The idea for the **LeadAR** program began with a fact-finding trip to the state of Washington in the fall of 1980 by J.B. Williams, Extension State Leader-Community Development, and Thomas Vaughn, an Extension area horticulturist for the University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff. These men joined representatives from 41 other states in Spokane to learn about a leadership training program concept initiated by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Williams and Vaughn reviewed the five year impacts of leadership training programs in Washington, Oregon, California, Michigan and Wyoming which had been funded by the Kellogg Foundation. These had been so successful that the Kellogg Foundation decided to provide startup funds for similar programs and requested proposals from other states. Arkansas submitted a proposal, and the Foundation provided a $12,000 planning grant.

University of Arkansas Extension Service administrators invited 100 plus leaders from across the state to Winrock International headquarters on Petit Jean Mountain near Morrilton to discuss the value of such a program. They agreed to pursue the effort and a 25-member advisory council was selected to implement the process. A second proposal was submitted, and the Kellogg Foundation awarded the Extension Service $213,000. J.B Williams was chosen as **LeadAR**’s first director.

The name "**LeadAR**" was suggested by then Advisory Council member Ben Burton, Government Affairs Manager with Weyerhaeuser Corporation. Other states were naming their programs beginning with the word "Lead" followed by the state name. Ben suggested that AR (Arkansas’ postal code abbreviation) be added to the word "Lead" and with that **LeadAR** was officially "christened".

The Extension Service was able to use the initial grant to help fund the first three classes thanks to supplemental funding from Producers Rice, Riceland Foods, Weyerhaeuser Corporation, Arkansas Farm Bureau, Stephens Corporation, and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. Several of these organizations continue to provide funds for the program.

From the beginning, a subcommittee of the **LeadAR** advisory council selected class participants based on detailed applications and interviews. Initially, potential participants learned about **LeadAR** through their local media, from county agents and civic leaders through Extension publicity in local newspapers, on radio shows and during various meetings. In future years, **LeadAR** alumni would recruit the largest number of applicants.

Class 1 began in March, 1984, Class 2 began in October, 1985, and Class 3 began in September, 1986. J.B. Williams’ idea in overlapping these early classes was to get as many participants as possible through the program to develop a strong alumni base and cement the viability of the program.

Class 4 began in February, 1989 and graduated in April, 1991. All classes since have followed the same pattern. A new class begins in February of an odd numbered year and graduates in April two years later.
Saving Program Directors

As J.B. Williams made plans to retire in January, 1989, he began searching for a replacement. Tom Riley, a Class 1 graduate, who was working as a lobbyist for the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts applied for the position and became the second LeadAR director. He conducted Class 4, Class 5, and recruited Class 6.

In late 1992, Dr. David Foster, the Extension Director, asked Riley to administer Extension’s Environmental and Natural Resources section and offered Dr. Joe Waldrum (at the time, State Leader for Agriculture, Economic and Resource Development) the opportunity to become the LeadAR program director and to implement a staff development program for the Extension Service. Dr. Waldrum became the third director and initiated Class 6, in February, 1993.

Portions of this history was taken from a preliminary draft of the History of Arkansas Extension, interviews with J.B. Williams, Tom Riley and Joe Waldrum, February 2006, Chapter 31 by Richard Maples (Unpublished).