

does the public know?

Barney L. Cosner
James P. Key

Extension professionals can do a better job when they know how people feel about their programs. Information backed up by data is of benefit not only to Extension professionals, but also to the groups they're accountable to.¹

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Yet, the information available about the awareness and use of Extension services by the general public is very limited.

To provide services for expanded audiences, it's extremely important for Extension personnel to know and understand the perceptions or awareness potential audiences have toward the Cooperative Extension Service.

Therefore, the following questions become relevant to Extension: How aware is the general public of Cooperative Extension? What do the people feel about the quality and value of Extension and its programs? What methods are being used by the public to obtain Extension information? What segments of the population use Extension services?

To help answer these questions, the general public in Oklahoma was surveyed during the spring of 1980. This article discusses the procedures used and the answers provided.

The Instrument

The survey instrument consisted of 12 questions about the Cooperative Extension Service. Eight of the questions were used to determine the respondent's awareness of Extension, while four questions were used to solicit opinions. The eight awareness questions were weighted to help measure the

Barney L. Cosner: Former Assistant Professor, Department of Agricultural Extension Education, Iowa State University—Ames and *James P. Key:* Professor, Agricultural Education, Oklahoma State University—Stillwater. Accepted for publication: July, 1981.

respondent's awareness. Questions that indicated a "direct" involvement or knowledge of Extension were weighted more heavily than other questions. The questions, possible answers, and weighted values are shown in Table 1.²

Table 1. Weighted awareness scores by question.

Question No. *		Response	Weighted value	
7	Do you have an agriculture Extension office in your county?	Yes	1	
		No	0	
8	Have you or any member of your family ever been involved with or been a member of:			
		4-H youth program	Yes	2
		Extension Homemakers Club	Yes	2
	Other agricultural or related Extension groups	Yes	2	
9	Have you ever had any contact with or heard of the following Extension personnel in your county:			
		Agricultural agent	Yes	1
		Home economist	Yes	1
		4-H agent	Yes	1
	Raymond Kays, Extension horticultural specialist	Yes	1	
10	Have you ever contacted the county Extension office for any information?	Yes	2	
		No	0	
11	How was the contact made?	Called Written Personal contact		
12	Have you participated in any meetings sponsored by the ag Extension service?	Yes	2	
		No	0	
13	How valuable was the information you received at these meetings?	Valuable No value Not sure		
14	Do you read news columns written by Extension agents?	Yes	1	
		No	0	
15	Do you listen to radio or watch T.V. programs by Extension agents?	Yes	1	
		No	0	
16	Have you or any member of your family provided exhibits for a county or state fair?	Yes	1	
		No	0	
17	Would you like to receive information about the Extension programs available to you?	Yes		
		No		
18	Do you think increased funding for the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service would be beneficial to the people of Oklahoma?	Yes		
		No		
	Total possible		18	

*Questions are numbered as found in the actual survey instrument.

Procedure

The survey questions, along with demographic data questions, were administered through a telephone survey interview. A stratified random sample of 14 Oklahoma counties was selected to be representative of the entire state. From these counties, 2,401 Oklahoma residents who were 18 years or older, having access to a telephone, and having their telephone number listed in a published telephone directory were asked to respond to the survey. A total of 1,662 Oklahoma residents agreed to answer the survey.

Findings and Conclusions

Responses from these 1,662 Oklahoma residents provided the following information:

County Office: Over 78% of the residents were aware of having an Extension office in their county.

Program Areas: There were slightly over 47% of the respondents or a member of their family who had been involved with the 4-H program, about 25% of the respondents were involved with Extension Homemakers Clubs, while 14% had been involved with agricultural or related programs.

Awareness of Personnel: About 25% of the respondents had contacted or heard of the Extension home economist or agricultural agent in their county. There were 12% who knew of Raymond Kays, the state horticultural specialist, and about 11% knew of or had contacted the 4-H agent.

Contact for Information: Almost 37% of the respondents had contacted an Extension office for information. Of those who had made contacts, over 50% had "called" in, while slightly more than 43% had made a "personal contact."

Participation in Meetings: About 30% of the respondents had participated in an Extension-sponsored meeting. Of these people, 92% indicated that the information they received was valuable to them.

Extension Mass Media: Extension news columns were read by over 54% of the respondents, while over 51% had listened to radio or watched television programs presented by Extension personnel.

Fair Exhibits: About 43% of the respondents or a member of their family had provided an exhibit for a county or state fair.

Information Wanted: Over 50% of the respondents wanted information about Extension programs available to them.

Increased Funding: When asked if increased funding for Cooperative Extension would be beneficial to Oklahoma residents, over 80% said "yes."

Awareness scores were categorized by household income, age, occupation, education, race/ethnic group, and sex. Here are the results:

Household Income: An Oklahoman's household income didn't seem to influence the awareness of Cooperative Extension.

Age: Age of the resident was an influence on the awareness of Extension. Residents between 35-49 years of age were most aware, while those between 18-34 were least aware of Extension.

Occupation: Residents having agricultural or agriculturally related occupations were more aware than those residents in other occupations.

Education: Generally, as the education level increased, so did the awareness.

Race/Ethnic Group: The race of an Oklahoman influenced awareness. Indian residents were most aware followed by whites, blacks, and Hispanic/other residents.

Sex: Females were more aware of Cooperative Extension than were male residents.

Over 90% of the respondents scored 1 or more points for awareness of the Oklahoma Extension Service. The average awareness score was 4.2 points.

In analyzing the respondents' demographic data, the percentage representation was very close to the census data projections for Oklahoma in 1980. The survey representation was slightly skewed because 62% of the respondents were female and 38% male. This differs from the projected figures of 51% female and 49% male for 1980 in Oklahoma.

Implications

The survey indicates that Extension has more contact with Oklahoma residents who have higher income levels, higher educational levels, and aren't members of minority groups. Also, there's strong evidence that Extension services are used heavily by the agricultural segment of Oklahoma.

The question that quickly arises is: Where should the priorities for Extension's program and services be placed? This question is especially relevant for tomorrow's programs. It can be argued pro and con for agricultural vs. nonagricultural clientele, successful vs. disadvantaged clientele. Oklahoma Extension personnel must be willing to meet this question head on *and* still be able to provide a variety of programs and services to a variety of clientele at the local level.

**Final
Consideration**

Most Oklahoma residents, regardless of income, race, education, age, occupation, indicated a desire for information about Extension programs and services available to them. And, a large majority felt that *increased funding* for Cooperative Extension *would be beneficial* to the residents of Oklahoma.

Footnotes

1. John G. Gross, "Farmers' Attitudes Toward Extension," *Journal of Extension*, XV (March/April, 1977), 19.
2. Barney L. Cosner, "Perceptions of Oklahoma Residents Toward the Cooperative Extension Function of the Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture" (Ph.D. dissertation, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, 1980).