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## **Why Do Producers Attend or Do Not Attend Extension Meetings?**

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### **Why use Meetings to Teach/Educate**

Extension meetings can be used to effectively educate clientele, disseminate information, determine educational needs, and solve problems. In addition, Extension meetings provide an opportunity for agents and specialists to meet agricultural producers, establish credibility, and learn with clients. Producers are more likely to attend meetings if they know and trust the agents and specialists facilitating the meetings (Tubene & Holder, 2001).

Extension agents and specialists should ask producers the ideal time for meetings. Timing is essential because producers will not attend meetings during planting and harvesting seasons. Producers are inclined to attend meetings if they believe the information presented will address specific needs, improve farm profitability and sustainability, or make farming easier (Torrell, Bruce, & Kvasnicka, 1999).

### **Recent Research on Producers: Meeting Attendance/Motivation**

Twelve focus groups were held with 94 producers in Louisiana, Tennessee, and Virginia to discuss their preferred learning methods and what that means for Cooperative Extension program development and delivery. Each participant completed a questionnaire consisting of 25 learning methods. They were asked to check “prefer” or “do not prefer” for each learning method. In addition, producers were asked why they attend or do not attend Extension meetings.

Producers attend Extension meetings for various reasons. Those most often cited were:

- To learn about problems relevant to our situation.
- To learn new skills and production practices
- To benefit one or more segments of the farm enterprise
- A meal is served

- The meeting is held in the winter to avoid planting and harvesting
- Socialization with other producers and experts
- Friends attend
- To attain certification or licensing (e.g., pesticide license)
- To learn from a knowledgeable and credible presenter
- To develop a trusting relationship with the presenter
- A meeting place located not too far from home
- The opportunity for a hands-on demonstration of practices

Producers will not attend Extension meetings for the following reasons:

- The meeting place is too far from home
- The producer is too busy
- Too much information is presented
- The information presented is irrelevant to their farming operation
- The information presented is too technical
- The information is not presented with enough detail for adoption
- The producer's short attention span
- Shy producers do not like group interaction
- Competing family obligations
- The meeting is not a top priority
- The meeting includes only a non-interactive lecture or PowerPoint

### **How can Agents and Specialists Improve Extension Meetings?**

Based on the findings, Extension agents and specialists should consider the following factors when planning and conducting meetings: (a) focus on producers' needs, (b) present relevant information in a timely manner, (c) involve knowledgeable and credible presenters, (d) provide opportunities for socialization, (e) plan meetings that don't interfere with planting and harvesting, (f) utilize diverse teaching methods, and (g) consider a central location to reduce travel for producers.

### **Conclusion**

Many Extension agents and specialists prefer to disseminate information to farmers through meetings. Extension meetings are effective if agents and specialists select an appropriate time and location, consider the needs of the producers, and provide relevant and beneficial information to improve farm profitability and sustainability. Additionally, Extension agents and specialists should consider factors that prevent farmers from attending meetings (e.g. timing, location, technical information, and short attention span). Extension meetings are a viable means to reaching a large population but Extension agents and specialists need to invest time and effort into planning and conducting effective meetings.

### **References**

Torell, R., Bruce, B., & Kvasnicka, B. (1999). Promoting and organizing agricultural extension meetings. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 37 (1). Available at <http://www.joe.org/joe/1999february/tt1.php>.

Tubene, S., & Holder, D. (2001). *Serving small farmers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Glen Burnie, MD: University of Maryland Small Farm Institute.