Welcome to Module 1, Lesson 2: Family & Consumer Sciences History. As a volunteer for Extension Family & Consumer Sciences, your role is recognized as an important, valuable resource. Volunteers are active participants that provide a valuable service. It is important that you review and study our past as a foundation to your service. Understanding the history of Family & Consumer Sciences will help you to understand how our discipline evolved and transformed, our identity and purpose, key historical figures and organizations, and our relevance over time. This lesson will review Family & Consumer Sciences history.
There are two objectives for this lesson. First, you will be able to describe basic Family & Consumer Sciences history and how it fits into the land-grant mission. Second, you will be able to identify the mission of Extension Family & Consumer Sciences.
The history of Family & Consumer Sciences began many, many years ago, as far back as the mid-1800s. Back then, many women stayed home and took care of their families and household. Few women, especially in the South, had the advantage of higher education.
Catharine Beecher, who is the sister of author, Harriet Beecher Stowe, came from a family that valued education for women. She was interested and dreamed of a field of study to help girls develop the skills needed to be a wife and a mother. She, along with her sister, wrote several books. These books helped bring attention to domestic work and the economy of the home. Then, in 1862, with the passing of the Morrill Act, land-grant institutions offered courses to educate farm wives, making it acceptable for women to attend co-educational colleges. The work and legacy of Catharine Beecher and the passing of the Morrill Act laid a foundation for the real emergence of Home Economics as a profession.
After growing up in a modest home in Massachusetts, Ellen Richards left home to attend Vassar College, where she graduated in 1870. From there, she went to Massachusetts Institute of Technology to be the first woman to earn a degree from this institution. With her degree in chemistry and interest in water quality, she began to focus on the science of domestic and home situations as well as improving both the standards and quality of living in the home environment.
Ellen Richards designed a kitchen that was a feature of the World's Fair in 1893. In this kitchen, nutritious meals were served, along with information on labor-saving work environments, water quality, and nutrition. In the late 1890s, Richards convened a group in Lake Placid, New York to discuss the problems, concerns, and solutions of domestic science and how studies in this field would help improve the quality of life for families.

The group that convened at the Lake Placid Conference, consisted of one male, Melvil Dewey, who was a pioneer in supporting the discipline. Melvil Dewey is also the founder of the Dewey Decimal System; it is significant that a man of his stature understood the importance of domestic science or Home Economics.
Over the next ten years, these educators worked to make this study a legitimate profession. Their annual conferences became known as the Lake Placid Conferences. At one of the early conferences, they decided on the name, “Home Economics,” as the discipline. Because of these conferences and the work of Richards and the other educators, a movement had taken shape.
Over the next four slides, the history of Family & Consumer Sciences, as found in the American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences Co-Branding Tool Kit, will be discussed. Richards, who began the Lake Placid Conferences, continued her support of family and home issues as a discipline. In 1909, she founded the American Home Economics Association (AHEA), which became the most influential professional association for home economists. Richards and AHEA felt that students who chose Home Economics as a field of study would not only be better prepared to manage their own homes, but also be better prepared for careers focused on people and their environments. At the federal level, Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, which firmly embedded Home Economics into the United States Department of Agriculture Cooperative Extension and the Land-Grant University System.
The National Home Demonstration Agents’ Association was started in 1933 during the annual meeting of American Home Economics Association (AHEA) by a group of 21 women representing 13 states. This organization was founded to promote the interest of home demonstration work in Extension. In 1964, the association changed its name to the National Association of Extension Home Economists (NAEHE). In 1965, the National Negro Home Demonstration Agents’ Association, founded in 1958, joined NAEHE. In 1995, the NAEHE changed its name to the National Extension Association of Family & Consumer Sciences (NEAFCS). The mission of NEAFCS is to educate and recognize Extension professionals who impact the quality of life for individuals, families and communities.
In 1963, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act was passed and has been regularly updated to support career and technical education. Students and teachers across the nation benefit from Perkins funding through Family & Consumer Sciences curriculum and participation in Family, Career and Community Leaders of America, the student organization for Family & Consumer Sciences.
Family & Consumer Sciences focuses on impacts at the individual, family, community, environmental and organizational levels. Because of this, Family & Consumer Sciences professionals, in one way or another, touch upon all of the various dimensions of the Social Ecological Model as depicted in this slide. 

Bronfenbrenner believed that in order to understand human development, the entire ecological system in which growth occurs needs to be taken into account.
As times have changed and become more complex, so have the issues that impact our quality of living. The workforce is more diverse than ever, the makeup of today’s families is more varied than in the past, and our neighborhoods, communities, and cities are facing an increasingly complex set of challenges. Widespread concerns such as obesity, divorce, energy prices, unemployment and underemployment, and the credit crisis have affected nearly everyone.
While the Internet has made a lot of information available to us all, access to information alone does not assure the development of critical thinking or problem solving skills. Extension information on the internet is reliable and research based, but not all information on the internet is credible or valid. There is a great need for Family & Consumer Sciences professionals to help develop the knowledge, skills, and experiences that individuals, families and communities need to solve many of the issues they face.
Home Economics helped generations of people become more prepared to build better lives for themselves and their families. As society continues to present complex issues, it is clear that people need more complete skill sets to be successful on a personal, family, and professional level.
In 1994, Home Economics-related organizations and programs decided to change the name of the Home Economics field to Family & Consumer Sciences to more accurately reflect the complexity of the field and to better serve the needs of individuals, families, and communities. Also in 1994, the American Home Economics Association (AHEA) changed its name to the American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences (AAFCS). In 1995, National Association of Extension Home Economists changed its name to National Extension Association of Family & Consumer Sciences (NEAFCS). Family & Consumer Sciences continues to evolve and provides a broad foundation of research-based knowledge and skills to help families be prepared to live, work, and succeed in our society.
Within Cooperative Extension, Family & Consumer Sciences is in the unique position of having professionals and volunteers from many educational and life skills backgrounds. These volunteers and professionals also have advantages, because they have connections at the land-grant universities, at the federal level, the state level, and within their local communities. Although the mission of Family & Consumer Sciences is slightly different from state to state, the basic message remains the same. Family & Consumer Sciences provides research-based, non-biased, education to individuals and families to help them make informed decisions to enhance their health, well-being, and quality of life. At the national level, *USDA NIFA Family & Consumer Sciences mission is to focus on the human dimensions of food and agriculture in addressing priority issues through scientific research and its application; strategic partnerships; Extension education; and the preparation of the next generation of Family & Consumer Sciences professionals.*
To give you an idea of how this mission is expressed in different ways, it will be helpful to review the mission statements from several states’ Family & Consumer Sciences Extension programs. For example, briefly review the mission statements for The University of Kentucky, The Ohio State University, and North Carolina Cooperative Extension. They represent examples of single university and joint universities state Family & Consumer Sciences mission statements. What is the mission statement for your state Family & Consumer Sciences program?
These professional groups provide support for Family & Consumer Sciences Educators through networks, training and certification. Some organizations provide resources and certifications for para-professionals and volunteers as well.
In review, Family & Consumer Sciences was started as a discipline of study primarily because of Catharine Beecher and Ellen Richards. Richards established the American Home Economics Association in 1909, which later became the American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences. In 1914, Home Economics became embedded in the United States Department of Agriculture and the Land-Grant University System with the enactment of the Smith-Lever Act. Since that time, Home Economics has adapted and strengthened as a field of study to help individuals, families, and communities meet the demands and needs of their generation. In 1994, Home Economics changed its name to Family & Consumer Sciences to reflect the complexity and diverse subject areas that are addressed through Family & Consumer Sciences. The professional organization of Extension Family & Consumer Sciences is National Extension Association of Family & Consumer Sciences (NEAFCS). Through the last almost one-hundred years and all of the societal changes, the mission of Family & Consumer Sciences has remained the same, but our work has evolved to reflect societal changes: To help individuals, families, and communities make informed decisions to enhance their health, well-being, and quality of living.
Master Family & Consumer Sciences
Volunteer Program

References


References

Mid-1800’s Family. Photograph. n.d. Find Farm Credit.  