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Etaferahu (Eta) Takele

Etaferahu (Eta) Takele is an area extension economist and farm advisor in the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) in southern California. As an extension economist, Eta has an impressive record of advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion, through achievements as a researcher, mentor, and leader.



In her research, Eta brings economic insights to multi-disciplinary teams working on tackling questions related to agriculture, farming, and production in Southern California. Her research encompasses development of production cost models, and models to analyze profitability of subtropical fruit production, vegetable crop, and cereal grain crops in this area. In her extension research and education interest, Eta has advanced the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC ANR) mission of **promoting economic prosperity in California**. The goal of the group is to **safeguard healthy food for all Californians and build Climate-Resilient Communities and Ecosystems**. Over her extensive career, she worked on multiple projects with commodity specialists, disciplinary specialists, and policy advisors to develop policy relevant crop production research that blends insights from economic theory with bottom-up insights shared by farmers.

As an extension leader, Eta has spent her time raising funds to reach more extension participants and has worked hard to improve the DEI climate of organizations that she has been associated with. From 2007 to 2020, Takele was appointed county director for the University of California Cooperative Extension program in Riverside County. She revived and strengthened programs such as 4H Youth Development, doubled the Master Gardener program and doubled the reach of the Expanded Food Nutrition Program (EFNEP) to the underrepresented clientele in Riverside County.

While at the UCCE, she enhanced the quality and quantity of program benefits and extended the program's coverage to DEI beneficiaries across Riverside county. In addition to tripling the share of the budget, she doubled the UCCE staff. Her focus on growing the institution involved ensuring greater staffing diversity by hiring staff. One of her recommenders had this to say about Eta's efforts, *"She co-developed and led a group of fellow county directors to develop a hiring plan. Through their efforts to advocate for local and regional needs, their voices were heard by UC leadership and multiple positions were awarded for several successive years. These positions addressed diversity, equity and inclusion; and majority of the people hired were underrepresented professionals."*

Another fellow recommender shared that Eta's mentorship was key to supporting successful efforts made by junior farm advisors in their projects. *"Eta helped me understand the importance of needs assessments and gain knowledge in affirmative actions of the UCANR to jump start my program. Eta further helped me adapt to my CD (county director) roles (CD for the first time) and seeking collaborators for research and extension. Her mentorship helped me run a successful program, provide administrative leadership, and retain my positions until today. I strongly believe that Eta helped not only me, but also many other junior farm advisors and CDs."*

As a community leader, Eta raised a \$ 0.5 million grant award from USDA for the Inland Empire Small Farm Initiative in partnership of the UCCE and California State University San Bernardino. The goal of the grant was to provide risk management education to Hispanic minority growers

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and farm laborers with little or no experience with running their own farms in the United States. In this project, Eta worked with farmers to develop budgets and determine risks associated with production of various crops. To ensure the program was inclusive, this was delivered in Spanish. Eta provided minority farmers regular financial counseling and helped them develop cost benefit models of investing in minor crops. Her work with small scale and minority growers influenced the introduction and expansion of new specialty crops such as blueberries, and Cherimoya (or chili pepper) in the coastal and the desert regions of Southern California.

Eta's sheer grit and dedication to improving DEI through education, research, and mentoring, was fanned by her experience moving from a small village in Ethiopia to the United States. During her illustrious years as an extension economist, Eta has always been a trail blazer. First as the only female person of color during her graduate program at North Dakota State University (NDSU) in Fargo, and then as the first woman professional in agricultural area in the University of California Cooperative *Extension system*, Eta has inspired all those she has met and interacted with. As a role model, Eta has been an agent of diversity, influencing and empowering women and underrepresented people to grow in their education and business.

Her recommender succinctly surmises, *"Throughout Ms. Takele's life, before affirmative action, diversity, equity and inclusion were something to advocate for, she modeled and advocated for the underrepresented people in her community, at the university, within the county government and in her professional associations."*

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