

THE EXTENSION AGENT NETWORK

BACKGROUND

For over 100 years, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service has served Texas by creating and delivering high-quality education through science-based knowledge.

AgriLife Extension teaches youth and adults how to improve agriculture and food production, learn and adopt practices that improve health and wellness, protect the environment, and strengthen communities.

Additionally, our agency nimbly adapts in response to the state's emerging needs. Our network of county agents and specialists have been a frontline resource for Texas through our Disaster Assessment and Recovery unit in direct response to COVID-19 and wildfire recovery efforts.

RECRUITING & RETAINING QUALITY TALENT

AgriLife Extension is a statewide "people agency" with more than 93% of its annual budget invested in professional educators across 250 counties.

Extension employee salaries average below those of public school educators, and the agency's ability to keep up with economic changes is necessary to:

- > Respond to huge population growth and demand for services.
- > Maintain consistent local educational programs.
- > Support statewide emergency response.

Since 2018, AgriLife Extension agent salary increases have trailed average public teacher salaries by 6.6%.

Over the past ten years, the agency has seen a 20% loss in faculty-equivalent specialist positions – many of whom are recruited away by private industry due to enhanced salary competitiveness.



EXCEPTIONAL ITEM REQUEST

\$32.2 MILLION

OBJECTIVE

Maintain effective educational and emergency response to retain funding support for statewide network, enabling

- > Programs, tools and resources that teach people how to improve agriculture and food production, advance health practices, protect the environment, strengthen the economy and enrich youth.
- > Support for statewide emergency and disaster response through readiness, response and recovery.
- > Response to explosive population growth and increasing demand for services and educational programming.



DESIRED FUNDING OUTCOMES

- > A reduction in turnover to below 7% to maintain consistency in program delivery, emergency response and community presence.
- > Increased quality and diversity of the agency's applicant pools due to higher starting salaries.
- > Increased ability to respond to current and emerging needs of Texans, educate communities, and engage with public and private collaborators.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Competitive compensation is a primary factor that limits AgriLife Extension from recruiting and keeping high quality educators in many areas of the state. This item:

- > Seeks \$21 million over the biennium to address recruitment and retention across the network.
- > Would raise minimum pay for agents to \$53,000 per year up from \$41,000.
- > Would raise agent average up to \$70,000 per year from \$58,000.

DISASTER AND RECOVERY AGENTS

Texas ranks first in the U.S. in the variety and frequency of natural disasters. The work of Extension strike teams and the Disaster Assessment and Recovery Unit is now an integral part of our state's ability to respond to disaster.

This item seeks \$3.2 million for 18 Disaster and Recovery educators in key locations. These positions would:

- > Align with all regional councils of governments (COGs).
- > Further support FEMA emergency support functions related to agriculture and natural resources.
- > Increases support of local jurisdictions in completing preliminary damage assessments.

INCREASE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

AgriLife Extension agents work directly in their local community to customize programming and topics that impact local lives and economies.

This item requests \$8 million for 36 new specialists across Texas. These positions are critical backbone to support the agent network and provide expertise for plant & water diagnostics, food safety, and numerous other agricultural programs.

These new positions are essential to our agent network add critical subject matter expertise for agriculture, natural resources and community health issues. They are essential to our agent network and serve additional benefit as conduits for emergency response and recovery during times of disaster.

