



## **2025 Annual Conference Agenda**

**Hilton Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport**

**Bloomington, MN**

**October 6-8, 2025**

### **CONFERENCE GOALS:**

- To provide inspiration, resilience and leadership in times of turmoil.
- To provide a forum for (or similar) interaction among Directors and the Program Areas.
- To provide a forum for interaction between and among the Program Areas.
- To identify actions/responses for collaborative multistate and regional responses to issues.

### **DAY 1: (Monday, October 6)**

**11:00 am: Registration Table Opens**

**12:00 pm: Welcome Lunch – informal (Announcements begin at 12:45p) – Minnesota Valley Ballroom**

**1:15 pm – 1:30 pm: Break for clearing lunch**

**1:30 pm – 4:00 pm: Regional Collaborative Leadership and Resilience [Plenary/All Attendees]**

- A. The COVID Reset for the North Central Region (NC Regional Chair, Charlie Stoltenow, UNL)
- B. Collaboration and Resilience Strategies in Uncertain Times  
Kathy Quick, University of Minnesota Extension, Humphrey School of Public Affairs and the Center for Integrative Leadership
  - a. Why does collaborative leadership matter?
  - b. Resilience tests and strategies
  - c. Tensions of problem definition / redefinition amidst uncertainty
  - d. Strategic approaches to dealing with the overwhelm
  - e. Group Questions:
    - What makes collaborations effective?
    - How do attempts to scale up ideas work for or against you?

**4:00 pm – 5:00 pm: Opportunities for Cross Program Areas [Plenary Session]**

- A. Task Force on Rural and Youth Mental Health (TF Chair, Amber Canto, University of Wisconsin)
- B. The National Six Pillars (Bev Durgan, University of Minnesota and Robin Shepard NCCEA)

**5:00 pm – 5:15 pm: The Charge for Tomorrow's Break-Out Sessions**

- A. What makes successful multistate collaborations?

- B. What can YOU do as a program leader to foster strong collaboration?
- C. How can it be scaled up (from the local/state level) or down (from the regional/national level)?
- D. What are the impacts of multistate work that matter to partners, constituents, and funders?
- E. How will your program area address needs associated with Rural and Youth Mental Health?

**5:15 pm:** Adjourn for the Day. Dinner on your own and/or in groups.

## **DAY 2: (Tuesday, October 7)**

**7:00 am – 8:00 am: Networking Breakfast (Buffet Style) – Wood Duck Pond Room**

**8:00 am – 12:00 pm: Program Area Breakouts / Program Area Business Meetings**

\*These breakouts allow groups to discuss: (1) questions related to the conference topics posed at the end of Day 1; and (2) time for their business topics.

<b>Breakout Session</b>	<b>Room</b>
4H	I. Blue Heron Colony
Professional Development Leaders, Evaluators, and Communicators	II. Cardinal Perch
Family and Consumer Sciences	III. Eagles Nest
Community Development	IV. Hawks Ridge
Agriculture and Natural Resources	V. Mallard Point
Associate Directors	VI. Owl Overlook
Directors	VII. White Pelican Bay

**12:00 pm: Luncheon – Minnesota Valley Ballroom**

Recognitions and Awards for Regional Excellence in Extension [NC Regional Chair Charlie Stoltenow, UNL and Vice Chair Gregg Hadley, KSU]

Dwayne James, Excellence in Extension Award for Reaching New Audiences

**1:00 pm – 1:15 pm: Break for clearing lunch**

**1:15 pm – 3:30 pm: Forging successful regional and multistate collaboration [Plenary Session]**

Continued from Day 1 with Kathy Quick, University of Minnesota

- A. What We Have Learned from Prior Multistate Programming
- B. A framework for collaboration – Alignment, Differentiation, Merging, and Boundaries)
- C. **[Discussion at Your Table]** Elements That Lead to Successful Multistate Work

**4:00 pm - 5:00 pm: [Plenary/All Session]**

**The Politics of Reaching All Audiences in a Cooperative Extension Culture of Inclusion**

(Dr. Antomia Farrell, Associate Dean and Director for Culture, Access and Belonging and Interim Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Development, Michigan State University)

**5:00 pm: Adjourn the formal sessions for the day with dinner on your own by program area.**

**DAY 3: (Wednesday, October 8)**

**7:00 am – 8:00 am: Networking Breakfast (Buffet Style) – Minnesota Valley Ballroom**

**8:00 am – 8:30 am: Federal Budget and National Influences [Plenary-All Session]**

(Christina Laridaen, Lewis-Burke Associates)

**8:30 am – 9:30 am: The Challenge – Describing What We Do and the Impact We Have  
[Plenary Session]**

(Charlie Stoltenow, UNL; Gregg Hadley, KSU; Chad Higgins, MU; Ben Steffen, NE)

- Insights from Directors about how to show the ROI in CES, what are constituents asking for in ROI, and how do we mobilize the power of community-based support for Extension
- What do our constituents say they want to know about our work?

**9:30 am – 11:00 am: Debriefs from the Program Area Groups**

Each group has approximately 5-7 minutes **[lightning talks]**

- 4-H Youth Development
- Agriculture and Natural Resources
- Community Development
- Family and Consumer Sciences
- Professional Development Leaders, Evaluators and Communicators
- EXPAND – update on regional training program of University of Wisconsin.
- Associate Directors
- Directors

**11:00 am – 11:45 am: Thinking Big, Starting Small, Scaling Up –**

An Example of the North Central Region's EXCITE Initiative (Beth Nacke, UNL)

**11:45 am – 12:00 pm: Final summary and recap of ideas, actions to be taken, multistate next steps, goals for the region for the next year.**

## **Speaker Bios**

### **Kathy Quick, PhD**

Kathy Quick is the Gross Family Chair and an Associate Professor of the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, an Academic Co-Director of the University-wide Center for Integrative Leadership, and a State Specialist in Leadership and Civic Engagement with University of Minnesota Extension.

Dr. Quick's focus is bringing together people with diverse perspectives to work on high-stakes, complex, and often contentious public policy problems. Since 2016, she has centered her work on how different people define and experience public safety. Her research has included collaborating with tribal governments on roadway safety in reservations, partnering with government and nonprofit organizations to improve community relationships with police and other first responders, co-editing a special issue of Public Management Review on what public management can learn from studies of policing, and co-founding an international study group on policing.

### **Amber Canto, PhD**

Amber is the Director for the Extension Institute for Health & Well-Being at University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension. She is responsible for the strategic, financial and operational oversight of the full range of health and well-being programming. Amber works to build organizational capacity for the planning, implementation and evaluation of community-based health promotion programs. Amber has been involved in several applied research efforts related to closing gaps in disparities to healthy food access and availability and provides leadership to Extension's policy, systems and environmental change efforts to promote healthy eating and active living.

Amber's prior Extension experiences includes serving as the FoodWise State Program Coordinator and Poverty and Food Security Specialist with Extension. Before joining Extension in 2011, Amber worked as a nutrition consultant for the United Nations Children's Fund in the Dominican Republic, where she coordinated infant and young child feeding interventions along the Haitian-Dominican border.

### **Dr. Antomia Farrell**

Dr. Antomia "Mia" Farrell, a transformational leader and native of Louisville, Kentucky, obtained an Ed.D. from Murray State University in the P-20 Community and Leadership Program with a concentration in Agriculture, M.S. Human Development Leadership with a concentration in College Student Personnel from Murray State University, and B.S. from University of Kentucky (UK) Agricultural Economics.

Dr. Farrell serves as the Associate Dean and Director in the Office of Culture, Access and Belonging at Michigan State University (MSU), College of Agriculture & Natural Resources (CANR) and the Interim Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Development. She is also an Associate Professor at MSU CANR in the Department of Community Sustainability. Dr. Farrell served as the Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the University of Kentucky, Martin- Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment (M-G CAFÉ) where she led the development of a successful five-year strategic plan centered on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility for the college including Cooperative Extension Service, serving 120 counties. She served as the National MANRRS President from 2019-2021.

**Dwayne James**

Dr. Dwayne T. James, P.E., is a dynamic leader with a deep commitment to community engagement and expanding access to opportunity. He serves as the statewide Director of Access and Engagement for MU Extension, where he leads efforts to foster a culture in which all individuals – faculty, staff, participants, volunteers, and partners – are valued, supported, and able to thrive. He also serves as a Field Specialist in Community Development for St. Louis County, leading impactful programs such as the Neighborhood Leadership Fellows and the Youth Empowerment Program—initiatives that equip residents with the tools to drive meaningful change in their communities. With a background in structural engineering and public service – including serving as a Ferguson City Council member and co-founding the Ferguson Youth Initiative – Dr. James brings a unique blend of technical expertise, civic leadership, and a strong dedication to strengthening communities. He holds B.S. and M.S. degrees in civil engineering and a doctorate in education.

**Christina Laridaen**

Christina Laridaen is currently a Principal at Lewis-Burke Associates LLC. Christina Laridaen brings experience from previous roles at Lewis-Burke Associates LLC and Minnesota Student Association. Christina Laridaen holds a bachelor's degree in applied economics, management, political science, and environmental science from University of Minnesota.

**Ben Steffen**

Ben Steffen is a farmer from Humbolt, Nebraska. Having closed down the family dairy operation two years ago, he and his wife Paula Sue now focus on growing corn, beans, wheat, and hay. Ben is a proponent of using cover crops to improve soil quality and productivity. He serves as North Central Chair of the Council for Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching (CARET) and is a member of the national Board of Directors of CARET as well.

Ben serves as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Nebraska Rural Radio Association. This co-op owns fifteen radio stations in six markets across the state of Nebraska. Broadcast signals reach six states, and digital streams are available everywhere. The mission of this company is to serve agriculture and help our communities and state move forward. Ben's other interests include involvement with political campaigns, community service, and flying.

**Beth Nacke**

Beth Nacke is an Extension Educator and Registered Dietitian with the Nutrition Education Program serving Colfax, Dodge, Platte, and Saunders counties as well as state-wide school wellness coordination. Her areas of focus are nutrition education for youth and adults, food security and food access, and school wellness. Beth is passionate about improving the health and wellness of low-resource individuals and families through evidence-based nutrition and physical activity education.

**Your Hosts – current Chair and Vice Chair of NCCEA:****Charlie Stoltenow (Chair)**

Charles Stoltenow has served as dean and director of Nebraska Extension since January 2022 and is currently Chair of NCCEA. Stoltenow came to Nebraska from North Dakota State University, where he

served since 2013 as assistant director of extension for agriculture and natural resources. He had also served as the NDSU Extension veterinarian, a professor in NDSU's Animal Sciences Department, and director of the NDSU Veterinary Technology academic program. Other positions Stoltenow held while at NDSU include North Dakota Horse Racing Commissioner, Consulting Veterinarian for the North Dakota Board of Animal Health, Board of Pharmacy, Department of Emergency Services and the North Dakota Department of Health. He has held leadership positions within the North Dakota Veterinary Medical Association and the American Veterinary Medical Association.

**Gregg Hadley (Vice Chair)**

Gregg Hadley, PhD, has been an Extension professional for over 20 years. He is the Assistant Vice President - Director for Extension at Kansas State University. He is also an Associate Professor in the Kansas State University Department of Agricultural Economics. He earned his PhD and MS in Agricultural Economics from Michigan State University, and his BS in Agricultural Economics from Purdue University.

A native of Indiana, Gregg's personal pursuits include training, competing, and coaching in Olympic-style weightlifting. He is also a wannabe artist, primarily working in graphite and pen & ink.