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Clientele Perceptions of the University of the Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service Livestock Program

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Clientele Perceptions of the University of the Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service Livestock Program

Abstract

The purpose of the study reported here was to assess the level of satisfaction/perceptions of University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service livestock clientele. The conclusions indicated: (1) traditional producers had a higher level of satisfaction than non-traditional producers, (2) clientele did not perceive a difference in single-county or multi-county programming, (3) the program was beneficial, and (4) opportunity exists to increase clientele. The recommendations were: (1) maintain present educational course, but also seek other programming avenues, (2) assess perceptions of non-user clientele, (3) increase the information available to non-traditional producers, and (4) increase awareness of educational opportunities.

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Significance and Purpose of Study

Since a groundbreaking study was conducted in Ohio by Young and Cunningham (1977), clientele satisfaction/perception studies have been used by the Cooperative Extension Service. The general findings suggest that clientele are satisfied with the content of the educational information received, the delivery methods used by the educators, and the professionalism of Extension educators and Extension as a whole. Decker and Yerka (1990) and Radhakrishna (2002) note that such input is also beneficial in correcting flaws of sub-par situations, establishing new programs to meet the demands of clientele, and revising existing programs or implementing new ones to meet future expectations of clientele.

Given the usefulness of the Extension clientele satisfaction/perception studies, it was thought that a study in Wyoming would be beneficial. Especially considering that in 2002 the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UWCES) began the process of implementing a new strategic plan that was designed to better serve its clientele in a time of change and redirection.

In 1999, the UWCES assembled a committee to assess alternative delivery systems. The first tenet established was for the UWCES to continue its programming throughout the state. The second aspect stated it must continue its presence in every county. The third premise was that since the UWCES does not have the funding to provide full staffing for each county, a new organizational model must be developed.

The objectives and significance of the study reported here became magnified because the UWCES was reorganizing into multi-county programming regions and undergoing other changes that influenced its clientele. Therefore, it was possible that this was the first study to assess the perceptions of clientele while undergoing a shift in organizational structure and a concurrent shift in program delivery. It was also possible that this was one of the first studies to assess perceptions from all clientele, especially because the Smith-Lever Act did not distinguish between user and non-user clientele. It simply stated that clientele were all "people not attending or resident in land-grant colleges" (Warner & Christenson, 1984, p. 57).

The UWCES was undergoing changes and redirection that affected all of its clientele. Due to time constraints and other challenges, the research project could not survey clientele involved in all of

the programming areas. The scope was narrowed to the livestock program because it is a programming cornerstone, and it is this researcher's area of responsibility. As a result, the overriding objective and purpose of the study was to assess the perceptions of the UWCES livestock clientele pertaining to the livestock programming provided by the UWCES.

Sampling Procedures and Data Collection/Analysis

The study population consisted of the 7,998 names of livestock producers (4,711 with the duplicates accounted for) contained on the livestock mailing lists managed by the Wyoming Agricultural Statistics Service. The study sample was stratified so that it contained a representative proportion of livestock producers from each of the nine UWCES programming regions and a representative proportion of livestock producers from each county. It also contained a representative proportion of producers from various types of livestock operations (beef, swine, poultry, etc.).

The 400 project participants (8.5 % of the population) were mailed a cover letter, a survey instrument, and a pre-stamped/pre-addressed return envelope. Two weeks later, a second letter and duplicates of the original mailing were sent to non-respondents. Those who had not returned the survey after 4 weeks were considered as non-participants. The data received were checked, coded, and entered into a computer database. Means, ranges, percentages, and t-test values were calculated (Bordens & Abbott, 2002).

Survey Demographics

There were 232 surveys returned (58% return rate). The return rate was similar for each type of producer. Therefore, the original stratification was similar to the stratification reflected in the returned surveys. For example, beef producers received the most surveys and their return rate was the highest and horse producers received the second most surveys and they returned the second most. Furthermore, the percentage of returned surveys did not significantly vary between user clientele and non-user clientele.

Results

Livestock Information

The perceptions of producers pertaining to the livestock information provided by the UWCES were evaluated in terms of the information being:

- Useful
- Practical
- Accurate
- Current
- Meeting needs
- Delivered in a timely manner

A ten-point Likert Scale (1 being very dissatisfied and 10 being very satisfied) was provided for producers to summarize their level of satisfaction with the livestock information provided. The majority (82.9%) of producers rated the information as 7 or higher. The mean for the producers' perception of their level of satisfaction was 8.0 for producers who used the UWCES. The mean and t-value for each demographic factor and livestock information are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Mean and T-Value for Each Demographic Factor and the Livestock Information Provided

All Producers; m = 8.0	T is Significant if, t > 1.96
Type of Livestock Operation:	Traditional*; m = 8.4, t = 2.10
	Non-Traditional^; m = 5.7, t = 5.90
Length of Producer Involvement:	< 10 Years; m = 5.5, t = 4.31
	> 49 Years; m = 8.9, t = 5.29
Age of the Producer:	20 -29 Years Old; m = 4.1, t = 5.65

	> 59 Years Old; m = 8.9, t = 2.87
Educational Level of the Producer:	No College Degree; m = 8.6, t = 2.22
	With College Degree; m = 7.3, t = 2.12
Involvement with UWCES:	Currently Involved; m = 8.9, t = 2.09
	Not Currently Involved; Not Statistically Significant
*Traditional = beef, horse, sheep, dairy ^Non-Traditional = swine, poultry, goat, exotic	

Livestock Education

The perceptions of producers pertaining to the livestock education provided by the UWCES were evaluated in terms of the education provided in:

- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Newsletters
- Radio spots
- Television spots
- Mailings
- Subject matter meetings
- Field days
- Ranch/farm/home visits
- Other education (emails, phone calls, etc.)

Another ten-point Likert Scale was provided for producers to summarize their level of satisfaction with the livestock education provided. The majority (77.6%) of producers rated the education as 7 or higher. The mean for the producers' perception of their level of satisfaction was 7.6 for producers who used the UWCES. The mean and t-value for each demographic factor and livestock education are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Mean and T-Value for Each Demographic Factor and the Livestock Education Provided

All Producers; m = 7.7	T is Significant if, t > 1.96
Type of Livestock Operation:	Traditional*; m = 7.9, t = 1.58 (ns)
	Non-Traditional^; m = 5.7, t = 5.43
Length of Producer Involvement:	< 10 Years; m = 5.4, t = 4.00
	> 49 Years; m = 8.5, t = 2.37
Age of the Producer:	20 -29 Years Old; m = 4.1, t = 5.47
	> 59 Years Old; m = 8.5, t = 3.03

Educational Level of the Producer:	No College Degree; m = 8.2, t = 2.31
	With College Degree; m = 7.0, t = 2.00
Involvement with UWCES:	Currently Involved; m = 8.7, t = 2.78
	Not Currently Involved; Not Statistically Significant
*Traditional = beef, horse, sheep, dairy	
^Non-Traditional = swine, poultry, goat, exotic	

Livestock Programming

The perceptions of producers pertaining to the livestock programming provided by the UWCES were evaluated in terms of how well the UWCES:

- Kept current with technological developments
- Used research-based information
- Filtered information
- Was meeting current needs
- Was expected to meet future needs

Their perceptions were also evaluated to determine:

- If producers learned something of value
- If producers used the information received

Again, a ten-point Likert Scale was provided for producers to summarize their level of satisfaction with the livestock programming provided. The majority (73%) of producers rated the programming as 7 or higher. The mean for the producers' perception of their level of satisfaction for the livestock programming provided was 7.6 for producers who used the UWCES. The mean and t-value for each demographic factor and livestock programming are shown in Table 3.

Table 3.
Mean and T-Value for Each Demographic Factor and the Livestock Programming Provided

All Producers; m = 7.6	T is Significant if, t > 1.96
Type of Livestock Operation:	Traditional*; m = 8.0, t = 1.82 (ns)
	Non-Traditional^; m = 5.7, t = 4.87
Length of Producer Involvement:	< 10 Years; m = 5.4, t = 3.54
	> 49 Years; m = 8.5, t = 2.05
Age of the Producer:	20 -29 Years Old; m = 4.2, t = 4.72
	> 59 Years Old; m = 8.5, t = 2.73
Educational Level of the	

Producer:	No College Degree; m = 8.3, t = 2.35
	With College Degree; m = 6.8, t = 2.37
Involvement with UWCES:	Currently Involved; m = 8.8, t = 2.61
	Not Currently Involved; Not Statistically Significant
*Traditional = beef, horse, sheep, dairy	
^Non-Traditional = swine, poultry, goat, exotic	

Livestock Program as a Whole

The previous three sections delved into the findings of the three major tenets of the livestock program: information, education, and programming. However, additional insight could be gained by combining the producer summary of each tenet into an overall perception of the whole livestock program. The majority (80%) of producers rated the whole livestock program as 7 or higher. The mean for the producers' perception of their level of satisfaction for the whole livestock program was 7.7 for the producers who used the UWCES. The mean and t-value for each demographic factor and the livestock program as a whole are shown in Table 4.

Table 4.
Mean and T-Value for Each Demographic Factor and the Livestock Program as a Whole

All Producers; m = 7.7	T is Significant if, t > 1.96
Type of Livestock Operation:	Traditional*; m = 8.1, t = 4.00
	Non-Traditional^; m = 5.7, t = 9.52
Length of Producer Involvement:	< 10 Years; m = 5.4, t = 7.06
	> 49 Years; m = 8.6, t = 3.33
Age of the Producer:	20 -29 Years Old; m = 4.2, t = 8.75
	> 59 Years Old; m = 8.6, t = 5.00
Educational Level of the Producer:	No College Degree; m = 8.6, t = 2.22
	With College Degree; m = 7.3, t = 2.12
Involvement with UWCES:	Currently Involved; m = 8.8, t = 4.40
	Not Currently Involved; Not Statistically Significant

*Traditional = beef, horse, sheep, dairy

^Non-Traditional = swine, poultry, goat, exotic

Responses to Research Questions

The first research question was: What percent of livestock producers are user clientele and what percent of livestock producers are non-user clientele? The data revealed that 57.8% of producers used the services of the UWCES and 42.2% of the producers do not use the UWCES.

The second research question was: How do clients (user clientele) perceive the information, education, and programming provided by the UWCES livestock program? The data indicated the majority of livestock producers (73.0% to 99.1%, depending on component) provided positive responses to indicate their perception of the livestock information, livestock education, and livestock programming provided by the UWCES. However, this response must be tempered by the statistical fact that some of the producers (21.6% to 57.7%, depending on component) indicated they were unaware of some of the educational opportunities provided by the UWCES livestock program.

The third research question was: Is there a difference in the client's (user clientele) perception of the UWCES livestock program based upon demographic factors such as the type of livestock operation (beef, dairy, goat, horse, etc.), longevity of the livestock operation, age of the producer, educational level of the producer, and producer involvement with the UWCES? The statistical data indicated there was a difference in the perception of clientele based upon each of these demographic features.

Implications and Conclusions

The over-riding implication revealed in the study and the major conclusion drawn in the study were that the vast majority of user-clientele were satisfied with the livestock programming provided by the UWCES. This was based upon the following.

- Livestock clientele had not perceived a difference in the educational services provided by the UWCES livestock program, regardless of whether the services were provided via the new multi-county organizational/programming structure or via the former single county organizational/programming structure.
- The livestock program provided by the UWCES was perceived as beneficial for producers.
- Producers of traditional species in Wyoming were better served by the UWCES livestock program than producers of non-traditional species. It is important to note that prior studies indicated a linkage between producer age, producer education, producer involvement with UWCES, and operation longevity. However, these studies did not use type of livestock operation as a demographic factor, and this linkage had not been indicated prior to this project.
- Producers with more than 49 years of involvement with their operations were better served by the UWCES livestock program than producers with less than 10 years of involvement.
- Older producers (more than 59 years old) were better served by the UWCES livestock program than younger producers (20 to 29 years old).
- Producers without a college degree were better served by the UWCES livestock program than producers with a college degree.
- Producers who were currently involved with the UWCES were better served than producers who were previously involved or producers who were never involved with the UWCES.
- The promotion of the educational opportunities provided by the UWCES could be improved.
- The UWCES has an opportunity to increase the number of livestock producers it serves by inducing non-user clientele to use its services.

Recommendations

The recommendations of the study were based upon the finding that producers who currently use the UWCES consider the livestock program a positive resource. Furthermore, the recommendations of this study centered on the opportunity to increase the number of producers who use the services and programming provided by the UWCES.

- The UWCES should continue on its present educational course, but also seek other avenues to advance program quality and subject matter diversity.

- The study revealed that 42% of livestock producers had not used the UWCES livestock program. Therefore, it was recommended these producers become a target audience. It is believed that increased program availability and program diversity could greatly help these producers become user-clientele.
- The data revealed differences in the level of satisfaction between traditional livestock producers and non-traditional producers. As a result, it was recommended that the UWCES compile more knowledge and information pertaining to non-traditional species because this could increase the level of satisfaction of non-traditional producers.
- The data revealed differences in the level of satisfaction between older and younger producers. Therefore, it was recommended that this information be posted on the UWCES Web site because this could facilitate use of the UWCES by younger producers. It is also possible that this could facilitate use of the UWCES by producers with college degrees because they also tend to use the Internet on a more frequent basis.
- Furthermore, it was thought that accomplishment of the task of increasing the research, knowledge, and information pertaining to non-traditional species could be made easier by more deeply incorporating the use of the Internet information available from the Extension Services of other states and by more deeply incorporating the use of e-Extension. If all of the states implemented this strategy, then a more unified and creditable National Extension would evolve. This would also result in an increased level of recognition and an increased level of satisfaction by livestock clientele across the U.S.

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