

## **PILD 2019 Reflections**

I am pleased to provide the reflections of NEAFCS members recounting their experiences at the Public Issues Leadership Development conference in April 2019. - Julie Garden-Robinson, Vice President for Public Affairs

### **Ines Beltran, University of Georgia Extension (third from left)**



The conference and the visit to the Capitol was a great opportunity to learn more about the legislative process and visit our Georgia delegation. I enjoyed being in DC with my colleagues from Georgia and learning more about the great job we do in our State. We met with the Assistants of Congressman Drew Ferguson, Rob Woodall, and Doug Collins, and with the Assistant of Congresswoman Lucy McBath. I shared with each of them my story about the great impact of EFNEP on the lives of thousands of people in Georgia, and how participants of the "Food Talk Program"

demonstrate long-term behavior changes.

The PILD conference speakers helped me to prepare better to meet with those Congress officials. Each of the speakers and presenters added great information about how to have an effective communication and how to bring a clear and concise message. I felt more prepared and ready for my meetings. We were all glowing examples of how to tell the story of Extension. My appreciation also to the planning Committee members for all the information shared and the super conference planned.



### **Joy Rouse, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach**

Attending a national conference is a good way to get a new perspective on your work. The PILD Conference is a chance to hear from the National Program Leaders for Family and Consumer Sciences giving you the breadth of what is offered and the resources available. One of the best things is to connect with staff from other states to hear what they are doing and the challenges they face. I always gather some information to share with my coworkers in Iowa. Allan Ladd, Carol Waters and I went on three congressional visits to share what we are doing. Although each visit was a little different depending on what the staffer knew about Extension, we were able to add some new information to their knowledge concerning our impact in Iowa.

Innovation was mentioned several times at the PILD conference this year. Two speakers reminded me why innovation can be uncomfortable. People like innovation but hate change. It can be disruptive

because we have to stop something we do well. The innovation process may not be linear and take several turns. As we become innovative to work with emerging issues, keeping these things in mind will help everyone adapt or follow the process.



**Brittany Martin, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service**

Before attending the Public Issues Leadership Development Conference, I was not sure what to expect from the experience. I knew it would be valuable to my growth as a leader within Extension, but I never could have anticipated the impact it would have on me in just a few days. The general sessions gave me perspective on our common goals and interests. One of my favorite sessions was the update on our field from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Though I had a vague understanding of programming efforts nationally, this presentation helped everything “click” for me.

It gives me pride to know that my programming efforts make a difference on a larger scale. The information on speaking to our local Representatives was not only useful for our visits the next day, but something I will take back home with me and use to strengthen those relationships for the rest of my career. As we met with our Representatives, it was so inspiring to see other Extension professionals traveling from office to office as well and know that we were sharing common experiences from across the nation. As I share details from the trip with my colleagues, friends, and family, I am reminded that the work we are doing is important and meaningful. I encourage everyone to get outside of the daily stresses and tasks to see the larger picture of leadership within Extension whenever possible!

**Sonya Patterson, North Carolina State University Cooperative Extension**



Thank you NEAFCS for the opportunity to attend the 2019 PILD conference in beautiful Alexandria, Va. It was an amazing experience to meet and network with Extension professionals from so many different states. It was awesome to see how we operate so differently to achieve the same mission. The concurrent sessions were very well done and super insightful. One of my favorite sessions was the one conducted by NIFA professionals. The information presented really opened my eyes to so many great resources that I didn't know existed. I also enjoyed the NEAFCS concurrent session that afforded us as FCS professionals the opportunity to share our triumphs as well as our challenges. The Healthy Communities and Opioid Crisis sessions I attended were extremely relevant and enlightening.

The Association and States Night Out were both enjoyable and served as another great networking opportunity. The food was great too! Lastly, the trip to Capitol Hill was an excellent experience! We were given tips by a panel consisting of a congressional staffer on the best way to communicate with our state legislators. We were also entertained with a skit regarding what to say or not to say during our Hill visits. Congress was in recess the week of the conference, therefore we were unable to meet our actual state representatives; however, we were allowed to meet with their staffers and share our concerns, as well as our successes from NC State University and NC A&T State University. We were also allowed to leave hard copies of our impact report for later review. Two of my favorite take away messages was "what should we do or what could we do?" and we must always deliver compelling messages that stick. I learned so much more about the importance and value of our work.



**Melanie Thomas, University of Florida/IFAS Extension**

Thank you to NEAFCS for the opportunity to attend the 2019 PILD Conference. As a first-time attendee the experience was eye-opening and wonderful. The opportunity to meet and network, with not only fellow colleagues within NEAFCS, but with leaders across all Extension disciplines was very beneficial. We don't often get the chance to expand our sights beyond our own program areas. Unfortunately, the first morning of the conference none of us were seeing too far while sitting in the dark due to a power outage. Thankfully our keynote presenter, Paul Hill, is a TRUE Extension professional and never skipped a beat while delivering a dynamic presentation via flashlight. We all just figured we were at 4-H camp for the morning. The highlight of the week was visiting with our Representatives' and Senators' staff on Capitol Hill to briefly share about the work we do and to thank them for their continued support of Extension funding.

I came away with a greater understanding of the structure and funding of the national Extension system and greater appreciation for the nationwide network of Extension. I consider it an honor and a privilege to have represented UF/IFAS Extension at the national level. The future of the Extension system is bright! We have an amazing group of true leaders whose drive and passion for Extension is unstoppable. Thank you again for assisting me in this venture.



**Misty Harmon**, Ohio State University Extension

Attending PILD enabled me to expand upon the things I had learned last year while participating in NELD (National Extension Leadership Development Program). We learned how USDA and NIFA help fund extension and we met with some of the leaders from the different agencies. Returning to Washington DC after having 9 months to reflect and grow, was a great opportunity. I was able to revisit some of the aids I met last year and remind them of the work we are doing, in addition to meeting with others for the first time. Attending the meetings with other educators from Ohio enabled me to learn more about what other program areas are doing to help meet the needs of our communities, our state, and our nation.

In addition to the work that I do as a Family and Consumer Sciences Educator, I can speak to the work of others. PILD helped to reinforce the necessity of having a clear and concise message in order to tell effective stories. I enjoyed working on our elevator speech during the NEAFCS session and hearing about the work being done around the country. Karen (Munden) was so enthusiastic and welcoming to all of us during that session. Overall, PILD was a great chance to learn even more about extension and our government, and how to more effectively utilize information to tell stories about our work. Thank you for this opportunity!



**Vanessa Hoines**, North Dakota State University Extension

Thank you to NEAFCS for the opportunity to attend PILD. What a memorable experience from the general session speakers to networking with fellow Extension colleagues. And who could forget the presentations by flashlight! "Innovation Through Lean Experimentation," presented by Paul Hill in the dark, really made you rethink the idea of innovation. The story he shared about the high jumper who invented a new way to do the sport was enlightening and gave me pause to think about the things I do automatically. Should I be looking for new ways to complete this project?

The updates from NIFA were excellent, giving us a national perspective of the cooperative extension system and I especially enjoyed the capnote presentation by Dr. Doug Steele. Being able to share personal stories of success and impact statements from our programs with staffers of our Congress members was a great opportunity. It was exciting to create our presentation and work through the materials and tips that were shared for working with staffers. We were definitely feeling prepared and ready to present when it came time for "the ask." Again, this opportunity will allow me to

continue to serve my community with a renewed sense of purpose for what I can offer to my county and beyond. Thank you again to NEAFCS for the opportunity to attend the PILD conference.

**Kirstin Dagny Jensen**, University of Idaho Extension (shown on far right)



A big thank you to NEAFCS and my state association (IEAFCS) for the opportunity and support to attend PILD 2019! This year's theme was Enhancing Leadership Capacity for Emerging Issues and I thoroughly enjoyed the conference, the great speakers, the opportunities to network with other Extension professionals across the nation, and the experience of meeting with state representatives on the Hill. After a jaw dropping night monument tour, the conference started out with a little bit of humor and some good 'ole Extension flexibility with "lights out"! After a warm welcome, one of the keynote speakers, Paul Hill, gave an inspiring and humorous talk on economic development strategies through leadership and engagement and I even was

lucky enough to win one of his books – "We've Tried That Before: 500 Years of Extension Wisdom".

I enjoyed spending time with other educators who were at the conference representing NEAFCS. We worked together on developing a 3 to 5-minute elevator speech based on our association's national and state impact statements. One of my favorite moments was the opportunity to go to the "hill" and meet with staff from Idaho's state and government offices. I enjoyed getting to share what we can and do accomplish in Extension and felt very well received. The ending keynote speaker, Dr. Douglas Steele, was an inspiring talk encouraging us to not keep "Extension as the best kept secret". Attending PILD was an awesome experience and one that I am excited to share with all Educators across my state



**Susan Johnson**, Kansas State University Research and Extension

As President of our affiliate of NEAFCS, it was an incredible experience to represent Kansas at the PILD Conference. I have been engaged in many leadership conferences during my 40-year Extension career; however, the PILD experience far surpassed any of them. To kick-off the week with the Washington Twilight Tour was a perfect way to set the scene for the week ahead. Keynote Speaker, Paul Hill, was a true master at overcoming the electrical outage as he discussed "Innovation is a process – one can't apply the same model to new problems, new thinking. In Extension, we may have one career – we don't want to get too efficient, too good at something because we might get stuck doing the same thing." I also appreciated Dr. Marshall Stewart's remarks on building strong messages that are clear, concise, and valid. A top-notch break-out session on "Wicked Problems –

How Naming and Framing Creates Space for Dialogue" was a session that we can take home and utilize

immediately and effectively. The small group interactions illustrated a community scenario on the importance of differentiating between positions, interests, and values.

The NEAFCS Association Meeting was valuable in working together to create an elevator speech that conveys who we are and the impacts that individuals and families are experiencing through behavior change. Having a better understanding of the complexity of APLU and NIFA was eye-opening and intriguing. Dr. Doug Steele was captivating as he challenged us to connect the dots throughout Extension, become people-centered, and emphasize being timely, relevant, trusted, and local. We cannot continue to talk about the what – we have to share the WHY. To bring all of the parts of the PILD Conference into the whole prepared us to visit with our congressional legislative assistants on the last day. Our team discussed the WHY Extension is important in Kansas as a convener and educator and how our programs positively impact the citizens and stakeholders of our state. As a First-Timer, this was an amazing opportunity to discuss important issues that help improve the people’s lives and to share the knowledge gained with our co-workers and association members, Finally, to remember: A meaningful life is meaningful work.



**Stacy Reed**, Pennsylvania State Extension

NEAFCS, thank you for the opportunity to attend the Joint Council of Extension Professionals Public Issues Leadership Development Conference as a first-timer. Being a new Extension employee and being able to network with fellow Extension Agents/Educators and NEAFCS members from around the United States was invaluable. The PILD Conference’s 2019 theme of Enhancing Leadership Capacity for Emerging Issues is very timely for the land-grant system.

From Paul Hill’s discussion on Innovation I learned that to be innovative you must be prepared to accept failure. I also learned throughout the conference that to be successful in Extension you need to know your impacts and speak to key stakeholders about the value you and your programs bring. During our NEAFCS meeting we learned how to create an elevator speech in 30 seconds or less, which I plan to share with my affiliate chapter. We also discussed new ways that our chapters can showcase impacts locally using infographics, videos or even a bookmark. Thank you again for allowing me the chance to attend PILD.



**Naomi Brower**, Utah State University Extension

PILD was an excellent opportunity to interact with individuals across multiple program areas and discuss challenges that impact all of Extension. I especially enjoyed the opportunity to network with other FCS professionals from across the nation to learn about programs in their areas and strategize how to best share our impacts with stakeholders. The highlight of the conference was having the opportunity to visit our legislators to highlight some of our state impacts. This conference was an excellent opportunity to learn from other Extension leaders from across the country and how our individual programs and reports weave into the tapestry of Extension as a whole.



**Shana Withee**, Oregon State University Extension Service

My experience as a first-timer to the 2019 PILD was amazing. I wish to thank NEAFCS for the scholarship that helped to make this possible. I especially enjoyed the opportunities to network and gain insightful information and knowledge about possible resources from the many knowledgeable guest speakers. Paul Hill's presentation on "Innovation through Lean Experimentation" was all about being adaptable in our jobs. He did a great job adapting to the lack of electricity and use of his PowerPoint. What a fantastic, inspiring speech his was.

I learned and enjoyed the networking at the breakout sessions, especially the ones that dealt with community health. The PILD Conference provided an opportunity to network with co-workers across program areas and across the nation. I also gained a better understanding of where our funding comes from. The acronyms were familiar – NIFA, APLU, AFRI, USDA, EFNEP, etc. – but learning about federal funding gave me a clearer understanding of why we do the work we do. The sessions were of benefit to me professionally as well as personally. I found the volunteer session especially insightful. It was such a phenomenal experience to educate and advocate for Cooperative Extension Service on the hill. Talking with our senators and congressional representatives was my highlight of the conference. Being able to share success stories with them and connect coworkers with them for upcoming projects was very rewarding. It made me proud of the work we do.



**Jay Christiansen**, Purdue University Extension

My experience as a first time attendee at PILD was great! I greatly appreciated the opportunity to meet with and learn from Extension Professionals across the country. I found the theme for this year's PILD conference – “Enhancing Leadership Capacity for Emerging Issues” – to be an excellent choice for me professionally. The speakers and panelists provided us with thoughtful remarks and challenged us to be more innovative. I especially appreciated the remarks from Paul Hill and specifically when he said, "We can't apply our old way of thinking to new issues and problems." Our capnote presentation by Dr. Doug Steele reminded us to be effective communicators, deliver meaningful

outcomes, become a "people-centered" organization and challenged us to become leader advocates.

I also gained a better understanding of where our funding in Extension comes from, insight into Family & Consumer Sciences from a Federal Perspective and why advocacy is so important. The conversation with the Congressional Staffer gave all of us insights into how we can use our time wisely when we get the opportunity to meet with our congressional representatives. Thank you, NEAFCS, for giving me the opportunity to this year's PILD Conference!



**Sara Richie**, University of Wisconsin Extension

I am so grateful for the opportunity to attend the Public Issues Leadership Development (PILD) Conference this year. I am currently the President of our Wisconsin Extension Association of Family and Consumer Science (WEAFCS) and have only been in my county-based position for 4.5 years. Attending PILD early in my career has provided me with an extensive overview of our national funding structure and how we compare to other states.

I believe having this knowledge, and the experience of sharing my story on Capitol Hill with our state legislators office, has better positioned me to advocate locally for support from my communities and local elected officials that I serve. The opportunity to network and learn from colleagues from around the country is invaluable. My big take-away from the conference was the activity that NEAFCS did in our meeting to help build our story. It is a strategy that I have already shared with colleagues in Wisconsin! I can't wait to share it again at an upcoming meeting!



**Dorothy Nuckols, University of Maryland Extension**

Transcendent is the term that comes to mind as I reflect on the 2019 PILD experience. Transcendent, defined by Miriam Webster as, “surpassing the ordinary; exceptional,” aptly describes all the PILD conference components: plenary and concurrent sessions, program area gatherings, state meetings, networking breaks, and of course, Hill visits with congressional influencers. The experience illustrates Extension’s ability to excel and to impact communities, transcending limitations of county and state lines, demographic designations, political affiliation, Extension state structure, funding, and even electrical power! As the conference opened, we were in the dark, literally, when a storm disrupted power to the conference hotel and surrounding area. How appropriate that the opening plenary session was entitled, “Innovation through Lean

Experimentation.” Paul Hill brought his presentation to life with a real-time demonstration of flexibility, and who will forget the live long jump demonstration?

The culmination of the conference was the opportunity to visit our Maryland congressmen, promote the work of Extension throughout our state, and offer our services as a resource. Throughout the conference, the true impact of Extension’s work came to life in a new way. The exuberance and camaraderie of colleagues from across the United States was unforgettable. But that would have been less meaningful if unsupported by data detailing our collective impact, the millions of Americans we touch from every state, and the ways we leverage our federal funding through our partnerships and collaborations with local and state support and the army of energetic volunteers who work with us.



**Eugenia Wilson, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension**

Many co-workers had told me PILD would be the best conference I would attend. And they were right! The conference was an opportunity to be with colleagues in a different atmosphere than our normal trainings and conferences. This was an opportunity for me to step outside my comfort zone; I often tell people I am not political. But this time was not about politics; it was about why what we do is important. I think sometimes we work so hard in our counties that we forget that there is a bigger picture and the impact we have is greater than we see in our community.

We are a collection of skilled professionals and together, unified, our voice is strong and our county impacts can spread through the state and even internationally. With outstanding general sessions with practical information, and plenty of time for networking, I was inspired as I discovered our collective efforts nationally. PILD was an opportunity to step up to those who make decisions and say they look at what Extension does, EVERYWHERE. We are skilled intellectuals with the ability and resources to assist families with making the best choices to grow their families and communities as healthy as possible.



**Joy West, University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service**

I was honored to represent the Arkansas NEAFCS association at the 2019 PILD Conference. I would like to commend the PILD committee and speakers Paul Hill and Heather Mannix for continuing and being affective during the power loss. I felt the breakout sessions were helpful, but I would have liked a better description on the sessions, I would have chosen differently had I known more fully what they were about. I felt the National Program Leader Panel Sessions were very helpful in letting us know what is happening in our areas.

The PILD committee did a great job of preparing us for the hill visits. I learned a lot from the panel on “Communicating on the Hill” which included role-playing good and bad examples of meeting with elected officials and staff members. I also thought it was important to have the opportunity to listen to recommendations from a House and Senate staffer to help us prepare. Although I didn’t feel fully prepared for the hill visits, I found the legislator staffers open and willing to listen. I enjoyed getting to share with them personal stories of how the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service has impacted the people of Arkansas.



**Holly Jay, Montana State University Extension**

As a first-time attendee, the PILD conference was a great learning experience. After navigating the weather delays, long lines and uncertainties of travel and hotel power outages, the sessions were all very beneficial. The workshops and provided many advantageous ideas and tips which we could use later in the week when visiting the hill or at the local level working with county and state officials.

The most beneficial presentations to me were the opening speaker and the FCS breakout sessions. I will share some thoughts on the FCS breakout session. Beverly Samuel, National Program Leader, Housing & Environmental Health, Division of Family & Consumer Sciences, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, did a wonderful job sharing all the information available through NIFA. She understands Extension. The PowerPoint presentation has been shared to the NEAFCS website. If you have not viewed it, take a moment and do so. There are many areas in which we can learn about programs offered, curricula that has been developed for our use and grant funding opportunities.

One aspect of my programming that I plan to change as a result of attending the PILD Conference is to utilize the resources and curricula available through the NIFA website. I hope you will take a moment to visit their website and learn about all the wonderful programs available. I also want to thank NEAFCS for the opportunity to attend this conference and represent the Treasure State of Montana.



**Karen Jones, Louisiana State University Cooperative Extension Service**

PILD exceeded my expectations. Thank you for this opportunity!

Heather Mannix enlightened the audience: Is the program content we are teaching relevant for the time? So What? And does science really matter? In the book, *Escape from the Ivory Tower*, scientists can be dedicated to their research and teaching. But, maybe the science does not really matter unless they can communicate their findings to the public and decision makers. As a Nutrition Agent teaching research based information to the general public, my job is to make the science important for the residents to adopt, which will lead to behavior change.

Paul Hill told this story: A high jumper used a new technique, continuing to practice and changed the sport. People will challenge you for challenging the status quo. Innovation is a journey of endurance with risks, and be okay with failure, see things differently and do not get too comfortable. Try new things and apply new thinking to new problems. Growth comes with testing and moving forward, because it's a process of stumbles and successes. This has motivated me to evaluate my programming. He urged us to follow our Congressman, so now I am following them on Twitter.

According to Dr. Doug Steele: Find passion in your work and pull in the right direction. Connect the dots, continue building trust and be people-centered, answering the why in our programming. Extension is being connected to the people. Extension is trusted, local, and relevant. I shared these last two statements during the Hill visits.



**Rachel Lockwood, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service**

Thank you to NEAFCS for the opportunity to attend PILD. It was an honor to represent Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service as an FCS Educator. As a fourteen-year Educator, this was my first time to attend PILD, as well as my first trip to Washington D.C. This was an amazing experience and far exceeded my expectations, especially the Twilight Tour of D.C. and our opening sessions with flashlights!

The opening sessions by flashlight was a perfect way to kick off the conference as to how relevant, resilient and resourceful Extension is. The theme of "Enhancing Leadership Capacity for Emerging Issues" was perfect for our challenging times in Extension. The opening sessions on both days and the FCS session emphasized the importance of telling the Extension story and how we, as humble professionals, need to improve on sharing our Extension stories. The sessions of "Creating a Culture of Health" and "Utilizing Technology to Provide Leadership for Emerging Issues" were relevant and empowering as to how Extension continues to evolve around the needs of communities. I also gained a better understanding of where our funding comes from.

This entire experience from networking with others throughout the nation to learning about federal funding provided me a clearer understanding of why so many of us are dedicated to what we do. This enlightening experience also reemphasized why advocacy for Extension is so critical to our communities and the people we serve! Thank you again for the opportunity to attend PILD.