July 14, 2008

Dear friend of the Oregon State University Extension Service in Lane County:

Imagine losing about one third of your annual household income and learning that the rest might disappear in less than a year. What would you do? How would you make ends meet?

Lane County commissioners recently approved their 2008-09 operating budget without $47 million in annual federal timber payments. This loss of federal funds is delivering a serious blow to many services supported by the county, including the OSU Extension Service.

Local Extension offices are typically funded through a cooperative agreement among federal, state, and county governments. In 2007-08, every dollar that Lane County government invested in its local Extension office was matched by similar amounts from state and federal partners. However, the loss of annual federal timber payments has forced Lane County to eliminate the OSU Extension Service from its 2008-09 budget. We now have to operate with nearly one third less money, and our matching funds from state and federal partners are now at risk. Despite the county’s dire financial situation, commissioners have granted us one year of “rent forgiveness.” We are grateful for this support, but still face a cash shortfall of about $483,000.

Thanks to careful spending in recent years, we have built up reserves that will allow us to operate with reduced staffing and program levels through June 30, 2009. Here is what that means for our educational programming:

**Farms and Gardens**
Last year, Master Gardener volunteers helped more than 50,000 Lane County residents learn to grow their own food, conserve water, identify plant pests and disease, and find alternatives to pesticides. Extension composting volunteers helped local businesses divert more than 70 tons of organic material from their trash, reducing the need for landfill space and saving taxpayers money. Lane County farmers learned to improve yields, minimize pesticide and fertilizer use, and increase profitability through workshops delivered by local Extension faculty. These programs will remain active in the coming year, but only through increased assistance from volunteers, fee increases, partnerships with other organizations, and adequate fund raising efforts.

**4-H Youth Development**
Lane County youth learn citizenship, leadership, and life skills through 4-H clubs in animal science, natural resources, engineering and technology, home economics, horticulture, and expressive arts. These programs will remain active in the coming year, but only through increased assistance from volunteers, fee increases, partnerships with other organizations, and adequate fund raising efforts.
Family and Community Development
Limited-resource individuals, children, and families learn to make healthy food choices through the Extension Nutrition Education Program. This program does not rely on county funding, so it will continue to exist essentially as it does today. Home and family activities including consumer assistance, financial literacy, healthy aging, family self-sufficiency, indoor air quality, and homemaker study groups are being suspended until sustainable funding can be secured. Trained volunteers, known as Master Food Preservers, will continue offering food safety and food preservation education through the end of September. The future of the Master Food Preserver Program—beyond September 30—will depend on adequate fund raising efforts.

Forestry
Woodland owners and managers use OSU research to improve woodland stewardship, enhance natural habitat, and increase profitability. However, all forestry programming, including the Master Woodland Manager Program, is being suspended until sustainable funding can be secured.

This is a difficult time for all of us. We are saying farewell to some incredible OSU Extension Service employees who have put their heart and soul into serving Lane County residents for many years. In the months ahead, we will do our best to serve you in every way we can, but things are going to be different until we secure sustainable funding. You will notice a reduction in office and phone hours, but we hope that keeping our doors open over the noon hour will create a new convenience for many people. You might notice that our ability to respond to individual email questions will diminish, but we are working hard to help answer your questions with a growing collection of Web-based resources. You may also notice that we are increasing fees for many of our educational materials and programs. We will continue to offer fee waivers and scholarships for limited-resource participants, but increased fees have become a financial necessity in our quest to replace county funding.

If you have not yet had a chance to visit our Web site at http://extension.oregonstate.edu/lane, we hope you will take a few minutes to check it out. The site provides convenient access to a variety of OSU Extension Service educational materials and may even save you the time and cost of a trip to our office near the Lane County fairgrounds. In the months ahead, we have plans to expand and enhance our Web site, using it as a communications tool to keep you informed about the latest news from the OSU Extension Service.

We invite you to become involved—as a volunteer or a donor—so we can rebuild the OSU Extension Service in Lane County into an organization that is bigger and better than ever before. We truly believe that is possible with the help of our loyal supporters. If you have specific suggestions about ways to address our current challenges, we invite you to share those suggestions in a letter, or via email at lanecounty.extension@oregonstate.edu.

Sincerely,

Steve Dodrill, Lane County Staff Chair
Oregon State University Extension Service