

A Study of the Effectiveness of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's
Program Excellence Academy for New Employees

by

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I never thought that I would see the day that I would complete this degree, but perseverance paid off. I also knew that I was stubborn enough and there was no quit in me. Believe me, there were many times that I just wanted to throw my hands up and just do my job and not worry about school. That is why having a tremendous support group was a definite must. Believe me, my support group was relied on quite often. Without that group, I would not have made it. I want to dedicate this to my wife and best friend, Kathy and Braden, the best son a dad could ask for.

I know that Kathy had to listen to all the griping and complaining, because she was the one there every day. If it were not for her and those famous last words of “suck it up and move on”, I may not have finished. I am truly thankful to have a wife like you, that is so supportive of my endeavors.

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ABSTRACT

A Study of the Effectiveness of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's Program Excellence Academy for New Employees. (August 2014) Donald W. Kelm, B.S., M.S. Primary Chairman of Advisory Committee: Dr. David Lawver and Co-Chairman of Advisory Committee: Dr. Chris Boleman.

The purpose of the study was to determine if Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's Program Excellence Academy for new employees increased the knowledge and changed the behavior of new employees related to program development. The Program Excellence Academy for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is required professional development training focusing on program development for all new County Extension Agents. Additional purposes of the study included determining if the objectives set for the Program Excellence Academy were being met as well the three research objectives developed to determine the effectiveness of the Program Excellence Academy and identify improvements that could be made. Findings showed the Program Excellence Academy is an effective new agent training activity with some minor improvements in some areas to increase the effectiveness.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

The mission of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is improving the lives of people, businesses, and communities across Texas and beyond through high-quality, relevant education. That relevant education is not only focused on the residents of Texas, but also other states and countries. This is accomplished with a vast network of 250 county Extension offices and some 900 professional educators with the expertise to disseminate research based information and education to residents of Texas. Educational programs are developed by county Extension agents and subject matter specialists based on issues that are identified by clientele or emerging issues that arise (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, n.d.).

Training and development of new employees is an integral part of any organization's success. This is especially true for Extension Services, as the success of Extension's educational programs depends heavily on the abilities of agents (Prawl, Medlin, & Cross, 1984). The success of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's program development process depends on the abilities of county Extension agents.

With the training and development of new employees so critical, Dromgoole (2007) developed the South Region Excellence in Programming Academy to provide county Extension agents with the skills needed to plan, implement and evaluate programs effectively. The South Region Excellence in Programming Academy was developed for

early to mid-career county Extension agents focusing on principles, theories, techniques and applications of program development with professional development and agent training in mind. In addition to the South Region Excellence in Programming Academy that was conducted in 2006, another Excellence in Programming Academy was conducted in the North Region in 2008-2009 with the same guiding principles.

As a result of two successful Excellence in Programming Academies conducted in the South Region and the one in the North Region, it was decided by Texas AgriLife Extension, now known as Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, to utilize this method of training new county Extension agents on a statewide basis.

With the guidance and leadership provided by Dr. Jeff Ripley, Assistant Professor & Extension Specialist; Dr. Scott Cummings, Associate Head for Extension Programs and a planning committee comprised of various Extension personnel, the Program Excellence Academy was initiated in 2010 as the statewide training for new county Extension agents.

The Program Excellence Academy is a professional development course that focuses on principles, theories, techniques, and applications for program development within educational programmatic environments. Program development strategies, focusing educational programming in relation to issues identified by clientele, and program planning to help people and organizations succeed is the focus of the course. The course is delivered by two face-to-face classroom meetings, online self-directed lessons and assignments that support the agent's county programs.

The Program Excellence Academy's face-to-face meetings include two sessions that are four days in length. The two sessions are referred to as Program Excellence Academy I: Program Planning and Educational Design and Program Excellence Academy II: Program Implementation and Evaluation.

Below is the outline for the two Program Excellence Academy sessions.

Academy I: Program Planning and Educational Design

Major Topics include:

- ✓ A review of Program Development (Keys to Education that Work)
- ✓ Outcome vs. Outputs
- ✓ What does our community look like? (Creating Your Visibility, Teamwork, Civic Responsibility and Community Involvement)
- ✓ Agency Strategic Plan (Resource Procurement and Management; Ethics and Expectations; Partnerships and Collaborations)
- ✓ Overview of Program Area Committees/Youth Boards/Leadership Advisory Boards
- ✓ True Colors (personality profile) (Ethics and Expectations; Program Committees and Action Teams; Partnerships and Collaborations)
- ✓ Recruiting committee members, bylaw development, agendas
- ✓ Leadership/Management of Volunteer Groups
- ✓ Facilitate to Make a Difference

- ✓ Teaching Volunteers to Teach (Teaching Methods; Program Delivery; Teamwork; Ethics Expectations)
 - Learning Styles
 - Delivery Methods
 - Adult Learning Theory
- ✓ Outcome/Output Template
 - Description and Development of the Issue
 - Goals and Objectives
 - Writing Outcome Indicators
 - Target Audience
- ✓ Comprehending the importance of and developing educational design
- ✓ Developing an Extension educational teaching plan
- ✓ Understanding learning styles and the role that they play in educational designs

Academy II: Program Implementation and Evaluation

Major topics include:

- ✓ Learning how to engage volunteers to deliver educational programs
- ✓ Utilizing technology in and educational program
- ✓ Integrating distance education in educational programs
- ✓ Developing newsletters, personal columns, and marketing plans to promote educational programs
- ✓ Overview of Extension Evaluation Philosophy for each of the four regions

- ✓ Three primary evaluation strategies used in Extension
- ✓ Utilizing types of evaluations typically conducted for Extension programming
- ✓ Calculating “before vs. after” responses
- ✓ Understanding evaluation models and evaluations methods
- ✓ Developing evaluation plans and evaluation instruments
- ✓ Analyzing Quantitative data
- ✓ Analyzing Qualitative data
- ✓ Developing outcome statements
- ✓ Utilizing 3 “Rs” of program interpretation
- ✓ Developing interpretation documents

Statement of the Problem

With the initiation of the Program Excellence Academy in 2010 as the statewide professional development training for all new county Extension agents, the need to determine the success and effectiveness of this training is apparent. Program Excellence Academy is a crucial part of the onboarding of new employees within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Determining the effectiveness of this training is vital to keeping the organization relevant.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine if Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service’s Program Excellence Academy increased the knowledge and changed the

behavior of new employees related to program development. In addition, the study will help determine if the objectives set for the Program Excellence Academy are being met.

The course objectives of the Program Excellence Academy include:

1. Define and use terminology associated with Extension.
2. Define in detail the Extension organization and infrastructure.
3. Describe how Extension programs are developed, implemented and evaluated.
4. Demonstrate the core competencies critical for individuals employed within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, as they relate to the program development process.
5. Help Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service faculty achieve success, determine their sense of purpose, deal with change, and improve effectiveness and efficiencies through planning and program development.

Research Objectives

For this study, there were three main objectives developed to accomplish the purpose of this study.

Those objectives were:

1. Describe the participants of the Program Excellence Academy.
2. Determine the participant's perceived knowledge of program development before attending the Program Excellence Academy.

3. Determine the knowledge gained and change of behavior related to program development, since attending the Program Excellence Academy.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations that should be considered after reviewing the findings from this study include:

1. The sample size contained a limited number of individuals who have completed both phases of the Extension onboarding process. The response rate was low for those who have completed Program Excellence Academy II, as opposed to those who have completed Academy I.
2. The study measured only the perceived knowledge increase of the respondents, as opposed to observations from Extension mid-managers and administrators.

Need for the Study

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's success depends on the ability of the administrators to recruit, hire and train new employees. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's mission is to improve the lives of people, businesses, and communities across Texas and beyond through high quality, relevant education. To ensure that Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service accomplishes its mission, new agents must be highly qualified individuals that when provided the resources and professional development opportunities, will be able to provide high quality, relevant education to the residents of the State of Texas.

This study provided an overview of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the statewide professional development training that all new employees must attend.

This study also showed the relationship between quality professional development, the program development process and quality programming.

The Program Excellence Academy is a key component of the onboarding of new county Extension agents. It has been and will always be important to determine the success and effectiveness of this training.

Definitions of Terms

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service – A service provided to Texans that provides community based education as part of the Texas A&M System (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, n.d.).

Excellence in Programming Academy – A professional development course intended for early to mid-career county Extension agents, which focused on the principles, theories, techniques and applications for program development within Extension educational programmatic environments (Dromgoole, 2007).

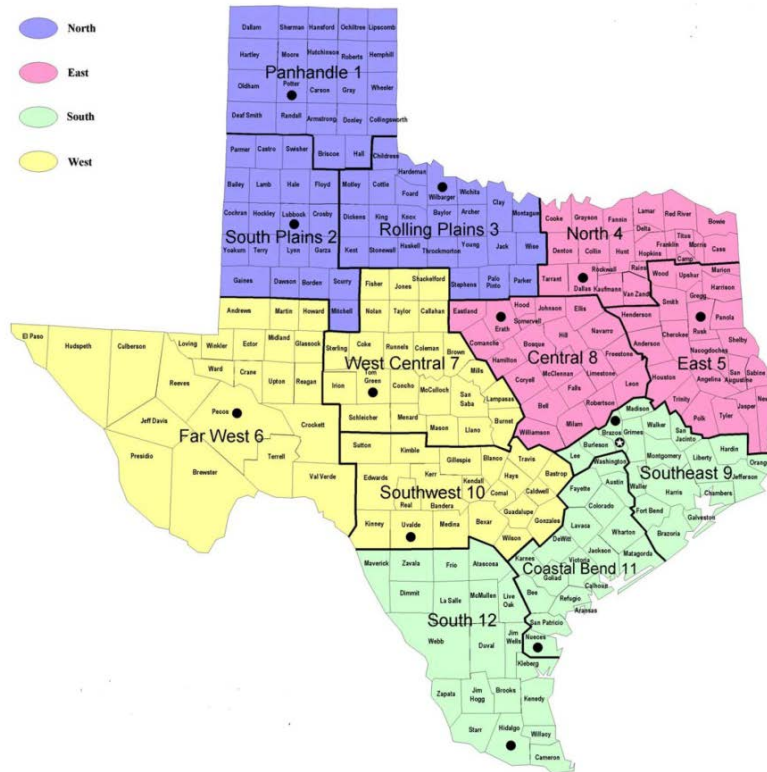
South Region – The South Region of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service consisted of 56 counties in three districts.

North Region – The North Region of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service consisted of 65 counties in three districts.

County Extension Agents – County based employees of Texas A&M AgriLife

Extension Service located in districts and regions reflected in map below (Figure 1):

Figure 1. District and Regional Map, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (n.d.).



Summary

Onboarding of new employees is critical for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. The Program Excellence Academy is one key component of the onboarding of new county Extension agents within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Providing a high quality professional development training like the Program Excellence Academy is vital to the success of the new employees and their success in their respective positions. This study attempted to determine the success and effectiveness of the Program Excellence Academy related to the program objectives and identify any changes that may be made to enhance the quality of it.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For this study, literature providing an overview of the importance of the training and development of new county Extension agents, delivery methods, training needs, mentoring, as well as currently used new agent development programs by various Extension Services was reviewed. This review of literature focused on Extension agent training/professional development, program development and programs that are currently in place.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the study was to determine if Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's Program Excellence Academy increased the knowledge and changed the behavior of new employees related to program development. In addition, the study will help determine if the objectives set for the Program Excellence Academy are being met. Research objectives of this study were:

1. Describe the participants of the Program Excellence Academy.
2. Determine the participant's perceived knowledge of program development before attending the Program Excellence Academy.
3. Determine the knowledge gained and change of behavior related to program development, since attending the Program Excellence Academy.

Training and Development of New Extension Agents

Training and development of new employees is an integral part of any organization's success. This is especially true for Extension Services, as the success of Extension's educational programs depends heavily on the abilities of agents (Prawl, Medlin, & Cross, 1984). After having spent time and effort recruiting knowledgeable and skilled staff, it is important to develop these assets into employees capable of meeting an organization's needs. Extension agents may come on board with a high degree of subject matter knowledge, but it is the duty of the organization to help them develop the skills they will need to become successful agents. Organizational structure, job expectations, program development, and management of volunteers are just a few of the subjects that need to be introduced to new agents. This literature review will focus on Extension agent training and development as well as a review of programs that are currently in place to provide new agents with this training.

Delivery Methods

A common goal of Extension Services is to provide agents with up to date training on a variety of topics. While there are many different methods of delivery, most training programs can be divided into two main types. These are face-to-face training and Internet-based, distance training. The Academy is comprised of face-to-face sessions, online training modules and online assignments that are completed by the participants.

Face-to-face training is the traditional method of training Extension agents. However, distance education is becoming increasingly popular to educators in a variety

of fields. McCann (2007) comments that, “the trend towards learning at a distance is especially evident in the Extension Service, where traditional face-to-face classroom instruction is slowly being replaced by distance education in an effort to reach the rural client and county personnel” (Introduction section, para. 1). Much literature supports the move away from face-to-face training and toward distance education. In a study of the Pennsylvania State University Cooperative Extension’s county based faculty, Mincemoyer and Kelsey (1999) determined the top reasons why Extension personnel did not attend face-to-face in-service training. In order of highest response, the reasons cited were previous commitments, too much time away from the office, conflict with local programming, conflict with another in-service, work/family conflicts, and in-services not relevant to program in county. With the exception of in-service not relevant to program in county, all of these barriers could be remedied by providing online, self-paced training. In a survey with similar results, Ohio State University Extension agents reported that difficulty taking time from job, scheduling conflicts, in-services viewed as irrelevant to job, and distance to travel sites too far as barriers to attending face-to-face training. 92% of personnel surveyed reported that they would be willing to participate in in-service training via distance education (Conklin, Hook, Kelbaugh, & Nieto, 2002).

Extension interest in distance education comes as no surprise. With many programs facing budget constraints, Internet-based instruction allows Extension Services to get information to agents without incurring as many costs as traditional face-to-face training. With distance education, agents are no longer required to travel to training sites, reducing travel costs. The flexibility of Internet-based training also allows for agents to

work the training into their schedules without compromising productivity. A survey of Extension agents in Georgia, South Carolina, and Alabama new to distance education determined that when provided with in-service training available exclusively online, agents reported that they strongly favored this method of delivery and indicated that the Internet can be effectively used in conducting an in-service Extension training for certain topics (Lippert, Plank, Camberto, & Chastain, 1998). In a survey of Mississippi Extension personnel, many agreed that an interactive online option could be utilized to deliver necessary training within the Extension Service (McCann, 2007).

While distance education looks to be the way of the future, Extension Services should not discount the merits of face-to-face training. “Due to the constraints of time and money, there continues to be a need to explore distance education alternatives to find the most efficient and effective methods of in-service training, whether for the updating of content, the introduction of new materials, or the development of process skills. However, Extension should also be willing to invest in in-depth in-service training when it is the best method for the desired outcome” (Ferrer, Fugate, Perkins, & Easton, 2004, Conclusion section). Ferrer et al. (2004) indicated that face-to-face instruction should be desired when, more complex and theoretical information is delivered. A study of the Virginia Cooperative Extension’s new 4-H agent training program showed that agents enjoyed the face-to-face format because it gave them the opportunity to not only learn new information, but to build relationships as well (Garst, Hunnings, Jamison, Hairston, & Meadows, 2007).

The literature suggests that both training methods can be effective. In a study by Sexton, Raven, and Newman (2002), Mississippi 4-H agents were given in-service training on an equine related topic. The agents were split into two groups, with one group receiving traditional training and the other receiving web-based training. The results of the study were that “4-H agents were equally successful in completing the knowledge-level station identification post-test regardless of training method or computer anxiety” (Sexton et al. 2002, p. 33).

Training Needs

Studying the training needs of Extension agents can be an important tools in helping Extension Services develop training for new agents. In reviewing the literature, a few common themes appeared. These included the need for training in managerial skills, program development and evaluation, and management of volunteers.

In a survey of Virginia Cooperative Extension agents, agents reported, “Extension needs to build a curriculum that encompasses time management and prioritizing, listening and organizing, and thinking clearly and analytically” (Gibson & Brown, 2003, p. 22). A study conducted in North Carolina focused on the needs of area specialized Extension agents. The survey of area specialized Extension agents, administrators, and subject-matter specialists revealed that additional training was needed in the areas of understanding the role of area agents, involving lay people, developing a long-term Extension program, developing programs, and implementing evaluation procedures (Gibson & Hillison, 1994). It is important to note that over 50% of the respondents had

held their position for five years or less and 33% for three years or less. This indicates that orientation and in-service training on these topics could be particularly useful (Gibson & Hillison, 1994). In a study of self-perceived orientation training needs, Iowa Extension professionals identified meeting staff, time management, motivation, and teaching as areas that needed to be covered in orientation (Gamon, Mohamed, & Trede, 1992).

The literature suggests that there is a strong need for agent training in the area of volunteer management. Boyd (2004) claimed, “County Extension Agents often lack the competencies needed to be effective administrators of volunteers” (Introduction section, para. 4). A survey of 4-H Youth Development Agents revealed that training was needed in the areas of volunteer recruitment and motivation, conflict management and liability issues, evaluation, and time management (Seevers, Baca, & Leeuwen, 2005). One program respondent commented, “I feel we hire individuals too young and they are not ready to work with volunteers. In some cases, the volunteers have more experience than the 4-H agent. The first six months of training should be with an experienced agent, learning how to manage programs and volunteers” (Seevers et al, 2005, New Agent Training and Preparation section, para. 1). Another agent stated, “I feel there is a lack of knowledge about what a good volunteer program looks like and what it takes to implement a middle-management system. This is a major barrier that a young agent runs in to” (Seevers et al., 2005, New Agent Training and Preparation section, para. 3). Boyd (2004) concludes that, “leaders of volunteers need skills in areas other than those identified in the various volunteer administration models used in Extension and volunteer

administrators need to be competent in systems leadership, developing a positive organizational culture, and personal skills that will help them in developing effective teams and managing change” (Conclusion and Implication section, para. 1).

Mentoring

One employee development program that seems to be gaining popularity in Extension is mentoring. Mentoring pairs a new Extension agent with a more experienced individual. Zimmer and Smith (1992) comment, “new employees have the potential to become the new life and energy of any organization. Nurturing this energy is important if organizations want to keep new agents from being overwhelmed” (Need for Mentoring section, para. 1). Several studies have reported the benefits of a mentoring program. A study by Place and Bailey (2010) of new employees participating in the University of Florida Extension mentoring program revealed that mentees, “gained valuable knowledge in areas such as: learning how to find and build relationships with important clientele in the community, learning how to manage volunteers, knowledge of how the Extension services works, learning technical information about their program area, learning how to develop an advisory committee, and gaining knowledge on creating systems to effectively report on their plans of work and reports of accomplishment” (Results and Discussion section, para. 2). It is important that Extension Services establish mentoring relationships early in the new agent’s employment, as the benefits of the relationship were less profound the later the relationship was established (Zimmer & Smith, 1992). It appears that many Extension Services are already on-board with this concept and are setting up new agents with mentors as part of the orientation process.

New Agent Development Programs

There are several training programs currently being utilized by Extension Services around the country. An analysis of new agent training and development programs in North Carolina, Ohio, Kentucky, Kansas, and Texas reveals that while each program is slightly different, the basic structure of the training is very similar.

The North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service Personal and Organizational Development System (PODS) includes agent in-service training with specific programs aimed at new agents. New agents attend a three-day face-to-face orientation program which covers topics ranging from program development to the use of social media. New agents also receive a self-study guide, links to online lessons, and are introduced to their support group. (North Carolina Cooperative Extension, n.d.)

The Ohio State University Extension Service provides employees with a new personnel orientation as well as workshops on conflict management and program development and evaluation. New agents are also encouraged to attend an Actions Leadership Retreat, designed for agents with eighteen months to three years of experience. The program involves simulated on-the-job experiences that serve to help agents develop their leadership, conflict management, and communication skills. While there is no mentoring program in place, the Ohio State University Extension Service does encourage new employees to receive frequent coaching from their supervisor. (The Ohio State University Extension Service, n.d.)

The Kansas State Research and Extension Service takes a slightly different approach to new agent training. In addition to a face-to-face orientation, online materials, and mentoring programs, agents are expected to come to Kansas State University for five face-to-face professional development sessions (Local Operations, Basic 4-H Operations, Communications, Program Development and Navigating Differences) during their first year of employment (K-State Research and Extension New Agent Professional Development Overview, n.d.)

The Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service divides it's new agent training into three parts: orientation, core training, and professional development. The orientation phase includes a face-to-face orientation, introduction to the agent's support team, and the assignment of a mentor. The second stage, core training, involves three face-to-training sessions covering individual and organizational development, management development, and program development. The final stage, professional development, includes web-based and face-to-face in-service training in subject matter specific areas like agriculture/natural resources, family and consumer sciences and 4-H and youth development. Agents will remain in this stage throughout their career in Extension (University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, n.d.).

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service on-boarding system was one of the most comprehensive and well-documented new agent training programs in the literature. This program combines both face-to-face and distance training as well as a mentoring component. An interesting aspect of this program is the "First Step" month where new employees are given the opportunity to shadow an experienced agent in a neighboring

county in order to develop an understanding of how Extension works. All agents attend a face-to-face orientation, known as Extension Foundations, where they learn about the Extension Service organization and mission. Agents are given a new agent study guide to be completed within the first six months of employment as well as a First Step Journal to track their progress. New agents are then assigned to a mentor who will help guide them as they begin their new career. During this same time period, agents meet with supervisors to create relationships and professional development strategies. A variety of online training materials with topics ranging from adult learning theory to program development to volunteerism are also provided for new employees to complete throughout their first year of employment. In addition to their orientation and online training, new agents also participate in the Program Excellence Academy I and II, a three-week advanced training program. This program provides new agents with more in-depth training on program development and evaluation (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, n.d.). The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service new agent on-boarding process appears to be very thorough in preparing Extension agents for their new roles. Recent research supports this statement. As part of his doctoral research, Mike Martin conducted a survey of 40 new Extension Agents in each part of the Southern Region. His findings revealed that of new agents surveyed in Texas, 57.1% slightly, moderately, or strongly agreed that Extension provided accurate training necessary for success in agent's first year on the job, 82.9% slightly, moderately, or strongly agreed that they received professional development necessary to perform the job capably, and 57.1% slightly, moderately, or strongly agreed that Extension provided new agents with effective

mentoring and coaching experiences as part of their job (Martin, 2011 as cited in “Research Examines”).

Research on Previous Academies

The Academy conducted in Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service’s South Region in 2006 that was studied by Dromgoole (2007). It was found that early to mid-career agents increased their knowledge on the program development process as a result of attending the Academy. Dromgoole’s (2007) study also found that participants of the Academy intended to adopt or adopted the program development elements (planning, implementation, evaluation and interpretation. The study also revealed that participants were highly satisfied with the Academy and its content, which in turn positively affected their knowledge gained.

A study of the Academy (Hatter, 2009) conducted in Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service’s North Region in 2008 and 2009 determined that the participant group consisted of County Extension Agents- Agriculture/Natural Resources, Family Consumer Sciences and 4-H and Youth Development. Hatter’s (2009) study also showed that Academy participants were confident in their ability to utilize the program development process and the different parts of the process. The study also indicated that after attending the Academy, participants adopted practices related to program development as well as changed their behavior related to planning, implementation, evaluation and interpretation.

Program Development

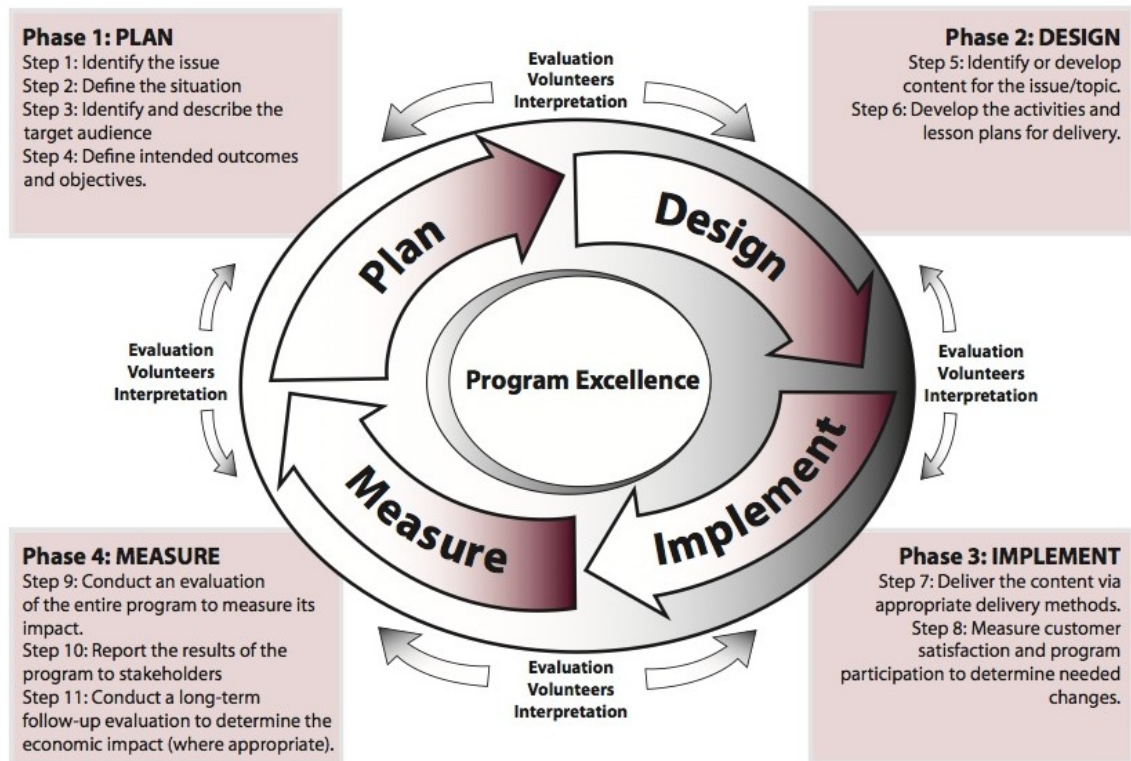
Programming includes the individual and collaborative efforts of the education organization, the educators, and the learners in planning, designing, implementing, evaluating and accounting for educational programs (Boone, E., Safrit, R., & Jones, J., 2002). The process encompasses all of the planned, coordinated, and collaborative activities of educators, leaders, learners and learner groups in designing and effecting educational strategies that should culminate in behavior change in individual learners and within learner groups and systems (Boone et al. 2002). Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service utilizes a process to create educational programs for the clientele in the State of Texas and it is called program development. This process is the foundation of the relevant, high quality educational programs that are conducted by county Extension agents within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

The *Creating Excellent Programs* handbook (Ripley, J., Cummings, S., Lockett, L., Pope, P., Wright, M., Payne, M., Kieth, L., & Murphy, T., 2011) explains the program development process covered at the Program Excellence Academy for new employees and utilized by county Extension agents within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the concepts for each step as follows (Figure 2):

Figure 2. Program Development Model, Ripley, Cummings, Lockett, Pope, Wright, Payne, Keith & Murphy (2011).

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

Program Development Model



Professional Development Model Continued

Phase 1: Plan

Step 1: Identify the issues.

Possible sources:

- Leadership advisory board
- Base programs
- Emerging issues
- County committees
- Specialists
- Elected officials
- Commodity groups
- State and federal mandates

Step 2: Define the situation.

- Scope
- Severity
- Social
- Economic
- Environmental

Step 3: Identify and describe the target audience.

- Primary audience-people who need the information
- Secondary audience-those who might be reached even though they are not targeted directly
- Number of people in the potential audience
- Number of people who can realistically be reached
- Audience's current knowledge about the topic
- Audience characteristics, such as age, income, education, culture, and language

Step 4: Define the intended outcomes.

What changes will occur in the audience as a result of the program?

- Learning
 - Knowledge

- Skills
- Attitudes/beliefs
- Application
 - Behavior change
 - Adoption of best practice
 - Adoption of new technology

Phase 2: Design

Step 5: Identify or develop content.

- Available curricula on the topic
- Materials that can be adapted to teach the topic
- Materials that need to be developed
- People who will develop these materials

Step 6: Develop the activities.

- Types of educational activities that will be used to address this topic
- Appropriate activities for the intended results
- Appropriate activities for the target audience and for the subject matter

Phases 1 and 2: Volunteer involvement and evaluation

Volunteer involvement

- Leadership advisory board, a group of 10 to 20 people who help identify critical issues in the county and who serve as spokespeople for AgriLife Extension
- County committees and/or planning groups
- Specific responsibilities for implementation by committee members
- Other volunteers to help implement the program

Evaluation

- The issue and situation, described accurately, including data and/or statistics to support the need to address them
- The target audience, clearly defined
- Realistic intended outcomes

- Appropriate educational design and client change for the identified audience

Phase 3: Implement

Step 7: Deliver the content via appropriate methods.

To reach as many target audience members as possible, deliver the information using a variety of group, mass media, and individual methods:

Group methods

- Workshops
- Seminars (face to face or online)
- Tours
- Short courses (face to face or online)
- Lectures
- Field days
- Method demonstrations

Mass media

- Newsletters
- Blogs and/or social media
- Print media
- Television
- Radio

Individual methods

- Home visits
- Farm visits
- Office visits
- Consultations

Step 8: Measure customer satisfaction and participation to determine needed changes.

For Phase 3, evaluation usually focuses on customer satisfaction and limited client change:

- Percentage of the identified target audience being reached
- Program participant satisfaction with the information, methods, and instructors
- Changes needed in the program to ensure that the intended outcomes are achieved
- Increase of awareness or knowledge in the early phases

Phase 4: Measure

Step 9: Conduct an evaluation of the entire program to measure its impact.

This phase measures the program's impact on clientele and ultimately the community, county, and state. At this stage, collect and analyze data to determine whether the program has achieved the intended client change and impact. Data can be collected using these methods:

- Surveys (in-person, mailed, or online)
- Questionnaires
- Tests
- Direct observation
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Individual measurement

If appropriate, collect data on the anticipated economic benefit to the participants.

Step 10: Report the results to stakeholders.

Stakeholders are interested in the success of programs locally and statewide. Relay your success stories to these individuals and groups:

- Participants

- Program committees and planning groups
- Leadership advisory board members
- Coworkers
- Commissioners court and other county officials
- State legislators and staff members
- Extension administrators

Step 11: Conduct a long-term follow-up evaluation to determine the program's economic impact.

For selected programs, follow up with the program participants several months after they have completed a program to determine its economic impact. Even if you ask them for an anticipated economic benefit immediately after a program, consider taking the extra steps to ask them months later if they did benefit economically and if so, by how much.

Following the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Development Model's four phases and the steps outlined in each phase will lead to County Extension Agents ability to produce high quality programs with positive results.

The literature reviewed for this study indicated the importance of the training and development of new Extension agents, along with the merits of utilizing face-to-face and online delivery methods. The literature review provided examples of several new agent development programs with program development being one of the main training topics.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter provides the research methods and procedures utilized for this study. This chapter discusses the following topics: Research Design, Population and Sample, the Instrument, Collection of Data and the Analysis of the Data.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the study was to determine if Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's Program Excellence Academy increased the knowledge and changed the behavior of new employees related to program development. In addition, the study helped determine if the objectives set for the Program Excellence Academy were being met.

The course objectives of the Program Excellence Academy include:

1. Define and use terminology associated with Extension.
2. Define in detail the Extension organization and infrastructure.
3. Describe how Extension programs are developed, implemented and evaluated.
4. Demonstrate the core competencies critical for individuals employed within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, as they relate to the program development process.

5. Help Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service faculty achieve success, determine their sense of purpose, deal with change, and improve effectiveness and efficiencies through planning and program development.

For this study, there were three main objectives developed to accomplish the purpose of this study.

Those objectives were:

1. Describe the participants of the Program Excellence Academy.
2. Determine the participant's perceived knowledge of program development before attending the Program Excellence Academy.
3. Determine the knowledge gained and change of behavior related to program development, since attending the Program Excellence Academy.

Research Design

For this research, the data that was used is considered secondary as it was collected by the Organizational Development Unit within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. The data collection was under the direction of Dr. Scott Cummings, Associate Head for Extension Programs; Dr. Jeff Ripley, Assistant Professor & Extension Specialist; and Ms. Katy Weber, Extension Assistant. Permission was granted by Dr. Scott Cummings to have access to this data.

An official approval from the Texas Tech University Protection of Human Subjects Committee was received by email on October 8, 2013. A copy of the approval letter can be found in Appendix B.

An online questionnaire was utilized by the Organizational Development Unit to collect the data from the identified population. Instructions on completing the online questionnaire along with other information provided to the identified population was done by the Organizational Development Unit. The questionnaire that was utilized was developed by the Organizational Development Unit within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

Population and Sample

The subjects or population included all new County Extension Agents that participated in the Program Excellence Academy I and Program Excellence Academy II since it started statewide in the Spring of 2010. This included six cohorts with a population of 130. The seventh cohort was not included as they had attended only the Program Excellence Academy I at the time of this study. The six cohorts with a population of 130 have attended Program Excellence Academy I and Program Excellence Academy II. At the time the online questionnaire was activated, 109 of the original population of 130 were still employed with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Of the 109 that received notification of the activation of the online questionnaire availability, 67 participated by responding to at least one question in the online questionnaire. That participation represents a 61.47% response rate by those County Extension Agents that

had completed both Program Excellence Academy I and Program Excellence Academy II.

Within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, there are predominately four different type groups of County Extension Agents. Those types of County Extension Agents include County Extension Agent-Agriculture/Natural Resources (CEA-AG/NR), County Extension Agent-Family and Consumer Sciences (CEA-FCS), County Extension Agent-4-H and Youth Development (CEA-4-H) and County Extension Agent-Horticulture (CEA-Hort). These types of County Extension Agents are determined by subject matter and program area emphasis. The County Extension Agents that attended the Program Excellence Academy I and Program Excellence Academy II included a mixture of these different types of County Extension Agents. There are 254 counties in the State of Texas and there are County Extension Agents from at least one of these groups assigned to each county. There may be one, two, three, or more County Extension Agents assigned to a specific county depending on the category of the county. Within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, counties are assigned a numerical number to signify what category county they are. Those categories include I, II, III, IV, V, VI and VII. Category VI counties are also referred to as urban initiative counties. Category VII counties are also referred to as urban counties. The specific category of a county is determined by county population, county income, county agriculture income and the number of farms within the county. The total population that participated in the online questionnaire included County Extension Agents representing these different groups as well as categories of counties within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

Instrument

The online questionnaire consisted of five sections with a varying number of questions to which to respond. Section One consisted of questions to determine the perceived knowledge before and after concerning program development, planning, design, teaching styles, learning styles and utilization of volunteers. Section Two consisted of questions to determine the adoption of practices within program development, planning, design, teaching styles, learning styles and utilization of volunteers. Section Three consisted of questions to determine the perceived knowledge before and after concerning program implementation, interpretation, evaluation and recruiting/training volunteers. Section Four consisted of questions to determine the adoption of practices within program implementation, interpretation, evaluation and recruiting/training volunteers. Section Five included six open ended questions along with five questions pertaining to Master's Program information for those enrolled in Master's degree program at various universities. A copy of the instrument can be found in Appendix A.

Institutional Review Board

After discussing the potential study, the researchers submitted the prepared proposal with a copy of the proposed questionnaire to the Texas Tech University Protection of Human Subjects Committee requesting exempt status. The basis of a claim for exemption was proposed because the study was utilizing existing data that is available to the public.

The proposal was submitted the week of September 16, 2013 and official approval from the Texas Tech University Protection of Human Subjects Committee was received by email on October 8, 2013. A copy of the approval letter can be found in Appendix B.

Collection of Data

Data was collected via an online questionnaire utilizing the Qualtrics software program. The Qualtrics software was utilized because of its high security, program capabilities and ease of use. The online questionnaire was activated on October 16, 2013 and the population was notified by an email through Qualtrics from Dr. Darrell Dromgoole, Associate Director for County Programs for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. The initial deadline to respond was October 28, 2013, but was extended in order to increase response rate. Email reminders through Qualtrics were sent October 23, 2013; October 31, 2013; November 5, 2013; and November 12, 2013. Once a participant completed the online questionnaire, they did not receive any further emails. The online questionnaire was deactivated on November 19, 2013. The data collected was analyzed to help in determining the effectiveness of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's Program Excellence Academy for new employees. A copy of the email notification of the online questionnaire activation and email reminders can be found in Appendix D.

Analysis of Data

SPSS 22.0 for Windows software was used when analyzing the data for this study. Descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, central tendency measures, and

variability, were used to summarize the data. Relationships were compared between the perceived competencies and applications of the County Extension Agents from their perspectives on the before and after means by running paired sample t-tests. Paired sample t-tests were utilized to determine if there was significant statistical difference between the before and after mean on the different statements.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will provide a discussion on the findings of this study. Within this chapter, there will also be an in-depth discussion of the findings as it relates to each specific objective.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the study was to determine if Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's Program Excellence Academy increased the knowledge and changed the behavior of new employees related to program development. In addition, the study helped determine if the objectives set for the Program Excellence Academy were being met.

The course objectives of the Program Excellence Academy include:

1. Define and use terminology associated with Extension.
2. Define in detail the Extension organization and infrastructure.
3. Describe how Extension programs are developed, implemented and evaluated.
4. Demonstrate the core competencies critical for individuals employed within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, as they relate to the program development process.

5. Help Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service faculty achieve success, determine their sense of purpose, deal with change, and improve effectiveness and efficiencies through planning and program development.

For this study, there were three main objectives developed to accomplish the purpose of this study.

Those objectives were:

1. Describe the participants of the Program Excellence Academy.
2. Determine the participant's perceived knowledge of program development before attending the Program Excellence Academy.
3. Determine the knowledge gained and change of behavior related to program development, since attending the Program Excellence Academy.

Findings for Research Objective One

Research objective one was in place to provide readers a description of the participants of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's Program Excellence Academy since it started statewide in the Spring of 2010. The participants of the Program Excellence Academy include County Extension Agents employed with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

Within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, there are predominately four different type groups of County Extension Agents. Those types of County Extension Agents include County Extension Agent-Agriculture/Natural Resources (CEA-AG/NR),

County Extension Agent-Family and Consumer Sciences (CEA-FCS), County Extension Agent-4-H and Youth Development (CEA-4-H) and County Extension Agent-Horticulture (CEA-Hort). These types of County Extension Agents are determined by subject matter and program area emphasis. The County Extension Agents that attended the Program Excellence Academy I and Program Excellence Academy II included 24 County Extension Agents- Agriculture/Natural Resources; 22 County Extension Agents-Family and Consumer Sciences; 18 County Extension Agent-4-H and Youth Development; and three County Extension Agent-Horticulture (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Distribution of Agents Involved in Study

County Extension Agent Title	Number of Agents Represented
AG/NR ¹	24
FCS ²	22
4-H & Youth	18
Horticulture	3

¹Agricultural and Natural Resources; ²Family and Consumer Sciences

There are 254 counties in the State of Texas and there are County Extension Agents from at least one of these groups assigned to each county. There may be one, two, three, or more County Extension Agents assigned to a specific county depending on the category of the county. Within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, counties are assigned a numerical number to signify what category county they are. Those categories

include I, II, III, IV, V, VI and VII. Category VI counties are also referred to as urban initiative counties. Category VII counties are also referred to as urban counties. The specific category of a county is determined by county population, county income, county agriculture income and the number of farms within the county. County categories represented by the participant group included zero Category I; five Category II; 11 Category III; 23 Category IV; 14 Category V; five Category VI; and nine Category VII. The total population that participated in the online questionnaire included County Extension Agents representing these different groups as well as categories of counties within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Distribution of Counties Involved in Study

County Category	Number of Counties Represented
I	0
II	5
III	11
IV	23
V	14
VI	5
VII	9

The educational level of the County Extension Agents within the population in this study included 35 with a master’s degree, 29 with a bachelor’s degree and three did not answer that question (Table 4.3). One of the requirements of employment with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service as a County Extension Agent is a minimum of a bachelor’s degree. Those that start with a bachelor’s degree are required to obtain a master’s degree within eight years of employment.

Table 4.3 Highest Degree Attained by Participants Involved in Study

Degree Attained	Number of Agents with that Degree
Master of Science	35
Bachelor of Science	29
No Answer	3

Findings for Research Objective Two

Research objective two was to determine the participant’s perceived knowledge of program development before and after attending the Program Excellence Academy I & II.

To determine the perceived knowledge of the participants on program development before and after attending the Program Excellence Academy I, participants were asked to respond to seven statements with each having a before and after response.

Table 4.4 displays the population, mean, and standard deviation for each of the seven statements related to Research Objective Two as well as Grand Mean for before and after.

Table 4.4 Program Excellence Academy Participants Response to Statements Regarding Program Development

Knowledge of	Before			After		
	n	\bar{x}	SD	n	\bar{x}	SD
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Program Development Model	67	2.31	.908	66	3.23	.627
Learning & personality styles	67	2.58	.838	65	3.52	.640
Educational methods used in Extension	67	2.49	.805	66	3.36	.598
Importance of lesson planning	67	2.60	.954	66	3.35	.734
How volunteers are engaged to develop and deliver programs	67	2.34	.789	66	3.15	.685
Teaching methods, tips, and techniques	67	2.66	.930	66	3.39	.630
How to train members of planning groups	67	2.09	.848	66	2.92	.865
Grand Mean		2.44			3.27	

Program Excellence Academy I participants responded to seven statements that related to the program development process. In this section of the survey instrument, participants were asked to rank their knowledge level before and after the program on a 1-4 scale with P (poor) = 1, F (fair) = 2, G (good) = 3 and E (excellent) = 4. Sixty seven participants (61.47%) responded to all seven questions related to their knowledge before participating in the academy and sixty six participants (60.55%) responded on the same

statements related to their knowledge level following the academy. When asked about the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service program development model, the before mean was 2.31 and the after mean was 3.23 with 30.67 percent increase in knowledge. The second statement, learning personality and styles had a 2.58 mean and a 3.52 mean after the program which is a 31.33 percent increase in knowledge. When asked about educational methods used in Extension, there was an overall increase in knowledge of 29.00 percent with a mean of 2.49 before and 3.36 after. The importance of lesson planning showed a 2.60 mean before followed by a 3.35 mean after, resulting in a 25.00 percent increase in knowledge. Statement five, how volunteers are engaged to develop and deliver programs had a 27.00 percent increase in knowledge with a before mean of 2.34 and an after mean of 3.15. Teaching methods, tips and techniques was the sixth statement showing a 2.66 before mean, 3.39 after mean and a percent change of 24.33. The final statement, how to train members of planning groups, resulted in a 2.09 before mean and an after mean of 2.92. The percent change in knowledge was 27.67. The grand mean of all seven statements resulted in an increase in knowledge of 27.67 percent, with a before mean of 2.44 and an after mean of 3.27.

Table 4.5 provides an outline of the frequency of responses for the seven statements.

Table 4.5 Displays the Frequency of Each Response for Each of the Seven Statements Related to Research Objective Two

Knowledge of	Before				After			
	P ¹	F	G	E	P	F	G	E
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Program Development Model	17	15	32	3	0	7	37	22
Learning & personality styles	6	25	27	9	0	5	21	39
Educational methods used in Extension	6	29	25	7	0	4	34	28
Importance of lesson planning	10	10	26	12	1	7	26	32
How volunteers are engaged to develop and deliver programs	8	33	21	5	0	11	34	21
Teaching methods, tips, and techniques	8	20	26	13	0	5	30	31
How to train members of planning groups	17	31	15	4	5	12	32	17

¹Responses: P (poor) = 1, F (fair) =2, G (good) =3, E (excellent) =4

Based on the data in Table 4.5, the following conclusions can be made.

Sixty-seven participants (61.47%) responded to all seven questions related to their knowledge before participating in the academy and sixty-six participants (60.55%) responded on the same statements related to their knowledge level following the academy. When asked about the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service program development model, 35 (52.24%) participants indicated that they had good or excellent knowledge and 32 (47.76%) had poor or fair knowledge before attending. After attending, 59 (89.40%) indicated a level of good or excellent knowledge and seven (10.60%) indicated a level of fair knowledge. There were no participants that indicated a poor knowledge. When asked about learning styles and personality, 36 (53.73%) indicated they had good or excellent knowledge and 31 (46.27%) had poor or fair

knowledge before attending. After attending, 60 (92.31%) indicated a level of good or excellent knowledge and five (7.69%) indicated a level of fair knowledge. There were no participants that indicated poor knowledge. When asked about educational methods used in Extension, 32 (47.76%) indicated good or excellent knowledge and 35 (52.24%) had poor or fair knowledge before attending. After attending, 62 (93.94%) indicated a level of good or excellent knowledge and four (6.06%) indicated a level of fair knowledge. There were no participants that indicated poor knowledge. When asked about the importance of lesson planning, 28 (41.79%) indicated they had good or excellent knowledge and 29 (43.28%) had poor or fair knowledge before attending. After attending, 58 (87.88%) indicated a level of good or excellent knowledge and eight (12.12%) indicated a level of fair knowledge. One participant indicated poor knowledge. When asked about how volunteers are engaged to develop and deliver programs, 26 (38.81%) indicated good or excellent knowledge and 41(61.19%) had poor or fair knowledge before attending. After attending, 55 (83.33%) indicated a level of good or excellent knowledge and 11 (16.67%) indicated a level of fair knowledge. There were no participants that indicated poor knowledge. When asked about teaching methods, tips and techniques, 39 (58.21%) indicated good or excellent knowledge and 28 (41.79%) had poor or fair knowledge before attending. After attending, 61 (92.42%) indicated a level of good or excellent knowledge and five (7.58%) indicated a level of fair knowledge. There were no participants that indicated poor knowledge. When asked about how to train members of planning groups, 19 (28.36%) indicated good or excellent knowledge and 48 (71.64%) had poor or fair knowledge before attending. After attending, 49

(74.24%) indicated a level of good or excellent and 12 (18.18%) indicated a level of fair knowledge. Five (7.58%) indicated poor knowledge.

In addition, a Paired Sample T-Test was used to determine if there was significant differences ($p < .05$) between the means of the before and after responses of each of the seven statistics. A summary of these findings is displayed in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 T-Test Values for Research Objective Two When Comparing the Before and After Means of the Program Development Statements

Statement	t value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Program Development Model	-8.866	65	.000**
Learning & personality styles	-9.342	64	.000**
Educational methods used in Extension	-10.035	65	.000**
Importance of lesson planning	-6.974	65	.000**
How volunteers are engaged to develop and deliver programs	-8.271	65	.000**
Teaching methods, tips, and techniques	-7.822	65	.000**
How to train members of planning groups	-8.953	65	.000**

Note: ** $p < .01$ indicating statistical significant difference

The results in Table 4.6 show a negative t value for each of the seven program development statements when comparing the before and after means. The table also shows $p < .01$ for each comparison indicating statistical significant difference.

Table 4.7 Program Excellence Academy Participant Responses to Statements Regarding Program Development

Knowledge of	Before			After		
	n	\bar{x}	SD	n	\bar{x}	SD
Evaluation tools & resources available from Organizational Development	30	1.90	.712	29	3.03	.680
How we interpret the impact of educational programs	30	1.97	.765	30	2.90	.759
Community demographics, how to find and analyze demographic data	30	2.17	.791	30	2.90	.759
Planning group structure, their involvement in program development	30	2.30	.794	30	3.20	.664
How to recruit & train volunteers	30	2.10	.759	30	3.00	.695
Educational methods used in Extension	30	2.47	.860	30	3.23	.626
Grand Mean		2.15			3.01	

Program Excellence Academy II participants responded to six statements that related to the program development process. During this section of the survey instrument participants were asked to rank their knowledge level before and after the program on a 1-4 scale with P (poor) = 1, F (fair) = 2, G (good) = 3 and E (excellent) = 4. Thirty participants (27.52%) responded to all six questions related to their knowledge before participating in the academy and after attending. When asked about evaluation tools and resources available from Organizational Development, the before mean was 1.90 and the after mean was 3.03 with 37.67 percent increase in knowledge. The second statement, interpreting the impact of educational programs had a 1.97 mean before and a

2.90 mean after the program which is a 31.00 percent increase in knowledge. When asked about community demographics, how to find and analyze demographic data, there was an overall increase in knowledge of 24.33 percent with a mean of 2.17 before and 2.90 after. When asked about planning group structure and their involvement in program development showed a 2.30 mean before followed by a 3.20 mean after, resulting in a 30.00 percent increase in knowledge. Statement five, how to recruit and train volunteers had a 30.00 percent increase in knowledge with a before mean of 2.10 and an after mean of 3.00. Educational methods used in Extension was the sixth statement showing a 2.47 before mean, 3.23 after mean and a percent change of 25.33. The grand mean of all six statements resulted in an increase in knowledge of 28.67 percent, with a before mean of 2.15 and an after mean of 3.01.

Table 4.8 displays the frequency of each response for each of the six statements related to Research Objective Two.

Table 4.8 Displays the Frequency of Each Response for Each of the Six Statements Related to Research Objective Two

Knowledge of	Before				After			
	P ¹	F	G	E	P	F	G	E
Evaluation tools & resources available from Organizational Development	9	15	6	0	0	6	16	7
How we interpret the impact of educational programs	9	13	8	0	2	4	19	5
Community demographics, how to find and analyze demographic data	6	14	9	1	1	7	16	6
Planning group structure, their involvement in program development	4	15	9	2	0	4	16	10
How to recruit & train volunteers	6	16	7	1	1	4	19	6
Educational methods used in Extension	4	11	12	3	0	3	17	10

¹Responses: P (poor) = 1, F (fair) =2, G (good) =3, E (excellent) =4

Thirty participants (27.52%) responded to all six questions related to their knowledge before and after participating in the academy. When asked about the evaluation tools and resources available from Organizational Development, six (20.00%) participants indicated that they had good knowledge and 24 (80.00%) had poor or fair knowledge before attending. There were no participants that indicated an excellent knowledge. After attending, 23 (79.31%) indicated a level of good or excellent knowledge and six (20.69%) indicated a level of fair knowledge. There were no participants that indicated a

poor knowledge. When asked about how we interpret the impact of educational programs, eight (26.67%) indicated they had good knowledge and 22 (73.33%) had poor or fair knowledge before attending. There were no participants that an excellent knowledge. After attending, 24 (80.00%) indicated a level of good or excellent knowledge and six (20.00%) indicated a level of fair or poor knowledge. When asked about community demographics, how to find and analyze demographic data, 10 (33.33%) indicated good or excellent knowledge and 20 (66.67%) had poor or fair knowledge before attending. After attending, 22 (73.33%) indicated a level of good or excellent knowledge and eight (26.67%) indicated a level of fair or poor knowledge. When asked about planning group structures and their involvement in program development, 11(36.67%) indicated they had good or excellent knowledge and 19 (63.33%) had poor or fair knowledge before attending. After attending, 26 (86.67%) indicated a level of good or excellent knowledge and four (13.33%) indicated a level of fair knowledge. There were no participants that indicated poor knowledge. When asked about how to recruit volunteers, eight (26.67%) indicated good or excellent knowledge and 22(73.33%) had poor or fair knowledge before attending. After attending, 25 (83.33%) indicated a level of good or excellent knowledge and five (16.67%) indicated a level of fair or poor knowledge. When asked about educational methods used in Extension, 15 (50.00%) indicated good or excellent knowledge and 15 (50.00%) had poor or fair knowledge before attending. After attending, 27 (90.00%) indicated a level of good or excellent knowledge and three (10.00%) indicated a level of fair knowledge. There were no participants that indicated poor knowledge.

Table 4.9 T-Test Values for Research Objective Two When Comparing the Before and After Means of Evaluation & Interpretation Statements

Statement	t value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Evaluation tools & resources available from Organizational Development	-7.844	28	.000**
How we interpret the impact of educational programs	-6.176	29	.000**
Community demographics, how to find and analyze demographic data	-5.809	29	.000**
Planning group structure, their involvement in program development	-6.139	29	.000**
How to recruit & train volunteers	-6.139	29	.000**
Educational methods used in Extension	-5.769	29	.000**

Note: ** $p < .01$ indicating statistical significant difference

The results in Table 4.9 show a negative t value for each of the six program development statements when comparing the before and after means. The table also shows $p < .01$ for each comparison indicating statistical significant difference.

Findings for Research Objective Three

Research Objective Three was in place to evaluate the knowledge gained and the change of behavior of the participants of the Program Excellence Academy in relation to program development after attending the Program Excellence Academy I and II.

Table 4.10 shows the frequency of each response for each of the five statements related to Program Excellence Academy I and Research Objective Three.

Table 4.10 Frequency of Response of Participants of Program Excellence Academy I Related to Adoption

Statement	n	DWN	PWN	DK	PW	DW	AA	NA
Utilize the program development model & guidelines to develop programs	67	0	1	8	14	15	28	1
Utilize planning groups in each program area that I work with	67	0	4	3	8	18	33	1
Utilize multiple teaching methods to reach the various learners in my programs	67	0	1	3	5	11	46	1
Utilize volunteers in leading educational programs	67	0	0	4	11	19	32	1
Utilize lesson plan strategies in my teaching efforts	67	0	4	4	7	11	40	1

¹Responses: DWN (definitely will not) =1, PWN (probably will not) =2, DK (don't know) =3, PW (probably will) =4, DW (definitely will) =5, AA (already adopted) =6, NA (not applicable) =7

Program Excellence Academy I participants responded to five statements that related to knowledge gained and adoption of practices. In this section of the survey instrument, participants were asked to rank their level of adoption after attending the Academy on a 1-7 scale with DWN (definitely will not) = 1, PWN (probably will not) = 2, DK (don't know) = 3, PW (probably will) = 4, DW (definitely will) = 5, AA (already adopted) = 6 and NA (not applicable) = 7. Sixty-seven (61.47%) responded to all five questions related to the knowledge gained and the change of behavior of the participants of the

Program Excellence Academy after attending. When asked about the utilizing the Program Development Model and Guides to develop programs, 57 (85.10%) participants indicated that they probably will, definitely will or already adopted this practice. Nine (13.40%) indicated that they probably will not or don't know and one (1.50%) indicated that it was not applicable. There were no responses for definitely will not. When asked about utilizing a planning group in each program area that they work with, 59 (88.10%) participants indicated that they probably will, definitely will or already adopted this practice. Seven (10.5%) indicated that they probably will not or don't know and one (1.50%) indicated that it was not applicable. There were no responses for definitely will not. When asked about utilizing multiple teaching methods to reach the various learners in their programs, 62 (92.60%) participants indicated that they probably will, definitely will or already adopted this practice. Four (6.00%) indicated that they probably will not or don't know and one (1.50%) indicated that it was not applicable. There were no responses for definitely will not. When asked about utilizing volunteers to lead programs, 62 (92.60%) indicated that they probably will, definitely will or already adopted this practice. Four (6.00%) indicated that they don't know and one (1.50%) indicated that it was not applicable. There were no responses for definitely will not or probably will not. When asked about utilizing lesson plan strategies in their teaching efforts, 58 (86.50%) indicated that they probably will, definitely will or already adopted this practice. Eight (12.00%) indicated that they probably will not or don't know and one (1.50%) indicated that it was not applicable.

Table 4.11 shows the frequency of each response for each of the four adoption statements related to Program Excellence Academy II and Research Objective Three.

Table 4.11 Frequency of Responses of Participants of Program Excellence Academy II Related to Adoption

Statement	n	DWN	PWN	DK	PW	DW	AA	NA
Utilize various data collection methods in my evaluation strategy	30	0	1	1	9	6	12	1
Develop outcome summaries that are structured by the 3 R's	30	0	0	1	4	6	18	1
Utilize scan forms to evaluate outcomes of programs	29	0	2	2	0	7	17	1
Engage my Leadership Advisory Board in program interpretation	30	0	1	1	2	5	19	2

¹Responses: DWN (definitely will not) =1, PWN (probably will not) =2, DK (don't know) =3, PW (probably will) =4, DW (definitely will) =5, AA (already adopted) =6, NA (not applicable) =7

Program Excellence Academy II participants responded to four statements that related to knowledge gained and adoption of practices. In this section of the survey instrument, participants were asked to rank their level of adoption after attending the Academy on a 1-7 scale with DWN (definitely will not) = 1, PWN (probably will not) = 2, DK (don't know) = 3, PW (probably will) = 4, DW (definitely will) = 5, AA (already adopted) = 6 and NA (not applicable) = 7. Thirty (27.52%) responded to all four questions related to the knowledge gained and the change of behavior of the participants of the Program Excellence Academy after attending. When asked about utilizing various data collection methods in their evaluation strategy 27 (90.00%) indicated that they probably

will, definitely will or already adopted this practice. Two (6.60%) indicated that they probably will not or don't know and one (3.30%) indicated that it was not applicable. There were no responses for definitely will not. When asked about developing outcome summaries that are structured by the three R's (response, relevance and results), 28 (93.30%) indicated that they probably will, definitely will or already adopted this practice. One (3.30%) indicated that they don't know and one (1.50%) indicated that it was not applicable. There were no responses for definitely will not and probably will not. When asked about utilizing scan forms to evaluate outcomes of programs, 24 (82.70%) participants indicated that they definitely will or already adopted this practice. Four (13.8%) indicated that they probably will not or don't know and one (3.40%) indicated that it was not applicable. There were no responses for definitely will not and probably will. When asked about engaging their Leadership Advisory Board in program interpretation, 26 (86.70%) indicated that they probably will, definitely will or already adopted this practice. Five (6.60%) indicated that they probably will not or don't know and one (6.70%) indicated that it was not applicable. There were no responses for definitely will not.

Qualitative Results from Open Ended Questions

The online questionnaire that was utilized for this study included four open ended questions for the participants to answer. Fifty-seven participants responded to at least one or more of the open ended questions. A summary of the responses to each of the questions is included below, using the procedure outlined by Dooley and Murphy (2001)

to theme and aggregate the responses. A copy of the open ended questions and individual responses can be found in Appendix C.

1. What was your greatest benefit from attending the Program Excellence Academy?

There was one major theme and two minor themes that could be identified from the responses to this question. Of the 67 respondents, 57 provided a response to this question.

The major theme along with the two minor themes in order, included:

1. Networking
2. Structure/Culture of Extension
3. Educating/Teaching

The complete list of responses to the open ended questions, as provided by the participants, is included in the appendix. The data from the responses is summarized below in Table 4.12.

**Table 4.12 Summary of Greatest Benefits from Attending
Primary Benefits Identified by Members**

	n
Networking	35
Structure/Culture of Extension	12
Educating/Teaching	10

Based on the responses, it is clearly evident that the greatest benefit from attending the Program Excellence Academy, as perceived by the participants, is the opportunity to network with the other participants. The responses also showed that information provided on Extension and teaching was beneficial.

2. After attending the Program Excellence Academy, what (if anything) could be strengthened to assist you in your program efforts at the county level?

There were 57 responses to open ended question 2, with no major themes really emerging from the responses.

Three themes with the highest number of responses included:

1. Program Plans/Planning
2. TExAS/Reporting
3. Experienced Agent Involvement

The complete list of responses is included in the appendix. The summarized data provided three areas that could be enhanced to strengthen the Program Excellence Academy. These three areas are identified in Table 4.13 below, along with the number of times it was listed in the responses.

Table 4.13 Areas Identified to Strengthen the Program Excellence Academy

Areas to Strengthen	n
Program Plans and Planning	7
TExAS/Reporting	7
Involving Experienced Agents	5
Other Responses	38

Based on the responses, both the planning and reporting in the TExAS System, could be strengthened to enhance the Program Excellence Academy. Another area identified was the involvement of tenured agents in the different sections of the Program Excellence Academy.

3. What can Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service do to build upon your program development skills following participating in the Program Excellence Academy?

There were 43 responses provided with suggestions on how Texas A&M AgriLife Extension could assist participants in building on their program development skills after attending the Program Excellence Academy. There were two themes that emerged with the highest number of responses:

1. Educational/Training Opportunities
2. Mentor Assignment

All responses exactly as provided are included in the appendix. The responses are summarized in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14 How to Enhance Program Development Skills after attending Program Excellence Academy

Areas to Enhance	n
Provide additional Education/Trainings	8
Ensure Quality Mentor Assignment	5
Other	30

Based on the responses by the participants to enhance their program development skills after attending the Program Excellence Academy, more training opportunities are wanted. County Extension Agents also want a quality learning experience with their assigned mentor.

4. What could Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service do better to help you in your job preparation?

There were 58 responses provided with suggestions on what Extension could do better to help them in their job preparation. Responses reflected many different suggestions, but the one theme that emerged more than any others was:

1. Ensure quality training

All responses exactly as provided are included in the appendix. The responses are summarized in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15. What Extension Could do Better for Job Preparation

Area to do Better	n
Quality/Type of Training	9
Others	49

Based on the responses, County Extension Agents want to receive quality trainings and be provided the opportunity for more quality trainings in the First Step program, with their assigned mentor, Regional Program Leader, County Extension Director and District Extension Administrator.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final Chapter V provides a summary of the study as well as conclusions, implications and recommendations.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the study was to determine if Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's Program Excellence Academy increased the knowledge and changed the behavior of new employees related to program development. In addition, the study helped determine if the objectives set for the Program Excellence Academy were being met.

The course objectives of the Program Excellence Academy include:

1. Define and use terminology associated with Extension.
2. Define in detail the Extension organization and infrastructure.
3. Describe how Extension programs are developed, implemented and evaluated.
4. Demonstrate the core competencies critical for individuals employed within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, as they relate to the program development process.
5. Help Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service faculty achieve success, determine their sense of purpose, deal with change, and improve effectiveness and efficiencies through planning and program development.

For this study, there were three main objectives developed to accomplish the purpose of this study.

Those objectives were:

1. Describe the participants of the Program Excellence Academy.
2. Determine the participant's perceived knowledge of program development before attending the Program Excellence Academy.
3. Determine the knowledge gained and change of behavior related to program development, since attending the Program Excellence Academy.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations that should be considered after reviewing the findings from this study include:

1. The sample size contained a limited number of individuals who have completed all three phases of the Extension onboarding process. The response rate was low for those who have completed Program Excellence Academy II, as opposed to those who have completed Academy I.
2. The study measured only the perceived knowledge increase of the respondents, as opposed to observations from Extension mid-managers and administrators.

Research Design

For this research, the data that was used is considered secondary as it was collected by the Organizational Development Unit within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. The data collection was under the direction of Dr. Scott Cummings, Associate Head for Extension Programs; Dr. Jeff Ripley, Assistant Professor & Extension Specialist; and Ms. Katy Weber, Extension Assistant. Permission was granted by Dr. Scott Cummings to have access to this data. An online questionnaire was utilized by the Organizational Development Unit to collect the data from the identified population. Instructions on completing the online questionnaire along with other information provided to the identified population was done by the Organizational Development Unit. The questionnaire that was utilized was developed by the Organizational Development Unit within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service under the direction of Dr. Scott Cummings, Associate Head for Extension Programs; Dr. Jeff Ripley, Assistant Professor & Extension Specialist; and Ms. Katy Weber, Extension Assistant.

Population and Sample

The subjects or population included all new County Extension Agents that participated in the Program Excellence Academy I and Program Excellence Academy II since it started statewide in the Spring of 2010. This included six cohorts with a population of around 130. The seventh cohort was not included as they had attended only half of the Program Excellence Academy at the time of this study. The six cohorts with a population of 130 have attended Program Excellence Academy I and Program Excellence

Academy II. At the time the online questionnaire was activated, 109 of the original population of 130 were still employed with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Of the 109 that received notification of the activation of the online questionnaire availability, 67 participated by responding to at least one question in the online questionnaire. That participation represents a 61.47% response rate by those County Extension Agents that had completed both Program Excellence Academy I and Program Excellence Academy II.

Within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, there are predominately four different type groups of County Extension Agents. Those types of County Extension Agents include County Extension Agent-Agriculture/Natural Resources (CEA-AG/NR), County Extension Agent-Family and Consumer Sciences (CEA-FCS), County Extension Agent-4-H and Youth Development (CEA-4-H) and County Extension Agent-Horticulture (CEA-Hort). These types of County Extension Agents are determined by subject matter and program area emphasis. The County Extension Agents that attended the Program Excellence Academy I and Program Excellence Academy II included a mixture of these different types of County Extension Agents. There are 254 counties in the State of Texas and there are County Extension Agents from at least one of these groups assigned to each county. There may be one, two, three, or more County Extension Agents assigned to a specific county depending on the category of the county. Within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, counties are assigned a numerical number to signify what category county they are. Those categories include I, II, III, IV, V, VI and VII. Category VI counties are also referred to as urban initiative counties.

Category VII counties are also referred to as urban counties. The specific category of a county is determined by county population, county income, county agriculture income and the number of farms within the county. The total population that participated in the online questionnaire included County Extension Agents representing these different groups as well as categories of counties within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

Instrument

An online questionnaire was utilized by the Organizational Development Unit within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service to collect data from the identified population. Instructions on completing the online questionnaire along with other information provided to the identified population was handled by the Organizational Development Unit. The questionnaire that was utilized was developed by Dr. Jeff Ripley, Assistant Professor & Extension Specialist and Ms. Katy Weber, Extension Assistant within the Organizational Development Unit under the direction of Dr. Scott Cummings, Associate Head for Extension Programs.

The online questionnaire consisted of five sections with a varying number of questions to respond to. Section One consisted of questions to determine the perceived knowledge before and after on program development, planning, design, teaching styles, learning styles and utilization of volunteers. Section Two consisted of questions to determine the adoption of practices within program development, planning, design, teaching styles, learning styles and utilization of volunteers. Section Three consisted of questions to determine the perceived knowledge before and after on program

implementation, interpretation, evaluation and recruiting/training volunteers. Section Four consisted of questions to determine the adoption of practices within program implementation, interpretation, evaluation and recruiting/training volunteers. Section Five included six open ended questions along with five questions pertaining to Master's Program information.

Institutional Review Board

After discussing the potential study, the researchers submitted the prepared proposal with a copy of the proposed questionnaire to the Texas Tech University Protection of Human Subjects Committee requesting exempt status. The basis of a claim for exemption was proposed because the study was utilizing existing data that is available to the public.

Collection of Data

All data was collected by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Organizational Development Unit by Dr. Jeff Ripley, Assistant Professor & Extension Specialist and Ms. Katy Weber, Extension Assistant under the direction of Dr. Scott Cummings, Associate Head for Extension Programs. Data was collected via an online questionnaire utilizing the Qualtrics software program. The Qualtrics software was utilized because of its high security, program capabilities and ease of use. existing data that is available to the public.

Analysis of Data

SPSS 22.0 for Windows software was used when analyzing the data for this study. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data. Frequencies, percentages, central tendency measures, and variability were used to describe the data. Relationships were compared between the perceived competencies and applications of the County Extension Agents from their perspectives on the before and after means by running paired sample t-tests. The paired sample t-tests were utilized to determine if there was significant statistical difference between the before and after mean on the different statements.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

Research Objective One

The goal of research objective one was to describe the participants of the Program Excellence Academy. Table 4.1 shows the distribution of the agents involved in the study and Table 4.2 shows the distribution of the counties represented in the study by the agents that attended the Program Excellence Academy.

For research objective one, two main conclusions can be made. First, the majority of the participants of this study were County Extension Agents-Agriculture and Natural Resources (35.82%) and County Extension Agents-Family and Consumer Sciences (32.84%). Second, 34.33 percent of the participants of this study were from a Level IV county. Therefore the findings in this study supported by the data in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 follow the dynamics of employment of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

Information acquired from Dromgoole (2014) on the dynamics of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service employment reflects County Extension Agent - Agricultural/Natural Resources (45.36%), County Extension Agent - Family & Consumer Sciences (35.71%), County Extension Agent - 4-H & Youth Development (12.32%) and County Extension Agent – Horticulture (3.39%). The information also reflects the county categories as Category I (4.33%), Category II (19.29%), Category III (17.72%), Category IV (32.28%), Category V (16.14%), Category VI (6.30%) and Category VII (3.94%). Dromgoole (2007) reported that a majority of participants in his study were County Extension Agents-4-H and Youth Development.

Research Objective Two

The goal of research objective two was to determine the participant's perceived knowledge of program development before and after attending the Program Excellence Academy.

Program Excellence Academy I participants responded to seven statements that related to the program development process. In this section of the survey instrument, participants were asked to rank their knowledge level before and after the program on a 1-4 scale with P (poor) = 1, F (fair) = 2, G (good) = 3 and E (excellent) = 4. The before and after responses of the participants are found in Table 4.4 and Table 4.5.

When asked about the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service program development model, the before mean was 2.31 and the after mean was 3.23 with 30.67 percent increase in knowledge. The second statement, learning personality and styles had

a 2.58 mean and a 3.52 mean after the program which is a 31.33 percent increase in knowledge. These two statements showed the highest percent increases when comparing the before and after for all seven statements. Teaching methods, tips and techniques showed a 2.66 before mean, 3.39 after mean and a percent change of 24.33. This statement reflected the lowest percent increase when comparing the before and after for all seven statements. The grand mean of all seven statements resulted in an increase in knowledge of 27.67 percent, with a before mean of 2.44 and an after mean of 3.27. The two statements in Table 4.5 reflecting the highest percentage of good or excellent knowledge after attending were educational methods used in Extension (93.94%) and teaching methods, tips and techniques (92.42%). The two statements with the lowest percentage of good or excellent knowledge after attending were how volunteers are engaged to develop and deliver programs (83.33%) and how to train members of planning groups (74.24%). Utilizing a Paired Sample T-Test, the data in Table 4.6 reflects a $p < .01$ which indicates statistical significant differences.

The conclusion can be made that the participants of the Program Excellence Academy I definitely increased their knowledge of the program development process after attending when comparing the before and after grand mean of the seven statements and the 27.67 percent increase. This is supported by the studies conducted by Dromgoole (2007) and Hatter (2009). The main concern that I have is the 83.33 percent and 74.24 percent of good or excellent knowledge by participants after attending on how volunteers are engaged to develop and deliver programs and how to train members of planning groups respectively.

Program Excellence Academy II participants responded to six statements that related to the program development process. During this section of the survey instrument participants were asked to rank their knowledge level before and after the program on a 1-4 scale with P (poor) = 1, F (fair) = 2, G (good) = 3 and E (excellent) = 4. The before and after responses of the participants are found in Table 4.7 and Table 4.8.

When asked about evaluation tools and resources available from Organizational Development, the before mean was 1.90 and the after mean was 3.03 with a 37.67 percent increase in knowledge. This statement reflected the highest percent increase when comparing the before and after for all six statements. Educational methods used in Extension showed a 2.47 before mean, 3.23 after mean and a percent change of 25.33. This statement reflected the lowest percent increase when comparing the before and after for all six statements. The grand mean of all six statements resulted in an increase in knowledge of 28.67 percent, with a before mean of 2.15 and an after mean of 3.01. The two statements in Table 4.8 reflecting the highest percentage of good or excellent knowledge after attending were educational methods used in Extension (90.00%) and planning group structure and their involvement in program development (86.67%). The two statements with the lowest percentage of good or excellent knowledge after attending were community demographics/how to analyze demographic data (73.33%) and evaluation tools and resources available from Organizational Development (79.31%). Utilizing a Paired Sample T-Test, the data in Table 4.9 reflects a $p < .01$ which indicates statistical significant differences.

The conclusion can be made that the participants of the Program Excellence Academy II definitely increased their knowledge of the program development process after attending when comparing the before and after grand mean of the six statements and the 28.67 percent increase.

The increase in perceived knowledge after attending the Program Excellence Academy in this study is supported by the studies done by Dromgoole (2007) and Hatter (2009). The 73.33 percent of good or excellent knowledge responses on community demographics, how to find and analyze demographic data after attending is concerning. After attending, eight (26.67%) still indicated a level of fair or poor knowledge. One can conclude training in this area may need to be enhanced to increase the percentage of good or excellent knowledge responses after attending.

Research Objective Three

The goal of research objective three was to determine the knowledge gained and change of behavior related to program development of the participants after attending the Program Excellence Academy.

Program Excellence Academy I participants responded to five statements that related to knowledge gained and adoption of practices. In this section of the survey instrument, participants were asked to rank their level of adoption after attending the Academy on a 1-7 scale with DWN (definitely will not) = 1, PWN (probably will not) = 2, DK (don't know) = 3, PW (probably will) = 4, DW (definitely will) = 5, AA (already

adopted) = 6 and NA (not applicable) = 7. The frequency of responses of participants of Program Excellence Academy I related to adoption are found in Table 4.10.

When asked about utilizing multiple teaching methods to reach the various learners in their programs, 92.60 percent indicated that they probably will, definitely will or already adopted this practice. When asked about utilizing volunteers to lead programs, 92.60 percent indicated they probably will, definitely will or already adopted this practice. These two statements indicated the highest percentages of responses for probably will, definitely will or already adopted. When asked about utilizing the Program Development Model and guides to develop programs, 85.10 percent indicated they probably will, definitely will or already adopted this practice. When asked about utilizing lesson plan strategies in their teaching efforts, 86.50 percent indicated they probably will, definitely will or already adopted this practice. These two statements indicated the lowest percentages of responses for probably will, definitely will or already adopted.

When analyzing the data in Table 4.10, the concern that rises to the top is the number of responses for probably will not, don't know or not applicable for the five statements related to knowledge gained and adoption of practices. Each one of the statements refers to the utilization of an integral part of the program development process. I am worried about these new employees that provided these responses. If they do not realize the importance of the program development process, the chances of them becoming a successful County Extension Agent is not very good. I would say some of these individuals possibly should not have been hired. One can not only focus on those

mentioned earlier, but you also have to look at the percentage of responses for probably will, definitely will or already adopted for the five statements. Those percentages range from 85.10 percent to 92.60 percent. This adoption of practices is also supported by the studies conducted by Dromgoole (2007) and Hatter (2009).

Program Excellence Academy II participants responded to four statements that related to knowledge gained and adoption of practices. In this section of the survey instrument, participants were asked to rank their level of adoption after attending the Academy on a 1-7 scale with DWN (definitely will not) = 1, PWN (probably will not) = 2, DK (don't know) = 3, PW (probably will) = 4, DW (definitely will) = 5, AA (already adopted) = 6 and NA (not applicable) = 7. The frequency of responses of participants of Program Excellence Academy II related to adoption are found in Table 4.11.

When asked about utilizing various data collection methods in their evaluation strategy, 90.00 percent indicated they probably will, definitely will or already adopted this practice. When asked about developing outcome summaries that are structured by the three R's (response, relevance and results), 93.30 percent indicated they probably will, definitely will or already adopted this practice. These two statements indicated the highest percentages of responses for probably will, definitely will or already adopted. When asked about utilizing scan forms to evaluate outcomes of programs, 82.70 percent indicated that they definitely will or already adopted this practice. When asked about engaging their Leadership Advisory Board in program interpretation, 86.70 percent indicated that they probably will, definitely will or already adopted this practice. These two statements indicated the lowest percentages of responses for probably will, definitely

will or already adopted. Findings on Leadership Advisory Board not being fully utilized in program interpretation is supported by the findings of Ripley (2008) in regards to Leadership Advisory Board members not being utilized effectively to advocate for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

I would conclude that after attending the Program Excellence Academy II, participants realized the importance of evaluation of programs and the different steps that it includes. The percentages of probably will, definitely will or already adopted responses by participants for these four statements range from a low of 82.70 percent to a high of 93.30 percent. These findings are also supported by the findings of Dromgoole (2007) and Hatter (2009) in regards to evaluation. In regards to those probably will not or not applicable responses, there should be high concern for the success of these individuals and their understanding of the importance of evaluation or the curriculum that is utilized within the training.

Open Ended Questions

1. What was your greatest benefit from attending the Program Excellence Academy?

There was one major theme and two minor themes that could be identified from the responses to this question. Of the 67 respondents, 57 provided a response to this question.

The major theme along with the two minor themes in order, included:

1. Networking (35)
2. Structure/Culture of Extension (12)
3. Educating/Teaching (10)

I believe that networking with other County Extension Agents is very beneficial and will always be very beneficial, not only for new employees but tenured employees as well. Positive communication with other County Extension Agents is an integral part of onboarding within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. I believe that the Program Excellence Academy also provides an environment to educate new employees on the structure and culture of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

2. After attending the Program Excellence Academy, what (if anything) could be strengthened to assist you in your program efforts at the county level?

There were 57 responses to open ended question 2, with no major themes really emerging from the responses.

Three themes with the highest number of responses included:

1. Program Plans/Planning (7)
2. TExAS/Reporting (7)
3. Experienced Agent Involvement (5)

Even though there were no major themes that could be extracted from this question, I believe points of interest could be focused on within the responses to this question. I believe that continued strengthening of the education provided on program plans/planning, reporting and the TExAS system in general would continue to enhance the quality of the Program Excellence Academy. I believe increased involvement of tenured County Extension Agents in the training agenda would also strengthen the educational value of the Program Excellence Academy.

3. What can Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service do to build upon your program development skills following participating in the Program Excellence Academy?

There were 43 responses provided with suggestions on how Texas A&M AgriLife Extension could assist participants in building on their program development skills after attending the Program Excellence Academy. There were two themes that emerged with the highest number of responses.

1. Educational/Training Opportunities (8)
2. Mentor Assignment (5)

Based on the responses to this question, I believe continually providing quality educational/training opportunities on the program development process will strengthen and enhance the program development skills of not only new employees, but tenured employees as well. I believe District Extension Administrators need to continually stress to mentors the importance of quality and detailed discussions on the steps of the program

development process with the mentee will only enhance the new employees program development skills.

4. What could Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service do better to help you in your job preparation?

There were 58 responses provided with suggestions on what Extension could do better to help them in their job preparation. Responses reflected many different suggestions, but the one theme that emerged more than any others was:

1. Ensure quality training (9)

I believe that the time and effort that Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service puts in developing quality training opportunities for County Extension Agents will pay dividends in the future success of new employees. Those quality training opportunities not only include the Program Excellence Academy, but the entire onboarding process. Along with enhancing the Program Excellence Academy, I believe strengthening the First Step Program, the mentor program and the onboarding by the District Extension Administrators, Regional Program Leaders and County Extension Directors will provide new employees the tools/skills to be successful.

Recommendations for Program Excellence Academy

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's Program Excellence Academy is a quality professional development training for new employees. Continued evaluation of the effectiveness of the Program Excellence Academy needs to happen. The

recommendations listed below have been developed based on the findings from this study.

1. Education/training on volunteer management and empowering volunteers should be enhanced and strengthened to assure that County Extension Agents realize the important role that volunteers play or can play in a successful program.
2. Education/training stressing the importance of the Program Development Model utilized by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, the program development process and the importance of each step in the process to assure County Extension Agents understand that in order to have a successful program this process needs to be followed.
3. Enhance and strengthen training on the importance of evaluations and the entire process, along with additional training on the utilization of scan forms to evaluate programs.
4. Education/training on the utilization of the Leadership Advisory Board in program interpretation should be enhanced as well as stressing the specific roles and responsibilities of Leadership Advisory Board members.
5. Enhance the current onboarding process by strengthening the First Step program. I would recommend creating a number of training positions within each district for new employees. A new employee would remain in this position for a minimum of six months and no longer than 12 months. During this time, they would attend at least Program Excellence Academy I and possibly Program Excellence Academy II. They would have the opportunity to experience more in

this scenario than the current First Step program, which is 30 days. With the opportunity to experience more in the county, in my opinion it would enhance their experience when attending Program Excellence Academy.

Implications for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

The success of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service relies heavily on the effective utilization of the program development process, the effective utilization of volunteers and the effective utilization of quality evaluations to determine programmatic impact. It is concerning to me when only 85.10% indicated that they probably will, definitely will or already adopted the utilization of the Program Development Model and guides to develop programs, 86.70% engaging their Leadership Advisory Board in program interpretation and 82.70% utilizing scan forms to evaluate outcomes of program.

Recommendations for Future Study

The following is a list of recommendations for possible future studies that Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service might consider.

1. A study should be conducted on the entire onboarding process that is utilized by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, which would include the time line of onboarding a new employee in relation to their date of hire.
2. Studies have been conducted on Program Area Committee and Leadership Advisory Board volunteer involvement. Extension should consider a study on the following questions. Are County Extension Agents providing quality/adequate training for volunteers? Are County Extension Agents

empowering volunteers to the full extent to enhance their programmatic efforts?

3. Evaluation is critical in determining programmatic impact and results.

Extension should consider a study on the following question. Are County Extension Agents evaluating programs to the level needed by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service?

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APPENDIX A
ONLINE INSTRUMENT

Instrument

Q36 Did you attend Program Excellence Academy I?

- Yes
- No

Q33 For each item listed below, select the correct option in the left column that best describes your level of understanding BEFORE the program; and then select the correct option in the right column that best describes your level of understanding AFTER the program.

	BEFORE				AFTER			
	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Program Development Model	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning and personality styles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Educational methods used in Extension	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The importance of lesson planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How volunteers are engaged to develop and deliver programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching methods, tips, and techniques	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How to train members of planning groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q35 Please indicate your intentions to adopt each item listed below OR indicate if you have already adopted the item listed or if it does not apply to your situation. Practice or technology that could be adopted...

	Definitely Will Not	Probably will not	Don't know	Probably will	Definitely will	Already Adopted	Not Applicable
Utilize the Program Development Model and Guides to develop my programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Utilize a planning group in each program area that I work with	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Utilize multiple teaching methods to reach the various learners in my programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Utilize volunteers in leading educational programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Utilize lesson plan strategies in my teaching efforts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q37 Did you attend Program Excellence Academy II?

- Yes
- No

Q19 For each item listed below, select the correct option in the left column that best describes your level of understanding BEFORE the program; and then select the correct option in the right column that best describes your level of understanding AFTER the program.

	BEFORE				AFTER			
	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Evaluation tools and resources available from Organizational Development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How we interpret the impact of our educational programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community demographics, how to find and analyze demographic data	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Planning group structures and their involvement in program development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How to recruit and train volunteers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Educational methods used in Extension	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q20 Please indicate your intentions to adopt each item listed below OR indicate if you have already adopted the item listed or if it does not apply to your situation. Practice or technology that could be adopted...

	Definitely Will Not	Probably will not	Don't know	Probably will	Definitely will	Already Adopted	Not Applicable
Utilize various data collection methods in my evaluation strategy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Develop outcome summaries that are structured by the 3 R's	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Utilize scan forms to evaluate outcomes of programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engage my Leadership Advisory Board in program interpretation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q21 What was your greatest benefit from attending the Program Excellence Academy?

Q22 After attending the Program Excellence Academy, what (if anything) could be strengthened to assist you in your program efforts at the county level?

Q23 How prepared did you feel after Program Excellence Academy to develop, deliver and evaluate a quality educational program in your county?

_____ Program Excellence Academy

Q24 What can Texas A&M AgriLife Extension do to build upon your program development skills following participation in the Program Excellence Academy?

Q25 Taking into consideration ALL of the steps that Texas A&M AgriLife Extension has taken you through to help you become fully oriented and trained, how effective do you feel the TOTAL ONBOARDING PROCESS has been for you?

_____ EFFECTIVENESS

Q26 What could we do better to help you in your job preparation?

Q27 Have you completed a Masters Degree?

- Yes
- No

Q28 Are you currently working on completing your Masters?

- Yes
- No

Q29 Which university did you earn your Masters degree through?

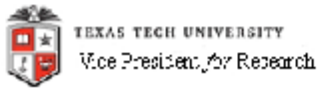
Q30 Did you utilize any of the credits available to you when you completed Foundations and Program Excellence Academy?

- Yes
- No

Q31 If so, how many hours?

- 1 Hour
- 2 Hours
- 3 Hours
- 4 Hours
- 5 Hours
- 6 Hours

APPENDIX B
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



October 8, 2013

Dr. David Lawver
Ag Ed & Communications
Mail Stop: 2131

Regarding: 504159 A Study of the Effectiveness of Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service's Program Excellence Academy for New Employees

Dr. David Lawver:

The Texas Tech University Protection of Human Subjects Committee approved your claim for an exemption for the protocol referenced above on October 8, 2013.

Exempt research is not subject to continuing review. However, any modifications that (a) change the research in a substantial way, (b) might change the basis for exemption, or (c) might introduce any additional risk to subjects must be reported to the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) before they are implemented.

To report such changes, you must send a new claim for exemption or a proposal for expedited or full board review to the HRPP. Extension of exempt status for exempt protocols that have not changed is automatic.

The HRPP staff will send annual reminders that ask you to update the status of your research protocol. Once you have completed your research, you must inform the HRPP office by responding to the annual reminder so that the protocol file can be closed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosemary Cogan".

Rosemary Cogan, Ph.D., ABPP
Protection of Human Subjects Committee

APPENDIX C
OPENENDED QUESTION RESPONSES

1. What was your greatest benefit from attending the Program Excellence Academy?

Learning about structure of extension.

Learning to understand the Culture of Extension and interacting with other new Agents.

Getting to know new agents from across the state.

The networking with other new agents.

Interaction with other county agents.

Getting to hear from other agents that are going through the same thing around the state with certain problems. / Also being able to ask questions that might not have been as easy for DEA's and RPL's to answer

The Program Excellence Academy helps give an understanding of the overall goal and responsibility of Extension Agents across the state. Additionally, it brings new agents together and allows them to interact and discuss ideas that they are trying in their counties. Academy also helps with the development of agents and gives them the foundation to have a successful career.

Meeting professional cohorts and getting an excellent understanding how Texas A&M AgriLife functions.

A good refresher course for me as I came back to Extension with 11.5 years of prior experience

Meeting peers in other counties and discussing how they approach different program areas. There was a lot of repetition between the two weeks but that might have changed.

Networking with other new agents to build relationships for future collaboration. / Learning new program ideas / Practicing educational methods

Networking with fellow Extension faculty at the County and State level. This was imperative for understanding the overall flow of information and structure within Extension.

It was a good teaching training and allowed the agent to see that we are educators first and foremost. Really enjoyed the sessions and like getting to work in smaller groups.

Networking with other agents, gained a basic understanding of Extension.

The personality differences and how that should effect building our committees and taking that into consideration.

4-H information

Connections with other agents.

Learning from other agents.

Granted, there is a wealth of knowledge there and I did learn a great deal, but that ability to talk about your programs and experiences with other 1st year agents...one can not put a price on that. When you are in a district with a great deal of experienced agents, sometimes you may get worried that you're not on target, when the truth is - everyone has been there. It's just nice to be with agents in the same places dealing with the same "newby" issues you have!

Getting to know the other agents in my cohort that I could look to for assistance

Evaluations and interpretation.

Nothing but possibly networking with agent from other districts.

How to better educate.

Networking with other agents and hearing how they did their programs

I have not attended Academy yet.

Creating relationships with my peers who are going through the same experiences.

Better understanding of teaching environments / Better understanding of volunteer personalities

General understanding of the extension program.

Learning some insight into the AgriLife extension relationship.

I had the opportunity to meet other new agents and develop contacts. I learned the type of personality I have and that of other my co-workers that has been really helpful.

Networking and sharing ideas.

Networking with other agents. Putting names and faces together of those who office in College Station.

I haven't attended, yet.

The greatest benefits I have received from attending both Foundations and Academy have been the networking amongst agents from all over the state, and learning who does what at Texas A&M.

Meeting agents from all over the state.

Knowing that other new agents were facing the same issues I was.

Having the agents that are currently working share what is working for them in the field. get to meet and put a face to the resources individuals we need to call when questions arise. bonds with other agents in our field to draw on from advice.

Learning about Planning Groups.

Meeting other new agents and beginning to learn how to properly plan and report on those plans.

I had the opportunity to meet other agents from around the state and brainstorm ideas with them.

I had 12 years of extension experience; I cannot name a greatest benefit. I enjoyed meeting other people

None.

Meeting the different agents.

Becoming more familiar with teaching/learning styles.

Exchange of ideas with other new agents who are also outsiders in their counties. Dr. Ripley and Dr. Kieth - any presentation they gave.

A greater and broader knowledge to utilizing a Program Area Committee.

Developing programs.

Meet the higher ups.

Training on the structure of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension program and utilizing committee (including the different styles of how to run a committee meeting).

It show me how to operate the extension program in my county to get it to its full potential.

Networking with agents that were as tenured as I was in the program.

Networking with other agents within the state.

Learning about extension. I knew nothing about extension before I got this job.

Networking with other agents around the state.

I have not attended yet.

Meeting other agents and the 4-H FCS training.

Understanding the hierarchy of extension. Teaching Effectively.

Better understanding of Texas and evaluations.

Utilizing volunteers and community partners.

Getting to know other agents outside of my district. Utilizing the resources of those agents as well as Extension specialists

Making new contacts. / Learned a lot about 4-H. / Liked the hands on Livestock portion the best. Learned the most there

Have not attended Academy yet, but if it is anything like Foundations it will be a huge waste of my time and I will not benefit from it.

Meeting other agents across the state and discussing programs

N/A.

Program Excellence Academy is structured to allow for more Q&A opportunities. It is very beneficial to talk though different scenarios and problems with other agents and administrators.

Learning more about teaching styles.

Receiving more information which supported the firs step program.

Program Development model; Target Audience.

2. After attending the Program Excellence Academy, what (if anything) could be strengthened to assist you in your program efforts at the county level?

Support.

I thought that the teaching style needed to be more hands on. The instructors told us to be hands on teachers but didn't model hands on learning.

Increased specialized subject matter training or new agents.

Much of what is thought is relevant to counties with two or more agents. There needs to be a special breakout session or something for single agent counties.

Have not attended.

Broader outlook such as rural development, community development section

It would have been helpful to have someone walk us through the FCS Agent Only website. That thing is confusing and doesn't always make sense, so to have someone tell us how to find things more quickly would be helpful. Same thing with the state 4-H website.

Academy was well rounded and informative. Bringing in experienced or level III or IV agents for small group sessions would be a great addition to provide an opportunity for agents to discuss suggestions for dealing with challenges they may be facing in their new counties.

Understanding of how to accomplish program area committees with low volunteer support or want to participate in the programs.

Maybe less focus on teaching us how to teach and more focus on how to get programs going and growing in our counties. I came from a background of educating adults, so maybe it was repetitive for me, but not for someone else. I can see the value in it.

I feel like a lot about PEA could be changed to enhance the ENTIRE on boarding system. For example, we are sat down in a room and given PowerPoint presentation after PowerPoint presentation. I can honestly say that when I'm being preached to by people who don't seem to remember what it was like to be a new Extension Agent, it is extremely hard to retain any of that information. It is slightly ironic that the PEA in April harped so much on effective teaching methods, yet hardly anything was taught in a way for the new agents to learn anything. I am not trying to be super critical or harsh on those who put on Foundations and the PEAs. I know they work their tails off to make that program happen. However, I feel like there is ALOT left to be desired in the delivery of the information. I have no doubt that the information is valuable. However, the way it is delivered probably is not the most effective. I feel like we should do more of a "real life" situation when teaching. Break us up by our different positions, and teach us how to put

together an entire outcome plan for 4-H or FCS or AG. Not just in TExAS, but SHOW us how to run an educational presentation, how to report those numbers, how to evaluate our clientele, and then how to do the summary. Basically, in the week we are there, we should get to see a real living model(not something generated on a PowerPoint, but an actual model using us as the clientele) to show us how we should be performing our jobs. At both Foundations and PEA 1 I was given the same presentation about TExAS. Which essentially just showed me how to navigate through the system, not what was expected of me when USING the system. Most of the new agents are fresh out of college and we can figure out how to navigate through a system without someone showing us that. But instead, use that time actually show us the types of reports, and the information that should be contained in those reports, that we should be submitting. I believe that SHOWING us what we need to be doing and not telling us would be more valuable. This way we would have a tangible example to pattern when we return to our counties.

Help with reporting.

Making the training more specific to my county.

Provide some background on Extension terms used so that agents not familiar with 4H and FCS and Hort can get on the fast track to speaking the same language.

I really feel like it hit the mark. I liked it. I think it was fabulous. My only concern was being gone from the office that long you always come back to a mess. I feel like if there was any way to take off a day it would really relieve some pressure. I know it's all wonderful information and we need to hear it all, but being gone that long from work is difficult.

The problem with academy is the time when we learn these things. The things I learned in Academy 1 I already knew about from my Masters Degree program. The stuff I really needed to know in my first 6 months were the things we learned in academy 2. Many of the issues related to evaluation, TEXAS system and outcome summaries I had to learn on my own because we did not really go into much of that in academy 1.

Some of the information taught at both 1 and 2 need to get to the Agent sooner. This program gives good direction, but there are many new Agents out there who had a terrible First-Step Process and feel lost on what to do, so they are wondering around for months up to a year with no idea of what they should be doing or how to do it.

Stop creating additional reports for agents to complete.

How to better deal with commissioner courts.

I feel that trainings should be from co-agents, who are currently at the county level.

I have not attended Academy yet.

Continual training. I think having the foundations program is a good thing because spreading it out over a longer time is better for a new agent because we are able to come

prepared with new questions each time from experiences that have come up over the past 6 months.

Informational assets within the system- I realize that our web of agents and faculty can answer most of the questions we may have but I would like to have had a more complete and accessible listing of who does what and what information they have to offer. / I also think more information on dealing with Private pesticide applicator issues

Different approaches for urban counties vs rural counties.

Having more training at the beginning of our career. Letting us know what exactly is expected of us.

I need more specific ideas for programs in my county and reaching the specific social economic and cultural groups. Most of the programs are not geared to the Hispanic population which is the major population in my county.

More time spent on how to develop plans and use TEXAS.

I don't know right off hand. I was previously in Extension and my Master's degree was an Extension track so except for Texas specific information, it was all a repeat for me from what classes I had in graduate school. My co-worker however has expressed extreme frustration on not understanding the components of a strong Outcome. She is struggling with the whole Outcome experience and knowing how to plan an outcome and then carry it out to the end.

More assistance with Program Planning. Not so much why or what it means to plan programs, but how, in terms of specialist scheduling and talking points for local committees on outcome indicators that Texas A&M has already identified.

more specialist involvement. more real life stories from other agents, can be Lynced in. All the lesson plan stuff is good but after a few months you get so busy the little bit of free time you have you don't want to spend it on lesson plans. create a vita template to get started on right there, need more on outcome program documents and result demonstrations.

More help with Evaluation.

For as much time as we are given in training, I'm not sure much else can be done to improve beyond more engagement during sessions. More hands-on, quality training I think is what is really needed, but due to budget constraints, this obviously can't be done.

More involvement for first time extension employees on behalf of RPL.

Do not spend the entire week talking about Program area committees. Offer 4-H project leader trainings such as train the new county agents to become shooting sports coaches or train the agents to teach livestock judging trainings.

Concentrating on reporting and different programs.

All the basics are there. The challenge is to make it work in my county.

Training in news releases early / More round tables with agents that are early in their careers to share things that have worked and how they adjusted to the responsibilities of the job. One that is general, and then round tables on FCS & Ag, and a joint round table on 4-H.

N/A.

realized that there is an abundance of resources for me.

Help with issue identification and then helping identify an outcome program relevant to addressing said issue.

Nothing.

A refresher. Not a two year commitment but just one week three years later to make sure everything is working smoothly.

It is too long. A lot of repetition.

I have not attended yet.

Marketing programs to new audiences.

Many times the new agents that come into positions have dormant or non-developed committees, however the lessons in PEA do not really outline how to go about starting a committee where there hasn't been one in quite a while. The most difficult part of utilizing committees is getting one started and getting the ball rolling. It would be more beneficial if that was covered in PEA.

A Texas simulation.

More individual program focus.

Training on Texas and doing reports. I have has no follow up and hardly any assistance. Only criticized about my reports.

Have not attended Academy yet, but if it is anything like Foundations it will be a huge waste of my time and I will not benefit from it.

Make it shorter, give more time for interaction, speakers coordinate to eliminate redundancy.

N/A.

More guidance with committees.

There is so much information that is packed in three and half days, I feel that a five days secession would be more beneficial. I would have also like to have seen how to write an outcome summary and have to develop plans on TExAS.

In my situation, I would have liked to have the academy a little sooner because most of the stuff I had to self teach myself, which was fine for me. I would be afraid that other new agents would have a difficult time doing this especially when it comes to TExAS system.

Volunteer Management; ISOTURE.

3. What can Texas A&M AgriLife Extension do to build upon your program development skills following participation in the Academy?

Not make trainings so long and redundant.

It would be nice to have someone follow up on the trainings with me. I was all on my own. I didn't have first step or a mentor or anything. My program was a mess and most of the trainings I did were because I stumbled across the new agent training section on the website.

Increased subject matter training!

Good training method. The more hands on and group discussions there are, the better.

A list or directory that can be looked at to see specialist around the state and there specific fields to identify right specialist for our programs.

Have not attended.

Recorded sessions to refer back to could be helpful.

Some how simplify the planning process to which there are more defined long term goals and outcomes that create the short term outcomes from year to year.

Skip the "EZ Analyze" training for the group. That was a huge waste of time. If someone wants/need to analyze data in that way, they can have someone teach them individually. I barely have enough time in the day to get the standard evaluations done, much less create my own at this point. That just seems like something you would do if you have been in extension for a while and know how to keep everything organized and are developing new programs, etc... For a new agent, it was just overwhelming. / I would've loved to have someone talk to use about organization and time management. I think that is one of the biggest struggles new agents deal with. Also, how to say no to someone or a group

when they want a program done that doesn't fit within your schedule or program plans for the year.

Continue to promote communication between agents at the district level throughout the year.

Provide continual educational opportunities where we can one on one and in a group discuss the program development process and practice those skills.

Make sure that all agents are assigned a mentor agent in their county. I have never been told that "X agent in Y county is your mentor agent". I have had to call others who I believed to be succeeding at the program I was trying to implement. Or ask the RPDs to spend more time one on one with the new agents when developing plans. When we are at program planning on the district level, we are mixed in with much more tenured agents who are asking question above our heads and likely only confusing us more. I am blessed with two good co workers in my county who have been in extension for numerous years, and they are able to hold my hand so to speak when it comes to reporting and program development. Without them, I'm sure I would be severely struggling, and likely not getting good remarks on my yearly evaluations. Some counties are blessed with agents who are able to work with such a younger agent and help them without inadvertently sounding condescending. Unfortunately, some are not so lucky. / / Furthermore, I'm not looking for a pat on the back, but when I have expressed my doubts(in myself and my programs) to middle management in the past, the answer I got was, "when I talk to people in your county, you seem to be doing a great job so I thought you were doing ok. I didn't realize you were struggling." Even though I did not look like I was struggling, I was severely doubting whether or not the programs I was doing, or even the reports I was submitting were up to par with what was expected from me. I feel that this only shows the disconnect between new agents and administration. I completely understand that the said administrator was trying not to step on my toes and seem to micro manage. However, we shouldn't have to wait on our superiors to hear we aren't doing a good job for them to personally check in with us either over the phone or lync. But definitely not by email. I feel that monthly if not quarterly, agents in their 1st year of tenure, should have a meeting with their DEA or RPD about where their programs are, and how the planning/implementation is going. As well as how their reporting is looking and what could be done to strengthen the new agents in various areas. Especially areas that will be evaluated annually.

Spend more time on teaching reporting.

Not sure.

Provide professional marketing strategies to learn how keep our programs out in front of our audience.

Help develop new skills and new methods of giving the information.

I went through the program when I had already been employed for over a year. Nothing about it was useful and the "homework" was ridiculous. Like agents have time to do homework on top of all the other stuff we need and have to get done. Homework that wasn't going to help me with anything since I was hired with a MS degree and didn't need college credit hours. The program could have been shortened into a one night two day deal too - if needed at all. No one wants to be stranded in Brownwood or College Station away from their homes and families for unhelpful required trainings.

I think the program is good.

I have not attended Academy yet.

Tips on creating and sustaining productive relationships with volunteers and community members.

Again, I felt the academy was not a waste of time and that valuable information was delivered.

I think that one of the most effective things is to let us have a group session (FCS) and discuss problems and solutions with each other.

Opportunities for in-person subject matter training. Better curriculum available for programs.

For some agents, I think it would be helpful for them to have extensive training on Outcomes, planning, carrying out and reporting on them. My co-working is struggling with that currently.

Our RPD gave us an outstanding resource for program planning, with specialist contact information. That book will be my bible, so to speak. But, the timing of when it was given was extremely late in the program development process. Also, the book lists all of the specialists but it seems like each department was allowed to come up with their own format, which makes it difficult to read. I think every department needs to be on the same format. Also, there really needs to be a concerted effort by administration to make the specialist understand what their roles are in assisting the agents with their programs. It is mind boggling to me that the agents and specialist work for the same outfit, yet there is such a communication disconnect on working together.

Continue to support us.

I liked Marvin's program planning conference where we did a roundtable discussion about methods, demonstrations and other ideas that agents are already doing instead of reinventing the wheel. Have TCAAA breakout programs to visit about gold star programs currently happening.

More one on one help from the RPD.

Need to talk about the reporting system, the different types of committees, how to create agendas, what are job entails, etc.

There needs to be more in-county training. I realize we will never go back to the assistant county agent model but surely there is a way to better prepare new agents for a quality county program. I would suggest using experienced agents who excel in certain areas to spend a few days in each new agent county. I believe this would best be handled at the district level.

Quarterly Lync meetings or a new agents blog - not allowing a complaining session but exchanging ideas, talking about a new, relevant programming need, etc. Our district has done the Lync meeting for new agents, but only in year one, and not on the more complex tasks. Please address fund raising, managing a budget, motivating and leading volunteers & staff. Some agents may have come to the job with those skills, but not all of us have.

Starting in areas with no previous programming how to develop the culture of programs with little money.

Lync refresher course.

Have not attended.

Without attending Foundations, I was, and partly still am, unaware of all of the resources we have to use at our disposal.

Workshops on Collaborations and partnerships.

Remind agents to consistently use these programmatic tools.

Subject matter trainings - providing current and relative topics that could be brought up to PACs. More hands on type trainings.

Follow up.

Have not attended Academy yet, but if it is anything like Foundations it will be a huge waste of my time and I will not benefit from it.

Cover 'How to deal with difficult people'.

N/A.

I would find a great benefit to discuss the content that goes into TEXAS. Everyone teaches you how to navigate, but I haven't received much guidance/feedback if I am doing things correct.

4. What could Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service do better to help you in your job preparation?

I feel that everything was very helpful in preparing me for my current position, some things we covered in the academy I wish we would have covered when I started rather than 6 months into the job, and also a few of the things that were covered in the academy felt kind of repetitive since I was already doing most of them in my daily work at the office.

I think that the CED's need to be more accountable to their Agents. It seems like mine never knew what was going on and just told me to talk to the RPD. But the RPD is so far away. CED's should be more familiar in all programs and provide more training support.

Allow us more time, to really learn the job, before we are just thrown into our county situation. I didn't feel ready to take on my county, after spending what ended up being a couple of weeks with my first step county. I was able to ask a lot of questions to my first step county along the way, but I didn't feel like it was enough to properly prepare you for the real deal. I also got very little information and support from my DEA. I felt blind coming into this position, you definitely have to saddle up, and get ready for a heck of a ride if you are going to stick it out.

Time spent with my mentor agent and DEA was far more valuable than Academy I & II. It would have been helpful to have more subject matter training in the different program areas I work in.

From what I've seen, there is not as much consistency in first-step, mentor program and DEA/RPD methods across district lines. The district I started in was excellent in assisting new agents. My current district doesn't seem to be as active in this and I have seen many new agents that had potential leave Extension due to lack of support. As agents, we should ALL try and help new agents, not just rely on their mentor or first step agent to take care of it.

More one on one time with RPL's and DEA's to determine particular goals and expectations for us as agents .

Better selection of first step agent and more time with mentor. I would of liked to be able to see more programs in action, either in person or things that had been previously recorded. A clear layout with specific job responsibilities and expectations on time spent in the office. Some kind of HR training when it comes to hiring an office secretary (i.e. what interview question can you not ask). More information on working with specialists and multi county efforts .

Understand that it takes some time to learn the process even though I have done extension before in other states everyone is different and some issues take time to really grasp such as planning. It may take more than one year to work out issues in the planning process.

I think the process is very effective and it helps new hires not feel thrown into this job.

We shouldn't be allowed to give programs during the first month -two months. It should be all about networking and building your resources. Get to know the people in the community. Let them know who you are, find out what issues need to be addressed before you do any program planning. We should attend any civic club meeting, go meet all of the administrators at the schools, find out who the important people are in town, attend chamber of commerce meetings, get to know the commissioners, etc., before we start doing programs. It would also be helpful if we had a canned press release to send out to the newspaper when we are hired.

Process is on the right track, much of the process hinges on new agents having a trainer agent that they can work easily with to get them started. Understanding compatibility among colleagues may provide beneficial insight into future training events.

Doing more hands on activities to assist me in preparing for job success.

I don't know! Extension is just a big job and agents have to figure out a way to manage things in their county. Sometimes just getting in and figuring it out is all that can be done. It's a hard job to step in to in my opinion. Definitely need more focus in training on planning and how to effectively plan in order to work toward a healthy work/life balance. Hardest part of the job by far, juggling all that is asked of agents.

I realize that it will cost more money, and take more time, but we have to collectively figure out a way to get more hands on with our new agents. I envy the days of Assistant Agents. Yes, I think it is not feasible to be in a county for 6 months to a year, only to move again. However, you were allowed to learn from a tenured agent without the pressure of making sure you don't screw something up. The way the system is now, I feel like we are drinking water from a fire hose as far as information is concerned, and then thrown into the deep end without a life vest. The way the system is now, an inexperienced agent has the pressure of knowing that we don't have someone to double check our work and make sure we aren't making a mistake. If we make a mistake now, the people who notice are our clientele. As we ALL know, sometimes it is extremely hard to bounce back from making a mistake in front of your clientele. Some of our supporters and clientele expect us to be experts immediately, and are disappointed and no longer respect newer agents if they make a major programming mistake. That is a lot of pressure to put on newer agents, not to mention it makes the agency look less credible if we have underprepared agents who are pretending to be an expert at something they know nothing about because they haven't had a chance to gain the knowledge they need to run such a program. Extension is supposed to be a credible, reliable source of information for the public. However, we can only keep that reputation as long as our agents are prepared with the information and experience to make sure that we are putting our best foot forward.

I think the hands on in county training that used to be provided when there were assistant agents would be a giant step back to proper training.

Provide texts on volunteer management to supplement the Academy and take back to our counties for reference.

I know that mentor agents are selected because they do a fantastic job and we look to them for guidance, but when they are trying to mentor a large number of agents, they aren't able to properly help each new agent. I would like to see more mentors trained in the state.

Honestly, many of the things that I have learned how to do or what I need to do was answered by those who should answer them, however not until I asked. Luckily, I asked questions to hit the ground running and jump start programing in my county. Yet, there are some new agents that may not know what to ask or where to go. Even through the process, you feel like your being dragged along until the next training comes along, and people in the county expect you to get busy. I think that many things are not covered such as dealing with support staff (how does the structure work), what are we to expect out of support staff, how do you deal with volunteers who badger you constantly and always cause problems. Many new agents are fresh out o college and have no clue what the boundaries are on these types of issues or problems. The program planning and other information is a great but the everyday things are what frustrate new agents and drive them to leave, many feel like they are thrown to the wolves when it comes to it.

No one sat with me until my third month of working. There were no real standards ever defined for my position. I shadowed another agent and was told "make the program yours." I was then later told that no, you have to do specific things that UX7 wants, even if the schools don't want it. It was not explained to me that this job wasn't the best for beginning a family. 60 hour work weeks mon - sat just to meet all the goals for your programming. More time needs to be spent with new agents describing to them what is really expected and work-life balance. Much time was wasted with me shadowing another agent that was not trained as a mentor. If there is to be a mentoring program, mentors should be trained and have an understanding of program goals for both CEP and Agrilife.

Have a minimum six month training with a qualified agent - more than 10 years employed. have the entire foundation and program academies upon hiring not when your 6 months or 1 year into the program. Agents are expected to start off the bat knowing all this and then you come in and help train. Backwards from what it should be. Better morale from the top down would help all of us agents too.

How to work better with the adult leaders.

To me, Extension is a job where you need to go through your first year and learn from experience and then build and adapt your programs in the following years. I personally have gotten more out of asking other agents about their experience implementing programs.

As far as online training for onboard, I know it was very hard for me to keep up with what needed to be done because it was all written out in a book and I had to search for what needed to be done that month. Maybe a simple weekly calendar in the back with a list of what need to be completed would be helpful. // For First Step, as I mentioned, it could have been more helpful to follow an agent that was closer to my county. Also maybe spending the first couple of days at the district office discussing exactly how monthly commissioners reports and TExAS Reports should be done, then going into the county.

Create more opportunities for state wide networking with other agents. Both new and old.

Social media issues.

Demands are plentiful but the economic support for the programs are very limited.

I would be remiss if I said my meetings with DEAs and RPDs did not cover all the topics listed, but I did not find them as effective as feel-good meetings. I haven't referred to the First Step pdf files given to me since the first month. What I have learned so far is on the job, so heading off to the Academy would only be appealing if I really had the time.

Simplify planning and reporting systems.

Make the Texas, BLT, and dossier all one reporting system that will produce all information that everyone needs in a useful way. Different reporting systems is very time consuming and it could be condensed into one system.

Many of the online links in the onboarding notebook are no longer usable.

I believe agent training is very important, but my goal would be to take it one step further. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension really needs a workforce that can hit the ground running upon hiring. We need to be a major force of educational programming in the colleges in the state, so students can choose an Extension option, and take classes preparing them for a career in Extension.

More guidance during the whole first year of new things that will come your way. Such as validations, adjunct faculty forms, district contests and requirements. Just need to be more open communication on all aspects.

A lot of information is given to an agent in the first year. Somehow that information needs to be broken down into smaller increments.

Program Plans this is very important but i feel that is where i am falling short. We need one on one time with someone to help us in this effort.

Bullet proof vest. Some things you just have to live.

A more detailed walk-through of TExAS and more uniform reporting rules. If you ask other seasoned CEA's how they enter information into TExAS, you get a different answer from each one.

Get more county agents involved in the training.

Locate mentors who are willing to share their expertise and knowledge.

Remember to teach us in a format other than PowerPoint lectures. Get us engaged so we really understand the material and learn from it. Don't just tell us to teach in new and different ways and then exempt yourselves from the new ways of teaching. PLEASE develop some state-wide ways of sharing successes and ideas (blogs, message board, newsletter).

Weekly guidance. It hinders procrastination and the option of putting off to another day what could get done today.

How to handle money. What's important to file away. What's expected in audits. Why is there a form for everything? Can we go back to the green cards for entry to 4-H, send the cards to TAMU then TAMU put the info in the connect so we have it.

Identification of volunteers in rural communities.

Give the new agents a list of all of the specialist in the extension program and their title.

Continue webinars. They are very helpful.

Have an in county mentor at the beginning or have foundations prior to starting or within 30 days.

Extension is so broad I think experience is the best teacher. As far as preparing Texas A & M AgriLife Extension does its best to have you prepared for the most common situation.

When agents come in and first-step, we sit and watch another county. As everybody knows, every county is different, and what applies in one, does not apply in another. First-step agents are always asked "do you have any questions", and to be honest, we don't know what to ask because we do not know what we do not know yet. Then we are told to go to our county and get started, then you sit in your office, look around, and think "Well, Now What?". Maybe by extended the first stepping process to two months and having that person observe two different counties, they would have an opportunity to see more and a better frame of reference to ask questions. They get a better opportunity to build a comfort level with Extension, their mentor agent(s), and would feel better prepared when they reach their own positions. The USDA-FSA used to pair their County Executive Directors for 6 months with a trainer before letting them loose in a county.

Doing great, thanks.

I think that DEAs and RPDs need to do a better job of communicating with new agents over their entire first year. Just because they were "told" something once, does not mean that they understood it or remembered it. Being a new agent is very overwhelming and that support is lacking, mainly in the area of program plans. The most valuable tool to me was the first step process and the mentor. Foundations and program excellence academy are great programs, but they are short term. New agents need long term support.

Subject matter training.

Need more hands on and one on one. The mentor agent deal is a completely not working.

I feel the deficiency has been in learning to utilize the TExAS system .

Timeliness .

I think Extension is a great organization to work for. I sometimes get the feeling from administration that the numbers to report are more important than the difference the programs are making in our communities. I think we should get more recognition for what we are doing right, instead of always thinking about numbers.

Have programs in a timely manner so that the agent never feels lost. I see a lot of new agents becoming discouraged because they have not went through training other than first step. First step is only beneficial if your mentor is willing to work with you and takes pride in teaching you as much as they can in a month before the agent is in their county. I was lucky enough to have a great first step experience but I have talked with other agents that came in the same time I did that were totally lost before Academy 1.

APPENDIX D
EMAIL NOTIFICATION SENT TO PARTICIPANTS

October 16, 2013

Dear CEA:

In our constant effort to improve the ways that we train and onboard new employees, we are seeking your feedback regarding the processes that you completed as a part of your onboarding. Many of you have completed all phases of the process, while others have only completed certain components. Please answer the sections that are appropriate to your experience. Your input is extremely valuable to our agency as we strive to better prepare our new agents for the job in their county. The survey should not take you more than 20 to 30 minutes, so I ask that you carve out a little time in the next few days to complete it. **I would like to have all responses by October 28.** Click the link below to complete the survey.

Follow this link to the Survey: [\\${!://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser: [\\${!://SurveyURL}](#)

Thanks again for your honest feedback.

Darrell Dromgoole
Associate Director - County Programs
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

Follow the link to opt out of future emails: [\\${!://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}](#)

October 23, 2013

Dear CEA:

REMINDER

In our constant effort to improve the ways that we train and onboard new employees, we are seeking your feedback regarding the processes that you completed as a part of your onboarding. Many of you have completed all phases of the process, while others have only completed certain components. Please answer the sections that are appropriate to your experience. Your input is extremely valuable to our agency as we strive to better prepare our new agents for the job in their county. The survey should not take you more than 20 to 30 minutes, so I ask that you carve out a little time in the next few days to complete it. **I would like to have all responses by October 28.** Click the link below to complete the survey.

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Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser: [\\${!://SurveyURL}](#)

Thanks again for your honest feedback.

Darrell Dromgoole
Associate Director - County Programs
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

Follow the link to opt out of future emails: [\\${!://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}](#)

October 31, 2013

Dear CEA:

REMINDER

*In our constant effort to improve the ways that we train and onboard new employees, we are seeking your feedback regarding the processes that you completed as a part of your onboarding. Many of you have completed all phases of the process, while others have only completed certain components. Please answer the sections that are appropriate to your experience. Your input is extremely valuable to our agency as we strive to better prepare our new agents for the job in their county. The survey should not take you more than 20 to 30 minutes, so I ask that you carve out a little time in the next few days to complete it. **Responses were due October 28, please complete ASAP.** Click the link below to complete the survey.*

Follow this link to the Survey: *[\\${!://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}](#)*

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser: [\\${!://SurveyURL}](#)

Thanks again for your honest feedback.

*Darrell Dromgoole
Associate Director - County Programs
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service*

Follow the link to opt out of future emails: [\\${!://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}](#)

November 5, 2013

Dear CEA:

REMINDER

In our constant effort to improve the ways that we train and onboard new employees, we are seeking your feedback regarding the processes that you completed as a part of your onboarding. Many of you have completed all phases of the process, while others have only completed certain components. Please answer the sections that are appropriate to your experience. Your input is extremely valuable to our agency as we strive to better prepare our new agents for the job in their county. The survey should not take you more than 20 to 30 minutes, so I ask that you carve out a little time in the next few days to complete it. **Responses were due October 28, please complete ASAP.** Click the link below to complete the survey.

Follow this link to the Survey: [\\${!://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser: [\\${!://SurveyURL}](#)

Thanks again for your honest feedback.

Darrell Dromgoole
Associate Director - County Programs
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

Follow the link to opt out of future emails: [\\${!://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}](#)

November 12, 2013

Dear CEA:

REMINDER

In our constant effort to improve the ways that we train and onboard new employees, we are seeking your feedback regarding the processes that you completed as a part of your onboarding. Many of you have completed all phases of the process, while others have only completed certain components. Please answer the sections that are appropriate to your experience. Your input is extremely valuable to our agency as we strive to better prepare our new agents for the job in their county. The survey should not take you more than 20 to 30 minutes, so I ask that you carve out a little time in the next few days to complete it. **Responses were due October 28, please complete ASAP.** Click the link below to complete the survey.

Follow this link to the Survey: [\\${!://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser: [\\${!://SurveyURL}](#)

Thanks again for your honest feedback.

Darrell Dromgoole
Associate Director - County Programs
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

Follow the link to opt out of future emails: [\\${!://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}](#)