

COMPARISONS OF EXTENSION HOME ECONOMISTS' PERCEIVED COMPETENCY  
IN FAMILY AND CONSUMER ECONOMICS

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The Cooperative Extension System is a source for reliable, objective information related to Family and Consumer Economics. Extension agents often have backgrounds in areas other than Family/Consumer Economics, or lack full time specialist support at the state level. Extension Home Economists were surveyed in two states to determine: the number of requests received for Family/Consumer information, how knowledgeable and comfortable agents felt answering questions and conducting programs, and if there was a need for training. Results are reported and suggestions offered for educators.

PURPOSE

Family Economic Security is a priority initiative in the federal plan for Cooperative Extension. Individuals and families can rely on Cooperative Extension to provide information and update their knowledge in Family and Consumer Economics. In some states, budget constraints and down-sizing have affected Extension agents' ability to provide information. Programming may suffer if there is not a fulltime permanent specialist. There were three purposes for this study: 1) to determine the number of requests Home Economists in two states received for Family/Consumer Economics information, 2) to assess how comfortable the Home Economists felt doing programs and answering questions in this area, and 3) to assess the need for more training.

METHODOLOGY

Surveys were mailed to all Extension Home Economists in North Dakota and Massachusetts in the fall of 1989. Twenty-nine (94%) North Dakota Home Economists and 20 (90%) Massachusetts Home Economists responded. They were asked about their home economics background, for the number of requests for Family and Consumer Economics information received monthly, their perceived level of knowledge and confidence in these areas, and if they needed training to strengthen their skills.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Extension Home Economists received an average of

one to five requests for consumer information each month. The numbers of requests increased among those with more experience. This might indicate that clients know that Cooperative Extension provides information in this area, or that agents knowledgeable and comfortable with the subject encourage those questions.

Percentages of responses from Extension Home Economists from Massachusetts (MA) and North Dakota (ND) can be found in below. Responses indicated that in "specialized" areas of money management, agents feel less comfortable providing programs and information. In several areas, over half of the respondents indicated that they needed more training either now or in the future.

TABLE 1 Perceived Level of Comfort in Teaching

	Not Comfort		Somewhat Comfort		Very Comfort	
	ND	MA	ND	MA	ND	MA
	Resource Manage.	31%	10%	62%	60%	7%
Time Management	7	10	38	50	55	40
Recordkeeping	41	20	52	35	7	45
Home Based Business	50	35	43	35	7	30
Taxation	93	70	7	30	—	—
Spending Plans	21	25	72	30	7	45
Consumer Credit	59	55	41	15	—	30
Money and Banking	45	55	55	25	—	20
Insurance	72	70	24	30	3	—
Financial Planning	55	55	45	35	—	10
Social Security	90	75	10	25	—	—
Consumer Ec.	7	25	66	45	—	30

TABLE 2 Perceived Need for Additional Education

	adequate		no need		some-time		definite need	
	ND	MA	ND	MA	ND	MA	ND	MA
	Resource Manage.	3%	20%	3%	10%	38%	40%	55%
Time Management	38	50	17	10	35	30	10	10
Recordkeeping	7	60	10	20	21	25	62	10
Home Business	17	45	3	20	52	25	28	10
Taxation	3	10	10	25	38	25	48	40
Spending Plan	17	40	—	15	24	20	59	25
Credit	3	20	7	20	31	45	59	15
Money Manage.	3	10	7	25	52	35	38	30
Insurance	—	10	10	30	41	30	48	30
Planning	3	5	3	25	28	35	66	35
Social Security	3	10	10	35	45	25	41	30
Consumer Ec.	38	30	3	10	31	35	28	25

\* Responses expressed as percent

Most of the respondents did not have a strong background in Family/Consumer Economics. Students considering careers in Cooperative Extension could be encouraged to take courses in this area. Students interested in the area could be encouraged to consider Cooperative Extension as a career.

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