

2023 State of OSU Extension Address

(speaker: Jackie Wilkins)

You, our Extension professionals, work daily to address some of today's most challenging issues. We're constantly connecting community members and leaders, seeking solutions, translating research into action, using local, state, and national resources, and putting knowledge into practice.

Hello, Ohio State University Extension Community. It is my pleasure to represent our faculty, staff, partners, and stakeholders across the state.

OSU Extension is the primary outreach and engagement arm of the College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. And CFAES is the cornerstone college of The Ohio State University.

With our network of offices and staff throughout the state. OSU Extension is well-positioned to deliver research-based knowledge from the university to every county in Ohio, and we bring people and ideas together to help CFAES sustain life.

Our partners and community stakeholders continually inform and help us fund our work throughout the state, as well as the research and discovery at our land-grant institution. And for that unwavering support, we are very grateful.

In OSU Extension we believe that all Ohioans should have the knowledge and resources they need to actively engage in creating conditions in which they thrive. And for this reason, we are committed to creating opportunities for people to explore how science-based knowledge can improve social, economic and environmental conditions.

We help build better lives, better businesses, and better communities. OSU Extension is committed to Investing in people, programs and partnerships that results in impacts that are anchored in our values.

And we do this with purpose and with a passion that is truly unique to Extension.

The foundation of our success has been and will always be our people who bring the mission of the land-grant to life in every community across Ohio. People are our greatest asset, and OSU Extension has the most knowledgeable and dedicated professionals focused on co-creating opportunities and environment where all individuals can thrive.

At OSU Extension, we are continuously taking the pulse of the needs of the state. We have nearly 800 Extension professionals located throughout the state who live and work

in the communities they serve. Our county staff, educators, field specialists and state specialists are all dedicated to sharing their expertise with colleagues and communities.

In addition, we have our faculty in our college and other units at Ohio State who engage in applied research and Extension scholarship to bring the latest research to the people of Ohio.

Along the way, we're proud to support our people with training via our Learning and Organizational Development unit plus department specialists and the OSU Leadership Center.

Our goal is to be an employer of choice and we are committed to attracting and retaining talent, hiring people with the right expertise, welcoming them, and preparing them for early success, and then mentoring them along the way and providing timely and relevant professional development across the length of their career and Extension.

Our employees have numerous options for promotion and advancement, leadership opportunities and connections with colleagues throughout the university to name a few.

In addition to growing our own workforce, we're committed to developing the workforce of tomorrow by establishing training and certifications that will provide demand-driven, hands-on training and ensuring that workers have the training and tools they need to be successful.

Ensuring the young people attain education and employment here in Ohio, or undertake entrepreneurial venture, is especially critical for the growth and success of our state. And in 4-H, we believe in the power of young people. Hands-on 4-H projects and experiences bring out their potential, their passions, and their drive to help others. In 4-H, we believe true leaders aren't born, they're grown.

To bring this belief to life, OSU Extension and Ohio 4-H are working with key partners to develop and implement targeted skill-building for youth in both rural and urban communities, especially focused on high-demand manufacturing and STEM-related fields.

In Extension, we're committed to lifelong learning with a people-first philosophy and engaged scholarship around focused needs and programmatic priorities. We partner with Ohioans, and we leverage resources for optimal impact.

We co-create solutions to today's and tomorrow's most vexing problems. And we've been doing this for well over a century. We're focused not just on what matters now, but also in the future. Our Extension programs most often are locally driven to meet the unique needs of the communities and to complement, but never duplicate, existing community efforts.

Plus, many of our programs can be replicated and localized for other communities across the state.

Our community development professionals focus on building and maintaining healthy businesses and creating vital communities together with local leaders through a variety of tactics, including convening, coalition building and strategic planning.

Our family and consumer sciences professionals focus on healthy families, healthy finances, and healthy relationships across the life span. This looks slightly different in each county, but that's who we are – people-centered programming aimed at improving health and well-being and focused on prevention education, so life can be enjoyed to the fullest.

Our agriculture and natural resources professionals also tackle many important challenges to help manage the well-being of the ag industry. Water quality issues, ag production research and implementation, solar energy, urban on-farm research, ag safety, and mental health of ag producers, just to name a few of our current priorities.

OSU Extension empowers farmers, business owners, families, and communities of all sizes to meet the challenges they face, adapt to changing technology, improve nutrition and food safety, prepare for and respond to emergencies, and protect our environment.

We do this by partnering in community-oriented research, translating knowledge into action, and convening local partners with common interests to ensure that solutions are found.

When we proactively engage with partners, we reduce redundancy, leverage funding dollars, and increase collaboration to achieve desired results. This reciprocal and abiding relationship has long been one of the distinguishing characteristics of our success and allows us to be a partner of choice – engaging to build coalitions, fund programs and people, and create strategies for building pathways for Ohioans to thrive.

It's so exciting that we can literally look to any area of the state and realize we have some great partnerships going on.

A few others that I'd like to call out today are the Broadband Accelerator program helping Ohioans connect, literally. Financial literacy with (the) Ohio Treasurer and throughout the state. The new business park in Noble County, transforming that area of the state. Connecting with Intel in Licking County as it impacts that community. Ohio Sea Grant focusing on sustainable use of Lake Erie and its resources. And if you can imagine it, we're likely helping to create it. The new Farm Financial Management Policy Institute will help unify our farm financial management and policy expertise across the full spectrum of the agricultural industry. Farm Science Review reaches beyond state lines. The Food Kindness

and Grow Kindness events with the Office of Student Life. I could go on, but you get the picture.

Our reach is extended because of our volunteers. This really is one of the things for which OSU Extension is best known. Many of our 4-H volunteers are second, third, or even fourth generation. Our Master Gardener Volunteers give of their time and talents to build community gardens and educate garden enthusiasts throughout the state.

There are Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalists around the state. And let's not forget the many other people who volunteer at their local Extension office to help us maintain that front door of the university in their very own community.

Stakeholders within local businesses and in the legislature are the backbone of Extension. Their fiscal and other support helps our people put programs into action with our partners.

And our commodity organizations are always supportive of Extension, with the insight and expertise of their own staff, as well as funding for grants and other programs.

We live our values. Last year, we rolled out our Extension Keys, and this year, they are becoming part of our core competencies. Research suggests that less than 10 percent of companies and organizations are intentional about living their values. OSU Extension will be in that 10 percent, because we care about our people and our partners.

In addition, we aren't afraid to explore our culture and address areas where improvement is necessary. This year, we will be reviewing the results of a recent Enterprise Trust Index survey, and we will begin the journey of identifying opportunities to enhance our organization while celebrating our identified strengths. We want to be known as an organization that is reflective and continuously works to best serve its employees and its clientele.

We are Extension.

(speaker: Jamie McConnell)

We are Extension. We are the front door to Ohio State and the many resources of a land-grant institution. Youth in 4-H have often spent at least ten years learning, experimenting, and developing as leaders and the next generation workforce by the time they've graduated high school.

(speaker: Jared Morrison)

We are Extension, and we believe that learning happens everywhere and across the lifespan. We believe that learning happens every day in many different formats and countless topics.

(speaker: Kaytlin Felger)

We are Extension and we listen to our stakeholders as we work and live in communities across the state in all 88 counties.

(speaker: David Civittolo)

We are Extension, and we are more than just the sum of our parts. We are a mission, a philosophy, and a way of life. The people we serve matter to us because they are people just like us.

(speaker: Whitney Gherman)

We are Extension, and we care about the people in our communities. If something impacts our community, it affects where we live and work, and we are committed to co-creating solutions.

(speaker: Tim McDermott)

We are Extension, and Extension is at its core, our people, our employees, our clientele, our volunteers, our stakeholders, and our funders. Achieving the mission of Extension is not easy. It requires hard work and dedication. It involves understanding that our North Star is improving the quality of life, not just for ourselves, but for those around us and for the next generation.

(speaker: Jacci Smith)

We are Extension. We recognize that to create a world where all Ohioans thrive, we must bring our best selves to our work, to our community, and to our partnerships each and every day.

(speaker: Jackie Wilkins)

We are Extension. And I'm proud to say that we are a century strong – with a bold vision for making today and tomorrow better for everyone. And we have the will and the people to do it.

So, what's the state of OSU Extension? Our state of mind in OSU Extension is proud, positive, and proactive.

We employ our resources wisely to serve Ohioans well. Those resources are our people, our programs, and our partners.

We look forward to continuing to invest our time and talent in OSU Extension. And again, we do this with passion and purpose. Just look around at your own local team, your colleagues around the state, and your personal triumphs with programs and partners. In this past year, we've done some great things, and we're poised to do even more in 2023.