



Summary of 2016 PILD 1st Timer's Reflections

Edited by Glenda Hyde, Vice President for Public Affairs

Carla Hadley (AR)

I have worked for over 25 years in the Cooperative Extension Service system as a county extension agent and I have to say this and JCEP are 2 of the best conferences I have had the opportunity to attend. I gained so much knowledge to be used both at the state level with stakeholders and key leaders, but also in my county. In fact, I came back and immediately used some of the information with our county quorum court members during our interpretive event where we make sure they know what a successful county program we have.

My favorite session was Dr. Steele from Texas A&M AgrLife Extension. He said two things that stuck with me, "We are about relationships. We are in the people business, without those relationships as Extension we do not exist." His next quote that I loved was "Because of strong county programs, we have a strong Extension Service." Wow!!!

The breakout sessions were great! I particularly enjoyed Dr. Cindy Reeves breakout session on her successful funding she received for Extension programs in Hawaii. The biggest takeaway from her presentation was it's about building professional relationships with your funders, knowing your program and finding the programs of greatest interest/need in your county. Doing what we've always done may not be what our funders see as important and it may be hard for the decision makers to want to fund those. Armed with the information she provided I went back, tweaked it for my county, and used it within a week of PILD. Thank you for this opportunity!! I wish everyone could attend at least once in their career!

Hope Wilson (AZ)

Attending the Public Issues Leadership Development Conference for the first time, as someone relatively new to Cooperative Extension, helped me to understand what is happening nationally how that impacts my work locally. I came away with a much better understanding of Cooperative Extension and how others around the country are shaping their work. The conference is also an excellent opportunity to network with other states and other program areas. Attending the National Program Leaders Panel Discussions was a highlight and provided some context for NIFA programs and grants and how their resources can benefit my local programs. I also found the "A Panel Discussion - Communicating on the Hill: Two Roles - Advocating and Education" to be very helpful the afternoon before the Hill visits. I was not able to participate in a Hill visit, but the role playing demonstration helped to bring everything together. Watching these informative and entertaining examples helped to relieve any anxiety about the process I may have had. Thank you for organizing this. I very much enjoyed PILD.

Judy Corbus (FL)

As President-Elect of the Florida affiliate of NEAFCS, I served as one of my state's delegates to the 2016 PILD Conference. The opportunity to meet colleagues from around the country and gain a broader understanding of Extension at the national level was very beneficial. Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy, NIFA Director, shared that a study has been conducted showing the financial return on FCS programs; I am following up to learn more about the results and how they can be applied at the local and state levels. Meeting the various NIFA FCS National Program Leaders provided an opportunity to learn about the resources available to support our state programming efforts; it also was nice to put faces with the names we see in e-mails. The highlight of the week was visiting with our Representatives' and Senators' staff on Capitol Hill to briefly share about the work we do and to thank them for their continued support of Extension funding. I came away with a greater understanding of and appreciation for the nationwide network of Extension. I consider it an honor and a privilege to have represented UF/IFAS Extension at the national level. I encourage my colleagues to attend PILD as they have opportunity to deepen their understanding of Extension's connection to USDA NIFA and how to work with policy makers at all levels of government.

Leigh Anne Aaron (GA)

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to attend the 2016 Public Issues Leadership Development Conference. As a first-timer, it was incredibly eye-opening to see the inner workings Joint Council of Extension Professionals. The chance to network was incredible, but the breakout sessions and general sessions were fantastic too. I especially enjoyed the session titled "Innovation through Leader Development across the Life Span" that was presented by Eric Kaufman, Virginia Cooperative Extension Specialist. As leaders, we are pushed and pulled in different directions. As we age, we naturally gain new experience and insight that drives us to improve or enhance our leadership skills. It is important to understand our stages of leadership as it relates to our stages in life. Transformative leadership tends to take place in educational settings through Cooperative Extension. As an Extension Professional, it is imperative that I understand not only how I have grown as a leader but recognize how to provide environments for others to grow as well.

Barb Wollan (IA)

PILD was a terrific conference for a lot of reasons. It's always enlightening to learn what Extension looks like and is accomplishing in other states; in addition to learning about other states, we gained a greater understanding of the national structures around Extension (NIFA, ECOP, and more). I certainly gained a greater appreciation of the challenges faced by our state and national administrators in building/maintaining support for Extension work. A few presentations left lasting impressions:

- 1) At the joint session sponsored by NEAFCS and ESP, we heard from Dr. Frances Lee, a political scientist at the University of Maryland, about what life is like from the point of view of our elected officials. We often complain about our elected officials, but Dr. Lee made us aware of the many competing (and increasing) demands on their time, from both constituents and parties. Her description built some sympathy (to my surprise), and pointed out the importance of *understanding their point of view* if we want our message to be heard. One of the lessons I'm

taking away is that staff are extremely important. Members of the House of Representatives tend to have smaller staffs at low pay, so turnover is high; by contrast, Congressional Committees have larger staffs, with individuals who become experts on a particular issue or sub-issue. Communicating with the appropriate staff members – both member staff and committee staff – can be the best way to share pertinent information. She also pointed out that the best time to influence legislation is early in the process – concerned individuals and organizations are wise to pay attention to committee processes and provide information before or during the drafting of the legislation.

- 2) Comments from NIFA Director Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy also made a significant impression, on two fronts. As part of a discussion about Extension's role in combatting nutritional insecurity, which he labeled as an existential threat to our society, he referenced the fact that science deniers (regarding climate change and other related issues) get tremendous following because they put out a clear and simple message – they take the complexity out of the issues and make statements that appeal to the public, even though they're incomplete, misleading and often outright untrue. His message pointed out to me the importance of our role in conveying complex information in the clearest and simplest terms possible, and helping people become comfortable with complexity in order to make informed decisions as individuals and as citizens. In addition, Dr. Ramaswamy, as well as several other speakers on the first day, drove home the importance of our success stories – both personal/anecdotal success stories as well as aggregated impact numbers. I will never complain about writing success stories; in fact, I have a new appreciation for different types of success stories.

A final major take-away from PILD was an increased sense of PRIDE in what we do. We sometimes get bogged down in hectic schedules and never-ending workloads, and fail to look at the big picture. One of our speakers referred to a survey of people who were not familiar with Extension. When that group heard the idea of creating an organization that does what we do, they *loved* the idea. We are still needed in our second century; we simply need to make sure our stories are told.

Dale P. Kehr (IL)

As a SNAP-Education Educator I found the experience at the PILD conference to be empowering. The Association's night out at the Wax museum helped me to think about how our nation was shaped through the stories told by the mannequins. I found most of the sessions to be beneficial in preparing for the visits to the hill on the last day. I enjoyed hearing what our volunteers had to say about the conference and what they thought were the important messages that we should share with the government officials. One of my favorite sessions that I attended was *Camping on the Capital: Innovative Ways to Enhance Advocacy and Build Support for Extension*. I found this session provided ideas that are easily replicated to highlight the mission of every State's Extension program. The tips and resources provided are already being incorporated in my work as I meet with county, state and federal legislators.

Thank you for this wonderful opportunity to grow professionally as well as personally. I enjoyed meeting members of the NEAFCS Association and it has given me an opportunity to explore other benefits of this association.

Demarcus Sneed (IN)

I had a great experience at the PILD Conference. I learned a lot during my time at the conference including how to engage with our representatives, what to expect during our visits, the type of environment in which politicians work, and much more. One of my favorite parts of the conference was Dr. Steel's Keynote presentation regarding Innovation and Technology within Extension. I think he did an excellent job of driving home the point of keeping Extension relevant by being innovative in today's changing world. In addition to the learning events at the conference, I also enjoyed the opportunity to network with educators and volunteers from other states which further enhanced my experience.

During the meetings with our members of congress we were able to share all of the great work that Purdue Extension is doing for the State of Indiana. Both our Senator (Joe Donnelly) and Representatives (Susan Brooks) offices' were aware and supportive of the work of Extension and we were able to give them more detailed examples of how we're making an impact in their State and District. We were also able to find out about the issues they thought were important. Opioid/Substance abuse in Indiana was an issue identified by both Senator Donnelly and Representative Brooks' offices. We were also able to meet with their staff members which I learned at the conference is sometimes more effective than meeting with the legislators themselves. Overall it was a great experience and I'm grateful for the opportunity and support of NEAFCS to have represented Purdue Extension at the event.

Kylie Ludwig (KS)

What do people in our communities want? Trust. Through our role in our communities we in extension can provide just that. We are knowledgeable, timely and provide a network of relationships to extend knowledge and provide solutions. Public Issues Leadership Development, PILD, two-day conference allows extension professionals to come together and reinforce our importance. We are local, trusted and relevant.

PILD provides the opportunity for seasoned extension professionals as well as newer professionals to learn about the connections extension has in DC. The conference helps attendees "know the rules," meaning, who is the governing authority at your university, who the designated lobbyist for extension are and in what context. It helps educate us on the difference between advocating as an individual and speaking on behalf of our organization.

PILD is an excellent chance to learn another part of extension more fully. One of the best parts is networking with our peers from across our nation. Connecting with our peers helps us increase our ability to reach more individuals on a broader spectrum.

What a privilege it was to attend the Public Issues Leadership Development (PILD) conference in Washington, D.C.! The experience broadened my understanding of public policy issues that impacts Cooperative Extension and Extension clientele. Having the experience to learn, in depth, the political process at the National level, made this the best professional development opportunity I have had in my 18 years with Extension.

Vicki Wynn (KY)

Keynote speaker, Dr. Doug Steele, spoke with integrity in his message that we are all in the people business, and we are all about relationships. He stressed the fact that using social media must be a tool to move our message forward. In addition, he emphasized the importance of innovation and technology, and how those connections determine our relevance in the world today.

One breakout session examined the importance of advocacy for Extension and how it is critical for our future survival. More than ever, we must know our impact data, and the positive changes we are making in our state. We must also be able to communicate these changes to stakeholders, as well as legislators.

Another session stressed the role of narrative inquiry and how stories can document the value and impact of Extension programs on our local communities. Linking stories to purpose enables the storyteller to motivate others through their positive experiences.

The National Institute of Food & Agriculture (NIFA) National Program Leaders brought updates from Family & Community Health, Housing & Environmental Health, and Adult Development & Aging. In addition, funding opportunities were announced, and links to new resource materials were shared.

A highlight of the conference was Dr. Frances Lee's presentation during the NEAFCS sponsored session. Currently a professor, researcher and author at the University of Maryland, she painted a very realistic picture of "a typical day in the life" of a legislator. Her enthusiasm for the political process was interesting and informative. Her comments helped us be better prepared for Hill visits at the conclusion of the conference.

Thank you for the opportunity and support to attend this year's PILD conference. I look forward to sharing my experiences and insight with colleagues throughout Kentucky.

Carolyn E. Robinson (LA)

As a first time attendee to PILD, I cannot express how appreciative that I am of having the experience of participating in this leadership development conference. I thank the scholarship committee for the opportunity of a scholarship and even more so for being a recipient of the scholarship.

As President-Elect of the Louisiana Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, even though I traveled alone, the experience of being there is all mines.

As an attendee of the 2016 PILD conference I can say that my 18 years of extension has not provided me the advocacy and leadership skills to affect public issues. It is out there but the process of knowing the effective communication processes for meeting with legislators was enhanced at this conference. In the session What I Learned: My Experiences "Advocating" for Extension in the State Legislature and Locally in the Community did help me to understand what are the limits of advocating or Extension. The conference breakout sessions, and speakers all had an impact that I can use forever.

I did enjoy Ethan Orr, and the skit by Dr. L. Washington Lyons group on Understanding the Structure of Extension System. Everything was more than what I expected from the First timer's orientation to the Day on Capitol Hill.

I did meet with the 5th District Congressman Abraham from Louisiana. Meeting with him and using my skills of advocating for Extension made my day. I was so exciting that he took time to listen, but already knew so much of what I had to say. What an Experience.

I would advise all Extension persons who have not had the experience of attending PILD to please do so.

Shauna Henley (MD)

"Sit a spell" is what I learned. Being from New England and now working in the Baltimore, Maryland area, my ear for Southern drawls is still a work in progress. I listened hard to make sense of what I thought was "sitter-spell," and wondered what kind of magic are they doing in Texas? ...after a while I heard "sitting a spell" and laughed at myself. Luckily, a key theme of Ronnie and Alexis' talk was taking the time to listen to others. As a newbie to PILD, I sat a spell, and tried to absorb what the speakers and those I talked to had to say. I learned more about my coworkers who I don't always see based on geography and discipline; I learned about party trends since the Civil War; I learned how NIFA is organized; I learned that people still don't understand us millennials; I learned that Lee from Montana makes pretty amazing arrowheads; and I learned that the conversations you have sitting a spell with others can have great importance decades down the line.

Maude Harris (MO)

The Public Issues Leadership Development (PILD) conference in Washington, D.C. was a wonderful opportunity for my professional development. In fact, this was one of the most beneficial conferences that I have attended in quite some time. The presentations and breakout sessions before the meetings on Capitol Hill were very helpful. I learned how to better communicate with our stakeholders and policy makers and now have a clearer understanding of Extension's Federal funding and how it has an effect on our local programs. The most useful tool was learning how to communicate how Extension programs are impacting the Economy, Education, and Nutrition and Health concerns in Missouri. The highlight of the conference was being able to meet with the legislators and their staff. It was a powerful experience to be an advocate for the University of Missouri Extension system and share the work we do on Extension's behalf.

Kim Gowdy (MS)

My first time attendance of PILD conference was enlightening, refreshing, and insightful of the history and the importance we serve within our communities. This year's theme "The Story of Extension" provided an insight of how valuable our impact is not only just in my community, but in all of our communities. The best quote which set the course of what to expect throughout the conference was best stated by Dr. Douglas Steele, "Important part of our past allows us to understand our future." As the future state of our communities adapt to the ever-changing ways of society, so must Extension in

order to remain as effective while still holding true to our foundation of providing education to the people. Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy stated “Capitalize trust within our communities” which is so true, because we serve as the voice.

The most impactful sessions were “Crafting Your Message” by Ethan Orr because it really gave me an opportunity to strengthen my leadership efforts and feel even more confident on my visit to the hill to deliver my speech. I already had a speech in mind that was well rehearsed; however, I really felt after attending this session I needed to skip the script and really express the what, how, and needs of our community. Therefore, I left that session with an “A-Ha” moment which served as my voice to my legislative officials “community sustainability is only achievable through continued growth and education and this is the story of Extension”. The most memorable event with the conference was our Association Night. Just imagine 15 women and 1 man traveling the metro and fine dining in the heart of Washington D.C. indeed a true blast!!!

Deborah McGiffin (NC)

The theme of the 2016 PILD conference was “Innovation: The Story of Extension” which emphasized the importance of telling our Extension and Family and Consumer Sciences story. As funding for Extension has seen a steady decline over the last two decades, many pertinent and significant programs have had to relinquish public availability, particularly in the program areas of Family and Consumer Sciences. The PILD conference focused on strategies that underscore the relevance of FCS programs in local communities. Specifically, the conference centered on ways to effectively demonstrate FCS impacts through using volunteers to communicate with public decision makers, and by using media outlets to describe impacts on local families involved in Family and Consumer Sciences programming. Another noteworthy outcome of the conference was the opportunity to meet with NIFA staff and learn of additional program support available to counties. The presentations given by Dr. Ahlishia Shipley and other NIFA program leaders were beneficially informative and applicable to local Extension offices, because FCS agents in attendance were made aware of program resources at NIFA that can be utilized in individual counties. The two additional breakout sessions I attended, “Camping at the Capitol” and “County Level Advocacy for \$\$\$ to Support Extension Programs” both highlighted how Extension agents can feature signature programs and involve community leaders in identifying community needs, so that Extension programs are more impactful and can obtain adequate local support and funding. The visit at NIFA headquarters was equally educational in explaining funding procedures and opportunities available through competitive grants. I found the experience and opportunity to network with both volunteers and Extension professionals along with the information gained on advocacy to be constructive and relevant to the needs of Family and Consumers Sciences in North Carolina. I am looking forward to applying many of these strategies in my own county as well as apprising our district and state NEAFCS affiliates of appropriate advocacy approaches suitable for local individual FCS programs. If utilized efficiently to each unique the locale, increased FCS advocacy will serve to generate positive public perception of FCS programs which in turn can strengthen family and consumer capacity and prosperity.

Holly Arnold (ND)

Thank you to the NEAFCS for the 2016 PILD 1st Timer's Scholarship of \$200.00. I enjoyed Dr. Doug Steele's keynote presentation "Diffusion of Innovation: Impacts and Implications for Extension". I found it to be very relevant about the challenges that Extension staff experience. The speaker for the NEAFCS Association Meeting was so knowledgeable and passionate about the federal government and her time was much too short.

I appreciated Ahlshia Shipley's, NIFA Program Leader, reminder/encouragement to utilize "Just in Time Parenting" information. It is great information to use on Facebook, supplement curriculum materials and provide to parent support groups.

The meetings with the ND House and Senate members and their staff was the highlight of the conference. It was good to visit with them in their Washington environment and highlight what Extension is doing in their home communities.

Shannon Carter (OH)

Upon reflecting on my experience as a 1st Timer at PILD in Washington, D.C, there are several things I gained from the conference. I appreciate the opportunity to hear from several different speakers, from different perspectives, on how to speak with legislators... and more importantly, how to be heard. Our NIFA leaders helped me understand the national impact and reach of Extension and how research is translated into programs at the national level. Messages from state Extension leaders brought to light the impact of Extension and how innovation continues to fuel efforts to reach diverse populations with great impact. The portion of the conference I gained the most knowledge from was the presentation by Dr. Frances Lee. She really helped me understand the perspective of the legislators and politics, how they function and how to be effective in communicating with them. I learned a great deal about programs at NIFA that can support my local Extension work, and some resources to tap into. Lastly, and most importantly, was the opportunity to put this learning into practice while visiting with my legislators and their staff. The knowledge and skills gained at the conference gave me the confidence to speak with legislators with greater ease. Thank you for your support of my attendance at PILD.

Misty Layne-Watkins (TN)

The theme of this year's Public Issues Leadership Conference was "Innovation: The Story of Extension." The general sessions provided me with a better understanding of public policy issues. Topics included: "Extension: Is It Still the Best Kept Secret?" Crafting Your Message," Urban Innovation, "The New Extension Story", and "Innovation in Extension - A Call to Action". The National Program Leaders Panel Discussions was very informative. The breakout sessions were excellent. I chose to attend the sessions that focused on leadership. Alexis Cordova's session "Putting the Pieces Together: Leading Together was educational, interactive and entertaining. She gave us effective strategies to facilitate the building of trust and sharing of leadership responsibilities among individuals, across cultures and between communities. To sum it all up, we learned about the importance of "Sitting a Spell" to build trust with the public. The PILD Conference gave me the tools that I needed to go to Capitol Hill, and have successful visits with our federal legislators. I was better prepared to advocate for Extension. I highly recommend this conference to other Extension professional. Thank you TEAFCS and NEAFCS for providing me with an experience I will always remember.

Michelle Allen (TX)

I would like to say thank you so very much for the opportunity to be one of the recipients of the 2016 PILD scholarship. It was an experience of a lifetime and I will never forget it. As I return home, I am in awe of all I gained while attending the PILD Conference in Washington, D.C. My participation allowed me the opportunity to see advocacy unite with education in a fantastic manner. Most importantly, the critical role advocacy plays in the very existence of Extension in general. As Dr. Ramaswamy stated in his general assembly presentation, we must do a better job telling our story and I plan to do just that whenever possible. The speakers were truly informative and their words challenged my thinking in more ways than one. I was inspired by their passion and amazed by their knowledge and expertise. In addition, I thoroughly enjoyed meeting so many wonderful Extension educators from around the United States. It was wonderful having the opportunity to share programmatic ideas and discuss county success stories. That was fantastic!!! What an awesome experience and I look forward to my participation next year.

GaeLynn Peterson (UT)

I wasn't sure what to expect as a first time attendee at the Public Issues Leadership Development (PILD) conference held in Virginia in April, 2016. After attending the First-Timer's session and meeting the warm and welcoming staff, I knew it would be an amazing experience and I was right!

Working as a County Extension Faculty, I knew the importance of Cooperative Extension and Land Grant Universities but I only knew a fraction of the impact we can have. Through the various key-note speakers and presenters, I was able to gain additional insight into what we can do through "Extending Knowledge, Changing Lives" and how important it is to tell our story not only to our national congressmen but also to our state and local leaders. It was an amazing opportunity to meet with our state representatives at the Nation's capital and share with them our accomplishments and impacts.

One of the highlights of my PILD adventure was gaining new friends and contacts from other states by networking while having an enjoyable Washington D.C. experience. The Washington Twilight Tour was educational and uplifting. There was such a strong feeling of the vibrancy of our country and the men and women who made the opportunities and freedom we enjoy a possibility. The visit to Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum as a group and dining at the Oceanaire Seafood Restaurant were a delight.

Thank you for the Public Issues Leadership Development Scholarship and the opportunity to participate in this year's conference. Thank you to the planning committee and all those responsible for the beautiful hotel, food, entertainment and the learning opportunity. It was an experience I will not soon forget.

Jeanne Walsh (WI)

PILD 2016 was great! Thank you so much for providing me with a 1st timer's scholarship. The experience at the Public Issues Leadership Development Conference allowed me to learn more about America's Land Grant universities and related institutions, the need for increased Smith-Lever funds, and the growth, priorities, and impacts of various extension programs. It also gave me the opportunity to learn and build relationships with county board members, volunteers, and professionals from across Wisconsin and the United States. Spending time on Capitol Hill gave me a wonderful opportunity to meet with staffers from Wisconsin, and educate them on the many ways UW Extension impacts our local communities.