

AN EVALUATION OF THE RETENTION OF TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE  
EXTENSION COUNTY AGENTS AND ONBOARDING PRACTICES

A Thesis

by

GRACE DEKOYER MEARS

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Chair of Committee,	Scott Cummings
Committee Members,	Philip Shackelford
	Jenna Anding
Head of Department,	Clare Gill

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## ABSTRACT

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (AgriLife Extension) serves all 254 counties in Texas, so it is important attention is paid to the hiring and retention of best fit county agents to keep turnover low. This mixed methods study examined various factors that affected agents joining, staying, or leaving AgriLife Extension, as well as employee opinions on where training topics are covered. This was done with the intent to better understand how the agency can recruit, prepare, and retain effective county agents.

Study results showed agents choosing to work for AgriLife Extension often did so for the variety in work duties, ability to serve and have relationships in the community, and the flexibility in scheduling. Work/life balance and compensation were found as the reasons most likely to cause agents to leave. Paperwork and hours were identified as the biggest surprises to the county agents. Regional trainings were preferred over state-wide trainings on most topics. Conclusions were made to establish a recruiting presence for the agency and ensure consistency across the state. Opportunities need to be available to build relationship internally and with clients and regional trainings should be held. Further research is suggested to measure the efficacy of regional trainings and the ideal training implementation timeline.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Cooperative Extension Service, known to some as the world's largest nonformal educational program and to others the "grassroots" organization, gains its strength and reputation from the staffing structure (Rasmussen, 1989). The Cooperative Extension System (CES) was born out of the land-grant universities, which were recognized by the federal Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, and formally established via the Smith-Lever Act in 1914 to connect the local people to the research and resources of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the land-grant institutions. Staffing was designed to place local "experts" within reach of the clientele in counties across the nation with more than 60 percent of CES professionals located in county placements. The scope of the organization's mission, subject-expertise, and clientele has broadened and expanded over the years. Continuing with its informal educational methods, today Extension works to improve the lives and communities of individuals around the globe. Extension is a publically-funded, education network that addresses local needs with the research and resources of the land-grant universities. It utilizes scientific knowledge to solve issues with practical education, relies on the organization of programming by county agents and educators and provides service to any person without discrimination (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997). For example a local county agent might implement an urban gardening program in a low income, food impoverished neighborhood or a workshop on new technologies in weed management for farmers.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (AgriLife Extension), an agency of the Texas A&M University System and part of the Cooperative Extension Service, was established in 1915. Today AgriLife Extension operates offices in 250 counties to serve all 254 counties in Texas. Roughly 25 million teaching contacts are made annually via the statewide network of specialists, trained volunteers, and county agents (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, 2016). At the heart of this network are the 575 county extension agents – the boots on the ground – who help both identify needs and deliver programs within their counties to address those needs (J. Ripley, personal communication, April 10, 2017). County agent positions are distributed by county and classified by a program area. Program areas are the content areas or subject matter departments that should encompass the majority of their role responsibilities and programs. The most common program areas in AgriLife Extension are Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR), Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS), 4-H Youth Development (4-H), Horticulture (HORT), and Integrated Pest Management (IPM). To achieve its mission and meet annual goals, it is essential that the agency recruit, train, and retain effective county Extension agents.

### **Statement of the Problem**

More than half of the Extension personnel are in county positions and the majority of direct teaching contacts come from the responsibilities of those individuals. Therefore, priority must be placed on hiring, training, and retaining the best individuals for those jobs. AgriLife Extension's current turnover rate is 10% - 12% (S. Cummings, personal communication, July 19, 2017). Turnover is financially costly to the

organization and potentially damages reputation and relationships within the county. Extension is funded via a unique partnership between federal, state, and local legislation. Fewer vacancies and better efficiency in the hiring and retaining of Extension personnel means a more effective use of money provided by these various public funding sources.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the reasons individuals choose positions as county Extension agents, why they stay with AgriLife Extension as an employer, and what might cause them to leave their position with AgriLife Extension. In addition, this study was used to determine what county Extension agents wish they knew before taking their job as a county Extension agent and whether onboarding practices should change to instruction of certain topics at regional rather than state-wide trainings.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research is applicable to both the faculty and staff of the Cooperative Extension Organization, particularly AgriLife Extension, as well as prospective or interested individuals pursuing a position as a county agent or educator. The administrative team for AgriLife Extension would benefit from the research and information gathered. Benefits would be notable to the unit of Organizational Development which includes the employee development and agent onboarding personnel. As understanding grows regarding the reasons why people choose and remain in jobs with the organization, efforts in how a county agent position is marketed and recruited for can adjust to be more efficient in attracting the best fit employee.

Furthermore, as regional trainings are considered, better methods for educating the new hires on their upcoming roles are expected using the conclusions formed from this study.

### **Definition of the Terms**

The following definitions have been provided for the understanding of this study.

*Cooperative Extension Service:* Publically funded, national education agency created by the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 to extend the knowledge gained by research being done by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the land-grant universities (Seevers et al., 1997)

*County Extension Agent:* Professional who implements the work of the Cooperative Extension Service at the county level, including but not limited to: program development, volunteer management, record-keeping, evaluations, and reporting.

*Turnover:* The voluntary or involuntary vacancy of a position within an organization.

*Retention:* “Concerned with keeping or encouraging employees to remain in an organization for a maximum period of time” (Kossivi, Xu, & Kalgora, 2016).

*Onboarding:* The sum of all actions and efforts in hiring employees (Martin & Kaufman, 2013)

*Competencies:* Essential skills and characteristics needed for workplace success and personal satisfaction.

*Motivation:* “Desire to behave in ways leading to satisfaction and accomplishments” (Harder, Gouldthorpe, & Goodwin, 2015, p. 2).

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The literature regarding retention is vast. Literature is available in great quantities both within and outside of the context of Extension. Studies have been performed relating retention in Extension to items such as community size, county funding, individual and organizational factors, but it is impossible to generalize the majority of the studies performed due to the large scope and approach of the national Cooperative Extension Service and the unique size and reach of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (AgriLife Extension).

In 2008, Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, and Eberly wrote, “from a managerial perspective, the attraction and retention of high-quality employees is more important today than ever before.” This was said due to the globalization, accelerating rate of technological advancements, and other trends that are requiring business environments to “acquire and retain human capital” (p. 232). The importance of human capital is no new concept, especially in the world of Extension. The importance of the staff is iterated in Extension literature. Rasmussen wrote in 1989 of the Extension personnel being considered in his mind among the “unsung heroes of the nation” (Rasmussen, 1989, p. 3). In 1966, Sanders et al. wrote about the many roles the county Extension agents have had to hold from, “itinerant teacher, to organizer, to educator, to highly trained technician, social action catalyst, or change agent,” expressing the great responsibility that is placed upon the position and therefore the individual (p. 391). Even since the creation of the organization the people were a priority, not only those who were served

as clientele but the employees as well. Dr. Seaman Knapp, credited by many as the father of Extension, believed that an agent's value was not in what the agent could do, but in what the agent could get others to do. Through this Knapp expressed the importance of the agent as a respected and influential role model in the community and organization (Seevers, et al., 1997).

The retention of competent and committed county agents continues to be a topic of discussion nationwide. Retention was identified as a critical human resource challenge by the leadership advisory council of the Extension Committee on Policy (2005). For over a decade now studies have been conducted to determine organizational and individual factors affecting employee retention in Extension. For example, Feldhues and Tanner published a study evaluating the impact of county funding on retention rates for Extension educators (2017). They discovered that retention was most stable in counties with greater than or equal to six dollars or more in per capita funding. On the other hand, turnover was greatest in counties with less than two dollars per capita funding (Feldhues & Tanner, 2017). Insufficient or unstable funds affecting job retention supports the motivation-hygiene theory of Frederick Herzberg. Herzberg's theory states that there are two levels of job-attitude factors: motivating and hygiene. Motivating factors impact job satisfaction and, quite simply, are motivators. These include items such as achievement, recognition, and promotion opportunities. Hygiene, or maintenance, factors affect job dissatisfaction and include factors of the environment or context of the job which would include funding or the policies in place (Herzberg, 1966). Retention of county agents has also been studied in comparison to community

size where the agent is employed. Potentiality for retention issues were indicated in what were defined as the “most rural (under 10,000) and most urban (over 100,000)” communities (Young & Jones, 2015).

The competencies needed by the county Extension agent have been identified, categorized, and studied in a variety of ways. Competencies are studied in relation to retention and turnover because it is expected that competent agents, relying on their knowledge, skills, and abilities, are more satisfied in their positions and likely to remain longer if unaffected by dissatisfaction factors. Creating training on the necessary competencies of successful county agents likely increases the new hires’ job readiness. Cooper and Graham performed a study of what competencies county agents needed in comparison to the supervisors of county agents (2001). The authors wrote the following in their conclusion: “While shifts of competencies were found, Arkansas agents believe that strong work ethic and character traits such as being fair, honest, and trustworthy will bring the most success for agents of the future. People skills, credibility, and earning peer/clientele respect will always bring success to our changing organization,” further proving the priority placed on people within this organization (Cooper & Graham, 2001).

Almost a decade later a national Delphi study was performed on the competencies needed for county Extension agents in the year 2015 (Harder, Place, & Scheer, 2010). Nineteen core competencies were identified as being a model for a qualified entry-level Extension educator. These competencies included self-management, program planning, teaching skills, problem-solving, and oral and written



communication skills (Harder et al., 2010). Bengé, Harder, and Carter performed a study of what county Extension agents perceived as necessary competencies upon entering the Extension field (2011). The most important pre-entry competencies as perceived by the current county agents in the study were self-management, program development process, communication skills, and interpersonal skills. The authors suggest any discrepancy between the two indicates the “need for increased communication between Extension agents and Extension administration” (Harder et al., 2010, p. 6).

Though no national statistics in Extension retention are known, growth in retention rates are met with great financial benefits. Another aspect of retention is the training of agents once they are hired as part of the onboarding process. An article published by Harder, Hodges, and Zelaya presents a method of calculation for the return on investment (ROI) of an Extension onboarding program. This is accomplished by assigning a numerical value and weight to the change in competency levels from pre- and post-evaluations administered to the cohort of new employees in a new hire training. Such methods help articulate the ROI of onboarding (Harder, Hodges, & Zelaya, 2016). Maximizing the ROI by “accomplishing a balanced approach to quality and cost calls for innovative educational solutions” (Harder, Zelaya, & Roberts, 2016). Some Extension programs have answered that call by switching to a blended use of face-to-face and online learning components for onboarding. Unfortunately, the study’s results evaluating the perceptions of the blended approach were not positive. The respondents found some of the online components to be boring, redundant, or not applicable. They also shared

that it was noticeable that the instructors had no previous experience in blended learning methods. The authors collected details to help address the issues. They believe more positive results would have been gathered had better attention been paid to andragogy theory and communication and connections increased between the face-to-face and online sessions (Harder et al., 2016).

Teaching competencies in onboarding is a constant theme throughout the literature but attention should be paid to the time frame during the entire onboarding process in which content is incorporated. Brodeur, Higgins, Galindo-Gonzalez, Craig, and Haile found that county agents considered different skills and competencies to be the most important after one month, six months, one year, eighteen months, and three years of being hired (2011). They also found that it was important to define the competencies being discussed. The example was given that “networking” has a different meaning in the first month of hire versus after eighteen months of being hired (Brodeur et al., 2011, p.11). In addition to time, if competency modeling is to be used it is important to align the competencies used in the academic Extension education preparation of county agents and the human resource management model. One student found that though overall many similarities in competencies for knowledge, skills, and abilities exist, some discrepancies suggest that a few important competencies, such as knowledge of Extension, flexibility and change, management and supervision, and customer service, are underrepresented in the academic preparation of Extension professionals (Scheer, Cochran, Harder, & Place, 2011).

The researcher is speculating that due to few other Extension programs being comparable in size and scope to that of AgriLife Extension no literature is found regarding the value of regionally hosted training in lieu of only offering statewide trainings as a part of onboarding programs.

Even with the job satisfaction and motivation research and the onboarding and training that occurs to prepare employees for positions, turnover is still a costly problem for practically all business. Literature suggests turnover is highest among new employees. Johnson and Senge wrote an article that cited a study of 800 enterprises in the United States that indicated 90% of new employees make the decision of whether or not to stay with an organization in the first six months (2010). The costs incurred by the organization because of turnover are huge and more than just financial. Safrit and Owen identify some results of turnover as, “disrupted educational programs, unmet citizen needs, low morale among remaining Extension professionals, and wasted financial and material resources” which were used in the agent’s onboarding and in-service training (2010, p. 2). These items harm the reputation of the Cooperative Extension Service of the state. Even if the vacancy is filled quickly, the time needed to acclimate the new hire to the role is “costly to the relationships needed for successful programming and maintaining positive relationships with stakeholders” (Martin & Kaufman, 2013). Great variety is seen in the numbers published as the cost of turnover, mostly due to what direct and indirect costs are considered in contributing to the overall cost of the vacancy and filling of the position, but the range includes estimated costs of six months of an employee’s pay and benefits to 150% of a salary (Fitz-Enz, 2009; Strong & Harder,

2009). For these reasons it is important to continue the study and practice of research on efficient and effective recruitment, onboarding, and retention practices.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Multiple theories are used as the framework, relying on the expanse of literature that precedes this study. R.E.T.A.I.N.S. conceptual model for retaining county professionals by Safrit and Owen was created in response to a content analysis and exhaustive literature review related to employee retention and employee turnover (2010). The acronym stands for seven identified themes that resulted from the use of an analytical matrix and the constant comparative method to condense the data for retaining county program professionals. The seven themes and their operational definitions as provided by the authors are seen in Table 1.

Table 1

*Operational Definitions for the Seven Themes/Components Comprising the R.E.T.A.I.N.S Conceptual Model*

<u>Model Component</u>	<u>Operational Definition</u>
Recruit authentically	Communicating to prospective employees the job’s professional responsibilities as well as critical aspects of the total organization’s and specific workplace’s cultures critical to success in the position.
Expand on new employees’ experiences and abilities	Hiring employees who have substantial overlap between their personal needs, interests and goals and those of the total organization and immediate workplace

Table 1 Continued

<u>Model Component</u>	<u>Operational Definition</u>
Train, train, train	Providing moral support and material resources for the continuous professional education (CPE) of the newly-hired employee so s/he may meet and exceed basic professional competencies (i.e. knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations) needed to ensure professional success
Advocate for both the employee and the position	Ensuring that both the employee and his/her position grow and evolve together as the organization's mission/vision and employee's needs/goals evolve
Inspire in, invest in, and empower employees	Dedicating time and energies to best understand the needs of each individual employee and then developing and sustaining a workplace environment within which s/he thrives and succeeds
Nurture connectivity among employees	Building strategic linkages between people and people, ideas and ideas, and people and ideas so as to strengthen each employee's internal and external workplace environments
Show appreciation through effective recognition	Using appropriate intrinsic and/or extrinsic resources to effectively communicate appreciation to each employee for workplace excellence

The second theory used to guide the study is job embeddedness theory. Job embeddedness theory includes three critical aspects or dimensions that influence employee retention: links, fit, and sacrifice. Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez define the dimensions as follows:

*Links:* Informal or formal connections between a person and institutions or other people. The extent to which people have links to other people or activities.

*Fit*: An employee's perceived compatibility or comfort with an organization and with his or her environment. The extent to which their jobs and communities are similar to or fit with the other aspects in their life spaces.

*Sacrifice*: The perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that may be forfeited by leaving a job. The ease with which links can be broken--what they would give up if they left, especially if they had to physically move to other cities or homes (2001).

Job embeddedness theory is a popular choice among Extension literature for retention analysis but rarely explicitly states the value of recruitment in obtaining excellent hires for the position, which is why slight preference is given to the R.E.T.A.I.N.S. model to guide the study. Both the conceptual model of R.E.T.A.I.N.S. and job embeddedness theory were created from a broad collection of influences and review of the literature on employee retention.

No argument is being made against Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory and the researcher would be remiss to not mention the role it plays as the foundation of a great amount of retention information. A two-factor theory seems rather elementary for the variety of influences on an individual's career today. If agreed upon by literature that professionals are driven more by motivating factors than by hygiene or maintenance factors as Herzberg's theory suggests, more attention should be paid to how those motivating factors play out in a role as an Extension county professional and defining and naming factors as such. Nevertheless, the motivation-hygiene theory should also be mentioned as included in the framing of this study when considering the factors why

individuals decide to remain in a position or leave. Herzberg explains that a lack of satisfaction is not equivalent to dissatisfaction and vice versa. Instead a list of factors called motivators contributes to an individual's satisfaction and a list of factors named hygiene factors contributes to one's dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1966).

CHAPTER III  
PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES, AND METHODS

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the reasons individuals choose positions as county Extension agents, why they stay with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (AgriLife Extension) as an employer, and what might cause them to leave their position with AgriLife Extension. In addition, this study was used to determine what county Extension agents wish they knew before taking their job as a county Extension agent and whether onboarding practices should change to instruction of certain topics at regional rather than state-wide trainings. The final purpose of this study is used to address a gap in the literature in terms of hosting regional versus state-wide onboarding trainings in the Cooperative Extension System.

**Research Objectives**

The five research objectives guiding the study included:

1. Why do people choose jobs as county Extension agents with AgriLife Extension?
2. Why do county agents remain in their position with AgriLife Extension?
3. What would cause current county agents to leave their profession with AgriLife Extension?
4. What do current AgriLife Extension county agents wish they had known before accepting their position?



5. Should certain onboarding training topics be taught at a regional rather than state-wide training? If so, which topics?

### **Research Methods**

This study utilizes pre-existing, mixed methods data that was collected for the agency to evaluate retention and onboarding practices. The data was recorded in a de-identified manner. Identities remained anonymous to the researcher. This study was reviewed and declared exempt by the Institutional Review Board in accordance to Texas A&M University's Human Subject Research requirements (IRB2017-0558M). The IRB Outcome Notification is included in Appendix A.

### **Population and Sample**

The target population for the study includes all county agents employed by AgriLife Extension with fewer than 15 years of experience. Fifteen years was chosen as the cutoff point to allow comparisons to be made between those who recently made AgriLife Extension their employer and those who have made a career out of their work without including those whose knowledge of onboarding and training was too outdated. A census survey was used as the sampling approach to enable all aspects of the population to be studied and because it is a favorable method for seeing the descriptive statistics of a population (Johnson & Christensen, 2010).

### **Instrument and Data Collection**

To gather data, a survey instrument was developed in Qualtrics as part of a classroom project to study retention in the agency. This instrument consisted of 32

response questions with both quantitative and qualitative data collected. A copy of the survey questions is included in Appendix B. Qualitative data was collected in the form of open-ended response questions. Quantitative data was collected by means of ranking, select all that apply, multiple choice, and Likert-type questions. The team creating the survey consisted of an AgriLife Extension county agent, working professionals, and full-time graduate students. Response options were selected for the study based upon the anecdotal knowledge of team members and the experience of the county Extension agent rather than being based on the literature. Due to time constraints imposed by the academic semester, the survey was not pilot tested but instead reviewed by Extension administration for content. Included in the survey were demographic questions to allow for further segmentation of the data. The survey was distributed to 406 county Extension agents via an email signed by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Associate Director for County Operations. The survey was sent on March 13 and remained open until April 3, with two reminders sent on March 20 and March 27, respectively.

Survey data was pulled from Qualtrics and available for analysis on April 5, 2017. A total of 197 participants opened the survey, with 188 of those completing the survey, thus achieving a 46% response rate.

### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously as part of the survey. The results were analyzed and then merged to address the research objectives of the study to make this a basic convergent mixed methods study. Mixed methods data

allows for the strengths of quantitative and qualitative data to be combined for a more complete understanding of the research questions. (Merriam, 2009). The quantitative data was collected multiple choice, select all that apply, and ranking questions. Because the survey was sent as a census to all agents, inferential statistics were not appropriate. Therefore, descriptive statistics such as frequencies are reported in the data analysis.

Qualitative data was collected in the form of open-ended questions. This data was analyzed using the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss as discussed in Merriam (1967; 2009). Thus, coding of raw data formed the construction of categories that are relevant to the objectives of the study to be reviewed.

Literature suggests new hires decide whether or not to stay in a position within 6 months and supports that newest hires have the highest turnover (Johnson & Senges, 2010). Anecdotally, it is believed by some top-level administration in AgriLife Extension that if an agent stays with the organization for two years their likelihood of voluntary turnover decreases significantly. In 2013, 70.49% of turnover in county agents was seen in those with five years or less service while 47.5% was seen in those with two years or less service (D. Dromgoole, personal communication, September 27, 2017) Therefore comparisons were made between those with 0-2 years of experience, 3-5 years of experience, and greater than 5 years of experience to see if responses differ in relation to the number of years an agent has been with the organization. Data was also segmented according to program area to allow for inferences to be made if differences are present amongst the program areas. The program area of the county agent is crucial to the

organization. An agent's program area assignment affects the overall operations of the county agent position due to differences in content and clientele.

The qualitative data was sorted before analysis by program area and years of continuous service. Responses were coded by program area as follows: 4-H Youth Development (4H), Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR), Health (H), Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS), Integrated Pest Management (IPM), Better Living for Texans and Nutrition Education Program (BLT), Horticulture (HO), Marine (M), and Other (O). Years of continuous service in the organization were assigned a symbol and coded as follows: 0-2 years of service (\*), 3-5 years of service (<), 6-10 years of service (>), 10-15 years of service (+). Each response was coded according to program area and years of continuous service and numbered to give it an identifying name throughout the analysis (i.e. 4H1\*, FCS14<).

### **Study Limitations & Bias**

With a response rate of 46%, nonresponse bias is possible. This bias is accounted for by comparing early and late respondents and no notable differences were found. Because part of the methods is qualitative, researcher bias is a potential threat due to the researcher's prior exposure to the Extension agency and desire to work for the agency. Researcher bias was accounted for by utilizing critical reflection via reflexivity as well as triangulation between the qualitative and quantitative data. Theoretical triangulation was incorporated to help guide the interpretations and explanations of the data. Audit trails (Appendix C) and qualitative analysis notes for open coding and axial

coding were kept and peer debriefing occurred to improve trustworthiness (Merriam, 2009).

CHAPTER IV  
RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The demographics of the survey respondents are seen in Table 2.

Table 2

*Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents*

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	119	63.3%
Male	69	36.7%
<b>Age</b>		
20-25	22	11.7%
26-30	31	16.5%
31-35	28	14.9%
36-40	19	10.1%
41-45	25	13.3%
46-50	29	19%
51-55	20	10.6%
56-60	14	7.4%
<b>Education</b>		
Bachelor's Degree	56	29.8%
Master's Degree	126	67%
Doctoral Degree	5	2.7%
Professional Degree	1	0.5%

Prior to analysis, responses were coded and numbered so that during analysis the responses were identified by program area and years of continuous service as a county Extension agent. Responses were coded by program area using the following abbreviations: 4-H Youth Development (4H), Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR), Health (H), Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS), Integrated Pest Management (IPM),

Better Living for Texans and Nutrition Education Program (BLT), Horticulture (HO), Marine (M), and Other (O). Years of continuous service in the organization were assigned a symbol and coded as follows: 0-2 years of service (\*), 3-5 years of service (<), 6-10 years of service (>), 10-15 years of service (+). Each response was coded according to program area and years of continuous service and numbered to give it a distinguishing name throughout the analysis (i.e. 4H1\*, FCS14<). The coding assignments are seen in Table 3. The frequency counts for each category are seen in Table 4.

Table 3

*Coding Assignments for Qualitative Responses*

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Code</u>
Program Area	
4-H Youth Development	4H
Agriculture/Natural Resources	ANR
BLT/NEP	BLT
Family and Consumer Sciences	FCS
Health	H
Horticulture	HO
IPM	IPM
Marine	M
Other	O
Years of Service	
0-2	*
3-5	<
6-10	>
11-15	+

Table 4

*Program Area and Years of Service of AgriLife Extension County Agents*

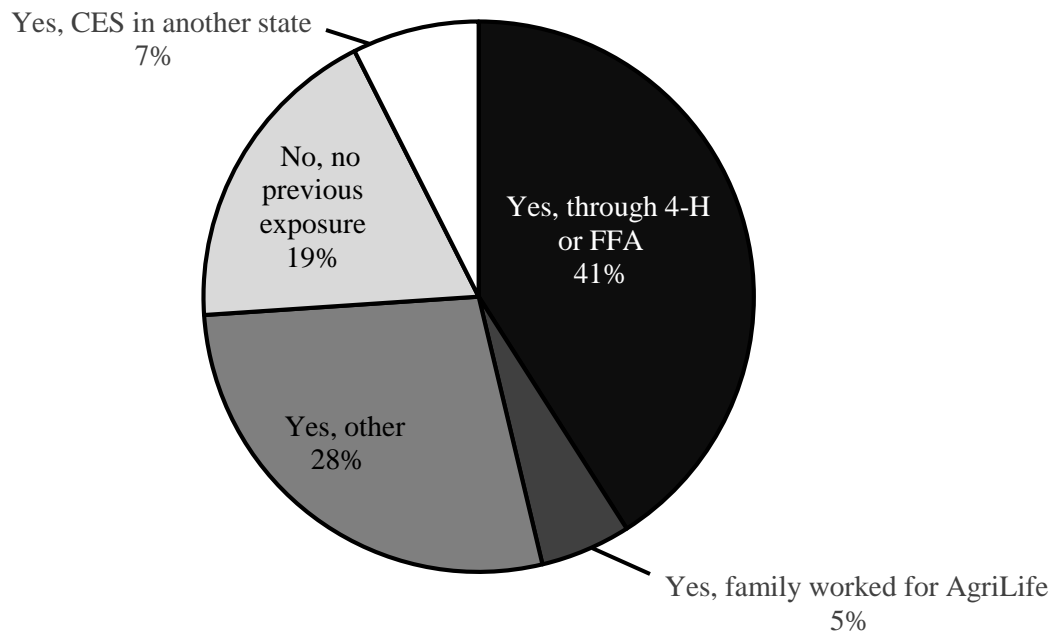
<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
<b>Program Area</b>		
4-H Youth Development	25	13.3%
Agriculture/Natural Resources	66	35.1
BLT/NEP	4	2.1%
Family and Consumer Sciences	61	32.4%
Health	4	2.1%
Horticulture	13	6.9%
IPM	5	2.7%
Marine	2	1.1%
Other	8	4.3%
<b>Years of Service</b>		
0-2	68	36.2%
3-5	51	27.1%
6-10	43	22.9%
11-15	26	13.8%

**Objective One**

*Research Objective 1: Why do people choose jobs as county Extension agents with AgriLife Extension?*

When considering why people choose jobs with an organization, their exposure or knowledge could be telling of their relationship with the organization. The question was asked in the survey, “Did you engage with AgriLife Extension prior to beginning the application process to work as a county Extension agent?” The response is seen in Figure 1.





*Figure 1.* Engagement with AgriLife Extension prior to choosing to work for AgriLife Extension. This figure shows the ways current county Extension agents engaged with AgriLife Extension before being hired.

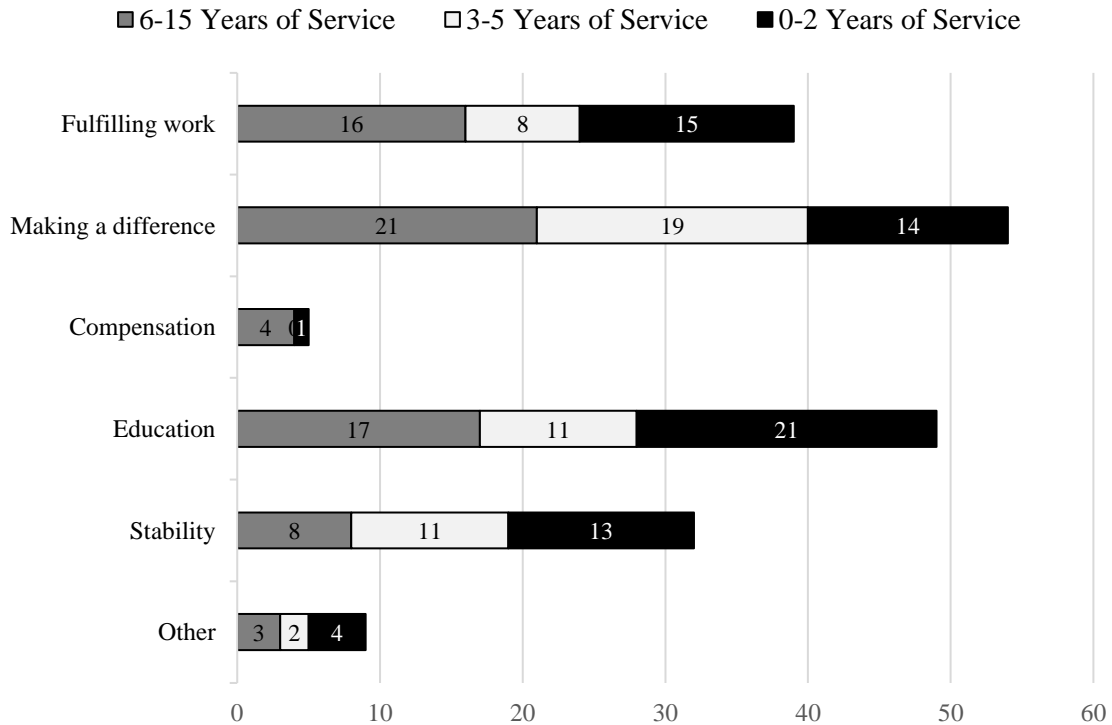
The majority (81%) of current AgriLife Extension county agents had some previous exposure with the Cooperative Extension System. Of the 19% who had no previous exposure, 66% have been serving with AgriLife Extension for five years or less. When considering the relatively large number of responses that indicated “other,” qualitative analysis of the open-ended option revealed certain themes. First, some responses could be sorted into pre-existing categories or a combination of pre-existing categories. The majority of the “other” responses created a theme of student or previous employment. This theme included responses of those who had held an internship, student worker position, graduate assistantship, or other employment such as county

support staff or program assistant with AgriLife Extension. The other theme that emerged was adult involvement, indicating they interacted with 4-H or FFA as a former educator, volunteer, or parent.

In order to address why individuals choose a job as a county agent, the survey asked respondents to rank eight factors in order of importance in terms of their career. These eight factors were: job stability, opportunities for promotion or advancement, job location, the people I work with, compensation, job duties, work/life balance. For the total response, “job stability” and “work/life balance” were most frequently ranked in the top two positions. These were the same for all the categories of years of service, but those with 0-2 years of service more frequently ranked “work/life balance” in the first position, whereas those with more than two years of service more frequently ranked “stability” in the first position.

To address and compare the decision factors for a job as a county agent the respondents were similarly asked to rank five factors in order of their influence when deciding to take a job with AgriLife Extension. The five factors were: variety in work, making a difference in my community, compensation, flexibility in work location, and mentor said I would be good at this job. “Variety in work” and “making a difference in my community” were ranked most frequently in the top two positions, among the 0-2 ( $n=68$ ), 3-5 ( $n=51$ ), and 6-15 ( $n=69$ ) years of service. “Mentor said I would be good at this job” was the factor ranked least important by each of the years of service groups.

In a separate question, the respondents were asked to select which factor was most important in their decision to work for AgriLife Extension. The responses can be seen in Figure 2.



*Figure 2.* Important factors in choosing to work for AgriLife Extension. This figure shows the factors according to years of service. Education = Aligned with educational pursuits. Stability = Working for an organization that offered stability.

Figure 2 shows that the top three choices were “making a difference,” “aligned with educational pursuits,” and “fulfilling work.” The newest educators, with 0-2 years of service, believed a position that aligned well with their educational pursuits was the most important when making their decision to work for AgriLife Extension. Those with three

years of service or more chose “making a difference.” “Compensation” was selected the least amount of times and only five times total by all respondents. Of the responses marked “other,” four of the nine listed location (M1>, FCS16>, FCS1>, 4H13<) as the most important factor.

## Objective Two

*Research Objective 2: Why do county agents remain in their position with AgriLife Extension?*

When considering why county agents remain in their position with AgriLife Extension, the survey asked the respondents to indicate what they enjoy most about their job and what aspect of their role brings the most personal satisfaction. These responses are seen in Table 5.

Table 5

*Enjoyment and Personal Satisfaction Aspects of the Role of County Extension Agent*

Enjoyment		Personal Satisfaction	
<u>Role Aspect</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Role Aspect</u>	<u>n</u>
Variety in job duties – no two days are the same	71	Working with people in the community	96
Working with people in the community	63	Variety in job duties – no two days are the same	37
Setting my own schedule	33	Giving back to the community	32
Giving back to the community	10	Setting my own schedule	18
Other	5	Other	3
Working with my co-workers	3	Working with my co-workers	1
The stability of the organization	3	Compensation	1

Extension agents selected “variety in job duties – no two days are the same” (37.8%), “working with people in the community” (33.5%), and “setting my own schedule” (17.6%) as the top three things they enjoy most about their job. When asked what aspect of their role brought the most personal satisfaction the entire sample of agents ( $n=188$ ) responded with “working with people in the community” (51.1%), “variety of job duties – no two days the same” (19.7%), and “giving back to the community” (17%). Though those are reflected in all the categories the order changes for those serving for 3-5 years ( $n=51$ ): working with people in the community (47.1%), giving back to the community (23.5%), and the third position is tied between variety of work – not two days the same and setting my own schedule (13.7%).

In the analysis of the open-ended question “if you left Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and came back,[...] what made you return” some major themes evolved as to why agents chose to remain in their positions. This happened because many answered the question regardless of whether or not they have left. Thirty-seven survey respondents answered this question. The researcher believes nineteen of those responses came from individuals who have left AgriLife Extension and the other eighteen were respondents giving reasons why they might leave and return as well as what is keeping them in their position. For example, response O7< said, “It is the relationships with my fellow CEAs that keeps me here. If it were not for the relationships I have built with my colleagues across the district and state and the fact that I have day to day flexibility in my schedule, I would be long gone.” From this response, one is introduced to the two largest themes of the four that emerged in analysis of these responses: relationships and autonomy. The

other themes that surfaced as to why agents returned to their position were enjoyment and compensation.

Relationships was the largest theme that emerged from analysis. Some simply said they, “missed the people in Extension” (ANR3\*) while the majority were able to be divided into the sub-constructs of internal and external relationships. The smaller construct was internal relationships which included relationships with colleagues and superiors (ANR37<). One respondent shared, “I would return because AgriLife is like one big family. Everyone supports each other” (FCS18\*).

The larger construct of external relationships included mention of relationships with clientele (4H6<), community members (ANR4\*), agricultural people (ANR63+), and communities as a whole (ANR11\*, HO6>, FCS26<). The interaction, connection, service, and giving back involved with these external relationships provided a strong enough case for many to either return to their work as a county agent after leaving or to not plan on leaving in the first place.

The second largest theme that emerged was autonomy. They like “being autonomous and self-directed” (HO6>). County Extension agents shared that the flexibility in their schedule or the ability to “work without being micromanaged” (ANR37<) was enough to make them choose to return or remain in their positions. For example this theme included the statements, “for the flexible scheduling in work hours” (4H17<) and “having the flexibility of setting my schedule” (FCS57<). Others shared, “I may come back because of the flexible work week schedule” (ANR46\*) or “Hour flexibility and benefits would be my reasons to return” (ANR23\*).

When asked if they have left Extension and why they returned many took the opportunity to express their general enjoyment and love for the position. Some simply shared they “enjoyed the work” (FCS59>) while another exclaimed, “I have always loved it” (FCS51>). One shared they came back because they find “the nuts and bolts of Extension work to be very fulfilling” (ANR62<). From these responses the theme of enjoyment and fulfillment was created.

The smallest theme that emerged was compensation. All but one of these responses belonged to individuals who had left Extension and returned to the position and gave compensation as the reasoning. For example, 4H4> said, “I came back because of compensation” and ANR59+ said, “I returned because of compensation.” The individual, FCS9<, that gave reasons why they would leave and would come back said, “I would come back because of benefits.”

### **Objective Three**

*Research Objective 3: What would cause current county agents to leave their profession with AgriLife Extension?*

Analysis of three survey questions was used to address the question, what would cause current Extension agents to leave their position as a county Extension agent. The qualitative data resulted in great insight because though the question asked, if you left AgriLife Extension why did you leave, many answered the question regardless of whether or not they have left. Thirty-seven respondents total answered this question

leaving responses such as, “I have not left Texas A&M AgriLife, but am currently considering it” (FCS31\*) or “I have been considering it for some time” (O7<).

Four major themes arose from the qualitative analysis. These themes were work/life balance, compensation, climate, and opportunity. Family and time combined to form the largest theme of work/life balance. Some quoted “life circumstances” (FCS57<), “the time it took” (ANR3\*), or “family comes first” (ANR11\*) as reasons to leave. Family business, the family ranch, and family obligations and priorities all support the theme that work/life balance could be a main reason many leave AgriLife Extension (4H4>, ANR62<, 4H13<, FCS18\*). The “extensive hours” (ANR46\*) that are put in result in “pulling away from my family too much” (FCS31\*).

Additionally, relocations for family reasons have caused or could cause voluntary termination with AgriLife Extension. Marriages resulting in relocation and moves to be closer to family or due to family relocation formed a sub-construct within the theme of work/life balance. Interestingly the entire sub-construct of family relocation and not having an employment opportunity with Extension where they moved were all shared by agents in the program area of Family and Consumer Sciences.

Work/life balance often blurred lines with compensation as many mentioned the hours they worked and position responsibilities in comparison with the money they were and are paid (ANR16+, O4\*, FCS61<). That being said, the second theme of compensation evolved on its own from the voice of the responses. The theme was formed from agents of all program areas and years of service. They shared they left “for



compensation” (ANR8>), “more compensation” (ANR23\*), “for a better paying salary” (4H17<), or “to make more money” (FCS51>).

The next theme created from the voice of the surveys was climate. Climate included constructs of lack of support and office conflict. “Lack of connection and support related to program leaders” (4H6<), “lack of support from those above CEAs” (ANR66\*), and “because of not having DEA support” (ANR27\*) were all responses given as reasons why agents have left or would leave. Additionally, O7< shared, “I do not feel my DEA has adequate support to keep positions filled, they seem to always be putting out fires and have very little time to invest in the CEAs that choose to stay.” One respondent gave the lack of support from their supervisor and a state specialist in resolving a problem in the county as the reason they left the organization (HO6<). O6\* threatened to leave, “if a toxic, incompetent leader was allow[ed] to stay and sabotage the efforts [of] Extension agents [...]” This lack of hierarchal support and how the different levels of the hierarchy interact affects the climate of an organization as do the office interactions. “Office politics” (FCS26<) and “dealing with conflict within the office” (O4\*) were reasons survey respondents gave for leaving AgriLife Extension. It should be noted that the majority of this theme was seen in those with five years or less of continuous service in the organization.

The smallest theme that emerged from the qualitative analysis was that of opportunity. This came naturally as one response said, “I left simply because an opportunity presented itself” (ANR37<). Another shared that they “thought the ‘grass

was greener’ on the other side” (FCS20<). Finally, ANR37< pursued an opportunity out of Extension “to prove to myself that I could do something outside of Extension work.”

A ranking question and select all that apply were also used to address the third research objective. When asked to rank a least of reasons why they would consider leaving AgriLife Extension, “compensation” and “work/life balance” were most frequently ranked in the top two positions as most likely reasons to leave. “Compensation” was placed in one of the top two spots 78.8% of the time while “work/life balance” was ranked as the first or second most likely to leave reason on 49% of the surveys.

AgriLife Extension does not collect formal exit interviews, therefore current county agents were asked to select all the reasons they have heard others give as reasons for leaving. “Compensation” and “work/life balance” continued to surface as the top two reasons. “Compensation” was selected by 85.6% of the agents and “work/life balance” 60%. This was reflected in all the categories of years of service and program areas. The entire breakdown of responses is shown in Table 6.

Table 6

*Reasons Other County Agents Have Given as to Why They Have Left AgriLife Extension*

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<u>Reason</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Compensation	161	85.6%
Work/life balance	113	60.1%

Table 6 Continued

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Challenges working with county stakeholders	56	29.8%
Changes in job duties	48	25.5%
Lack of opportunities for promotion	47	25%
Other	46	24.5%
Work is no longer challenging	4	2.1%

As seen in Table 6, other is selected as response 46 times. These open-ended responses were analyzed and the two main themes noticed were climate and job demands. As mentioned before, climate includes coworker and supervisor relationships (FCS5<, ANR20\*). A lack of administrative support and challenges with hierarchal relationships (4H12\*, ANR6+, ANR26<, HO10>, O6\*, 4H6<) are suggested as the cause for positions as county agents to be left.

Job demands emerged from the surveys as a new theme. Many responses noted a large amount of reporting and documentation (ANR24\*, ANR41<, ANR62<, FCS21<, IPM5<, O5>). Outside of documentation, high job demands were mentioned. One shared the inability to focus on a single program area (FCS36>). Others labeled the reasons others have left as “unrealistic demands” (ANR22+) or “work overload” (FCS44+).

## **Objective Four**

*Research Objective 4: What do current AgriLife Extension county agents wish they had known before accepting their position?*

In order to best prepare newly hired county agents for success and retention in their position, the researcher looked at what current agents wish they knew before accepting their position. To accomplish this a ranking question, select all that apply, and some open-ended response questions were used to suggest what surprised them the most about their position, what they felt like new agents do not know, and if and how their academic or Extension training prepared them for their role.

County agents were asked to rank the following seven aspects of their job duties in order of what most surprised them about their position: hours, travel, paperwork, communication, working with clientele, working with fellow CEAs, and other. All years of service categories ranked “paperwork” and “hours” most frequently as the top two aspects of their job that surprised them the most.

A list of twenty-three skills and knowledge items with an option of “other” was listed and survey respondents were asked to select all they felt were lacking in new county Extension agents. The top five most selected skills are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

*Skills and Knowledge Items Lacking in New County Extension Agents*

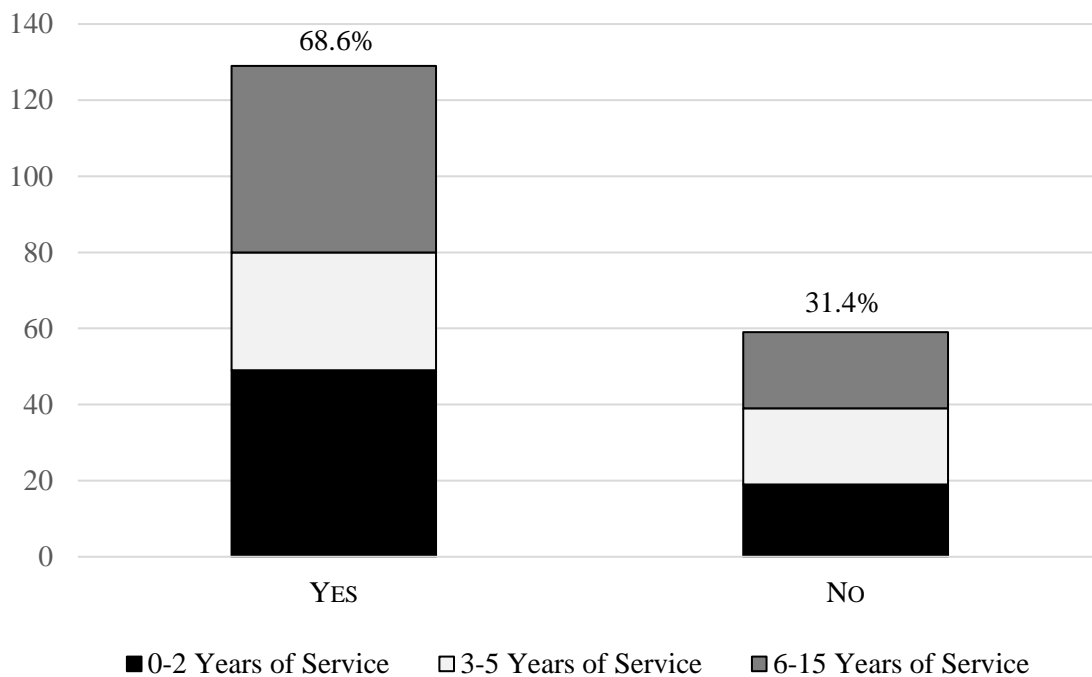
<u>Years of Service</u>	<u>Ranking of Items Selected (1<sup>st</sup> = Most Frequently)</u>				
	<u>1<sup>st</sup></u>	<u>2<sup>nd</sup></u>	<u>3<sup>rd</sup></u>	<u>4<sup>th</sup></u>	<u>5<sup>th</sup></u>
0-15	Developing Programs Effectively	Time Management	Effective Teaching & Facilitation	Volunteer Management	Committee Management/ Building Community Partnerships*
0-2	Accountability & TexasData	Developing Programs Effectively	Interpretation & Summary Reports	Issue Identification	Committee Management
3-5	Time Management	Volunteer Management	Developing Programs Effectively/ Effective Teaching & Facilitation*	Committee Management/ Interpretation & Summary Reports*	
6-15	Effective Teaching & Facilitation	Time Management	Developing Programs Effectively & Professional Appearance & Behavior*	Volunteer Management & Building Community Partnerships*	

*Note.* An \* denotes ties in frequency counts. Skills and knowledge items differing from the top five shared in 0-15 years of service are highlighted in gray.

Developing programs effectively, time management, effective teaching and facilitation, volunteer management, committee management, and building community partnerships were the most frequently selected items overall. The greatest variation from those selected was seen in the 0-2 years of service category. Those with 0-2 years of service identified accountability and TexasData, interpretation and summary reports, and issue

identification among the top five lacking skills in new county agents. The longest serving agents added professional appearance and behavior to the list.

The survey asked county agents if their academic training had prepared them for their role as an agent. They were to select “yes” or “no.” An open-ended question followed asking, “why or why not.” The breakdown of their responses by years of service is seen in Figure 4. Their responses by program area are displayed in Table 8.



*Figure 3.* Did your academic training prepare you for a role as a county Extension agent? This figure demonstrates the response of the county agents broken down by the continuous years of service with AgriLife Extension by the county agent.

Table 8

*Did your Academic Training Prepare you for a Role as a County Extension Agent?*

<u>Program Area</u>	<b>No</b>		<b>Yes</b>	
	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
4H	13	52%	12	48%
ANR	19	28.8%	47	71.2%
H	0	0%	4	100%
HO	4	30.8%	9	69.2%
FCS	19	31.2%	42	68.8%
BLT	0	0%	4	100%
IPM	1	20%	4	80%
M	0	0%	2	100%
O	3	37.5%	5	62.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>31.4%</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>68.6%</b>

When analyzing the open-ended response question, the responses were first divided into the reasons why academic training prepared them for the county agent role and reasons why not. From there, analysis occurred and themes emerged. The majority of respondents (68.6%) said that their academic training prepared them for their role as a county Extension agent. The largest theme that surfaced from the responses was education. Other themes included skills and techniques, subject matter, and work experience.

Education starts broadly as a theme with responses like, “coursework was applicable” (FCS42>), “I’m actually using my degrees in my job” (ANR16+), “appropriate courses” (ANR51\*), and “degree prepared me for my role as a CEA” (FCS15\*). Sub-constructs also emerged. The largest sub-construct, which was formal or teacher education, was made of a majority of Family and Consumer Sciences agents. This construct believed that their academic training prepared them well for a role as a county agent due to their educational experience in teaching. Education courses in teaching and lesson planning as well as teaching experience are all suggest as reasons why they felt prepared for an Extension job through their education. FCS48> said, “My background in education helped me understand how to teach people of all ages effectively.” Another response said, “Having previously taught, I was already familiar with lesson planning, which is similar to program development, as well as facilitation and teaching strategies” (ANR17). One Family and Consumer Sciences agent shared that their bachelor’s in education prepared them for “behavior management, appropriate/safe interaction[s] with youth, [and] curriculum development” (FCS17>).

A second sub-construct developed from education as an Extension focus or concentration. For example, many agents felt they were prepared for their role as a county agent via their academics because they had either taken courses in or focused in Extension during their academic schooling. Some selected their “graduate degree based on Extension work” (FCS19+) planning on a career in Extension (FCS59>) and choosing degrees “specifically designed to work in Extension” (FCS37<). Those who had the opportunity to be “taught by people that were affiliated or have worked with



Extension employees” (ANR37<) or “had Extension employees present to [their] classes” (ANR3\*) felt as though their academic training prepared them.

Still operating under the theme of education were those who credited their feeling prepared from academic training to their agriculture degree. This created an agriculture sub-construct under education. All responses but one in this group belonged to Agriculture and Natural Resource agents. These agents said their “broad based agriculture degree” (ANR59+) was “very useful in having an understanding of many key areas” (ANR54\*), and allowed them to feel “very well prepared” (4H13<). One respondent believes that “a degree in agriculture production is critical to be a CEA” (ANR66\*).

The smallest sub-constructs evolved out of education are graduate school and diversification. A handful of responses credited their graduate school degrees as academic preparation to be a county Extension agent. Others credited their “well-rounded” (FCS35\*, ANR27\*) academic backgrounds and “diversified” (ANR6+) academics as helping them prepare academically for a job in Extension.

The next theme that emerged from why their academic training prepared them for a role as an agent was skills and knowledge. All years of service and program areas are represented throughout these responses. In this theme, agents identified certain skills or knowledge items they grew from their academic training and helped prepare them for their position. The sub-constructs of skills and knowledge were: people skills, program development, communication skills, and research and access to resources.

Those identifying people skills said that their academic training “taught me effective people management skills” (FCS52>), “prepared me to work with clientele [*sic*] and the community” (4H3>), or “learned to work with people...people skills are a must in Extension” (FCS29<). A county agent that classified as “other” shared: “By completing my education, I feel confident that I would be able to serve in any role necessary to complete the job. Specifically, my education has very little to do with my role as a CEA, it is my attitude and my aptitude to work with people that has prepared me the most” (O7<).

Knowledge and skills in program development were mentioned as being gained through academic training. This included “working with grants and partnerships” (ANR38<), “planning, implementation, and evaluation” (FCS11<), “how to effectively market [a] program” (FCS43+), and administration courses helping with staff management and budgeting (BLT2\*).

Academic training also prepared agents with communication skills and research skills. “Professionalism and communication” (BLT4<) and “basic knowledge and communication skills” (ANR45\*) supported the sub-construct of communication skills. Research sub-construct emerged from comments such as, “I learned how to research items and find answers through numerous sources” (ANR33>). Another shared, “I have the knowledge base to find the information I need to succeed at this job” (IPM4>) or similarly, academic training prepared a county agent for the job because they said they know, “where to find answers to questions” (ANR48\*).

The third theme that emerged from the responses was that of subject matter. A large group of agents felt as though their academic training prepared them for the position by providing subject matter expertise. This allows agents to “facilitate with confidence the subject matter” they manage (O6\*). “Subject matter expertise” (ANR9>, HO6>), “subject matter degree” (HO13\*), the degree field matching the principles of the role (O3\*), and the target of their degree plan helps agents feel as though they are a perfect fit as an agent (FCS56<). This subject matter prepared county Extension agents for their role as it “was essential to answering the questions” from clientele (HO10>) and helps agents “understand all the questions that are brought” to them and “address them from a scientific point of view” (ANR36\*).

Lastly, though these responses all stated that their academic training prepared them for their role a theme emerged from those who still gave larger credit to work experience. Agents said work experience was the “best teacher in preparing” agents for this role (ANR24\*) because “academic training only teaches you how to learn” but “you can never stop” (IPM5<). Work experience was classified in sub-constructs of previous work experience and on-the-job work experience. Work experience came about from comments such as, “my industry background was a greater influence” (HO4<) and many mentioned internships (4H20\*, FCS40+, HO11+). On-the-job experience was important to a handful of agents with less than five years of service. One horticulture agent said, “there are some things in Extension that have to be learned through experience” (HO9\*). Another agent shared, “much of the role of an Extension agent must be learned within the job” (ANR64<).

The opposite side of the question was analyzed looking at themes that emerged from county Extension agents that did not believe their academic training prepared them for the role. All four of the same themes emerged: subject matter, education, work experience, and knowledge and skills.

Those that gave education as a reason why they felt their academic training did not prepare them shared reasons such as “I was not sure what I wanted to do” (4H15+). A sub-construct of degree option emerged because many listed what they majored in or what they did not major in as the reason why they did not feel prepared for the role. For example, “did not major in education” (4H17<), “I had no agriculture academics” (O1\*), “I studied outside of agriculture” (ANR52\*), “my educational background is not in ag or consumer sciences” (FCS8\*), and “my degree is in fashion merchandising” (FCS26<) were all reasons shared in the survey. Education can also be divided into a sub-construct of formal, teaching education like before but this time as reasons why academics did not prepare agents. Some with education backgrounds shared, “early childhood education and adult education is very different” (4H1\*) and “AgriLife is different than teaching in a school setting” (FCS12<). Interestingly, all the respondents but one in the education theme have less than five years of experience serving with AgriLife Extension.

Subject matter formed as a theme for why academics did not prepare county Extension agents for their roles. Subject matter emerged because the agents shared that their academic training was “too specialized” (FCS13+) for their role and therefore provided “subject matter expertise but [...] little to no knowledge useful in working” (ANR58>) and “almost prepared [...] more for a specialist position” (ANR23\*).

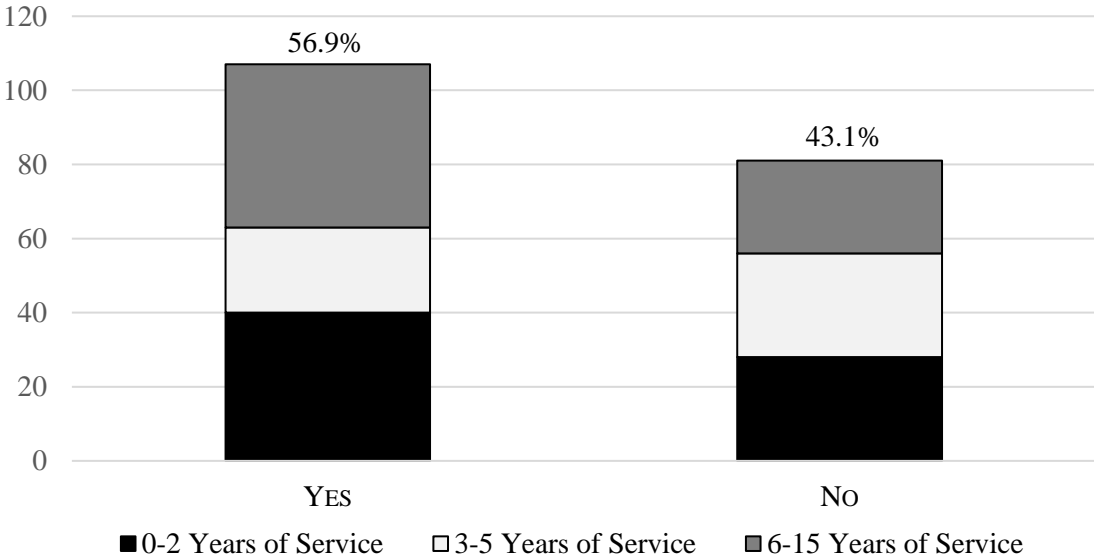
Similarly, subject matter arose as a theme because the role of the agent is too broad and wears “too many hats” (ANR42+). Agents shared that there are “too many variable and pieces” (ANR63+) and “I really don’t think one degree can prepare you for the many hats you wear as a CEA” (FCS34>).

Knowledge and skills arose as a theme for why academic training did not prepare agents for their roles. This came from the number of identified topics that agents shared were lacking in their degree plans that were needed to be successful as an agent such as: problem solving skills, people skills, and operations knowledge. An Agriculture and Natural Resource agent said that, “a degree should have some sort of conflict solving class attached to it” (ANR11\*). Agents described their degree as “not relevant to day to day operations” (FCS60<) because more time is spent “managing people or teaching people how to manage people” (ANR46\*) or “dealing with elected officials, working with clientele or developing community partnerships and relevant programs” (4H11+). As shared by this group of responses, academics did nothing to prepare the agents for those things.

The final theme that developed from the voices of the responses was work experience. Agents shared that “real-life lessons are learned not taught” (4H6<), “academic training is all theoretical” (FCS51>), or “a lot of things are taught better in the field than in a classroom” (ANR56\*). One Horticulture agent said, “A lot of the knowledge needed comes from the experience, not college classes” (HO5>). One agent mentioned a desire for more internships, “to really show interested youth what Extension agents do” (ANR10>). When asked why their academic training did not prepare them for

their role as an Extension agent, the desire for experience over academics formed the final theme of the data analysis because agents shared statements like, “Nothing could prepare you to be a county agent. It is something you just have to do and learn as you go” (O5>).

Similarly, the survey asked whether their AgriLife Extension training prepared them for their role as a county agent. The response was given in a “yes” or “no” selection as before and then a follow-up question of “why or why not” was asked. The responses are shared according to years of service in Figure 4 and according to program area in Table 9.



*Figure 4.* Did your AgriLife Extension training prepare you for a role as a county Extension agent? This figure demonstrates the response of the county agents broken down by the continuous years of service with AgriLife Extension by the county agent.

Table 9

*Did your AgriLife Extension Training Prepare you for a Role as a County Extension Agent?*

<u>Program Area</u>	<b>No</b>		<b>Yes</b>	
	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
4H	14	56%	11	44%
ANR	27	40.9%	39	59.1%
H	2	50%	2	50%
HO	5	38.5%	8	61.5%
FCS	20	32.8%	41	67.2%
BLT	2	50%	2	50%
IPM	1	20%	4	80%
M	2	100%	0	0%
O	5	62.5%	3	37.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>43.1%</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>56.9%</b>

Qualitative analysis resulted in themes of responses as to why and why not AgriLife Extension training either prepared or did not prepare agents for their positions. Over half of the survey respondents (56.9%) state that AgriLife Extension training prepared them for their role. Of those who answered yes, their reasoning resulted in themes of relationships and support, training, Extension knowledge, and experience.

AgriLife Extension training was identified as helpful in preparing county agents for their positions by provided relationships and support through networking

opportunities, mentors, and the assistant agent position and program. Extension training “allowed me to interact with agents across the state and realize there is a network here to help” (FCS2\*), one agent shared. Agents liked the opportunity to learn from “experienced agents” (ANR8>) or “spend time with my Program Director” (BLT1\*). Quality time with experienced agents and mentors is stated to be the “most beneficial” (4H15+, FCS28+) because some parts of the training may change, but “many aspects of training have come from mentors” (HO12+). New and experienced county agents shared the value of the Assistant Agent experience (ANR25\*, ANR12\*, ANR63+).

Training emerged as a theme in accordance with responses such as, “training was very well presented” (ANR28\*), “it was great” (ANR24\*), “training has helped” (FCS56<), and “I was able to learn things in training that I was unaware of” (FCS41\*). Within training sub-constructs emerged including: suggested topics and structure. Even from those who said that AgriLife Extension training helped them prepare for their role, a lengthy list of suggestion topics for future consideration was generated from these responses. These topics came from comments such as, “needed more on program development and teaching, conflict management, etc.” (ANR65>) or “I don’t know that I had a basic understanding of how to organize volunteers” (FCS33>). One agent suggested multiple online training for new agents to share a better big picture and suggest topics of: “TexasData, county reports, AgriLife annual reports, travel requests, county budgets, etc...” (ANR11\*). A few agents made comments about the amount of material to learn such as, “training was helpful but a lot at once” (FCS30>), “it was too broad” (FCS40+), and “there’s a lot to understand” (H1\*). A focus on smaller, regional



or local trainings was mentioned in a few responses. One agent said, “the regional training was more helpful” (FCS4\*), while another agent suggested a “need to do Extension training in smaller groups” (HO6<) due to the diversity in the different counties.

Extension knowledge evolved as a theme from mostly those who have been serving for five years or less. Extension knowledge was gained at training and helpful in terms of the county agent position roles and responsibilities, the overall Texas A&M AgriLife System, and logistics and operations. One survey responded, “I came from another state Extension service” (FCS26<) so AgriLife Extension training was the opportunity to learn how Texas operates. Agent position roles, responsibilities, and expectations were gained through Extension training (ANR50+, BLT4<, FCS54\*). It shared that the training also prepared them for their roles by giving them a change to understand their day to day roles better (ANR35\*, ANR31\*). A few agents mentioned the training “taught me how to get started” (FCS43+).

Even if they believed the AgriLife Extension training prepared them for their position, a large portion still acknowledged experience both on-on-the-job and prior to employment as what helps prepare individuals the most. One agent said, “my training prepared me well, but it just takes about a year to get some things figured out” (FCS6>). Another agent said that some things “took several years to understand” (FCS9<). Therefore, learning and adapting is important. For example, FCS10+ said, “Training helped me to prepare, but every day is a different day and not much can help you prepare for that, it is a part of learning and adapting.”

When analyzing the responses for why the AgriLife Extension training did not prepare county Extension agents for their role the same themes emerged: relationships, training, and experience. Just like the other qualitative themes experience emerged encompassing both on-the-job experience and previous work experience. This time work experience was being given as the reason why AgriLife Extension training did not prepare county agents. Instead county agents said, “Most training comes through trial by fire, do it and if it’s not right do it again” (ANR1<) or “because every day is different and every county is different this job is ‘on the job’ training” (ANR13<). On-the-job experience helps some county agents the best with their role (H3\*). Sometimes trainings are “too much information that you don’t know what to do with, [therefore the] best training is just getting in there and getting involved” (4H21+).

Mentors emerged as a theme in why Extension training wasn’t helpful. The responses indicated it was due to a mentor not being “helpful in preparing” agents (BLT3\*), needing more time with a mentor (ANR16+), or no mentor being assigned to a new county agent (ANR26<). Additionally, one response indicated a mentor was assigned but on the way out of the organization so not providing the best mentor experience (4H24<).

The largest theme that emerged was training – the structure, surprises, and suggested topics, are each sub-constructs within the larger theme. Some of the overall comments made about why Extension training did not prepare county agents for their position within this theme are: “What training?” (FCS60<) “It was more intimidating than helpful,” (FCS4\*) “I don’t think any amount of training would prepare,” (FCS11<)

and “too minimal with low expectations” (IPM5<). The training was considered not realistic or not applicable by a number of survey responses. For example ANR47> described it as “unrealistic goals and can’t simulate all the problems that one has to battle through.” Along the same lines, 4H12\* says, “did not cover aspects of what is involved in working in my county, each county is unique.” Comments such as “real world topics not covered” (FCS1>), “not relevant to my position” (BLT2\*), and “most was a waste of time” (M1>) all suggest that the training is not applicable to all county agents. This is especially the case if program area information is shared or left out. Program areas were mentioned as one commented that, “4-H is too much information and has too many rules. It’s overwhelming” (FCS32\*). Another suggested there be more specifics for the agents of each program area (FCS46<).

The topics of the training and how it’s implemented are two big aspects of the structure of the training. HO9\* requested a need for more hands-on interaction and less PowerPoint presentations. Trainings were requested in “how to effectively and efficiently build a team of volunteers” (FCS31\*), “what to report, how to fill out reports, how to develop a work plan that’s not overloaded with tasks, and how to manage time. All those answers seem to vary depending on who you talk to” (FCS13+). Some felt that training addressed reporting too much and needed more attention paid to programming (M2<). In a similar fashion, HO7> says, “Employee training should focus on supporting and teaching the employee in practical aspects of how to perform their job effectively, then secondarily you can train them on what administrators want. Administrators have focused too much on what they want from employees (reports and expectations), and not

enough on building an effective agency and supporting its employees that are doing all the work around the state.” 4H4> says that the training is “very paperwork oriented and relationship skills are what is needed.” Paperwork proved to be a big shock to a few at Extension training. Some agents shared the following: “was not prepared for the long hours and paperwork involved” (FCS47>), “I was unprepared for the amount of stress, hours, and the amount of paperwork” (4H3>), and “didn’t realize the amount of paperwork that would come with the job” (ANR41).

The time period that all the topics are taught and training upon is very important. Some mentioned there was simply, “not enough time to learn everything” (ANR7\*). Many mentioned they went to training after they had been in their position for “several months” (ANR17<) even and therefore had “already been thrown to the wolves” (ANR46\*, 4H16\*, ANR2<, 4H19<). This all being said, “there was very little appropriate training at odd times. This was not well organization, communication, or scheduled” (4H20\*). An Integrated Pest Management agent suggested, “all new agents should get a binder or guide with directions and examples that directly relate” to their programs as well as, “a calendar with what to look for being due each month for reporting” (IPM4>).

The trainings are described as “too vague” (4H12\*), “too much at once” (FCS12<), “not specific enough” (FCS39\*), “too broad” (IMP3\*), “so broad it is impossible to take it in all at once” (HO10>), and “too generalized and not in-depth enough to actually make you feel prepared” (4H5\*). Suggestions for addressing these issues surfaced in the responses as well and include, “more training in an office where it

would have been helpful to see what a full week is like” (FCS5<) and “have someone come to your county to work with a new CEA to build relationships and get committees set” (ANR32<).

### **Objective Five**

*Research Objective 5: Should certain onboarding training topics be taught at a regional rather than state-wide training. If so, which topics?*

As shared in the findings of objective four, the qualitative analysis of the responses regarding the Extension training provided great insights into the structure of current onboarding and training practices. In addition to those findings, to address research objective five, the researcher used two survey questions asking county agents to select whether each item in a predetermined list of topics should be taught at a regional or statewide delivered training. When looking at the entire pool of responses collected, regional trainings were the preferred method of delivery for all but four topics: Extension in the Land Grant System, Branding & Social Media, Career Ladder and Professional Development, and a perfect tie with 94 respondents choosing regional and 94 respondents choosing state – Working with Media. The results that differed from the majority when divided into years of service are seen in Table 10.

Table 10

*Should Extension Onboarding & Training be Delivered at the State or Regional Level?*

<u>Training Topic</u>	<u>0-15 Years</u>	<u>0-2 Years</u>	<u>3-5 Years</u>	<u>6-15 Years</u>
Professional Appearance and Behavior	Regional	State	Regional	Regional
Program Support (Funding & fee based programming)	Regional	Regional	State	Regional
Position Roles (CEA, Specialist, etc.)	Regional	Regional	Regional	State
Cash Management	Regional	Regional	Regional	State
Interpretation & Summary Reports	Regional	Regional	Regional	State
Conflict Management	Regional	Regional	Regional	State
Working with Media	Regional/State	State	State	Regional
Career Ladder & Professional Development	State	Regional	State	State

*Note.* Selections differing from the overall 0-15 years of service are highlighted in gray.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A mixed methods study was done utilizing pre-existing data collected from a survey to evaluate employee retention and the onboarding practices involved in the hiring and training of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (AgriLife Extension) county agents. Questions were selected from the survey to be analyzed to address the following research objectives: (1) why individuals choose jobs as a county Extension agent, (2) why Extensions agents remain in their position, (3) what might cause them to leave their position, (4) what did they wish they knew before accepting the position, and (5) should onboarding trainings happen at a regional or state level, and which topics should be included? For further study of the results, responses were often viewed and sorted by continuous years of service in the organization as well as the agent's primary program area assignment. This chapter contains the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for implementation and further research in regards to the analysis of this study. Results are aligned with previous literature and the frameworks of the study as appropriate.

#### **Objective One**

*Research Objective 1: Why do people choose jobs as county Extension agents with AgriLife Extension?*

Over 80% of current county Extension agents had previous exposure with AgriLife Extension before being hired. This engagement occurred most commonly

through former youth involvement in 4-H or FFA, but also via internships and previous employment, other state Extension agencies, or as an adult volunteer, parent, or Extension program participant.

The survey asked participants to rank eight factors in order of most important in terms of choosing a career. “Job stability” and “work/life balance” resulted as the top two factors most frequently ranked in the most important positions. Specifically looking at the decision to take the job, county agents were asked to rank factors in order of their influence when choosing to work for AgriLife Extension. The item selected as most important was “making a difference.” This was the top choice for all agents with three years of service or more but the second choice for the agents with 0-2 years of continuous service. New agents selected “work that aligned with my educational pursuits” as the most important decision factor when choosing to work for AgriLife Extension. “Fulfilling work,” which was selected by the 0-2 years of service second most frequently, was selected third most important overall.

## **Objective Two**

*Research Objective 2: Why do county agents remain in their position with AgriLife Extension?*

To address why agents remain in their positions with AgriLife Extension the researcher selected the questions from the survey about personal satisfaction and enjoyment. The top three things agents identified as enjoying most about their role are “variety in job duties – no two days are the same,” “working with people in the



community,” and “setting my own schedule.” The aspects of their position that bring the most personal satisfaction were selected. The top three responses include “working with people in the community,” “variety of job duties – no two days are the same,” and “giving back to the community.”

In the qualitative analysis of the question, “If you left Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and came back, why did you originally leave and what made you return,” insight was provided as to why county agents remain in their positions. In the answering of this question, some gave reasons for why they have considered leaving and what has kept them in their position regardless of whether or not they have actually left the organization for any period of time. Relationships, autonomy, enjoyment, and compensation were the four themes that emerged as reasons why county agents either remain, have returned, or would return to their position as a county Extension agent.

Relationships included internal relations with colleagues and superiors as well as external relationships with clientele and community members. Autonomy was developed from the many responses that share flexibility in schedule as a main reason to return or remain, as well as the ability to work without a being micro-managed. Voices also shared that their enjoyment or love for their position and Extension is a reason they do remain or have returned. Lastly, compensation was included as an answer to the question why people have returned to employment in Extension.

### **Objective Three**

*Research Objective 3: What would cause current county agents to leave their profession with AgriLife Extension?*

In the survey, current agents were asked to select all the reasons they have heard former agents give as reasons they have left and asked to rank a list of reasons why they would consider leaving AgriLife Extension. Compensation and work/life balance were top choices for both questions. Compensation and work/life balance were ranked in the top two positions as to why current agents would consider most frequently and were selected most often as reasons they have heard other agents give for leaving the organization.

The open-ended question, “If you have left Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and came back, why did you originally leave and what made you return,” provided great insight into objective three and supported the quantitative results. The major themes that emerged from the analysis were work/life balance, compensation, climate, and opportunity. Work/life balance includes the time the position takes and family issues, obligations, and relocations. The second largest theme was compensation. Though compensation includes more than just salary, many shared that a better paying salary or more money as the reason they have left or would consider leaving.

Climate encompasses the hierarchal structure of an organization and office interactions. Climate was named as a theme in regards to the number of responses that shared lack of support from superiors and office conflict as the reasons for considering

leaving. Lastly, other opportunities provide reasons for county Extension agents to vacate or consider the possibility of vacating their position with Extension.

#### **Objective Four**

*Research Objective 4: What do current AgriLife Extension county agents wish they had known before accepting their position?*

For objective four, the research incorporated the question over what surprised county agents the most as well as what skills were lacking in new county agents. When asked to rank seven aspects of the job that surprised them paperwork and hours most frequently occupied the top two positions. The top five skills identified as lacking most in new county agents include: developing programs, time management, effective teaching and facilitation, volunteer management, and committee management and building community partnerships, tied in the fifth position. The 0-2 years of service group selected three different skills to be in the top five. The top five skills lacking in new county agents by those with 0-2 years of service were accountability and TexasData, developing programs, interpretation and summary reports, issue identification, and committee management.

To address this research question the county agents' academic and Extension background were questioned. The survey asked if the county agent believed their academic training prepared them for a role as a county Extension agent and followed-up with an open-ended question asking why or why not. Similarly, the survey asked if their

Extension training prepared them for their position as a county Extension agent and followed-up with an open-ended question asking why or why not.

Nearly 69% of respondents say they believe their academic training prepared them. 4-H Youth Development was the only program area that the majority (52%) did not believe their academic training prepared them. The same themes emerged when discussing why or why not their academic training prepared them for their roles. These themes included: subject matter, education, work experience, and knowledge and skills.

Similarly when asked if their Extension training prepared them, almost 57% said yes. This time 4-H Youth Development agents and Marine agents both had majorities who believe Extension training did not prepare them for their role as a county agent. Better Living for Texas and Health agents were split half and half in their decision. Of the responses who said yes, the themes of relationships and support, training, Extension knowledge, and experience emerged from the open-ended question. The themes that emerged from the responses given saying Extension training did not prepare agents for their role included: relationships, training, and experience.

### **Objective Five**

*Research Objective 5: Should certain onboarding training topics be taught at a regional rather than state-wide training? If so, which topics?*

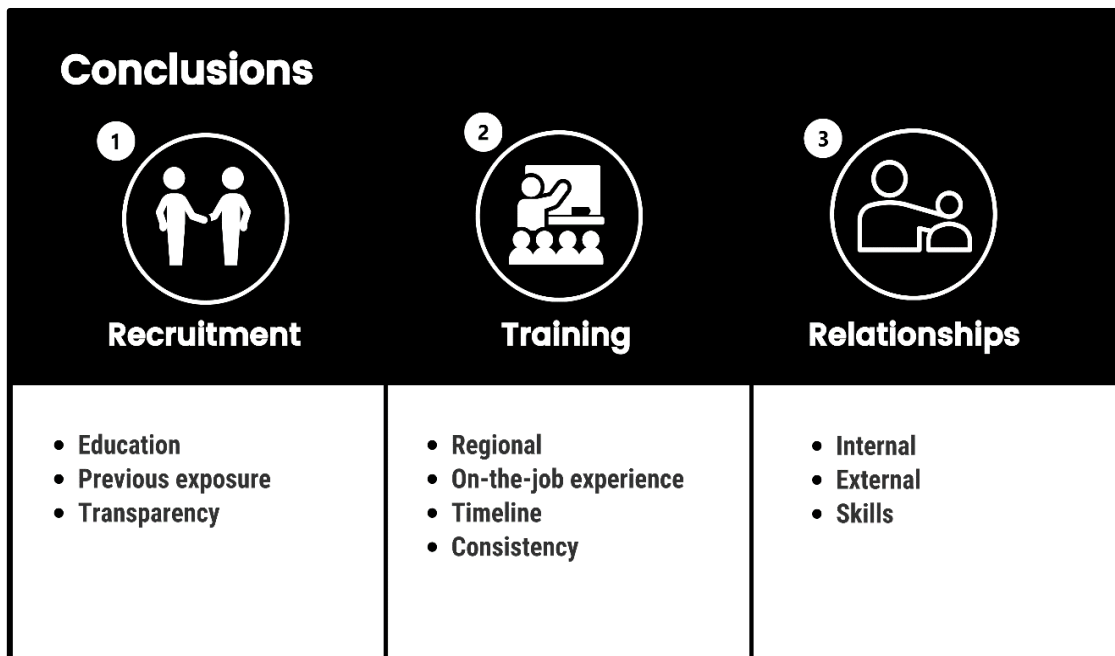
A list of training topics was provided in the survey asking if the topics should be taught at a regional or state administered training. Regional trainings were selected by the majority for all topics except for “Extension in the Land Grant System,” “Branding

and Social Media,” and “Career Ladder and Professional Development.” A tie occurred; “Working with the Media” was selected by half of the respondents to be administered at a regional training and half at state.

Discrepancies were seen from the majority when looking at the divisions by years of service. The newest serving agents selected “Professional Appearance and Behavior” to be administered at a state training and “Career Ladder and Professional Development” within regions. The longest serving agents with greater than six years of service selected “Program Support,” “Position Roles,” “Cash Management,” and “Interpretation and Summary Reports” to be administered at a state level training.

### **Conclusions & Recommendations**

From this evaluation, it is suggested that county agents consider stability and work/life balance most important when deciding upon a career. That being said, when deciding to work for AgriLife Extension, the ability to make a difference and have work that is aligned with their educational pursuits is considered of greatest importance. At the same time, work/life balance emerged as the largest theme in why county agents leave their positions and was supported by the quantitative analysis as well. While recognizing these mismatched values, the conclusions and recommendation seen in Figure 5 emerged. These conclusions and recommendations were formed from the implications of the study and the supporting theories and literature.



*Figure 5.* Conclusions and recommendations from the study. This figure illustrates the three categories of conclusions that emerged from the study and the recommendations fitting to each.

## Recruitment

**Recruitment.** Create a recruitment presence. AgriLife Extension could benefit from hiring a recruiter for the agency to focus on the recruitment of county Extension agents. Ideally, there would be a recruiter for each region or program area to concentrate efforts. Creating a recruitment presence could address the lack of support and climate issues identified by this study and alleviate some of the surprises of the position. If a recruiter was hired, some of the burden of filling vacancies could be lifted from District Extension Administrators, allowing them to focus more time on supporting current agents. Marketing for recruitment that included what an Extension county agent position

entails and the day-to-day life of an agent would address some of the surprises felt by newly hired agents.

**Previous exposure.** Utilize 4-H and FFA youth programs as targets in recruitment efforts. The majority of current agents had some sort of prior engagement with Extension before being hired. A large portion of the exposure occurred through youth involvement with 4-H and FFA. Internships and other student employment opportunities such as a graduate assistantship or student worker position were frequently mentioned in the “other” category. Youth and college career development programs such as job shadowing and internships should be maintained. Such exposure connects the individual to the organization creating a link as discussed in job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al., 2001)

**Education.** Use the variety of degree options to the organization’s benefit to recruit individuals with personal goals and interests overlapping with Extension. No one academic degree serves as a best fit for preparing Extension county agents. Some may suggest a degree in education or general agriculture. Degrees offering a variety of courses, including people management, research, program development skills, and administrative knowledge could be useful. Programs with an Extension focus or the opportunity to take courses from instructors with former or current Extension appointments might be a wise choice in preparation for a county agent position. Degree programs with subject matter for a specific program area could be suitable for areas other than 4-H.

The newest Extension agents selected “working for an organization aligned with my educational pursuits” as the most important factor when making a decision to work for AgriLife Extension. Safrit and Owen included “expand on new employees’ experiences and abilities” as part of their conceptual model for retention (2010). Being able to show that a variety of degrees may be utilized in AgriLife Extension may help in the recruitment of individuals whose personal goals and interests overlap well with the agency.

**Transparency.** Make sure expectations and requirements for paperwork and hours are included early. In both qualitative and quantitative results, paperwork and hours were listed as the biggest surprises to county Extension agents. With work/life balance considered as the top reason why agents may leave their position, Extension does not want to be surprising their employees with such items. Making sure expectations and requirements are communicated early in the recruitment or hiring process helps efforts in authentic recruitment (Safrit & Owen, 2010).

## **Training**

Training is crucial to the success of the Cooperative Extension Service as the context in which it performs its service is always changing. Training provides moral support, material resources, and grows basic competencies for job success (Mitchell et al., 2001). Though the majority of the survey responders did indicate their Extension training prepared them for their role, much analysis time was spent on the topic and theme of training.



**Regional trainings.** Host regional trainings. Survey responses indicated that regional trainings were the preferred method of delivery for the vast majority of training topics. The total survey responses suggested the following four topics be delivered via state level trainings: Extension in the Land Grant System, Branding & Social Media, Career Ladder and Professional Development, and Working with Media. The newest employees with 0-2 years of services indicated a desire for the Professional Appearance and Behavior to be administered at the state level as well.

**On-the-job experience.** Encourage internships and incorporate on-the-job experience, such as agent shadowing, into the onboarding process. Work experience and the irreplaceable value of it continually emerged as a theme during qualitative analysis. Creating opportunities for more internships, shadowing, and assistant agent positions would allow for on-the-job and previous work experience to be gained, which many within the study suggested was beneficial. Incorporating county agent shadowing or a similar on-the-job experience within onboarding training could help introduce the new hire to the day to day life in Extension.

**Timeline.** Pay attention to when trainings are incorporated and choose a timeline of trainings with purpose and intention for efficiency. Qualitative analysis suggests that many felt the timing was inappropriate for their current working situations. Continuing training opportunities and implementing them at more intentional times helps address other themes identified as areas of concern as well. Creative implementation of training timeline helps improve professional development opportunities, prevent trainings being too much information to gain at once, and if done

regionally as suggested, allow more face-to-face time with those around them to build relationships and interact with various layers of the hierarchy and regional colleagues.

**Consistency.** Establish consistency among training across the state. In the qualitative analysis, it was interesting to find voices in the data alluding to never having been trained or re-trained after moving to a new county. Each county is unique and attention must be paid to training for efficiency in the county of the job assignment, but consistency in training requirements, expectations, and opportunities are needed at the state level so that county Extension agents have equal access to opportunities.

## **Relationships**

Relationships emerged as the largest themes in the qualitative analysis of why agents return to or remain in their position as well as why they felt Extension training prepared them well for their role as a county agent. According to job embeddedness theory, relationship could be identified as a sacrifice. This is a benefit of the position that would be lost if the position was left, which encourages retention (Mitchell et al., 2001). Alternatively, relationships can be hurtful and cause conflict or result in feeling a lack of support. Therefore, relationships also emerged as a theme in why people have left their position with AgriLife Extension. Positive interaction among employees of all levels of the hierarchy should be nurtured to encourage employee retention and commitment to the position (Safrit & Owen, 2010).

**Internal.** Encourage consistent mentor relationships between county agents and offer networking opportunities. Internal relationships include those with others

employed by AgriLife Extension. Internal relationships build an employee's links to the position as regarded in job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al., 2001). Mentor relationships and networking opportunities were among the sub-constructs of why Extension training prepared agents for their roles as county agents. Practicing consistency and enhancing mentoring relationships for new hires is suggested to build positive internal relationships. Networking opportunities could be included or built into events where Extension agents from various counties will be present to encourage internal relationships between colleagues working in various locations.

Collect formal exit interviews. The data collected from this survey provided great insight into the reasonings for turnover and retention of county Extension agents. AgriLife Extension could benefit from establishing procedures for administering a formal exit interview to all voluntary leaves from the agency.

**External.** Encourage positive working relationships with the community and provide adequate resources and training for interacting with the community. Working with the community was noted as the top choice by respondents when asked what brings them the most personal satisfaction and within the top three factors of their job that bring them the most enjoyment. It is suggested that these relationships often bring about feelings of fulfillment and enjoyment as they allow agents to serve and give back to the community. These factors can affect the agents' perceived compatibility with their environment and address how they see they "fit" with the organization and position (Mitchell et al., 2001).

**Skills.** Offer regular training in conflict resolution, creating and encouraging open dialogue, leadership, and committee management. Look for these qualities and skills in potential recruits. Relationships have been identified in this survey as one of the largest themes encompassing why people stay with Extension and included as a theme for why people leave Extension. Skills involving people and volunteer management emerged in the qualitative analysis of the survey responses. Therefore it is suggested that training in conflict resolution, creating and encouraging open dialogue, leadership, committee management and other people skills be emphasized. It could also be suggested that these are important abilities and qualities to look for in a potential recruit or new hire for a county agent position.

### **Future Research**

Future research is recommended to complement and add to the findings of this study.

1. Create a data collection instrument to address the research objectives, rather than utilizing pre-existing data. Attention to previous literature should be a part of the instrument creation process. This evaluation could be replicated with attention paid to county population and size or academic degree of the county agent for segmentation of the data.
2. Research should be conducted to determine the most efficient training implementation timeline. This study would help determine which topics should be trained on and when for county Extension agents.

3. As technology assisted learning expands, more research on blended approaches to Extension onboarding and professional development opportunities should be considered. Blended or online training can allow for more flexibility and cost efficiency in delivery.
4. Research should be done on the efficacy of regional versus statewide delivery of trainings if implemented.

### **Final Thoughts**

Being a county Extension agent is about service and people. Seevers et al., writes, “the ultimate value that guides Extension work is the belief in the development of people” (1997). The Cooperative Extension Service was founded to provide a service directly to community people. In order for the county agents to have a full focus on serving others the organization must emphasize taking care of and selecting well fit employees. Efforts should be made to recruit authentically, encourage experience, train intentionally, nurture relationships, and genuinely support its people, but the realization must be made at the end of the day that if the person does not have the aptitude and selfless nature necessary to serve others, the efforts of the organization will be in vain.

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## APPENDIX A

### IRB AND PERMISSION TO USE DOCUMENTATION

DIVISION OF RESEARCH



**EXEMPTION DETERMINATION**

August 11, 2017

Type of Review:	Submission Response for Initial Review Submission Form
Title:	An Evaluation of Retention Factors and Onboarding Practices of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Employees
Investigator:	Scott Cummings
IRB ID:	IRB2017-0558M
Reference Number:	062033
Funding:	N/A
Documents Reviewed:	IRB Application Version 1.1 Mears Thesis Proposal Letter of approval to use the data Survey questions
Special Determinations:	N/A
Risk Level of Study:	Not Greater than Minimal Risk under 45 CFR 46 / 21 CFR 56

Dear Scott Cummings:

The HRPP determined on 08/11/2017 that this research meets the criteria for Exemption in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b) under category Category 4: Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded in a de-identified manner..

Your exemption is good for five (5) years from the Approval Start Date. At that time, you must contact the IRB with your intent to close the study request a new determination.


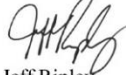
If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Administrative Office at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636.

Sincerely,  
IRB Administration

750 Agronomy Road, Suite 2701  
1186 TAMU  
College Station, TX 77843-1186  
Tel. 979.458.1467 Fax. 979.862.3176  
<http://rcb.tamu.edu>

*Figure 6.* IRB exemption determination. This figure shows a copy of the IRB exemption decision.

## PERMISSION TO USE DATA

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR	
August 8, 2017	
<b><u>MEMORANDUM</u></b>	
TO: Dr. Scott Cummings	
SUBJECT: Retention Study Data	
This letter provides approval for Grace Mears to use the AgriLife Extension Retention study data for her thesis. Please let me know if you need any additional information.	
Sincerely,	
	
Jeff Ripley Associate Director, County Operations	
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service 600 John Kimbrough Blvd., Ste. 509   College Station, Texas 77843-7101 Tel. 979.845.7896   AgriLifeExtension.tamu.edu	
<i>Texas A&amp;M AgriLife Extension is an equal opportunity employer and program provider. The Texas A&amp;M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating</i>	

*Figure 7.* Permission to use data. This figure shows a copy of the letter from AgriLife Extension allowing use of data for the study.

## APPENDIX B

### A COPY OF THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

# Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Employee Retention Survey

---

#### Start of Block: Part 1: Classroom Retention Evaluation

Q1 Thank you for your time in responding to this survey, which will provide data on factors influencing the retention of County Extension Agents who work for the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (AgriLife Extension). Information gained from this evaluation may provide insights on current selection and on-boarding practices and lead to possible adjustments to these practices. Being respectful of your time, we have intentionally designed this survey to be completed in under 15 minutes. **All responses will remain anonymous.** Should you experience technical difficulties with this survey, please contact Scott Cummings at 979-847-9388 or s-cummings@tamu.edu.

---

Q2 Please rank from 1 to 5, with 1 being **most important**, how important were the following in terms of their influence on your decision to take a job with AgriLife Extension? (Drag the items to the ranking you desire.)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Variety in work (1)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Making a difference in my community (2)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Compensation (3)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Flexibility in work location (4)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Mentor said I would be good at this job (5)
-

Q3 What was most important to you in choosing to work for AgriLife Extension?

- Fulfilling work (1)
  - Making a difference (2)
  - Compensation (3)
  - Work that aligned with my educational pursuits (4)
  - Working for an organization that offered stability (5)
  - Other: (6) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q4 Did you engage with AgriLife Extension prior to beginning the application process to work as a County Extension Agent?

- Yes, I interacted with county extension agents when I was in 4-H or FFA. (1)
- Yes, I had family members who had worked for AgriLife Extension. (2)
- Yes, I interacted with AgriLife Extension in other ways. Please provide how: (3)
- No, I did not have previous exposure to AgriLife Extension. (4)
- I had previous exposure to the Cooperative Extension Service in another state. (5)

Q5 What do you enjoy most about your job?

- Working with people in the community (1)
- Variety in job duties - no two days are the same (2)
- Giving back to the community (3)
- Working with my co-workers (4)
- The stability of the organization (5)
- Setting my own schedule (6)
- Other: (7) \_\_\_\_\_

Q6 What aspect of your role as a County Extension Agent brings you the most personal satisfaction?

- Compensation (1)
- Working with people in my community (2)
- The stability of the organization (3)
- Setting my own schedule (4)
- Giving back to the community (5)
- Variety of job duties - no two days are the same (6)
- Other: (7) \_\_\_\_\_






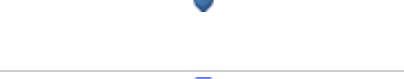

Q7 From 1 to 8, with 1 being **most important**, rank how important the following are to you in terms of your career? (Drag the items to the ranking you desire.)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Job stability (1)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Opportunities for promotion or advancement (2)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Job location (3)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ The people I work with (4)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Compensation (5)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Job duties (6)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Work/life balance (7)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Other: (8)
- 

Q8 Which of the following have you heard other County Extension Agent's give as reasons for leaving AgriLife Extension? Please select all that apply.

- Lack of opportunities for promotion within AgriLife Extension (1)
- Compensation (can make more outside the organization) (2)
- Work/life balance (3)
- Work is no longer challenging (4)
- Challenges working with county stakeholders (5)
- Changes in job duties (6)
- Other: (7) \_\_\_\_\_

Q9 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

I receive appropriate recognition for my efforts. (1)	
I feel valued for my contribution as a CEA. (2)	
I receive adequate support from my superiors to enhance my programming efforts. (3)	
AgriLife Extension provides adequate opportunities for promotion. (4)	
My current job duties are an appropriate use of my knowledge, skills, and abilities. (5)	
I have an adequate work/life balance. (6)	
My experience as a County Extension Agent has met my expectations. (7)	

-----  
\_\_\_\_\_



Q10 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

I have a positive working relationship with:

	Strongly agree (1)	Somewhat agree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Strongly disagree (4)	Not applicable (5)
Clientele in my county (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
County office and staff (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
County stakeholders(3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Colleagues in my district (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Colleagues in my region (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Subject Specialists (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My District Extension Administrator (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My Regional Program Leaders (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q11 What aspects of your role as a County Extension Agent do you find stressful? Please rank with 1 being the **most stressful** and 8 being the **least stressful**. (Drag the items to the ranking you desire.)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Limited resources (1)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Time commitment to the job (2)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Organizational change (3)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ CEA turnover (4)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Communication with the clientele (5)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Communication with county stakeholders (6)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Communication within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension (7)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Other: (8)
- 

Q12 Which of the following would be reasons you would consider leaving AgriLife Extension? Please rank with 1 being the **most likely** to leave and 8 being the **least likely** to leave. (Drag the items to the ranking you desire.)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Compensation (given opportunity to earn more outside the organization) (1)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ A better work/life balance (2)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Job location (3)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Better benefits (4)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Less traveling (5)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Family obligations (6)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Return to school full-time (7)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Other: (8)
- 

Q13 What aspects of your job duties as a County Extension Agent surprised you the most? Please rank with 1 being the **most surprising** and 7 being the **least surprising**. (Drag the items to the ranking you desire.)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Hours (1)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Travel (2)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Paperwork (3)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Communication (4)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Working with clientele (5)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Working with fellow CEAs (6)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Other: (7)
-

Q14 Please indicate the level of usefulness for each of the following program development topics for your role as a County Extension Agent.

	Extremely useful (1)	Very useful (2)	Slightly useful (3)	Not at all useful (4)
Extension in the Land Grant System (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Position Roles (CEA, Specialist, etc.) (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accountability & TexasData (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cash Management (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Branding and Social Media (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Issue Identification (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing Programs (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Effective Teaching & Facilitation (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Committee Management (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteer Management (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interpretation & Summary Reports (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Program Support (Funding and fee based programming) (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q15 Please indicate the level of usefulness for each of the following training topics for your role as a County Extension Agent.

	Extremely useful (1)	Very useful (2)	Slightly useful (3)	Not at all useful (4)
Managing County Budgets (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Managing Support Staff (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conflict Management (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career Ladder and Professional Development (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Performance Appraisal (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional Appearance and Behavior (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time Management (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Program Marketing (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Building Community Partnerships (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with Elected Officials (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with Media (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16 Which of the following skills/knowledge do you think are lacking in new County Extension Agent's? Please select all that apply.

- Extension in the Land Grant System (1)
- Position Roles (CEA, Specialist, etc.) (2)
- Accountability & TexasData (3)
- Cash Management (4)
- Branding and Social Media (5)
- Issue Identification (6)
- Developing Programs (7)
- Effective Teaching & Facilitation (8)
- Committee Management (9)
- Volunteer Management (10)
- Interpretation & Summary Reports (11)
- Program Support (Funding and fee based programming) (12)
- County Budgets (13)
- Support Staff (14)
- Conflict Management (15)
- Career Ladder and Professional Development (16)
- Performance Appraisal (17)
- Professional Appearance and Behavior (18)
- Time Management (19)
- Program Marketing (20)
- Building Community Partnerships (21)
- Working with Elected Officials (22)

Working with Media (23)

Other: (24) \_\_\_\_\_

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---

Q17 For each of the following program development topics, please indicate whether you think it should be taught at a **STATE** delivered orientation or **REGIONALLY** delivered training.

	State Orientation (1)	Regional Training (2)
Extension in the Land Grant System (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Position Roles (CEA, Specialist, etc.) (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accountability & TexasData (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cash Management (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Branding and Social Media (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Issue Identification (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing Programs (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Effective Teaching & Facilitation (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Committee Management (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteer Management (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interpretation & Summary Reports (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Program Support (Funding and fee based programming) (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q18 For each of the following other training topics, please indicate whether you think it should be taught at a **STATE** delivered orientation or **REGIONALLY** delivered training.

	State Orientation (1)	Regional Training (2)
County Budgets (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support Staff (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conflict Management (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career Ladder and Professional Development (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Performance Appraisal (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional Appearance and Behavior (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time Management (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Program Marketing (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Building Community Partnerships (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with Elected Officials (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with Media (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Q19 Did your academic training prepare you for your role as a County Extension Agent?

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q20 Why or why not did your academic training prepare you for your role as a County Extension Agent?

\_\_\_\_\_

---

Q21 Did your AgriLife Extension training prepare you for your role as a County Extension Agent?

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q22 Why or why not did your Extension training prepare you for your role as a County Extension Agent?

\_\_\_\_\_

Q23 If you left Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and came back, why did you originally leave and what made you return?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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End of Block: Part 1: Classroom Retention Evaluation

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Start of Block: Demographics

Q24 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Q25 What is your current age?

- 20-25 (1)
  - 26-30 (2)
  - 31-35 (3)
  - 36-40 (4)
  - 41-45 (5)
  - 46-50 (6)
  - 51-55 (7)
  - 56-60 (8)
-

Q26 Years of **continuous** service with AgriLife Extension:

- 0-2 (1)
  - 3-5 (2)
  - 6-10 (3)
  - 10-15 (4)
- 

Q27 Number of years in your current County Extension Agent role:

- 0-2 (1)
  - 3-5 (2)
  - 6-10 (3)
  - 10-15 (4)
- 

Q28 Number of County Extension Agents who work in your office (including yourself):

- 1 (1)
  - 2 (2)
  - 3 (3)
  - 4 (4)
  - 5+ (5)
-

Q29 How would you classify your clientele/county?

- Rural (1)
  - Suburban (2)
  - Urban (3)
- 

Q30 What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Bachelor's degree in college (1)
  - Master's degree (2)
  - Doctoral degree (3)
  - Professional degree (JD, MD) (4)
-

Q31 What was your major in college (bachelor's degree)?

- Agriculture Communications (1)
  - Agriculture Economics/Agribusiness (2)
  - Agriculture Leadership (3)
  - Agriculture Science/Education (4)
  - Animal Science (5)
  - Education (6)
  - Entomology (7)
  - Food Science (8)
  - Human Sciences (9)
  - Nutrition (10)
  - Soil and Crop Science (11)
  - Wildlife and Fisheries (12)
  - Other: (13) \_\_\_\_\_
-

Q32 What is your primary program area or specialization?

- 4-H Youth Development (1)
- Agriculture/Natural Resources (2)
- BLT/EFNEP (3)
- Family and Consumer Sciences (4)
- Health (5)
- Horticulture (6)
- IPM (7)
- Marine (8)
- Other: (9) \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS AUDIT TRAIL TABLES

Table 11

*Qualitative Themes from Question 4 Regarding Previous AgriLife Extension Engagement*

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Responses</u>
Previous or student employment	4H3>, 4H4>, 4H7*, ANR2<, ANR3*, ANR8>, ANR10>, ANR11*, ANR20*, ANR35*, ANR55+, ANR62<, FCS29<, FCS36>, FCS40+, FCS60<, H4+, HO6>, HO7>, HO9*, HO11+, IPM1<
Adult involvement (parent, volunteer, business relationships)	O5>, IPM5<, FCS28+, FCS19+, FCS15*, FCS9<, FCS1>, BLT4<, BLT3*, BLT2*, BLT1*, ANR64<, ANR30*, ANR16+, ANR5<, 4H6<

Table 12

*Qualitative Themes from Question 8 Regarding Reasons for Leaving AgriLife Extension*

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Responses</u>
Climate	O6*, O3*, HO10>, HO9*, HO6>, FCS59>, FCS35*, FCS14<, FCS13+, FCS5<, BLT4<, ANR37<, ANR33>, ANR26<, ANR20*, ANR6+, 4H12*, 4H6<, 4H5*
Job demands	O5>, IPM5<, FCS44+, FCS43+, FCS36>, FCS21<, FCS9<, ANR65>, ANR62<, ANR60>, ANR41<, ANR24*, ANR22+, 4H18>, 4H16*

Table 13

*Qualitative Themes from Question 20 Regarding Why Academic Training Prepared Agents*

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Responses</u>
Education	4H1*, 4H15+, FCS12<, FCS31*, FCS46<, FCS26<, ANR25*, 4H5*, FCS39*, ANR52*, FCS8*, O1*, 4H17<
Skills & knowledge	ANR11*, ANR47>, ANR13<, HO7>, FCS28+, ANR21>, 4H8*, HO2<, HO12+, 4H23>, ANR46*, FCS53+, 4H11+, FCS60<
Subject matter	FCS34>, 4H16*, FCS3*, 4H14+, ANR63+, FCS61<, ANR42+, ANR23*, FCS13+, ANR58>, ANR39<, ANR65>, FCS10+, ANR61<
Work experience	O5>, ANR53<, ANR10>, ANR2<, ANR35*, FCS51>, HO5>, ANR56*, 4H6<

Table 14

*Qualitative Themes from Question 22 Regarding Why Extension Training Prepared Agents*

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Responses</u>
Relationships & supports	FCS23>, ANR63+, ANR12*, ANR58>, ANR25*, HO12+, 4H15+, FCS28+, FCS37<, FCS27*, O4*, ANR59+, FCS2*, ANR8>, ANR3*, BLT1*, ANR56*, ANR37<, FCS61<
Training	H1*, FCS40+, FCS30>, ANR64<, FCS22<, ANR55+, FCS19+, FCS59>, FCS38>, H013*, FCS17>, FCS4*, HO6<, ANR32<, ANR65>, FCS33>, FCS18*, FCS35*, ANR11*, ANR9>, FCS7*, FCS56<, ANR51*, ANR28*, ANR54*, FCS41*, HO2<, ANR24*
Extension	ANR50+, FCS54*, ANR30*, BLT4<, O3*, FCS29<, IPM1<, 4H8*, ANR31*, ANR23*, HO8*, FCS3*, FCS43+, ANR21>, ANR35*, ANR45*, ANR52*, FCS58>, FCS26<, FCS21<, O6*
Experience	ANR4*, 4H6<, ANR36*, ANR27*, 4H13<, FCS42>, 4H17<, FCS10+, FCS9<, FCS6>, ANR6+, 4H18>, FCS44+, FCS14<, FCS57<



Table 15

*Qualitative Themes from Question 20 Regarding Why Academic Training Did Not Prepare Agents*

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Responses</u>
Relationships & supports	O2*, ANR51*, ANR 50+, ANR16+, FCS15*, FCS42>, FCS6>, FCS20<, HO3*, FCS23>, BLT3*, ANR28*, FCS45<, FCS33>, FCS9<, FCS17>, ANR1<, FCS48>, ANR41<, FCS18*, ANR17<, FCS2*, FCS21<,FCS30>, FCS54*, FCS7*, ANR8>, FCS19+, FCS37<, FCS44+, FSC41*, ANR3*, FCS59>, ANR37<, 4H24<, 4H10*, ANR66*, ANR59+, ANR54*, 4H13<, ANR4*, ANR60>, 4H18>, ANR12*, FCS38>, FCS35*, ANR27*, ANR6+
Training	FCS58>, ANR14+, ANR33>, H1*, IPM4>, ANR48*, BLT4<, 4H4>, ANR45*, FCS50<, BLT2*, ANR38<, ANR22+, FCS11<, FS43+, O4*, O7<, FCS57<, ANR26<, BLT1*, FCS29<, HO8*, FCS52>
Extension	ANR7*, IPM1<, FCS27*, FCS47>,FCS56<, ANR55+, HO6>, HO13*, ANR9>, FCS24<, FCS5<, ANR34*, O6*, O3*, HO10>, ANR36*
Work experience	ANR31*, IPM5<, ANR64<, HO9*, FCS40+, 4H20*, ANR24*, HO4<, HO11+, M1>, M2<, H3*, FCS22<, ANR31*, IPM5<, ANR64<, HO9*

Table 16

*Qualitative Themes from Question 22 Regarding Why Extension Training Did Not Prepare Agents*

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Responses</u>
Mentors	ANR16+, ANR26<, 4H24<, O7<, BLT3*
Training	FCS34>, FCS8*, FCS60<, FCS4*, FCS11<, ANR42+, FCS15*, ANR32<, FCS50<, FCS5<, 4H5*, 4H1*, IPM3*, FCS16>, FCS39*, HO10>, FCS12<, 4H12*, IPM4>, ANR48*, 4H20*, 4H19<, FCS20<, ANR2<, ANR60>, ANR17<, ANR7*, 4H16*, ANR46*, FCS46<, FCS32*, 4H23<, 4H14+, ANR47>, ANR34*, HO3*, 4H12*, FCS52>, ANR66*, BLT2*, FCS1>, O1*,M1>, FCS51>, 4H3>, M2<, FCS47>, ANR41<, ANR53<, 4H4>, ANR15*, ANR38<, FCS31*, ANR33<, FCS13+, ANR61<, HO9*, HO7>
Experience	FCS45<, ANR20*, ANR39<, O5>, ANR22+, HO11+, ANR13<, H3*, O2*, ANR1<, 4H21+