



PICTURED: Crested Butte, Colorado/istockphoto

INTRODUCTION

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The Morrill Act of 1862 created the Land-Grant University system, which now has at least one institution in each of the 50 states. The Land-Grant system's three-fold mission includes teaching, conducting research intended to generate knowledge to address significant problems, and then extending useful knowledge generated by this research to the general public through Cooperative Extension. This system has proven to be extremely beneficial for vast numbers of people for over 150 years.

The Western Rural Development Center (WRDC) is committed to assisting the Land-Grant Universities of the West in fulfilling their important three-fold mission. As a regional center, the WRDC is in a unique position to facilitate research and Extension programming across state borders. *Rural Connections* is a tool of the WRDC to help us accomplish this objective. Through *Rural Connections*, significant and relevant research and Extension programs can be shared with persons throughout the region. The sharing of ideas across state lines allows everyone to be more effective and efficient.

This issue of *Rural Connections* continues the WRDC objective of sharing exceptional research and Extension programs. In this issue, Extension professionals from Washington, Utah, Colorado, and Nevada share exceptional programs on significant issues that include small business development, local and regional foods, water, wildfire, and renewable energy. Unquestionably, persons throughout the region can benefit from understanding these exceptional programs.

In this issue, Debra Hansen, Monica Babine, and Margaret Viebrock of Washington State University describe a program using a "Distributed Conference" format to deliver a carefully developed curriculum on small business development to audiences across the state. Stacey MacArthur of Utah State University Extension traveled to American Samoa as part of a program sponsored by the U. S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and administered by the University of Wyoming 4-H Youth Development Program. This program provided an opportunity for 20 youth and six adults from the 13 Western states to experience the Samoan culture first hand while exploring ways to improve food and healthy-living habits. Elizabeth Plombon, Julie Kallenberger, Reagan Waskom, and MaryLou Smith of Colorado State University describe the Colorado River Basin Agricultural Water Conservation Clearinghouse that deals with conserving water from the vitally important and heavily developed and used Colorado River. Extension professionals from the University of Nevada-Reno (Ed Smith, Sonya Sistare, and Elwood Miller) have developed programs to teach behaviors to communities and residents to help them reduce dangers resulting from wildfire. Finally, Blake Thomas and Roslynn Brain of Utah State University report the results of a survey that examines views about renewable energy information.

We are excited about the excellent research and Extension programs throughout the West, and we appreciate the opportunity to share this information with our colleagues. As always, *Rural Connections* editor and Assistant Director of the Western Rural Development Center, Betsy Newman, has done a tremendous job. Her talents are many and evident to all who have had the privilege of working with her. ♦