

PILD Reflections from 2014 NEAFCS Scholarship Recipients

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National Extension Association of Family & Consumer Sciences (NEAFCS) was pleased to award 20 scholarships to assist first time NEAFCS members in attending the JCEP Public Issues Leadership Development (PILD) conference this past year. One of the scholarship requirements is that attendees submit a short paragraph summarizing their PILD experience. Here are the reflections this year's scholarship recipients submitted regarding this past April's "Celebrating the Past, Leading the Future" PILD Conference. Hopefully they will inspire all of our Extension colleagues and peers to attend next year's PILD conference which will take place April 12-15, 2015 at the Hyatt Regency in Crystal City, VA.

"WOW! That is the only word to describe attending the PILD conference in the same year that the 100th anniversary of the Smith-Lever Act was celebrated. Attending PILD gave me a better understanding of just how important the work we do is, and how much it does to better the lives of individuals and families in our state and nation. I spent two intense days preparing and learning from dynamite speakers and attending breakout sessions on how to effectively communicate our message to our legislators on the Hill. All in all, attending PILD was very rewarding and one of the best professional development opportunities an NEAFCS member and extension educator could experience." ~ Mandy Armentor, Louisiana State University

"The PILD conference was a wonderful experience. The conference speakers emphasized many important pieces of information that helped us on our visit to Capitol Hill and will also help us in the future when advocating for Extension. It was also great hearing from some of the NIFA leaders and what they are currently working on. The opportunity to network with colleagues from across the country was also a great benefit. It is very helpful to understand how Extension works in other states and to hear about their programming. The visit to Capitol Hill was very rewarding. We always hear about the importance of communicating with legislators, but to be able to do it in that capacity was a great experience." ~ Bethany Bachmann, University of Missouri

"PILD was a wonderful professional development opportunity for me. I now better understand the big picture of how Cooperative Extension System and our government work at the federal level. The presentations and breakout sessions all contributed to a tremendous experience on Capitol Hill. Meeting with legislators and their staff was the highlight of the conference for me. It was powerful to be an advocate for University of Minnesota Extension, our programs and, specifically, my role as a food safety educator and member of NEAFCS. Thank you for the opportunity!" ~ Kathy Brandt, University of Minnesota

"I especially enjoyed the sessions about the history of the Extension service and the passing of the Smith-Lever Act to officially organize the Extension Service. The 100 year narrative presented by Travis Burke was most enjoyable and informative. Our Mississippi visit to the Hill was a great experience. Everyone was helpful...as to how to get from point A to point B. We had a short guided tour of the Capitol courtesy of Rep. Palazzo and visited all our state Congressmen and Representatives. While we

mostly met with staffers, we did get to visit in person with Rep. Greg Harper and he was a great host.”
~ Carolyn Conger, Mississippi State

“My participation at PILD surpassed my expectations! I felt empowered by all the speakers and encouraged by fellow Extension professionals as we celebrated our 100 anniversary. Having the opportunity to hear from our National Program Leaders was invaluable. The visit to my Congressman was very productive. I came back to my county with new ideas, new contacts and a refreshed sense of pride for being an Extension professional.” ~ Edda Z. Cotto-Rivera, University of Georgia

“This year’s PILD conference was one of the best Extension conferences I have ever attended. I have been involved with Extension over 20 years, and it was very educational and motivational in so many ways. I appreciated all the guidance on how to advocate for Extension. I look forward to attending next year.” ~ Karen DeZarn, Texas A & M

“As a first time attendee, I wasn’t sure what to expect. I knew that at the end of the conference I was to meet with my elected officials and discuss all the hard work that our state does. What I didn’t realize was that it would completely change the way I approach not only elected officials but also the audiences I work with. One of the most powerful things that stuck out to me was that people, elected or not, want to know why we do what we do. Yes, numbers do matter but they want to find a deeper connection of why -- not what and how. We have to learn to move forward from our past and not be stuck in it. We also need to think differently in order to keep up or be ahead of the world around us. I will close with Saffo’s Rule from Jerry Thomas’ session about looking at current and future issues: “Look back twice as far as you look ahead.” ~ Elizabeth Elizondo, University of Tennessee

“I found the PILD experience to be wonderful. Thank you for providing financial support to defray my expenses. I really appreciated hearing about what was being included in the newly passed Farm Bill, especially the Food Insecurity Nutrition incentives. Although Extension cannot directly receive the funds, we are encouraged to be a partner. I also enjoyed hearing about Extension’s rich history, but most importantly about how we need to be ready for the future. Each time I attend a JCEP conference I build a greater understanding of – and feel more connected to – NEAFCS. I appreciated all the great work of our national leadership team. Our state will get a lot of use from the NEAFCS impact statements.”
~ Cindy Evans, Kansas State University

“I have downloaded all the presentations and shared the one from our NIFA Program Leaders with our state membership. I was happily surprised to learn about the NIFA resources we could get and the conversations they are having on behalf of our programming needs in our states. I also sent our membership the presentation on telling our story using the ‘public value’ concept. By adding public value to our impact reports, I will better convey the importance to those not using our services but benefitting because we are improving lives in our communities and state.” ~ Linda Floyd-Chappell, University of Arkansas

“The conference was so purposefully planned to teach Extension Educators what they needed to know before their visits to the Hill, I was impressed. I found the national leaders to be accessible and eager to

share. I was proud that FCS had impact statements to give to constituents. It was worthwhile to see fellow NEAFCS members outside our group environment to see how we all fit into the big picture. After attending, I feel more interested in national service to this organization and to my state's, as well."

~ Melanie Hart, Ohio State University

"In Utah the responsibility to share the impact of Extension FCS programming is shifting to Utah Extension AFCS. My PILD experience provided a great foundation for developing a plan on how to tell our story to federal and state legislators, and local officials. We will take our impact statements and prepare a summary that will be read. We will help members develop skills to tell our story. We will be prepared to tell our story in two minutes or 20. We will use our Public Affairs committee to share information throughout the year to keep elected officials informed about what we do and the difference we make."

~ Ann Henderson, Utah State University

"Attending JCEP's PILD conference during Extension's centennial year celebration provided me a wonderful opportunity. Reviewing Cooperative Extension's history gave me a deeper appreciation for the work of early extension agents. Looking ahead to how our methods may change as we continue to strive to effectively distribute research-based information reminds me of the need to keep up with changes in technology while still retaining a rapport with our clientele. Meeting with legislators and their staff members increased my understanding of their role and responsibilities. Experiencing all of this in the splendor of Washington, DC increased the significance of the event for me." ~ Sharon Jeffrey, Michigan State University

"Thank you for helping make PILD a great experience. What a wonderful opportunity to network and meet with other educators across the states. As a result, I was able to develop a working relationship with other educators of various areas of extension and beyond. Building personal networking bridges was fun and fascinating, along with helping others connect, find information and share experiences – it was beyond expectations. The session that really stood out for me was Marshall Stewart, 100 Years and Counting. As a leader, knowing your story or elevator speech will carry a big impact as to what we have done in the last 100 years, but the greatest impact will be when we share the amazing things we are planning for the future." ~ Pat Jones, University of Nebraska – Lincoln

"It was a pleasure and an honor to represent NEAFCS at PILD. I gained the most from the presentation by Nancy Franz of Iowa State. Her discussion of articulating the public value of Extension was very relevant. It was nice to hear an approach that explains that what we do is not always a matter of statistics and dollars; that public value is the 'so what' that really makes a difference in society as a result of the program." ~ Jayne McBurney, North Carolina State

"By attending PILD I learned more about how truly connected we are with NIFA and USDA at the national level and how local projects and programs can tie directly into national initiatives and priorities. However, it is up to individual educators to help make the connection between national level priorities and local level priorities. Making sure to frame the Extension message and story so it fits the priorities and goals of our elected officials is critical in maintaining our place in all counties in Oklahoma."

~ Sonya McDaniel, Oklahoma State

“As I drove toward Washington, I could barely contain my excitement. The city is full of memories and moments that have developed into a love for the buzz in the Beltway. Having the opportunity to represent Extension on a new level provided a renewed outlook in my endeavors. In early May, I completed my second year with the WVU Extension Service. The conference was very complimentary to the experiences I have had thus far. PILD provided an opportunity to expand my knowledge, build relationships outside of WV and FCS, and become more familiar with those that support us at USDA. For those who have never experienced DC or a visit to Capitol Hill, I encourage you to make this a priority for Extension, your state, and your own personal and professional development.” ~ Elizabeth “Liz” Metheny, West Virginia University

“PILD was a great venue to learn about Cooperative Extension’s rich history and the revolutionary changes that it went through these past 100 years. I particularly enjoyed the sessions that addressed public issues and how to be an effective advocate versus lobbyist. The community circle concept session helped me realize the creative ways I can engage communities and be effective at program implementation by involving community volunteers and workforces. I appreciate all the hard work involved in creating the impact statements. I was most grateful to attend this conference.”
~ Dhruvi Patel, University of Maryland

“I had a great experience at PILD. I have always been a little overwhelmed by talking to public leaders. This conference helped me to gain confidence in this area. One message that stuck out to me is that planning is not an event. It should be ongoing. Always focus on your strategy. Build in capacity to be more flexible and leave room to innovate.” ~ Laura Sant, University of Idaho

“In my 35 years of Extension, I had never thought of visiting a legislator or providing information to one. The process of developing skills to do this and the visits on Capitol Hill were very rewarding. PILD was an opportunity to meet colleagues from other states and to work with educators from my state for this very purpose! The speakers were great and the subsequent NEAFCS meeting, too. I was able to bring back grant and other information that will lead to team building at our university. The presentations related to the history of Extension provided various views of our past history and future prospects. Thank you for this opportunity!” ~ Jan Scholl, Pennsylvania State University

“This was a great opportunity for me to hear from our national program leaders and to gain knowledge on funding and program initiatives at the national level. I gained new program ideas by attending the breakout sessions. It was also an honor being part of the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Cooperative Extension. I was able to network with colleagues from around the nation and gather ideas and insights from them. It was a wonderful opportunity to be able to go to “the hill” and meet with congressional representatives and share our great Extension work and thank them for their support. Thanks, again, for the opportunity.” ~ Jennifer Stefancik, Purdue University

**Note: Some comments had to be edited and/or shortened due to space considerations.*

