

HISTORICAL REPORT
By Rick Griffiths,
NEAFCS President Rick Griffiths
REPORT OUTLINE

Year 2023-2024

President's Name Rick Griffiths

Goals for the Year

- Promote belonging through member engagement
- Develop a new strategic plan for 2025 - 2028
- Continuing the Association's financial health in a time of increased inflationary pressure

List of Board Meetings

- | Date | Location |
|---|-----------------|
| • 3rd Monday of each month – Virtual | |
| • January 17 th and 18 th – Virtual | |
| • May 14 th and 15 th – Tampa, FL | |
| • September 15 th Tucson, AZ | |

List of Leadership Workshops

- | Date | Location |
|--|-----------------|
| • February 13 th and 14 th – Tampa, FL – JCEP, ELC | |
| • April 15 th -18 th – Arlington, VA – JCEP PILD | |

Annual Session Information

Date September 16 -19th 2024

Location Tucson, AZ

Name of Hotel - JW Marriott Tucson Starr Pass Resort

Theme – Under One Sky

Objectives

- Share success stories related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
- Recognize and appreciate effective programming that illustrates the great work being done by Extension locally, regionally, and nationally.
- Connect with fellow Family and Consumer Sciences colleagues to re-energize and develop new partnerships.

Number of attendees – 711

Special Guest: **Dr. Martha Ray Sartor**, USDA NIFA – Division Director, Institute of Youth, Family, and Community, Division of Family and Consumer Sciences.

The San Juan County, NM County Extension Director/Ag Agent Bonnie Hopkins-Byers and both San Juan County 4-H Agents attend the Awards Banquet.

- Unfortunately, an ECOP Director's meeting was scheduled the same week, which meant many Administrators, including those from Arizona and New Mexico, were unable to attend.

Major Accomplishments (narrative to be used in written history)

At the 2023 NEAFCS Annual Session in Providence, RI, I had the honor of stepping into the role of NEAFCS National President. It was a busy and exciting year, filled with collaboration, learning, and some big moments—including celebrating NEAFCS' 90th Anniversary in Tucson! I'm proud of what we've accomplished together as a Board and as an Association.

Working Together with the Board

Early on, the Board and I worked with our Executive Director and legal team to clarify how to handle a vacated Vice President position—ensuring our bylaws supported a smooth transition. We also led State President Training during the Annual Session and followed up with a Zoom session to keep affiliates in the loop on membership updates, JCEP events, and dues changes. Everyone on the Board really pitched in to make those efforts meaningful.

Annual Session Site Planning

We started reviewing site bids for the 2026 and 2027 Annual Sessions. Knoxville, TN, was approved for 2026, and after a wider search, Fort Lauderdale, FL, was selected for 2027. I appreciated the thoughtful work of the Site Selection Committees and our conversations as a Board as we navigated hotel bids, travel considerations, and affiliate commitments. I also reached out personally to the Florida Affiliate and later met with their leadership to support their decision to serve as the 2027 host.

Tackling Budget Challenges

When food and beverage costs for the 2024 Annual Session came in much higher than expected, I met with the Executive Director and conference planner to find solutions. The Board discussed and approved a plan to remove two meals and raise the registration fee to avoid a significant financial loss. I recorded a video and wrote a message to explain that the decision to maintain our members' transparency was important to all of us.

Strategic Planning and Moving Forward

At the Mid-Year Board Meeting in May, we focused on something big: our new strategic plan. With the help of a professional facilitator, we took member feedback from surveys, listening sessions, and affiliate reports and turned it into a five-part plan. It includes goals like improving member engagement, communication, program impact, and making the Annual Session more affordable. Two ad hoc committees came out of this work—one on our newsletter, and one on rethinking

the Annual Session format. Both made solid recommendations that were adopted by the Board.

Representing NEAFCS

This year, I represented NEAFCS on the AAFCS Alliance and helped coordinate a letter of support to the U.S. Department of Education, advocating for a national FCS Career Pathway. Though I wasn't selected to serve on their reorganization task force, I encouraged all state presidents to advocate in their own communities.

JCEP Engagement

On the JCEP Executive Board, I served on two committees and was elected Secretary/Treasurer-Elect. I joined the Executive Council and helped with the 2025 budget and management firm selection process. When we hit some bumps with our current management company, I worked closely with the Council to explore new options.

90th Anniversary and Annual Session Highlights

Celebrating our 90th Anniversary in Tucson was such a highlight! A special 90th Anniversary Committee was formed to lead the celebration and engage members across the country. They launched a "90 for 90" member challenge that encouraged individuals and affiliates to commemorate the milestone by completing FCS-related projects. The committee also hosted a video contest, inviting state affiliates to record and submit videos reciting the NEAFCS Creed—a fun and meaningful way to connect with our roots. In addition, they created a special newsletter series that featured leaders from the past, present, and future, shining a light on the people who have shaped and continue to lead our association. It was wonderful to see so many members participate and honor NEAFCS' legacy.

It was an honor and a privilege to serve as NEAFCS President.

List of Any First-Time Events, Activities, Happenings, etc.

- The Association celebrated its 90th Anniversary
- The Board of Directors created a 100th Anniversary fund and contributed \$1000. The Board also challenged the next 10 years of future boards to also contribute \$1000 per year to the fund from the Ops budget.
- Rick Griffiths served as the Association's First Male President

Also, please send a photo of yourself and your board.

Names, positions, and home states of board members

Rick Griffiths, *President*

New Mexico State University

Jennifer Bridge, *President-Elect*

University of Kentucky

Lisa Peterson, *Secretary*

University of Illinois Extension

Lance Hansen, *Treasurer*
University of Idaho Extension

Marcia Parcell, *VP Professional Development*
Purdue University

Michelle Wright, *VP Member Resources*
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

Donna Jung, *VP Awards & Recognition*
Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

Christine Zellers, *VP Public Affairs*
Rutgers Cooperative Extension

Jesse Kettermann, *Eastern Region Director*
University of Maryland Extension

Dianne Christensen, *Western Region Director*
New Mexico State University

Samantha Kennedy, *Southern Region Director*
University of Florida

Barb Wollan, *Central Region Director* Iowa State University
Extension and Outreach

Julie Garden-Robinson, *Immediate Past President*
North Dakota University

How many members were in the association this year? (Include active and life members)

Active Members - 1,850

Life Members - 1,078

Dues \$ 110 for Active Members

Friend of Extension Winner? Why were they selected? There was no Friend of Extension. The Board felt the Groups eligible for the award had not spent enough time supporting the organization at this point (they were too new to the NEAFCS family).

Other people receiving special recognition this year.
NEAFCS Hall of Fame

Karen Ensle, New Jersey

For nearly 40 years, Dr. Ensle has exemplified unparalleled dedication, expertise, and innovation in the field of Family and Consumer Sciences, making significant contributions that have positively impacted individuals, families, and communities. Her unwavering commitment to excellence, leadership, and service

embodies the values and mission of NEAFCS, making her a deserving candidate for this prestigious recognition.

Dr. Ensle's accomplishments are evident through her continued commitment to NEAFCS as a member and leader as well as an FCS professional. Karen has won over 20 awards from NEAFCS on the state, regional, and national levels, she has served as a reviewer for the Journal of NEAFCS since 2006 and has published articles in the Journal. Dr. Ensle serves selflessly to ensure that both the organization and its members continue to thrive and succeed, which is evident in her service to the organization as a whole and the individual members. She has served as an external reviewer for promotion and tenure packets since 2005, ensuring that NEAFCS continues to attract and foster excellence in its members.

Dr. Ensle currently serves on the NEAFCS endowment committee and two Public Affairs committees. In the past she has served on at least 8 different NEAFCS committees dating back to 1991 while holding many affiliate offices and most recently agreed to the affiliate representative for the 90th Anniversary committee. From having her local community make a proclamation for Living Well Month to conveying a historical note to new members about NEAFCS, Karen has exemplified what it means to be a dedicated member of her professional association and leader to new and experienced colleagues alike.

As if these activities do not speak enough to her dedication to the mission and vision of NEAFCS, it's worth adding that Karen makes a point to go out of her way to support colleagues in New Jersey and nationally. She devotes time, energy, and care to ensure FCS faculty and staff have the tools they need to develop into successful professionals and does it with the utmost kindness and compassion. Dr. Ensle completes every task with careful attention to detail, constructive feedback, and genuine care and concern.

Susan Routh, Oklahoma

Susan Routh is such a leader and a true Extension Professional. Susan began her Extension career in Johnson County, Texas in 1990. Susan became an educator to impact lives and change outcomes for families and communities. Susan is an Oklahoma 4H alumni and a 2nd generation of Oklahoma State University Extension educator.

Susan served as the OSU Extension Family & Consumer Sciences Educator in Grady County. She then became a Community Nutrition Education Program Coordinator and interim Southwest District FCS Program Specialist. She is currently the West District FCS Program Specialist. She has developed and delivered countless programs and mentored many Extension educators. She served in numerous leadership positions at the county and state level, serving as the Oklahoma Affiliate President 2012 – 2014.

Susan joined NEAFCS in 2005. Since that time, she has been a devoted member of NEAFCS. During her career, Susan has demonstrated dedication to NEAFCS in the numerous roles she has undertaken. Susan served as Southern Region Director (2013 – 2015), Vice President for Awards and Recognition (2017 – 2019), President-elect (2021), President (2022) and Immediate Past President

(2023). Susan has attended fifteen Annual Sessions and served on various committees. Susan represented NEAFCS on the Joint Council of Extension Professionals Board from 2021 – 2024. In JCEP, she has found her niche, she has served as Co-Chair of the Public Issues and Leadership Development Conference and is serving as the chair for 2024. She is an advocate for FCS and wants to make sure FCS is represented at all levels.

Susan has been an NEAFCS Active Member for nineteen years. She has received many OEAFCs and NEAFCS Awards including the Distinguished Service Award in 2020. She follows the NEAFCS Vision in building future leaders, providing innovative professional development opportunities, and promoting the profession. Susan served as a mentor to many NEAFCS Board members. Brenda Miller, Northeast District FCS Program Specialist, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service stated “I appreciate Susan’s thoughtful and caring approach to leadership. Her insight into Extension educators and overall grasp of the Extension system helps spur educators to use their unique skills to accomplish their personal goals and common goals of the organization”.

Send completed report to the NEAFCS Historian

Revised 9/2009

Addendum:

Personal Reflection: My Journey as the First Male President of NEAFCS

By Rick Griffiths, NEAFCS President (2023–2024)

When I joined the National Extension Association of Family & Consumer Sciences (NEAFCS) in 2014 as a new Extension Agent with New Mexico State University, I was stepping into a profession that had already shaped much of my life and career. Before coming to Extension, I had spent seven years as a Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) teacher in Salt Lake City, Utah—one of only two men teaching FCS in the entire state at that time.

My path into this field began in 2000, when I enrolled as the first male Family and Consumer Sciences Education major at my university. I didn’t consider it a remarkable distinction, but I quickly learned that it was unusual enough to prompt some change: several faculty members revised parts of their curriculum after realizing they would now have a male student in class. One memorable example was the sewing course, which required students to model their own projects—including a lingerie unit that was quickly removed. It was an early, lighthearted reminder that my presence represented something new for the field, and that small steps can signal broader evolution.

After graduation, I was placed for student teaching at Alta High School to be in the same department as Utah’s only male FCS teacher at the time. Following that experience, I was hired at a neighboring school and became the second male FCS teacher in the state.

When I joined New Mexico State University's Cooperative Extension Service in 2014, I learned during my first in-service that I was the first male "home economist" ever hired in the organization's history. Not long after, our state affiliate discussed adopting the more contemporary title of Family and Consumer Sciences Agent, a change ultimately approved through a collaborative decision among faculty—reflecting a profession increasingly aligned with modern realities and inclusivity.

My first NEAFCS Annual Session, held in 2015 at The Greenbrier, was both inspiring and eye-opening. At that time, male members were few, particularly in the Western Region. It often felt like more people knew my name than I could possibly remember myself—simply because I stood out. Over time, however, that dynamic changed dramatically. Each year brought more men to our conferences, to our committees, and eventually into leadership.

From the beginning, I never felt resistance to my presence or advancement in the Association. Quite the opposite: I was consistently encouraged, mentored, and supported by colleagues at every stage. Mentors such as Dr. Sonja Koukel, who served on the National Board, were early advocates for my leadership journey. Their confidence helped me see a path forward in an organization that truly valued people for their commitment, not their demographics.

When I ran for Western Region Director in 2020, it was during the height of COVID-19—the first year NEAFCS held virtual elections with recorded campaign videos. My election that year was contested, and I initially worried that my limited tenure might work against me. But I also recognized that many members already knew me from conferences and virtual events, which likely helped bridge that gap. I remember that day vividly: as votes were being counted, my internet connection failed, and I was briefly logged out of Zoom. When I rejoined, I realized I had been elected—confirmed by the flood of congratulatory messages filling the chat.

That year, our Board became known as "the Board that never met." We conducted all of our business virtually under President Dianne Gertson Drennan, who worked hard to build connections across the distance through online socials, retreats, and celebrations. Those months, though isolating, showed the strength of our community and our adaptability. And honestly, my NEAFCS work became a refuge for me to escape the local isolation—a reminder that even through distance, professional connection and shared purpose could bridge the gap.

My first in-person meeting as a National Board member came at the Joint Council of Extension Professionals (JCEP) Leadership Conference, where we collaborated across associations to plan and deliver programming. It was an exciting, if somewhat surreal, return to in-person engagement after so long online.

By the time I assumed the presidency in 2023, NEAFCS had grown into a more inclusive and representative organization. When members learned that I would be the first male president in the Association's 90-year history, most responded with surprise that it hadn't already happened, not with concern that it was happening now.

Throughout my presidency, I experienced nothing but collaboration and support. There were humorous moments, like when my photo—originally submitted with an awards entry—appeared on the NEAFCS homepage as part of a membership feature. At the Raleigh Annual Session, as I rode down the escalator, a colleague spotted me and called out, “Hey, you’re the website guy—wait, the website guy is running for president!” It was a lighthearted moment that captured the spirit of familiarity and community that defines NEAFCS.

Since my election to the National Board in 2020, I’ve been proud to watch the continued evolution of our Association. In just a few short years, five additional male members have been elected to the National Board, serving as Treasurers, Regional Directors, and Vice Presidents. Today, in every conference room and committee meeting, you’ll see a diverse mix of professionals—men and women—working side by side, sharing expertise, and strengthening our collective mission.

This change mirrors a broader transformation across the profession. A decade ago, most FCS positions required traditional Family and Consumer Sciences degrees. Today, as university programs have consolidated or closed, the Extension system has welcomed professionals from a wide array of disciplines. We have broadened the definition of Family and Consumer Sciences to include related fields and have strengthened our capacity by embracing diversity of education, experience, and thought.

This inclusivity has become one of NEAFCS’s greatest strengths. While some allied FCS organizations have struggled with declining membership by adhering to narrow definitions, NEAFCS has flourished by opening its doors—inviting those who share our mission, even if they come from nontraditional paths. We have found that diversity brings depth, innovation, and renewed energy to our work.

Today, our Association reflects the communities we serve: diverse, multifaceted, and united by a shared purpose. The real story of the past decade isn’t about breaking a glass ceiling—it’s about expanding the ceiling altogether. We’ve transformed from a largely traditional membership into a dynamic network of professionals from every background who are redefining what Family and Consumer Sciences looks like in the modern era.

Through it all, NEAFCS has remained true to its mission: strengthening individuals, families, and communities through Extension education. I am deeply grateful to have been part of this chapter in our history, a time when belonging grew broader, leadership became more inclusive, and the story of Family and Consumer Sciences expanded to reflect the diversity of those it serves.

Archival Note

This narrative was dictated by Rick Griffiths, NEAFCS President (2023–2024), and generated with the assistance of OpenAI’s GPT-5 model to ensure historical clarity and cohesion. The content reflects President Griffiths’ personal reflections and experiences as recorded in October 2025.