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## Levy County Extension director applicant introduced



**Levy County Clerk Danny Shipp (left) watches as Edward 'Ed' Jennings prepares to speak with the Levy County Board of County Commissioners on Tuesday (Oct. 17). Jennings is the top choice to replace former Levy County Extension Director Albert Fuller.**

**Story and Photo By Jeff M. Hardison © Oct. 18, 2016 @ 8:37 a.m.**

**BRONSON** – The four Levy County Commission members present for the regular twice-a-month meeting on Tuesday (Oct. 18) met the most recent applicant who seeks to fill the position of director of the UF/IFAS Extension office in Bronson.

County Commissioner Danny Stevens was absent. The four county leaders who were there, however, are Chairman John Meeks and commissioners Rock Meeks, Lilly Rooks and Mike Joyner.

Acting Extension Director Wilbur Dean introduced Edward “Ed” Jennings, noting that if Jennings is hired for this position he will be the director of Levy County Extension as well as being the livestock agent for the county.

Dean, who is also the assistant to Levy County Coordinator Freddie Moody, accepted the assignment to help the county as it continues to be in a transition phase of leadership at the Extension office.

A previous candidate for the vacant was like former Levy County Extension Director Albert Fuller, in that the previous applicant for the position would have served as the 4-H agent as well. Fuller retired at least eight months ago.

Levy County livestock owners asked the County Commission, literally at the last minute after there had already been a relatively lengthy vetting process, to request of the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences that it send a person with a focus on commercial livestock rather than on 4-H, which is a program for children.

The first applicant who had been vetted never even had a chance to meet the County Commission, although the date, time and place of that introduction had been set and almost happened.

UF/IFAS Northeast District Extension Director Dr. Eric Simonne accepted the request from Levy County to bring a livestock-oriented applicant.

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Agricultural Extension Agent Anthony Drew is known as the row crop specialist for Levy County, and he has been utilized by several other counties, states and even internationally as a hands-on as well as classroom setting educator for farmers.

The University of Florida historically has provided every county with agricultural education services and the Extension office today has evolved through a time when it for a period of time was known as the Cooperative Extension Service in each county, always with its foundation at the University of Florida in Gainesville, a land grant college from decades ago.

As a result of the request by Levy County commercial livestock interests, Levy County will get a separate person to be the new Levy County 4-H Agent. So, while some 4-H interests may have initially seen the request as detrimental to the 4-H program, the county is going to have a 4-H agent even before it has whomever as the future director of Levy County Extension hired.

Levy County 4-H Agent Genevieve Mendoza has a tentative starting date of Nov. 15, according to what Dr. Simonne said on Tuesday morning. Levy County 4-H Program Assistant Brenda Heberling will be assisting Mendoza, in the same position as Heberling used to assist Fuller before his retirement.

Jennings, who is currently the heir apparent to Fuller's former post as Levy County Extension director, has a 32-year background with UF/IFAS Extension, having served in many capacities, including as a 4-H agent.

If Jennings is presented with, and accepts, an offer from Levy County, then Jennings will be serving as the director over the entire operation of the office.

The potential future leader of this aspect of Levy County business and education has a global perspective on his possible future responsibilities in this county.

Jennings was the Sumter County extension director for seven years, he said. He has served in a four-county livestock educational position – serving Citrus, Pasco, Hernando and Sumter counties most recently.

While his key interest is livestock, he will be looking at everything – including 4-H, agriculture, livestock, family consumer science and environmental science, he said.

“I think I've been around (the UF/IFAS Cooperative Extension Service) long enough to appreciate the total program,” Jennings said. “I am a livestock agent by training. Most of us like to put the most emphasis on the program you're interested in most. If you're a 4-H agent, then you kind of lean toward youth. If you're a family consumer science agent, you lean toward that.”

Jennings said his decades of experience in this profession let him understand and appreciate the total program that Extension provides to counties in Florida.

“When I put on that County Extension Director hat, which I did before, I change a little bit from what I am right now,” Jennings said. “Right now, I am a livestock guy. I support those livestock producers in my area. And I will do that here as well.

“But I also understand you have to support the total program,” he continued. “Like you said Commissioner (Mike Joyner), the 4H program is very near and dear to my heart. As a livestock agent, I still do a lot of youth work.”

Jennings said he helps young people in FFA as well as 4-H, and he mentioned that in “junior cattlemen's associations” in the four-county region he serves now. Therefore, given he is the next Extension director in Levy County, then there may be a new program where young people will enjoy an opportunity to learn.