

# Jackson County Extension program facing cuts

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by RACHEL KIELTY  
*Associate Editor*

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There will be major changes made to the University of Minnesota Extension Service, including right here in Jackson County, but at present no one quite knows what the changes will be, or specifically, when they will take place. According to a Dec. 7 press release, "The University of Minnesota is

changing in response to the needs and issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including changing Minnesota demographics and flat funding. Extension has created a three-year plan for change that commits to maintaining county-based programming, creating a specific plan for the unique needs of the seven-county metro area, diversifying programs, streamlining the workforce and

increasing organizational flexibility to enable quick response to changing needs."

So what does this all mean to Jackson County? Well, according to Jackson County Extension Educator Kia Harries, "We don't know a lot yet." Harries said that she and her fellow educators started to hear rumblings of the changes this summer. "We first heard at the State Fair

that The Board of Regents had questions," said Harries.

Harries alluded that the biggest motivator for these new adjustments could be money. The Extension currently doesn't charge for its services, but higher-ups at the University of Minnesota are finding it difficult to fund all

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programs. The press release states, "As a result, some programs and activities will be discontinued. Our current financial model is not sustainable."

Harries noted that at this time she is unsure what programs will be cut. But programs aren't the only cuts she foresees. "Over the next two years, there'll be 50-60 jobs cut. Out of 300 jobs, that has some pretty serious implications." Currently, as one part of the restructuring aspect of the plan job descriptions are being re-written and Extension workers will be asked to write a description of what they'd be willing to do. After this, as Harries put it, "We'll wait till February to see if we fit into their plan." Harries added, "There is no one confident in their job as of today."

One thing Harries is confident of, however, is that the changes made will not be subtle ones. "We'll look different and we'll be staffed differently." One of the biggest changes that could be seen is in the area of 4-H. Instead of 4-H being a county affair, it could be altered to encompass different regions instead. Harries was quick to add, however, "Everything keeps changing. There are no answers yet."