

Sparrow, Roger C

From: Henning, Jimmy C
Sent: Tuesday, September 06, 2011 11:36 AM
To: 'bschreiner@ap.org'
Cc: Fulkerson, Matt; Herbst, David; Smith, Anna G; Sparrow, Roger C; Young, Jeffrey; Moore, Louise Z; Adams, David B; Ramage, Karen A; Skillman, Laura M; Nathe, Carl; Blanton, Jay; Smith, M S
Subject: Here's the article from Associated Press

The quotes from me are accurate. I'm pleased with the article.

Jimmy Henning
Assoc. Dean UK College of Ag
S107 Ag Science North
Lexington KY 40546
859 257 4302

----- Original Message -----

From: Schreiner, Bruce [mailto:bschreiner@ap.org]
Sent: Tuesday, September 06, 2011 11:20 AM
To: Henning, Jimmy C
Subject: Associated Press

^Jimmy:

Hi. Here's the story that's on the wire this morning. Thanks for all your help.

Regards,

Bruce

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) _ Robbie Smith is more accustomed to offering planting advice than promoting exercise, but these days his job as horticulture agent in Nelson County has him juggling dual roles due to a backlog of vacancies in cooperative extension offices across Kentucky.

¶ The chore of providing home and health tips would typically be handled by the local family consumer science agent. But that job has gone unfilled for about 18 months in Nelson County, forcing Smith and other agents to pick up the slack.

¶ The central Kentucky county may soon be asked to commit extra funds to fill the vacancy.

¶ "We've covered it as well as we can for as long as we could," said Smith, who on top of his horticultural duties has planned food preservation workshops along with events that promote exercise and other healthy lifestyle choices.

¶ The University of Kentucky's Cooperative Extension Service has been a staple in offering advice to Kentuckians on everything from gardening to canning vegetables to maximizing corn and soybean yields. They are the neighborhood experts on what crops or trees are best suited for particular soils, how to stretch a family budget or live a healthier life.

¶ But the ranks of county agents have taken a hit as state funding for UK's extension service shrank in the past three years. UK's share of state appropriations allocated to extension agents was \$12.3 million in 2011, down some 9 percent from \$13.5 million in 2008.

¶ The extension service has 31 vacancies among its 411 state-supported county agent jobs _ compared to about 20 unfilled positions three years ago, said Jimmy Henning, associate dean for extension in the UK College of Agriculture. The peak number of agent vacancies was 60 in the summer of 1994, he said.

¶ The Messenger in Madisonville last week reported on the long waiting time to fill vacancies in extension service offices statewide.

¶ Because of financial constraints, the wait is stretching about two years to fill vacancies, and the short-term outlook to accelerate hiring doesn't appear any better, Henning said.

¶ "The economic outlook isn't so rosy right now, so I've got to feel like it's not going to get shorter," Henning said.

¶ Vacancies would be even higher if some counties weren't taking the initiative to fill jobs sooner.

¶ Counties can speed up hiring new extension agents by temporarily absorbing all the costs of their salaries.

¶ Typically, counties pick up about one-third of the salaries for agents specializing in agriculture, 4-H and family consumer science. UK covers the rest of the salaries and also shoulders all health insurance and retirement costs. The starting salary is \$32,000 for agents with a bachelor's degree and no experience, and \$36,000 for agents with a master's degree and no experience.

¶ So far, 14 counties have picked up the entire tab on a stop-gap basis to expedite the hiring of some 15 extension agents, Henning said.

¶ The extra costs for counties can amount to more than \$10,000 before UK starts picking up the lion's share of the salaries. UK resumes paying two-thirds once those jobs rotate to the top of the list of state-supported vacancies.

¶ In 2008, counties contributed a total of \$5.5 million to the salaries of extension agents. By 2011, their share was \$7.3 million.

¶ A vacancy is looming in Hopkins County, where longtime agricultural agent George Kelley plans to retire at the end of February.

¶ County officials are weighing whether to come up with stop-gap funding to shorten the lapse between ag agents.

¶ The county, situated in the western Kentucky grain belt, boasts a \$60 million agriculture industry that includes cattle and poultry operations along with corn, soybean and tobacco production.

¶ Hopkins County Judge-Executive Donald Carroll said he'd like to see the job filled quickly if the money is available.

¶ For more than a quarter century, Kelley has advised area farmers on planting, how to apply pesticides and how to diversify operations as tobacco production declined.

¶ "There are some day-to-day services that we provide that certainly would go unprovided if an agent wasn't here," he said.

¶ In Nelson County, the three current extension agents chip in to help carry out some roles typically handled by the family consumer science agent, Smith said. But they have little time to add new programs that could benefit the county, he said. Family consumer science agents delve into an array of quality-of-life issues, from promoting proper nutrition and exercise to offering tips on managing a family budget.

¶ Nelson County Judge-Executive Dean Watts said he'll recommend that the county pick up the entire tab to get the opening filled in hopes that UK will assume its share of the salary within a few months to ease the county's load.

¶ The programs promoted by the agent benefit the community, he said, concluding: "We've waited long enough" to fill the job."

The information contained in this communication is intended for the use of the designated recipients named above. If the reader of this communication is not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that you have received this communication in error, and that any review, dissemination, distribution or copying of this communication is strictly prohibited. If you have received this communication in error, please notify The Associated Press immediately by telephone at +1-212-621-1898 and delete this e-mail. Thank you.

[IP_US_DISC]

msk dccc60c6d2c3a6438f0cf467d9a4938