

**AN EVALUATION OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION OF THE TEXAS A&M
AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE AMONG TEXAS COUNTY JUDGES AND
COMMISSIONERS**

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine and evaluate the level of client satisfaction of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service among elected county officials, namely county judges and commissioners.

The research was conducted with the county judge and all four county commissioners of all 254 counties in Texas resulting in total population of 1270.

The main purpose was to determine the level of satisfaction of county judges and commissioners with the professionalism and courtesy of local staffs and the information they provide and whether the county officials perceived a positive return in their investment in the local Extension programs. A secondary purpose was to determine the participants' perceived strengths of Extension, areas of potential improvement and opportunities for other impacts.

The sample population was 1270 Texas county judges and commissioners, with 653 participating in the survey. The instrument used was a single page (front and back) survey with 15 statements/questions to which participants responded on a Likert-type scale, nine questions gathering demographic information and 3 open-ended questions to gather perceived strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for additional impacts.

The results included seven significant findings and their corresponding recommendations for Extension and four areas of further research.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family.....

To my father, Delbert Sugg, who taught me dedication and instilled in me the work ethic that has made this project a reality. I would not have accomplished nearly as much without a “never give up” mantra that, without doubt, is attributed to the way you’ve lived your life. It is your example that continues to guide me.

To my mother, Karen Rose, who has always believed in me from the very beginning; no matter what pursuit held my focus at the time, whether it were sports, academics and later “real” life, you have always enabled me to succeed.

To Ashleigh & Turner, Thank you for understanding when this project took away from “family time”. There will be no more weekly trips to College Station that caused me to miss volleyball games, band concerts and awards banquets.

And finally, to Regina.....like every other “active family”, we didn’t need one more thing to add to our hectic lives. But, when I timidly brought the subject up, you said, “Go for it!” before I could even finish my “sales pitch”. I knew then, I would have a teammate through the process. Its common knowledge in Extension that it takes a special kind of person to be a “county agent’s wife”, and you have taken that on and then some with the addition of this endeavor.

To the three of you, this degree is just one more step in our journey together and I look forward to seeing what the Lord has in store for us next. I love you all.

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CONTRIBUTIONS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

This work was supervised by a dissertation committee consisting of Dr. Jeff Ripley-*Chair*, Dr. Scott Cummings-*Co-chair* and Dr. Gary Briers of the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications and Dr. Monty Dozier of the Department of Soil and Crop Sciences.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background and Setting

The Smith–Lever Act of 1914 established a system of cooperative extension services, to be a part of the land-grant universities, in order to inform people about current developments in agriculture, home economics, and other related subjects as well as provide opportunities for youth development. Also, the Act introduced home instruction which enabled farmers to learn innovative agricultural techniques. According to the Act, County Extension Agents and other personnel are charged with providing the education at the local level.

Today, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (AgriLife Extension) continues this mission. It is a grand endeavor that requires the tireless efforts of its employees. At the local level, program areas include Agriculture & Natural Resources (Ag/NR), Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS), 4-H & Youth Development (4-H/YD), and Community & Economic Development (CED). Ag/NR county extension agents encourage sustainability, and teach conservation and best management practices for production agriculture. FCS agents teach healthy lifestyle choices, food safety, and consumer economics. The 4-H program offers youth the opportunity to direct their own learning through real-life learning opportunities. Community Economic Development programs include leadership, community services and facilities, and public policy. These programs are an effort to help communities succeed through group involvement and networking.

To address this charge, Extension personnel are supported by resources, monetary and other, provided by federal, state and county governments. Although County Judges and Commissioners observe the effects of Extension programming at the local level, they do not typically evaluate the effectiveness of Extension efforts or personnel. These annual reviews are left for Extension administration to conduct.

The model of having “subject area” agents or agents that specialize in certain areas, but cover multiple counties, has been studied and that model has been put into practice in some states. However, to date, AgriLife Extension has maintained the county-based agent model. Having those agents in the county, being well connected, add to the Extension network and serve as an asset to the overall organization. In a study by McIntyre (1970) the job performances of Indiana county-based agents and agents in a multi-county system were compared. Included in his conclusion was the following paragraph:

Based on the responses of the agents in the job performance study, it's concluded that agents in the individual county system (control) spend significantly more time in organizing and planning, and significantly less time in implementing the program compared to the agents in the multi-county system (experimental). It appears that this additional time devoted to organizing and planning results in more effective Extension programs. (p. 36)

While having county-based agents is generally considered the most popular Extension model, the literature reviewed will show that very few studies have been conducted in regards to customer satisfaction of Extension programs among county

elected officials. While Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, like other Cooperative Extension Services across the country, has been proactive in assessing customer satisfaction among its clientele, no such assessment has been conducted among Texas county elected officials recently. It is critical to discover if the high customer satisfaction Texas A&M AgriLife Extension enjoys among its clientele, as reported in AgriLife customer satisfaction surveys, translates or is shared among the state's county judges and commissioners.

Customers, across the board, have a wide array of wants and needs. In the service and retail world, there are varied options to satisfy these needs. Because of the competition, businesses are constantly seeking feedback from their clientele; from car dealers to fast food restaurants, they all are willing to offer incentives, such as discounted service fees or free food during your next visit for completing an online customer satisfaction survey. Unlike the business world, clientele who are seeking unbiased, research-based information do not have the luxury of a wide array of county Extension offices from which to choose. While, historically, Extension has not had competition for customers in the traditional sense, that is changing. Other government entities, which may not be as unbiased or research-based as the information provided by Extension, private educational outlets and social media offer consumers information. Along with the race for consumers, comes the competition for ever dwindling funds.

The threat to Extension funding is not unique to Texas. Cooperative Extension services all over the United States have been dealing with the issue for several years. Texas and Iowa, among others, have begun charging a fee for their services. Program

attendees generally pay \$10 to attend and 4-H youth are charged a yearly participation fee; all services that were once offered free of charge. Some states' Extension programs are being encouraged to cut back and focus on their priority programs. In an article by Hebel (2002) James Mulder, executive director of the Association of Minnesota Counties is quoted as saying, "Extension is trying to be too many things to too many people. We are running the risk of spreading ourselves way too thin and essentially threatening the quality of the services."

Although the article was published 15 years ago, the situation remains unchanged. Funds are limited and Extension programs still strive to offer its citizens the best possible service. Extension administrators across the U.S. continue to face difficult decisions related to funding, personnel, and services provided.

Statement of the Problem

County support is critical to Extension programming efforts but county budgets in Texas are being stretched increasingly thin in order to address other obligations. Since Extension, in essence, is competing for the same limited support, it is paramount that Extension stay relevant in the minds of citizens and elected officials. It is worth noting that unlike many of the items in a county budget, counties in Texas are not mandated to fund the Extension programs in their respective counties. This is one of the reasons that Extension is many times at the top of the list when budget cuts are looming.

Since the passing of the Smith-Lever Act, Extension has been tasked with assisting in the diffusion of information in agriculture and home economics to improve

productivity. Additionally, those responsibilities have grown to include nutrition and health, youth development and strengthening communities (Wang, 2014). For its part, Extension has offered a high rate of return for its investors. Some reports of internal rates of return have ranged from 16% to 110% (Birkhauser, Evenson & Feder, 1991).

Extension programs have three funding partners: Federal (through the United States Department of Agriculture, State and Local. As with any partnership, it is important for Extension to get input and an honest evaluation from its county partners so that the county commissioners' courts and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension can more effectively and efficiently continue working to address the issues facing the citizens of Texas. Should Extension's impact be lost on local county decision-makers, local budgets risk being cut. In a study conducted through the UF/IFAS Extension in Florida researching the problems impacting Extension program quality at the county level, Harder, et al. (2013, "Impact of Budget Cuts") stated:

The primary problem identified was the *impact of budget cuts*. The magnitude of budget cuts ranged considerably between counties, but reductions forced all counties to adapt their personnel and/or programming. Report 3 stated, "The reduced budget negatively impacts [our] county's ability to maintain a full staff, deliver the current number of programs, and fund basic office necessities" (R3). In several counties, the number of programs was reduced, and certain programs were cut altogether. Also, in one case the agents began charging program fees from participants, which "is a concern because the economy has devastated the [county's] communities, and many residents are unable to pay the fees" (R5).

Other effects of budget reductions were felt in the personnel sector. One county saw a 35% reduction in staff over the preceding 5 years, and loss of staff coming "at a time with increasing demands on Extension services and educational programs" (R2). Others addressed budget cuts to personnel with furloughs, which caused frustration among agents who "continue to meet the demands of their position by working on those days" (R5).

It is no secret that county support is vital to Extension. For that reason alone, Extension must monitor and value its close relationship with county officials who make the funding decisions. Without their support, Extension becomes much less effective.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to determine Texas county commissioners' and judges' perceptions and opinions of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension at the local level. Data gathered should aid Extension in planning short and long term strategies. Specific objectives are as follows:

1. Describe the demographics of the judges and commissioners participating in this study.
2. Describe their level of satisfaction with the local Extension staff's professionalism and courtesy.
3. Describe their level of satisfaction with information provided by the local Extension staff and determine if they believe they are getting a positive return on the county's investment in Extension.

4. Determine the levels of satisfaction within the participants' demographic groups, including: gender, position (whether judge or commissioner), time in office, age and education level.
5. Determine what these county officials perceive as Extension's strengths, areas of potential improvement and opportunities for other impacts.

Research Questions

To address these objectives, the following research questions were developed:

1. What is the current relationship between county officials and the local Extension program? How involved in the program are these officials? How important are the local Extension programs to the county and to what clientele group are these programs most important?
2. How satisfied are these county officials with different aspects of the local Extension program in regards to the professionalism and courtesy of county staff? How satisfied are they with the information provided by Extension personnel and programs? Do county officials feel they are getting a positive return on their investment in Extension at the local level?
3. What is the level of satisfaction among these elected officials within genders, positions, age groups, education levels, etc.
4. According to local county officials, what are Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's greatest strengths? What areas could Texas A&M AgriLife Extension improve upon? What areas could Texas A&M AgriLife Extension address that it is not currently satisfying?

Implications of the Study

It is the hope of the researcher that Texas A&M AgriLife Extension will take the findings of this research and employ the information in the following ways:

1. The availability of resources for agents to market Extension programs and services at the local level will increase.
2. While local input has always been a major component of its programming, Extension will seek ways to allow for more autonomy for its agents and input from its local partners where possible.
3. Extension will continue to seek opportunities and partnerships to allow increased youth participation in its programs.

Delimitation

This study was delimited to the 1,270 Texas County Judges and Commissioners (1 judge and 4 commissioners in each of the 254 Texas counties).

Limitations

This study sought to gain a perspective on the thoughts and opinions of the members of the county commissioners' courts of Texas on the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension program in their respective counties. While Extension specialists, administrators, and state-wide programs play a vital role in the Extension mission, they were not included in this study. Any data related to those roles that were included in this study were recorded and made available for future reference in other studies and by use of Extension administration.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature relevant to this study has been grouped into the following categories: general client/customer satisfaction, public sector customer satisfaction and historical customer satisfaction assessments in Extension. The literature has been generally reviewed so as to gain a broad perspective on these areas of customer satisfaction. It is arranged such that broad, overall customer satisfaction is narrowed to customer satisfaction within the public/non-profit sector and further narrowed to Extension customer satisfaction.

General Client/Customer Satisfaction

One does not have to look far to have the opportunity to participate in a customer satisfaction survey. Most receipts from businesses from fast food restaurants to electronics stores offer enticements for their customers to call or log on to report their experiences with the associated establishment. Much attention has been given in both the public and private sectors in the past 15-20 years to the concept of client satisfaction.

Generally, customer satisfaction is defined as a post consumptive evaluative judgment concerning a specific product or service (Gunderson, Heide and Olsson, 1996). Such judgment is the result of perceived disconfirmation. Perceived disconfirmation is the comparison of the perceived performance against a standard. Disconfirmation can have either a positive, negative or zero effect. In other words, customers enter with a pre-determined standard and when the result is better than the expected standard, that

standard is disconfirmed, generally resulting in a satisfying experience. Likewise, when the result is less than the pre-determined standard, the standard is disconfirmed, only this time, it results in a dissatisfied opinion.

There are several factors that affect customer satisfaction: expectations, disconfirmation of expectations and performance, just to name a few (Szymanski, Henard 2001). Expectation can generally be viewed as anticipation or as comparative reference. As for the anticipation model, there is no comparison to or assessment of performance levels or outcomes. Instead, consumers arrive with their own preconceived acceptable level of performance. These acceptable levels of performance, or expectations, serve as the baseline to which actual performance is compared.

As mentioned earlier, disconfirmation of expectations occurs when realized results differ from anticipated results, either positively or negatively. In general, consumers are satisfied when actual outcomes exceed expectations (positive disconfirmation), dissatisfied when outcomes fall short of expectations (negative disconfirmation), and just satisfied when outcomes match, or are equal to, expectations (zero or simple disconfirmation). In other words satisfaction and disconfirmation are thought to be positively correlated.

Performance obviously plays a role in disconfirmation, but it can also stand alone as a predictor of satisfaction. Customers are likely to be more satisfied with a good or service as the ability of that good or service to provide what they want or need increases in relation to the costs incurred (Johnson 1998).

In 1995, Johnston explored the zones of tolerance experienced by customers in service transactions. For reference, an illustration of the zones of tolerance is shown below in Figure 1.

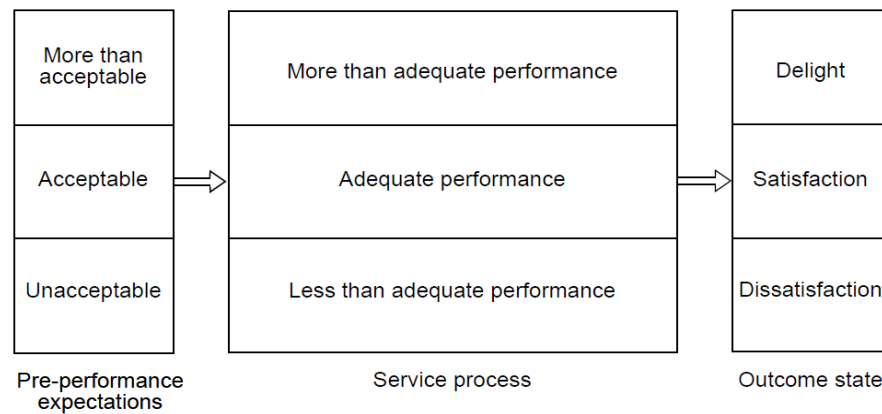


Figure 1. Three Zones of Tolerance, Johnson (1995)

To borrow a term from the Gunderson, et al. (1996) study, a performance above the acceptable tolerance zone resulted in a positive disconfirmation, resulting in delight from the customer and a strengthened loyalty. Johnston (1995) found that customers who had little involvement in the process had a wider zone of tolerance and those more involved in the process and armed with more information had a narrower zone of tolerance. He also discovered that while highly satisfying experiences lead to high expectations, those expectations, in turn, increase the likelihood of future disappointments.

So, is customer satisfaction ranked highly from the earlier experience or is it low because of the exceedingly high expectations previously set? A study by Rosenberg (1996) might address that question. In his study, he outlined what he considered the five

myths of customer satisfaction and six steps to address them. The myths he listed are as follows:

- Customer satisfaction is objective
- Customer satisfaction is easily measured
- Customer satisfaction is accurately measured
- Customer satisfaction is quickly and easily changed
- The customer is obvious

Rosenberg (1996) contended that a poor experience may not necessarily result in low satisfaction if the customer had low expectations to begin with. He also considered customer satisfaction as an opinion developed over repeated experiences. His suggestions for changing or improving customer satisfaction included:

- Identifying potential customers
- Identifying issues in satisfaction and dissatisfaction by talking to customers
- Decide how involved those issues are
- Investigate causes and initiate improvements
- Evaluate the results
- Institutionalize customer involvement and the measure of satisfaction

Taking a different angle to customer satisfaction, Martin and Smart (1993) studied the level of customer satisfaction among customers who had correspondence with the business, not in relation to the product or service itself, but rather in relation to the business' response to their concern. They found that just over 55% of the 300 consumers had written at least one letter to a business (nearly 19% had done so on more than one

occasion). Most of the letters (63.5%) were letters of complaint. 19.5% were letters of praise and 17% were letters of inquiry. 94.3% of those who wrote letters could distinctly recall whether or not the business responded to their concern. Those receiving responses were generally satisfied (mean satisfaction = 5.35 of possible 7.00).

In a 1993 study by Mitchell, the advantages and disadvantages of handling complaints were evaluated. Boycotts and negative word-of-mouth advertising are the result of dissatisfied customers and dissatisfied customers tell twice as many people about their experience than do satisfied customers. Mitchell discovered that 55-70% of dissatisfied customers came back if their complaint was handled quickly. While that alone, should make the effort worthwhile, he also listed 11 other advantages of effective complaint handling:

- Use in strategic planning as well as operational decision
- Reduced likelihood of legal proceedings
- Increased brand loyalty
- Improved marketing intelligence
- Increased ease of complaining
- Internal marketing benefits
- Reduced warranty and servicing bills
- Customer perception of quality
- Objective quality gains
- Cross-selling to satisfied complainants
- Reduced negative word of mouth

Customer satisfaction research is very broad and endless in its opportunities of focus. However it serves as a theoretical framework for more focused studies.

Customer Satisfaction in the Public Sector

Determining the customer's perceived quality of service is the goal of customer satisfaction surveys. We know that their perception of quality of service is the result of comparing their expected experience with their perceived experience. So what determines their expectation of service? Zeithaml, et al. (1993) used a focus group to identify the nature and determinants of the customer's expectation of service. Figure 2 below provides a visual of the model created through the study.

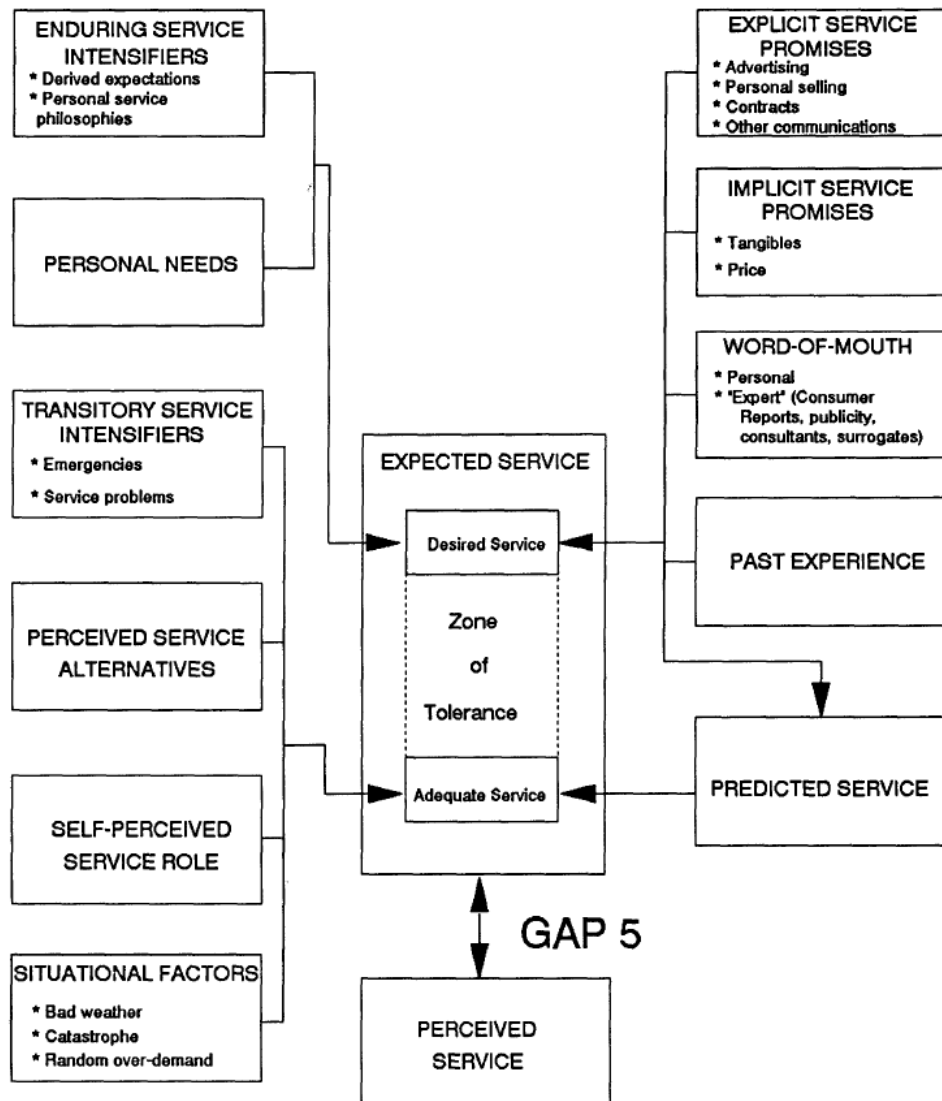


Figure 2. Nature and Determinants of Customer Expectations of Service, Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1993)

There exists a range of acceptable service, from desired service to adequate service. The model also illustrates the antecedents of the desired service, the antecedents of the adequate service and the antecedents of both predicted and desired service.

So, now that we know how the customer's expectations are determined, and it is established that customer satisfaction is the difference between the expected and

perceived service, what determines the perceived quality of service? Through interviews with executives and focus group discussions, Parasuraman (1985) determined that there were ten primary factors. Illustrated below in Figure 3, is the perceived service quality, a result of the customer's anticipated experience compared against the perceived service.

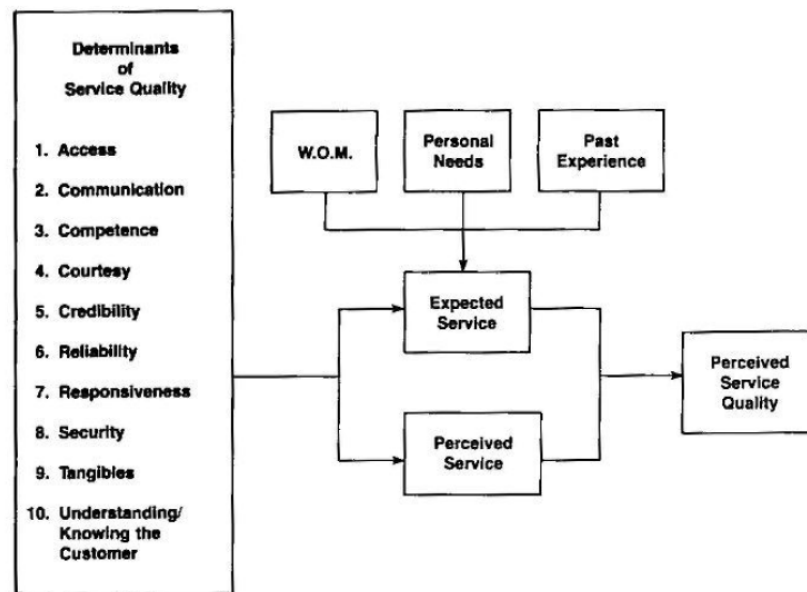


Figure 3. Determinants of Perceived Service Quality, Parasuraman (1985)

Public transportation is a very iconic public service. Andreassen (1995) studied the dissatisfaction among users of this service. He found that the root cause of dissatisfaction was the homogeneous service to all clients. In other words, as one would expect, there is no customization to public transportation (at least the modes of transportation included in this study: bus, train, and tram). Even those who would be considered loyal customers of public transportation were users out of necessity rather

than choice. The results indicated that public transportation must become more flexible in order to increase customer satisfaction.

Another study related to public works was conducted by Das, Das and Mackenzie (1996). In this study, the customer satisfaction of town services was discussed. Like Andraessen's (1995) study, the root cause of dissatisfaction stemmed from the heterogeneity of needs. In other words, services like recreational programs, recreational facilities, and yes, transit operations, scored lower than services that filled homogeneous needs, i.e. sewer, street lighting, garbage, water supply, etc. Customers tend to be satisfied as long as those basic services filled their needs; it is when customers' unique and individual needs are in play that the service must be flexible.

In 2016, Cho & Cho sought to evaluate the effectiveness of an educational program in the public sector. Content, values, and relationships among motivation, acquisition, perception, attitude change, satisfaction, and willingness to recommend were considered to determine program effectiveness. Through this study, they determined that the perception of the staff's professionalism impacted participants' level of satisfaction of the educational program. They were unable to prove that the staff's expertise and textbook had an impact. They also laid out the following hypotheses:

- H₄:** The degree of motivation in the development education affects the degree of satisfaction
- H₅:** The degree of motivation in the development education affects the degree of acquisition of development knowledge.
- H₆:** The degree of acquisition of development knowledge affects the change in attitude on development education program.

- H₇:** The degree of acquisition of development education affects changes in perception on development education program.
- H₈:** The degree of attitude change affects the degree of satisfaction with development education.
- H₉:** The degree of perception change affects the degree of satisfaction with development education.
- H₁₀:** The degree of acquisition of development knowledge affects the degree of satisfaction with development education.
- H₁₁:** The degree of satisfaction affects willingness to recommend the program to others.

A visual depiction of how these hypotheses are inter-related is shown below in

Figure 4.

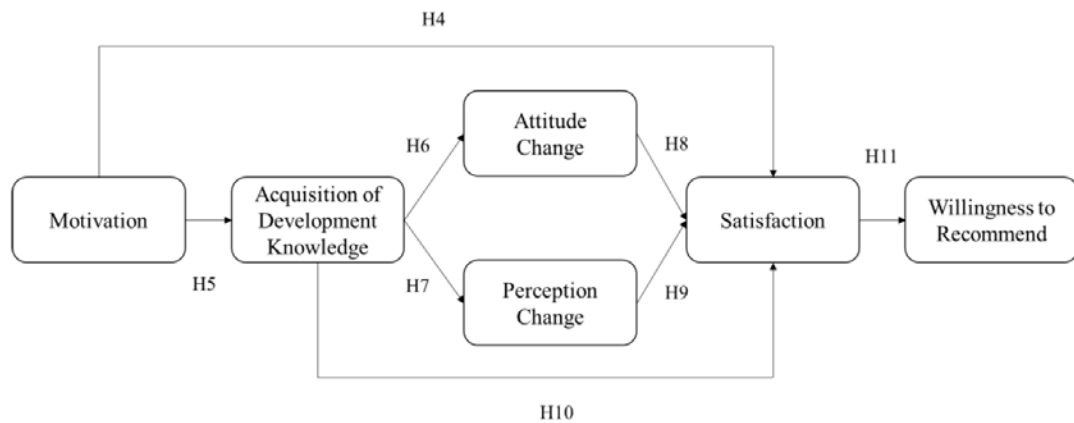


Figure 4. Cho & Cho Evaluation Points, Cho & Cho (2016)

The study revealed significant relationships among motivation, acquisition of development knowledge, perception and attitude change, satisfaction, and willingness to recommend. In other words, hypotheses H4 – 11 were all accepted. Cho & Cho (2016) claimed that this study, by revealing the relationships among these factors, stressed the significance of customer relationship management in the public sector.

Historical Assessments of Extension

Cooperative Extension Services across the country have performed assessments of customer (client) satisfaction over the years. Warnock (1992) conducted a telephone survey of Extension clientele who had sought educational information from their local office within the last 30 days. The questions asked were simple and to the point: 1) Did the information meet your expectations? 2a) Have you had an opportunity to put the information to use? 2b) Did it resolve your problem? 3a) Have you shared the information with anyone else? 3b) Do you think you will? 4) How do you feel about the way your request was handled by the Extension office? 5) How do you feel about this conversation? The results showed that, in general, the customers appreciated Extension. Warnock (1992) determined that after two years of Florida Cooperative Extension agents utilizing customer satisfaction surveys, local and state government officials were positively influenced by the organization's willingness to seek input from its clientele and its considerations of suggestions for improvement.

Lawrence and Mandal (2016) found strong support for locally-based association within a university system and collective support for a university office in the county. They also concluded that support of university programming and recognition would weaken without a direct local connection.

Not only is there generally strong support at the county level for Extension programming, Whitehead, Hoban, and Clifford (2001) found that North Carolina residents were willing to pay substantial amounts of money to maintain agricultural research and extension programs.

Although local residents find great value in Extension programs, local governments are cutting expenses and moving funds around as best they can in order to make ends meet and balance budgets in times of economic down-turn (Perlman & Benton, 2012). It is vital to Extension that its county-level offices not be an easy target for the chopping block.

As a result of this increasing pressure, a study was conducted by Lawrence and Mandal (2016) of the Washington State University Extension Service to determine the value residents place on having an Extension office in their local community, the benefit of using public funds to support the local office, and the collective value the Extension and its programs provide to the community. The study determined that not only did the respondents believe, overall, that having a WSU Extension office in the county was important, but also, overwhelmingly, they believed that the local office added value to the community and that county support of the local office was an appropriate use of public funds. When asked to give a dollar amount ranging from \$0 to \$20 that they would be willing to pay annually through tax dollars to keep the local office, 33.7% of the general population was willing to pay \$10-\$20, while 16.3% were willing to pay more than \$20. Another subset of the sample were those who had a working relationship with Extension. Of that group, 32.5% said it would be willing to pay the \$10-\$20. Additionally, the same number of respondents in that subsample was willing to pay more than \$20.

According to this study, there is strong support for a local presence of the university system. It also suggests that Extension support would weaken without that direct local connection.

Clemson Extension Service conducted a customer satisfaction survey in 1999 and benchmarked those results with two other states in the Southern Region, namely the Extension services of the University of Florida (1998) and Texas A&M (1997). Radhakrishma (2002) determined that findings in all three studies were similar and that Extension customers were very satisfied with the information they received from Clemson Extension offices in the counties. Cited benefits of the survey included the wealth of information that agents can use to improve their programs and meet the needs of the clientele they serve and the demonstration to legislators that Extension was willing to ask customers for feedback and suggestions.

In a study conducted with the Florida Cooperative Extension on agent performance and customer satisfaction, Terry & Israel (2004) determined that, contrary to expectations, customer satisfaction was not positively related to agent performance. In other words, those agents receiving Extension's highest evaluations did not necessarily have the highest quality programs nor offer the highest benefits to their clients. Agent experience was positively related to customer satisfaction up to a certain point. Customer satisfaction began to fall with agents having more than 14 years of experience. Agent aspects were not the only factor affecting overall customer service; service quality (as determined by up-to-date information, relevant information, opportunity to use information, information solved the problem, and information was shared with others)

was also important. They, along with their relationship to customer satisfaction, are illustrated in Figure 5 below.

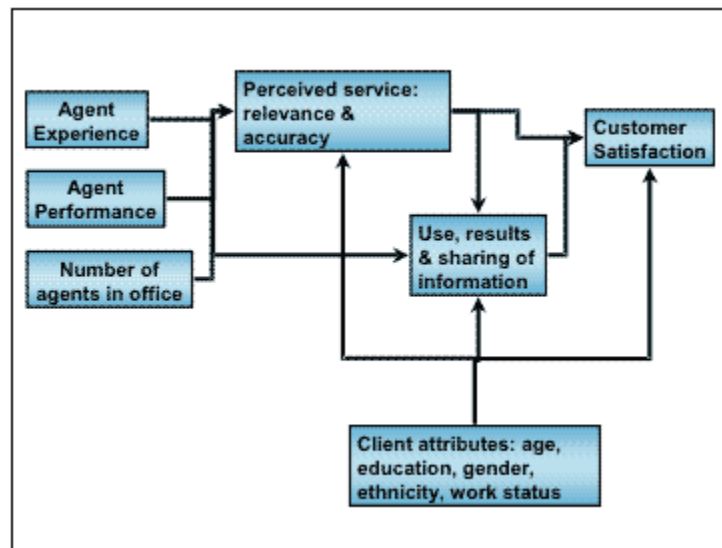


Figure 5. Service-Satisfaction Model for Extension, Terry & Israel (2004)

These findings underscore that both the information provided as well as the agents who are delivering the information are both crucial to Extension customer satisfaction.

Rennekamp et.al (2001) stated a growing trend of basing funding decisions on customer satisfaction as the reason Kentucky Cooperative Extension commissioned a study to determine where it stood with its clientele. That particular study examined four key concepts that comprised the overall construct of customer satisfaction within the Extension system. These four concepts were relevance, quality, usefulness, and customer service. In the area of relevance, the respondents to this study indicated that while Extension does a good job of seeking input from its constituents, general awareness of

Extension programs and services was comparatively low. As for the quality of Extension programs, the study revealed that while Extension got high marks as a source for unbiased information, its delivery methods of that information could be improved. Respondents in the study overwhelmingly felt that Extension was well worth the money invested but would like to see Extension find ways to help its citizens use the information provided to make decisions. As for customer service, respondents were very satisfied with the friendliness and courtesy of the staff, however, could see opportunities for improvement in use of technology. In general, the recommendations listed as a result of this study included:

- Continue to Emphasize Local Program Development
- Explore New Options of Program Delivery
- Build on a History of Success
- Capitalize on a Reputation for Objectivity
- Maintain Friendly and Courteous Service
- Increase Awareness of Extension
- Reach Out to New Audiences
- Use Technology to Meet Customer Needs

Florida's Cooperative Extension Service (FCES) performs an annual Customer Satisfaction Survey under recommendation from the Florida Board of Regents and also the requirements under the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993. Galindo-Gonzales & Israel (2010) examined the data to explore the quality of the experience

across various types of contact. They considered the quality of experience as a dependent variable that is measured on four dimensions: accuracy of information, timeliness of delivery, relevance of the information, and ease of use of the information. The study revealed that the type of contact, namely office visits, telephone calls, or planned programs, affects the quality perceived by the clientele but does not affect their overall satisfaction. Relevance of the information was the main factor that influenced all types of contact. Although they considered themselves highly satisfied, customers thought that planned programs covered information that was too generic and topics too broad in an effort to interest the greatest number of participants. One might draw a parallel to the findings in Andraessen's (1995) study that indicated public transportation was too homogeneous when serving a customer base with diverse needs. On the other hand, information received via telephone, although relevant, was sometimes not delivered in a timely manner. Reasons considered included the agent having to research the topic in order to provide the best answer, having to refer to a specialist who was not always immediately available, or the agent was in the field and not able to immediately respond to the phone call.

Other surveys of Extension clientele were done in 1996 and 1999 by Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) after they reorganized into Areas of Expertise, linking county Extension agents and specialists around specific commodity groups' needs in 1994. The purposes of these studies were to (1) determine producers' awareness of MSUE and its programs, (2) determine the quality of the MSUE educational programs, (3) determine producers' perceptions of the new Area of Expertise format, and (4)

identify major educational needs. From these surveys, MSUE was able to determine that awareness of the program remained high among agricultural producers while full-time farmers participated at a high level in MSUE programs, and part-time farmers participated less even though their numbers were on the rise. They also discovered that farmers wanted the one-on-one interaction with agents, including having the agents visit them at their farm. Marketing and business management information was listed by 50% more producers in 1999 than in 1996 as an important issue, indicating an increased demand for educational programs in that area (Suvedi, Lapinski and Campo, 2000).

A 2005 study by Stienbarger looked at the current relationship between Extension and its county partners. The purpose of the study was to determine the perceived accountability and relevance of Extension programs to county governments. It included six counties in southwest Washington with populations ranging from 9,900 to 345,238. The study found that county commissioners viewed Extension programming favorable, but felt very little ownership in the program. Few of the commissioners invested much time in their local Extension program and, furthermore, had few suggestions for improving Extension because they had little idea how the Extension system was structured beyond their local office. All that said, of the 16 commissioners participating in this study, 11 considered the rate of return on their investment in Extension as good or very good. Part of that may stem from the fact that Extension budgets in this area of Washington comprise less than 1% of the county's general fund (less than .5% in more urban counties).

In the process of understanding past studies and research efforts in the customer satisfaction arena, and more specifically, Extension customer satisfaction, new studies such as this one can be modified to increase effectiveness in Extension evaluation and customer satisfaction. These past studies and literature served as a framework for this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine Texas county commissioners' and judges' perceptions and opinions of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (AgriLife Extension) at the local level as it relates to (1) their relationship with the local Extension program, (2) their satisfaction with the courtesy and professionalism of the local staff and (3) the strengths of AgriLife Extension as well as opportunities for improvement. Data gathered should aid Extension in planning short and long term strategies.

Research Design

The researcher developed a survey instrument that was sent to each County Judge and Commissioner (n=1270) in the state of Texas in an effort to address the following research questions.

1. What is the current relationship between county officials and the local Extension program? How involved in the program are these officials? How important are the local Extension programs to the county and to what clientele group are these programs most important?
2. How satisfied are these county officials with different aspects of the local Extension program in regards to the professionalism and courtesy of county staff? How satisfied are they with the information provided by Extension personnel and programs?

Do county officials feel they are getting a positive return on their investment in Extension at the local level?

3. What is the level of satisfaction among these elected officials within genders, positions, age groups, education levels, etc.
4. According to local county officials, what are Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's greatest strengths? What areas could Texas A&M AgriLife Extension improve upon? What areas could Texas A&M AgriLife Extension address that it is not currently satisfying?

The survey was completed via mailed survey by Texas County Judges and Commissioners. Returned surveys were compiled and scanned into an electronic database and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Qualitative data, responses to 3 open-ended questions, were aggregated into main themes.

Population and Sample

The target population for this study were the 1270 Texas County Judges and Commissioners. Because this is a relatively small population and one that is easily defined, the researcher chose to conduct a census. The V. G. Young Institute of County Government, a part of the AgriLife Extension, maintains a database of Texas County Judges and Commissioners. Any missing names and addresses from that database were gathered from county websites or other sources of public information. An attempt was made to contact all members of the county commissioners' courts (1 judge and 4 commissioners) in all 254 Texas counties for the study. Returned mail messages indicated that of the 1270 addresses, 44 were undeliverable.

Data Collection

The data were collected for this study through a self-administered hard copy survey. The survey was created and distributed via US Mail, following the model outlined by Dillman (2014). A preemptive letter was sent on August 31, 2016 to the study participants notifying them of the upcoming survey and explaining the study's intentions. Approximately two weeks later, on September 15, 2016, a survey, along with an invitation letter, was sent with a postage-paid, return envelope to each potential participant. The postage-paid envelope was coded for the sole purpose of tracking respondents, so that they did not receive follow-up reminders. A thank you reminder followed approximately a week later. The purpose of this letter was to remind the participants of the survey in the event it was set aside to be revisited later. Of the 1226 surveys, 396 were returned and considered "early responders". Approximately two weeks after the thank you reminder, on October 13, 2016, a second copy of the survey, along with another postage-paid envelope and follow-up reminder, was sent to all nonrespondents. After 10 days, the final reminder letter was sent to the remaining nonrespondents. Of the remaining 830 surveys, 257 were returned and considered "late responders". The last survey returned and included in this study was received December 29, 2016. Total combined surveys returned were 653. Returned mail indicated that 44 of the surveys were undeliverable due to insufficient or incorrect addresses. The 653 completed surveys of the 1226 delivered resulted in a response rate of 53.2%.

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument was developed for Texas County Judges and Commissioners to assess their thoughts and opinions of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. This survey was reviewed for validity by experts within the agency.

The survey included two constructs pertaining to County Level Extension Program Information and Customer Satisfaction, one section to collect demographic information from the participants, and a section consisting of 3 open-ended questions where participants were afforded the opportunity to include written open-ended responses. These 24 questions/statements from the first three sections were responded to on a Likert-type scale. The sections of the survey instrument are detailed below.

County Level Extension Program Information

Questions 1-11 dealt with the participant's personal knowledge of and involvement with the AgriLife Extension office in their respective county. The first three questions asked participants to detail their level of knowledge about Extension, the effectiveness of Extension, and the importance of Extension. The next three questions dealt with the levels of staffing and state and local contributions. The subsequent three questions asked how well the local agents kept the participant informed, how often the participant participates in Extension programs, and how aware the citizens of the county were of Extension programs. Question 10 asked the participant to state the level of importance of Extension's six program areas, namely: Agriculture & Natural Resources, Community Development, Family & Consumer Sciences, Health Education, Public

Leadership Education, and Youth Development (4-H). Question 11 asked the participant to rate Extension's level of importance to its clientele groups, i.e. Community Leaders, Families, Farmers & Ranchers, New Landowners, Small Businesses, Senior Citizens, and Youth.

Customer Satisfaction

This section comprised four questions. The first question required the participant to state their level of satisfaction as it pertains to the local staff. Staff courtesy, professionalism, appearance, office atmosphere, ability to address questions/concerns, and the types of programs offered were listed. The second question of the section related to the information offered, such as, is it up-to-date? Is it accurate, received in a timely manner, easy to understand and relevant? The next question asked participants to state their view of Extension's overall value. The final question asked if they perceived a positive return on investment in Extension.

Demographics

This section was used to gather demographic information from the participants. They were asked their position (Judge or Commissioner), years of service, gender, age group, career (or past career), whether they had served on an Extension committee, if they or their children had been involved in the 4-H program and their highest level of education.

Cronbach's alpha was used to determine internal consistency for each of the two constructs within the instrument. Alpha scores were .91 for the County Level Extension Program Information questions and .93 for the Customer Satisfaction of staff questions.

Data Analysis

SPSS 24.0 for Windows software was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize data. Frequencies, central tendency measures, variability, and percentages were used to describe and present the data. Non-response error was addressed by comparing means of Early and Late responders via t-tests for statistical significance and was set a priori at the 0.05 level. Responses to open-ended questions were aggregated into common themes.

Nonresponse Error Handling

With 653 of the 1226 delivered surveys returned (53.3%), there existed some threat to external validity in the form of error of nonrespondents. The researcher compared the responses of the 396 "early responders" to the responses of the 257 "late responders", a procedure outlined by Lindner, Murphy and Briers (2001). For the purpose of this study, the date used to differentiate early and late responders was determined to be October 28, 2016, the date the second group of letters and surveys went out to non-respondents which generated the last 257 responses. The list of questions used to compare early and late responders as well as the compared means and t-test values are recorded below in Table 1. As shown, there were no statistical differences at

the $p=.05$ level of significance between the two groups of respondents. As such, both groups of data were generalized to the target populations.

Table 1. T-test values for selected variables Comparing Early and Late Responders to the Survey

Variable	Early Mean	Late Mean	t-value	df	Sig (2-tailed)
How knowledgeable are you about Texas A&M AgriLife Extension?	3.95	3.92	.475	500.677	.635
How important is the Extension program in your county?	4.61	4.71	-1.901	582.120	.058
How well do your County Extension Agents keep you informed on Extension and 4-H activities?	4.45	4.49	-.524	562.606	.601
Do you feel the county receives a positive return on its investment in Extension?	4.47	4.50	-.437	554.173	.663

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to determine Texas county commissioners' and judges' satisfaction, perceptions, and opinions of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension as they relate to Extension's importance, effectiveness, and direction. A secondary purpose was to determine the demographic information of responding participants.

Description of the Sample

Texas has 254 counties, each one being represented by one judge and four precinct commissioners. The target sample for this study included all 1270 elected county Judges and Commissioners in the state of Texas. Of the possible 1270 possible participants, 44 did not receive the survey due to inaccurate mailing addresses. These surveys were returned by the US Postal Service. Of the 1226 surveys that were delivered, 653 were returned in time to be included in this study for a response rate of 53.3%. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to describe the demographics of the respondents.

Demographics of the Sample

Of the surveys returned, 175 (26.8%) were returned by County Judges while 473 (72.4%) were returned by county commissioners. Five (.8%) respondents did not address

the question. Because the ratio of Judges to Commissioners is 1:4, a slightly higher percentage of judges responded to the survey than did commissioners.

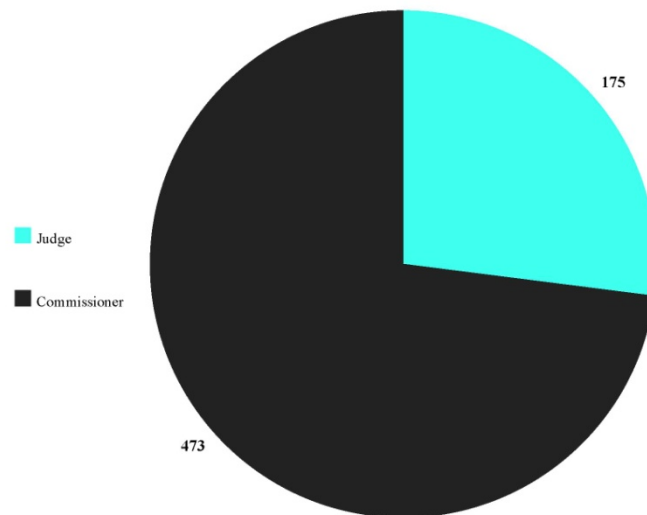


Figure 6. Breakdown of respondents as Judge and Commissioner

Of the 651 respondents who reported their length of time in their current position, most were relatively new to their respective positions. Results showed that 210 (32.3%) had held their office for 1-4 years, 146 (22.4%) for 5-8 years, 108 (16.6%) for 9-12 years, 86 (13.2%) for 13-16 years and 101 (15.5%) for 17 years or longer. A visual depiction of respondents' time of service can be seen in Figure 7.

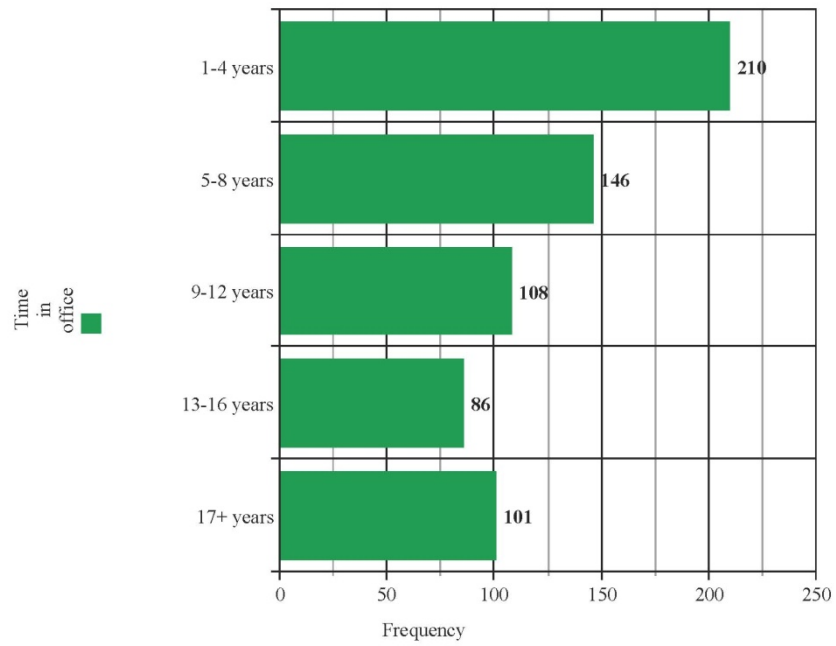


Figure 7. Length of time in current position as Judge or Commissioner

As shown in Figure 8, the respondents in this study were overwhelmingly male, 589 to 46.

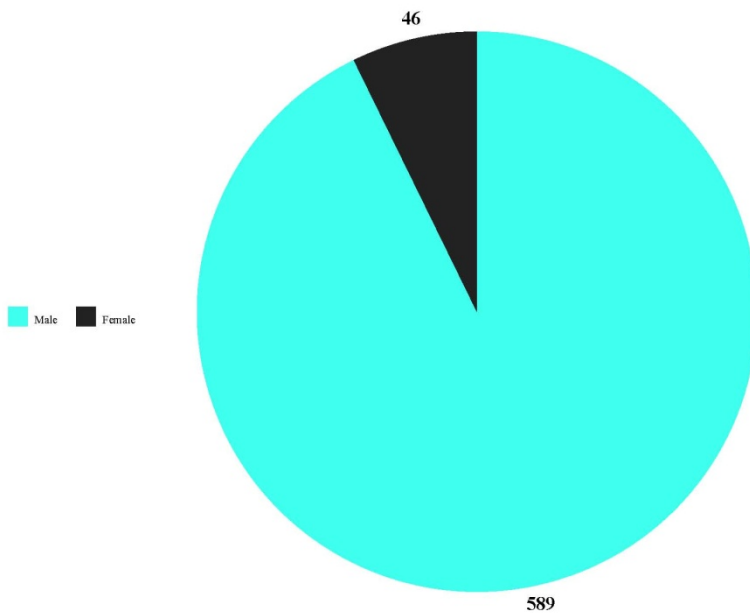


Figure 8. Gender of respondents

Of the 653 respondents, 647 provided their age within a 10 year range. Although *29 or younger* was an option, none of the respondents reported that age range. However, 13 identified their age as 30-39, 50 as 40-49, 185 as 50-59, 282, the largest group by far, as 60-69 and 117 as 70 years or older. A visual illustration of the age ranges can be seen in Figure 9.

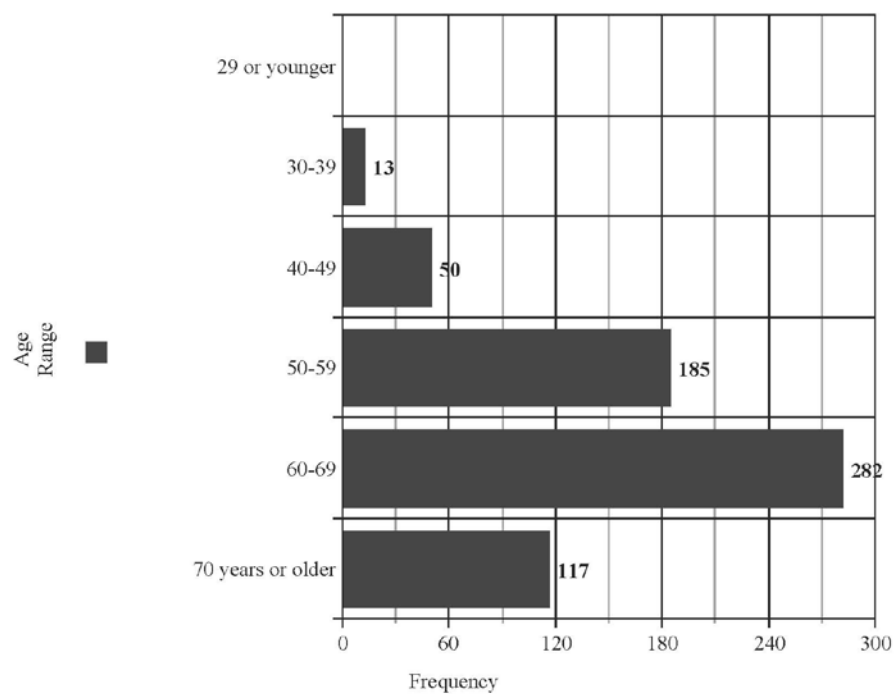


Figure 9. Age distribution of responding judges and commissioners

Participants of the study were given six options to identify their current career or previous career. Those options were Agriculture, Government/Public Service, Professional, Sales (retail or wholesale), Trades, or Other. The frequency of those selections are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Current or Former Careers of Judges and Commissioners

Profession	Responses
Agriculture	218
Government/Public Service	118
Professional	168
Sales (retail or wholesale)	81
Trades	58
Other	78

Of the 653 responses, 538 participants listed one career area, while 73 listed an affiliation with two areas, and eleven listed three or more.

When considering the level of customer satisfaction among elected officials of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, it is of interest to determine the participants' involvement with the agency. There were three questions in the survey that addressed this issue. The first question sought to determine if the participants had ever served on an Extension committee. Nearly a third, 31.5%, of the respondents reported that they had, in fact, served on an Extension committee (Leadership Advisory Board, Program Area Committee, Coalition, etc.)

The next two questions pertained to the 4-H program....1) had they, themselves, ever been a member of the 4-H program and 2) had their children ever been members. As to the first point, 44.6% reported that they had been members while 54.2% said they had not. The remaining 1.2% chose not to answer the question. As to the second point, 4-H involvement was increased. More of their children are/were involved in the 4-H program than were the county officials. According to survey responses, 55.1% reported

that their children were members of 4-H while 39.6% said that they were not. 5.4% either reported that they did not have children or they did not answer the question.

The last demographic question sought to determine the education level of the participants. They were asked to identify the highest level of education they had attained. Results were fairly evenly distributed among High School/GED, Associate’s degrees, Bachelor’s degrees, Master’s degrees and “Other”. The results are displayed below in Figure 10.

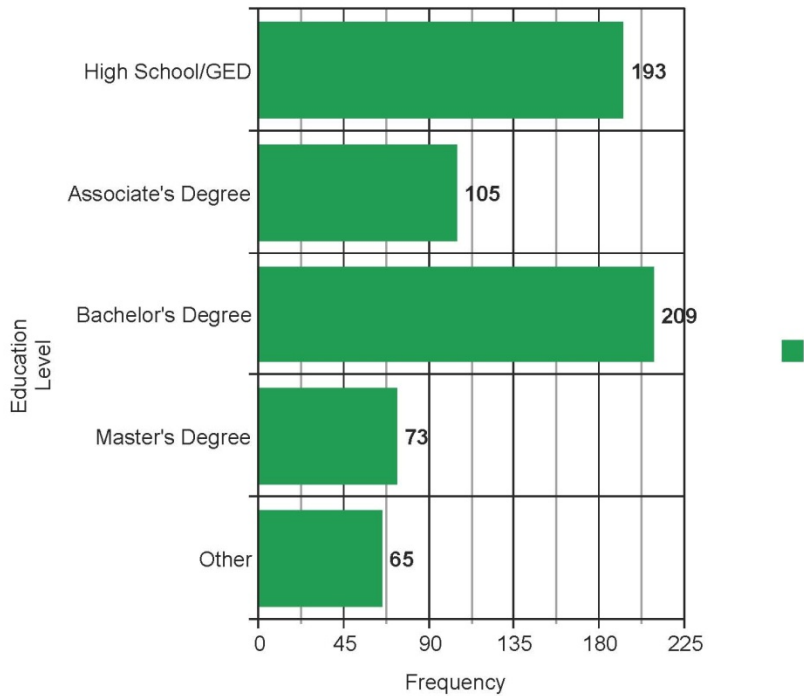


Figure 10. Highest level of formal (or technical) education attained

Findings Related to Research Question 1

What is the current relationship between county officials and the local Extension program? How involved in the program are these officials? How important are the local Extension programs to the county and to what clientele group are these programs most important?

In order to determine the current relationship between county elected officials and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, the participants were asked a series of questions concerning how knowledgeable they were about the Extension program, how effective Extension was in their county, and the level of Extension importance. The mean, distribution, and frequency of responses to each of these can be seen in

Table 3.

Table 3. County Officials' Responses to Questions Regarding Their Knowledge of Extension and Extension's Effectiveness and Importance

Statement	Frequency of Responses					\bar{x}	SD	Total
	Not at All	Slightly	Somewhat	Mostly	Highly			
How knowledgeable are you about Texas A&M AgriLife Extension?	1 .2%	12 1.8%	152 23.3%	349 53.6%	137 21.0%	3.94	.73	651
How effective is your county Extension program?	3 .5%	18 2.8%	49 7.6%	195 30.3%	378 58.8%	4.44	.79	643
How important is the Extension program to your county?	0 0.0%	9 1.4%	38 6.0%	122 19.2%	468 73.5%	4.65	.66	637

Responses to these three questions show that, on average, county elected officials considered themselves knowledgeable about Texas A&M AgriLife Extension with 74.6% stating that they are either mostly or highly knowledgeable about Extension. Overall, 89.1% of the elected officials consider Texas A&M AgriLife Extension effective within their county.

One area of concern for Extension might be that a quarter of the participants of this study reported that they were only somewhat or slightly knowledgeable of Extension. When the amount of time in their elected position is considered, it is discovered that those in position for 9-12 years and those new to the position (1-4 years) reported to be less knowledgeable than their counterparts. These differences were significant at a $p = .05$ level. A full breakdown of those results is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. Knowledge of Extension by Time in Office¹

Years in Office	Mean Score
1-4 years	3.86
5-8 years	4.01
9-12 years	3.81
13-16 years	4.07
17+ years	4.00

¹Responses: NA (Not at All)=1, SL (Slightly)=2, SW (Somewhat)=3, IM (Important)=4, HI (Highly)=5.

The next series of questions sought to determine elected officials' opinions on the level of staffing and funding as it relates to their local Extension office. The mean, distribution and frequency of each response to each of these can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. County Officials' Responses to Statements Regarding Their Opinion of Staffing and Funding Within Their Local Extension Office

Statement	Frequency of Responses			\bar{x}	SD	Total
	Increased	Kept at Current Level	Decreased			
The level of Extension staffing in my county should be:	96 14.9%	538 83.4%	10 1.6%	1.87	.39	645
My county's contribution for our county's Extension program should be:	49 7.7%	540 84.0%	54 8.4%	2.01	.40	643
The state's contribution for our county's Extension program should be:	408 64.2%	221 34.7%	7 1.1%	1.37	.51	636

Responses to these statements show that a strong majority (over 83%) of elected officials were satisfied with the current level of staffing within their local Extension office. A very similar number were satisfied with their county's contribution toward the local Extension program. However, when it comes to the state contribution, over 64% of respondents feel that the state's contribution should be increased. Only 1.1% felt that the state's contribution should be decreased.

Next, participants were asked 3 questions to determine elected officials' involvement and participation in Extension activities and their perception of their local citizens' awareness of the county's Extension program. Participants were asked how

well their County Extension Agents kept them informed of Extension and 4-H activities, how often they attended those activities, and then how aware the citizens of their county were of Extension programs and activities.

As to the question pertaining to agents keeping elected officials informed of Extension programs and activities, 87.9% of the 642 who answered the question, felt that the Extension Agents in their county kept them “Mostly” or “Very” informed of local programs. The results can be seen in Figure 11 below.

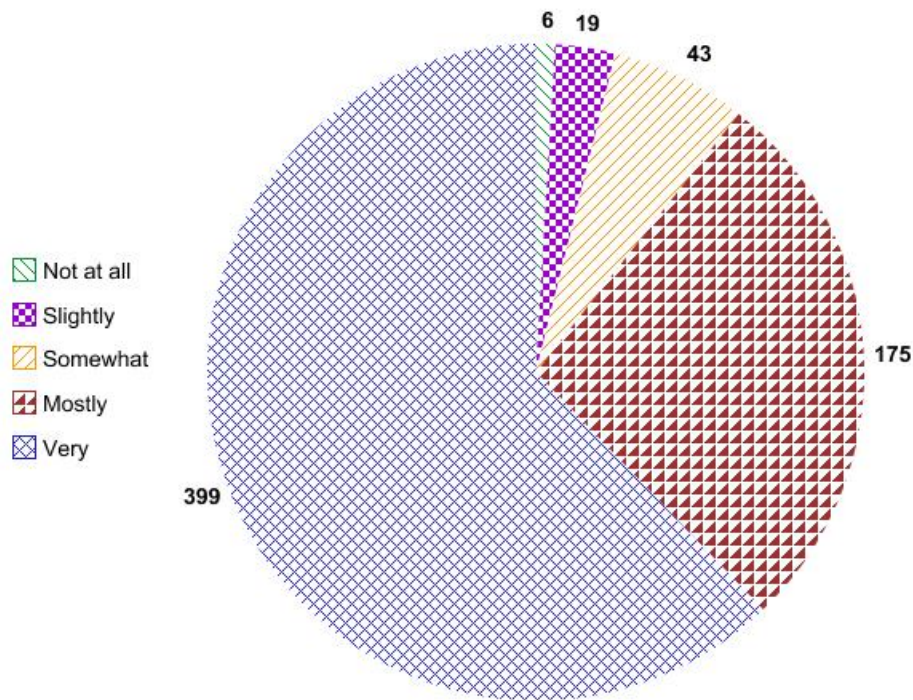


Figure 11. How informed are elected officials of local Extension programs

Being informed of Extension programs and events is one thing, how often the county elected officials attended and/or participated is another. To that question, 82.6% of the 650 participants responded that they “Sometimes” or “Often” attend. Only 3.2% said

that they “Never” attend, while 2.5% replied that they “Always” attend Extension programs and events.

Another vital issue is determining how aware the general public is of Extension programs and events. When local elected officials were asked their perception of public awareness to such activities, none of them felt that the public was “Not at all” aware of Extension programs and events, but a combined 233 of 640 (35.7%) felt that the public was only “Slightly” or “Somewhat” aware. The full results of this question can be seen in Figure 12 below.

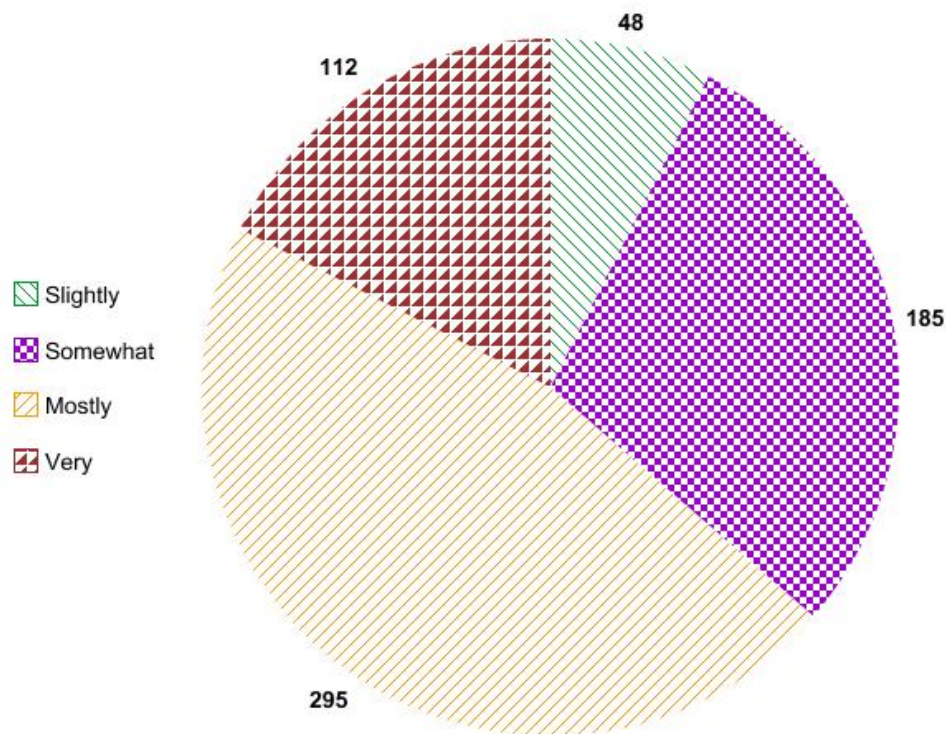


Figure 12. How informed are local citizens of local Extension programs

Next, participants were asked how important six different Extension programs were to their county. They were presented a scale of “Not at all” important to “Highly”

important. The mean, distribution and frequency of each response to each of these can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6. The Importance of Extension Programs to the County¹

Program	Frequency of Responses					\bar{x}	SD	Total
	NA	SL	SW	IM	HI			
Ag & Natural Resource Education	0 0.0%	8 1.2%	38 5.8%	266 40.7%	332 50.8%	4.43	.66	644
Community Development	5 .8%	32 4.9%	128 19.6%	293 44.9%	184 28.2%	3.96	.87	642
Family & Consumer Science Education	5 .8%	35 5.4%	95 14.5%	295 45.2%	204 31.2%	4.04	.87	634
Health Education	10 1.5%	27 4.1%	116 17.8%	276 42.3%	214 32.8%	4.02	.91	643
Public Leadership Education	7 1.1%	30 4.6%	105 16.1%	287 44.0%	213 32.6%	4.04	.88	642
Youth Development (i.e., 4-H)	0 0.0%	8 1.2%	12 1.8%	146 22.4%	478 73.2%	4.70	.57	644

¹Responses: NA (Not at All)=1, SL (Slightly)=2, SW (Somewhat)=3, IM (Important)=4, HI (Highly)=5.

From the responses to this question, it is clear that Youth Development is considered by many of the elected officials as the most important program that Extension has to offer with 95.6% stating that it is “Important” or “Highly Important.” Community Development Activities was the only program that had a mean score less than 4; however, 73.1% still reported it as “Important” or “Highly Important”.

Following a general linear model analysis, a pairwise comparison of the means indicated that the mean scores of Youth Development and Ag & Natural Resource

Education were each significantly different from each other and the other program areas. Other comparisons indicated that the mean scores for Health Education were not significantly different than any other program areas other than Youth and Ag. There was also no significant difference between Family & Consumer Education and Public Leadership Education. All other relationships indicated significant differences between the mean scores.

Finally, participants were asked to rate Extension's importance from "Not at All Important" to "Highly Important" for seven different clientele groups with the option of identifying an eighth group. Using the Likert scale, the respondents provided the results recorded in Table 7 below.

Table 7. The Level of Importance of Extension to Clientele Groups¹

Program	Frequency of Responses					\bar{x}	SD	Total
	NA	SL	SW	IM	HI			
Community Leaders	2 .3%	24 3.7%	124 19.3%	312 48.5%	181 28.1%	4.00	.808	643
Families	2 .3%	14 2.2%	77 12.0%	313 48.6%	238 37.0%	4.20	.752	644
Farmers & Ranchers	1 .2%	6 .9%	32 5.0%	213 33.0%	394 61.0%	4.54	.650	646
New Landowners	6 .9%	29 4.5%	113 17.7%	260 40.8%	230 36.1%	4.06	.895	638
Small Businesses	19 3.0%	64 10.0%	215 33.6%	240 37.6%	101 15.8%	3.53	.972	639
Senior Citizens	12 1.9%	72 11.2%	181 28.1%	244 37.9%	134 20.8%	3.65	.991	643
Youth	1 .2%	6 .9%	23 3.6%	146 22.7%	468 72.7%	4.67	.607	644
Other	2 2.5%	1 1.3%	11 13.8	24 30.0%	42 52.5%	4.29	.930	80

¹Responses: NA (Not at All)=1, SL (Slightly)=2, SW (Somewhat)=3, IM (Important)=4, HI (Highly)=5.

While Extension is considered at least “Somewhat” important to all of the clientele groups listed, it is most important to Youth according to the respondents of this study. 95.4% of the elected officials responding reported that Extension was “Important” or “Highly Important” in providing youth development activities for the youth of their county. The group identified next as relying heavily on Extension was Farmers and Ranchers with 94.0% of respondents believing that Extension was

“Important” or “Highly Important” to those producers in their county. While Extension importance to Small Businesses had the lowest mean score of 3.53, it remained relatively important to that clientele group with 53.4% reporting that Extension was “Important” or “Highly Important” to that group in their county

Findings Related to Research Question 2

How satisfied are these county officials with different aspects of the local Extension program in regards to the professionalism and courtesy of county staff? How satisfied are they with the information provided by Extension personnel and programs? Do county officials feel they are getting a positive return on their investment in Extension at the local level?

This series of questions sought to address the county elected officials’ basic satisfaction with the Extension program in their respective county. They were first asked about their level of satisfaction with different aspects of their local Extension staff and office, namely: courtesy, professionalism and professional appearance of the staff, as well as the professional atmosphere of the local office. They were also asked how satisfied they were that the local staff addressed their questions and/or concerns and with the programs and services offered. Participants were presented with five different aspects of the local staff and office and asked to report their level of satisfaction using a Likert scale ranging from “Not at all satisfied” to “Completely satisfied”. They were also given the option to select “Not Sure.”

The mean, distribution, and frequency of each response to each of these aspects of the program can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8. Level of Satisfaction of Aspects of Local Extension Staff and Office¹

Program	Frequency of Responses					\bar{x}	SD	Total
	NA	SL	SW	M	C			
Courtesy of staff	2 .3%	7 1.1%	13 2.0%	98 15.4%	518 81.2%	4.78	.52	638
Professionalism of staff	2 .3%	8 1.3%	19 3.0%	111 17.4%	499 78.1%	4.74	.56	639
Professional appearance of staff	4 .6%	6 .94%	21 3.3%	145 22.8%	459 72.3%	4.67	.61	635
Professional atmosphere of local office	4 .6%	13 2.1%	29 4.6%	132 20.9%	453 71.8%	4.64	.68	631
Addressing your questions/concerns	3 .5%	9 1.4%	27 4.3%	105 16.5%	491 77.3%	4.71	.63	635
Types of programs & services to meet community's needs	5 .8%	11 1.8%	29 4.7%	183 29.6%	391 63.2%	4.54	.71	619

¹Responses: NA (Not at All)=1, SL (Slightly)=2, SW (Somewhat)=3, M (Mostly)=4, C (Completely)=5.

From their responses, 96.6% of county elected officials are “mostly” or “completely” satisfied with the courtesy of their local staff. 95.5% had the same opinion of the professionalism of the staff. The professional appearance of the local staff also ranked highly with 95.1% of respondents stating they were “mostly” or “completely” satisfied. When asked about the professional atmosphere of the office itself, 92.7% were “mostly” or “completely” satisfied. More than 90% were also highly satisfied with how

local staff addressed their questions and concerns and with the types of programs and services offered in their respective community.

As the purpose of Extension is to diffuse innovation and information to the public, it is important to determine the level of satisfaction of local elected officials as it pertains to the information they receive from the local Extension staff. Like the statements dealing with satisfaction levels pertaining to the office and staff, participants were presented with five different aspects related to the information they receive and asked to report their level of satisfaction using a scale ranging from “Not at all” satisfied to “Completely” satisfied. They were also given the option to select “Not Sure.”

The mean, distribution and frequency of the responses to each of these can be seen in Table 9.

Table 9. Level of Satisfaction of Aspects of Information Received from Local Extension Staff¹

Program	Frequency of Responses						SD	Total
	NA	SL	SW	M	C	\bar{x}		
Information is up-to-date	4 .6%	9 1.4%	39 6.3%	218 35.0%	352 56.6%	4.48	.71	622
Information is accurate	3 .5%	4 .7%	17 2.8%	188 30.7%	401 65.4%	4.59	.64	613
Information is received in time to be useful	6 1.0%	7 1.1%	39 6.3%	213 34.5%	353 57.1%	4.48	.73	618
Information is easy to understand	2 .3%	7 1.1%	35 5.6%	220 35.1%	363 57.9%	4.50	.68	627
Information helps my community solve relevant problems	6 1.0%	13 2.2%	73 12.1%	246 40.9%	263 43.8%	4.25	.82	601

¹Responses: NA (Not at All)=1, SL (Slightly)=2, SW (Somewhat)=3, M (Mostly)=4, C (Completely)=5.

Similar to the levels of satisfaction with the local staff and office were the levels of satisfaction as it pertains to the actual information coming from those agents and offices. From their responses, 91.6% of county elected officials are “mostly” or “completely” satisfied that the information was up-to-date. A slightly higher number, 96.1%, had the same opinion that the information was accurate. As for the timeliness of the information received, 91.6% were mostly to completely satisfied with that as well. Similarly, 93.0% were at least mostly satisfied that the information was easy to understand. The only aspect that did not get at least 90% mostly or completely satisfied was the statement the “information helps my community solve relevant problems”; 84.7% of elected officials responding stated they were “mostly” or “completely” satisfied with that aspect.

According to Texas A&M Professor and Extension Specialist Dr. Scott Cummings, (personal communication, June 6, 2017) customer satisfaction of information provided by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension among these elected officials closely mirror responses provided by AgriLife clientele to the same questions via customer satisfaction surveys distributed at various Extension events.

Participants were then asked to rate the value of Extension programs that are provided by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. They were given the options of not at all valuable, slightly valuable, somewhat valuable, mostly valuable, and very valuable. Over 90% of the respondents stated the programs Extension offers are mostly or very valuable. All 650 responses are shown in Figure 13.

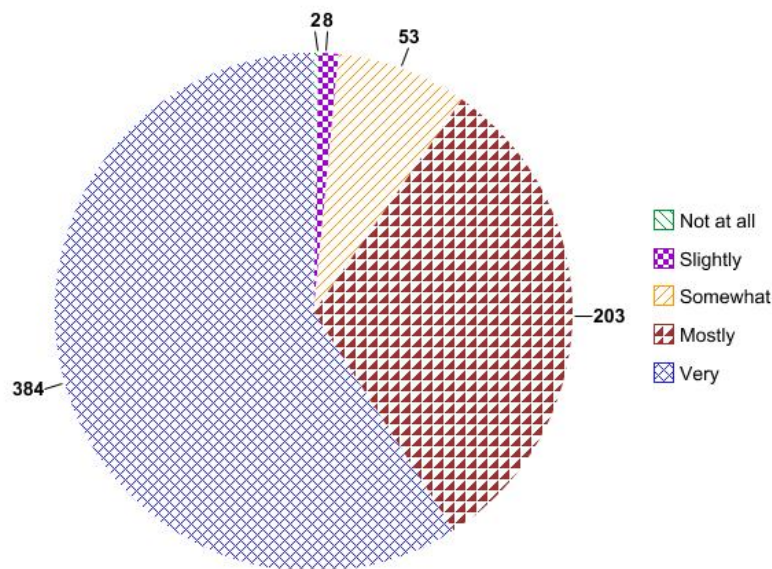


Figure 13. Elected officials' perception of the value of Extension programs

Next, the participants were asked if they felt that their county received a positive return on its investment (ROI) in Extension. They were given the options of not at all, slightly, somewhat, mostly, and absolutely. Of the respondents, 89.3% rated the ROI as “mostly” or “absolutely” getting a positive return on their investment in Extension. Only 1.1% thought that they did not receive a positive return on their investment. All 648 responses are shown in Figure 14.

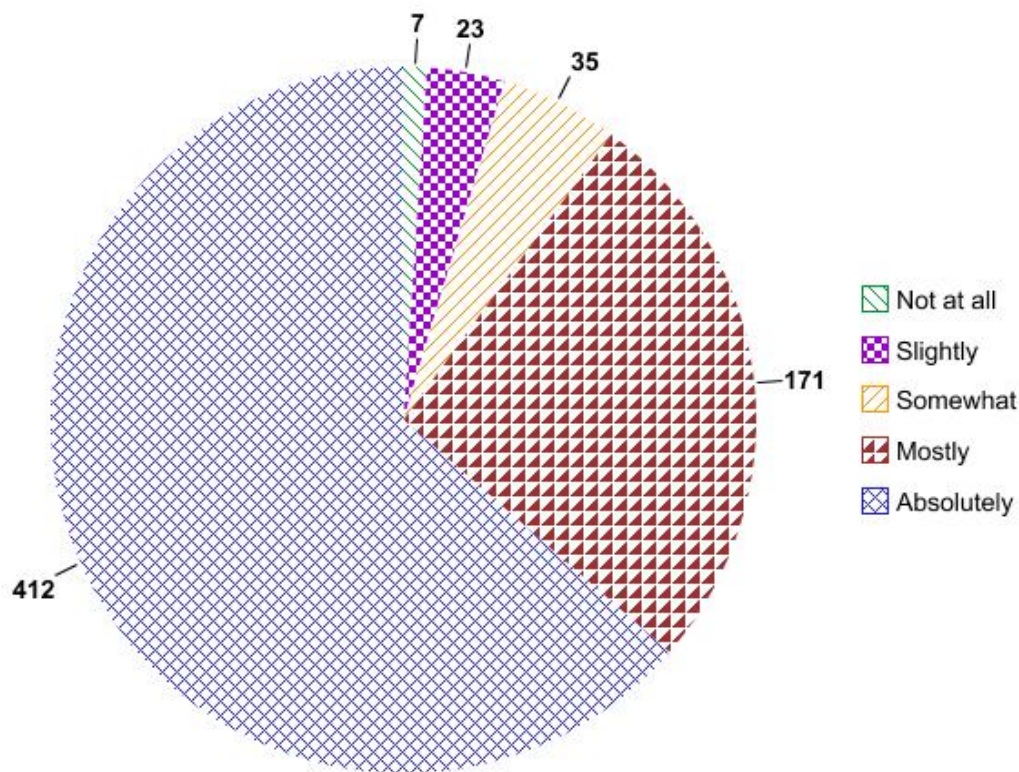


Figure 14. Elected officials perception of the return on their investment in Extension

Findings Related to Research Question 3

What is the level of satisfaction among these elected officials within genders, positions, age groups, education levels, etc.

To determine the participants' level of satisfaction with the Extension program within their respective county, data was analyzed using t-tests for dichotomous groups such as gender or position (county judge or county commissioner). To determine levels of satisfaction within other groups such as age groups and education levels, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. These independent variables were analyzed with the customer satisfaction of personnel and customer satisfaction of information constructs.

Of the 635 participants that provided gender information, 623 provided responses within the customer satisfaction of personnel construct and 614 provided responses to the customer satisfaction of information construct. From that data, it was determined that there was no significant difference in customer satisfaction in either the personnel of information construct between male and female respondents, as illustrated below in Table 10.

Table 10. T-test Values for Customer Satisfaction Constructs Comparing Male and Female Respondents¹

Variable	Male Mean	Female Mean	t-value	df	Sig
Satisfaction with personnel	4.66	4.60	.587	621	.596
Satisfaction with information	4.45	4.37	.780	612	.504

¹Responses: NA (Not at All)=1, SL (Slightly)=2, SW (Somewhat)=3, M (Mostly)=4, C (Completely)=5.

Of the 648 participants that provided position information, 636 provided responses within the customer satisfaction of personnel construct and 626 provided responses to the customer satisfaction of information construct. From that data, it was determined that there was no significant difference in customer satisfaction in either the personnel of information construct between judges and commissioners, as illustrated below in Table 11.

Table 11. T-test Values for Customer Satisfaction Constructs Comparing Judges and Commissioners¹

Variable	Judge Mean	Commissioner Mean	t-value	df	Sig
Satisfaction with personnel	4.65	4.66	-.257	634	.797
Satisfaction with information	4.45	4.44	.123	624	.902

¹Responses: NA (Not at All)=1, SL (Slightly)=2, SW (Somewhat)=3, M (Mostly)=4, C (Completely)=5.

To determine if the elected officials' time in office influenced their satisfaction with the Extension program in their county, an analysis of variance was performed to compare their years in office and the level of satisfaction in both constructs. The mean scores of the constructs by the respondents time in office is recorded below in Table 12 .

Table 12. Mean Score of Customer Satisfaction Constructs by Years in Office¹

Variable	1-4 years	5-8 years	9-12 years	13-16 years	17 + years
Satisfaction with personnel	4.67	4.59	4.68	4.74	4.61
Satisfaction with information	4.45	4.45	4.41	4.45	4.43

¹Responses: NA (Not at All)=1, SL (Slightly)=2, SW (Somewhat)=3, M (Mostly)=4, C (Completely)=5.

An analysis of variance was used to determine that there were no significant differences at the $p = .05$ level within the two constructs among the experience groups. The result of the analysis is shown in Table 13.

Table 13. One-Way Analysis of Variance of Customer Satisfaction by Years in Office

Construct	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Satisfaction with personnel	Between Groups	1.648	4	.412	1.156	.329
	Within Groups	225.913	634	.356		
	Total	227.561	638			
Satisfaction with information	Between Groups	.183	4	.046	.107	.980
	Within Groups	267.350	624	.428		
	Total	267.532	628			

Next, the participant's age was considered. Of the 647 participants that provided their age range, 635 provided responses within the customer satisfaction of personnel construct and 627 provided responses to the customer satisfaction of information construct. The mean scores of the constructs by the respondents time in office is recorded below in Table 14.

Table 14. Mean Score of Customer Satisfaction Constructs by Age Range¹

Variable	Age 30-39	Age 40-49	Age 50-59	Age 60-69	Age 70+
Satisfaction with personnel	4.69	4.77	4.58	4.64	4.73
Satisfaction with information	4.48	4.49	4.30	4.52	4.45

¹Responses: NA (Not at All)=1, SL (Slightly)=2, SW (Somewhat)=3, M (Mostly)=4, C (Completely)=5.

An analysis of variance was used to determine that there were no significant differences within the satisfaction of personnel construct among the experience groups. However, it was determined that there was a significant difference within the satisfaction of information construct. Post hoc tests determined that the significant difference occurred between the 50-59 year age group and the 60-69 year age group. Those groups were not significantly different than any other age groups. The result of the analysis is shown in Table 15.

Table 15. One-Way Analysis of Variance of Customer Satisfaction by Age Range

Construct	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Satisfaction with personnel	Between Groups	2.314	4	.578	1.624	.166
	Within Groups	224.344	630	.356		
	Total	226.658	634			
Satisfaction with information	Between Groups	5.3	4	1.325	3.139	.014
	Within Groups	262.169	621	.422		
	Total	267.469	625			

Lastly, the participant's education was examined. Of the 645 participants that provided their highest level of education attained, 634 provided responses within the customer satisfaction of personnel construct and 623 provided responses to the customer satisfaction of information construct. The mean scores of the constructs by the respondents time in office is recorded below in Table 16.

Table 16. Mean Score of Customer Satisfaction Constructs by Education Attained¹

Variable	HS/ GED	Associate's	Bachelor's	Master's	Other
Satisfaction with personnel	4.66	4.63	4.67	4.64	4.58
Satisfaction with information	4.44	4.40	4.43	4.46	4.49

¹Responses: NA (Not at All)=1, SL (Slightly)=2, SW (Somewhat)=3, M (Mostly)=4, C (Completely)=5.

An analysis of variance was used to determine that there were no significant differences at the $p = .05$ level within the two constructs when examined by the education levels of the participants. The result of the analysis is shown in Table 17.

Table 17. One-Way Analysis of Variance of Customer Satisfaction by Education Attained

Construct	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Satisfaction with personnel	Between Groups	.511	4	.128	.355	.841
	Within Groups	226.616	629	.360		
	Total	227.127	633			
Satisfaction with information	Between Groups	.369	4	.092	.215	.930
	Within Groups	265.375	618	.429		
	Total	265.745	622			

Findings Related to Research Question 4

According to local county officials, what are Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's greatest strengths? What areas could Texas A&M AgriLife Extension improve upon? What areas could Texas A&M AgriLife Extension address that it is not currently addressing?

In order to answer these questions, participants were asked three open-ended questions in order for them to share their thoughts on both the strengths of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and the areas where they saw opportunities for improvement. The response rate to these questions was good, with 439 of the 653 respondents (67.2%) responding to at least one of the three questions. Below is a summary of the responses to each of the questions.

1. In your opinion, what are the greatest strengths of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension?

Of the 653 respondents, 432 (66.2%) offered a response to this question. These responses could be grouped into three different themes:

1. Its work with 4-H and Youth Development
2. Its educational programs, information, and relationship to TAMU and its network
3. The people, relationships, and community leadership

Many of the respondents provided multiple responses to this question. The complete list of responses, exactly as they were reported, can be found in the appendix. The data from these responses have been aggregated and reported in Table 18.

Table 18. Summary of Greatest Strengths of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Identified Strengths of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service	Frequency
Its work with 4-H and Youth Development	210
Its educational programs, information, and relationship to TAMU and its network	136
The people, relationships, and community leadership	114
Other strengths (e.g., opportunities for family time, ability to work with all demographics, etc)	21

It is obvious from the data that Extension's work with 4-H and Youth Development is considered its greatest strength with 210 respondents identifying it. As one might expect, Extension's educational programs, diffusion of information and its relationship with its Land-Grant University ranked highly with 136 participants naming

it as a strength. Extension's presence in the county, its agents, their relationships, and community leadership were also noted by 114 of the participants. These results closely mirror the Lawrence and Mandal (2016) findings that there is generally strong support for a locally based association with a university. Only 4.9% of the respondents listed strengths outside of the three major themes listed above; most of them just making general statements of support.

2. In your opinion, what areas need to be improved for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension to meet the needs of Texans in the future?

Just over half, 363 or (55.6%), of the respondents acknowledged this question in some fashion. Subtracting the responses such as "No Suggestions", "No", "N/A" and "Just keep on trucking", of which there were 113, there remained 250 viable suggestions/areas for improvement. There were seven areas mentioned more often than any others:

1. Youth
2. More (Agents and Funding)
3. Marketing/Publicity/Outreach
4. Improved Communication/Local Input
5. Urbanization
6. Technology
7. Water

A few of the respondents provided multiple responses to this question. The complete list of responses, exactly as they were reported, can be found in the appendix. The data from these responses has been aggregated and reported in Table 19.

Table 19. Summary of Areas in Need of Improvement by Texas A&M AgriLife

Identified Areas for Needed Improvement by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service	Frequency
Youth	45
More Agents & More Funding	44
Marketing/Publicity/Outreach	31
Better Communication/Local Input	22
Urbanization	13
Technology	10
Water	8
Other (e.g., organic/holistic ag, fill vacancies faster, fire ants, oak wilt, more interaction with local landowners, economic development for small, rural communities, etc.)	52

Youth is still very much an issue for the respondents of this survey. While youth issues were listed as a strength of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, it is also viewed as an area of opportunity for improvement with 45 respondents listing it. Many of the responses related to recruitment and outreach to new youth audiences. Almost as equally important to the respondents was the perceived need for more agents and/or more funding. Many identified agent compensation and their expected workload as a major issue. Thirty-one participants listed a need for increased marketing and publicity of Extension and its programs. Several stated that the general public does not realize everything that Texas A&M AgriLife Extension has to offer. Another common theme among the respondents was a desire for better communication between Extension and the local stakeholders and as an extension to that, more local input into hires, agent

autonomy, and less training and paperwork so that agents have more time to work locally. Thirteen respondents listed the need to address Texas' increasing urbanization within the counties. Nine respondents listed Technology as an area for improvement, both using technology in its program delivery as well as teaching some aspects of technology. The last issue identified by eight respondents was that of water. Included in this are rainwater harvesting, water conservation, and future water needs. The remaining 52 responses were scattered among a number of issues, none garnering more than 2 to 3 mentions each, and many that were unique to that particular county, such as "I feel our agent should make more farm visits."

3. Are there areas that you feel Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is equipped to address that it is currently not addressing?

Of the 653 respondents, 302 (46.2%) acknowledged this question in some fashion. The responses could not be as easily grouped into themes as the others. However, after sorting through the responses, 126 could be omitted as the participants responded with answers such as "No", or "None", meaning they did not feel that there were additional areas that Texas A&M AgriLife could address. Next, 73 responded with statements such as "Unsure", "No opinion", "N/A" or "?". These, too, could be dismissed, leaving 103 viable responses to sort through. There were three main themes mentioned more than any others:

1. Youth and children issues
2. Keeping up with the changing times
3. Agent turnover, pay, and trainings

A few of the respondents provided multiple responses to this question. The complete list of responses, exactly as they were reported, can be found in the appendix. The data from these responses have been aggregated and reported in Table 20.

Table 20. Summary of Areas that Texas A&M AgriLife Could Address

Identified Areas Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Could Address That They are Not Currently Addressing	Frequency
Youth and children issues	13
Keeping up with the changing times	7
Agent turnover, pay, and trainings	7
Other areas (Water, Vocational trainings, More Ag, Seniors, etc)	13

Of the 102 viable responses, only 38 are represented in the table above. The category listed as “other areas” included issues that were listed at least twice such as water, programs for seniors, etc. The remaining 64 responses not included in the table were those that were only listed one time, responses such as simply “Yes” with no elaboration and messages of affirmation that did not truly address the question being asked.

As with the first open-ended question, it is apparent that the youth are very much on the minds of the respondents with 13 participants listing it. Even though it was the most mentioned strength of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, it is still the most popular answer as to the area that most needs to be addressed. Next, the respondents listed Extension’s ability to stay relevant in times of rapid change, specifically as it pertains to the use of technology. Seven participants listing it as an area to address. County Extension Agent turnover, low pay, and increasingly frequent trainings were noted by

seven respondents as an area to address. Other areas received at least two mentions such as more agriculture programming, water issues, Judges & Commissioners trainings, programs for seniors and opportunities for vocational trainings and certifications.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter contains an overview and summary of the research and findings of this dissertation project. Implications and recommendations based on these findings are also included for the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to determine Texas county commissioners' and judges' satisfaction, perceptions and opinions of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (AgriLife Extension) as they relate to Extension's importance, effectiveness and direction. A secondary purpose was to determine the demographic information of responding participants. This data was gathered using a mailed survey instrument addressed to all 1270 Texas county judges and commissioners with 1226 actually being delivered and 653 being returned in time to be included in these results.

Research Questions

The researcher developed a survey instrument that was sent to every County Judge and Commissioner in the state of Texas in an effort to ascertain their thoughts and opinions of AgriLife Extension.

1. What is the current relationship between county officials and the local Extension program? How involved in the program are these officials? How important are the local Extension programs to the county and to what clientele group are these programs most important?
2. How satisfied are these county officials with different aspects of the local Extension program in regards to the professionalism and courtesy of county staff? How satisfied are they with the information provided by Extension personnel and programs? Do county officials feel they are getting a positive return on their investment in Extension at the local level?
3. What is the level of satisfaction among these elected officials within genders, positions, age groups, education levels, etc.
4. According to local county officials, what are AgriLife Extension's greatest strengths? What areas could AgriLife Extension improve upon? What areas could AgriLife Extension address that it is not currently addressing?

Instrumentation

A survey instrument was developed for Texas county Judges and Commissioners to assess their thoughts and opinions of AgriLife Extension. This survey was reviewed for validity by experts, in this case, members of Extension's Organizational Development team.

The survey included two constructs pertaining to County Level Extension Program Information and Customer Satisfaction. These 24 questions/statements were

responded to on a Likert-type scale. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine internal consistency for each of the two constructs within the instrument. Alpha scores were .910 for the County Level Extension Program Information questions and .893 for the Customer Satisfaction questions. The composite alpha score for the two constructs combined was .932, suggesting that this survey instrument has relatively high internal consistency.

Additionally, demographic information was asked as well as three open-ended questions that allowed the respondents to elaborate.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1

What is the current relationship between county officials and the local Extension program? How involved in the program are these officials? How important are the local Extension programs to the county and to what clientele group are these programs most important?

From the results of study, it appears that the relationship between local elected officials and Extension is strong. The vast majority of these elected officials reported that they were knowledgeable about AgriLife Extension and felt that Extension was effective within their county. They felt that they were informed of Extension programs and activities and reported that they "Sometimes" or "Often" attend those events. However, when asked about the level of public awareness of these programs and events, they were not as confident.

Local elected officials stated overwhelmingly that they believed that current staffing levels and county contributions should be maintained, while, not surprisingly, the state level of contribution should be increased.

As for the level of importance of the various Extension programs, those related to Youth and those focused toward Agriculture & Natural Resources were ranked at the top. Likewise, when asked to identify the clientele groups to which Extension was most important, Youth and Farmers & Ranchers ranked at the top.

Research Question 2

How satisfied are these county officials with different aspects of the local Extension program in regards to the professionalism and courtesy of county staff? How satisfied are they with the information provided by Extension personnel and programs? Do county officials feel they are getting a positive return on their investment in Extension at the local level?

Overall, the results for customer satisfaction were very favorable. Over 90% of the respondents feel that the local Extension staff is courteous, professional, and maintains a professional appearance. Likewise, over 90% stated that the local Extension office maintained a professional atmosphere, the local staff did a satisfactory job addressing issues and concerns, and offered programs that met the community's needs.

The information offered by local Extension offices received high marks as well with over 90% feeling that the information offered was up-to-date, accurate, received in a timely manner, and easy to understand. Opinions dropped slightly concerning the role of such information in solving relevant problems. However, the information and

programs provided by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension was perceived as being valuable and the respondents perceived a positive return on the county's investment in Extension.

Research Question 3

When examining customer satisfaction in two constructs: Extension personnel and information provided by Extension, results were considerably positive. By all indications, Texas County Judges and Commissioners are generally satisfied with both aspects with mean scores indicating that they are somewhere between "Mostly Satisfied" and "Completely Satisfied". According to this study, it has been determined that there is no significant difference in level of customer satisfaction of the personnel construct nor in the information construct among participant gender, position, education level or time in office. The only significant difference discovered was in area of participant age. The study also determined that there was no significant difference among the age groups in the personnel construct. however, there was a significant difference in customer satisfaction of the information construct between those participants reporting their age in the 50-59 and 60-69 ranges, with the 50-59 age range ranking information lowest and the 60-69 age group ranking the information highest of any age group. These ranges were not significantly different than the remaining age ranges.

Research Question 4

According to local county officials, what are Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's greatest strengths? What areas could Texas A&M AgriLife Extension improve upon? What areas could Texas A&M AgriLife Extension address that it is not currently addressing?

Data for these questions were collected via three open-ended questions, allowing the respondents a blank slate to address whatever issues were important to them. First, on the question of what Texas A&M AgriLife Extension does well, the most oft mentioned area was its work with the youth. A somewhat distant second was its educational contribution to the local citizens through its relationship with Texas A&M University and network of partnerships in both academia and industry. Its people, because of their relationships and leadership within in the community were also highly regarded.

Secondly, as to the question of what areas of improvement exists for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, first on the list was improved youth programming, especially in the area of recruitment of new youth audiences. The next area can be characterized as “MORE”; meaning more agents and more money and resources provided to those agents. Many respondents specifically referred to agent pay in relation to their expected workload as a major issue. More marketing and outreach were also noted as areas in which Extension could improve.

Lastly, on the topic of issues that Extension could address that it is currently not addressing; first on the list was youth; again, mainly referring to youth that are not currently being reached through the 4-H program. Next, was just the reassurance that Extension was positioned to adapt to a rapidly changing society. The same number that expressed this concern also expressed a concern over agent turnover and pay.

In general, the youth is, without a doubt, foremost on the minds of elected officials and the role of Extension. Youth development is what Extension does well, the area

where it needs the most improvement, and the area that it is equipped to address and should.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn. Also included are recommendations addressing those conclusions.

1. While Texas A&M AgriLife Extension offers many different programs and services to their clientele, 35.7% of the elected officials participating in this study felt that the public was only “Slightly” or “Somewhat” aware of these programs.

Associated Recommendation – Texas A&M AgriLife Extension must continue to find ways to market its programs, especially to new, non-traditional, audiences. Branding materials must not only be made available to, but also utilized by county staff in order to have a more visible presence within the community.

2. Of the elected officials participating, 95.6% and 91.5% felt that Extension was “Important” or “Highly Important” to their county’s youth and Ag producers, respectively. Of all the program areas listed, “Community Development” scored lowest at 73.1%.

Associated Recommendation – Even the lowest ranking program area scored a respectful 73.1%, meaning that participants considered all program areas having some level of importance to their citizens. However, in times of economic uncertainty, should the situation arise where program areas must be pared down due to more limited

resources, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension should consider the rankings of these program areas.

3. Similarly, when asked to give their opinions on the level Extension's importance to different clientele groups, 95.4% and 94.0% stated Extension was "Important" or "Highly Important" to the Youth and Farmers & Ranchers, respectively. This correlates with findings associated to the importance of program areas.

Associated Recommendation – Similarly, while Extension is quite capable of addressing many different groups, the youth and agricultural producers should be considered its base.

4. From this study, it has been determined that one of the strengths of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is the information it provides to its citizens. Specifically, 91.6% consider the information provided to be at least "mostly" up-to-date. 96.1% had the same opinion that the information was accurate. 91.6% felt that it was timely and 93.0% thought the information was easy to understand. However, similar to the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service study, Rennekamp et.al (2001), those percentages dropped when the focus turned to actually being able to use the information to solve relevant problems.

Associated Recommendation – Texas A&M AgriLife Extension must seek out ways to assist its clientele in using the information it provides. While the information itself is highly regarded, it is, in and of itself, only information. It is without worth until it is put into practice. While, in recent years, the focus has been moved away from such activities, in the Ag & Natural Resource program area, increased utilization of Field

Days, Applied Research, and Result Demonstrations would serve as vehicles to address this issue.

5. When asked what the greatest strengths of AgriLife Extension were, participants listed Youth Development, the educational programs, information and relationship with Texas A&M University, as well as, its people. Only 4.9% of the participants listed something other than those three areas. These results agree with other findings within this study; Youth and youth development are extremely important to the local elected officials and Extension is held in high regards with the information it provides.

Associated Recommendation – AgriLife Extension must continue to tout 4-H & Youth & Development as its most visible program. As mentioned earlier, while branding and marketing the overall Extension program is vital, the same can be said for the 4-H brand. Extension must also continue to encourage its county staff to be active members within their respective communities and do everything within its power to attract the most dedicated employees with a penchant for service.

6. As for areas with room for improvement, youth, again was a top concern among the participants of the study. Other areas listed included more agents and funding, marketing/publicity/outreach and better communication with local input.

Associated Recommendation – It is evident from this study that the participants value the local Extension program. That can be seen from the results found within, but also by the fact that the local officials want more; more agents and more funding. Obviously, funds are limited on all levels, but Extension has begun and should continue to search out alternative sources to fund agent positions. Examples may include new partners such

as other municipalities besides counties, like school districts or cities. It may also consider organizations such as local groundwater districts in order to subsidize water education programs. Again, branding materials provided and utilized by county staff should address the issue of marketing and publicity. Extension must continue to remember that the local counties are a partner in the program and should treat them as such. Improved channels of communication and relationships between local officials and Extension central leadership should be fostered and encouraged.

7. Looking to the future, Extension faces many challenges and opportunities. When asked to identify these, participants listed youth and children issues, keeping up with the changing times and agent turnover, pay and trainings among others.

Associated Recommendation – The charge of a local County Extension Agent is a significant one. He or she is asked to work longer hours for less pay than many of his college classmates who take employment in industry. For the vast majority of Texas citizens, he is the face of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and the Texas A&M University System. Attracting the top college graduates to a life of service at a new agent's beginning salary is a daunting task. Extension has given its agents opportunities for pay increases through the Agent Career Ladder for CEAs. But, until those promotions can be realized, and in addition to those promotions, Extension must convey the intangible benefits of a career in Extension like the opportunity to work without a supervisor looking over your shoulder, or the flexibility to make your own schedule and the diversity of the workdays, while continuously looking for opportunities to increase

agent pay and benefits in order to attract and keep the personnel needed to represent Texas A&M AgriLife Extension.

Implications for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

While the 4-H & Youth Development program has historically been the most visible aspect of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, its status has not decreased during our long history. As seen throughout this study, youth development was at the very top of the list of what Extension does well, what it can improve upon, and what it should address in the future. No other program area was identified in all three aspects. Therefore, AgriLife must continue to support the program, tout its achievements at every opportunity and strive to search out new ways to involve an ever changing youth demographic.

The partnership among the Federal USDA, the Land Grant University, and the local counties is the very definition of the cooperative Extension service. While it is the administrators and the University that set the course for the overall destination of the partnership, some autonomy must be granted to the counties and their local offices to decide the route to take. Not only does this make the efforts more efficient, but also and more importantly, it gives the local partners a rightful place at the table. The best agents in the field can be hand tied when the local courts do not feel like they are being included or their voices heard. On the other hand, local partners can provide the agent with everything he or she needs if they are given ownership of the program.

Open lines of communication are vital to this partnership. Local officials must feel comfortable voicing their thoughts and concerns and confident that they are being heard. Extension must continue to foster these relationships in order to provide the citizens of Texas with the service they deserve.

This study revealed that although Extension has spread itself to address many issues, when questioned, local officials stated that Texas A&M AgriLife Extension was most important to the youth and the agricultural producers in their county. If Extension is forced to pare back for budgetary reasons, these two groups must continue to be addressed.

Recommendations for Further Research

As a result of this study, other areas of research interest have been uncovered. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension could or should consider evaluating further in the following areas:

1. With youth being identified as such a high priority through this study, more research should be conducted to understand what components of youth development are most critical in the eyes of elected officials, i.e. character education, life skills, leadership, etc.
2. Marketing and awareness were identified as areas of potential improvement for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. A study should be conducted to determine the best possible means and avenues for those improvements.

3. Staffing and agent turnover were identified as areas of concern for participants of this study. A study to identify the reasons agents choose to leave (Extension altogether, but also transfers to other counties) would be beneficial in addressing this issue.
- 4a. This particular study should be replicated every 5-7 years in order to “take the pulse” of our elected official partners and to compare the progress made using this study as a baseline.
- 4b. At least one more variable should be added to this study going forward. It would be useful to identify the participant’s county as rural or urban so that comparison of urban and rural as could be done.

Conclusion

Local partnerships are the foundation of any Cooperative Extension Service. It is at the local level that Extension faculty build relationships that make Extension successful. It is of the utmost importance that Extension encourages these local relationships and partnerships in order to be successful at the local level. While the results of this study are largely positive in regards to the existing partnerships, it is the hope of this researcher that such partnerships are continually fostered and monitored to ensure the continued success of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. It should also be noted that even though the responses were widely positive, there exists, as noted especially in the qualitative data, areas of improvement in the eyes of the local partners.

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APPENDIX A

INVITATION LETTER AND FOLLOW-UP LETTERS TO ELECTED OFFICIALS



Department of Agricultural Leadership,
Education, and Communications
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
Organizational Development
252 AGLS Building, MS 2116 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-2116
(979) 845-7210; FAX (979) 862-7190
t-gunnels1@tamu.edu

August 31, 2016

Dear County Elected Official:

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is committed to providing our constituents with unbiased, research-based information, and excellent service. In line with our commitment to continuous improvement, we are looking to examine our current standing with you, our valued partner. In order to do this, we are asking you to participate in a Customer Satisfaction Survey and to provide us with your opinion on how we are currently performing.

All 1,270 Texas county judges and commissioners will receive the survey in the coming weeks via US Mail. A self-addressed stamped return envelope will be provided for your convenience. The survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. We hope that you will agree to share with us your assessment of our organization from your perspective at the county level.

Please remember, there are no right or wrong answers. It is your honest feedback we are seeking.

Should you have any concerns or questions about this survey, please feel free to contact Dr. Scott Cummings at 979-229-3187 or s-cummings@tamu.edu.

Please be assured that the results of this survey will be an invaluable tool as we chart our path to continue to address the issues that are important to our shared constituents. This study has been approved by the TAMU IRB, TAMU IRB#2016-0492D, Approved: 07/21/2016, Expiration Date: 07/15/2017.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Ripley".

Jeff Ripley
Associate Director – County Operations
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

*The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.
The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating*



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September 15, 2016

Dear County Elected Official:

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is committed to providing our constituents with unbiased, research-based information, and excellent service. In line with our commitment to continuous improvement, we are looking to examine our current standing with you, our valued partner. In order to do this, we are asking you to participate in a Customer Satisfaction Survey and to provide us with your opinion on how we are currently performing.

All 1,270 Texas county judges and commissioners are receiving this survey. A self-addressed stamped return envelope is provided for your convenience. The survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. We hope that you will agree to share with us your assessment of our organization from your perspective at the county level.

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Jeff Ripley
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The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating*

**Information Sheet
Customer Satisfaction Survey For
Elected Officials**

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate in this study, this form will also be used to provide you with relevant information about the study.

You are being asked to participate in a research project studying the satisfaction of county elected officials with regard to the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. The purpose of this study is to better understand how county elected officials perceive AgriLife Extension. You were chosen for this survey because you currently serve as a county elected official.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete the attached survey in which we will ask you questions about your perceptions of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. This study will take 15 - 20 minutes to complete.

What are the risks involved in this study?

The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, developing best practices having a strong Extension program in each county will be the main benefit from your participation.

Do I have to participate?

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, your employer, or city/county being affected.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?

This study is confidential. The records for this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only research personnel will have access to the records.

Information about you will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law. People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly.

Whom do I contact with questions about the research?

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Dr. Scott R. Cummings at 979-847-9388 or s-cummings@tamu.edu.

Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?

This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For questions about your rights as a research participant, to provide input regarding research, or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program office by phone at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at irb@tamu.edu.



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Organizational Development
252 AGLS Building, MS 2116 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-2116
(979) 845-7210; FAX (979) 862-7190

October, 2016

Dear County Elected Official:

We recently sent you a survey to gather your input on the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. To date, we have not received your survey. A copy of the original survey mailing is being provided to you for your convenience. In line with our commitment to continuous improvement, we are looking to examine our current standing with you, our valued partner. Your input is valued and appreciated.

All 1,270 Texas county judges and commissioners received this survey. A self-addressed stamped return envelope is provided for your convenience. The survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. We hope that you will agree to share with us your assessment of our organization from your perspective at the county level.

Please remember, there are no right or wrong answers. It is your honest feedback we are seeking. Should you have any concerns or questions about this survey, please feel free to contact Dr. Scott Cummings at 979-229-3187 or s-cummings@tamu.edu.

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The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.*

APPENDIX B
SURVEY INSTRUMENT



Customer Satisfaction Survey for Elected Officials

MARKING INSTRUCTIONS

CORRECT: ☐ INCORRECT: ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒

Section 1 - County Level Extension Program Information

Please answer the following questions.

	<u>Not at all</u>	<u>Slightly</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Mostly</u>	<u>Highly</u>
1. How <u>knowledgeable</u> are you about Texas A&M AgriLife Extension?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. How <u>effective</u> is your county Extension program?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. How <u>important</u> is the Extension program to your county?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<u>Increased</u>		<u>Kept at current level</u>		<u>Decreased</u>
4. The level of Extension staffing in my county should be:	<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>
5. My county's contribution for our county's Extension program should be:	<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>
6. The state's contribution for our county's Extension program should be:	<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>
7. How <u>well</u> do your County Extension Agents keep you informed on Extension and 4-H activities?					
<input type="radio"/> Not at all <input type="radio"/> Slightly <input type="radio"/> Somewhat <input type="radio"/> Mostly <input type="radio"/> Very					
8. How <u>often</u> do you attend Extension programs? <input type="radio"/> Never <input type="radio"/> Slightly <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Always					
9. How <u>aware</u> are the citizens in your county of Extension programs and activities?					
<input type="radio"/> Not at all <input type="radio"/> Slightly <input type="radio"/> Somewhat <input type="radio"/> Mostly <input type="radio"/> Very					
10. How <u>important</u> are the following Extension programs to your county?					
	<u>Not at all</u>	<u>Slightly</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Important</u>	<u>Highly</u>
a. Agricultural & Natural Resources Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Community Development Activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Family & Consumer Science Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Health Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Public Leadership Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Youth Development Activities (i.e. 4-H)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Rate Extension's level of <u>importance</u> to the following clientele groups:					
	<u>Not at all</u>	<u>Slightly</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Important</u>	<u>Highly</u>
a. Community Leaders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Farmers and Ranchers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. New Landowners	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Small Businesses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Senior Citizens	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Youth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. Other, (please specify) _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 2 - Customer Satisfaction

The following are questions pertaining to aspects of how the local Extension office and staff operate. Please rate the following items according to how satisfied you are with each item

	<u>Not at all</u>	<u>Slightly</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Mostly</u>	<u>Completely</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>
12. Aspect of:						
a. Courtesy of staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Professionalism of staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Professional appearance of staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Professional atmosphere of local office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Addressing your question/concerns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Types of programs/services to meet your community's needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The next series of questions concerns the information you receive from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. Please rate how satisfied you are with the information you receive.

	<u>Not at all</u>	<u>Slightly</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Mostly</u>	<u>Completely</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>
13. Aspect of:						
a. Information is up-to-date	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Information is accurate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Information is received in time to be useful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Information is easy to understand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Information helps my community solve relevant problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

MARKING INSTRUCTIONS

CORRECT: ● INCORRECT: ☒ ☓ ☐ ☑

14. Overall, how valuable is the information and programs provided by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension? ☐ Not at all ☐ Slightly ☐ Somewhat ☐ Mostly ☐ Very
15. Do you feel the county receives a positive return on its investment in Extension? ☐ Not at all ☐ Slightly ☐ Somewhat ☐ Mostly ☐ Absolutely

Section 3 - Demographics

16. In which county office do you serve? ☐ County Judge ☐ County Commissioner
17. How long have you served as an elected county commission or judge?
☐ 1 - 4 years ☐ 5 - 8 years ☐ 9 - 12 years ☐ 13 - 16 years ☐ 17 year or more
18. You are a ☐ Male ☐ Female
19. To which of the following age groups do you belong?
☐ 29 years or younger ☐ 30-39 years ☐ 40-49 years ☐ 50-59 years ☐ 60-69 years ☐ 70 years or more
20. What is your current career or your career before you became a county official?
☐ Agriculture ☐ Sales (retail or wholesale)
☐ Government/Public Service ☐ Trades
☐ Professional ☐ Other, please describe: _____
21. Have you ever served on a County Extension committee (Leadership Advisory Board, Program Area Committee, Coalition, etc.) with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension? ☐ Yes ☐ No
22. Were you ever a member of the 4-H program? ☐ Yes ☐ No
23. Have your children ever been members of the 4-H program? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I have no children
24. What is your highest level of formal (or technical) education?
☐ High School diploma or GED ☐ Master's Degree
☐ Associate or Technical Degree ☐ Other, please describe:
☐ Bachelor's Degree

Section 4 - Discussion

Please answer the following questions in your own words. Feel free to be as open as you would like.

25. In your opinion, what are the greatest strengths of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension?
26. In your opinion, what areas need to be improved for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension to meet the needs of Texans in the future?
27. Are there areas that you feel Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is equipped to address that it is currently not addressing?

APPENDIX C

ELECTED OFFICIALS' RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS (Early Responders)

Question 1

In our opinion, what are the greatest strengths of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension?

Helping youth and ranch/farm owners	Reaching young people
The research database of the Extension in all areas plus the willingness to share that information with the community	Supports local famers & ranchers. Inform/educates youth about importance of agriculture to our community
Youth & Leadership programs; Family & Consumer Science, public awareness & education	The work with the young people of our community. Information available for just about anything.
Reputation of 4-H-benefit to young people for years. -Network of specialists-aware of many complex situational issues facing a hostile environment -Recognition of source assistance, expertise	-Education of farmers & landowners about programs relating to land, crops, livestock management & water conservation. -Keeps farmers informed about changes and new programs that benefit them. -Working with our youth-developing good working skills.
Knowledge &	4-H program-working with kids
4-H program	Their employees!
Keep Ag informed of Rules & Regulations Keep Ag informed of Research	Developing youth of today to become leaders of tomorrow.
Youth programs. Ag & Marine very important in our county.	Answering modern technology inquires in agriculture
Two things: 1. The work Extension does with our youth. 2. The work Extension does with all ages in the urban areas of the state.	Our county is still involved in ranching, farming and depend on AgriLife staff. AgriLife is very involved with the youth of our community in many aspects.
Provide timely information to producers & people.	The education us farmers receive from the agents.
You have great people!	Working with the public
The staff	Preparing our youth to be leaders
Helping the youth of our community become stronger and more confident, preparing them for real life.	We are a very rural county. Farms, trees, kids. Very poor. Health care programs very strengths.

At any time the county has ever needed assistance in a matter the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension agents have always been there for us.	1. Serves landowners (large and small) with programs to improve use of property 2. Serves many groups with health and nutritional needs
Their local agents	Getting information out
-Providing information to farmers & ranchers -Supporting youth through 4-H -Providing educational programs for co. judges and commissioners	The greatest strengths are providing safe & educational programs are activities for all members & children of our communities that wish to be involved! Another strength is the educational events provided for officials.
Leadership	Local involvement with youth & schools
Give knowledge to the public	Youth programs & non health programs
When the staff works together for the children	Youth programs-4-H; leadership & citizenship
The relationships that our agents create with our youth.	Families working together spending quality time
Helping the youth and older people who can't use computer.	Community involvement & programs for the youth & nutrition
1.Education for ag producers and a ready source of information 2.Youth programs	-providing leadership training to youth through 4-H -information to ranchers on Ag questions
AgriLife is critical to the rural areas of our county & to the residents of our county in general. Food service & food safety are very important as are programs that focus on poverty & home economizing. These are <u>not</u> just "city" issues. AgriLife understands & addresses this.	In my county-Advisory information as it relates to dairy, beef cattle, hay, pecan crops & grasses. Support local 4-H clubs FCS-healthy meal planning & food preparation. Nutrition Education programs, teaching our youth the need for & importance of agriculture.
Getting information out	All mentioned in questionnaire
The research, education based information given to the public	-4-H & Youth Development -Producer Educational Events
Education on water conservation methods	Helping kids
1.The people 2.Compassion for Agriculture	1.Youth involvement 2.Agricultural Issues
Educating youth	Helping people

The work that is put toward the young youth in Texas	-the leadership training -diversity of interests available
Community Education	The information that is available
Working with 4-H agent	Teaching and information
The work with the youth of Lee Co. is great! This, in my opinion, is the best thing about AgriLife Ext. There are great programs for adults as well, but working with youth is just great.	From the Ag side, it's a source of information that based on research and not information that's presented from a sales motive. Programs can be tailored to fit individual county needs.
Their organization-real interest in community	Education on all aspects of agriculture. Senior citizens education.
Work with children to build strong people & leaders	Knowledge to help citizens in their everyday lives.
-	People and knowledge
Dissemination of new technology and practices and youth/leadership/citizenship development	To some degree we are quickly changing from an agricultural county to a more suburban county
information	Predator control, hog out, 4-H, educational
Youth development & leadership	The resources they offer
They are in tune with the need of the people they serve.	Tools that are provided the agents to do the job
Help to farmers/ranchers & youth program	The youth program & Ag related programs
The University and its specialists that back up the local agents. All of the Extension Specialists that I have worked with are excellent!	-Outstanding educational opportunities for all ages of citizens -Leadership training -Research in agriculture
The Extension Agents & staff	Your people!
Educate our youth on the importance of agriculture	Helping counties by providing qualified agents to help serve the public.
The 4-H program	staff
4-H program	Enthusiasm
The vast resources of TX A&M Research & Personnel, Land Grant University you are in all 254 counties with mostly young knowledgeable agents.	Planning commissioners training schools. Local folks do fine jobs with 4-H stuff hog+calf+sheep+goat projects, "Exceptional".
N/A	Person to person contact
Research, communication & public service	Supporting farmers & ranchers & youth

To inspire the youth to become leaders in the community, and in the future to become national leaders.	1.Quality youth leadership & development 2.Agriculture education & training in rural Texas
Education	Agriculture info and youth programs
To educate the public and to be a problem solver when ag related issues arise.	-Youth programs -Health information
The 4-H program is very beneficial to the youth in our county.	Interface between state, people, government
Working with the youth programs, and new comers to the county.	Getting the younger kids involved and out of the house.
The Extension service has the potential of being very beneficial to our county. Information provided to agriculture, business, youth and the general public can be invaluable.	Programs for youth of our county-meetings with them and able to be available when needed. Getting the youth ready for contests, stock shows, etc. Win or lose this gets them ready for later on in life.
Exposing the community to programs available.	The commitment of the staff to help our county.
Working with children and youth	Activity with youth.
Preparing our youth for adulthood	Locally controlled programming
Responsiveness to needs of citizens and involvement in agriculture and 4-H.	The great number of people that it reaches within the state of Texas-youth & adult.
4-H support	Not sure!
To work with families, youth & ag producers one on one and in local organizations to improve quality of life, education and business.	Brings valuable and proactive information to all classes of citizens. Can be a wealth of information to the community if local agent is active and engaged.
Leadership-Responsible for livestock	4-H, CEU training & Ag info
Provides education and information to our communities and counties.	Youth education & leadership, information & assistance for farmers & ranchers
Building the youth	Helping the youth.
4-H and working with youth helping them to be leaders and better citizens.	Master Gardener program, Community outreach, 4-H and HS programs
4-H programs	Education
1) Unbiased research information provider 2) Work with families 3) Youth development	The greatest strengths are all the programs together. Not afraid to jump out there and take the lead on relevant issues.

Developing youth leadership	Offering CEU programs for ag producers
Reaching the young people	Teaching children to be leaders
As a county judge of a <u>very</u> urban county, I do not see much impact. But, as a native Texan, I strongly support the work of A&M AgriLife Extension.	The information that is available to government entity is one of the strongest. Programs for the youth & health programs for seniors.
Very friendly staff and leaders. Preparing our youth for scholarships.	Best place to get answers about ag; if they don't know, they will find out.
Networking w/ agencies Networking w/ county & community	4-H programs for our youth, 4-H kids are respectful and keep their pants pulled up.
4-H program for youth A lot of good info for farmers & ranchers and small businesses	1) County Gov't 2) Agriculture 3) Youth
The greatest strength is 4-H	Working with youth
In our county - the personnel - 5 Star	Youth, elderly, farmers & ranchers
The excellent employees	Kids
Provide guidance and responsibility to young people – 4-H. Provide info & guidance to farmers & ranchers.	-Good availability of information (not well shared or organized at times) -Good coordination between agents
The right people in the right positions	Ability to work with the community
Educating our youth about Ag	Close association with local government
Judging by our agents & staff, it's the staff & support staff. They dedicate a lot more time & effort into their jobs than the average citizen might be aware of.	Keeping me informed about the needs of Ag in Fort Bend County. Specifically, how the county can help Ad do their job. And the 4-H programs for the kids.
Integrity of the programs	4-H
In our county-the Ext. Agents!	Close to community
4-h programs & community education. Our TEA program is outstanding.	Communications & assisting youth and elderly
Its people, programs.	The children and senior citizens
1. Improve crop production in the county 2. Youth involvement, 4-H; county fair, etc 3. Ed programs for general public 4. Senior citizens programs	We are an ag based county. Agriculture & Resource mgmt. is the biggest asset. 4-H is second in our county-Please give us more support.
For the youth and education of others	Research based information.
The development of our youth and the knowledge for our farmers and ranchers.	Expertise with multifaceted topics/programs.

The ability to communicate needed information to Hill County citizens.	Teaching them good skills and knowledge for the future.
Brining information to the people of our county.	The history of AgriLife in Texas is the best of any state in the U.S.
Being available in our county for questions & helping our youth in all aspects of daily life.	Technical advice to farmers and homeowners Leadership skills to youth
Keep public informed	“Staff”
-children-	communication
Your people are your greatest assets- researchers, agents, etc. and you need to continue to recruit and attract the best people to keep these positions filled.	Communication with the youth with the Livestock Shows. Communication with the new landowners on what the needs of the land are.
Education	They have unlimited information.
The reports I receive are <u>very positive</u> with regard to agents involvement in youth, 4-H, stock shows	They are involved and have lots of information for young kids, farmers and ranchers also.
-Youth Leadership (4-H) -Adult Education	Its reputation and acceptance by the community.
Co. agents	4-H
The ability to find out in the rural area about Agriculture fields.	4-H Education
4-H	Ag Development
Knowledge and integrity. Ability to be force multipliers with the level of citizen participation.	Addressing actual problems and situations in our count. Making research information available to the public.
Our Extension service at a location level with kids	Valuable information to our county citizens and youth programs
Agriculture and youth programs	Its relationship with the University
The state-wide network of the Extension Service	Offer relevant programs that help connect the informed & uniformed to agriculture.
The people that work for you are top notch	N/A
In the past we had a wonderful home economics program. We need to rebuild that program. The previous Home Economics program taught our youngsters how to cook & sew, etc.	Being able to get information from constituents in the county first hand concerning what the issues are and then having knowledgeable Extension Specialists to address those issues.
There connection with the county residence is very good. They do a great job with what they have.	Focus on youth. The lessons they teach our youth

The leadership of honest, dedicated and hardworking agents that can be trusted to “train” our youth on how to be productive citizens.	1. Preparation of life skills through the 4-H program for children and youth 2. Dissemination of information & training for Ag producers in the area.
It has continually improved the standard of living for everyone since its beginning.	Community services projects for youth & seniors
The people	Service to community
Youth education	Individual youth in many projects
Leadership	Working with our young people.
The youth programs. I think that programs that will help local ag producers would be well received. Greatest strength you have in Archer County is Kathryn Carnes and Miles Dabovich.	The ways the Extension Agent works with the youth of our community. The ways they work with the farmers & ranchers. The professionalism of the agents is our communities.
I don’t work with our AgriLife Extension that close so I don’t think I could give an opinion.	The varied programs address different needs for different people. Our county has really good youth programs.
Their people, leadership, willingness to help & educate farmers, children, people from all walks of life. I the dreams that are being fulfilled by your leadership.	Information to Agriculture Producers most important, and second is community outreach seminars and especially youth
In preserving our rural heritage and teaching the kids about agriculture.	Crop production, crop disease, gardening, grass education, pesticide
-info for farmers/ranchers -youth 4-H	Working with the kids & the youth. They are the future.
Dedicated hard working people – that want to help and make a positive difference	Youth & family oriented, with great service to promote our community and agricultural culture.
4-H & FCS	Helping the youth of our county
Promotion of ag and youth programs	It’s people and their drive to help the public.
Guiding and teaching our youth	Community involvement stock show
Bringing current & best advice to our county	Youth organization, leadership guidance, youth leadership training
Dedicated hard working agents and staff. Access to the many specialist that work for the system.	Readily accessible education & programs for youth and the community.
The programs they provide for our youth	A resource for info.
The way it helps our youth develop into mature, responsible adult leaders	Programs, access to land @ office

Teaching our future leaders responsibility and Life Skills to be better citizens	Knowledge, assistance, training, professionalism
Your people	Information & 4-H
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I.P.M. very important for Floyd County 2. Michael Clawson listens & is easy to communicate with 3. We are blessed to have Cristan, Amie & Donna (sec) in Floyd County 	The involvement with youth and agriculture. Extension has gotten away from that in rural areas. The priority here for senior citizen programs, food safety programs and all the other requirements put on the agents in great for urban areas. It is ruining the program in rural area. Back to what made Extension strong, The youth & agriculture!
4-H Service	1. Youth, 2. Ag
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scientific information to help farmer/ranchers 2. 4-H 3. Community Outreach 	Extension is a great asset and has many strengths our county could not survive without their help
The best backing from a great school of educators.	The 4-H programs are wonderful tools for kids and parents.
Outreach of agents in the local community. Our agents have been a great asset with our youth and with programs for the adults. The program assist our producers in making decisions the ability to understand some of the trends.	<p>*help mold our future leaders – our youth</p> <p>*education for landowners, farmers, ranchers on best practices to insure a good future for our lands</p> <p>*education on nutrition, health, wellness programs</p>
It's connection to A&M and its research capabilities	Agriculture info and assistance to farmers and ranchers and 4-H work with teens
Provide a source of accurate information and services that provide a benefit to our local community.	<p>Involvement with our youth – great opportunities for development</p> <p>Young families – nutrition and other life skills</p> <p>Elderly – healthy habits-Master Gardener programs, etc.</p>
Information provided is up-to-date and accurate. Staff is always courteous and willing to help in any way they can.	Excellent CEA Ag, CEA-FCS CEA-Hort and urban outreach agent
Leadership of Extension Personnel	Educate the public
Its personnel & programs.	

<p>Strengths of Mills County Extension program is our staff. The agent with knowledge and love for the job has created a great working environment for our county. Responds promptly and knowledgeable.</p>	<p>For our community, the knowledge and skills that the AgriLife Extension program brings, not only to our youth, but to all citizens in the aspect of agriculture, and trade in general, is the greatest strength.</p>
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Question 2

In our opinion, what areas need to be improved for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension to meet the needs of Texans in the future?

More publicity to the public to know what Extension does. 1) newspaper 2) TV	State funding for agent salaries & more timely notices of information and events.
Keep agents-more pay-no masters required	Keep being progressive not regressive
Don't know if maintained or improved, but programs should be locally generated instead of state where programs are used to generate state numbers instead of meeting local need. (small county bias)	Our area for the future: our full time 4-H agent was eliminated- <u>The county pays her part time salary.</u> We have in the past been advised that you would give us a full-time agent. This has not happened.
Continue to improve conservation of water for the future.	Just keep on keeping on; you're doing everything we need
Not sure	?
Smaller homes, lower salaries, less regulations, decline of rural communities, need jobs, young farmers healthcare-you are listening to candidates	As we continue to become urbanized and more technical, Extension must stay current with methods, technical expertise and generational mindsets.
Stay in the budget.	N/A
Be ready to change methods as we become more urban & meet the challenges that we have ahead of us in our changing society.	Keep trucking, don't stop! Without A&M AgriLife Extension, we are a Ag County that's all we got!
Not sure	No areas
Make the local agents more autonomous	Full time 4-H agent
More programs aimed at senior citizens	Not sure
Getting the word out as to the value of TAM AgriLife to the local community.	Wish they could be more active in all 3 ISDs of our county
Agriculture awareness to younger generation	Public govt. and lobbying thru the legislature
More involvement with new landowners-educational info needed-for them to manage their land, brush control, predator control, wildlife mgmt.	We need an ag agent in our county. All we have is CSA. She doesn't do much for the ag part of the community. Nor does she do much at the project show.
Nothing	Not sure

As growing numbers of people are transitioning from urban to rural environments, Extension programs could focus on self-sufficient life styles.	We, as counties, probably need to help get the word out-that seems to be the greatest challenge-public awareness-word of mouth is pretty much it now!
Only keeping up to date with advancements in agriculture	More education to citizens on what all Extension offers
Work to bring at-risk youth into programs	No suggestions
More advertising geared toward youth and youth activities in the state of Texas	Make services and 4-H available to youth without charging a fee
Put more resources in where the rubber meets the road. The agents are over worked and <u>underpaid</u> -Extension as a whole is <u>too</u> top heavy.	I have 3 children. All my children have been in 4-H since they were 9 years old and participated their entire life. It's a great organization. I think you all do a great job.
Increase state contribution	Kids
None	Explain to public importance of Ag.
Education in capitalism, family values, our freedom	There is always room for improvement, but I believe they are doing an excellent job.
-	?
Agents need to be seen more in public	More emphasis on water conservation
NA	N/A
A lot of the public have never heard of AgriLife Extension, especially those who live in urban areas.	Focus on leadership skills, responsibility of the individual, common sense. Not sure of the cost benefit to the community. Ag is very beneficial!
More active role in legislature as it relates to local farmer/rancher needs. Community service/involvement/education beyond just youth.	More diverse programs. Millennials don't seem to be engaged; mostly young people & the baby boomers. Few participants in the middle is my observation.
The AgriLife staff Celie Salinas needs to be instructed on how to deal with parents, other staff etc. She is rude, curses in public! Very unprofessional during an activity.	Put more into 4-H to help the kids learn about the importance of agriculture' that it plays a role in everything we do! Even a rocket scientist eats and has clothes on his back.
More state funds	Good as is
Seeing that the agents do their job. Monitoring the success of program.	Trouble with an agent putting in the time & staying any length of time.
I can't think of any	?

Programming and program information too slow in coming. Private industry moves quicker. Extension would be more helpful if it were more proactive. Need to identify potential areas where education is needed, before it becomes apparent.	To stay relevant to the communities they serve. Timely education, programs, information in a rapidly changing information age. To be able to relate to older populations that are often not as involved in activities, and to hold the interest of younger people.
Try to bridge the gap between rural & urban	They help fill in gaps on many issues. This is a big help in our small community.
Help to farmers/ranchers & youth program	None
The use of technology in agriculture	Doing a great job
Community programs	None
Adjust to the community's needs, not all will be agriculture based.	Our Extension assistants come and go quite often.
N/A	technology
To understand that times change, for the good and also for the bad. To understand that counties have to adapt to the above so they should also.	We must increase the salary of extension agents if we are to recruit and retain quality agents. A Master's degree requirement at current salary level is not feasible.
I feel things are going good.	Inner-city youth programs
Our county has not had the benefit of having a quality agent in some time. Don't know if that's the fault of the county or the District supervision. We have had a problem with communication between district and county personnel. We have an excellent secretary who has run the office for many years even in periods when we had no agent, but yet has been excluded from needed information. This exclusion has resulted in children not receiving important information. I don't feel we are well served in our present district or by present district personnel.	Read above or below! (Above) The involvement with youth and agriculture. Extension has gotten away from that in rural areas. The priority here for senior citizen programs, food safety programs and all the other requirements put on the agents in great for urban areas. It is ruining the program in rural area. Back to what made Extension strong, The youth & agriculture! (below) Hell no! You have too much crap now that takes away from what built the Extension Service... The youth & agriculture!
Stop having agents attend weekly training at the county expense.	I feel that our ag agent should make more farm visits.
Population growth=programs growth. Additional personnel commensurate with audience growth.	Greatest need is more boots on the ground. 4-H & FFA training overpowering two people

More outreach to kids in lower socio-economic status in community.	Just stay on track with the current involvement, all the needs are being met.
Less expense	More funding from state or A&M
Our agent has something for all kids to get involved. I don't see anything for improvement he is doing a great job. Us being a small county we tend to treat everyone as a family.	FCS program could do much more than what was being provided by former FCS agent. Reach out to families, young adults, to help with wise money use and diets for families.
We need to have commissioner schools and training closer to Levelland. Lubbock & Amarillo are closer. You give us adequate training but some locations are far from home, for instance Galveston. You are putting on good programs everywhere you go.	Too much time spent in conferences/trainings, etc. Our county is small in population/area and is surrounded by similar counties. Every county does not need an agent trained in everything. Consolidate and eliminate. Too many programs just to justify position.
Believe all areas meet expected needs	Increased state funding
None	More time in the county
4-H through family programs	On hand work
We need more helicopter hog hunts. They have proven to be the most effective method of eradication. The hogs are causing tremendous damage. They are reproducing much faster than they are being removed.	1) Strengthening traditional families(this family destruction) costs local governments millions 2) More focus on youth development & less on stock shows 3) Home horticulture program absent in our county
More use of computer programs, Facebook, Twitter, etc	Being able to reach the large population of Texas which is expanding every day.
Have agents committed to the jobs they are assigned.	Focus your strengths rather than trying to cover every possible area or topic
Agents and staff should be able to spend more time doing their jobs helping citizens versus spending excessive desk time or reports.	The public needs to be informed that Extension is not just Ag related. They should be involved in community improvement.
Expansion of 4-H and other youth activities	Keep the program moving forward
Tough one here. Just continue to meet the needs of an ever changing society.	Agriculture needs to be improved for the youth that are coming in our future.
Need to stick with a program of teamwork and team building.	The state should increase its share of the funding.

Continued investment in youth training & leadership. Educating the general public on importance of agriculture.	Food safety & handling is #1 to me. 4-H groups are safe place for kids & to learn from their leaders.
Many rural counties, including ours, have no hospital and no nursing home, so health issues are important to us. Our FCS agent is addressing many programs-just keep it coming and add more if you can.	I believe they are covering all that needs to be covered at this point in time. Over the years I have seen our staff integrate new programs, & adjust existing programs to fit the needs that become evident.
More information on our water needs & environmental issues asso, with gas and oil production.	Would like to see the program in Uvalde to expand the annual conference to 2 days (12 hrs) instead of 1 day (6 hrs).
Good job!	Farmer & youth
No opinion	N/A
-better outreach to community members & bus. -better coordination w/ other entities -evaluate cost to counties and travel -level of organization for programs	Allowing county input in putting the right people in agent positions. Assistance from District offices. We have a district office in our county but staffed by out-of-county employees that are never here.
More health related topics	More stuff
?	Unsure
Keep doing the same things. It's working.	N/A
Publicity of the programs	More funding for outreach programs
Just keep up to date	"Funding"
The state needs to fund Ext. Agents salary completely.	Not sure of improvement needed at this time. Just continue to grow.
none	Perhaps better community awareness.
1. Educate public on water conservation. 2. Develop family plans in case of disasters, evacuation, etc., food preparation.- freeze dried, etc.	After the staff cutback a few years ago the workload for the agents has increased. Please review on county by county basis, Nacogdoches needs a third agent.
Don't know, after Nov. 8 th we will see what lies ahead.	Spend more time with the students in school
More funding from the state!	Help next generation
I think Extension is working well enough right now.	Keep the program going...it is good for the youth & adults as well.
none	More meetings
Long term agent more experienced	More information or when & where event are happening (advertising)

-Continue effort with Healthy south Texas initiative. -Affordable community development planning for the targeted counties near metropolitan areas & growing commerce.	Better communication lines \bar{c} discussions @ Judges & Commissioners Conferences to update each other on budgetary constraints and programs, either added or taken, in order to better plan for the future.
How do we get young people involved either in attendance or serving on a committee.	More emphasis on commercial agriculture than show stock. More emphasis on I.T. than homemaking skills.
Communication: is the key to success	Health education
Continued focus and program development and outreach to new small rural landowners. Concerning stewardship and building neighborhood relations.	As Texas becomes more urban the population is removed from Agriculture & food production in general. So funding for AgriLife is always threatened.
More Ag related information	Realign and narrowly define what you are
Personnel needs to be responsible	No opinion
Better relationship with the Prairie View extension agents. In their work with the African American community.	Reach out to the minorities to raise their living standards especially in the rural communities.
None	None
More agents	N/A
Many counties are in a transition from rural to a non-rural make up of population. Look at what is needed to better serve the changing demographics.	Improve the home economics program. The employees need to be paid more by A&M, that way we can recruit more agents & keep those positions filled.
Extension salaries have fallen far behind private jobs and other government positions. Good agents are very hard to find that will work for what they are paid in Extension.	Less emphasis on conducting programs in the County that have a fee to attend and more emphasis on having good programs with Extension Specialists presenting unbiased information.
Youth directed	Not sure
No suggestions	Water needs
1. Public Ed-Awareness 2. Partnerships, rural/colonia outreach 3. Senior centers	Keeping our youth involved in agriculture and helping them to be productive, job ready, or innovative.
EPA water issues	Not sure
Job programs with young people to give them a skill	Health issues – Society is fat & <u>lazy</u>

Above (I don't work with our AgriLife Extension that close so I don't think I could give an opinion.)	Must continue to keep offerings relevant. We are always only 1 generation away from losing our connection to ag.
Agent does a wonderful job with the 4-H program in our county. As long as he does that I so no need for improvement.	None that I can come up with. Great job always
Rain water capture, water conservation	Interaction with young people
Involve as many kids as possible.	Become more Tec knowledgeable
More 4-H/assistant CEA's	Agriculture
Keeping/getting youth more in touch with the ag technology advancements and career opportunities.	Working with our youth and teaching them, responsibility and to be great role models in our community, which in my opinion priceless!
The salaries for agents are far below what they need to be to attract and retain quality folks. Starting salaries are deplorable!	Not sure what the state of Texas needs but in our county the agency is meeting our needs.
To educate the public on the affect of fragmentation of ranch land. Subdivision need some rules.	Perhaps retraining & education in Civics & U.S. Constitution Constitutional role of federal govt. vs. state govt.
More understanding of what is going on with the programs at the top, how the resources are being allocated in the programs. With better information I believe that we as county officials could bring the local input forward to address there needs.	More public knowing the programs, I think more advertising, paper, radio ads etc. Maybe more online features to reach people
Community Outreach – make life better for all our citizens, address community needs like water conservation, etc.	Working with the youth of our county, and education them about agriculture. We are a dying breed.
More involvement with land clearing programs & development of new water resources.	Get the information about available programs out to the public better and consistently. Most residents do not know what is available from the extension office.
-Getting the information out to the public better -The information & services very good but most people unaware.	*each county program can't be identical – each program has to be customized to meet the needs of the population, the land, the way of living- --
I really don't know	None

Our county has had trouble finding and keeping extension agents-agriculture	Not that I can think of – thank you for all that you do!
Emphasize recruiting, training, empowering, and recognizing volunteers. We have lost many 4-H leaders and gained few in the last decade.	More resources and funding from the state. This is about rural America & the Texas ag culture we need to preserve through our youth and community.
Funding & marketing your services.	Stronger connection w/ county to ensure everyone is on the same page
When on agent leaves replace them as soon as possible	Sometimes agent is hard to reach but always calls or gets back to you.
None	Ours is fine
None come to mind other than stay up with agricultural technology.	In my opinion these agents in our community already do a great job.
More state funding	Better training sessions
-	NA
Promotion of programs and services to all individuals in our county.	

Question 3

Are there areas that you feel Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is equipped to address that it is currently not addressing?

I believe the Harrison County office do a good job addressing all areas, such as the Zika virus before it became the huge problem that it is now, the Ash borer problem, Diabetes epidemic as well as the fresh water problems.	Need to more fully address declining groundwater. Work to educate all parties to conserve and protect groundwater. Help to plan for continued trend of depopulation of rural Texas. Rural Texas is losing people, we can't change that, but help plan for it.
?	Vocational training programs
No	None
Local training in order to obtain certifications on different subject matters.	Am sure you're scratching your heads on this one-I wish I knew
No.	No
There are not many programs targeting young adult families.	Social skills & professionalism to staff-Celia Salinas
Not sure	No!
No	None
No	More public meetings, esp about water
What agriculture is to Texas	Put more into the ag part of the Extension.
no	unaware
I just think that it is critically important for everyone to understand that we are all inter-connected & as a result-are affected by what happens in our world.	Working with other local groups to help youth overcome problems such as drinking, drugs, teenage pregnancy, all high in this area.
Give Hunt County a full-time 4-H agent; we are a rural area.	Not familiar with what TX A&M is equipped to do. More than being done now.
Not sure	NA
Can't think of any	N/A
No	Just more information to the public
N/A	?
Our political correctness: tell it like it is	-
None	?
NA	N/A
This program adapts to changing informational need of the county as they occur.	Just feel our Ag Ext. office could be doing a better job. Leadership could be improved upon.
No, just 4-H; all rest is good	?
none	NA

Find a way to cross the wide millennial gap	Not in my county
Not sure; I do not know all Extension offers	Encouraging reading both English and English as second language \bar{c} families.
Not sure	no
no	Not that I'm aware of
1) Home horticulture 2) Community & youth leadership development	Doing a good job in our county. Maybe help teach your people the importance of voting. When there is an election.
N/A	None
-	No
Not sure-maybe the coordination of the programs with other rural focus groups or organizations such as FFA, USDA, etc.	Like to see more opportunity for the youth to stay involved in, although I do realize we are small and participation has been an issue for some time.
No	Inner-city youth programs
<u>Youth</u> program. Engage early----educate---	Overall do great job!
No	No-running very smoothly
Recruitment & retention of quality agents	no
Not sure	No
???	Not at this time
-	?
None	None
None that I can think of. Personally, I'm extremely impressed with the Extension svc and what you do-especially with the 4-H program. I wish I had known about 4-H when I was young.	You must have a willing & accepting population to be addressed. Keep on moving forward but don't forget what was behind and built the foundation for your programs.
N/A	None I can think of at this time
No	No
You're A&M AgriLife Extension agents doing above the call they have each day	Public service announcements of services for citizens. Social media-
No	Not aware of any
No	No
Family & community improvement	Currently I do not know
No	No
?	N/A
No	None
No opinion	Not sure
N/A	Don't know!
Need more agents-Be able to pay agents more	I'm sure there are areas, but for our county they do an outstanding job.
No	Not to my knowledge

No	Unsure
none	More into child nutrition, development
Not sure	-
No	NA
None	Not to my knowledge
Can't think of any specifics at this time	No
Health & safety education ex. Alcohol & drug education tobacco-health risks.	Maybe more time with cooking shows and contests with school programs.
Nope	None
They (Staff) cover as much as possible.	N/A
Health education	-
Not any I am aware of	No!!
I.T.	-
Develop a cooperative relationship w/ FFA and position more young people for the workforce.	Extension is the best force for positive community involvement that a county can invest.
I think y'all are doing a great job.	No
Not at all....Ask and you will get an answer.	More participation with the African American community. And its youth.
No	No
N/A	Yes
I am not aware of all of their programs	"PAY" "PAY" "PAY"
No	Teaching American culture and Honor
None	Not sure
Help local producers with new info and ideas.	I think adding Public Health was great idea. It needs to develop-takes time.
No	Small business, Free enterprise!
Above (I don't work with our AgriLife Extension that close so I don't think I could give an opinion.)	More on healthy lifestyles for youth and adults. More on water conservation.
No	Not sure
No.	None at this time
Yes. Not enough interaction with local landowners	No not really, this office runs very efficient.
Yes. Assisting other federal & state agencies with dissemination & implementation of land clearing programs.	If we can just offer more support to what they are doing now that would be great advancement.
No.	No
More economic development info for small rural counties.	Keep up the good work that has always been an asset to our county.
No	Not sure
Our agents do a good job for the most part. Many of the "old hands" are stuck on <u>no</u>	Too much repetition from government agencies. All doing the same thing. Need

<u>big change</u> . Do what the youth want and need today – that is not the same things it was 40 years ago. It is not all about stock shows and old time 4-H programs.	to focus more on successful programs and communicate with other Government agencies to coordinate efforts.
No!	N/A
*education program to teach younger generation how to be self-sufficient – survival skills, farming, etc.	Hell no! You have to much crap now that takes away from what built the Extension Service... The youth & agriculture!
Some way somehow we need to get people into positions in Austin & Washington that know which end of the cow eats grass and which end disposes of the grass instead of make believe politicians	Something has to change to keep real farmers & ranchers operating the farms and ranches instead of corporate and rich people doing it for a hobby, and make sure we can keep the ag exemption
N/A	No. I feel you do very well. <u>Don't fix it.</u>
None	-
See # 26 above (Perhaps retraining & education in Civics & U.S. Constitution Constitutional role of federal govt. vs. state govt.)	I think they should do some market analysis to better determine the needs of individual communities. Our extension office is run by wonderful people!
I am not aware of any.	None that I know of
Not that I am aware of	No comment
No	No
No – other than timely replacement of vacancy	None
Areas I see improving are teaching/working with youth on social side of things. Through social media our youth seem to be not as socially adequate.	Extension should be the leader in recruiting, training empowering volunteers. Extension has fallen back in the last decade with the exception of Master Gardeners

APPENDIX D

**ELECTED OFFICIALS' RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS
(Late Responders)**

Question 1

In our opinion, what are the greatest strengths of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension?

It gives young people a good opportunity to learn about where a lot of our food & clothing comes from. And a lot more.	Community involvement -agri/ranching/comm gardens -4-H
Youth and Ranching	4-H programs
Having the resources to help the community and its citizens.	To help future generations learn to be a leader & solve their own problems.
Hands on help	Helps youth development
The work they with children & seniors. Amazing!	Reaching out & training our children to become responsible and effective leaders
Ability to work with all demographics of the population and provide relevant programs to a large range of groups.	Programs that add "quality of life" to our community. Programs that give children hands on experiences.
Sharing availability of programs	Youth programs
Sometimes the meeting dates & times conflict with other meetings.	Working with the young children in the county.
Youth programs	Youth activities
Helping and educating the youth, farmers, ranchers and overall general public.	Education support & impact to the local community.
Your people and TAMU	Go to place for just about anything
Help to the public	Communication and education
For our county the agent does a super job with our 4-H program and the kiddos. Keeps the county updated on events and programs that are in our interest for our county.	4-h programs promote citizenship, responsibility and community service. Lets kids connect to our rural heritage and understand the importance of agriculture in our economy.
Education & Information	Community outreach
Keep informing the county and local farmers & ranchers and all involve with Extension Service with all the update.	Blending Government with citizens of all ages and diversity with education and information
Great staff, knowledgeable, willing to serve everyone.	Programs that help rural communities live better.
Ag education, youth development	Information.
Utilize their office with county extension offices	Keeping our youth strong and out of trouble
-The staff	AgriLife agents & office staff

-Reaching out to the smaller communities in the county -Health programs for senior citizens	-They answer questions and are involved with the community. Agent Rhonda Cummings is EXCELLENT.
Historically assistance to farmers, ranchers and 4-H youth activities.	Keeping farmers & ranchers aware of problems in the county
The agents also the weakest	Provides current and up-to-date info
Helping kids understanding life. Getting them ready to be helpful adults	4-H; Health Ranchers
Community relations	Informational programs
Providing services that are available nowhere else and at no charge or with fees that are not exclusive to any family or person. Also, many programs address needs that provide a service to local government. Example in my county-Training for maintenance of Aerobic Sewage systems. Involvement of youth in recycling and protection of our environment.	Wide range of activities for youth. Great for kids from “ag” families * opportunities for city kids to be involved. Hands on, outdoors, not electronics. Also do programs for lower income urban schools. Difficult to get kids away from electronics & into outdoor activities that are not school based. I have never met a 4-H youth who used poor language or had a poor attitude around others and they all stand for national anthem & flag ceremonies.
Staff	Great People
The valuable information they provide to the county.	Access to resources & programs through TAMU
Continue to educate youth & older adults	Youth and community involvement
Giving a chance for rural children to have activities to participate in	All the programs you have to help this county and community
4-H	The local & state employees
The community involvement and education provided to our youth	Providing agricultural & leadership training for our youth
-Education for Ag producers and Ag related business -Programs for our youth	Educating youth & ranchers about programs-disease. Assisting with programs.
Involvement with youth and education	Helping youth
Education	The personality’s of the agents.
Their knowledge of farm and ranch needs (grasses, livestock and general farm needs)	Its people. Making good matches for the community the staff serves.
Communicating on important and relevant issues that affect the county as a whole.	The variety of programs for youth and adults
Keep Texas residents in touch with	For our part of the state, being rural,

outdoors: 1. Farm/Agricultural heritage 2. Consultant to Healthy Lifestyle	agriculture is tremendously important. TAMU AgriLife Extension is heavily used and positively influences our county
Informing the public about events and needs in the community	Teaching children and young adults important skills.
The education of those who may be first time farmers in our community. As well as providing helpful insight to the more experienced farmers. The work with our seniors & families.	The utilization of a large and well trained volunteers enables the staff to reach large numbers of the population with family and consumer sciences and the health and wellness program.
The educational opportunities that are provided for all Howard County citizens; information based on research in a part of the state that has little rain, a lot of wind and sandy soil help all county farmers and ranchers.	In my opinion, the strongest programs are 4-H and other activities directed at teaching our youth leadership skills. Other helpful areas are horticulture-grasses, trees-and agriculture information for our areas that farm.
The staff	Interaction with county
Development of our youth	Bringing families together
Opportunities offered to our youth they would not receive in school.	4-H leadership and development, shooting sports, livestock-horse contest
Kids in community	Youth
Informing public of the needs of county	Information and handouts.
Communication with the public & local governmental bodies.	Very knowledgeable works with all aspects working with youth leadership
It's agents program with direct contact with volunteers that make the programs go!	Educational leaders – great teachers, public servants
The information they provide and the education they provide	The depth and breath of information & services
Assistance & Information	Programs it offers for kids.
Teaching the kids the importance of being responsible	The broad strength of the Texas A&M System
Keeping people informed	Helping young people.
Encouraging our youth for future agricultural endeavors	Availability of personnel, knowledge of various programs, and willingness to assist.
Helps to further our youths education and values.	For our county I think Master gardeners & 4H, & health
Youth	The youth
Promoting youth programs	It teaches kids in 4-H responsibility
Teachers young people valuable	I think AgriLife Extension greatest

lessons keeps families close knit useful skills not taught in school	strengths in Kenedy County is the 4-H program and agriculture field.
Connecting kids to outdoor learning opportunities	I am very satisfied with all aspects on the programs
The growth of our kids who are in the programs that 4-H has. The program that are agent and kid take and involve our communities in the county.	Professionism Care Knowledge helpful
----	Youth training
The strong network of agents & researchers	Working with children
Helping the community with the farmers and youth programs	Helping our youth. Health and nutrition, agricultural information
Local agents	Outreach to the youth of Brown County
It's the training our children get from it	Ability to deal one on one with public
That they cater to our most precious assets, our youth. This program is vital for our youth. These young people take great pride in the involvement with raising animals to show in the many stock shows that open to them. I buy every year from several contestants and it's amazing how thankful these young people are.	Trust, it has taken time by our community trusts the Extension offices from leading our kids to assisting our farmers who grow crops. Trusting the office to assist in training adults from cooking, raising grand children to finance. Trust is a big strength.
Dedication to 4-H	Local knowledge
N/A	Complete plan of execution of programs offered.
Programs for children/families. Services for agriculture.	Teaches 4-h members skills that will serve them throughout their life. Judging, leadership
The greatest strength is their research based educational programs.	Development of agriculture related programs and youth/4-H programs
Knowledgeable staff	Support of youth
I believe the greatest strengths is the communication and programs that they have with the people of Texas	The knowledgeable personnel, their willingness to help the community, I think they truly love their job.
N/A	The Volunteers
Leadership opportunities for youth, public speaking	Help build the youth and help citizens within community
Education & leader in Agriculture development and research	4-H is the most visible and therefore has the most impact-and is its greatest strength
Agrilife extension to me is only as	Service to area farmers and ranchers

strong as the county extension agents. I have worked with several and some are strong and some aren't.	Work with county FFA and 4-H programs Health and Diet information Training
Leadership and youth programs	It's staff and directors
Professional learning programs for children Teaching values and activities for successful lives Education for successful living for adults	The ability to bring families together for a opportunity to work together and bond with other families.
Animal Sci. Control and research of undesirable plants	The University system, helping the community by answering questions.
Information comes from good, reliable, and professional people. Sometimes yield data is a little late to be of much use the next year due to harvest dates and compiling data.	Assisting farmers in the county and 4-H programs is a must. Kids today have too much computer and not enough interaction. Parents both have to work and not enough time with children.
Texas A&M University-Resources	Youth development, agriculture assistance
Community Outreach and education	It's people
It helps keep us inform about new changes and laws that happen all over country	Working with youth 4-H etc
People and leadership	Lead our youth in the right directions
They are great with the kids	

Question 2

In our opinion, what areas need to be improved for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension to meet the needs of Texans in the future?

I believe that everybody at that level is doing everything to accommodate everybody.	Just stay in touch with each communities needs not really an improvement needed. Just keep on top of needs.
Satisfied	Comm...notification of programs available
Continue and improve relations with larger metro areas so all have a good understanding of agriculture.	Send the county more information including the judge/commissioners with the upcoming activities planned in the county.
Need more operations funds from County and State	Continue doing a great job & add more staff if the need should arise.
I think Texas A&M is a well-oiled machine and very renown. Their reputation is untouchable, but in every case, there is more that can be done. Our youth is priceless.	I'm in production agriculture. I've felt that extension information is usually outdated to industry seed/chemical dealers. I usually hear cutting edge technology from other sources first.
-	Information
More marketing & media coverage needed to bring public awareness of the contributions that AgriLife can provide the communities.	Reach out to the upcoming generations of young people that populate our growing state, and expand their thinking outside the box.
We need an agent	None
None	Keep the younger people involved
Uncertain	More funding
Add short courses for technology as it applies to agriculture and family management	Positive public relations campaign- using real life success stories and testimonials indicating programs offered by AgriLife
Increase the number of experienced agents	-
They do a real good job	Create more youth involvement
Helping youth find their strengths to be better citizens no matter where they live.	Outreach, public awareness of program offerings
They are doing a good job	Unsure
I think all is great	None

4-H, Boy Scouts, church youth groups – all have same struggles. How to get kids away from electronics, away from “school only activities & having fun learning & serving others.	As our state continues to grow I feel the Extension will need to be able to educate our communities about water conservation. Have knowledge of the state wide water plan so education can be provided to all Texans.
Unknown	None
?	More Staff
None	No opinion
More funding for adult education.	Computer Science
Have more programs related to Ag at closer locations.	I think the program is managed well enough to meet continuing growth.
Need to have a class for judges and commissioners that share other county experiences. Don’t invent the wheel, open record requests, phone lines cut	I, feel that everything is being cover to your best of knowledge. Hope, that this service continues and if can improved that is also fine.
Education of everything that is needed to thrive for a better life.	At this time I am very satisfied with the program
State funding	Unsure
Better funding from the state	N/A
I would like to have more opportunity to get CEUs for my applicators license	Getting youth involved, allowing the importance of job, careers, etc.
Working with land owners to improve forage for livestock. Help find inexpensive ways to manage brush control.	Fewer and fewer individuals are interested in becoming agents. Something needs to be done to make the positions more attractive to college graduates.
Keep the programs you have. Get more youth involved.	More advertising to let people know about available programs.
-	Another agent.
More involvement with our youth	Commissioners training classes
Programs are great.	Not sure
None	Youth
More participation Example During food prep classes, may only have 2 or 3 participants attend. Spending unnecessary money. Also, our co. agents are attending training classes & meetings too often 120 miles away. In my opinion many could be done by conference calls or internet. (Just my opinion)	Those in charge of communicating with local officials with regards to staffing of local offices could do a better job in those communications, or rather their timeliness. The extension personnel I speak of are in management positions.
Promoting our ag heritage	None

More money	Does a good job
There is always room for improvement but I cannot think of anything now	Staying current on latest technology without forgetting past practices.
Since Texas is a southern state and we grow things to survive horticulture needs to improve to encourage environmental stewardship for Travis County	With so many new people moving to Texas, AgriLife should market themselves better so everyone knows what programs and information they offer
More local input, less state “paperwork”	Legislature needs to budget more \$ for AgriLife Ext. needs
Education	Community involvement
?	N/A
More participation	More youth programs
Funding from state	Getting the word out
-----	Public outreach can be improved upon.
Since we are a small county, the adjoining county (Hood) does a good job of holding many useful programs which we are informed about thru the internet. (since I have given them my info at one of the program) not sure all our citizens receive the same	Our staff is talking problem that other counties are not custom to. Immigration. Teaching the refugee population is a challenge. Bringing a different culture into agriculture. More resources that meet this challenge. Our staff is excellent.
Be more open with counties and develop a better partnership.	I don’t know, but they are doing a very good job in serving our county.
Need to be more available that is the reason for another agent	None that I can think of in our county
More online & social media presence	Not sure
Get extension’s story out to the average citizen as to what programs are available	See above answer: I am very satisfied with all aspects on the programs
Crop & livestock “protection” from EPA regulations	I am very pleased with AgriLife Extension in Red River County
Most of the information disseminated by AgriLife is aimed at the commercial/industrial ag sector. We need more info on holistic-natured-organic production practices.	Perhaps allow agents greater latitude and discretion in extension operations. They are face to face with the population and have the best view of the needs of the population.
Where our food comes from	Getting the word out to the county
Educational programs for urban residents who move to rural areas.	More education for elected officials on state grants
Expansion of extension services... additional staff	The agents have grown with the program and are doing a wonderful job with every program

The population in our county is “urbanizing”. No longer are rural citizens primarily farmers. With this change come needs that need to be addressed. Two examples are above. Other examples or helping new neighbors become a part of the local society and addressing many needs associated with the change we are all experiencing.	I believe that the good agents should be compensated for their efforts and success of their programs. There seems to be a lot of people in the Agrilife system that do nothing. Monetarily compensate the AGENTS that do the work and don’t make them move from where they live to better their careers. I also think that is is ridiculous that they must have a Master’s Degree.
N/A	none
Texas A&M Agrilife is doing a great job. I believe continue communicating any up-to-date information to Texans as soon as possible, also relating any hands-on experiences can be a great asset to better Texans for the future.	We need to make 4H more readily available to underprivileged youth. We need to eliminate the fees for participation in 4-H.
Continue to focus on youth development.	none
Expansion of extension services... additional staff	The agents have grown with the program and are doing a wonderful job with every program
Continue 4-H, master gardeners programs	Recruitment of young 4-H members
Not sure	none
There are so few actually engaged in production agriculture anymore, that the education of the general public and perception by the public. We have to battle the GMO, Greenie Weenie, Liberals?	In my county, as the population increases, and the land gets subdivided, I think that there will be an increased interest in gardening programs, lawn and tree programs and micro farming, and 4H education.
Control of feral hogs	Reaching more children
Have no idea	N/A
Quit charging a fee for the youth to participate in 4-H and for your educational programs.	Ranching Cattle Weed problems in hay meadows and yards
I think that the agriculture meetings could be better. Would help if they were better informed on current issues ie: sugar can affids, local pest. This is on a local level. Ed Bynum is very informative on these.	I believe technology and tech education will be an area extension will have to address to be viable to a new generation.

Stay the same route.	They are doing good
More consistency in local leadership.	

Question 3

Are there areas that you feel Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is equipped to address that it is currently not addressing?

No	Satisfied
More funding from AgriLife for their conferences.	Like I said, the judge/commissioners of all future plans throughout the local county.
In our area maybe they could help more with the programs for seniors-meals, projects-games-etc.	Let the agents do their work & stop or cut back on the ever growing amount of reports they are required to produce.
Fire ants, oak wilt	-
?	None
No	No
No	No
Don't think so	-
No!	no
No. Keeping up with this changing world is enough.	Use more self-promotion using social media
Unsure	None
No	None
-	No
No	?
?	Not to my knowledge
None	No
No	No
Arrow pointing back to response to question 2 (Need to have a class for judges and commissioners that share other county experiences. Don't invent the wheel, open record requests, phone lines cut)	Everything that is available is being cover at this time, but if extension service feel like it need to improve on other programs I'm gain for that. Thank you!!!
No	No
It is doing a great job for Howard County	None at this time
They're doing just fine	none
No	Not really
-	No. meeting the needs of community.
Yes, I believe vacancies in Extension agents should be filled more quickly.	Helping ranchers to battle noxious weeds. Developing programs for wildlife enhancement

As a community that is becoming more urban I would like to see programs designed toward the use of technology & innovation.	-More involvement with youth -Attend more 4-H meeting -Better communication with parents of our 4-H youth
N/C	no
N/A	-
No	None
No	Youth
Many complaints about kids with animals not being assisted by agents, for example, more attention to certain specie and not any of the others.	Agents are spending too much time away from the county attending conferences and training. More time needs to be spent with county consumers.
No	No
Unsure of any	None
Not necessarily	No
Satisfied now	?
No	No
No	Information about areas of assistance
Greater home agriculture outreach	See above answer: I am very satisfied with all aspects on the programs
----	None at this time
See above. Most of the information disseminated by AgriLife is aimed at the commercial/industrial ag sector. We need more info on holistic-natured-organic production practices. I DO NOT like the name change to “AgriLife”	That it is currently equipped to address. They are addressing everything possible already. They are very creative and have to think outside the box. I feel they are addressing everything possible already. The kids are their customers and they do a great job. Thank you.
Due to turn over – I believe agents should start out at a better salary	The 4-H program needs to be addressed as it is crucial to our everyday life.
unknown	N/A
None	Not sure
N/A	Not sure
No	Land conservation (erosions)
Cannot think of any	Not for sure
Unsure	N/A
I wouldn’t know of any	none
Not sure	yes
??	Not sure
World-International issues/matters of global concerns.	I believe it is addressing all of the traditional areas well.

I like the health seminars and education opportunities for our older folks and the undereducated people.	No. Reagan County's Programs are bringing in more #'s and offering more programs overall.
none	no
no	Not really
no	N/A
No	No
No	

APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

DATE: July 21, 2016**MEMORANDUM**
TO: Scott Cummings
ALRSRCH - Agrilife Research - Ag Leadership, Education & Communication

FROM: Dr. James Fluckey
Chair, TAMU IRB
SUBJECT: Approval**Study Number:** IRB2016-0492D
Title: An Evaluation of Customer Satisfaction of the Texas A&M AgriLife
Extension Service Among Texas County Judges and Commissioners
Date of Determination:**Approval Date:** 07/21/2016
Continuing Review Due: 06/15/2017
Expiration Date: 07/15/2017
Documents Reviewed and Approved:

Only IRB-stamped approved versions of study materials (e.g., consent forms, recruitment materials, and questionnaires) can be distributed to human participants. Please log into iRIS to download the stamped, approved version of all study materials. If you are unable to locate the stamped version in iRIS, please contact the iRIS Support Team at 979.845.4969 or the IRB liaison assigned to your area.

Submission Components			
Study Document			
Title	Version Number	Version Date	Outcome
County Elected Official V1.3	Version 1.3	07/08/2016	Approved
2016 Cust Sat for Elected Officials (57694) V1.1	Version 1.1	07/07/2016	Approved
CS Elected Official Information Sheet V2.0	Version 2.0	07/20/2016	Approved

Document of Consent: Waiver approved under 45 CFR 46.117 (c) 1 or 2/ 21 CFR 56.109 (c)1
Waiver of Consent: