

who is extension serving?

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The history of the Cooperative Extension Service indicates that farms and farm families have been seen as the principal, if not the sole, clientele of Extension in its early years.¹ However, over time, Extension's clientele has changed in response to such influences as the changing structure of the population, differing clientele needs, legislative influences, and funding sources.

In response, state Extension Services have tried to alter their programs and reach audiences with specialized needs such as small farm operators, racial minorities, the elderly, rural nonfarm residents, and displaced homemakers. Thus, Extension has found itself pulled in two directions—to reach out to groups of individuals with specialized needs and, at the same time, continue to serve traditional farm and rural audiences.

EMIS System

Extension has come under increased scrutiny to demonstrate that its programs and services are available "without regard to race, color, sex, age, handicaps, or national origin." It's not adequate merely to say that one doesn't discriminate; it must be proven by evidence of the clientele being served. Most states have accomplished this goal through the use of information collected in the Extension Management Information System (EMIS).

Though Extension professionals in the majority of states continue to use the EMIS system of planning and reporting, many question the adequacy and quality of the resulting information. And, when reviewed by persons outside of Extension, agency records are often viewed with suspect. Therefore,

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Accepted for publication: November, 1980.

it may be argued that what's needed is an independent assessment of who Extension's clientele really are.

Kentucky Study

The present study provides such an assessment in Kentucky. Extension clientele were identified from among individuals randomly selected from the list of registered voters in the state. Though the information presented in this article is for a single state and shouldn't be assumed to be the same for other states, Kentucky does have a diverse population with a wide range of potential clientele, thus providing a good test of Extension's ability to reach individuals of varied characteristics and needs.

Data on Extension clientele were collected in a statewide mail questionnaire survey carried out in Kentucky in 1979. From the list of registered voters, a proportional sample, based on each county's percentage of the state adult population, was drawn. Completed questionnaires were returned by 2,076 residents, for a response rate of 72%.

Users and Non-Users

One-fourth of the respondents indicated they or a member of their family used or contacted the services of an Extension agent in the past year. Table 1 provides a description of the characteristics of users of the services, as well as a comparison with the non-users.

Table 1. Comparison of users and non-users of Extension.

	Users (N=504)	Non-users (N=1,506)
<u>Age in years (N.S.)*</u>		
18-29	18.4%	24.9%
30-39	21.1	20.4
40-49	16.0	18.0
50-59	19.9	17.4
60 and over	24.6	19.3
<u>Education in years (N.S.)</u>		
0-6	14.6	16.0
7-12	35.1	34.8
13-16	35.0	38.6
17 or more	15.3	10.6
<u>Sex (N.S.)</u>		
Male	49.3	45.5
Female	50.7	54.5

Table 1 (continued)

<u>Income in dollars (N.S.)</u>		
Less than 5,000	15.5%	13.3%
5,000-9,999	14.7	16.0
10,000-14,999	20.2	16.1
15,000-19,999	15.1	17.0
20,000-24,999	14.7	14.3
25,000-29,999	7.2	9.7
30,000 or more	12.6	13.6
 <u>Race (N.S.)</u>		
White	95.8	96.0
Black	3.8	3.7
Other	0.4	0.3
 <u>Marital status (N.S.)</u>		
Never married	12.2	11.8
Married	76.4	76.3
Divorced, separated, widowed	11.4	11.9
 <u>Years at present residence (N.S.)</u>		
5 or less	13.5	14.9
6 or more	86.5	85.1
 <u>Employment status of man (N.S.)</u>		
Employed full-time	69.6	74.8
Employed part-time	4.7	5.2
Retired	21.0	15.7
Unemployed	4.7	4.3
 <u>Employment status of woman ($P \leq .03$)</u>		
Employed full-time	31.6	38.4
Employed part-time	14.6	13.7
Retired	10.5	6.8
Unemployed	6.1	7.2
Homemaker	37.2	33.9
 <u>Residency by size of place ($P \leq .01$)</u>		
Open country	14.6	7.5
Less than 500	8.0	3.9
500-999	6.6	5.6
1,000-2,499	14.2	11.0
2,500-9,999	23.7	19.1
10,000-49,999	17.9	18.8
50,000-99,999	3.5	7.8
100,000 or more	11.5	26.3

Table 1 (continued)

<u>Occupation (P ≤ .01)</u>		
Farmer	28.3%	6.4%
Non-farmer	71.7	93.6

<u>Farm size in acres (P ≤ .01)</u>		
Less than 50	30.7	45.4
50-99	14.0	20.6
100-179	19.6	20.6
180-259	13.3	5.2
260-499	13.3	4.1
500 or more	9.1	4.1

*N.S.=not significant. When significant, the level of significance is given.

Age, Education, Sex Represented among users were all age levels—about 40% were between ages 18 and 40, 36% from 40 to 60, and 25% 60 or over. Though not statistically different, Extension reached a slightly greater proportion of elderly and less young adults.² The educational level was almost the same for users and non-users—about 35% had some high school, and 50% had some college. The clientele surveyed were nearly equally divided between men and women; however, among non-users, there were slightly more females.

Income and Race While the income level of users was almost identical to that of non-users, it's important to note that Extension served a slightly larger percentage of low-income people and a smaller proportion of those with higher incomes. Ninety-six percent of the clientele were white, and four percent were black. Again, this was similar to the racial composition of the non-user group.

Marital Status Slightly more than 75% of Extension clientele were married, 12% had never married, and another 12% were either divorced, separated, or widowed. These proportions approximated those for non-clientele. Fourteen percent of Extension clientele were new residents (had lived in the community for 5 years or less).

Employment Employment figures revealed that 70% of the men Extension clientele were employed full-time, 21% were retired, 5% were employed part-time, while another 5% were

unemployed. Among women clientele, 32% were employed full-time, 15% were part-time employees, 10% were retired, 6% were unemployed, and 37% were homemakers without outside employment. Extension reached a higher proportion of women homemakers and retired men and women and a lower percentage of women employed full-time than was represented in the non-user group.

*Residence and
Occupation*

Significant differences between users and non-users were found with respect to: (1) place of residence, (2) whether the respondent was a farmer, and (3) the corresponding farm size. About 15% of Extension clientele reported living in the open country, 29% lived in towns of less than 2,500 people, 42% in places of 2,500 to 50,000 and 15% over 50,000. Percentage-wise, Extension served about twice as many who lived in the country and very small towns and less than half as many in cities of over 50,000 when compared with the non-user group.

When occupational status and farm size were examined, it was found that among users, 28% were farmers, compared with only 6% among non-users.³ In addition, Extension in Kentucky served a substantial number of small farms. Of those farmers who reported using Extension, 45% farmed less than 100 acres, 33% had from 100 to 259 acres, 13% farmed 260 to 499 acres, and 9% had over 500. Nevertheless, even with the majority of clients being small farmers, Extension served a smaller percentage of small farms and a larger proportion of large farms than was present among non-users.

This article is unique in that it provides an independent assessment of Extension clientele, compares their characteristics with non-clientele, and arrives at the conclusion that Extension has been successful at serving a wide cross-section of people, while also reaching individuals with special needs.

Implications

*Service
to All*

One criterion for examining Extension's clientele is the obligation to make services available to all people without regard to their physical, economic, or social status. This suggests that the clientele group should mirror the general population. Or in other words, there shouldn't be significant differences between the characteristics of users and non-users.

In general, Extension performed well in this regard. No statistically significant differences were found between

users and non-users on the basis of age, education, sex, income, race, marital status, length of residency, and employment status of men. Significant differences were reported for employment status of women, place of residence, whether the client was a farmer, and the size of the farm.

With respect to employment status of women, Extension may need to give more attention to methods of reaching the working woman, especially those who work full-time. Though not statistically different, the same difference occurred for men.

As might be expected, Extension served a larger proportion of rural residents than urban. Nevertheless, a third of the clientele resided in cities with a population of 10,000 or greater. The policy decision is whether to try to reach urban audiences at the same rate as is occurring among rural residents, or whether to conclude that Extension's audiences should justifiably be more rural.

The traditional audience of Extension has been farmers, and they were present among current users at a higher rate than among non-users. In recent years, criticism of Extension has been that it doesn't adequately serve small farmers. In Kentucky, a lower proportion of small farmers were users than was indicated among non-users. However, it's inaccurate to conclude that Extension isn't serving small farmers. In fact, nearly two-thirds of the users reported farming less than 180 acres. Therefore, one must conclude that while Extension is helping large commercial farms, it's also working with a considerably larger number of small farm operations.

Reach Special Audiences

A second criterion for evaluating Extension's clientele is the mandate to give special attention to identified groups of people who have been historically underserved or who have specialized needs. Some of the groups identified are racial minorities, the poor, women, and the elderly.

The question is: how well is Extension reaching these special audiences? According to the survey results, Extension in Kentucky reached slightly more females than males, a higher proportion of older people, a higher percentage of low-income people, and the same proportion of blacks than was present among non-users. From the evidence provided, one must conclude that Extension is reaching these special audiences.

Conclusion

This article is unique in that it provides an independent assessment of Extension clientele, compares their characteristics with non-clientele, and arrives at the conclusion that Extension

has been successful at serving a wide cross-section of people, while also reaching individuals with special needs.

Footnotes

1. A. C. True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work in the United States: 1785-1923* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1928), p. 3.
2. It should be remembered that in using the list of registered voters as the sampling frame that a person would have to be 18 years of age before they could be a potential respondent.
3. Of all the farmers surveyed, 60% reported using Extension services in the past year.