

Trent Wilde
Introduction to Piute County Commission
January 11, 2016

My name is Trent Wilde, and I am the new Utah State University Piute County Extension Agent. This is a dual county position split between Piute and Wayne Counties. As many of you know, the previous agent, Verl Bagley, retired on June 30th of last year. At that time, I was employed as the Millard County Extension agent. Because my family lives in Piute County, the university asked me if I would like to transfer from Millard County to this position. This was not really what the university wanted. I had been employed in Millard County for the previous six years, and from a university perspective, they would have preferred that I stay there. They even offered to significantly increase my salary if I would move my family to Millard County and stay there. But, my family really didn't want to leave Piute County, so I turned down significantly more money than I will ever make here to be able to move home.

Unfortunately, the university was not able to have a replacement ready by July 1st, so I was asked to stay in Millard County until a replacement could be found and also spend some time in the new counties. Looking back, I think it may have been better to leave Verl's position vacant until the full transition could be made, because the partial transition created some confusion in the new counties. But, for the last six months, I have been working in all three counties. A new agent for Millard County was hired in November with a starting date of January 4th, so, as of the first of the year, I am officially full-time in this position. Now that I am officially here, I thought it would be good to formally introduce myself.

I was born and raised in Summit County, Utah. My family lived in the small rural town of Oakley in southern Summit County. We had a small dairy there and ran a small beef cattle herd utilizing public land grazing in the Uintah National Forest. I graduated from South Summit High School in 1990 and served a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the Washington D. C. North Mission from 1991-1993.

During my high school years, our family began to feel some of the pressures of urban encroachment into our valley. With Park City less than thirty miles away, high end development began to spill over into the Kamas Valley driving up real estate values and creating rural/urban conflict issues. It was not uncommon to have what would now be million dollar homes built in the middle of what were formally cow pastures, and it soon became very evident that cows had a hard time differentiating between a cow pasture and very expensive landscaping. Needless to say, even very nice people got quite upset when they found cows grazing on their new front lawn. Of course, we made every effort to prevent this from happening, but when you have cattle which are used to working their way off of the high mountain summer range in the fall, they find it very difficult to pass up a lush front lawn on their way down the mountain.

In addition to the urban sprawl, we were experiencing changing management practices from the federal land management agencies related to public land grazing permits. They were many of the same issues we are facing here today, but they began a little earlier up north due to the proximity to large urban areas.

These issues made agricultural production increasing difficult, so by the time I returned from D. C. in 1993, my family was exploring options for moving their operation to a more conducive area. In January of 1994, we sold our properties in Summit County, got out of the dairy business and purchased a cattle ranch in the Sandhills of Nebraska. The positive side of the urban encroachment was, by driving property values up, it allowed us to expand significantly. The ranch in Nebraska was 95% private property and had a carrying capacity of about 600 beef cattle. I spent the next several years in Nebraska working the family cattle ranch with my family. My brother, his family and my mother continue to operate the ranch today.

My wife and I moved back to Utah in 2002 where she began teaching at Circleville Elementary, and I went back to college to finish my degree through Utah State University's distance education program right here in Junction. After obtaining my bachelors degree, I was recruited by Verl Bagley to pursue a masters degree with the intent of having it completed when he retired. The university requires a masters degree for Extension Agent positions, so it makes it difficult for local people to qualify for these positions.

Part way through my masters program, the university began experiencing financial shortages. One of the measures taken by the university to cut costs was to offer a buyout program for agents who were approaching retirement. Verl was eligible for this program but was concerned that if he retired at that time, his position would not be replaced due to the tight financial circumstances at the university. So, he accepted a partial retirement which left him at about twenty percent time for his last several years. It was his desire to hold on long enough for the crisis to pass and hopefully have the opportunity to convince the university that this area was worthy of a full-time agent again.

I finished my masters degree in the middle of the financial crisis at the university, and there were no plans to put a full-time agent in Verl's position at that time if he retired. So, Verl kept working at 20% time, and I accepted an Extension agent position in Millard County. In the spring of 2015, due to some administrative changes in Extension at the university level, returning a full-time agent to this position became an option again. This surprised me and pretty much everyone else, because moving this position back to full-time from the 20% level required a significant amount of additional funding from the university. That was something that hadn't been on the table for several years.

During my six years in Millard County, my career has gravitated toward public grazing issues on federal land. I have a long history with these issues and look forward to utilizing my experience and education in assisting our counties in dealing with these issues. I have a lifetime of experience in many agricultural areas and feel like this experience will be an asset to the counties.

I look forward to working in these counties. At this time, it appears that a schedule of Monday, Wednesday and Fridays in Wayne County and Tuesdays and Thursdays in Piute County will work best. This is a general schedule and will be flexible enough to allow for being where I need to be if the needs of the counties conflict with this schedule.

It is important that the counties understand some of the practical realities of the Extension system. Extension's official title is "Cooperative Extension", because it is a three part organization with Federal, State and County funds being utilized. This requires that all three entities cooperate with each other for it to be successful. This can be very difficult at times, because all three entities have their own needs and want their funds to be utilized effectively.

Federal Extension funds come directly to the university, and the university decides how to best expend those funds within each state. The most common arrangement is the university agrees to use the state and federal funds they have for salary and benefits to place Extension agents in the counties, and the counties agree to provide the operating expenses necessary for the agents to perform their day-to-day duties. The one exception to this in these counties is the university has agreed to provide a university vehicle to transport the ag agent between counties. This was a decision made by the university years ago, because it was cheaper to pay one agent to travel back and forth between counties than it was to hire an agent for each county. Paying for an agent to travel between counties is a rare arrangement and becoming rarer. The trend is toward requiring counties who share an agent to pay for the transportation of the agent between the counties, and that is something that these counties may be asked to do at some point in the future.

This should not be seen as the university being responsible for paying for all of Extension's travel. It is a unique arrangement meant to specifically address small counties where a full-time agent for each county isn't practical. Most counties pay all of the travel expenses, as well as all the other day-to-day operating expenses, for the Extension employees based in their county. It is the responsibility of Extension agents to stay current with evolving knowledge areas. This can require out of county and out of state travel. This is a requirement of the university to keep agents up to date on evolving topics and to bring expertise from other areas back to the counties. The county pays for this travel.

One of the challenges created by moving this position back to a full-time position from the 20% time position that Verl had for the last several years is funding. Because Verl was only 20% time, most of the county funding for Extension in both counties has gravitated to other Extension program areas over the last few years. This has created a situation where there is very little funding for day-to-day operations for a full-time position without taking it from existing programs. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that Verl had been using Special Service District funds for much of the work he had been doing. When the decision was made to not have the Extension agent sit on the Special Services District Board, it took most of the funds that been used to support the ag agent position in recent years. I am not questioning the decision by the commission to remove the Extension agent from the Special Services District Board. But it is important to recognize that Special Services District funds had been being utilized to support this Extension agent position, and this change has significantly affected the resources available to the Extension agent. I don't know what the answers to these questions are, but I think it's important that the issue is recognized.

Ideally, this position is not a sit in the office all day type of position. Ideally, I would be out and about the counties helping the citizens and reporting on crop, livestock, range and weather conditions. But I do not have the resources to do that right now in either county. Ideally, each county would provide a dedicated four wheel drive vehicle for this position and the fuel and

maintenance necessary to use it. I realize funds are extremely tight everywhere, so I know that a new vehicle is out of the question. But I do not need a new vehicle. In Millard County, the county provided the Extension agent with a used Sheriff's vehicle. These were usually well used vehicles, but they had a lot of use left in them. It didn't cost the county a ton like a new vehicle would, but it was a major asset to the Extension agent. In my opinion, some type of four wheel drive vehicle is necessary for this position. If the county is unable to provide this resource to me I will be extremely limited in fulfilling my job. Again, I wouldn't need anything fancy, but I do need something to do my job. But, in the end, that decision is up to you as a commission, and I will do the best I can with what I have.

The partnership between the university and the counties has the potential to do a lot of good, but it takes an investment from the county to make it happen. The partnership is like having the university provide the county with a brand new bulldozer. It is a significant investment that has the potential to do a lot of work, but it does no good unless the county is able to afford to operate it. I hope we can work together to resolve these issues and get the most out of the investment the university has made in the county.

Administration of Extension employees is an important topic. The university supervises all Extension employees who receive their pay checks from the university according to university policies. This is outlined in the agreement between the university and the county. This is done by regional supervisors based throughout the state. The regional supervisor for the southern region has traditionally been based out of Richfield. As indicated in an email I forwarded on to you several weeks ago, the regional supervisor, Kris Saunders, retired on December 31st. We are currently under an interim supervisor who is an Extension agent in Juab County. Her name is Margie Memmot, and her contact information is in the email I forwarded to you.

Extension has well over a hundred year history of working with counties to provide access to university resources to local areas. I hope we can continue to work together to make the most of this opportunity.

Thank you for your time.