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By Chris Kaufman / Sep 30, 2018

**UC Cooperative Extension creates network of researchers, educators**

The University of California, in 1913, created a new division – Agricultural Extension – in preparation for federal funding that would become available in 1914 through the Smith-Lever Act (federal law that established services connected to land-grant universities to inform citizens about current developments in agriculture and home economics and other matters).

Through the Agricultural Extension division, farm advisors could be requested by California counties. Sutter and Yuba Counties put in requests in 1918, both were granted, and farm advisors were assigned and began work that year.

In 1974, the Sutter and Yuba County Farm Advisors merged offices, in order to maximize resources and better serve the community.

For more than 100 years, the University of California Cooperative Extension has been working to improve the agriculture industry throughout the state.

The UCCE is a network of researchers and educators who work together to develop and provide science-based information to solve locally-relevant economic, agricultural, natural resource, youth development and nutrition issues, according to their website.

Sutter-Yuba director Janine Hasey recently discovered historical documents at the local office and credits Jessica Hougen of the Sutter County Community Memorial Museum for creating a display highlighting the information.

A century later, and the Cooperative Extension Service is still going strong and the service, as well as the issues it addresses, has evolved.

Agriculture markets have grown sophisticated over the years, with technological improvements and new ways to gather and use information, but the importance of local reports remain crucial to growers.

“We collaborate on various issues with the ag commissioners,” Hasey said. “This was the first time that I can remember that we submitted articles for their crop report. I requested it and both ag commissioners graciously gave us space to tell our story.”

The University of California Cooperative Extension is part of the Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the advisors work in every California county, applying research from the University of California to help local businesses. The UCCE experts partner with local specialists and innovators to develop and disseminate best practices through the UC’s local and global networks.

“Our grower cooperators and agency cooperators are very important to our research and education programs,” Hasey said.

Programs include 4-H Youth Development, Master Gardeners, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education, and the Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program.

Nancy Perkins, 66, of Live Oak is the co-community leader of Franklin 4-H with her daughter, Erin Cucchi, but her connection to the club runs deep and said the UCCE is a big part of that

“The UCCE is pretty intertwined with 4-H and they go hand-in-hand with all the great programs,” she said. “When I was in fourth-grade, we had a home advisor and a farm advisor and they organized things like training about canning food.”

Perkins said even though the training needs change over the years, that collaboration still exists today and it’s more comprehensive.

“Both advisors were crucial to the 4-H program because of the 4-H camp in Dobbins and the Yuba-Sutter fair, plus there used to be a spring fair that was called exhibit day,” she said. “Janine (Hasey) is still involved in the spring fair – it’s a like a mini fair where kids learn to show their animals and learn to create photos and arts and crafts for their projects. It’s all wound and bound together and they’re invaluable to the ag community.”

Her late father, Alban ‘Bro’ Byer, and mother, Mary Lou Byer, had almond and walnut orchards and both were involved in 4-H.

“My father and his siblings were in Franklin 4-H, and it was a way of life for them back in the 1930s,” she said. “My dad was part of 4-H, I was part of 4-H, my children were part of 4-H and my grandchildren are part of it.”

Perkins is still working in the ag industry as a crop insurance adjuster, but has fond memories of learning the value of hard work through 4-H.

“I was a member of the District 10 4-H and growing up I raised poultry – about 60 laying hens – and I’d ride my bike along Highway 70 to sell all the eggs. It’s hard to imagine a kid doing that today,” she said. “It was common back then because my brother had a dairy cow and he and my sisters would milk the cow and sell some of the milk but we’d keep most of it.”

**SIDEBAR**

UC Cooperative Extension Sutter-Yuba offers resources to the community, has evolved

David Ramos in 1959 took his first job out of college serving as an extension assistant – learning from all the people in the Cooperative Extension Service in Sutter County.

“When I was there, our office was downstairs from the post office in Yuba City and it’s incredible to see how it’s changed,” said Ramos, 85, of Davis. “What’s so incredible is the number one crop when I got there was cling peaches. It tickles me to see the transition because I’ve seen the prune and walnut industry develop since then and it gave me an incredible perspective on the dynamics of the change that’s taken place.”

A year later, he took a job at the Santa Clara office as the farm advisor and later moved on to the Stanislaus office, where he was the advisor from 1965-1970.

“My area of study in college was horticulture but I went back to get my Ph.D. in plant pathology in 1971,” he said. “After that, I interfaced with the researchers at the university and the county advisors throughout the state on their programs.”

He said facilitating those connections helped the industry in many ways.

“When I started in Sutter County, Hartley was the leading walnut and all the others in production were varieties that were brought in from Europe and elsewhere,” he said. “Today, virtually all the walnut acreage is almost all university-developed. It revolutionized the nature of the industry with higher quality and more production.”

He said Chandler walnuts, developed by the University of California in 1979, dominate the industry making up about half the walnuts in the industry.

“One of the reasons we’ve been able to move that way is upping the level of education at the universities and the extension offices,” he said. “When I started, most farm advisors had a bachelor’s or master’s degree and now almost all of them have Ph.D.s.”

**Timeline of developments**

Here’s a look at Extension Service developments through the 1970s:

**March 1918** – Sutter County Cooperative Extension established.

**July 1918** – Yuba County Cooperative Extension established.

**1920** – Peach Growers contest established in Sutter County.

**1921** – 4-H club began in Yuba County for boys only.

**1926** – 4-H club included girls for the first time in Yuba County.

**1926** – Orchard acreage increased from 1,000 acres in 1918 to 14,000 acres in Yuba County.

**1930** – First 4-H camp held in Dobbins.

**1938** – Conference held to establish a 25-year water study for ag development in Yuba County and one project was a water development program for irrigating county farm lands.

**1942** – Wartime programs the UCCE office ran for the Federal Government included: Food For Freedom, Salvage, Labor, Transportation, Cost of Living, Rationing, Fire Protection (for farms), Farm Water Supply, Farm Machinery and State Militia.

**1944** – The Sutter and Yuba county offices of UCCE coordinated efforts to have soldiers from Camp Beale help with peach harvests. German prisoners of war from Camp Beale were also used for the harvest.

**1946** – First 4-H camp held since 1942. Rice at 700 acres in Yuba County – the largest in 20 years.

**1947** – In response to high land prices, the farm advisor worked with the county assessor to do a study on the land use and valuations which changed the way ag land was assessed.

**1950** – The first 100 acres of Safflower planted in Sutter County. Peaches at 2,860 acres are noted in the annual crop report at bringing in important income to Yuba County.

**1952** – Rice becomes largest crop in Sutter County at about 65,000 acres grossing $13 million. Safflower tops 9,000 acres in Sutter County. Water resources department established by Yuba Country Board of Supervisors to continue work on the 25-year irrigation study.

**1959** – Yuba County is the sixth county in the state for prune acreage and the fourth in cling peach acreage. Yuba County Water Agency is created to develop the Yuba River for ag irrigation needs.

**July 1974** – Sutter and Yuba County Extension Offices combined.

**1976** – Cooperative Extension moves into new office on Garden Highway.

**UCCE Sutter-Yuba Activities**

Here’s a snapshot of what the University of California Cooperative Extension Sutter-Yuba does:

* **4-H Youth Development Program:** The University of California 4-H Youth Development Program engages youth in reaching their fullest potential by focusing on the development of citizenship, leadership, and life skills, such as decision-making, communication, responsibility and teamwork.
* **Master Gardeners:** Trained representatives of the University of California Cooperative Extension that assist the gardening community of Sutter and Yuba counties by providing research-based home gardening information.
* **Provide consultation on orchard crops:** Like prunes, almonds, pears, apple, cherry, olive, plum and pomegranate. **And tree crops:** Like walnuts, peaches, kiwifruit, pecan, grape, nectarine, pistachio, persimmon, chestnut, apricots and fuelwood.
* **Provide consultation on field crops:** Sarah Light is the agronomy advisor working on field crops in Sutter, Yuba, and Colusa Counties. She holds a dual master’s degrees in soil science and plant pathology from Oregon State University.
* **Rice program:** Whitney Brim-DeForest is a member of the UC Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor rice team. She’s based out of the Sutter-Yuba office but serves Placer and Sacramento counties as well. She holds a Ph.D. in horticulture and agronomy and an M.S. in international agricultural development (both from UC Davis), and a double B.A. in biology and music from Brown University.
* **Nutrition Education Program:** Provides nutrition curricula to qualifying schools and community organizations to encourage a healthy lifestyle and food choices.
* **Livestock and Natural Resources:** Ranch economics and business management, drought resilience, predator-livestock coexistence and irrigated pasture management.
* **Living With Fire:** Prevention of loss of homes during a wildfire, how to landscape and construct homes for improved safety.