

that “. . . there’s always an essence of truth in every story I tell.”

He took Extension very seriously and was a strict disciplinarian, tolerating no “shenanigans.” He advocated conservation grazing, range management, selecting better bulls, providing salt to cattle on the range and dehorning. His advice was widely accepted.

Arizona’s Cooperative Extension Service today is the same — and yet, very different. The four program areas are now agriculture-renewable natural resources, home economics, 4-H youth and rural development. However, most important, the people of Arizona have changed since 1914, and so have their needs. A mostly rural population has become mostly urban. Advances in agricultural technology have been enormous. Producers routinely use laser beams to level their land; keep records with computers; irrigate their land efficiently with sprinkler and drip systems; and control animal breeding through artificial insemination and embryo transplants.

Cooperative Extension, simply stated, mirrors society and the changes that society has undergone in attitudes and technology. Arizona’s Cooperative Extension Service plays an even more critical role today as educator and problem solver.

Ostriches Shared Range With Traditional Stock

Glancing down the columns of a 1910 U of A livestock report, a reader could see horses, mules, milk cows, beef cattle, sheep, and hogs but not a word about “ostriches.” Yes, ostriches.

The gangly, wide-eyed African transplants felt right at home in the Arizona desert. In fact, back in 1910 some 5,000 ostriches shared range and corral space with traditional Arizona livestock.

That same year the ostrich population, valued at \$1 million produced some \$125,000 worth of feathers for the fashion-conscious European markets.

Although the overseas feather market collapsed during World War I, some University of Arizona researchers believed the ostrich feather market would eventually come back. Those same people saw Arizona grown ostriches, with their valuable plumage, making a significant contribution to the state’s agricultural economy.

With that hope, U of A researchers in 1915 turned their attention to the world’s largest bird. The fourteen ostriches that made up the University flock became the center of interest at the school’s new five-acre poultry farm east of the main campus.

The novel project found a friend in experiment station director and agriculture dean Robert H. Forbes.

“This bird is well suited to the arid Southwest and will probably prove adapted not only to irrigated farms but the range country also,” Forbes said.

The Agricultural Experiment Station’s annual report for 1915 included a section on ostrich investigations.

By 1917 only eight ostriches roamed the University farm. Fashions had changed. The demand for ostrich plumes “plummeted” and so did the high hopes for an Arizona ostrich industry.

