

**THROUGH THE YEARS... AAHE, HOUSING PROBLEMS AND CHANGE:  
AN EXTENSION PERSPECTIVE**

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**Introduction**

Extension educational programs in housing have obviously changed drastically over the last 25 years. After all, we have moved from being all things to all people to focusing our programs on key issues affecting Americans today. The goal of this article is to present an overview of Extension housing programs, clientele or audiences, and teaching/learning methodology, and to show the changes that have occurred in all three of these areas during the past 25 years.

**Methodology**

In order to understand how Extension housing has responded to problems and change over time, this article was based on the author's conclusions after a systematic review of the American Association of Housing Educators (AAHE) proceeding published since 1965, the journal *Housing and Society*, published since 1974, and other relevant reports related to AAHE and Extension (such as the 1988 Vogel Extension Program Activity Survey, a survey of all Extension housing specialists that focuses on their current program emphases). This article begins with a look at the people who make Extension housing programs possible.

**Extension Faculty**

Extension people are the housing or related specialists who are AAHE members. Housing is broadly defined to include home furnishings, equipment, and energy. Although fewer housing specialists are employed today than a quarter of a century ago, they have become more involved and supportive of each other and are a proactive force in AAHE.

In the 1960s, Extension specialists accounted for eight percent of the AAHE annual meeting attendance. That percentage increased to 18 percent in the 1970s, and to 29 percent in the 1980s. In 1974, Extension became a standing AAHE committee to complement the Academic Programs and Research Committees. It should be pointed out that the average number of people attending the annual meetings has not changed greatly, usually averaging about 85. But the number of Extension people attending AAHE has increased. One possible reason for this increased attendance is that Extension specialists recognize AAHE as an annual source of support and ideas.

Extension has given much to AAHE during the past 25 years, including seven presidents. Extension specialists have also chaired, or locally co-chaired, 15 out of 25 of the annual meetings, and most of those meetings since 1980.

As a group, Extension people changed to primarily a housing and home environment specialization with fewer and fewer states having home furnishings and equipment specialists. As state specialist positions were cut as a result of learner budgets, many states decided to eliminate home furnishings and equipment specialists' positions altogether. Today, there are more male specialists, and more of the specialists have terminal de-

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grees, usually Ph.D.s. There has also been a change from 100 percent Extension appointments to more joint Extension/research and teaching appointments.

### Extension Programs, Audiences, and Methods

**The 1960s.** The primary emphasis of Extension housing programs in the late 1960s was on improving the physical structure of the home. Extension programs were on the cutting edge of knowledge in areas such as home improvement and space planning, storage, and kitchen planning. While consumers were, and will continue to be a major audience, programs were also targeted for limited-resource audiences and home builders' groups. The methods used were primarily one-on-one teaching, public meetings, mass media for specialists and field personnel, and Extension circulars for specialists.

Table 1. Extension housing programs through the years, 1965-1990.

| Year      | Topics/Programs   | Clients   | Methods   |
|-----------|---|---|---|
| late 1960 | Improving Physical Structure  | Limited-resource households<br>Home builders  | One-on-one<br>Public-meetings<br>Television   |
| 1970      | Energy and Environment<br>Public Policy<br>Community Housing<br>Economics<br>Housing for Elderly<br>Renting   | Low-income households<br>Young adults<br>The elderly<br>The physically disabled<br>Migrants<br>Tenants<br>Planning groups<br>Tenant organizations<br>Housing managers<br>Home builders<br>Legislators           | Public meetings<br>Workshops/seminars<br>Slides, cassette tapes<br>Videotapes<br>Television services<br>Publications<br>Field trips<br>Simulation gaming<br>Self-help packets |
| 1980      | Natural Resources and Environmental Management<br>Family Development and Resource Management<br>Community Resources and Economic Development<br>Water Quality<br>Waste Management | Local Government<br>Decision-makers<br>Community leaders<br>Limited resource households<br>Renters<br>Young people<br>The elderly<br>Children<br>Home builders<br>Contractors<br>Realtors, bankers<br>Landlords | Computers<br>Videotapes<br>Model building<br>Technical, popular publications<br>Mass media<br>Teleconferencing<br>Self-help resource packets                                  |

**The 1970s.** Extension programming responds quickly to socioeconomic events and issues. As its mission states, "The Cooperative Extension System helps people improve their lives through an educational process that uses scientific knowledge focused on issues and needs" (USDA, 1991). The ability to change programs was evident following the social activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Most housing programs in the 1970s were concerned with energy and the environment, public policy issues, economics (including housing and land costs), and housing for specialized populations such as the elderly. Renting emerged as a concern during this period, whereas previously the emphasis had exclusively been on home ownership.

As programs changed, the audiences requiring that information also changed, as well as the methods used to disseminate the information. Young adults, the elderly, the physically disabled, migrants, and tenants were some of the target populations requiring Extension housing programs. Increased emphasis was placed on reaching planning authorities, tenant organizations, housing managers, home builders, and legislators.

In the 1970s, audiovisual techniques became important as teaching aids, supplemented by publications, field trips, simulation gaming/self-help hands-on materials-all designed to promote self-learning. Extension methods had changed in response to the cry that "people don't come to meetings anymore."

**The 1980s.** Issues-based programming and program accountability became the buzzwords in the Extension system during the 1980s. At the local, regional, state, and national levels, relevant, critical issues became the focus of programs and priorities. Consequently, the emphasis of programs became efficiency, accountability, and clarity of public messages while striving to meet the critical socioeconomic, environmental, and technological needs of clients.

The following Extension housing programs for the 1980s were grouped under some of the more common national-based program classifications. These on-going priority programs involve many disciplines that Extension housing specialists have been involved with for the last few years.

#### Natural Resources and Environmental Management

- Earth-sheltered and solar housing
- Energy-audits and conservation
- Energy-efficient housing
- Indoor air quality/radon
- Moisture control
- Public policy

#### Family Development and Resources Management

- Affordable housing/manufactured homes, renting, and alternative mortgages
- Housing for the elderly, the physically disabled, and day care
- Home improvement, community resources, and Economic Development
- Affordability
- Elderly housing
- Home remodeling and improvement
- Historic preservation
- Community facilities
- Public policy

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Two major programs are national initiatives. These are current and significant programs that are of shorter duration than base programs:

### Water Quality

- Protection
- Conservation
- Health, including testing/treatment
- Appliance selection
- Community and public policy

### Waste Management

- Recycling
- Reducing
- Reusing
- Community and public policy

Audiences during the 1980s have included local government officials, decision-makers, and community leaders; consumer groups such as limited-resource households, renters, young people, the elderly, and children; and professionals involved in the housing industry such as home builders, contractors, realtors, bankers, and landlords. There has also been a shift from primarily rural to urban audiences and closer links with 4-H and youth, community development, and agricultural programs. Networking has been the key to success in the 1980s' housing programs. Barriers were falling and Extension staff were working together to bring about change creatively, efficiently, and effectively. The survey of all Extension current programs emphasizes of housing specialists by the Extension Committee of AAHE (Vogel, 1988) is an example of current efforts to reduce duplicated effort and to share programs and materials. Another phenomenon in the 1980s was the regional cooperation among Extension specialists and their participation on regional research projects and teams.

Computers and videotapes were the predominant methodologies used during the 1980s as technology became an emphasis in the learning process. Other popular teaching methods used were technical and popular publications, mass media, teleconferences, and self-help or independent instructional methods such as learn-at-home packages.

## Conclusions

During the past 25 years, the concept of providing housing has shifted from being primarily the responsibility of an individual or a family to being a community issue as well. Extension housing programs, audiences, and methods have reflected this change. While Extension housing programs made the shift to issue-based programming and adjusted to budget cuts, specialists have continued to do what they have always done:

- Develop programs based on people's needs and current socioeconomic conditions and issues.
- Develop research-based programs.

Sometimes the research-base has lagged behind the programs. In the areas of energy, environment and water quality, and home remodeling and improvement, however, the author believes that Extension programs were ahead of the research and have stimulated additional research. Likewise, Extension has been a leader in working with diverse audiences, ranging from limited resource households to local decision-makers, and in using electronic communication technology such as computers, videotapes, and teleconferencing.

Yes, Extension housing educational programs have changed over the past 25 years. But so has the world. And yet the programs have still anticipated current housing problems and been flexible enough to respond to them. Extension has changed its housing

programs, reached out to include new audiences, and developed additional teaching methods to research these audiences effectively.

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