

Cooperative Extension Changes Personal Financial Behaviors

What Is Cooperative Extension?

Cooperative Extension is a nationwide educational network that brings research and knowledge of land-grant institutions to people in their homes, workplaces, and communities. Extension links the resources and expertise of more than 3,000 county extension offices, 107 land-grant colleges and universities (which include historically black colleges, tribal colleges, and institutions serving the U.S. territories), and the federal government through USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES).

How Does Cooperative Extension Help U.S. Citizens with Their Finances?

Extension educators deliver research-based programs through workshops, home-study courses, Web-based curricula, and other methods to give people the knowledge, skills, and motivation to build financial security. The emphasis of extension programs is on changing behaviors (see below) -- developing a financial plan, managing risks of loss, reducing household debt, and saving and investing to meet goals.

For More Information

To find the County Extension office or State Land-grant University nearest you, go to: <http://www.csrees.usda.gov> and click on partners.

Example #1 – Focusing on Youth

**** Received a USDA Secretary's Honor Award (1999)*

Since 1994, USDA-CSREES and Cooperative Extension have partnered with the National Endowment for Financial Education® to revise, deliver, and evaluate the NEFE High School Financial Planning Program® (<http://www.nefe.org>). The Credit Union National Association (CUNA) is another major partner. Each year, more than half a million students complete the six-unit curriculum, which emphasizes such concepts as managing credit, saving to achieve financial goals, and owning and protecting assets. A nationwide program evaluation conducted in 2003-04 showed the program resulted in statistically significant knowledge, behavior, and confidence improvements by students.

Example #2 – Building Wealth, Not Debt

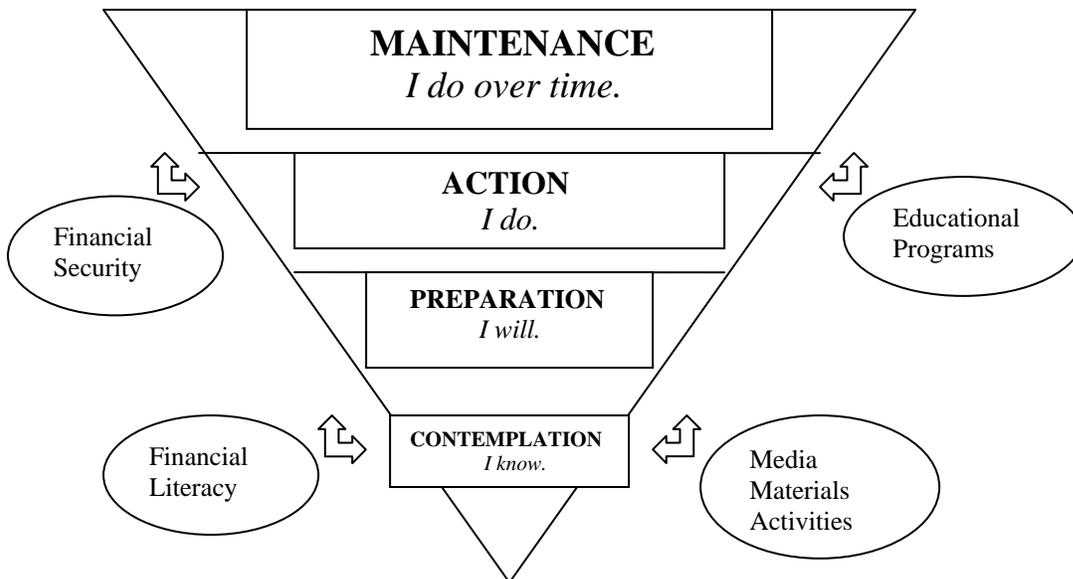
**** Received a USDA Secretary's Honor Award (2002)*

In the late 1990s, Cooperative Extension offered "Money 2000™," an educational program for beginning savers. (In cooperation with the Consumer Federation of America (CFA), this program has now been transitioned to "America Saves"—<http://www.americasaves.org>.) An estimated \$7.5 million in increased savings was reported by nearly 18,000 low- to moderate-income participants. A follow-up curriculum for successful savers is "Investing for Your Future," a basic investing course available online and via workshops (<http://www.investing.rutgers.edu>). A study of 195 program participants showed statistically significant association between knowledge gained by course users and planned actions, such as choosing financial advisors and investing in mutual funds. Respondents reported median increased savings of \$1,800.

Example #3 – Financial Security in Later Life (FSLI)

This national Cooperative Extension initiative offers a toolkit of Web-based and face-to-face educational programs designed to encourage preparation for retirement and long-term care costs (<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/fsl>). Included in the FSLI program toolkit are *America Saves*, offered in collaboration with the Consumer Federation of America; *Legally Secure Your Financial Future*; *Investing for Your Future*; *Critical Conversations About Long-term Care*; and the *Retirement Estimator for Farm Families*. Over the 5-year duration of the initiative, extension educators will report program impacts, including participant behavior changes, through an online database so that these impacts can be aggregated nationwide.

Stages to Changing Personal Financial Behaviors



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