

1896–1905

Show Me How: The Demonstration Concept and the Birth of Cooperative Extension

The essential ingredients of the land-grant mission are teaching, research, and extension, interwoven to sustain a constantly changing educational and public-service experience. Those dynamics became closely aligned with agribusiness expansion in Texas at the turn of the 20th century. Total Texas population rose from 3 million to 3.8 million in the 10 years from 1900 to 1910 and increased by approximately 1 million in each decade to 1940. In the decade 1900–1910 the value of farmland and buildings doubled. While Texas cities grew rapidly, Texas remained predominantly rural through World War II.

In Texas and throughout the United States, urban growth was being facilitated by the increasing productivity of agribusiness. The food and fiber available per capita increased much more rapidly than did the population, enabling the exodus of labor from the farm to the factory — and of populations from the farm to the city. Productivity increased because of improved stock grazing, feeding, and breeding practices and the control or elimination of such devastating livestock diseases as Texas fever, screwworm, and creeps or loin disease. The production of beef cattle, hogs, sheep, and goats increased substantially, and the quality of food and fiber continued to improve. Income from cotton, corn, sorghum, rice, and wheat production expanded exponentially due to improved cultivation practices, varieties, and processing systems.



A&M College students in an early grasses and crops class, 1899



1896

1897



Construction of the Agriculture Building is completed, at a cost of \$31,000. Later named Science Hall, the building was demolished in 1963.

1900

1899

The Texas legislature authorizes the A&M College to employ a professor of entomology, who will also devise ways to control the boll weevil and other pests. Frederick E. Mally is hired for this post.





The Texas A&M Farmers' Congress assumes sponsorship of junior agricultural clubs on a statewide basis. In July they organize the Farm Boys' and Girls' Progressive League, a forerunner of 4-H clubs.

1903



1903

The Bachelor of Science degree is offered at the A&M College. Common agriculture courses are established, and they remain as curriculum guidelines until after World War II.



November 10, 1904

The A&M Board of Directors designates an area of the campus as a permanent athletic field. Horticulture professor and chair of the Athletic Council Edwin Jackson Kyle works to get the 250,000-square-foot area fenced and provide seating for about 500. Work on the stadium is completed during the 1906 football season. The field was named for Kyle.

The public's right to know was inherent in the land-grant concept, and the carefully documented research of the agricultural experiment stations was made available to farms, ranches, and homes through extension information in agricultural bulletins and magazines and through hands-on demonstration and community education — the model that has embodied agricultural extension for nearly a century.



ABOVE: A&M College Cadets in front of Main Building

LEFT: Seaman A. Knapp (front row, center) with Texas agriculture agents



The A&M College Department of Agriculture is divided into the Departments of Animal Husbandry (now Animal Science), Plant Husbandry, and Farm Husbandry.

1904



1904

Seaman A. Knapp appoints 33 special agents for Texas, with two- to three-month tenures, to help local communities solve their special agricultural needs.



1904–1905

The Experiment Station begins conducting cotton breeding research.



“What a man hears, he will doubt. What a man sees, he may possibly doubt. But what he does himself, he cannot doubt.”

— Seaman A. Knapp
The Father of Extension

The Chillicothe substation, part of the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, is created to conduct sorghum research in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The partnership became instrumental in diversifying Texas agriculture by creating hybrid grain sorghum, developing new wheat varieties, introducing cool-season forage and pasture crops, and developing wildlife and watershed management programs.

1905



Seaman Knapp and the Porter Demonstration Farm

In 1903, Seaman A. Knapp, special agent with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, established the first demonstration farm on the Walter C. Porter farm near Terrell, in Kaufman County, Texas. The Porter farm provided a model for the inception and development of agricultural research and extension programs.

Walter Porter agreed to follow Knapp’s explicit farming instructions and the Department of Agriculture’s recommendations regarding the use of fertilizer, cultivation practices, and the selection of the crops. The community of Terrell agreed to guarantee Porter against financial loss, and he was assured that he would be entitled to all benefits and income earned. The first planting included 25 acres of cotton, 24 acres of corn (with the varieties selected by Knapp), three acres of peas and sorghum, one acre of sweet potatoes, and one acre of the grain sorghum species kafir corn and milo maize.

At the close of the crop year, Porter estimated that his income was at least \$700 more than it would have been had he used his usual practices, and he said he would continue to manage his farm according to Knapp’s recommendations. As the years passed, Porter helped other farmers operate on a demonstration farm model. The Porter Farm became a “laboratory” for teaching progressive farm techniques and an incubator for the establishment of the agricultural extension service. In 1965, the Walter C. Porter Farm was designated a National Historic Landmark and the birthplace of the Cooperative Extension Service. Knapp became known as the Father of Extension.