The Relationship Between CCE Associations and County Government

Summary

CCE associations have a relationship with county government that distinguishes them from other agencies and organizations that counties may fund or contract with. This fact sheet is intended to aid in understanding and communicating the features and implications of this unique relationship.

Background

Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) associations in New York State constitute a unique, formal partnership among the federal, state, and county governments, the citizens of the respective counties, and Cornell University as agent for the state. Each of these partners has roles and responsibilities as established by authorizing legislation:

- The federal government through the National Institute for Food and Agriculture of USDA provides national oversight and priorities for the cooperative extension system, and through various legal authorities supports extension and research by the land grant universities.
- The State of New York, through County Law 224 authorizes the establishment of CCE county associations as subordinate governmental agencies, provides direct and indirect state financial support for the associations, and supports research and extension at Cornell, New York’s land grant university.
- County Governments (board of supervisors) are authorized (although not required) by CL 224 to use property tax revenue to provide annual appropriations to CCE associations, such appropriations to be expended under the terms of an agreement between the association and Cornell as agent for the state.
- The citizens of the counties interested in extension work are authorized to establish local CCE associations and act through elected Boards of Directors to determine local program priorities, employ staff and exercise fiduciary responsibility for the association.
- The Director of Extension at Cornell University sets the standards for association professional staff and provides oversight for all extension work in New York State.
Guidance

County governments are important stakeholders for CCE, and associations are wise to align themselves with county priorities to the extent practicable. CCE associations are required by CL 224 to submit statements of their work and transactions to county government on an annual basis, and it is good practice to report program impacts to county government on a more frequent basis. However, the ultimate responsibility for program investment decisions and the allocation of association resources rests with the Board of Directors, and it could be considered contrary to the authorizing legislation for county governments to assume that role. Associations should take special care to ensure that the educational work they do serves the CCE mission, and avoid situations where CCE employees are *de facto* accountable to county government or any other organization.

Similarly, fiduciary responsibility for the association rests with the Board of Directors under the general oversight of Cornell which, in its capacity as agent for the state, establishes various accounting and reporting policies and procedures that associations are required to abide by. While county governments may choose whether or not to provide an appropriation to a CCE association, and while CCE associations are required to provide annual reports to county government, county government does not have oversight as to how association funds are allocated or expended.

Associations are encouraged to work closely with county governments to build confidence that association programs are addressing priority county needs in an impactful way, and that association resources from all sources are prudently allocated and administered.