

Cooperative Extension in Northern Idaho:

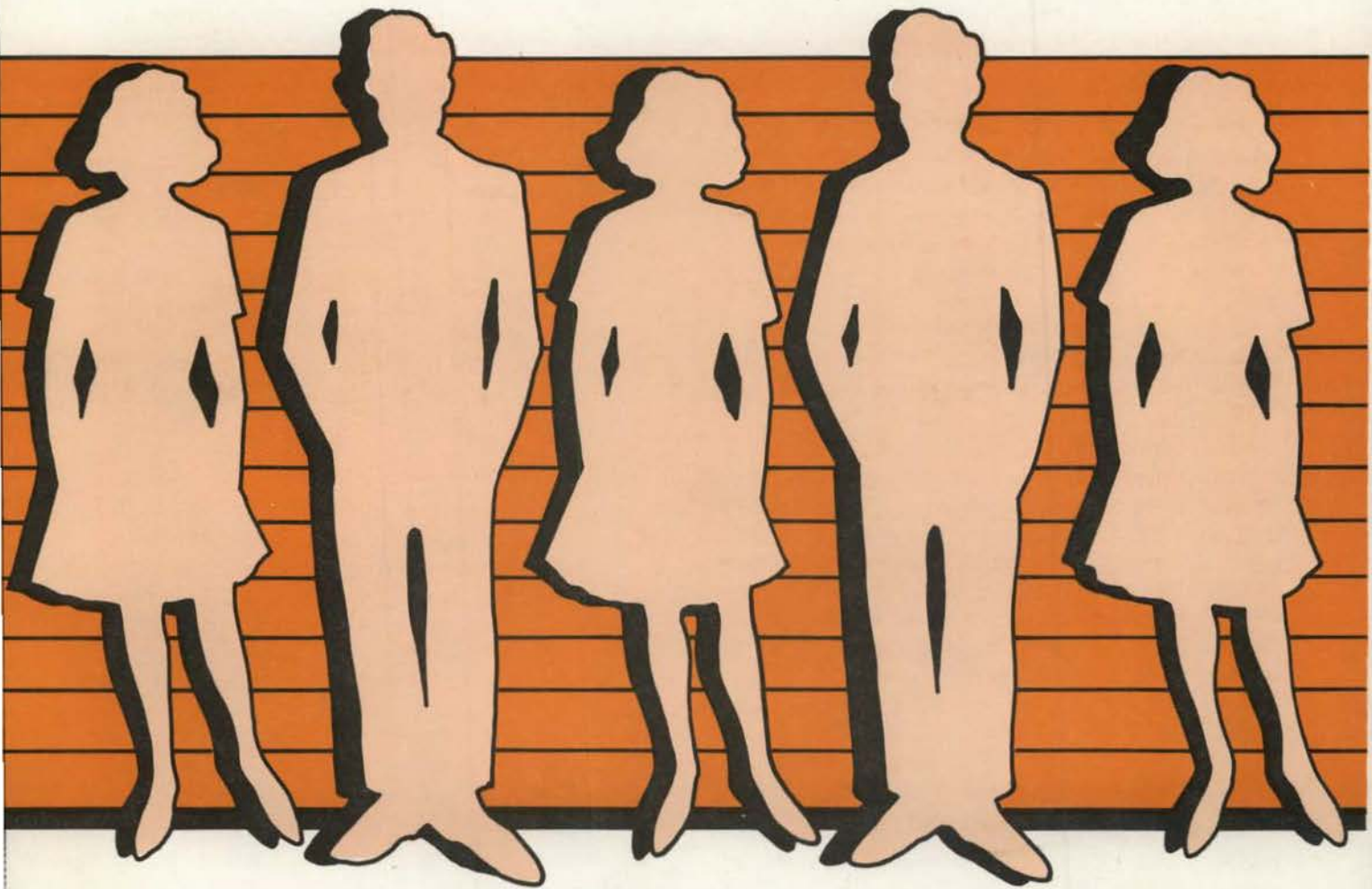
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Who uses our services?

Results of a Four-County Survey



Cooperative Extension Service

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Cooperative Extension in Northern Idaho: Who Uses Our Services? Results of a Four-County Survey

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Introduction

Cooperative Extension Service (CES), the informal educational arm of the United States Department of Agriculture and the University of Idaho College of Agriculture, develops programs designed to assist individuals through the transfer and adoption of a specific concept, idea or attitude or the solution of an identified problem or need. Agriculture, natural and environmental resources, home economics/family living and 4-H/youth education and development topics are addressed through a variety of methods and media. Funded cooperatively by state, federal and county governments, the basic mission of the Cooperative Extension Service is to disseminate and encourage the application of research-generated knowledge and leadership techniques to individuals, families and communities.

Extension was initially established to meet the needs of the nation's farmers and farm families. This meant helping people help themselves, particularly people in rural areas where educational opportunities were scarce. The goal was to transmit land-grant university and USDA-generated knowledge and experience to rural people, thus helping them to make better decisions. As social, economic and technical changes have occurred throughout the years, Extension's audience nationally has diversified to include greater segments of the general public.

Debate Over Program Emphasis

Outside of rural areas, Extension now finds itself pulled in two directions. Some would have Extension expand its efforts beyond its traditional audience and purpose to include urban residents with activity areas like 4-H, gardening, nutrition, recreation, energy, health, community services and many aspects of family living (Warner and Christenson 1984). Others recommend that "Extension redirect or eliminate programs and shift personnel to serve

the needs of producers of U.S. food and fiber." These critics would also have state Extension services "be directed to serve primarily the needs of people of rural America...who do not enjoy the extensive social and public services that are available in cities and suburban communities" (National Agricultural Research and Extension Users Advisory Board 1982).

Within rural areas, Extension faces the need to focus more closely its educational programs, and thus audience, as limited public resources effectively reduce the manpower available to serve a growing rural population. At the same time, pressures from residents for programs and information traditionally provided by Extension to farmers and farm families force agents to expand their services to all who seek assistance.

Idaho Extension Clientele

Who is included among Extension's clientele in a state such as rural Idaho? Is the audience primarily made up of farmers and others associated with the agricultural industry? Or, is Extension now serving a much broader audience? How do the users of Extension programs differ from the nonusers? What types of educational programs are being used and by whom? How useful to the users is the information provided? Finally, within our traditional offerings, what topics seem to have the greatest potential for serving both current users and nonusers?

Extension offices are maintained in 42 of Idaho's 44 counties by University faculty backed by a corps of subject matter specialists on campus and in district offices and research and extension centers. Educational programs are conducted in three broad subject areas — agriculture and natural resources (ANR), home economics/family living (HE) and 4-H/youth education and development (4-H). Program delivery is accomplished through workshops,

informal classes, one-on-one visits, demonstrations, newsletters, radio and television. In addition to these direct communication techniques, Extension faculty prepare lay volunteers for delivery of programs to broad audiences.

Recent Surveys of Users and Nonusers: Nationally and in Idaho

To assess clientele of the Cooperative Extension Service nationally, a survey of the general population was conducted in 1982. Information from that survey, conducted in part with the support of an Extension Service USDA special project grant, was published recently by Warner and Christenson (1982). A random digit sampling frame containing all valid combinations of area code and control office code numbers for the contiguous United States was used for this survey. Usable questionnaires were obtained from 1,048 adults with an overall response rate of 70 percent.

Coincidentally in 1982, questions related to use and interest in CES programs were inserted in a survey of the general population administered in four Idaho counties and four adjoining counties in another state. These questions can now be examined against the backdrop of the national study conducted during the same year.

Idaho Study

Respondents for the Idaho-adjacent state study were systematically selected through current telephone listings of each community within the region. A brief telephone quizzing determined the length of time a respondent had resided in this area. This procedure allowed interviewers to select only one in every six respondents living in the area over a 10-year period, thus effectively oversampling recent migrants, the target group for the primary study that focused on migration motivation. A mail questionnaire was then sent to those respondents who indicated a willingness to complete a written questionnaire. Of the original 343 households included in the Idaho telephone sample, 291 (84.8%) returned the mail questionnaire.

Because of the selection criteria, the ratio of recent migrants to residents (having lived in the area more than 10 years) was four to one. Counties included in the sample have grown an average of more than 50 percent within the 10-year time span bringing in about one out of every three of the current residents. Thus, the true ratio of migrant to resident should be one to two. Weight factors of .4625 for migrants and 3.15 for residents will be used in this analysis to reflect accurately the true population. The final sample size used was 275.

Findings and Discussion

Household Use Patterns

In the national survey, 27 percent (about one-quarter) of all households questioned had used the CES or contacted an Extension agent. The percent of users in the western region alone was 24 percent. In the four counties of the Idaho study, on the other hand, 45 percent (nearly half) of the responding households had had contact with the CES. Perhaps this is reflective of Idaho's rural nature as compared with the rest of the country. A higher percent of Idaho citizens might be expected to know of and use Extension. Nonetheless, in comparison with specific state studies mentioned by Warner and Christenson (Kentucky, 25 percent; Oklahoma, 37 percent; Wisconsin, 27 percent; Missouri, 28 percent), the percentage of CES use by Idahoans is uniquely high.

Residential/Occupation Users and Nonusers

Nationally, more than two-thirds of Extension users live in towns and cities, 37 percent in cities of 50,000 or more. This is to be expected since three-fourths of the population throughout the United States lives in urban areas. By comparison, Idaho users are predominantly rural nonfarm (55 percent)

with the balance of users split nearly equally between persons living in towns of less than 20,000 (22 percent) and persons living on farms (23 percent) (Table 2A.)

By occupation, Idaho study respondents reflect the distribution found nationally with approximately 15 percent of users and 5 percent of nonusers representing farming or other natural resource occupations (Table 2B).

Of greater significance is the proportion of people actually using Extension. Of those living on farms in the Idaho study area, 75 percent indicated contact

Table 1. Household use of Extension.

National study question:
Have you or other members of your family ever contacted an Extension agent or used the services of Extension? (N = 1,028)?

Idaho study question:
In your present location, have you had any contact with the county Cooperative Extension Service or county agent's office (n = 275)?

Response	National study (n = 1,028) (%)	Idaho study (n = 275) (%)
No or don't know	73 (7.50)	55 (19.9)
Yes	27 (2.78)	45 (16.4)

with Extension. Of those indicating rural nonfarm, towns and small cities as their residence, 47 and 29 percent, respectively, had had contact with Extension in their current location. Thus, in the Idaho study area, Extension serves a far greater proportion of farm residents than rural nonfarm or town residents. Also, a higher proportion of farmers or others in natural resource occupations use Extension services than do those in other occupations (54 and 34 percent, respectively). These figures are comparable to those found in the national study (57 and 25 percent) (Table 3).

In these figures, it is evident that Extension in the Idaho study area serves nearly half (45 percent) of the population compared to the one-fourth (27 percent) served nationally. Second, although more than half (55 percent) of Extension users in Idaho are from rural nonfarm areas, Extension is serving a greater proportion of farm residents (75 percent) than rural nonfarm or town residents (47 and 29 percent, respectively) and a far greater proportion of rural residents overall than what was found nationally. Third, a greater proportion of persons in agriculture and other natural resource occupations (57 percent nationally; 54 percent in Idaho) than in other kinds of occupations (25 percent nationally; 34 percent in Idaho) use the services and educational programs of Extension, both nationally and in Idaho.

Profile of Users

Nationally, Extension clientele are predominantly middle class (middle to upper income), high school and college educated, married, employed and homeowners (Warner and Christenson 1984:66). In Idaho a greater number have household incomes of less than \$20,000, have generally less education and are more likely to be unemployed or retired. Nevertheless, the Idaho profile of clientele does reflect a predominantly middle class orientation. Here, as nationally, Extension is reaching the vast, white, stable middle segment of Americans with underrepresentation evident among the less advantaged. Further, Idaho's clientele appear to be older than those found in the national survey (Table 4).

Use of Extension Program Areas

Differences in wording of questions in the national and Idaho studies regarding use of specific Extension program areas prevent direct comparison. The national study sorted users into identifiable Extension program areas as defined by USDA while the Idaho study used program areas by subject matter. These responses undoubtedly contain multiple responses and are, therefore, not additive. Some comparison may be possible, however, only by inference (Table 5).

Table 2. Residential/occupational distribution of users and nonusers.

	National study		Idaho study	
	Nonusers (n = 742)	Users (n = 278)	Nonusers (n = 146)	Users (n = 119)
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
A. Current residence				
Farm	4	10	6	23
Rural nonfarm	13	23	50	55
town (less than 50,000)	28	30	44	22
City (50,000 or more)	55	37	—	—
	100%	100%	100%	100%
B. Occupation				
Farmer	4	16		
Agriculture, natural resources			6	14
Other	96	84	94	86
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 3. Proportion of population using Extension.

	Residence							
	National study				Idaho study			
	Farm	Rural nonfarm	Town	City	Farm	Rural nonfarm	Town	City
Users	48	40	28	20	75	47	29	—
Nonusers	52	60	72	80	25	53	71	—
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	—
	Occupation							
	Farmer		Other		Agriculture, natural resource		Other	
Users	57		25		54		34	
Nonusers	43		75		46		66	
	100%		100%		100%		100%	

Both nationally and within the Idaho study area, agricultural programs had the highest level of use with more than half (62 percent) of all respondents indicating contact with this program area nationally. In Idaho, contact through home gardening and landscaping programs showed the highest single response (49 percent). (Attempts to build an extensive nursery and ornamental gardening industry is a focus of agriculture in two of the four counties and may be reflected in these high figures.) Home economics followed with 43 percent in both the national and the Idaho studies. Idaho respondents indicated contact with Extension through foods and nutrition alone at 43 percent. Quite possibly if the percentages of different individuals were available, Idaho figures would be even higher. The 4-H/Youth program showed much higher use in Idaho (44 percent) compared with just 28 percent nationally. The fourth national program area, community development, is not included as a program in Idaho.

Comparisons of the characteristics of users of the various programs offered by Extension were also examined (Table 6). Warner and Christenson point out in the national study that although women are the predominant users of home economics programs, a quarter of home economics information is used by men. Idaho data show similar percentages, but this is misleading in that the respondent was reporting for the entire household, not just for his or her self. Nevertheless, a sizeable proportion of home

Table 4. Age, socioeconomic characteristics of users and non-users.

	National study		Idaho study	
	Nonusers (n = 742)	Users (n = 278)	Nonusers (n = 140)	Users (n = 113)
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Age				
less than 30	37	24	12	5
30 to 39	20	28	21	25
40 to 64	31	40	46	54
65 and over	12	8	22	15
Family income				
less than \$5,000	10	3	10	5
\$5,000 to 9,999	16	10	7	14
\$10,000 to 19,999	27	27	43	43
(\$20,000 to 24,999)			18	13
\$20,000 to 29,999	25	26		
(\$25,000 to 34,999)			16	14
\$30,000 to 39,999	12	16		
(\$35,000 to 49,999)			5	8
\$40,000 to 49,999	4	8		
\$50,000 or more	6	9	1	4
Education				
Grade school	8	5	20	20
High school	54	45	66	54
College	32	32	12	19
Graduate degree	6	18	2	7
Employment status				
Employed	60	69	51	53
Unemployed	9	3	10	11
Retired	12	10	29	28
Homemaker	14	15	6	8
Student	5	3	3	0

economics program users appear to be male. Other than for the basic agriculture/farm management programs, women are also heavy users of all Extension programs.

Nationally, those listing occupation as farmer use agriculture and 4-H programs to a greater extent than home economics or community development (not shown in table). Percentages decline for those stating farm as current place of residence, however. For Idaho, on the other hand, those living on farms account for the highest percentage of users in four of the eight program areas (agriculture/farm management, woodlot/forest management, housing/heating/energy and home management). Rural nonfarm residents supply the highest percentage of users in the gardening/landscaping, food preparation/nutrition/preservative, sewing/clothing and 4-H/Youth program areas. Only in the foods area do residents of towns provide the highest proportion of program participants among the eight listed.

If a specific focus of Extension is to provide research-based knowledge and information to persons of low socioeconomic background, Extension in Idaho appears to be doing a better job than Extension in other parts of the nation. All program areas show the largest number of users coming from households with incomes of less than \$20,000. Nationally, 40 percent of agricultural and 4-H clients show incomes of \$30,000 or more. Idaho clients are also representative of those with less than college training while the reverse is true nationally (69 percent are college educated).

Methods of User

In addition to who uses Extension, respondents were also asked how they contacted Extension (Table 7). Three common methods used by Extension were incorporated in the national study. Similar questions were asked of Idaho respondents. The failure to include use of printed bulletins in the Idaho study or visits with or in the county office, either in person or by telephone, in both studies may present a false picture of actual methods used.

Table 5. Use of Extension programs.

Program area	National study	Idaho study
	Users	Users
	(%)	(%)
Agriculture	62	
Agriculture/farm management		41
Woodlot/forest management		30
Home gardening/landscaping		49
Home Economics	43	
Housing/home heating/energy		13
Food prep/nutr/preservation		43
Sewing/clothing		23
Home management		7
4-H/Youth	28	44
Community Development	21	na

In both studies, the use of some printed materials, bulletins, newsletters or newspaper articles captured the most attention of users (99 percent nationally, 53 percent in Idaho). Radio and TV, both more readily available in urban areas than in rural Idaho, drew 94 percent nationally but only 37 percent in Idaho. The percentage attending an Extension workshop or meeting was found to be fairly stable, both nationally and in Idaho, at right around 40 percent. Nationally, this represents 4.3 million households in attendance at such workshops. In Idaho, this number may be about 200,000 (if two-person households are the norm).

Satisfaction

According to Warner and Christenson (1984), client satisfaction rather than goal attainment (based on an organization perspective) has come to be accepted as a legitimate measure of organization effectiveness. As such, it is commonly used as a qualitative indicator of public services (Andrews and Withey 1976; Campbell et al. 1976; Marans and Rodgers 1975).

In the national assessment study, satisfaction was measured directly by asking the level of satisfaction the respondent had with CES in general and with each of the program areas within CES. The Idaho study took a different tact asking instead about the usefulness of the information received through Extension programs. Similar results may be seen through the two approaches (Table 8).

In the national study, more than 9 out of 10 persons who had used the services of Extension were

satisfied with the service they received. Similar results were found in Idaho where 91 percent of Extension users indicated the information they had received from Extension was somewhat or very useful. A comparable figure of satisfaction for the western region was 97 percent. The answer, therefore, to the questions, "Are Extension users satisfied with the services they receive?" and/or, "Is the information received from Extension useful?" is overwhelmingly YES. Only home management and 4-H/Youth programs were said to be useful by fewer than 90 percent of the respondents in the Idaho study area.

Interest in Extension Programs

Finally, the Idaho study asked respondents to indicate which programs, if offered in their community, would be of interest to them. Programs listed were the same as those used with previous questions to determine actual use of Extension programs. Table 9 shows responses by nonusers and users in general and specific program users (if already a user of the specific program) would be of interest to them.

Table 7. Methods of communication used by clientele.

Methods	User households using this method	
	National study Percent of users (n = 143)	Idaho study Percent of users (n = 123)
Written materials		
Bulletins, newsletters	99	
Newsletters, newspapers		53
Radio, TV	94	37
Meeting or workshop	39	4

Table 6. Characteristics of users by Extension program area (figures in percent).

Characteristics	Agriculture				4-H/Youth		Home Economics/Family Living				
	Natl	Agric	Forest	Garden	Natl	Idaho	Natl	Housing	Food/Nutr	Clothing	Home Mgmt
Sex											
Female	49	44	63	59	60	71	72	62	73	80	85
Male	51	56	37	41	40	29	28	38	27	20	15
Occupations											
Farmer	30				28		18				
Natural resources		19	6	12		7		6	16	9	5
Other	70	81	94	88	72	93	82	94	84	91	95
Current Residence											
Farm	18	47	46	23	18	28	10	57	27	33	45
Rural nonfarm	23	35	45	50	21	49	28	18	43	40	45
Town	21	18	9	27	33	23	32	25	31	27	10
City (50,000+)	38	—	—	—	28	—	30	—	—	—	—
Income											
less than \$10,000	7	27	14	26	8	26	14	6	19	5	15
\$10,000 to \$19,999	27	57	53	33	37	40	34	60	46	67	53
\$20,000 to \$29,999	26				13		27				
\$20,000 to \$34,999		8	37	30		31		32	26	25	23
\$30,000 or more	29				28		39				
\$35,000 or more		8	10	10		3		3	10	3	8
Education											
Grade school	1	33	17	17	3	19	2	0	20	26	0
High school	41	54	46	60	28	56	41	63	58	48	50
College	31	9	24	15	38	23	35	29	16	23	50
Graduate school	26	5	14	8	31	2	15	8	6	3	0

The main program area consistently of greatest interest to respondents, nonusers and current users alike, is gardening and landscaping. Among current users of this program, 91 percent indicated continuing interest in this area. (Note: The survey was conducted in the early spring. Time of year may have influenced responses to some degree.) Other programs having fairly high interest to nonusers and to users of Extension programs in general are hous-

Table 8. Clientele satisfaction with Extension programs.

Program area	National study	Idaho study
	% satisfied (n = 251)	% info useful (n = 123)
Overall	95	91
Agriculture	93	
Agric/farm mgmt		99
Woodlot/forest mgmt		90
Homegarden/landscape		100
Home Economics	94	
Housing/heating/energy		97
Food/nutr/pres		99
Home management		65
4-H/Youth	95	81
Community Development	84	na

ing/heating/energy, food preparation/nutrition/preservation and, to a lesser extent, sewing and clothing. The fact that close to half of the current users of specific programs indicated continuing interest in that program speaks well for the work being done by Extension personnel. To what extent this information indicates trends in the needs and interest of our society is not clear. Certainly it reflects the Idaho lifestyle and to some extent the economic condition of the times.

Table 9. Interest in Extension programs.

Program	Nonuser	User	User
	(n = 152)	(general) (n = 123)	(specific)
	(%)	(%)	(%)
Agriculture/farm mgmt	9	21	44
Woodlot/forest mgmt	13	27	41
Gardening/landscaping	37	72	91
Housing/heating/energy	30	43	86
Food prep/nutr/pres	25	59	85
Sewing/clothing	16	25	60
Home management	14	16	45
4-H/Youth	10	22	41

Summary and Conclusion

In the four counties of the Idaho study, nearly half of the respondents (45 percent) had had some contact with the county Cooperative Extension Service. This is a sizeable increase over the average found nationwide (27 percent) and that within the western region (24 percent). These Idaho Extension program users are predominantly rural nonfarm residents (55 percent). Twenty-three percent of the users reside on farms, and the balance are from small towns.

Of all the people included in the sample who live on farms, 75 percent indicated having had contact with Extension. For those who are rural nonfarm, town and small city residents, 47 and 29 percent, respectively, had had contact with Extension. Thus, in Idaho, Extension serves a far greater proportion of farm residents than rural nonfarm or town residents.

When occupation of respondents is examined, a higher proportion of farmers and others in natural resources occupations, e.g., forestry primarily, 54 percent of those in these occupational categories use Extension than do those in other occupations (34 percent). To the question, "Is Extension in Idaho now serving a broader audience than originally intended," the answer is a qualified yes and no. Undoubtedly the figures given for occupation reflect multiple jobs held; the principal occupation may or

may not be farming. Nonetheless, a greater number of respondents live on farms, and thereby engage in some agriculturally related enterprise, than is reflected in the number of persons indicating farming as principal occupation.

If socioeconomic characteristics are examined and compared with national data, Idaho Extension serves a greater proportion of persons from households with less than \$20,000 income, who have generally less education, are older and are more likely to be unemployed or retired than is generally true nationally. Idaho counties, however, like most in the United States, tend to reach the stable, middle segment of the population. Those who are less well off are generally under represented among Extension users.

Extension programs receiving the most attention and use in Idaho are those related to agriculture, primarily home gardening/landscaping (49 percent of users) and agriculture/farm management (41 percent), the 4-H/Youth program (44 percent) and food preparation/nutrition/preservation (43 percent of users).

The highest percentage of users of four out of the eight program areas given (agriculture/farm management, woodlot/forest management, housing/heating/energy) live on farms. Rural nonfarm residents supply the highest percentage of users in the

gardening/landscaping, food preparation/nutrition/preservation, sewing/clothing and 4-H/Youth program areas. Only in the subject area of foods do residents of towns provide the highest proportion of program participants among the eight areas included.

All program areas in the Idaho study show the largest number of users coming from households with incomes of less than \$20,000. By comparison, 40 percent of program users of agriculture and 4-H nationally are from households with more than \$30,000 annual income. Thus, Idaho Extension is reaching more people who earn less than the national average income than are other state Cooperative Extension Services.

Both nationally and in Idaho, meetings or workshops account for about 40 percent of the respondents' contact Extension. Bulletins and newsletters and radio/TV draw the largest contact nationally (more than 90 percent of users each) while in Idaho radio and TV accounts for just 37 percent of the contacts and newsletters and newspapers 53 percent.

Users of the Idaho Extension programs were asked to assess the usefulness of the information received from Extension. More than 9 out of 10 respondents indicated the information received was very or somewhat useful, a similar finding to that nationally. This can be inferred to be an indication

of satisfaction with programs as well as of information received. It is a legitimate measure of organization effectiveness and a qualitative indicator of satisfaction with public services (Andrews and Withey 1976; Campbell et al. 1976; Marans and Rodgers 1975; Warner and Christenson 1984).

An additional indicator of satisfaction with programs can be seen in the responses of specific program users to the request "which of the several programs might they and their families be interested in were these to be offered in their community?" Four of the eight programs received indications of continuing interest by current specific users of those programs while for the remaining four more than 40 percent indicated continuing interest. Thirty percent or more of current nonusers indicated interest in gardening/landscaping and housing/heating/energy. Twenty-five percent indicated interest in food preparation/nutrition/preservation while the remaining programs drew less than 20 percent of nonusers' interest.

From this study, it can be concluded that Extension in the four Idaho counties sampled is indeed meeting and satisfying the needs of the target audience through fairly traditional types of programs and methods. There is little indication that any change in focus is needed in order to satisfy both organizational purpose and current users and potential users.

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