

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Extension employees may encounter conflict of interest situations not faced by other faculty members. Certain situations may present a potential violation of public trust and can create a mistaken image. The issue of Extension employees being paid consulting fees and the potential conflict of interest inherent in this situation came to a head in 1989 as a result of a published article on the relationship of a university faculty member, partially funded by Extension, being paid honoraria by various chemical companies. As a result of the concern expressed by members of Congress, language in the 1990 Farm Bill directs the Secretary of Agriculture to ensure that colleges receiving funds under the Smith-Lever Act have, in place, appropriate policies to minimize actual or potential conflicts of interest among Extension employees.

The Secretary gave the Federal Cooperative Extension Service Administrator the responsibility for approving conflict of interest policies. He interpreted the Farm Bill language to include ANY Extension employee, whether or not his or her salary was actually paid on Smith-Lever funds.

In November 1990, in direct response to the Farm Bill, the CES Administrator requested each Extension unit to send to CES a copy of its written policy and information on how each policy was communicated to employees. The WSU Extension policies related to conflict of interest were approved by the Administrator. The following is a listing of these policies.