

2015 PILD Conference NEAFCS First Timer Reflections

Once again, NEAFCS was able to grant 20 first-timer scholarships to encourage members that might not otherwise been able to attend the PILD conference to take part. As a condition of receiving their scholarship check, they were required to provide a written reflection describing their experience. The following paragraphs summarize their reactions, insights and take-aways from being part of “Imagining Extension...Eye on the Future.”

“The breakout session “**Is it Lobbying or Advocacy? How to Communicate Programmatic Impact to Stakeholders**” was extremely valuable. In VA, we have been told to be cautious about talking to legislators, but session presenters explained that as long as we are not asking legislators to vote for a specific bill it is acceptable to inform and educate them about program impacts and ask for their support. **How the Four Generations Impact Extension** explained the differences between traditionalists, baby boomers, Gen Xers, and millennials. Millennials will make up 75% of the workforce in 10 years so we need to pay special attention to attract them as volunteers, staff, and program participants. Methods that worked for the other generations will not work for them. Instead, we will need to: provide access to high level information; help them understand how their role plugs into Extension; and provide a work culture where they can feel good about where they work. The PILD conference provided sessions that complement those we get at NEAFCS Annual Sessions. I highly encourage those with the resources and time to attend both. I think that PILD can help people become better Extension professionals.” -- **Jennifer Abel; Senior Extension Agent; Virginia Cooperative Extension**

“The PILD conference was an effective tool to prepare volunteers and University of Illinois Extension staff for the visit to Capitol Hill. The clarification between lobbying and advocating was valuable to understand our roles in dialogue. NIFA Director Sonny Ramaswamy was engaging and offered great communication strategies to share our work with legislators. I feel I have a greater understanding of my work and the history of land grant universities. The opportunity to meet with Extension employees from other States was great for networking and program development.” – **Laura Barr; Nutrition & Wellness Educator; University of Illinois Extension**

“As Public Affairs committee chair, I was asked to represent the Indiana Affiliate at PILD. Our very own Peggy Ehlers described PILD best in her April e-News message: ‘The PILD Conference is designed to provide professional development and personal growth opportunities regarding the political process at the national level, allow time for interaction with key leaders from [USDA’s] National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and... learn about building public support for Extension through consistent and targeted communication.’ What this conference does is educate participants on Extension’s priorities at the national level and how that affects us locally. Two aspects of the conference were worth the price of admission -- the morning with the NIFA/FCS Program Leaders/Specialists and the day on Capitol Hill. The NIFA staff updated us on their current projects and asked us for our pressing issues. We truly have some top notch colleagues who want to hear from us! On the Hill we met with our senators, congressmen/women and/or their aides who took the time to sit down and ask us about the programs we are presenting in our counties. It was a wonderful opportunity to inform our legislators of the innovative and transformational programs we are offering at Purdue Extension. I highly recommend this conference to educators from all program areas.” -- **Naomi Bechtold; Extension Educator; Purdue University**

“I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to attend the PILD conference. This was an experience that I will never forget. It was the second trip of my eight-year Extension career that I had to travel alone. During the conference I gained personal growth, career awareness, appreciation and encouragement to continue my passion to improve the citizens and their quality of life. One comment that was shared that really resonated and made me think was “Our Past: Who and What we were, Our Present: Who and what we are, Our

Future: Who and What we can and should be. I was proud to represent NEAFCS and my Alabama Affiliate.” --
Apriell Burgess; Urban Region Extension Agent II; Auburn University

“My journey into JCEP and PILD has had an even larger impact on me than I ever dreamt. The ability to converse with other delegates from across the country has given me insight into some of the challenges our chapter is facing. I have shared many of the new ideas with our Extension team. I always knew our jobs were very political. The threat of our quorum court cutting our budget years ago helped put that into perspective. And now with our staffing at a low it is even more imperative to sing our praises and help educate the public and our politicians to the value of Extension programming. I was honored to share our State’s successes in EFNEP and FCS with our representative’s staffers.” – **Keith A. Cleek; Regional Program Associate – EFNEP; University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension**

“Perhaps it was soft and delicate movement of the cherry blossoms in the spring breeze but this experience was a relaxing one, not rushed like some National meetings I have attended have been. The program was well-designed, the scholarship expectations clearly outlined, and all of the sessions I attended were engaging and interactive. Three segments stood out: the NC Biotechnology Director’s insights into the best way to approach congressmen and women; the FCS National Program Leaders session Tuesday morning and the NEAFCS business meeting that afternoon; and the utterly dynamic Barbara Chamberlin framing technology for me in a new supportive way. I was recently criticized for not being as current in technology but she made me feel okay about taking it in small doses so I am not overwhelmed. That alone was worth the price of admission for me. Thank you for my scholarship and the opportunity to meet with so many dynamic FCS educators. At this time North Carolina Cooperative Extension is going through a restructuring and reduction in staff. This conference offered me a chance to catch my breath, step back and reflect on what is going on nationally, and just relax and enjoy the cherry blossoms. It was work but it didn’t feel like work, it felt like we were doing all we can to continue to promote Extension and our mission.” –
Debbie Cox; Stokes County Extension Director; North Carolina State University Extension Service

“As I packed for my first trip to the PILD Conference, I was unsure of what to expect. The theme for our conference was “Imagining Extension – Eyes on the future ...” and my experience at the conference did afford me the tools to ask what can I do to get the message out about Extension to local, state, and national shareholders. I was impressed with the variety in the states, the use of volunteers, the 1890 schools, and the fact we had a common purpose of educating our legislators about Extension. This was a pivotal experience for me in my professional life. Thank you so much for the scholarship and the opportunity to go to Washington and stand tall as a representative of NEAFCS/GEAFCS.” -- **Heidi L. Flowers; County Coordinator and FCS Agent; University of Georgia Extension Ware County**

“What a fabulous week. I had initially started writing thoughts on Monday thinking I would 'get ahead' of the game. However, after Tuesday’s sessions with the Program Leaders I just scrapped everything I wrote previously to tell you - I WANT MORE OF THEM! Wow -- how amazing was that session for this Extension newbie! I feel like my light bulbs are all finally turned on and my elevator now reaches the top floor! The quick bits of info were phenomenal and I wish I could hit rewind and play their words over and over. Additionally I found the sessions on social networking and the final send off so very valuable. I am so very grateful to have found such an engaging and 'real' crew at the top of NEAFCS. My thanks to NEAFCS to my roomie Debby and my new found friends from all over the Extension world. As I went in to Wednesday’s Hill visits I want you to know that I indeed felt prepared to advocate and educate. But even more so, I am prepared to provide training and education to my councils on how important a role than can play both locally and nationally. Thanks, again!” –
Lori Hayungs; Human Sciences Specialist Family Life; Iowa State

“Since coming to Extension seven years ago, I have tried to make sense of the “alphabet” soup of acronyms and agencies, but have never successfully visualized the order of the agencies and how they all work together. Beginning with our first timer’s opening session on Sunday when we were given the list of acronyms, clear through to my last session meeting with our NEAFCS representatives to the conference, I was able to gain an understanding of our Extension system. I really enjoyed our FCS session with our National Project Leaders. In addition, I enjoyed learning about things our NEAFCS association is doing and it was great to the impact statement information I submit to our state leaders come full circle. I was nervous about meeting with my legislative leaders but the most important thing I gained from this experience was the opportunity to do so. I was able to tell my Extension story and hopefully make a difference as they consider the impact we have on the lives of others.” – **Christine Kendle; FCS Educator; Ohio State University**

“Pennsylvania brought a delegation of volunteers and this venue provided a great opportunity to really get to know these advocates and to provide them further insight into FCS programming and our impact on families. Many of our volunteers were familiar with 4-H and agriculture but during our state meeting at PILD, I was able to provide impact information about FCS programs to discuss on the Hill visits. I think the volunteers took away a better understanding of our FCS work. The general sessions better informed me about Extension at the National level. It is easy to get caught up in your local and state activities and sometimes forget about the big picture and the support that we have at this level. Hearing more about the history of Extension is always interesting -- while times change we are still as relevant today as we were 100 years ago. The role play highlighting the Hill visits was wonderful and helped take some of the ‘nervousness’ about the visits away, especially as a first time participant. The social media breakout sessions will be helpful in advancing our FCS programs. While we have a presence on various platforms we are struggling with ways of more effectively communicating information. The sessions provided me with tools and ideas to share with our team as we try to reach a more diverse and younger audience.” – **Sharon McDonald; Nutrition, Health and Food Safety Educator; Penn State University**

“This conference helped me to realize that it doesn’t matter what area your subject matter is that we all can learn something about how public policy is set. My most favorite sessions were the NIFA Update by Sonny Ramaswamy, National Program Leaders Panel Discussions and the Association Meeting. Two speakers I really enjoyed -- E. Norris Tolson and Barbara Chamberlain -- provided real practical information. It was helpful hearing from the NIFA Program Leaders about what programs they are involved in. I appreciated the NEAFCS association meeting link to this leadership meeting and the roll out of the 2015 impact statements. I was pleased to see that Oklahoma was mentioned in seven of the statements and would have been included in all eight but the nutrition section was so large that it was broken into two impact statements. At our annual state association meeting, I shared highlights with them about the conference and legislator visits. Thank you for providing financial support for me to attend this leadership conference. “ – **Gale A. Mills; FCS Educator; Oklahoma State**

“I bet you have been asked more than once “what do you do, again?” As an Extension educator, I struggle with this question because, well, we do so much. I struggle with this question because I really want people to understand the impact and the value of Extension and family living programs. As I prepared for PILD I made it my goal to answer how do we translate what it is that we do to state legislators, elected officials and others? While at PILD I strove to talk to all 25 Wisconsin delegates about why they came and what they valued about Extension. After my first conversation I knew I was on to something because this person had me crying, laughing and thanking them for their passion and desire to advocate on Extension’s behalf. I heard many wonderful stories from county board representatives, volunteers and town supervisors, all about how Extension made a difference in their communities and in people’s lives. Ultimately each story ended with, “UW-Extension educators make me do things better.” In their estimation, Extension is about: education; learning; knowledge you can trust; experiential learning; relevance; innovation; transformation; relationships; and people. My PILD conversations and lessons made me believe, even

*more, in the value of creating and maintaining strong relationships. So, if you have struggled with explaining what you do, I encourage you to get to know elected officials and their staff, community partners and those who can advocate for you. Invite constituents and elected officials to your events and programs; invite them to breakfast or lunch at your office. Create those relationships with people so they can experience what it is that you do instead of telling them what you do.” -- **Andrea Newby; Family Living Educator – Iron County; University Wisconsin***

Extension

“The 2015 PILD Conference was an informative and enjoyable professional development experience. It provided a great opportunity to meet and share ideas with other Extension professionals from across the nation. I especially enjoyed the session on social media marketing and the opportunity to hear from the National Program Leaders from NIFA. The insight gained from the presenters will be beneficial in communicating the impact of our programs in our communities more effectively. Overall, it was an enlightening, enjoyable, exhilarating experience! The fact that the cherry blossoms were at their peak was the icing on the cake!” -- **Liz Sadler; Extension Agent/Lamar County Coordinator; Mississippi State University Extension**

*“The PILD Conference was a great experience. The contacts made and learning about new programming ideas and resources from across the United States will strengthen the impacts made by FCS Agents. The National Program Leaders Panel Discussion by the Extension Family and Consumer Sciences division of NIFA was excellent. Before the conference, I didn’t know that NIFA included all of the different FCS program areas. The personal contacts we were allowed to make with Caroline Crocoll and her co-workers will prove invaluable. I am already receiving emails with up-to-date information on the different programming areas that I will share with TEAFCS members. Thank you for your support with a PILD scholarship and for this opportunity.” -- **Mandi Seaton; Lamb EA-FCS; Texas A&M AgriLife Extension***

“It is with great satisfaction that I reflect on my time at PILD. I’ve made several trips to our nation’s capital in different capacities, including as a Girl Scout, as a chaperone for each of my children’s Safety Patrol field trips, and to run in the Marine Corps Marathon. My PILD experience ranks with the best. Not only were we treated like we really mattered, but we were so well educated about our roles and responsibilities, that when it came time to conduct our visits, we were able to articulate our message with great pride and confidence. The aides and lawmakers we visited had done their homework. They were supportive of the Land Grant System and aware of the great work Florida Extension does. With that said, we were assured they would be mindful of the impacts we shared with them during the hours of deliberations about the Farm Bill and funding for Land Grant research, teaching, and Extension. I definitely am more informed about our nation’s appropriations process and am once again reminded that our system allows for, and even encourages us to have a voice. Thank you so much for this opportunity and most especially for your support!” -- **Lynda Spence; Financial Management & Aging; University of Florida Extension/Marion County**

*“I was privileged to attend the PILD conference in Washington, D.C. I attended all of the sessions and learned a lot about advocacy and public policy. I also made new partnerships with other educators throughout the country and built stronger partnerships with those I already knew. I especially learned from the NIFA FCS program leaders who spoke at the FCS breakout session. Our small Idaho delegation met with [legislators] and with staff members. I look forward to mentoring other FCS Extension Educators when they have the opportunity to attend PILD.” -- **Marnie Spencer, Professor and Extension Educator; University of Idaho***

“I want to thank NEAFCS for the scholarship support to attend the 2015 PILD conference. What a fantastic experience this was! Even though I have been an extension professional for over 25 years, I don’t think I fully understood the layers of connections and partnerships that make this organization so unique. The resources and

fact sheets on the appropriation requests laid out the funding streams in a way clear enough for me to share with local constituents and my colleagues. I have already started including some of the language in the introductory 'commercial' that I give at the beginning of my educational programs. The opportunity to include history of the 1890 institutions on the 125th anniversary was uniquely special. I came away with tools and a plan on effective utilization of social media to use in my programming. Concluding the conference with a visit to 'The Hill' to tell our legislators and/or staff how Extension programs impact their local constituents was amazing. Seeing the legislative process in action is really only fully grasped when experienced in person and it is something I hope to be able to repeat in the future. Above all, one of the very best things about national conferences like this and our professional association is making new connections. The friendships created through this common ground that we call 'extension' are special and they extend beyond the professional realm...and for that, I am very thankful." -- **Denise Sullivan; Kansas State Research & Extension Leavenworth County; NEAFCS Kansas Affiliate President**

*"I think PILD was the best experience I have had since being with Extension for almost 15 years. I was a reluctant attendee because I am not as familiar with the workings of our government as I should be, and I am really kind of shy. I really appreciated the sessions because they helped me to feel more relaxed and prepared for visiting the Capitol. I also appreciated learning the difference between lobbying and advocating. I appreciated knowing that I could confidently communicate our successes and tell the 'story' of our extension programs that I am most familiar with and passionate about. I learned that familiarity builds trust, which in turn builds cooperation, which leads to reciprocity. I also learned that there is 'vigorous reciprocity in Extension with the people, of the people and by the people' -- Ruby Green Smith, *The People's Colleges*." -- **Holly Tiret; MSU Extension Kent County; NEAFCS Michigan Affiliate President***

"I truly enjoyed attending the PILD conference! Not only was it a pleasure to be in Washington, DC, but I learned so much about NIFA, appropriate advocacy, Capitol Hill, and even better yet, came back to Missouri feeling revived with a new excitement about my programs and the impact I am making. Thanks to my state organization MEAFCS and NEAFCS for this wonderful opportunity!" -- **Sarah Traub; Human Development & Family Studies Specialist; University of Missouri Cooper County**

*"Attending the PILD conference expanded my insight into how important Extension is the local, state and federal community. The conference was packed with relevant, forward thinking presentations that focused on emerging topics and issues. The ideas shared at the conference provided me with many "thinking outside of the box" ideas that will increase the benefit to my program participants. PILD by far was one of the most beneficial conferences that I have attended in my Extension career. I highly recommend that every Extension professional attend this conference at least once. It will provide them with the insight and tools needed to be successful in advocacy, program development, and their institution." -- **Dana Wright; Families & Health Agent; West Virginia University Extension***