News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DATE: 5/14/2013

I am constantly amazed between what I think people know and what they actually know. This reality manifests itself in many ways. Just the other day I heard a radio trivia contest and the question was in what city is Independence Hall located? The answer given was, “Harrisburg, PA”. I am thinking really?

Then I think about my job and how people have no idea that extension or 4-H is connected to the University of Maryland let alone the Land Grant University System. I know I have stated on other occasions that I am a product of the Land Grant University System, I was a 4-Her, I hold two degrees from Land Grant Universities, I work for a Land Grant University and my mother is still a member of Clear Spring Homemakers Club.

Yet I still find it hard to believe people are uninformed when it comes to history. Will it make a real difference if someone knows the history of the Land Grant University System, maybe or maybe not? However, if current circumstances are any indication I would say the answer is yes.
Why, the reason is quite simply, people in both universities and government have forgotten the purpose of the Land Grant System and have unwittingly gone about undermining this treasured resource. For those of you that do not know, the Land Grant University System was set in motion when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act into law. This act which became known as the Land Grant Act established colleges of Agriculture and Mechanics for the express purpose of educating the “industrial class”.

I am not at all saying the scope of these colleges should not have been broaden, what I am saying is they were to attract or one might even say give preference to students that have great potential but not had the greatest opportunities in their educational careers. Remember in Lincoln’s day higher education or even high school education was almost exclusively the domain of the rich.

Today, many Land Grant Universities brag about the high SAT scores of their incoming class or any number of accolades these freshmen might have accumulated. That in and of itself is not bad but how many “industrial class” students of value have been over looked.

Next in 1887, the Hatch Act gave federal funds, initially of $15,000 each, to state land-grant colleges in order to create a series of agricultural experiment stations, as well as pass along new information, especially in the areas of soil minerals and plant growth. This was public funds to do research for the public good. Today, again I hope unwittingly, federal funds have been cut and have forced researchers to seek extramural funds to conduct their research. Extramural funds are funds that can be federally or state funded grants but in many cases are funds from private companies which have potential
gain from the outcome. It is becoming less and less common to do research for the public good.

Then in 1914 the Smith–Lever Act established a system of cooperative extension services, connected to the land-grant universities, in order to inform people about current developments in agriculture, home economics, public policy/government, leadership, 4-H, economic development, coastal issues (National Sea Grant College Program), and many other related subjects. It helped farmers learn new agricultural techniques by the introduction of home instruction.

Today, the scope of Extension’s breadth and reach is much more than agriculture, 4-H and home economics and many of you have benefited from our work. My request is spread the word and not keep Extension as one of the University of Maryland’s best kept secrets.

University of Maryland Extension programs are open to all citizens and will not discriminate against anyone because of race, age, sex, color, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, or national origin, marital status, genetic information, or political affiliation, or gender identity and expression.