

**Notes from Special DCMGA Meeting
Denton County Extension Office Conference Room
September 30, 2010**

Introduction:

Janet Laminack introduced Jayla Fry, State Master Gardener Coordinator, and Hurley Miller, District Extension Administrator, who together presided over the meeting.

Hurley Miller began by outlining Janet's duties as the County Horticulture Agent (CEA Horticulture), which include state and district activities, working with other county agents, and coordinating programs such as 4H and the Master Gardeners. He expressed his appreciation for the Master Gardeners' volunteer efforts.

Jayla Fry explained that she and Mr. Miller had come to address the organization because she had been contacted by a member of the DCMGA with concerns about the organization. She read a written statement saying that disagreements had arisen between some members of DCMGA and the Denton County Horticulture Agent, who is the MG Coordinator. She reviewed the role of the Horticulture Agent in the Master Gardener program and the relationship between the Master Gardener Association and the Horticulture Agent, as described in the Texas Master Gardener Management Guide (which can be found at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/mastergardener/program/guide.html>). The text of Jayla's statement is attached.

Hurley Miller reiterated that it is Janet's responsibility to coordinate the Master Gardener program. He said that the Extension continually receives new requirements, and that Janet may request assistance from the Master Gardeners to implement these requirements and to track the effectiveness of our activities.

Discussion:

1. There was a comment from the membership that after the resignation of the board members, Janet would only consent to meet with the former officers if a "witness" was present.

Jayla responded that she (Jayla) had recommended requiring a "witness" to get an unbiased opinion and to facilitate discussion. Witnesses could be chosen by whoever attended the meeting.

2. It was commented that a number of members wanted to delve further into why each of the board members resigned; it was felt that there wasn't enough investigation. During discussion, it was also expressed that the resignations weren't handled well, and it was admitted that there were miscommunications. Hurley said that if someone resigns, it is that person's prerogative to make the reasons known, and it is Janet's responsibility to maintain that person's privacy.

It was commented that the problem that sparked the resignations is disagreement about who runs the organization, the Horticulture Agent or the MG board. Jayla responded that the agent is ultimately in charge. Another member commented that the same Master Gardeners always seem to be in charge, but it was pointed out that this year's board was all new.

3. There was a comment that the financial relationship between the Extension and the Master Gardener Association isn't clear.

Jayla responded that the Master Gardener program is coordinated by AgriLife and the Horticulture Agent, but the Extension doesn't provide funding for projects. The Association supports the Extension by providing funding for the projects.

4. There was a comment that some members don't feel appreciated and that we didn't seem to have these problems when John Cooper was Horticulture Agent. John had an open-door policy and a more "hands-off" approach, though it was mentioned that "he got what he wanted". How are we going to keep the members who are so unhappy now?

Hurley said that each agent has his/her own management style. We have to understand the authority structure outlined in the Management Guidelines and try to improve communication to make it work.

It was commented by a member that we have recently taken a member survey to get improvement ideas from all members and had a 32% response. The results have been tabulated, and we'll vote at the October meeting on which items to address at Retreat. It was suggested that we send the results out prior to the meeting; that will be done. There was a question about whether members who can't attend the meeting can vote absentee. The answer was 'yes'.

5. There was a question about the nomination of new board members: does Janet approve all nominees?

Yes, the slate of nominees is approved by Janet, and it was approved by John before. The by-laws state that the Horticulture Agent has approval rights. The nominating committee is currently looking for candidates, so anyone who is interested in serving, please contact the committee.

6. There was a suggestion that we have more "hands-on" projects, and a comment that we have so many projects that it seems we are spreading ourselves too thin. Are projects mandated by the Extension?

Hurley said that there are program mandates, but also each association can initiate projects. Members need to make decisions about which projects to participate in.

7. There was a comment that we need to have more night meetings so that those who work during the day can participate.
8. Several members expressed the hope that we can get past this very difficult period and move on.

Jayla's introductory statement:

Resolution to the Denton County Master Gardener Disagreement

Message to Master Gardeners

The Denton County Master Gardener Program has successfully delivered high quality educational projects and activities for two decades. The Denton County MG Association has effectively supported and provided leadership for these educational efforts.

Over the past several months, a disagreement between a few members of the MG Association and the MG Program Coordinator has developed. This has resulted in the resignation of three board members. Communication back and forth and maybe even some rumors have continued to contribute to the confusion. The majority of the Master Gardeners are not involved and simply interested in volunteer activities of the Master Gardener program.

We are here to set the record straight. We have looked at this situation from every angle. We want you to hear this from the state level and from Janet's supervisor that Janet is doing what is expected of her and she is doing a good job. There is a difference between the Master Gardener Program and the Association. I want to go over with you what the roles of the coordinator and the association. These roles and responsibilities are not new. They are described in both the Texas Master Gardener Management guide and the Annual Chartering Document.

CEAs/MG Coordinators role:

The Master Gardener program is administered by Texas AgriLife Extension Service. Responsibilities of the MG Coordinator include:

- recruiting and selecting participants in the Master Gardener Program
- coordinating, conducting and funding training for Master Gardener volunteers
- certifying and recertifying Master Gardeners using State Master Gardener Guidelines
- identifying, developing and determining volunteer activities and projects for Master Gardeners which support Extension's educational mission
- approving, recording and reporting volunteer service of the Master Gardeners
- recognizing Master Gardeners for volunteer service and leadership
- facilitating communications between Extension personnel and Master Gardeners

These responsibilities are often shared with individual Master Gardeners and/or the leadership of a Master Gardener Association; however, the ultimate accountability for these actions lies with the local County Extension Agent or staff member who serves as Master Gardener Coordinator.

Master Gardener Associations:

County Master Gardener Programs can be managed without an association, yet the strong desire exists among Master Gardeners to meet on a regular basis for purposes of education, fellowship and service. Master Gardeners are the ideal group to coordinate these regular meetings and an "association" is often a natural organizational result of these meetings.

Another primary reason for a Master Gardener Association is financial independence. A Master Gardener Program does not need a large amount to be effective. Generally, Extension is able to fund basic program needs, such as office space, telephone and copying. However, Extension often does not have the available funds needed for specific Master Gardener activities and support. Associations have more freedom to raise money needed through several means. Funds generated or received by Master Gardener Associations provide support for educational projects, computer and office equipment for Master Gardeners and/or agents, horticultural libraries and resources, college scholarships, and educational and recreational activities for the Master Gardeners.

Expectations/Characteristics of a Successful County Master Gardener Program

Effective leadership and management of the Master Gardener Program will be provided by the local County Extension Agent/Master Gardener Coordinator

Disrespectful behavior and/or continual disruption will not be tolerated and may result in dismissal as a Texas Master Gardener (Extension employees are held to the same standards of behavior).

Open, honest, respectful communication is expected.

The County Extension Agent/Master Gardener Coordinator will regularly communicate and coordinate with the association regarding the activities of the Denton Master Gardener Program.

Delivery of high quality, effective educational programs to citizens is expected.

Submitted September 30, 2010 by Jayla Fry