

Current Issues and Prospects for Extension Outlook Programs in the Future

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AAEA 100th Anniversary Symposium - "USDA/Land Grant Extension Outlook Program and Role of Farm Management", Sunday, July 25, 2010 3:00 PM in room: Plaza Court 6.

Jean-Paul Chavas, University of Wisconsin: "History of Farm Management Research"

Jake Ferris, Michigan State University: "History of the USDA/Land Grant Extension Outlook Programs"

Ron Plain, University of Missouri: "Evaluation of 32 Years of the Extension Section's Annual Outlook Survey"

Jim Hilker, Michigan State University: "Current Issues and Prospects for Extension Outlook Programs in the Future" (**The survey will be used in this section**)

BELOW ARE SOME QUESTIONS IN THE SENSE OF WHAT INFORMATION I THINK WOULD BE USEFUL. HOWEVER, I WOULD APPRECAITE YOUR IDEAS IN ANY FORM THAT YOU WOULD BE WILLING TO SHARE.

1. Region, State, County, etc.
2. What commodities/items are included in your current Extension Outlook Program?
3. How is your current outlook program disseminated?
4. What commodities/items should be included in your future (10 years hence) Extension Outlook Program?
5. How should your future outlook program be disseminated?
6. What are the chief constraints to the desired future Extension Outlook program?

Summary of Respondents

19 responses

13 states, one regional/Nat'l, 1 private

Colorado

Illinois

Iowa 4

Kansas 2

Kentucky

Louisiana

Michigan

Missouri

Nebraska

North Dakota

Purdue

Tennessee

Texas

West – Colorado

North – North Dakota

East – Kentucky

South - Texas

12 University Based State Specialists

4 State Specialists

1 Regional/Nat'l

1 Private, former Univ. State Spec.

1 administrator

Summary of Question 1 - Region, State, County, etc.

17 covered their state.

Some were stationed at a state regional site, but all covered state wide.

6 stated they also covered the nearby region, and 3 stated National and Int'l. But given most have websites or are part of a website, the question may be mute. Most have presented at Regional, Nat'l, and some Int'l meetings.

Summary of Question 2 - What commodities/items are included in your current Extension Outlook Program?

Corn – 12

Soybeans – 12

Wheat – 5

Hogs – 13

Cattle – 13

Dairy – 8

Poultry – 6

Sheep – 4

Forage - 3

Distiller's grains - 3

Economy/ Financial - 3

Others mentioned - Grain Sorghum, Sunflowers, Meat, Equine, Goats, Horticultural Products, Feed, Cotton, Tobacco

Summary of Question 3 - How is your current outlook program disseminated?

Most of the respondents did much if not all of the below:

- Meetings, workshops, seminars, clubs, conferences, field days
- Internet
- Website(s)
- Media - local, state, regional newspapers, magazines, radio, television, plus national newswire services, electronic and hard copy.
- Newsletters, E-newsletters
- Agent Training
- Webinars, webcasts, podcasts

Summary of Question 4 - What commodities/items should be included in your future (10 years hence) Extension Outlook Program?

The naive model pretty much holds with a few comments:

The forecast is we will pretty much cover the same commodities/items as today, but would like or see a few changes..... And all the additional "shoulds" are followed by but.....

- Some change in emphasis among commodities/items

- Additions – crops inputs, biofuels, biomass, online simulation games with producer groups, carbon credits, land values and rents, international trade, meat markets
- Subtractions- Probably not those under production contracts.
- Macroeconomic Factors affecting both input and output prices
- Need International Factors.
- I will be retired in 10 years

Summary of Question 5 - How should your future outlook program be disseminated?

The basic answer for most all respondents was much the same as now, but moving even more electronic. But there were some interesting comments....

- I'm hoping that our clientele are more comfortable with electronic media – which would allow webinars and comparable tools.
- We should be part of a regional outlook and marketing program focusing on electronically and media delivery.
- It may be necessary for specialists from different states need to “band together” to cooperatively “cover” and provide input to the public in these dynamic, high demand web-based delivery methods.
- Still, it will be important to do major regional and national meetings in person.
- I'm also initiating a web presence in the form of audio/video clips (think "nice YouTube videos") on applied research projects and may well adopt this process for "outlook" dissemination in the future.
- We have just started using more social media (facebook).
- “Facebook” didn't exist 8 years ago, so I don't know what technology will exist in 10 years, but with that qualification, I'd still say social may play a role.
- Social media – Cooperative, Multi-specialist Facebook accounts, blogs, or Twitter, i.e., whatever relevant social media are in existence in a decade.
- Wimba, Facebook, Skype, blogs, and new methods that we do not even know of will be more and more important.
- The new generation will likely demand more information on Blackberries for example and we need to prepare for that audience.
- But until high speed Internet is available in the rural areas.....

Summary of Question 6 - What are the chief constraints to the desired future Extension Outlook program? (And I should have ask, needed changes. However, many still gave thoughts on needed changes, some under Q 5 and some under Q6, I have put all under question 6. First, constraints, than needed changes.)

Chief Constraints

- Lack of budget resources, plus lack of grant opportunities in this area. Additionally, inability to quantitatively measure impact from outlook programs will limit grant opportunities and possibly support from extension administration.
- The lack of structure for formal regional programming between states.

- Lack of state administrative support and funding for multi-state Extension cooperation
- Funding and budgets.
- Balancing of other Extension and research activities with producers desires to have outlook
- Fewer resources to do more.
- The tenure system that often does not reward dissemination.
- Limitations in Support from Non-Extension Agricultural Economics faculty within departments.
- An important constraint is the preference of our clientele, do clientele want us to provide outlook info, or should we be working on other things?
- Lack of qualified young analysts, not training prospects at LGU's.
- Resources: people and money
- The chief restraint for me is keeping up with and learning the new technology. That may be easier for a younger person that replaces me, but seems to be a continuing challenge as we get older. Shrinking budgets will continue to be a huge issue.
- Lack of knowledge in using computers and lack of high speed Internet in rural areas.

Needed/Suggested Changes

- Create regional web site and support to cover commodity marketing education.
- Play more important role in addressing emerging public issues related to grain and livestock markets. By the applied nature and structural flexibility of their appointments, Extension marketing specialists are positioned to bring objective, research-based information and perspectives in a timely manner to emerging factors affecting grain and livestock markets.
- Extension marketing specialists should focus on evaluating the inherent uncertainties / volatilities of market fundamentals and price-relationship dynamics as they affect grain and livestock markets. In turn, our market outlook information needs to be presented in terms of the likelihood of alternative grain or livestock market outcomes (as opposed to point estimates).
- Major challenge is for us to bring information that the audience can't get other places.
- In the Outlook arena there continues to be too much emphasis on forecasting prices and not enough emphasis on understanding the underlying economic forces driving changes in commodity prices and the implications for managing risk. Extension needs to shift the paradigm somewhat to help get this message across. If we are successful in doing this, future Extension Outlook programs will be viable and in demand.
- Academic "outlook" personnel are largely no better than the futures market in forecasting, YET many demanders of "outlook talks" expect alternative forecasts. I see it as a core educational goal to change the focus to bigger picture discussions than "today's Ps & Qs" as the active segments of today's industry are more connected with day-to-day price formation details than academics ever could be. Let's go with our comparative advantage.