Proposed County Budget Puts Greene County Extension Programs in Jeopardy

Written by Greg Whitlock of Strafford, Mo., is chairman of the publicly elected 20-member Greene County Extension Council.

The facts are pretty simple. A proposal by members of the Greene County Commission to cut the annual county allocation to the Greene County Extension Council to the statutory minimum of $10,000 puts the local Extension office and programs in jeopardy.

One very real option in 2013 is that all MU Extension resources and staff, programs and events will be moved from Greene County to counties that do support a local office with appropriate funding. That would result in nearly $2 million dollars being immediately moved from the county along with 12 staff people who live in and spend money in Greene County.

Our best projection is that with this reduction, the office will have enough money to operate for another 12 to 14 months. That assumes no major equipment failures, no major private donations and no financial surprises in 2012. It also presents the Commission with a very steep hill to climb when it comes to finding the necessary funding for 2013 after our reserves are gone.

In 2009, the County allocated $95,000 to the publically elected Greene County Extension Council. The local office also generated about $25,000 as part of an annual office budget of $115,000.

In 2010, the County Commission voted to allocate $27,000 to the local office as a savings measure and the local office began to draw heavily from reserve funds, even after making significant cuts. The Commission repeated the allocation of $27,000 with the 2011 budget.

By state law, every first class county funds an Extension office with a minimum of $10,000. That amount was set in 1961 and would actually need to be $72,000 now to have the same buying power. Our council would welcome $72,000 in local funding as the minimum.

The local Greene County Extension Council has instituted many cuts and revenue generating ideas over the past three years in an effort to balance our budget and preserve our reserve funds. We have reduced staff, kept mileage payments for travel below the IRS rate, eliminated professional development for all staff, and rationed office materials. We now find ourselves in a situation with no easy solutions.

Greene County Extension has existed since 1914. People from all walks of life have depended on our help, our information, our training and our research. It is made possible only because of the partnerships that exist statewide between the University of Missouri and county commissions.

Because the 2012 budget cut puts our office, staff and programs in jeopardy, council members believe they have an obligation to inform our clients and the general public. It would not be
responsible to wait until the week before and say, “we are closing now,” not with a 97 year history of great programs in this county.

We choose to remain hopeful and actually believe we have an opportunity to improve our local Extension programming in the coming years. As this issue continues to develop we will post updates and details on our website at http://extension.missouri.edu/greene.

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