

THE IMAGE OF COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AS PERCEIVED
BY THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS IN
SOUTHEAST OKLAHOMA

By

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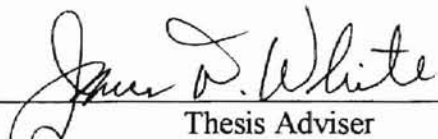
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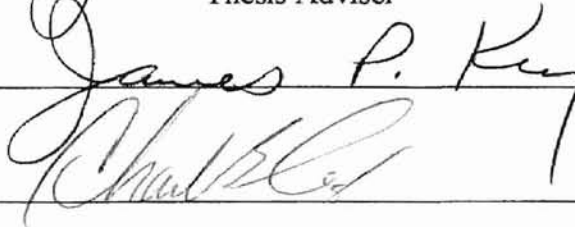
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Cooperative Extension Service is a government agency working with funds from the federal, state and county levels. Each state has a land-grant university committed to instruction, research and Extension. The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 “provided the financial support for the new Cooperative Extension Service needed for a successful future (Wessel & Wessel, p. 25).” This support called for the three partners to fund programs in agriculture, 4-H, family and consumer sciences and rural development in each county and in every state in the United States. The Cooperative Extension System is a public-funded, non-formal educational system which links research based information, educational programs, and activities of the United States Department of Agriculture through a network of 103 land-grant colleges and universities with more than 3,100 county governments. Although the financial support is not equally balanced among the three partners, each has input as to whether individual county programs will continue.

The perceptions of county commissioners in the Southeast District hold of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service are important when considering the future of the Cooperative Extension Service. Funding levels over the last 10 years from county sources have increased to more closely equalize the proportional share of county, state, and federal governments.

Rationale For The Study

Because of the many changes taking place within the Cooperative Extension Service in Oklahoma, a study of this nature provided an indicator regarding the image of Cooperative Extension in the minds of opinion leaders and polity makers at the local level.

Statement Of Problem

Many are saying the image of Extension is at an all time low. Is it because of program quality, morale or the staff, reduced budgets or perceived low esteem by the clientele served. Most would agree budgets, staffing, and services all impact the quality of Extension programs. However, budgets impact every aspect of the county program and at times result in making do with the resources available and less than desired emphasis in a particular program area. This in turn influences the effectiveness and many times the perceived image of the program. Since county commissioners are responsible for funding Extension programs at the local level, it is important to have some knowledge of how the program and its image are perceived by those providing the resources.

Statement Of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived image and attitudes of county commissioners toward the Cooperative Extension Service in the 19 counties in the Southeast Extension District.

Objectives Of The Study

To accomplish the purpose of this study, the following objectives were established:

1. To determine selected characteristics of county commissioners holding office in the Southeast Cooperative Extension District in Oklahoma.
2. To determine the extent of county commissioners' knowledge and their perceptions concerning the mission, programs, and educational activities of the Cooperative Extension Service in the Southeast District.
3. To assess the familiarity and relationships with county commissioners and the Cooperative Extension Service staff in the Southeast Extension District of Oklahoma.
4. To determine the perceived quality of Cooperative Extension programs as indicated by county commissioners in the Southeast Extension District.
5. To determine available service opportunities among County Extension programs as perceived by county commissioners in the Southeast District.

Scope Of The Study

The scope of this study included the county commissioners in the Southeast Cooperative Extension District in the State of Oklahoma.

Definition Of Terms

OCES: Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

PAC: Program Advisory Council for the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service in Oklahoma

Program Area: Program areas include agriculture, family and consumer sciences, rural development, and 4-H youth development.

Clientele: Individuals who utilize the services provided by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service.

Southeast District: Nineteen counties in the Southeastern part of Oklahoma at the time of the study. The district was determined by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service with the district office being designated in Ada.

Respondent: County commissioners who hold office in the 19 counties of the Southeast District who responded to the questionnaire.

FCE: Family and Community Education groups; formerly known as Extension Homemakers.

Field Staff: Any Extension professional who holds a county position, in the areas of Agriculture, Family and Consumer Sciences, 4-H Youth Development or any other county level professional position.

Area Specialist: An Extension professional who specialized in a particular program area and whose office is located in any of the four Extension districts in the state.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to present a review of literature which the author considered relevant to the study. This review was divided into three sections: (1) History of Cooperative Extension, (2) Extension's Image; (3) Funding for Cooperative Extension, and (4) A Summary.

History of Cooperative Extension

Extension began with a request to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) by farmers in Texas. Wessel and Wessel:

The USDA Bureau of Entomology thought it had a method of reducing destruction by the weevil and sent Seaman A. Knapp to Texas to introduce the practice to Texas farmers. Knapp discovered that the task of teaching farmers was more difficult than finding the means to combat the weevil (p. 21).

This trip made for the first Extension meeting.

Later, in 1903, Knapp created the office of Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work. This office employed demonstration agents in a few states in the south. Wessel and Wessel further emphasized, "Due in part by Knapp's diplomacy, the climate for gaining congressional support for the cooperative venture involving the USDA, land-

grant colleges and county government was much better in 1914 than in previous years” (p. 21).

The Smith Lever Act was passed in 1914 to provide opportunities for people in the areas of agriculture, rural development, home economics and 4-H youth development.

Extension's Image

Since Extension's beginning in 1914, people have found a great deal of value in the programs Extension offers its clientele. Link said, “the county agent was the foundation of the Extension system. Working one-on-one with farmers, county agents helped make Extension a system copied all over the world (p. 30).”

Miller (1988) sought to determine the perception of Extension among state legislators in South Carolina.

...legislators had little understanding of Extension's major mission. The majority of the legislators (75%) viewed Extension as a public service agency rather than an educational one. Surprisingly, only 11% indicated Extension's main function was an educational mission (p. 6).

In a study conducted by Terry (1994) concerning the state policy makers' perceptions of Cooperative Extension in Oklahoma, she found that “...it seemed that the lawmakers were in agreement and have a practical understanding of the mission, scope and functions of Cooperative Extension (p. 116).” Terry (1994) further stated, “The image of Cooperative Extension as well as its perceived impact and overall effectiveness among Oklahoma lawmakers appeared to be very favorable (p. 117).”

Melin's (1987) study sought to determine the perception of county commissioners toward Extension in Minnesota. Commissioners in Minnesota indicated:

...the quality of county Extension programs in the traditional program areas of Agriculture, 4-H and Home Economics were very favorable. There were some concerns about community and natural resource development. Communication appeared to be good between county commissioners and county Extension staff, but more involvement in reviewing programs was suggested.

County commissioners work well with state Extension staff, but indicated a need for improved funding and evaluating arrangements. Working relationships with county Extension staff were rated more favorable than those with state Extension staff. This is probably because the commissioners are further removed from the state staff (p. 17).

Furthermore, Melin (1987) emphasized:

County commissioners need to be more involved with state Extension administration to strengthen professional working relationships. County Extension staff should review the findings of this study with their county Extension committee for use in program planning development. State Extension staff should encourage more involvement of county commissioners on county Extension committees (p. 17). State legislators' and county commissioners' roles as policy makers carry great responsibility for government funded agencies such as the Cooperative Extension Service and the clientele it serves.

Funding for Cooperative Extension

Federal, state, and county governments' combination of funding support County Extension Offices throughout the United States has long been looked upon as a cooperative endeavor. Some states, however, have reduced their input of resources over the past five years. Gage (1991) stated in her article entitled, "Budget Cuts Force Many States to Curb Extension Programs." "State budget problems are forcing Cooperative Extension services in many states to scale back their activities (p. A1)."

Funding is a popular topic among all clientele, including agriculture producers. In Crummet's (1992) article in a popular farm magazine, he stated:

...the cost of keeping your county's Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Office and staff is going up, and if minimum levels of funding are not met, some local county agents' offices as we've known them for years may cease to exist within a year (p. 4).

Summary

Cooperative Extension began because of a need for farmers to learn how to control a pest that was destroying their crops. Seaman Knapp stepped in and began a program called, "Farmers Cooperative Demonstration Service." The need for research-based information and education among the nation's rural population led to the passage of the Smith-Lever Act which was signed into law by President Woodrow Wilson on May 8, 1914.

The image of Cooperative Extension in the minds of policy makers, regardless of the level of government, must be positive in order to and increase opportunities for program expansion and to serve the needs of clientele.

Funding for Cooperative Extension is a pertinent topic in these times because if certain levels of funding are not met, the number of staff and Extension offices could be forced to be reduced or even closed.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the methods and procedures used to conduct the study. The intent of this study was to determine perceptions of county commissioners in the Southeast Extension District regarding the Cooperative Extension Service in Oklahoma. In order to accomplish the purpose, it was necessary to determine a population and develop an instrument which would acquire the information necessary to fulfill the study objectives. A procedure for data collection was established and methods to analyze the data were selected.

Objectives of the Study

To accomplish the purpose of this study, the following objectives were established:

1. To determine selected characteristics of county commissioners holding office in the Southeast Cooperative Extension District in Oklahoma.
2. To determine the extent of county commissioners' knowledge and their perceptions concerning the mission, programs, and educational activities of the Cooperative Extension Service in the Southeast District.
3. To assess the familiarity and relationships with County Commissioners and

the Cooperative Extension Service staff in the Southeast Extension District of Oklahoma.

4. To determine the perceived quality of Cooperative Extension programs as indicated by County Commissioners in the Southeast Extension District.
5. To determine available service opportunities among County Extension programs as perceived by county commissioners in the Southeast District.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Federal regulations and Oklahoma State University policy require review and approval of all research studies that involve human subjects before investigators may initiate a research effort. The Oklahoma State University Research Services and the Internal Review Board (IRB) conduct this review to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in biomedical and behavioral research, AG-98-011.

Population

The study consisted of a census of the county commissioners who held office in the Southeast Extension District of Oklahoma. There were a total of 19 counties with each having three county commissioners. Therefore, 57 individuals were surveyed.

Development of the Instrument

The 52-item hand-delivered questionnaire which consisted of five parts: (1) Familiarity and relationships with Cooperative Extension , (2) Perceptions and knowledge of Cooperative Extension, (3) Perceived quality of Extension programs, (4), Perceived

service opportunities among Extension programs, and (5) Demographic characteristics concerning the county commissioner respondents. Questions consisted of 52 forced response items and one open response item to determine the commissioners' comments. The forced response items included "yes" or "no," rank order and exhaustive as well as mutually exclusive categories. Data ascertained by various parts of the instrument were collected using nominal, interval, ordinal and "Likert-type" scales.

The investigator's major adviser and a panel of eight state, district, and county Extension staff reviewed the draft of the instrument, and upon completion of the review, revisions were made. Once the questions were fully developed and implemented as the survey instrument, the drafted instrument was pilot tested among several former county commissioners. Based on several comments and questions raised by the individuals cooperating with reviewing the instrument, the investigator made recommended revisions.

Part I of the instrument addressed the commissioners' Familiarity and Relationships with Cooperative Extension. This portion of the questionnaire contained seven items. All responses were determined by marking the appropriate statement or condition through the use of a nominal or naming scale which employed an interval format. One of the seven questions had "yes" or "no" possible responses.

Part II of the questionnaire examined the commissioners' Perceptions and Knowledge of Cooperative Extension. Their replies included forced response, items which involved four categories of agreement: (4) "Strongly Agree," (3) "Agree," (2) "Disagree," (1) "Strongly Disagree." The levels of agreement concerning the six items were determined using a four-point Likert-type scale.

Part III addressed the Perceived Quality of Extension Programs which involved six forced-response items ascertaining the commissioners' input using a four-point Likert-type scale.

Part IV dealt with two questions which required the commissioners' responses regarding their Perceptions of Available Service Opportunities Among Extension Programs. This section contained two questions; responses were acquired by respondents marking the appropriate statement or condition through the use of an interval style format.

Part V was designed to gather Demographic Characteristics about the commissioners and characteristics of their districts. This information was collected using forced response items that utilized an interval scale, "yes" or "no" responses and non-numerical items which were ascertained using nominal and an interval scale format.

Collection of Data

The initial distribution consisted of a cover letter dated November 5, 1997 (Appendix A), the survey instrument "Booklet" (Appendix B), and a stamp return envelope with an affixed mailing label addressed to the investigator for returning the questionnaire. The instruments were distributed to County Extension Directors in the Southeast Extension District. The County Extension Directors then hand-delivered the surveys to the individual county commissioners in the counties were they serve.

Analysis of Data

Since the mean is a common measure used to express numerical value among group responses, it was decided this particular measure of central tendency was appropriate in describing data in this study. Steel and Torie (1960) in considering measures of central tendency stated, "the most common measure of central tendency and the one which is the 'best' in many cases is the arithmetic mean (p. 13)." Key (1981), in emphasizing the importance of being able to describe data using an easily understood approach, pointed out, "The primary use of descriptive statistics is to describe information or data through the use of numbers. The characteristics of groups of numbers representing information or data are called descriptive statistics (p. 175)." Therefore, the descriptive statistics employed to describe and interpret data acquired in this study were percentages, mean scores and standard deviations.

To determine and interpret mean scores from the data obtained from the survey using a four-point Likert-type scale, numerical values and real limits were established. As indicated in Table I, the numerical values were: 4="strongly agree," 3 = "agree," 2 = "disagree," and 1 = "strongly disagree" for 23 items in Part II of the instrument. However, the six items in Part III of the instrument, the numerical values were: 4 = "outstanding," 3 = "good," 2 = "fair," and 1 = "poor." Therefore, real limits and corresponding interpretations for the specific levels of agreement were: 1.0 to 1.50 ("strongly disagree"), 1.51 to 2.5 ("disagree"), 2.51 to 3.5 ("agree"), and 3.51 and above ("strongly agree), while interpretations regarding perceived quality included: 1.0 to 1.50 ("poor"), 1.51 to 2.5 ("fair"), 2.51 to 3.5 ("good"), and 3.51 and above ("outstanding").

TABLE I
A DISTRIBUTION OF ASSIGNED NUMERICAL VALUES AND REAL
LIMITS BY CATEGORY

CATEGORIES	NUMERICAL VALUES	REAL LIMITS
Strongly Agree & Outstanding	4	3.51+
Agree & Good	3	2.51 to 3.5
Disagree & Fair	2	1.51 to 2.5
Strongly Disagree & Poor	1	1.0 to 1.50

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The major purpose of this chapter is to present, describe and analyze the perceived image and attitudes of County Commissioners who serve the Southeast District toward the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service. A questionnaire was distributed to the entire population which consisted of 57 commissioners. Their inputs are presented in five sections including: Familiarity and Relationships with Cooperative Extension, Perceptions and Knowledge of Cooperative Extension, Perceived Quality of Extension Programs, Perceived Service Opportunities, and Demographic Characteristics.

Familiarity and Relationships with Cooperative Extension

The data in Table II illustrated the Southeast District County Commissioners involvement and participation in Extension activities. Slightly over 43 percent of the commissioner respondents indicated they had been "4-H members and participated in 4-H activities," while over 43 percent of the commissioners also stated "I make a point to be involved in at least one Extension activity each year." Furthermore, over 33 percent of the commissioners disclosed that they "have financially supported Extension" activities. Slightly over 23 percent of the respondents indicated that "a member of their immediate

family was/is active in 4-H activities or is a volunteer adult 4-H leader.” One respondent, however, indicated “no involvement” and three respondents stated “other.”

TABLE II

A DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY THEIR INDICATED INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN/WITH COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

INVOLVEMENT/ PARTICIPATION FACTORS	FREQUENCY (N=30)	PERCENT (%)
4-H member & participated in 4-H activities	13	43.3
Member of my immediate family is active in 4-H activities and/or is a volunteer adult leader	7	23.3
I make a point to be involved in at least one Extension activity each year	13	43.3
No involvement	1	3.3
I have financially supported Extension programs	10	33.3
Other	3	10.0

Table III disclosed the Southeast District commissioners' involvement with County Extension programs. Almost 37 percent of the commissioners indicated they had “acquired soil fertility recommendations,” while nearly 47 percent had “utilized Extension fact sheets and other Extension publications.” More than 53 percent of the commissioner

respondents had “received Extension newsletters” and over 33 percent “had read the Extension column in the local newspaper.” Furthermore, over 53 percent had “utilized the recommendations and/or services of County Extension staff, and/or area and/or state specialists” and almost 47 percent “had supported 4-H program activities.” However, over 23 percent of the commissioners “had been the beneficiary of rural development projects in their area.”

TABLE III
A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' INVOLVEMENT WITH COUNTY
EXTENSION PROGRAMS

INVOLVEMENT/ PARTICIPATION FACTORS	FREQUENCY (N= 30)	PERCENT (%)
Acquiring soil fertility recommendations	11	36.7
Utilizing Extension fact sheets and other Extension publications	14	46.7
Receiving an Extension newsletter	16	53.3
Reading the Extension column in my local newspaper	10	33.3
Utilizing the recommendations and/or services of county Extension staff, and/or area and/or state specialists	16	53.3
Supporting 4-H program activities	14	46.7
Has been the beneficiary of Rural Development projects	7	23.3

Table III disclosed the County Commissioners' in the Southeast District's involvement with County Extension programs. Twelve and one-half percent of the commissioners indicated they had "acquired soil fertility recommendations," while nearly 16 percent had "utilized Extension fact sheets and other Extension publications." Eighteen percent of the commissioners respondents had "received Extension newsletters" and over eleven percent "had read the Extension column in the local newspaper". Further, eighteen percent had "utilized the recommendations and/or services of county Extension staff, and/or area and/or state specialists" and 15 percent "had supported 4-H program activities." Lastly, eight percent of the commissioners "had been the beneficiary of rural development projects in their area".

The data in Table IV revealed the commissioners' knowledge of Extension, indicating over 66 percent of the commissioners expressing they were "personally acquainted with the County Extension staff" and 20 percent indicated "my family's involvement in Extension youth activities." Over 26 percent of the commissioner respondents disclosed their use of "Extension publications," while 36.7 percent expressed their "use of Extension recommendations and services," and over 16 percent indicated their "involvement in Extension educational programs." More than 23 percent of the commissioners were "personally involved in 4-H as a young person" and 70 percent stated they had "worked with the county Extension office and/or personnel as an aspect of their position." However, none of the commissioners had utilized "Sunup Farm Programs," but over 36 percent had relied on "Extension Newsletters" to keep up to date concerning Extension activities.

Table V indicated over 33 percent of the commissioners were “familiar with 4-H.” Over 73 percent of the commissioners indicated they were “familiar with agriculture,” while only 10 percent were “familiar with Home Economics.” However, nearly 30.0 percent of commissioner respondents were “familiar with Rural Development.”

TABLE IV

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' KNOWLEDGE OF EXTENSION

INVOLVEMENT/ PARTICIPATION FACTORS	FREQUENCY (N= 30)	PERCENT (%)
My personal acquaintance with the county Extension staff	20	66.7
My family's involvement in Extension youth activities	6	20.0
My use of Extension publications	8	26.7
My use of Extension recommendations and services	11	36.7
My involvement in Extension educational programs	5	16.7
My personal involvement in 4-H as a young person	7	23.3
Working with County Extension Office and/or personnel as an aspect of my position	21	70.0
Extension Newsletters	11	36.7
SUNIP Farm Program	0	

TABLE V

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONER'S FAMILIARITY WITH EXTENSION AND ITS
ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES

INVOLVEMENT/ PARTICIAPTION FACTORS	FREQUENCY (N=30)	PERCENT (%)
4-H	10	33.3
Agriculture	22	73.3
Home Economics	3	10.0
Rural Development	9	30.0

The information in Table VI revealed the Commissioners' personal acquaintance with Extension personnel. Over 83 one percent of the respondents indicated their acquaintance "with all Extension staff in their county," while more than 33 percent only knew "the County agricultural agent." Almost 17 percent were acquainted with "the County 4-H agent" and ten percent were acquainted with "the County Home Economist." Slightly over 13 percent know "an area or state specialist." Every commissioner knew at least one Extension staff member.

TABLE VI

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' PERSONAL ACQUAINTANCE WITH
EXTENSION PERSONNEL

INVOLVEMENT/ PARTICIAPTION FACTORS	FREQUENCY (N=30)	PERCENT (%)
All Extension staff in my county	25	83.3
The County Agricultural Agent	10	33.3
The County 4-H Agent	5	16.7
The County Home Economist	5	16.7
Area or State Specialist	4	13.3

Table VII disclosed the frequency of commissioner respondents' visits to the Extension office. Sixty percent visited the Extension office "occasionally," over thirty percent visited "often," while over six percent indicated they "had never visited the Extension Office."

TABLE VII

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' VISITS TO EXTENSION OFFICES

INVOLVEMENT/ PARTICIAPTION FACTORS	FREQUENCY (N=30)	PERCENT (%)
Often	10	33.3
Occasionally	18	60.0
Never visit the Extension Office	2	6.7

Table VIII contains a summary of data regarding the final question pertaining to familiarity and relationships with Cooperative Extension. Respondents were asked whether or not there should be an annual 'elected officials day' to update officials concerning Extension programs and activities. Over 69 percent of the commissioners agreed that such a day would be advantageous for them, while eight (30.8%) did not want such an event.

TABLE VIII

A SUMMARY OF THE COMMISSIONERS' ATTITUDES BY WHETHER OR NOT AN "ANNUAL ELECTED OFFICIALS DAY" WOULD BE HELPFUL IN KEEPING THEM UP-TO-DATE AND INFORMED

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY (N=26)	PERCENT (%)
Yes	18	69.2
No	8	30.8

Perceptions and Knowledge of Cooperative Extension

Section III sought to determine the perceptions and knowledge of Cooperative Extension by County Commissioners

The data in Table IX showed the commissioners seemed to be in agreement concerning citizen accessibility to Extension information and programming in their respective counties.

Almost 38 percent of the commissioners “strongly agreed” that citizens in their respective counties have accessibility to Extension information and programming, while more than 58 percent “agreed that citizens in the counties they served had access to Extension information and programming. However, one (3.4%) commissioner, “disagreed” with the statement concerning the accessibility of the citizens in his county to Extension information and programming.

TABLE IX
 COMMISSIONERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CITIZEN ACCESSIBILITY TO
 COUNTY EXTENSION INFORMATION AND PROGRAMMING

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=29)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	11	37.9
Agreed	17	58.6
Disagreed	1	3.4
Strongly Disagreed		
Total	29	100
Mean Score = 3.35		

Table X revealed the commissioner respondents seemed to be in agreement concerning Cooperative Extension helping to understand issues affecting agriculture, families, rural development, and youth.

Nearly 38 percent of the commissioners “strongly agreed” that citizens in their respective counties understood issues, while more than 58 percent “agreed” that citizens in their counties had help understanding issues affecting agriculture, families, rural development, and youth. However, one (3.4%) commissioner “disagreed” with the statement concerning understanding these issues.

TABLE X

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS’ PERCEPTIONS REGARDING CITIZENS’ UNDERSTANDING OF COOPERATIVE EXTENSION ISSUES AFFECTING AGRICULTURE, FAMILIES, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND YOUTH

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=29)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	11	37.9
Agreed	17	58.6
Disagree	1	3.4
Strongly Disagree		
Mean Score = 3.35		

Table XI illustrated the commissioners seemed to be in agreement concerning that education should be the mission of Cooperative Extension.

Over 37 percent of the commissioners “strongly agreed” that citizens in their respective counties understood issues, while more than 58 percent “agreed” that citizens

in the counties understood that education should be the mission of Cooperative Extension. However, one commissioner “disagreed” with the principle concerning this statement.

TABLE XI

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' BELIEF THAT EDUCATION SHOULD BE THE MISSION OF COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=29)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	11	37.9
Agreed	17	58.6
Disagreed	1	3.4
Strongly Disagreed		
Mean Score = 3.35		

Data in Table XII demonstrated the commissioners apparently were in agreement regarding the clientele to be served and should be involved in planning the Extension educational programming available through the county programs.

TABLE XII

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS THAT CLIENTELE TO BE
SERVED SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN PLANNING THE EXTENSION
EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING AVAILABLE THROUGH
THE COUNTY PROGRAM

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=28)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	7	25.0
Agreed	18	64.3
Disagreed	3	10.7
Strongly Disagreed		
Mean Score = 3.14		

Twenty five percent of the commissioners "strongly agreed" that citizens in their respective counties wanted to be involved in planning programming, while over 64 percent "agreed." However, three, 10.7 percent, commissioners "disagreed" that clientele should not be involved in the planning of Extension educational programming. No commissioner "strongly disagreed" with this issue.

The information in Table XIII illustrated that the commissioner respondents were compatible concerning appropriate technology for transferring information to clientele was more critical for Extension now than in the past. Almost 38 percent "strongly agreed" and over 55 percent "agreed" that it was more critical for Extension to transfer information now than in the past. Only two percent "disagreed" with this statement and no commissioner "strongly disagreed."

TABLE XIII

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS REGARDING THE
DETERMINATION OF APPROPRIATE METHODS FOR TRANSFERRING
INFORMATION TO CLIENTELE IS MORE CRITICAL FOR EXTENSION
NOW THAN IN THE PAST

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=29)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	11	37.9
Agreed	16	55.2
Disagreed	2	6.9
Strongly Disagreed		
Mean Score = 3.31		

Table XIV indicated that commissioner respondents agreed that priorities in Cooperative Extension should be oriented toward traditional programs in agriculture, rural development, home economics, and 4-H youth development. The statement which dealt with Cooperative Extension should be oriented toward traditional programs, nearly 29 percent stated they "strongly agreed," more than 71 percent of this group of respondents "agreed."

The data obtained from this portion of the study was reported in Table XV. Only one, 3.6 percent, commissioner "strongly agreed" that Extension priorities should emphasize program development and delivery to non-rural audiences, while over 46 percent of the respondents "agreed." However, nearly 36 percent "disagreed" and 14 percent of the commissioners "strongly disagreed."

TABLE XIV

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS THAT PRIORITIES IN COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SHOULD BE ORIENTED TOWARD TRADITIONAL PROGRAMS IN AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, HOME ECONOMICS, AND 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=28)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	8	28.6
Agreed	20	71.4
Disagreed		
Strongly Disagreed		
Mean Score = 3.29		

TABLE XV

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS THAT EXTENSION PRIORITIES SHOULD EMPHASIZE PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY TO NON-RURAL AUDIENCES

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=28)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	1	3.6
Agreed	13	46.4
Disagreed	10	35.7
Strongly Disagreed	4	14.3
Mean Score = 2.39		

Table XVI described the respondents' feelings related to whether or not current priorities and focus of Extension are meeting the needs of today's clientele. The majority were in agreement with this statement, revealing that almost 15 percent of the commissioners "strongly agreed," while over 81.5 percent "agreed." No commissioners responded that they "disagreed" with Extension's current priorities and the focus of Extension in meeting the needs of today's clientele. One commissioner, however, "strongly disagreed."

TABLE XVI

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' PERCEPTIONS AS TO WHETHER OR NOT THE CURRENT PRIORITIES AND FOCUS OF EXTENSION ARE MEETING THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S CLIENTELE

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=27)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	4	14.8
Agreed	22	81.5
Disagreed		
Strongly Disagreed	1	3.7
Mean Score = 3.07		

Concerning the responses to the question, "the impact and program effectiveness of Extension in my county is positive" in Table XVII; more than 39 percent of the

respondents “strongly agreed,” while over 57 percent “agreed.” No respondent “disagreed,” but one commissioner “strongly disagreed” that the impact and program effectiveness of Extension in their county was positive.

TABLE XVII

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS REGARDING THE POSITIVE
IMPACT AND PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS OF EXTENSION IN
THEIR COUNTIES

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=28)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	11	39.3
Agreed	16	57.1
Disagreed		
Strongly Disagreed	1	3.6
Mean Score = 3.32		

Data in Table XVIII revealed that respondents felt that Extension programs in their counties were positive, with over 46 percent stating they “strongly agreed” and 50 percent stating that they “agreed” with the statement. No commissioner “disagreed,” while one “strongly disagreed.”

A sizable majority of respondents agreed with the statement, “Extension programs in my county are generally cost effective,” as shown in Table XIX. Twenty-four percent

indicated they “strongly agreed,” while 64 percent “agreed.” Nevertheless, there was no commissioner who “disagreed,” however, one chose “strongly disagree.”

TABLE XVIII

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS REGARDING THE BENEFICIAL NATURE OF EXTENSION PROGRAMS IN THEIR COUNTIES

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=28)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	13	46.4
Agreed	14	50.0
Disagreed		
Strongly Disagreed	1	3.6
Mean Score = 3.39		

TABLE XIX

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS REGARDING THE COST EFFECTIVENESS OF EXTENSION PROGRAMS

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=25)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	6	24.0
Agreed	16	64.0
Disagreed	2	8.0
Strongly Disagreed	1	4.0
Mean Score = 3.08		

Southeast District County Commissioners were opposed to continuing the present funding arrangement by adding a clientele surcharge for using Extension services as revealed in Table XX. Sixty-four percent of the respondents “disagreed” and 16 percent “strongly disagreed.” Of those respondents who agreed, four percent “strongly agreed” and 16 percent “agreed.”

TABLE XX

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS THAT EXTENSION SHOULD CONTINUE THE PRESENT FUNDING ARRANGEMENT, BUT ADD A SURCHARGE FOR SERVICES PROVIDED TO THE PUBLIC

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=25)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	1	4.0
Agreed	4	16.0
Disagreed	16	64.0
Strongly Disagreed	4	16.0
Mean Score = 2.08		

Table XXI illustrates the responses to the commissioners' feelings about Extension programs being carefully reviewed and adequately funded to insure quality in all program areas. More than 92 percent of the study participants “agreed” with the statement and almost four percent “strongly agreed.” Less than four percent of the participants chose to “disagree” with the statement, with one “strongly disagreeing.”

Study participants presented with a statement which contended that multi-county units have the ability to serve the needs of Extension clientele as effectively as the traditional organizational structure of a fully staffed Extension office in every county, indicated general agreement. As seen in Table XXII, fifty-two percent "agreed," with no one "strongly agreeing." However, 32 percent chose to "disagree" with the statement and 16 percent "strongly disagreed."

TABLE XXI

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS REGARDING THE NEED TO CAREFULLY REVIEW AND ADEQUATELY FUND EXTENSION TO INSURE QUALITY IN ALL PROGRAM AREAS

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=25)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	1	3.8
Agreed	24	92.3
Disagreed		
Strongly Disagreed	1	3.8
Mean Score = 2.96		

TABLE XXII

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS REGARDING THE ABILITY OF MULTI-COUNTY UNITS VERSUS TRADITIONAL STRUCTURES TO EFFECTIVELY MEET THE NEEDS OF CLIENTELE

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=25)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed		
Agreed	13	52.0
Disagreed	8	32.0
Strongly Disagreed	4	16.0
Mean Score = 2.36		

The data in Table XXIII showed that commissioners' responses to the statement, "multi-county units offer an alternative to the current funding problems in Extension," were in general agreement, with over 61 percent of the responses being in the "agreed" category. Over 15 percent were in the "strongly agreed" category, while 15 percent also disagreed. However, two or 7.7 percent of the respondents "strongly disagreed."

When asked to respond to a statement which suggested that "in a time of austerity, Extension programs and staff at the county level should be reduced," 37 percent of the respondents "strongly disagreed," while almost 30 percent "disagreed," as shown in Table XXIV. However, almost 30 percent "agreed" with the statement, while one respondent "strongly agreed."

TABLE XXIII

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS THAT MULTI-COUNTY
UNITS OFFER AN ALTERNATIVE TO CURRENT FUNDING
PROBLEMS IN EXTENSION

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=26)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	4	15.4
Agreed	16	61.5
Disagreed	4	15.4
Strongly Disagreed	2	7.7
Mean Score = 2.85		

TABLE XXIV

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS REGARDING THE REDUCTION
OF COUNTY LEVEL SERVICES DURING TIMES OF AUSTERITY

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=27)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	1	3.7
Agreed	8	29.6
Disagreed	8	29.6
Strongly Disagreed	10	37.0
Mean Score = 2.0		

Illustrated in Table XXV was data regarding the reaction of respondents to the statement, “in a time of budget cuts, Extension should reduce programs and staff at the state and federal levels.” Over 51 percent of the respondents “agreed” with the statement and more than 29 percent “strongly agreed.” However, there were 11.1 percent of respondents who “disagreed” and over seven percent who “strongly disagreed.”

As revealed in Table XXVI, overall responses of “agreed” and “strongly agreed” were selected by respondents to the statement that, “the image of Cooperative Extension is favorable in commissioners’ counties,” with over 63 percent in agreement and 30 percent of the respondents indicating they “strongly agreed” concerning a favorable image of Extension. About three percent of the participants “disagreed” and “strongly disagreed” with this statement.

TABLE XXV

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS’ FEELINGS REGARDING THE
REDUCTION OF PROGRAMS AND STAFF AT THE STATE AND FEDERAL
LEVELS IN A TIME OF BUDGET CUTS

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=27)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	8	29.6
Agreed	14	51.9
Disagreed	3	11.1
Strongly Disagreed	2	7.4
Mean Score = 3.04		

TABLE XXVI

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING
THE A FAVORABLE IMAGE OF COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION IN THEIR COUNTIES

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=30)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	9	30.0
Agreed	19	63.3
Disagreed	1	3.3
Strongly Disagreed	1	3.3
Mean Score = 3.2		

With regard to the contention that Extension priorities should emphasize program development and delivery to rural audiences; Table XXVII indicated that 75 percent of the respondents "agreed," while almost 18 percent "strongly agreed." Nevertheless, just over seven percent chose to "disagree," but no commissioner selected "strongly disagree."

TABLE XXVIII

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS THAT THE EXTENSION PROGRAMS IN THEIR COUNTIES ARE DOING THE VERY BEST JOB POSSIBLE CONSIDERING THE CURRENT FUNDING SITUATION

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=29)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	13	44.8
Agreed	14	48.3
Disagreed	1	3.4
Strongly Disagreed	1	3.4
Mean Score = 3.35		

Participants were asked to rank order the Extension program areas of Agriculture, Home Economics, 4-H, and Rural Development in terms of their notoriety and visibility. Table XXX depicts those rank orders. Agriculture was deemed the program area with the most notoriety; 30 percent of the respondents ranked Agriculture over the other four areas in recognition. Four-H was the second most recognized program with 24 percent of the respondents indicating its status. Twenty percent of the commissioners responding ranked Home Economics as the third most recognized program area, while Rural Development ranked fourth with 23 percent of the participants selecting it as the program area with the least notoriety and visibility.

TABLE XXIX

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS THAT SINCE DISTRICT AND STATE SPECIALISTS ARE MUCH MORE ACCESSIBLE TO RESEARCH BASED INFORMATION, THEY SHOULD ALWAYS BE CONSULTED REGARDING LOCAL EXTENSION PROBLEMS

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=28)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	1	3.6
Agreed	17	60.7
Disagreed	10	37.5
Strongly Disagreed		
Mean Score = 2.7		

The data in Table XXXI revealed, "county Extension staff in my county should utilize advance technology such as web-sites, electronic mail and Internet in providing services to the public." Over 65 percent of respondents "agreed" while almost 14 selected "strongly agreed." However, over ten percent of the respondents "disagreed" and "strongly disagreed."

TABLE XXX

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' RANKINGS OF
EXTENSION PROGRAM AREAS IN TERMS OF
NOTORIETY AND VISIBILITY

PROGRAM AREA	FREQUENCY (N=30)	RANKING
Agriculture	15	1
4-H	8	2
Home Economics	6	3
Rural Development	1	4

TABLE XXXI

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS THAT COUNTY EXTENSION
STAFF IN THEIR COUNTIES SHOULD CURRENTLY UTILIZE ADVANCED
TECHNOLOGY SUCH AS WEB-SITES, ELECTRONIC MAIL, AND
INTERNET IN PROVIDING SERVICES TO THE PUBLIC

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=29)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	4	13.8
Agreed	19	65.5
Disagreed	3	10.3
Strongly Disagreed	3	10.3
Mean Score = 2.83		

With regard to the statement, "Extension adequately uses the media in promoting and marketing Extension and Extension activities;" the data in Table XXXII showed over 71 percent of the respondents chose to "agree," while almost 18 percent "strongly agreed." However, about seven percent "disagreed" and over three percent "strongly disagreed" that their counties utilized the media adequately.

TABLE XXXII

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS REGARDING EXTENSION STAFF IN THEIR COUNTIES ADEQUATE UTILIZATION OF MEDIA IN PROMOTING AND MARKETING EXTENSION AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CATEGORY OF AGREEMENT	FREQUENCY (N=28)	PERCENT (%)
Strongly Agreed	5	17.9
Agreed	20	71.4
Disagreed	2	7.1
Strongly Disagreed	1	3.6
Mean Score = 3.04		

Perceived Quality of Extension Programs

Section III of this research study addressed the commissioners' perceptions toward the quality of Extension programs. They were asked to categorize their choices as, "outstanding," "good," "fair," and "poor."

The data in Table XXXIII showed the extent to which respondents agreed with the idea that, "Extension staff in their counties were qualified to meet the needs of the public." Fifty percent felt that the job being done was "outstanding" and that the staff was adequately qualified, while over 46 percent felt it was "good." No respondent selected the "fair" option, however, one felt that the extent to which agents were adequately qualified was "poor."

TABLE XXXIII

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS THAT
COUNTY EXTENSION STAFF ARE QUALIFIED TO
MEET THE NEEDS OF THE PUBLIC

CATEGORY OF PERCEPTION	FREQUENCY (N=30)	PERCENT (%)
Outstanding	15	50.0
Good	14	46.7
Fair		
Poor	1	3.3
Mean Score = 3.43		

The commissioners provided input regarding the extent to which "the county Extension provided educational programs and services that meet the needs of young people in their counties" was summarized in Table XXXIV. It indicated that over 56

percent of the respondents felt that educational programs and services provided to meet young peoples' needs were "good," while more than 36 percent felt that it was "outstanding." One commissioner each responded with "fair" and "poor" options.

TABLE XXXIV

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' FEELINGS THAT COUNTY EXTENSION STAFF PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES THAT MEET THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THEIR COUNTIES

CATEGORY OF PERCEPTION	FREQUENCY (N=30)	PERCENT (%)
Outstanding	11	36.7
Good	17	56.7
Fair	1	3.3
Poor	1	3.3
Mean Score = 3.27		

Participants were asked to react to the extent to which they felt that, "Extension staff provided programs to meet the needs of agricultural clientele in their counties." The data as shown in Table XXXV, revealed more than 53 percent of the respondents indicated that staff in their counties were in the "good" category, while over 36 percent said they were "outstanding." Notwithstanding, two of the respondents indicated "fair" and one indicated "poor" were the appropriate descriptions with regard to the extent to which agricultural clienteles' educational needs were being met.

TABLE XXXV

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' VIEWS REGARDING THE COUNTY
EXTENSION STAFF'S PROVIDING OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS
AND SERVICES THAT MEET THE NEEDS OF
AGRICULTURAL CLIENTELE

CATEGORY OF PERCEPTION	FREQUENCY (N=30)	PERCENT (%)
Outstanding	11	36.7
Good	16	53.3
Fair	2	6.7
Poor	1	3.3
Mean Score = 3.23		

Table XXVI illustrated the extent to which the county Extension staff in respondents' counties keep up to date in relation to technological changes and adapts programs to meet those changes. Seventy percent of the respondents felt the extent was "good" while 20 percent felt it was "outstanding." There were two or 6.7 percent of the respondents who felt the extent was "fair" and one respondent felt it was poor."

The information in Table XXXVII showed commissioner respondents' feelings toward the extent to which the "county Extension staff provides educational programs and services to meet the needs of the public in home economics and family living." Seventy percent felt service was "good," while more than 23 percent felt it was "outstanding." However, one commissioner also listed the service in each of the categories, "poor" and "fair," in regard to Home Economics and family living.

TABLE XXXVI

A SUMMARY OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH COMMISSIONERS BELIEVE
COUNTY EXTENSION STAFF IN THEIR COUNTIES KEEP UP TO DATE
RELATIVE TO TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES AND ADAPTS
PROGRAMS TO MEET THOSE CHANGES

CATEGORY OF PERCEPTION	FREQUENCY (N=30)	PERCENT (%)
Outstanding	6	20.0
Good	21	70.0
Fair	2	6.7
Poor	1	3.3
Mean Score = 3.07		

TABLE XXXVII

A SUMMARY OF HOW COMMISSIONERS FEEL THE COUNTY EXTENSION
STAFF PROVIDES EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES
TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE PUBLIC IN HOME
ECONOMICS AND FAMILY LIVING

CATEGORY OF PERCEPTION	FREQUENCY (N=30)	PERCENT (%)
Outstanding	7	23.3
Good	21	70.0
Fair	1	3.3
Poor	1	3.3
Mean Score = 3.13		

The extent to which “the county Extension staff provided educational programs and services that meet the community and natural resource development needs” in respondents’ counties was listed in Table XXXVIII. Nearly 80 percent of the respondents felt that the extent to which these needs were met was “good,” while more than 10 percent felt it was “outstanding.” No respondents selected the “poor” option, however four or nearly 14 percent of the commissioner respondents said the extent was only “fair.”

TABLE XXXVIII

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' VIEWS OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE COUNTY EXTENSION STAFF PROVIDES EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES THAT MEET THE COMMUNITY AND NATURAL RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF THEIR COUNTIES

CATEGORY OF PERCEPTION	FREQUENCY (N=29)	PERCENT (%)
Outstanding	3	10.3
Good	22	75.9
Fair	4	13.8
Poor		
Mean Score = 2.97		

Perceived Service Opportunities

Section IV of this research deals with perceived service opportunities as perceived by county commissioners in the Southeast District.

The data in Table XXXIX indicated commissioners perceptions concerning the sector of their counties which they felt is under-served. The area selected by over 29 percent of the respondents as the most under-served sector was small business. Rural development was designated as the second most under-served area according to 18.9 percent of the commissioner respondents. The third most under-served sector was commercial agriculture. Youth were selected as the fifth most under-served sector, while minorities were ranked sixth as being under-served.

TABLE XXXIX

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING WHICH SECTOR OF THE COUNTY IS MOST UNDER-SERVED BY EXTENSION

SECTOR	FREQUENCY (N=37)	PERCENT (%)	RANKING (1-7)
Small Business	11	29.7	1
Rural Development	7	18.9	2
Commercial Agriculture	6	16.2	3
Families	5	13.5	4
Youth	4	10.8	5
Minorities	3	8.1	6
Others	1	2.7	7

Groups most uninformed about Extension and Extension activities were listed in Table XL. Entrepreneurs were considered the most uninformed by over 29 percent of the respondents, while minorities were considered the second most uninformed group by over 25 percent of the commissioners responding. The third most uninformed group were those involved in farming and ranching as indicated by slightly over 22 percent of the respondents. Community leaders seemed to be the fourth most uninformed group with just over eleven percent of the respondents consideration. Youth, with slightly over seven percent, were considered by respondents to be the fifth most uninformed group. The "other" group was ranked sixth. No commissioner respondent rated homemakers as a group which is uninformed about Extension and or Extension activities.

Demographic Characteristics

The final section of the questionnaire was designed to obtain selected demographic characteristics of commissioner respondents. Tables XLI through LIII were developed to report selected demographic information.

As shown in Table XLI, 29, (100%) of the Commissioners responding were male. Table XLII was developed to illustrate a distribution by age. The largest group of respondents was in the 51 to 60 age range, which consisted of 14 (48.3%) respondents. The second largest group was in the age range of 41 to 50 years and included six (20.7%) respondents. Three (10.3%) of the Commissioners were in the 61 to 70 age category. Only one (3.4%) respondent was in the 21 to 30 age group. However, one commissioner (3.7%) was in the 71 and over age range.

TABLE XL

A SUMMARY OF COMMISSIONERS OPINIONS WHAT GROUP IS MOST UNINFORMED ABOUT EXTENSION AND/OR EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

GROUP	FREQUENCY (N=27)	PERCENT (%)	RANKING (1-7)
Entrepreneurs	8	29.9	1
Minorities	7	25.9	2
Farmers/Ranchers	6	22.2	3
Community Leaders	3	11.1	4
Youth	2	7.4	5
Other	1	3.7	6
Homemakers			7

TABLE XLI

A DISTRIBUTION OF COMMISSIONERS BY GENDER

GENDER	FREQUENCY (N=29)	PERCENT (%)
Male	29	100.0
Female		

TABLE XLII
A DISTRIBUTION OF COMMISSIONERS BY AGE

AGE	FREQUENCY (N=29)	PERCENT (%)
21-30	1	3.4
31-40	4	13.8
41-50	6	20.7
51-60	14	48.3
61-70	3	10.3
70+	1	3.4

Table XLIII contains data as to the number of years respondents had spent as a County Commissioner. It was determined that 11 (37.9%) respondents had served from one to four years. Ten (34.5%) individuals served as county commissioners for five to eight years. Four (13.8%) commissioners served from nine to 12 years and three (10.3%) had been in the office for 13 to 16 years. One commissioner had served for 17 years or more.

The occupations of the respondents were reported in Table XLIV. As can be determined by inspecting data in this table, the occupational area which encompassed the largest number of responses from commissioners indicating 19 (59.4%) as “Farmers/Ranchers. “Small Business Owners” consisted of seven (21.9%) respondents,

which was the second largest group. One or (3.1%) respondents indicated he was an “Educator” and five (15.6%) of the respondents were in the “Other” category.

TABLE XLIII
A DISTRIBUTION OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS’ EXPERIENCE

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	FREQUENCY (N=29)	PERCENT (%)
1-4	11	37.9
5-8	10	34.5
9-12	4	13.8
13-16	3	10.3
17+	1	3.4

Distribution of the highest level of educational attainment by county commissioners was presented in Table XLV. Twenty-one (72.4%) of the respondents had received at least a “High School Diploma.” Four (13.8%) respondents had earned an “Associate Degree.” One (3.4%) of the participants listed “Less than High School Education.” One (3.4%) respondent indicated earning a “BS Degree” while one (3.4%) also completed requirements for a “Master’s Degree.” Only one (3.4%) respondent listed “Other” as the highest level of formal education.

TABLE XLIV

A DISTRIBUTION OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS BY OCCUPATION

OCCUPATION	FREQUENCY (N=32)	PERCENT (%)
Educator	1	3.1
Farmer/Rancher	19	58.4
Small Business Owner	7	21.9
Other	5	15.6

TABLE XLV

A DISTRIBUTION OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS BY HIGHEST LEVEL OF FORMAL EDUCATION

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION	FREQUENCY (N=29)	PERCENT (%)
Less than High School	1	3.4
High School Graduate	21	72.4
Associate Degree	4	13.8
BS Degree	1	3.4
Masters Degree	1	3.4
Other	1	3.4

Table XLVI was designed to present data by commissioners as to whether or not respondents had held a leadership position. Fifty (50%) of the respondents had held such a position, as "Chairman of the Board of Commissioners," while four (14.3%) had served on their "County Budget Board." Over 35 percent of the respondents had held "Other" positions. Memberships in a professional associations were represented in Table XLVII. Twenty-seven percent of commissioners had been affiliated with the state "Association of County Commissioners (ACCO)," while seven (20.0%) had been affiliated with "County Officers & Deputies Association." When asked if the commissioners had served as "Officers in ACCO," one (12.5%) had served as "President" while three (37.5%) had been on the "Executive Board of Directors" as shown in Table XLVIII.

TABLE XLVI

A DISTRIBUTION OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS BY THEIR
LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

POSITIONS SERVED	FREQUENCY (N=28)	PERCENT (%)
Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners	14	50.0
Budget Board	4	14.3
Other	10	35.7

TABLE XLVII

A DISTRIBUTION OF COMMISSIONERS BY THEIR MEMBERSHIP
IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION	FREQUENCY (N=35)	PERCENT (%)
Association of County Commissioners	27	77.1
County Officers & Deputies Association	7	20.0
Other	1	2.9

TABLE XLVIII

A DISTRIBUTION OF COMMISSIONERS BY OFFICER IN ACCO

OFFICE	FREQUENCY (N=4)	PERCENT (%)
President	1	12.5
Executive Board of Directors	3	37.5
Other		

Table XLIX was presented to describe a distribution of how respondents classified the social characteristics off their districts. Response choices consisted of "Rural," "Mostly Rural, Some Urban," "Mostly Urban, Some Rural," "Urban," "Other." The largest group of the participants, 21 (72.4%), characterized their district as "Mostly Rural,

Some Urban,” while seven (24.1%) said they represented “Rural” districts. Only one (3.4%) commissioner responded with “Mostly Urban, Some Rural”

Table L is a summary of respondents’ perceptions concerning the primary economic base in their county. Fourteen (33.3%) of the commissioners stated “Production Agriculture” was their primary economic base, while 11 (26.2%) indicated “Agribusiness.” Ten (23.8%) indicated “Oil and Natural Gas.” “Manufacturing followed with four (9.5%), “Small Business” with two (4.8%) and “Forestry” with one (2.4%).

TABLE XLIX

A DISTRIBUTION OF COMMISSIONERS BY DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS

DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS	FREQUENCY (N=29)	PERCENT (%)
Rural	7	24.1
Mostly Rural, Some Urban	21	72.4
Mostly Urban, Some Rural	1	3.4
Urban		
Other		

Respondents’ political affiliation was listed in Table LI. All commissioner respondents, 28 (100.0%), were Democrats. The data in Table LII was a summary of respondents’ 4-H alumni status. Eighteen (78.3%) of the commissioners who responded had not been 4-H’ers, while five (21.7%) indicated they were active in 4-H.

TABLE L
A DISTRIBUTION OF COMMISSIONERS PRIMARY ECONOMIC
BASE IN THEIR COUNTY

ECONOMIC BASE	FREQUENCY (N=42)	PERCENT (%)
Production Agriculture	14	33.3
Agribusiness	11	26.2
Oil & Natural Gas	10	23.8
Forestry	1	2.4
Small Business	2	4.8
Manufacturing	4	9.5
Other		

TABLE LI
A DISTRIBUTION OF COMMISSIONERS BY POLITICAL AFFILIATION

POLITICAL AFFILIATION	FREQUENCY (N=28)	PERCENT (%)
Democrat	28	100.0
Independent		
Republican		

TABLE LII

A DISTRIBUTION OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS BY WHETHER
OR NOT THEY WERE 4-H ALUMNI

4-H ALUMNI	FREQUENCY (N=23)	PERCENT (%)
Yes	5	21.5
No	18	78.3

Commissioners responses in Table LIII revealed whether or not they had served as members of an "Extension Program Advisory Committee (PAC)." Twenty two (84.6%) of commissioners had not served; only four (15.4%) indicated serving as PAC members.

TABLE LIII

A DISTRIBUTION OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS BY WHETHER OR NOT
THEY SERVED ON PAC COMMITTEE

SERVED ON PAC COMMITTEE	FREQUENCY (N=26)	PERCENT (%)
Yes	4	15.4
No	22	84.6

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to present a summary of the study problem and its setting, the design and conduct of the study and the major findings. Also presented are conclusions and recommendations which were based upon analysis and summarization of data collected and upon observations and impressions resulting from the design and conduct of the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived image and attitudes of county commissioners who served in the Southeast District toward the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service.

Objectives

To accomplish the purpose of this study, the following objectives were established:

1. To determine selected characteristics of county commissioners holding office in the Southeast Cooperative Extension District in Oklahoma.
2. To determine the extent of county commissioners' knowledge and their perceptions concerning the mission, programs, and educational activities of the Cooperative Extension Service in the Southeast District.
3. To assess the familiarity and relationships with County Commissioners and the Cooperative Extension Service staff in the Southeast Extension District of Oklahoma.
4. To determine the perceived quality of Cooperative Extension programs as indicated by County Commissioners in the Southeast Extension District.
5. To determine available service opportunities among County Extension programs as perceived by county commissioners in the Southeast District.

Design and Conduct of the Study

In order to accomplish the specific objectives, a five-part questionnaire was developed and mailed to all commissioners in the Southeast District in Oklahoma.

Commissioners' familiarity and relationships with Cooperative Extension were addressed in Part I of the survey consisting of seven questions. Levels of agreement of commissioners to a series of statements, were used as a means of assessing the perceptions and knowledge of Cooperative Extension in Part II of the questionnaire. In this portion, respondents were asked to respond to a "Likert-type" scale using four choices: 1) "Strongly Agree," 2) "Agree," 3) "Disagree," 4) "Strongly Disagree." In

addition, an ordinal scale was used to acquire the participants' rankings of Extension program area notoriety and visibility.

Part III contained six questions designed to elicit commissioners' perceived quality of Extension programs. A four-point "Likert-type" scale was used to denote categories of program quality. Part IV, included two forced response items for which a scale with an interval type format was also used.

Questionnaires were distributed to the County Extension Directors in each of the counties in the Southeast Extension District of Oklahoma on November 5, 1997. The County Extension Directors then hand-delivered the questionnaires and return envelopes to the total population of 57 commissioners. After one additional follow-up mailing, 30 useable responses were received for a total response rate of 52.63 percent.

After it became obvious that the maximum number of responses had been received, they were sent to the Agricultural Economics computer center for compilation and analysis. Treatments applied to the data were those designed to calculate standard deviations, mean scores, frequencies, percentages, and rank orders.

Major Findings of the Study

Familiarity/Relationships with Cooperative Extension

One aspect of familiarity and relationships dealt with their involvement and/or participation in selected Extension efforts. Others focused upon their acquaintance with Extension services, programs, and information; acquaintance with the program's personnel, and the program areas through which commissioners became most familiar

with Extension. As summarized in the table, 13 (43%) total respondents, had been members and participated in 4-H activities. Of the total group, seven (23%), had immediate family members who had been in 4-H. Slightly over three percent indicated they had no current involvements/relationships with Extension. However, over 33 percent have financially supported Extension programs. Three (10%) reported having “other” types of involvement/participation with Extension.

Just over 53 percent of the total group of respondents, reported that they were involved with County Extension programs through updating as a result of receiving Extension newsletters. More than 46% of the respondents, had used fact sheets, bulletins, publications, etc. as the means of becoming acquainted with Extension. Over 33 percent of the total respondents were reading Extension columns in newspapers to keep abreast of services provided, programs, and information. Acquiring soil tests and recommended practices were the methods which over 36 percent of the respondents became acquainted with various aspects of Extension.

Over 66 percent of the respondents were personally acquainted with all Extension staff in their county. Just over 33 percent of the total indicated they knew their County Agricultural Agent. More than 16 percent indicated being personally acquainted with the 4-H and Home Economics staff members. Only four of the 30 respondents indicated they were not acquainted with the area or state specialist.

Agriculture programs were the means whereby more than one-half of the combined group of respondents became most familiar with Extension activities. Of those surveyed, over 33 percent indicated they were made aware of Extension activities through the 4-H program.. Ten percent of the commissioners responding revealed that Home

Economics was the program area in which they had become acquainted, while 30 percent said Rural Development programs was the area in which they became acquainted. Over 69 percent of the commissioners indicated they felt an "annual Elected Officials Day" in their county would be helpful in keeping them updated and informed.

Perceptions and Knowledge of Cooperative Extension.

The summary of commissioners' extent of agreement relating to their perceptions and knowledge of Cooperative Extension is summarized below and in Table LIV. Sixty-two percent of the respondents "strongly agreed" that Extension programming was visible to all citizens in their county. While over 34 percent "agreed" with the statement. Only one respondent "disagreed."

Fifty-nine percent of commissioner respondents "agreed" that Cooperative Extension helped them understand issues affecting agriculture, families, rural development, and youth and the mission of Cooperative Extensions' should remain education. Sixty-four percent of the Commissioners "agreed" that it would be beneficial for clientele to be involved in planning Extension educational programs, while 25 percent "strongly agreed." However, nearly 11 percent "disagree."

Over 55 percent of the participants "agreed" that determining appropriate methods for transferring information to clientele was more critical for Extension now than in the past. However, thirty-eight percent of the respondents "strongly agreed," with almost seven percent "disagreeing." Seventy-one percent of the Commissioners "agreed" that Extension programs should remain traditionally oriented. Furthermore, nearly 29 percent "strongly agreed." No respondents "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed."

TABLE LIV

A SUMMARY OF SOUTHEAST EXTENSION DISTRICT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' RESPONSES CONCERNING THE EXTENT OF AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS RELATING TO RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTION AND KNOWLEDGE OF COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Statements	N	Category of Agreement								Mean	Standard Deviation	
		Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree				
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			
Citizen accessibility to county extension information and programming.	29	18	62.1	10	34.5	1	3.4			3.59	SA	.59
Cooperative Extension helps me understand issues related to the four program areas.	29	11	37.9	17	58.6	1	3.4			3.45	A	.55
Education should be the mission of Extension.	29	11	37.9	17	58.6	1	3.4			3.35	A	.55
Clientele should be involved in planning programs to be delivered.	28	7	25.0	18	64.3	3	10.7			3.14	A	.59
Determining appropriate method of information transfer is more important than in the past.	29	11	37.9	16	55.2	2	6.9			3.31	A	.60
Priorities in Cooperative Extension should be oriented toward traditional programs.	28	8	28.6	20	71.4					3.29	A	.46
Priorities should emphasize development and delivery to non-rural audiences.	28	1	3.6	13	46.4	10	35.7	4	14.3	2.39	D	.79
Current priorities and focus of Extension are meeting the needs of today's clientele.	27	4	14.8	22	81.5			1	3.7	3.07	A	.55
The impact of OCES in my county is positive.	28	11	39.3	16	57.1			1	3.6	3.32	A	.67
OCES programs in my county are largely beneficial.	28	13	46.4	14	50.0			1	3.6	3.39	A	.69
OCES programs in my county are generally cost effective.	25	6	24.0	16	64.0	2	8.0	1	4.0	3.08	A	.70

Real Limits: Strongly Agree (SA)-3.51 & above, Agree (A)-2.51 to 3.5, Disagree (D)-1.51 to 2.5, Strongly Disagree (SD)-1.0 to 1.50

TABLE LIV (continued)

Statements	N	Category of Agreement								Mean	D	Standard Deviation
		Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree				
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			
Extension should continue the current funding arrangement but at a surcharge for services provided to the public.	25	1	4.0	4	16.0	16	64.0	4	16.0	2.08	D	.70
Extension programs should be carefully reviewed and adequately funded to insure quality in all program areas.	26	1	3.8	24	92.3			1	3.8	2.96	A	.45
Multi-county units have the ability to serve the needs of Extension clientele as effectively as the traditional organizational structure of a fully staffed Extension office in every county.	25			13	52.0	8	32.0	4	16.0	2.36	D	.78
Multi-county units offer an alternative to the current funding problems in Extension.	26	4	15.4	16	61.5	4	15.4	2	7.7	2.85	A	.78
In a time of austerity, Extension should reduce services at the county level.	27	1	3.7	8	29.6	8	29.6	10	37.0	2.00	D	.92
In a time of budget cuts, Extension should reduce programs and staff at the state and federal levels.	27	8	29.6	14	51.9	3	11.1	2	7.4	3.04	A	.85
As a whole, the image of Cooperative Extension in my county is very favorable.	30	9	30.0	19	63.3	1	3.3	1	3.3	3.20	D	.66
Extension priorities should emphasize program development and delivery to rural audiences.	28	5	17.9	21	75.0	2	7.1			3.11	A	.50
The county Extension program in my county is doing the very best job possible considering the current funding situation.	29	13	44.8	14	48.3	1	3.4	1	3.4	3.35	A	.72
Since district and state specialists are much more accessible to research based information, they should always be consulted regarding local Extension problems.	28	1	3.6	17	60.7	10	35.7			2.68	A	.55

Real Limits: Strongly Agree (SA) -3.51 & above, Agree (A)-2.51 to 3.5, Disagree (D)-1.51 to 2.5, Strongly Disagree (SD)-1.0 to 1.50

TABLE LIV (continued)

Statements	N	Category of Agreement								Mean	Standard Deviation	
		Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree				
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			
County Extension staff in my county should currently utilize advanced technology such as web-sites electronic mail and Internet in providing services to the public.	29	4	13.8	19	65.5	3	10.3	3	10.3	2.83	A	.81
Extension staff in my county adequately utilizes the media in promoting and marketing Extension and Extension activities.	28	5	17.9	20	71.4	2	7.1	1	3.6	3.04	A	.64

Real Limits: Strongly Agree (SA) -3.51 & above, Agree (A)-2.51 to 3.5, Disagree (D)-1.51 to 2.5, Strongly Disagree (SD)-1.0 to 1.50

Only one commissioner "strongly agreed" that Extension priorities should emphasize program development and delivery to non-rural audiences, while 46 percent of respondents "agreed." However, 36 percent "disagreed" and 14 percent "strongly disagreed" that delivery of Extension programs should focus on non-rural audiences. Respondents' feelings related to whether or not current priorities and the focus of Extension were meeting today's clientele needs revealed with over 14 percent of commissioners "strongly agreed," while 81. percent "agreed."

When asked if "the impact and program effectiveness of Extension in my county was positive," more than 39 percent of the respondents "strongly agreed" while over 57 percent "agreed." Responding to the question, "if Extension programs in their counties were beneficial," over 46 percent indicated they "strongly agreed" and 50 percent "agreed." Twenty-four percent of the commissioners responding "strongly agreed" and the statement, "Extension programs in my county are generally cost effective," 64 percent "agreed."

Southeast District County Commissioners were opposed to continuing the present funding arrangement but adding a surcharge for Extension services. Over 92 percent of commissioners felt that Extension Programs were being carefully reviewed and adequately funded.

Commissioners felt multi-county units would not be able to serve the needs of Extension clientele as effectively as the traditional organizational structure with 52 percent in agreement, while 32 percent disagreed and 16 percent "strongly disagreed." Although respondents were generally in agreement that "multi-county units offer an alternative to the current funding problems in Extension." When asked during times of

austerity, “Extension programs and staff at all levels should reduce services at the county level,” 37 percent “strongly disagreed” and almost 30 percent “disagreed.”

Data regarding the reaction of respondents to the statement “in a time of budget cuts, Extension should reduce programs and staff at the state and federal levels” revealed 51 percent of the Commissioners “agreed,” while 29 percent “strongly agreed.” Overall responses of by respondents to the statement that image of Cooperative Extension is favorable in commissioners’ counties indicated over 63 percent we in agreement.

The contention that Extension priorities should emphasize program development and delivery to rural audiences indicated 75 percent of the respondents “agreed,” while 18 percent “strongly agreed.” Commissioners generally agreed that the County Extension program was doing the very best job possible considering the current funding situations. Respondents addressing the statement, “since district and state specialists are more accessible to researched based information, they should always be consulted,” indicated that 60 percent of the commissioner respondents “agreed” while 36 percent “disagreed.”

Data in Table LV illustrates commissioner respondents perceptions regarding the notoriety and visibility of the four program areas delivered by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service in the Southeast District. Agriculture was perceived as being the most widely recognized, followed by 4-H Youth Development; Home Economics and Rural Development followed respectively.

TABLE LV

A SUMMARY OF RESPONDENTS' RANK ORDERS OF AGRICULTURE, HOME ECONOMICS, AND 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN TERMS OF NOTORIETY AND VISIBILITY BY PROGRAM AREA(S)

Program Areas	Distribution of Responses by Rank Order Categories								Mean Rank	SD	Overall Rank
	1		2		3		4				
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
Agriculture	15	50.0	4	16.7	4	20.0	2	8.7	1.72	1.02	1
4-H Youth Development	8	26.7	12	50.0	4	20.0	1	4.3	1.92	.81	2
Home Economics	6	20.0	6	25.0	10	50.0	3	13.0	2.4	1.0	3
Rural Development	1	3.3	2	8.3	2	10.0	17	74.0	3.00	.85	4

Perceived Quality of Extension Programs.

Fifty percent of the Commissioner respondents indicated current Extension staff were “outstanding” and qualified to meet the needs of the public. Furthermore, over 46 percent of the respondents rated qualifications of the county staff as “good.” Almost 37 percent of the respondents who provided input concerning the extent to which the Extension provided educational programs and services to meet the needs of young people in their counties, rated them as “outstanding” in providing assistance, while over 56 percent of the commissioners responding rated this effort as “good.”

Study participants were asked to react to the extent to which they felt that extension staff provided programs to meet the needs of agricultural clientele in their counties. Over 37 percent of the commissioners responding stated the effect in programs was “outstanding,” while more than 53 percent indicated quality in this regard was “good.” Respondents felt the Extension staff was keeping up to date with technological change and adapting programs to meet those changes. In responding to this statement, 20 percent stated that county staff in their counties were doing an “outstanding” job of managing change, while 70 percent rated Extension staff as doing a “good” job in this area.

The extent to which the county Extension staff provided educational programs and services to meet the needs of the public in home economics and family living revealed 70 percent of the respondents rated this effort as “good” while over 23 percent states it was “outstanding.” Part III of the study explained the extent to which the county Extension staff provided educational programs and services that meet the community and

natural resources developments needs. Nearly 76 percent of the respondents felt that the extent to which these needs were met was “good” while more than ten percent felt they were “outstanding.”

Perceived Service Opportunities.

Almost 30 percent of the Commissioner respondents indicated the area most under-served was small business. Rural development was the second most under-served area as indicated by 19 percent of the respondents, while the third most under-served sector was commercial agriculture as indicated by 16 percent of the Commissioners responding. The fourth most under-served area was families. The group perceived as being the most uninformed about Extension and Extension activities were entrepreneurs, according to 29 percent of the respondents. Minorities were considered the second most uninformed group with almost 26 percent of the respondents in agreement. Surprisingly, over 22 percent of the Commissioners responding indicated farmers and ranchers were many times uninformed about Extension programs and activities.

Demographic Information.

As reported in Table LV, all Commissioner respondents (100%) participating in the study in the Southeast District were male. The age range for those participating in the study was 21 to 71 years of age. The largest group included 48 percent of the respondents in the age group ranging from 51 to 60 years of age.

Almost 38 percent of the commissioners who participated in the survey had four years or less of service, while over 34 percent of the respondents had five to eight years of

TABLE LVI

SUMMARY OF SOUTHEAST COOPERATIVE EXTENSION DISTRICT
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS RESPONDENTS BY DEMOGRAPHIC
CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics	N	Distribution %
Gender		
Male	29	100.0
Female		
Age		
21-30	1	3.4
31-40	4	13.8
41-50	6	20.7
51-60	14	48.3
61-70	3	10.3
71+	1	3.4
Experience as a County Commissioner		
1-4	11	37.9
5-8	10	34.5
9-12	4	13.8
13-16	3	10.3
17+	1	3.4
Primary Occupation		
Attorney		
Auto Dealer		
Banker		
Educator	1	3.1
Farmer/Rancher	19	59.4
Homemaker		
Minister		
Realtor		
Small Business Owner	7	21.9
Other	5	15.6
Highest Level of Formal Education		
Less than High School Education	1	3.4
High School Graduate	21	72.4
Associate Degree	4	13.8
Bachelor of Science	1	3.4
Masters Degree	1	3.4
Other	1	3.4

TABLE LVI (continued)

Characteristics	N	Distribution	
			%
County Leadership Positions			
Chairman of Board of Commissioners	14		50.0
Budget Board	4		14.3
Other	10		35.7
Membership in Professional Associations			
Association of County Commissioners (ACCO)	27		77.1
County Officers and Deputies Association	7		20.0
Other	1		2.9
Officer in ACCO			
President	1		12.5
Vice President			
Secretary/Treasurer			
Executive Board of Directors	3		37.5
Other	4		50.0
Social Characteristics of Your County			
Rural	7		24.1
Mostly Rural, Some Urban	21		72.4
Mostly Urban, Some Rural	1		3.4
Urban			
Other			
Primary Economic Base of Your County			
Production Agriculture	14		33.3
Agribusiness	11		26.2
Oil and Natural Gas	10		23.8
Forestry	1		2.4
Small Business	2		4.8
Manufacturing	4		9.5
Other			
Political Affiliation			
Democrat	28		100.0
Independent			
Republican			
4-H Alumni Member			
Yes	5		21.7
No	18		78.3
Member of Extension Program Advisory Committee			
Yes	4		15.4
No	22		84.6

service. As to occupation, the most common response was farmer/rancher which involved over 59 percent of the commissioners responding. While almost 22 percent were small business owners. Over 72 percent of the respondents stated their highest level of formal education was a high school graduate. Almost 14 percent had earned an “associate degree” with over three percent earning a BS and Masters Degrees respectively. Over half of the study participants had served as Chairman of the Board of County Commissioner in their respective counties. Over 14 percent of the study participants indicated they were utilizing a Budget Board format for county government in their respective counties.

An overwhelming 77 percent of the County Commissioners participating in this study were members of the State Association of County Commissioners (ACCO). One respondent had served as state president of ACCO, while three had served on the Executive Board of Directors. Seven commissioners were affiliated with County Officers and Deputies Association.

Just under three quarters of the respondents (72%) described their counties social characteristics as “mostly rural and some urban” while slightly over 24 percent were from “rural” counties. One respondent in the Southeast Extension District described his county as being “urban.”

Respondents were fairly evenly divided in describing the primary economic bases of their respective counties with over 33 percent in production agriculture, over 26 percent in agribusiness and almost 24 stated their county’s economy was largely driven by oil and natural gas.

All (100%) of the respondents listed their political affiliation as Democrat. Over 21 percent of the commissioner respondents were 4-H alumni, while slightly over 15 percent served on an Extension advisory committee.

Conclusions

Examination and interpretation of the major findings provided the opportunity for the author to draw the following conclusions:

1. It seemed that a large contingent of commissioners surveyed were former 4-H member and had participated in 4-H activities. However, it was apparent that utilization of services and educational programs provided by Cooperative Extension seemed fairly popular. Overall, it was apparent that some decision makers were familiar and had personal involvement with Extension and Extension activities.

2. Cooperative Extension program areas with which commissioners had the most familiarity and relationships were Agriculture and 4-H and their associated activities.

3. It was apparent that commissioners in the Southeast District were personally acquainted with an Extension professional in their respective counties. However, when questions addressing specific Extension positions were asked, the respondents seemed to be somewhat tentative in indicating whom they know by position/title, and how often they visited the Extension office.

4. In addition, it was concluded that an activity sponsored by Extension Field Staff for the purpose of keeping county officials informed and up-to-date about Cooperative Extension in their districts would be a welcomed and valuable endeavor. Based on the positive response of commissioners to the question concerning Extension

sponsoring an "Annual Elected Officials Day," it was apparent that the elected officials see both the need and the benefit of being accurately informed and updated concerning issues impacting Agriculture, Youth, Home Economics, and Rural Development.

5. Accessibility, benefits and cost effectiveness of Extension educational programming and the transfer of research based information to the public were primarily seen as being positive among County Commissioners in the Southeast District.

6. Based on the study findings, it appears that County Commissioners in the Southeast District were appreciative of the Cooperative Extension for providing accurate information that allows them to better understand the issues impacting Agriculture, Family, Youth, and Rural Development.

7. It was obvious that the respondents thought that education should be the mission of Extension, while involving the clientele in the program planning process.

8. County Commissioners responding to the same influences of modern communication as the general public, viewed the appropriate methods of transferring information as being an important aspect of the program, now more than in the past.

9. Respondents of the question were rather steadfast in their beliefs that priorities in Cooperative Extension should be oriented toward traditional programs in Agriculture, Home Economics, 4-H, and Rural Development. Elected officials were also equally divided in their belief that Extension should serve non-traditional urban and non-rural audiences..

10. After reviewing the findings, it was apparent that commissioners felt rather strongly that Extension programs were effective and meeting the needs of their clientele.

11. It was readily apparent that commissioners felt that Extension programs in their counties were largely beneficial and cost effective.

12. There was apparent disagreement among the commissioners concerning the concept of continuing the current funding strategy of a three-way partnership, among the county, state, and federal levels and then adding a user's fee/surcharge for clientele wishing to utilize the programs and services provided by Cooperative Extension. However, commissioners overwhelmingly agreed that programs would be reviewed and adequately funded.

13. Commissioners seemed to have mixed emotions concerning Extension's ability to effectively serve the needs of clientele in multi-county units as compared to a traditional, fully staffed single-county unit. However, commissioners agreed that multi-county units offer some relief to the funding problems plaguing Extension. However, at the same time elected officials seemed to be of the opinion that Extension should not reduce services or staff at the county level but review state and federal staff levels.

14. It was apparent that commissioners felt that the image of Cooperative Extension in their county was very favorable, however they seemed rather concerned about the development of programs to address the needs of rural audiences.

15. Based on the findings, the commissioners maintain that their Extension office is doing the best job possible in spite of the current funding problems, but showed some concern with clientele consulting state and district specialists directly.

16. It was apparent among commissioners that Agriculture and 4-H Youth Development seemed to be the most visible and attracted the most notoriety among Extension's four program areas.

17. Commissioners seem to be of the opinion that county staff should utilize technology available, including internet, electronic mail, etc. to provide services to the public, as well as, and continuing their use of the local media - newspapers and radio to market Extension.

18. Based on the findings of the study, commissioners were quite happy the qualifications of county Extension staff to meet the needs of the public. They felt strongly that the staff provided educational programs to young people and the clientele in their county. However, the commissioners did address some concern that natural resources development seem to be a rather low priority.

19. The commissioners participating in the study tend to believe small business was the area most under-served by Extension followed by rural development and commercial agriculture. The groups the commissioner felt most under-served were entrepreneurs, minorities, and farmers and ranchers.

20. County Commissioners in the Southeast District were male between the ages of 21 and 71 years of age with eight years or less experience. Furthermore, the primary occupation among the study participants was farming and ranching and small business owners. It was also readily apparent that commissioners held a variety of leadership positions within their county governments. As a group, the commissioner respondents were members of there State Association (ACCO) while representing their counties which were classified as mostly rural and some urban. The commissioners involved in this study were Democrats by political affiliation.

Recommendations

The subsequent recommendations were based on the results, inferences and insight of conducting this study.

1. Based on the findings of this study Extension should not reduce services at the county level.
2. All County Extension offices and staff should make a coordinated effort to inform their County Commissioners of the specific services, materials, and programs in their area.
3. It is recommended that each County Extension office conduct an “Annual Elected Officials Day” for the purpose of keeping commissioners up-to-date and informed.
4. From the findings to the study it was apparent that Home Economics and Rural Development do not seem to be as visible, nor do they attract the notoriety of Agriculture and 4-H Youth Development. Therefore, it would seem advantageous for Extension to develop a marketing approach to enhance the images of Home Economics and Rural Development so they may have a more positive image in the minds of elected officials.

Recommendations For Further Research

It is the author’s opinion that further study concerning the perceptions of county commissioners regarding Cooperative Extension should be addressed. It would be beneficial to conduct a similar impact study for the other counties in the state of Oklahoma. Such a study might compare the perceptions of commissioners in individual

counties to those in multi-county programming units. Such a study might be useful in more completely describing the effectiveness of County Extension programs.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER

November 7, 1997

Cliff Morgan
P. O. Box 607
Poteau, OK 74953

Dear Mr. Morgan:

We are in the process of conducting a descriptive study concerning the image and perception of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES) among county elected officials. As you know, OCES has a long tradition of successful public service in the four program areas of agriculture, home economics, 4-H and youth, and rural development. We also realize County Commissioners have a very important role in developing and approving county budgets. Therefore, your input and perspective is vital to the success of our program.

The purpose of this study is to acquire the input of decision makers elected by their constituents to share their personal insight as well as their perceived image of OCES. This is important from the perspective of planning, designing and conducting educational programming to meet the needs (economic and social) of the Extension districts in Southeast Oklahoma. Your reply to the survey will assist us in accomplishing this objective.

Please take about 20 minutes and complete the survey. A stamped addressed envelope to Mike Steele, Extension 4-H Agent, P. O. Box 1117, Ardmore, OK 73402, is provided for your convenience.

Again, we are most appreciative of your willingness to share your perspective and insight as well as the support you give the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service. Please rest assured that your responses will be strictly confidential and the coding of the survey instrument is done only for the purpose of providing follow-up to non-respondents. The data from this survey will only be reported in the aggregate. No individual responses will be able to be identified as a result.

If you have questions, you may contact me at the Love County Extension office in Marietta (405)276-3385 or call Dr. White at (405)744-8143 in Stillwater.

Sincerely,

Mike Steele

Mike Steele
Extension 4-H Agent
Love and Marshall Counties

James D. White

James D. White
Professor and Thesis Adviser
Department of Agricultural Education,
Communications, & 4-H Youth Development

Ray Campbell

Raymond E. Campbell
Associate Director
Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

APPENDIX B
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Cooperative Extension/Elected Officials Survey



OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

BRINGING THE UNIVERSITY TO YOU

**THE IMAGE OF COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION AS PERCEIVED BY THE
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS IN
SOUTHEAST OKLAHOMA**

Oklahoma State University
Department of Agricultural Education,
Communications & 4-H Youth Development

October, 1997

Please mark **ONLY ONE** response for each question/statement unless otherwise instructed. Your input will be invaluable and will assist Extension in enhancing a more positive image as well as developing new approaches about how to best serve the people of Southeast Oklahoma.

-1-

**I. Familiarity and relationships with
Cooperative Extension:**

Mark all responses which indicate your familiarity /relationship with /to Cooperative Extension.

- 1. My involvement/participation in cooperative extension is/has been...**
- I was a 4-H member and participated in 4-H activities
 - A member of my immediate family is active in 4-H activities and/or is a volunteer adult leader
 - I make a point to be involved in at least one extension activity each year
 - No involvement
 - I have financially supported Extension programs
 - Other (please specify) _____

-2-

2. The extent of my involvement with the county Extension program is/has been...

- Acquiring soil fertility recommendations
- Utilizing Extension fact sheets and other Extension publications
- Receiving an Extension newsletter
- Reading the Extension column in my local newspaper
- Utilizing the recommendations and/or services of county Extension staff, and/or area and/or state specialists
- Supporting 4-H program activities
- Has been the beneficiary of Rural Development projects

3. My knowledge of Extension is a result of...

- My personal acquaintance with the county Extension staff
- My family's involvement in Extension youth activities
- My use of Extension publications
- My use of Extension recommendations and services
- My involvement in Extension educational programs
- My personal involvement in 4-H as a young person
- Working with County Extension Office and/or personnel as an aspect of my position
- Sunup Farm Programs
- Extension Newsletters

4. I am most familiar with Extension and its associated activities through

- 4-H
- Agriculture
- Home Economics
- Rural development

5. I am personally acquainted with...

- All Extension staff in my county
- The County Agricultural Agent
- The County 4-H Agent
- The County Home Economist
- Area or State Specialist
- No Extension personnel

6. I visit the Extension office....

- Often
- Occasionally
- Never visit the Extension Office

7. As a Commissioner it would be helpful to me for the County Extension staff to sponsor an "Annual Elected Officials" Day in my county for the purposes of keeping me up-to-date and informed.

- Yes No

II. Perceptions and Knowledge of Cooperative Extension:

Circle one number on the scale which best describes your level of agreement with the statements one to 21.

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

4 3 2 1

1. Information and extension programming are accessible to all citizens in my county. 4 3 2 1
2. Cooperative Extension helps me to understand issues affecting agriculture, families, rural development and youth. 4 3 2 1
3. Education should be the mission of Cooperative Extension. 4 3 2 1

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

4 3 2 1

4. The clientele to be served should be involved in planning the Extension educational programming available through the county program. 4 3 2 1
5. Determining the appropriate methods for transferring information to clientele is more critical for extension now than in the past. 4 3 2 1
6. Priorities in Cooperative Extension should be oriented toward traditional programs in agriculture, rural development, home economics, and 4-H youth development. 4 3 2 1

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

4 3 2 1

7. Extension priorities should emphasize program development and delivery to non-rural audiences. 4 3 2 1

8. The current priorities and focus of extension are meeting the needs of today's clientele. 4 3 2 1

9. The impact and program effectiveness of extension in my county is positive. 4 3 2 1

10. Extension programs in my county are largely beneficial. 4 3 2 1

11. Extension programs in my county are generally cost effective. 4 3 2 1

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

4 3 2 1

12. Extension should continue the present funding arrangement, but add a surcharge for services provided to the public. 4 3 2 1

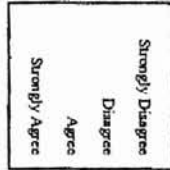
4 3 2 1

13. Extension programs should be carefully reviewed and adequately funded to insure quality in all program areas. 4 3 2 1

4 3 2 1

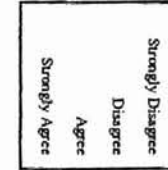
14. Multi-county units have the ability to serve the needs of Extension clientele as effectively as the traditional organizational structure of a fully staffed extension office in every county. 4 3 2 1

4 3 2 1



4 3 2 1

15. Multi-county units offer an alternative to the current funding problems in Extension. 4 3 2 1
16. In a time of austerity, Extension should reduce services at the county level. 4 3 2 1
17. In a time of budget cuts Extension should reduce programs and staff at the state and federal levels. 4 3 2 1
18. As a whole the image of cooperative extension in my county is very favorable. 4 3 2 1
19. Extension priorities should emphasize program development and delivery to rural audiences. 4 3 2 1



4 3 2 1

20. The County Extension Program in my county is doing the very best job possible considering the current funding situation. 4 3 2 1
21. Since District and State Specialists are much more accessible to research based information, they should always be consulted regarding local Extension problems. 4 3 2 1
22. In my opinion, program notoriety and visibility of Extension in my county is primarily in... (rank "1-4" with "1" being the most noticeable and "4" having the least visibility)
- _____ agriculture
 - _____ home economics
 - _____ 4-H
 - _____ rural development

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

4 3 2 1

23. County Extension Staff in my county should currently utilize advanced technology such as Webb sites, electronic mail, and Internet in providing services to the public.
24. Extension Staff in my county adequately utilizes the media in promoting and marketing Extension and Extension activities.

4 3 2 1

4 3 2 1

III. Perceived Quality of Extension Programs

Circle one number on the scale which best illustrates your feeling with statements one to six.

Poor
Fair
Good
Outstanding

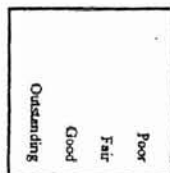
4 3 2 1

1. Qualifications of county Extension staff in my county to meet the needs of the public?
2. Extent to which the county Extension staff provide educational programs and services that meet the needs of young people in your county?
3. Extent to which the county Extension staff provide educational programs and services that meet the needs of agricultural clientele in your county?

4 3 2 1

4 3 2 1

4 3 2 1



4 3 2 1

4. Extent to which the county Extension staff in your county keeps up to date in relation to technological changes and adapts programs to meet those changes? 4 3 2 1
5. Extent to which the county Extension staff provides educational programs and services to meet the needs of the public in home economics and family living in my county? 4 3 2 1
6. Extent to which the county Extension staff provides educational programs and services that meet the community and natural resource development needs in your county? 4 3 2 1

IV. Perceived Service Opportunities

Please mark only one response which is most appropriate for your county.

1. In my opinion the sector of the county which is most under served by Extension is...
- Commercial agriculture
 - Youth
 - Families
 - Small Business
 - Minorities
 - Rural Development
 - Others (please be specific) _____
2. In my opinion the group which is most uninformed about Extension and/or Extension activities is...
- Farmers and Ranchers
 - Homemakers
 - Youth
 - Entrepreneurs
 - Minorities
 - Community Leaders
 - Others (please be specific) _____

V. Demographic Characteristics

Please mark only one response as to how each question/statement impacts you and your county.

1. Gender:

- Female
- Male

2. Age:

- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61-70
- 71 years & over

3. Experience as a County Commissioner:

- 1 - 4 years
- 5 - 8 years
- 9 - 12 years
- 13 - 16 years
- 17 years or more

4. Primary Occupation:

- Attorney
- Auto dealer
- Banker
- Educator
- Farmer/rancher
- Homemaker
- Minister
- Realtor
- Small business owner
- Other (please specify) _____

5. Highest level of formal education:

- Less than High School Education
- High school graduate
- Associate degree
- BS Degree
- Master's Degree
- Other (please specify) _____

6. County Leadership Position (s) in which you currently serve?

- Chairman of the Board of Commissioners
- Budget Board
- Other (please specify) _____

7. Membership in Professional Associations:

- Association of County Commissioners (ACCO)
- County Officers & Deputies Association
- Other (please specify) _____

8. Officer in ACCO:

- President
- Vice-President
- Secretary/Treasurer
- Executive Board of Directors
- Other (please specify) _____

9. Social characteristics of your county:

- rural
- mostly rural, some urban
- mostly urban, some rural
- urban
- other (please specify) _____

10. Primary economic base of your county:

- Production Agriculture
- Agribusiness
- Oil & Natural Gas
- Forestry
- Small business
- Manufacturing
- Other (please specify) _____

11. Political affiliation:

- Democrat
- Independent
- Republican

12: 4-H Alumni member:

- Yes
- No

13. Member of an Extension Program Advisory Committee (PAC):

- Yes
- No

Please use this space to convey your personal comments about how Extension might do a better job in your county:

APPENDIX C

SELECTED RESPONDENTS

COMMENTS

Respondents were given the opportunity to indicate “other” categories for several of the questionnaire items. Generally, those who listed “other” did not specify the term as it related to the questions. Four of the respondents did write comments about the Cooperative Extension Service as it related to their county. Those comments are as follows:

“I believe the staff does a good job of providing educational programs to the rural community.”

“Many of the citizens of the county depend on the programs provided by Extension.”

“This is one of the few services that people think they get for their tax dollars.”

“We hope we can continue to fund Extension, it is a good program, but it is one we have to take a close look at. Is it more important to have Extension or decent roads?”

APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

APPROVAL FORM

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

Date: 10-31-97

IRB#: AG-98-011

Proposal Title: THE IMAGE OF COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AS PERCEIVED BY THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS IN SOUTHEAST OKLAHOMA

Principal Investigator(s): James White, George M. Steele

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

ALL APPROVALS MAY BE SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AT NEXT MEETING, AS WELL AS ARE SUBJECT TO MONITORING AT ANY TIME DURING THE APPROVAL PERIOD.

APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR DATA COLLECTION FOR A ONE CALENDAR YEAR PERIOD AFTER WHICH A CONTINUATION OR RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED FOR BOARD APPROVAL.

ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL.

Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Disapproval are as follows:

Signature of _____

Chair of Institutional Review Board
cc: George M. Steele

Date: November 3, 1997

VITA

George Michael Steele

Candidate for the Degree of

Masters of Science

Thesis: THE IMAGE OF COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AS PERCEIVED BY
THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS IN SOUTHEAST OKLAHOMA

Major Field: Agricultural Education

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Ardmore, Oklahoma May 26, 1956, the son of George
Marion and Roxie Steele. Married to Donna S Newman on June 5, 1982

Education: Graduated from Wilson High School, Wilson, Oklahoma in
May, 1974. Attended Murray State College in Tishomingo,
Oklahoma from 1974 - 1976; received Bachelor of Science Degree
in Agriculture Education from Oklahoma State University in May,
1978; completed requirements for a Master of Science degree from
Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma May, 1998.

Professional Experience: Extension 4-H Agent, Stephens County,
Oklahoma 1978 - 1979, Ringling Public Schools 1979 - 1982, Vo-
Ag Instructor, Baker Tubular Services 1982 -1985, Oil Field Sales,
Vigortone Ag Products 1985 - 1991, Area Sales Manager, 1991 -
1993 Carter County 4-H Agent, 1993 to present Love/Marshall
County 4-H Agent, Member of OEA4-HA, 1991 - Present.