

EFFECTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION'S NEW
AGENT TRAINING PROGRAM ON RETENTION OF 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
EXTENSION AGENTS

by

Stacey Ellison

(Under the Direction of Maria Navarro)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate what effects the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program might have on employee retention, specifically that of 4-H Agents. The three main objectives of this study were to determine which parts of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program were perceived as most valuable to 4-H Agents, which parts were criticized by 4-H Agents or perceived as not beneficial, and finally how the New Agent Training Program may have affected participants' decisions to remain employed by University of Georgia Cooperative Extension as a 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent or to terminate employment. Findings show that while participants value the New Agent Training Program there is a much stronger relationship between county office and community situation and job satisfaction and retention. The development of competency-based County Extension Coordinator trainings may then assist with employee retention.

INDEX WORDS: Cooperative Extension, New Agent, Training, employee retention, 4-H Youth Development

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by

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BA, University of Florida, 2001

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
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DEDICATION

To my son, Nicholas, who both slowed down and sped up the progress of this thesis.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Employee turnover rates are an obvious issue of concern within Cooperative Extension. Kutliek (2000) estimated that \$80,000 was lost annually in the Ohio Extension System due to employee turnover. Chandler (2005) further estimated it could cost Texas Extension \$7,185 to \$30,000 to replace an agent who had an annual salary of \$30,000. Furthermore, a 1994 study in Ohio similarly found that it often costs the Extension organization up to 150 percent of the departing employee's salary to replace the agent (Ensle, 2005).

As an organization, Cooperative Extension is concerned with retention. The Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (2005) has declared agent retention a major concern. While numerous previous studies discussed in this document's literature review have investigated potential factors leading to both job satisfaction and retention, this particular study will investigate whether a positive relationship exists between the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Program and retention rates among 4-H Youth Development Extension Agents.

UGA Cooperative Extension New Agent Training

How can we most effectively train new 4-H Agents so that they are both effective in their positions, and motivated to remain employed as Extension Agents? With fifty different states there are arguably fifty different strategies toward meeting this need. The Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program, "Foundations," utilizes several methods to train new

Extension Agents. The New Agent Training Program is designed to span the first year of Cooperative Extension employment, with initial trainings taking place the first week on the job, and the final trainings occurring just after a year of service has been completed.

Table 1

University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program

| Optimal Time Frame of Completion | Training Title or Method |
|--|---|
| First Week of Employment | Mentor is assigned and contacts the protégé. |
| During the First 30 Days of Employment | Web-Based Course- “Getting Your Bearings” In-County Orientation with County Extension Coordinator Orientation with County Extension Secretary Orientation with the District Extension Director |
| Within the First 60 Days of Employment | Orientation with 4-H Program Development Coordinator |
| Within the First Four Months of Employment | “Basics of Youth Development” Formal Training |
| Within the First Six Months of Employment | “Fundamentals of 4-H Youth Development” Formal Training “Extension Foundations, Phase 1”, Formal Training |
| After Being Employed for One Year | “Extension Foundations, Phase 2”, Formal Training |

(The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, n.d.a.).

Detailed descriptions of trainings as taken directly from the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension’s County Operations website are found in Appendix A. This training system was utilized in the years between 2005-2008 when the subjects interviewed were trained.

It is important to note that since 2008 the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension has been facing budget challenges which have resulted in frozen positions and no new hires, thus the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program has not been employed in recent years.

Statement of the Problem

Facing a budget crisis, the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension system froze all Extension Agent positions from 2008 until Summer of 2011. During this time frame, no Extension Agent positions were advertised externally and consequently New Agent Training was not necessary. As the economy begins to turn, and as the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension once again begins the process of acclimating new staff, it is necessary to re-examine the systems which have previously been utilized. On top of this, previous research has reported the high costs of employee turnover within extension. Therefore, as the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program is evaluated, it is important to pay attention to what effects this training can have on retention rates of employees. This study serves to examine which facets of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program are working, which should be re-examined, and if this system does in fact have an impact on the retention of employees, specifically 4-H Youth Development Agents.

Purpose

The goal of this study was to uncover information from alumni of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program to identify perceived effectiveness of the program as it pertains to job satisfaction, agent retention, and improved ability to perform as a 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent. The study relied on interviews of eight alumni of the training program, four of whom are still employed as University of Georgia 4-H Youth

Development Agents and four who have terminated their employment with Cooperative Extension. Interviewees had completed the New Agent Training Program between the years of 2005-2008 and were selected by the researcher and her committee as they were identified as “information-rich”(Patton, 1990). The following questions were posed to interviewees:

1. When did you begin your employment with Cooperative Extension?
2. Please give your impression for the overall training and preparation you received from UGA Cooperative Extension? Describe the usefulness of the Foundation Training (Intro to Extension; Foundations Phase 1 & 2). What about subject matter training (Basics of Youth Development; 4-H Fundamentals)?
3. Was there too much training? Too little training? Just right? (Please explain).
4. How was the timing of the training?
5. Was your assigned mentor useful to you? Describe your interaction with your mentor.
6. Did you complete the in-county orientations with your county secretary? Your CEC (1, 3 and 6 months)? Describe the usefulness of these. Did you follow the checklist?
7. Did you have orientation visits with your Program Development Coordinator? How was this done? Did you use the checklist?
8. Did you have an orientation with your District Director? What was the format and what did you discuss?
9. Describe your county office situation- personnel; support; atmosphere.
10. Did you feel welcomed upon arrival to UGA Extension? Why or why not? How can this be improved?
11. Describe your community and the community support for you. For Extension.

12. What do you find/ did you find most rewarding about being a 4-H Agent?
13. What is/ was your biggest challenge as a 4-H Agent?
14. Do you feel that you brought skills and/or job experience with you to the 4-H Agent position that made you more successful? What were they?
15. What did you need in the first 12-18 months of employment that you did not receive?
16. If you could change the UGA Extension Training Process, how would you improve it?
17. Any other input you would like to give or feel would be useful?

Objectives

Previous academic studies (Purcell, 2003; Skaggs, 2006) have examined the reasons for which Cooperative Extension Agents of the University of Georgia terminate employment. In this particular study, the researcher has studied the University of Georgia New Agent Training Program and how it effects the retention of 4-H Agents. The specific objectives of this study were to:

Objective One: Determine which parts of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program were perceived as most valuable to alumni who were employed as 4-H Youth Development Extension Agents.

Objective Two: Determine which parts of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent training Program were criticized by 4-H Agents or perceived as not beneficial.

Objective Three: Determine how the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program may have affected participants' decisions to remain employed by the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension as a 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent or to terminate such employment.

Significance

This study provides an in-depth view of the perceptions of 4-H Extension Agent alumni of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program. A qualitative methodology was utilized for this study in order to allow the researcher to build rapport with the subjects and to obtain a wide range of information which might not have been possible through quantitative measures. This study can prove very beneficial to 4-H Youth Development and Cooperative Extension programs on the federal, state, and local levels as we examine our continually growing emphasis on Agent training and retention. This study may begin to help answer the question of how Cooperative Extension can put increasingly limited funding to best use in terms of the appropriate and effective training of new employees. The findings contained within this qualitative study can be of special interest to all individuals concerned with new agent acclimation, such as County Extension Coordinators, those in charge of new Agent education, etc.

Limitations

The scope of this qualitative study was limited to 4-H Agents and former 4-H Agents of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension system, specifically in two of the four Cooperative Extension districts- northwest and southwest. Therefore, the study cannot be generalized to other states or to agents of different program areas, and if replicated would be most effective if an increased sample size spanned all four districts, as different administrative persons (i.e. DED, CED, etc.) have a great influence on the total process. The interviewees were purposely selected based on being perceived by the researcher and her committee as “information-rich” subjects (Patton, 1990). Their views may not be representative of all 4-H Extension Agents who participated in the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension’s New

Agent Training Programs. Finally, the researcher's opinions and background could have had some influence over the way data was interpreted and thus this was documented through the researcher subjectivity statement found in Chapter 3.

Definitions

4-H- “one of the largest youth development programs in the world with almost 7 million members. 4-H operates through the Cooperative Extension System—a partnership of county, state, and federal governments and land-grant universities—and private sector partners” (United States Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture, ¶1 2009).

Cooperative Extension- the research-based education program of the land-grant University System. Focuses on bringing, or extending, practical, research-based information from the university to the client. In Georgia, typical Cooperative Extension focuses are in the venues of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Consumer Sciences, and 4-H Youth Development.

County Extension Agent- an individual employed by a county Cooperative Extension to create and deliver research-based educational programs to community members in one of the areas of Cooperative Extension. For instance, the County 4-H/ Youth Development Extension Agent focuses on bringing research-based programs to community youth.

District Extension Director- “ The District Extension Director is a member of the Extension Administrative staff of the College of Agriculture & Environmental Sciences, The University of Georgia is responsible for administering the Extension program in the assigned district.

Major responsibilities include: personnel action; implementing administrative policy, developing and maintaining budgets and facilities; developing and maintaining effective personnel and programs; public relations; and compliance with Civil Rights/EEO/Affirmative Action/ADA policies” (The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, ¶3, n.d.b.).

Program Development Coordinator (PDC)- Four such positions exist in Georgia. PDCs serves as a district-wide youth development resource. Typical duties include coordinating district and state events, and serving as a general resource person in the field of Youth Development.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Much previous research has been done in the areas of turnover among Cooperative Extension Agents. Furthermore, some best practices for training (i.e. identification of core competencies for which to formulate competency-based trainings, assignments of mentors, etc.) have been examined by previous researchers. However, usually research that focuses on training does not take into consideration whether there is a relationship between adequate training methods and resulting high employee retention rates. This chapter will examine: (1) new Extension Agent (in all program areas, not just 4-H) training practices in several states, and (2) the causes for employee dissatisfaction and turnover.

New Agent Training Practices

The struggles of a new agent is well described in this quote by Essex County, New Jersey 4-H Agent, Phillipa Myers:

I began my position as an Extension agent feeling confident. I had a strong sense of my potential to serve the community, with grand ideas on how to access enthusiastic collaborators and establish meaningful programming. Yet after a year spent frustrated with false starts and pulled in multiple directions, I'm able to refocus my efforts and gain ground, which is encouraging. I know that there are amazing opportunities for developing programs in my county community; I just have to determine what programming to offer them, how to pay for them, and how to staff them. It's not so easy! But a dose of patience also helps. It amazes me now how much I've already learned; some things that seemed so difficult to understand only a year ago are now a natural part of what I do (Myers, ¶8, 2011).

In order to assist these new professionals on their Extension journey, various new agent training systems have been utilized. In general, the two most widely utilized methods with which to train new Cooperative Extension Agents across the United States include formal new agent training in-services and the intentional development of protégé/mentor relationships. In many states, both methods are utilized in concert with one another (University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, 2011; Safrit, 2006).

Self-Perceived Necessary Competencies of 4-H Agents

4-H Agents are expected to possess a diverse array of skills. They must be competent in numerous areas including, but not limited to, youth development, volunteer development, public relations, and programming. This can be overwhelming. One method utilized to assist 4-H Agents in understanding the skills needed to achieve in their roles are competency models. “Since its inception in 1985 and through subsequent updates, the 4-H Professional Research and Knowledge Base (4hprk) has come to be the foundation for the 4-H youth development profession” (Stone & Rennekamp, 2004, p. 1). The current 4-H professional research, knowledge and competencies (4-H PRKC, 2004) model is divided into six domains:

- Youth Development: Utilizing the knowledge of the human growth and development process to create environments that help youth reach their full potential
- Youth Program Development: Planning, implementing, and evaluating programs that achieve youth development outcomes.
- Volunteerism: Building and maintaining volunteer management systems for the delivery of youth development programs.

- Equity, Access and Opportunity: Interacting effectively and equitably with diverse individuals and building long-term relationships with diverse communities.
- Partnerships: Engaging youth in community development and the broader community in youth development
- Organizational Systems: Positioning the organization and its people to work with and on behalf of young people most effectively (Stone & Rennekemp, pp. 4-7, 2004).

A 2008 study by Harder and Wingenbach assessed the professional development needs of 4-H Extension Agents in Texas using the Organizational Systems domain of the 4-H PRKC model. The study found that 4-H Agents felt that Personal Effectiveness domain of competencies were the most important to attain (Harder & Wingenbach, 2008). Within this domain are competencies such as time and conflict management, which were deemed important by Agents (Harder & Dooley, 2007). Much previous academic discussion has been focused around the constant struggle of Extension Agents to balance their personal and professional lives. The researchers cite that possible reasons for job burnout could include “night meetings, weekend events, and unexpected clientele drop ins” among others (Harder & Wingenbach, p. 70, 2008).

A 2011 Florida study conducted by Brodeur, Higgins, Gonzalez, Craig and Haile reaffirmed the importance of the identification of appropriate competencies for Extension Agents, but found that different competencies were more important and applicable to agents at different phases of their career. For instance, the acquisition of a competency related to understanding the philosophies of Extension is more important in the earlier part of an Agent’s

career than learning to write successful grants, although over time both would be important. Based on their findings, this study proposed an optimally timed competency based training system which spans thirty-six months (Brodeur, Higgins, Gonzalez, Craig, and Haile, 2011).

Formal New Agent Training

While the content may vary vastly between the states, most state Cooperative Extension programs offer some type of formal new agent training or in-services to new employees. Because new Extension Agents are unlikely to come to the job with all skills they will need to perform, it is necessary to supplement their education to master necessary competencies.

Arkansas

The decision of what to include in a formal Agent training program is handled by individual states. In 2001, Arkansas surveyed current Extension Agents (4-H, Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Family and Consumer Science program areas) to determine what they viewed as necessary competencies for successful Agents. The top seven competencies identified were found to be:

1. Faculty/Staff Relations
2. (tie) Public Relations
2. (tie) Work Habits
4. Program Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation
5. Personal Skills
7. (tie) Management Responsibilities
7. (tie) Personal and Professional Development (Cooper & Graham, ¶ 24, 2001).

Other states have also conducted studies to determine the competencies needed by Agents. The following is a synthesis of studies on methods of new Agent training in other states.

Indiana

The Indiana 4-H/ Youth Staff at Purdue University have created a training program which spans the first two years of employment. The program is designed to be non-sequential.

Topics covered in training include:

- 1) Working with Volunteers
- 2) Program Planning
- 3) Financial Management
- 4) Accountability and Evaluation
- 5) Communications
- 6) Collaboration
- 7) Human Development (Ritchie, ¶4, 1996).

Kentucky

According to the University of Kentucky's Cooperative Extension Program and Staff website at New agent training in Kentucky consists of four phases- "Orientation, Core Training, Program Area Training, and Professional Development" (University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, ¶5, 2011).

Phase I: Orientation Phase

New Agents participate in a three day training begins two-six weeks after employment begins. Sample topics covered include history of Extension, policies, benefits, program development, and reporting.

During this phase new Agents will also participate in an orientation with their District Extension Director and will be assigned a mentor. Agents are expected to meet with their mentors in person at least three times, and communicate on a biweekly basis. Finally, it is expected that Agents will orient themselves to their county office and colleagues through on-the-job training.

Phase II: Core Training

Agents are required to attend three core trainings. These trainings cover “individual and organizational development, management skills, and program development,” (University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, ¶23, 2011).

Phase III: Program Area Training

The Assistant Director of each program area coordinates training in an Agent’s program area. Agents also receive training in community and economic development during this phase.

Phase IV: Professional Development

This phase is self-directed. Agents are expected to complete in-service training. Also, although the state does not require agents to hold a Master’s degree, agents are required to take a certain amount of graduate level coursework (University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, 2011).

Virginia

Virginia takes an individualized approach toward the training of new Extension Agents. Through the New Extension Agent Training (NEAT) program, agents are required to develop a personalized training plan which they will implement (Gibson & Brown, 2002). A survey of 25 participants of the NEAT program found eight respondents felt they needed training in more subjects through the program, and four indicated that trainings needed to be specific to particular

subjects. While six respondents reported they didn't value out-of-county trainings, two indicated they wanted to train with retired Agents in other counties. Alumni of the NEAT program rated communication as the competency they felt the training was most effective at delivering, as compared to human development- the least (Brown, Gibson, & Steward, 2008).

Commonalities Among Competency-Based Programs

While the competencies targeted in various Cooperative Extension state Agent training systems vary, some commonalities do exist. It appears that programs do overlap in addressing competencies such as philosophies of Cooperative Extension, overview of Cooperative Extension, needs assessment, program development, program implementation, program evaluation, and reporting. Other competencies may be sought to develop depending on individual state needs.

The Situation in Georgia

The Georgia Cooperative Extension system employs a comprehensive New Agent Training Program which uses a combination of web-based training, formal classroom training, personal orientations (with administrative personnel), and mentoring to orient the new employee within the first year. Complete program description indicating specific competencies addressed can be found in Appendix A. An assessment organized by Dr. Laura Perry Johnson (2009) investigated the total program and found the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Program to be effective, but that effectiveness is dependent on the process being completed as it is designed and intended. She further noted that the Georgia Agent turnover rate for the years of 2004-2009 was 20.1 within the first five years on the job, compared to 38% of teachers in the first five years.

Summary

The review of the New Agent training systems and methods in other states identified some reoccurring themes. It seems that multiple states train Agents in understanding the philosophies of Extension, understanding the role of an Extension Agent, needs assessment, development, implementation and evaluation of programs, and reporting. Based on the similarities among Cooperative Extension systems, it makes sense that some commonalities among targeted competencies exist. Contrastingly, differences in state Extension program needs can also call for the targeting of different competencies.

Mentoring

As new agents begin Cooperative Extension employment, it is vital that they are enabled to connect with co-workers in order to develop helping relationships which may assist them in navigating the career of an Extension Agent. Zimmer and Smith describe “building helping relationships” as a “critical rung on the career development ladder for new employees” (Zimmer, & Smith, ¶1, 1992). Many states have recognized the benefit of new agent mentors, and have made assigning a mentor to all new agents an essential component of their total new Agent training program (Safrit, 2006).

A 2003 study conducted by the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents (NAE4-HA) Mentoring Task force found 34 respondents reporting the utilization of some type of county 4-H mentoring program in their state. Only two states reported no mentoring program. Based on their findings, the NAE4-HA Mentoring Task Force members suggested the development of a web-based 4-H Agent mentoring curriculum (Safrit, 2006).

Ohio

Ohio's Extension mentoring program began in 1983 with the first mentors being peer nominated. Mentors and mentees were then matched according to individual needs, program area, and geographical location (Zimmer, & Smith, 1992) In Zimmer and Smith's study (1992) of Ohio's mentoring program, the top outcome from these mentoring relationships identified by protégés was gaining from the mentor's expertise. Time management was the least reported outcome.

Pennsylvania

A 1998 study of Pennsylvania State University's Cooperative Extension mentoring system by Mincemoyer and Thomson concluded that it was essential to outline mentoring guidelines and share said guidelines and roles and responsibilities with County Extension Directors. The researchers further offered the following characteristics thought to be beneficial to the success of a mentor: (a) knowledge of the Extension organization; (b) empathy towards new staff; (c) program knowledge in their respective fields, and (d) a friendly personality and a positive attitude (Mincemoyer & Thomson, ¶30, 1998).

Formal vs. Informal Mentoring

A study by Lambert, Smith and Ulmer suggested two items that could hinder the development of a successful mentor-mentee relationship. First, mentees might feel that mentors are only fulfilling the responsibilities as a mentor because they are obligated to do so. Furthermore, both parties are aware that the mentor-mentee relationship is designed to be short term and thus this could limit the development of trust necessary for an effective pairing (Lambert, Smith, & Ulmer, 2010).

Summary

A study conducted by the National Association of Four-H Agents Mentoring Taskforce, found that 34 states maintained some sort of mentoring program for new 4-H Agents (Safrit, 2006). This committee further suggested the creation of a national 4-H mentoring curriculum, but at this time states utilize unique, but often similar, practices when assigning mentors, and ensuring the effectiveness of the mentor-mentee relationship. In Georgia, mentors are assigned by the District Extension Director, complete a state mentor-training, and follow the Georgia New Agent Training Program discussion suggestions found in Appendices J-K and fill out accompanying reports to the District Extension Office.

Causes of Employee Turnover

Employee turnover rates are an obvious issue of concern within Cooperative Extension. Kutliek estimated that there is a net cost of \$80,000 annually lost due to Ohio Extension turnover rates (2000). Chandler further estimated it could cost Texas Extension from \$7,185 to \$30,000 to replace an Agent who had an annual salary of \$30,000 (Chandler, 2005). A 1994 study in Ohio similarly found that it often costs the Extension organization up to 150 percent of the departing employee's salary to replace the agent (Enslie, 2005). Because this is an obviously valid area of concern for Cooperative Extension, several studies have been conducted to attempt to pinpoint specific reasons for which individuals leave the organization.

Research has identified a variety of possible reasons for Extension Agent turnover. A 1995 study of Ohio State University Extension, found the majority of staff left for the following reasons:

- Organizational factors: low pay, too many work responsibilities, too many requirements for advancement, and a lack of recognition for a job well done.
- Non-work-related factors, including family obligations, more money elsewhere, conflict with personal responsibilities, and no time for personal relationships.
- Individual work-related factors, including other priorities in life, too many late night meetings, and conflict with values. (Kutilek, Conklin, & Gunderson, ¶8, 2002).

In a review of the literature several factors were noted as possibly contributing to employee turnover. Factors mentioned included- stress, low pay, age, marital status, balancing work and personal time, and changing generational values.

Stress

Cooperative Extension can be a stressful job. Changing job descriptions and expectations can bring about such stress. Strong and Harder referenced numerous studies in their Journal of Extension Article, “Implications of Maintenance and Motivation Factors of Extension Agent Turnover” which indicate a strong correlation between high job stress and rapid employee turnover (2009). Therefore, it is vital that Extension Agents are equipped with appropriate coping skills in regards to stress management. Individuals who are able to cope with such stress, are better able to handle their job and the stress that coincides (Goering, 1991). This suggests the need to locate those agents who might have limited satisfaction with their job, determine if stress in the case, and if so employ additional training so they might develop improved coping skills (Riggs, & Beus, 1993).

Place and Jacob (2001) reaffirmed the idea that stress exists among Cooperative Extension Agents, and because of the nature of the organization, this is inevitable. Their research found that agents felt highest stress in the area related to time pressure. They found that the more faculty expressed feeling that they were “over-committed, worked late, constantly multi-tasked, and felt like they were racing against the clock,” (pg. 103) the higher the stress scores. Contrastingly, those agents who were able to manage their day and minimize time pressure experienced lower stress. The researchers recommended training in these areas to current and new agents as they begin employment.

Burnout is not unique to Cooperative Extension Agents. A 2008 study by Chenevey, Ewing, and Wittington, similarly found coping skills to be necessary to prevent burnout among agricultural education teachers. The researchers suggest that teachers should be alerted to the issue of burnout, and how such burnout can have a negative impact on both their professional and personal lives. The researchers further assert that steps should be taken to proactively educate teachers to equip them with necessary skills in the areas of coping and stress management (Chenevey, Ewing, & Whittington, 2008).

Low Salaries

Salary is important to the Extension Agent. Linder found that among Ohio Extension employees, that “good wages” was the second most important motivating factor, following right behind “interesting work” and directly in front of “full appreciation for work done” (Lindner, ¶13, 1998). A study by Rousan and Henderson found agents dissatisfied with their pay, especially in reference to the amount of work performed (1996). A 1990 Extension Staff Satisfaction survey of 24 Rhode Island Extension employees found that respondents were most dissatisfied with salary, with 81% reporting they were not appropriately compensated for their

work.(Mallilo, 1990). Kroth and Peutz found similar in their Delphi study of Idaho Extension employees in which they found the most pressing issues facing Cooperative Extension employees were receiving competitive salaries, experiencing supportive working environments, and a healthy balance of professional and personal time (2011).

Age and Marital Status

A study of agents in the Western region, found a correlation between job satisfaction and number of areas of job responsibility and also a relationship between job satisfaction and number of children at home. It was found that agents with less children and areas of responsibility reported overall greater satisfaction with their jobs (Riggs, & Beus, 1993). Family issues have actually been found in one study to be the top cause of turnover in 4-H and Family and Consumer Science Agents. Manton and van Es found the top three reasons surveyed Illinois Extension Agents (4-H and FACS) left were all related to family- changes in family, moves, time away from home and family (Manton & van Es, 1985). One of the issues addressed over more recent years has been an improved focus on a healthy balance of personal and professional life, and is addressed later in the literature review.

Employee's spouses can also play a large role in job satisfaction. According to Herbert and Kotrlik, the more satisfied the spouse, the longer the agent has the potential to stay employed with Cooperative Extension (1990). Agents' spouses were found to be most concerned with low income, stress levels, and amount of time spent on the job. 4-H Agent's spouses were found to be less satisfied with their spouses' jobs than other programmatic Agents (Herbert & Kotrlik, 1990). Other previous research has found that older agents who were married, and possessed more job experience, generally reported having more job satisfaction than their younger counterparts. (Bowen, Radhakrishna , & Keyser, 1994).

Balancing Work and Personal Time

Balancing work and family has long been identified as an organizational concern within Cooperative Extension. Overload of work responsibilities accompanied by lack of time with friends and family has resulted in employee turnover in several states (Ensle, 2005). Those who have left the organization have often cited family obligations as one of their primary reasons for leaving Cooperative Extension (Rousan & Henderson, 1996).

In 1997, the Joint Council of Extension Professionals (JCEP), through a national research study centered around balancing work, family, and personal time, found that nation-wide the most critical issues and challenges in this area were:

- 1) Heavy work load,
- 2) Evening and weekend time commitments, and
- 3) Lack of control or job autonomy (Kutilek, Conklin, & Gunderson, ¶36, 2002).

The failure to appropriately deal with the stress required as an Extension Agent can make an employee experience burnout. A 1986 study of Ohio Extension Agents found that typically, burned out agents are more often single and employed in the 4-H Youth Development program area (Igodan & Newcomb, 1986).

A survey of 1,720 Extension employees in Texas found that said employees expressed the most dissatisfaction with their work in the areas of balance between professional and personal lives, strategic planning, professional development, and employee involvement in the direction of Cooperative Extension. More than 80% of the respondents expressed concerns with a balance between professional and personal lives. Agents in rural areas, and those with less

than five years of experience showed the most concern. (Boltes, Lippke, & Gregory, 1995).

Changing Generational Values

As the Baby Boomer generation retires, and the Generation X'ers (born between 1961 and 1981) move in, it is imperative that Extension administration understands the value differences among the generations (Ensle, 2005). A 1994 Ohio Cooperative Extension study revealed that X'ers either burned out, left because of low pay, or determined they wanted to less time at work and more time with family (Ensle, 2005).

Generation X'ers can be seen as being more committed to themselves and their family than to the organization for which they work. This generation is much more willing to spend less time on their education or career in order to have more time to spend with family or in developing their personal lives. (Kutilek, Conklin, & Gunderson, 2002).

Summary of the Review of the Literature

Several research studies have indicated that there is strong need for appropriate new employee training practices for Cooperative Extension Agents. Other states have successful methods of training new Agents which contain the following key ingredients: understanding the philosophies of Extension, understanding the role of an Extension Agent, needs assessment, development, implementation and evaluation of programs, and reporting. Mentoring relationships for new Extension employees are also important. Research has demonstrated several suspected reasons for rapid employee turnover within the Extension organization. A thorough study of the Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program and whether there exists a relationship between such training and retention rates specific to 4-H Agents has not been conducted. The findings from a research study of this topic have the potential to assist Georgia Cooperative Extension in assigning an economic value to the New Agent Training

Program, as well as improving the program in an effort to cultivate and maintain the most talented county 4-H professionals.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGNS AND METHODS

Previous research studies have noted the startling turnover rate among Cooperative Extension Agents, particularly within 4-H Youth Development, across the nation. In an effort to increase the employee retention rate many states have devised comprehensive employee orientation and training programs. It is important to assess whether the added time and expense in training programs yield results (i.e. increased retention) to warrant such programs.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how the University of Georgia New Agent Training Program (comprised of learning modules, in-person trainings, and assigned mentors) may have a relationship with the retention rate of 4-H Youth Development Agents within Georgia Cooperative Extension, and if so, what can be done to improve training programs to increase the retention rates. This chapter discusses the methods used during this study. Justification for the study, researcher subjectivity, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis are included.

Research Question and Problem Statement

How can we most effectively train new 4-H agents so that they are both effective in their positions, and motivated to remain employed as an Extension Agent? This study takes a closer examination of Georgia's efforts in this arena. While several previous research studies have delved into the turnover rates of Extension employees, little research is available in the venue of how the New Agent Training Program may affect retention in Georgia. This study could be very beneficial to 4-H Youth Development and Cooperative Extension programs on the federal, state,

and local levels as we examine our continually growing emphasis on Agent training and retention. This study may begin to help answer the question of how to put our increasingly limited funding to best use in terms of appropriate training of new employees.

Population and Target Audience

In this study, interviews were conducted with eight individuals who had completed the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension's New Agent Training Program since 2005. All individuals were employed at one time as 4-H Youth Development Extension Agents in the state of Georgia, four being 4-H Agents who are still employed with Georgia Cooperative Extension, and four who have terminated their Extension employment. Individuals interviewed were purposefully sampled by the researcher and her committee, because they fulfilled the conditions of the targeted population, and based on the perception of them as "information-rich" individuals (Patton, 1990). The names of agents are publicly available, and are listed on the UGA Cooperative Extension website. Also, the committee members of the researcher, and the researcher know many of these individuals. Interviewees were asked to speak to the effectiveness of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program which encompasses formal classroom training, mentoring, in-county trainings, and meetings with administrators. Participation was completely voluntary, and interviewees had the opportunity to "opt-out" at any time. Documentation of IRB approval is included in Appendices B, C, and E. Interview questions used can be found in Appendix D.

Research Methods Used and Justification

A qualitative approach was used for this study in order to enable subjects to share their thoughts and opinions most openly and with the greatest depth via probing questions. Quantitative research methods would not have yielded the depth of information needed for this

study. This is a qualitative case study. There are no factors, variables or treatment/control groups.

Interviews

All subjects underwent qualitative interviews via phone and directed by the researcher. Length of interviews spanned from thirty to ninety minutes dependent on the amount of information offered by the subject. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim immediately afterwards. Approved interview questions were as follows:

1. When did you begin your employment with Cooperative Extension?
2. Please give your impression for the overall training and preparation you received from UGA Cooperative Extension? Describe the usefulness of the Foundations Training (Intro to Extension, Foundations Phase 1 & 2). What about subject matter training (Basics of Youth Development, 4-H Fundamentals)?
3. Was there too much training? Too little training? Just right? (Please explain).
4. How was the timing of the training?
5. Was your assigned mentor useful to you? Describe your interaction with your mentor.
6. Did you complete the in-county orientations with your county secretary? Your CEC (1,3, and 6 months)? Describe the usefulness of these. Did you follow the checklist?
7. Did you have orientation visits with your Program Development Coordinator? How was this done? Did you use the checklist?
8. Did you have an orientation with your District Director? What was the format and what did you discuss?
9. Describe your county office situation- personnel, support, atmosphere.

10. Did you feel welcomed upon arrival to UGA Extension? Why or why not? How can this be improved?
11. Describe your community and the community support for you. For Extension.
12. What do you find/ did you find most rewarding about being a 4-H Agent?
13. What is/ was your biggest challenge as a 4-H Agent?
14. Do you feel that you brought skills and/or job experience with you to the 4-H Agent position that made you more successful? What were they?
15. What did you need in the first 12-18 months of employment that you did not receive?
16. If you could change the UGA Extension Training Process, how would you improve it?
17. Any other input you would like to give or feel would be useful?

Qualitative Measures of Trustworthiness

A number of strategies were employed to insure trustworthiness of the study. Ary, Jacobs, and Razaveieh state “Validity on qualitative research concerns the accuracy or truthfulness of the findings (p. 451). Lincoln & Guba outline four components of truthfulness-credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (1985). Multiple techniques were utilized in this study to build trustworthiness.

In order to establish credibility, peer debriefing and triangulation were employed. These are two tools proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985). Through peer debriefing, the researcher discussed findings with a faculty member, who asked “searching questions” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) throughout the study. For triangulation, the researcher had two other investigators review and analyze the transcripts of the interviews, and compared the results of the analysis of the different investigators. To establish confirmability, the researcher employed an audit trail

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal in order to further establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, “Reflexivity is the use of self-reflection to recognize one’s own biases and actively seek them out” (p. 454, 2002). Notes on the participants, participant selection, methods of data collection, and transcriptions were reviewed by the researcher’s graduate committee.

The questions for all interviews were purposely written open-ended. Through the interviews, the researcher examined how the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program may have affected (or be affecting) the interviewee’s job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, reasons for staying in the job, reasons for considering leaving, or reasons for leaving.

Data Analysis

Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim immediately after. To guarantee confidentiality, the researcher was the only person with access to these recordings. The researcher’s committee and one additional researcher had access to the transcripts so they could also analyze the data for triangulation purposes.

The researcher used open coding analysis to look for common themes, similarities, and dissimilarities that arose from transcribed interviews. The qualitative data was coded by theme. Quotations representative of specific themes have been offered in the results chapter to illustrate total findings.

Data collection for qualitative research employs the researcher for the process of data analysis. The researcher is the main research tool as he or she organizes and interprets responses. Therefore, it is imperative that the researcher is aware of how previous experiences may influence and/or affect data analysis.

Researcher Subjectivity

A researcher's background can have an unintentional influence on qualitative research. It is important that a researcher recognizes this subjectivity and consequently shares said subjectivity openly with the reader. Glesne (1999) states, "awareness of your subjectivities can guide you to strategies to monitor those perspectives that might, as you analyze and write up your data, shape, skew, distort, construe, and misconstrue what you make of what you see and hear" (p. 109). The subjectivity of the researcher of this particular study is shared below:

I have been employed as a 4-H Agent through Cooperative Extension since 2001. I began my career in 2001 in Levy County, Florida. Levy County employed two 4-H agents, the other in the county serving as County Extension Director (CED). Having been a former 4-H member in a county neighboring Levy, I had known my CED since I was a child. My CED was actually the first person, while I was in college, who suggested I should consider a career in Cooperative Extension. This was unique in that I had my own informal mentor in my office, to work alongside on a daily basis. In the early part of my career, my CED and I conducted many programs together, and he taught me much about programming and professional development just by virtue of working alongside him. While, I specifically asked for a mentor in my interviews, I never actually received a formal mentor while working in Florida. Thus, my CED took on much of this role.

Working in a county that bordered the University of Florida, I had the opportunity to co-host several college Extension interns. Through this process, I found that I had a passion for mentoring others interested in Cooperative Extension, particularly in the 4-H Youth Development program area.

In 2005, I moved to serve as the 4-H Agent in Houston County, Georgia. Being new to Georgia Cooperative Extension, I had to go through new Agent training again even though I'd completed Florida's version. I am very open to professional development, and readily went and participated. Although it's been a few years since those trainings, one thing that sticks out in my mind is that I felt like I was "always" in training during that first year, and it made it difficult for me to attend to things in my county.

I was finally assigned a mentor once I entered the UGA Cooperative Extension program. After never receiving one in Florida, I was very excited to have this new professional development opportunity, and with five years of experience thought that this person could really focus on acclimating me to the differences between the Florida and Georgia systems.

My mentor was a very highly revered agent, who has since retired. She was very much a helping type personality but I believe we only met twice due to time constraints (on both of our ends). During our time together I remember discussing filing and how to manage my calendar (these topics are suggestions from the UGA New Agent Training Program guidelines). I recall being surprised that I was having these sorts of discussions considering my prior Extension experience. During that time frame, I had a fellow 4-H Agent who I'd known previously through our work in the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents, who I relied on much more heavily than my assigned mentor. I considered her my informal mentor during this year.

I am very active in my professional associations. I have recently been elected as Vice President of the Georgia Association of Extension 4-H Agents and am currently serving as the chair-elect of the National Association of Extension 4-H Agent's mentoring taskforce. I joined NAE4-HA mentoring taskforce after beginning my research for this thesis. It is through my

Association work, and personal research, that I've gained the bulk of my personal skill set in balancing personal and professional time.

I have not always been effective at balancing my professional and personal time. The first time I recall hearing about this balance, I was probably in my 3rd year of Extension work. In a training on the topic, I took a quiz to determine how likely it was that I was experiencing burn out. My results were already off the charts and I was only 24-25 years old. I began to re-evaluate many of my work philosophies based on strategies I learned through Association-based trainings and personal studies.

My experiences from my previous employment as a 4-H Agent in both Georgia and Florida, coupled with my Association work, and my role as a mentor to college interns have shaped the way I view the importance of training new agents. Having been acclimated as a new agent in two different states, along with my academic work in working towards a undergraduate minor in Extension Education, I experienced some variety in terms of new Agent training.

While the researcher did make all reasonable attempts to ascertain personal objectivity during data collection, the experiences the researcher has had could have affected the probing questions posed during interviews. It further could have shaped the themes in which the researcher felt were emergent through the research, thus triangulation was employed.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative study was designed to meet three primary objectives: a) Determine which parts of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program were perceived as most valuable to 4-H Youth Development Extension Agents, b) Determine which parts of the total University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program were criticized by 4-H Agents or perceived as not beneficial, and c) Determine how

New Agent training may have affected participants' decisions to remain employed by the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension as a 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent or to terminate such employment. Four current, and four former, Georgia Cooperative Extension 4-H Agents were interviewed, with each interview being audio recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were coded by theme. Trustworthiness was established through regular peer debriefing, triangulation of the data, an audit trail and the maintenance of a reflexive journal by the researcher.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine what effect the Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program might have on the retention of 4-H Extension Agents. This chapter presents the emergent themes after all interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and triangulated. The themes shared are those agreed upon through triangulation and are presented in order of the frequency of their occurrence in the raw data.

When reported, the reader will note that subjects who are identified by numbers are still employed with Extension, those identified by letters have left Cooperative Extension.

Demographics

To complete the purposes and objectives of this study, the researcher interviewed eight subjects who completed the training program. Four subjects were currently employed by UGA Cooperative Extension and four had resigned from employment. Participating subjects were individuals who were hired by the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension as 4-H Youth Development Agents after 2004. Initial subjects interviewed were selected via by the researcher because they were viewed as “information-rich” individuals (Patton, 1990). Additional interviewees were selected through the “snow-ball” technique, meaning that some of the interviewees recommended them as individuals who had the potential to give valuable information to the researchers. All participation was completely voluntary.

Descriptions of the Participants

Eight 4-H Youth Development County Extension Agents were surveyed as part of this research study. Four who are still employed at 4-H Youth Development Agents, and four who have terminated their employment. For confidentiality purposes, no names are used within this thesis, and descriptions are written purposely vague. Agents have been assigned names consisting of numbers (ex: 001) if they are still employed by Extension, and letters (ex: 00A) if they are no longer working for the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension. These agents were:

“001”: Cooperative Extension is her first professional job after college. 001 was hired to work in a rural county but faced challenges in getting youth to participate in activities and is considered to have a strong and well-established program.

“002”: Was a previous active Georgia 4-H member and has completed five years of professional work experience prior to her current position . 002 has no Program Assistant.

“003”: Cooperative Extension is 003’s first professional job after college. 003 supervises one full-time 4-H Program Assistant and notes a very supportive County Extension Coordinator.

“004”: Works in an urban county, supervising multiple 4-H Program Assistants. 004 has five years of prior professional teaching experience.

“00A”: Previously worked in a rural county. 00A was first hired as an Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent, and then later switched to a 4-H Youth Development position. 00A supervised one 4-H Program Assistant.

“00B”: Cooperative Extension was her first professional job. Previously worked in a rural county. 00B supervised one 4-H Program Assistant.

“00C”: Previously worked in Cooperative Extension in another state before transferring to Georgia. 00C worked in a rural county with no 4-H Program Assistant.

“00D”: Previously worked in Cooperative Extension in another state before transferring to Georgia. 00D worked in an urban county with multiple 4-H Program Assistants. 00D is the only interviewee who was also an appointed County Extension Coordinator.

Through the interviews, the researcher examined how the training program may have affected (or be affecting) the interviewee’s job satisfaction or dissatisfaction with 4-H Youth Development Cooperative Extension agent jobs, reasons for staying in the job, reasons for considering leaving, and reasons for leaving.

Research Objective One

Determine which parts of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program was perceived as most valuable to 4-H Youth Development Extension Agents.

Mentors are Useful in Acclimating New Agents to the Career

All subjects agreed that the philosophy of assigning a mentor was useful and most reported positive mentoring experiences.

“She was very good. She came to the county. I went to her county as well. I felt she did a really good job.” (00C)

Two subjects specifically noted appreciating the similarities between themselves and their mentors:

“My mentor was a good match because her program was similar to mine.” (001)

“It was great just to sit and talk to her for awhile and to realize that her office was cluttered just like mine and that’s normal!” (004)

In addition to receiving a mentor as a new 4-H Agent, individuals appointed to County Extension Coordinator (CEC) positions are assigned a CEC mentor.

“I was assigned two mentors (CEC and 4-H). They gave good ideas. The 4-H mentor gave really good ideas about processes and stuff. We got together once and talked on the phone a couple of times. I also got a CEC mentor that one was really useful too. Throwing ideas about budgets and all that kind of stuff together” (00D)

Criticisms of individual mentors (not the total mentoring process) were made

based on what subjects felt was a poor job of matching mentor and mentee by administration.

“A mentor could be very useful, however because its assigned there wasn’t a lot of similarities between mine and her programs. She didn’t have the same challenges and I really needed someone with a similar demographic or plan of work” (002)

“To improve it, maybe there could be a set schedule...like you meet with this person every three months or once a quarter or something like that” (00B)

4-H Program Development Coordinator (PDC) Orientation was Useful

There are four Program Development Coordinators (PDCs) employed in Georgia 4-H. Subjects interviewed came from two of the four Georgia 4-H districts (northwest and southwest) and are thus speaking on their interaction with their individual PDC. Seven interviewees reported feeling very supported by their PDCs formally (through orientations) as well as informally (mentor type relationships).

“I found this part of my training more useful, not just brainstorming stuff like foundations/fundamentals. I find that our PDC is super supportive, and I feel that’s contributed to my success.” (002)

“When she stopped by the office a) she was very helpful, b) very knowledgeable, and good support when she did come to the office. When she came to the office she was there to help you and not see what you may or may not be doing. She was there in a helpful mode.” (00B)

One respondent did not find the orientation with the 4-H PDC especially beneficial but noted the inopportune time of the training:

“I was not up to speed with everyone else because they had been hired on a couple

of months earlier, so I wasn't paid much attention to because I wasn't on the same page as everyone else.” (003)

Usefulness of Formalized Extension and 4-H Trainings

Two separate interview questions specifically focused on gauging subjects' perceived usefulness of 1) 4-H Specific Trainings and 2) Extension Trainings. When these questions were posed to subjects it became repeatedly apparent to the researcher that the subjects had difficulty in remembering which trainings covered which subjects. Therefore, their responses are grouped together in this section.

Seven subjects reported finding the 4-H and Extension new Agent trainings useful.

“I didn't know what a club meeting was supposed to be, I didn't know what events were, I had no idea. To go through that step by step was very helpful.” (001)

“One of the things that stood out to me was just, working with kids especially, was the adult supervision, overnight chaperone training, that's something that you know is going to be useful, and at the same time working with volunteers- as it relates to that, them being overnight chaperone trained.” (00B)

Criticisms of the trainings targeted the formalization of it, and one-size-fits all approach:

“They gave us some assignments that I remember I thought were kind of ridiculous. Now looking back I'm like why in the world did they make us do that? I think there was one that was like find out something about your county, so we had to call different people. I think that maybe they could have utilized the time better. I think looking back now that some of it wasn't relevant.” (003)

“Honestly...I think it's a great situation if everybody's personal situation in their county is as cookie-cutter as they think they are. Now we all have to deal with different personalities and characteristics. I think everything should be taken on a case by case basis. I feel there is differentiation that is required between every situation.” (00C)

Research Objective Two

Determine which parts of the total University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program were criticized by 4-H Agents or self-perceived as not beneficial.

District Director Orientation/Training was Not Useful

Interestingly, while respondents were very positive about their interactions and trainings with their District PDCs they reported quite differently of their orientations with their District Extension Directors. Six of the eight respondents actually reported that they either did not have an orientation with their District Extension Director or did not remember if they had one, or did not remember what was discussed. The two respondents who had some recollection of an orientation shared the following:

“We talked about fiscal things, but a lot of that was stuff the secretary handles. I only remember talking about teacher retirement, but it was after the 30 day sign up deadline. It would have been more helpful to have this at the beginning.” (002)

“I think it was myself and two or three other new agents with him. In his office, we came down to Tifton. The format was just touching on basic office rules and regulations, if I can remember it well. What sticks out were things that can and cannot get you fired working with Extension. Be mindful of your computer usage, be mindful of your office behavior, things such as that.” (00B)

Overwhelming Amount of Material

Of eight subjects, five reported feeling that they felt overwhelmed by the amount of formal in-classroom training they received within the first year. Two subjects who did not express that they were overwhelmed had been employed by Cooperative Extension in other states previously, and thus had previous applicable work experience and completed some similar trainings previously. Some comments offered by the subjects:

“I remember it being overwhelming. It seemed like a lot at one time. Like when you go to basics and stuff, it’s just a whole lot of stuff compiled all in that short time span. I don’t know if it would be better to break it up or not. I remember thinking, wow I think I

need to go back and figure all of this out. I just felt overwhelmed because it's so much stuff. I think you should feel that you've gotten so much information that you feel better about your job, but in reality it can almost make you feel more discouraged because you feel like you just have so much information that you don't know where to start.” (001)

“I felt overwhelmed with the 4-H trainings but I think it's the nature of the 4-H program” (002)

“I'm not sure how much I retained. The trainings were so close together and they all kind of ran together” (003)

“It could've been spread out over some years and not just one time. I'm thinking Foundations 1 in the first year and then an extension to what you talk about in Foundations 1. It could be a recap or reflection period during the next year, year 2, year 3.” (004)

Timing of Training

The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension system utilizes a very formalized and structured schedule of trainings designed so that participants are being trained in areas most pertinent to them at that particular phase of their career. Interviewees were fairly split on how optimal they perceived this timing. So split, that some respondents answered both positively and negatively in reference to questions regarding the timing of their trainings in the same interview, often stating that while the timing was good for them, it might not have been for a colleague they knew, or vice versa.

“I got it at about the right time. It seemed with some other agents that started at a different time frame than me, timing of the training might not have been good.” (001)

They were also split in regards to if they felt they were receiving the information too soon...

“Some of the stuff was too early, but I think some of it had to be done early on, like Intro to 4-H. But, I think some of the other things could've waited a little bit later on. Maybe in a year's time, or year 2. If I'm not experiencing this, I kind of store it in the back. In Extension you experience so much so you just kind of put that in the reserve for awhile until you're able to use it if you remember to get it from that reserve.” (004).

“To put it in a nutshell, some of it I could use, most of it I didn't use until after I got my feet wet in Extension.” (003)

...or too late.

“I had a 3 month gap of just hanging out in my office trying to figure out what was going on before my first training. By then end of training, I felt it was too late. I felt it would be better to go to training and then go to the county.” (002)

One respondent noted the unfortunate timing of the training taking place at the same time he needed to be present in the county to promote 4-H at the beginning of the school year.

“To me it’s more the fact of getting those resources and networking in the beginning, but also having the opportunity to go back and work as opposed to always having to be at training. Especially at that critical time at the beginning of the school year.” (00D)

Research Objective Three

Determine how New Agent training may have affected participants’ decisions to remain employed by University of Georgia Cooperative Extension as a 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent or to terminate such employment.

Previous Work Experience is Beneficial to Being Successful as a 4-H Agent

All interviewees were unanimous in their belief that previous work experience relative to Extension either had made them more successful or would make a new Agent more successful in their position.

“I have seen or met one or two of my coworkers who came straight out of college who it might have been a little overwhelming for them...like how do I get that done? I believe that my background and experiences that I encountered before I took this position with UGA Extension, they helped me out immensely.” (00B)

“In my previous job I wrote education programs and had some previous training, so I had some experience. That made it a little easier on me. Also, being a camp counselor gave me a whole volunteer network.” (002)

County Situation and its Impact on Retention

The largest variance among agents who remained with Extension and those who terminated employment was found in the area of their individual county situations. All

agents who are still employed specifically cited a positive, supportive working environment, whereas three of the four who have left Extension mentioned a variety of county-based issues.

From those still employed:

(Regarding the office atmosphere) *“I think it’s contributed to me staying there—my office is great. We all get along really well, very supportive, very helpful, anything I need they are always willing to help.”* (001)

“All in all we are very caring for each other, and support each other.” (002)

“If it hadn’t have been for my CEC I don’t think I would’ve lasted as long as I did because I didn’t know what was going on.” (003)

“Our CEC was a no-nonsense person. So basically people knew they couldn’t come in with foolishness. We have to work together, we have to present ourselves in a professional way.” (004)

From those who have left:

“I got along great with support staff, but the CEC was moody and not very supportive.” (00A).

“My Coordinator left after a year and things changed. I had no clue on how to do a soil sample, but yet I was expected too, and I had no clue on how to do a peanut shuck or whatever it’s called and yet people expected me to do this.” (00C)

“Before me, there was a revolving door so everything was kind of up in arms.” (00D)

Community Support and its Impact on Retention

As fore-mentioned, the county office and community support situations seemed to demonstrate some relationship with whether an individual remained employed or terminated their employment as a 4-H agent. 100% of the agents who have terminated employment referenced some difficulties with community support, whereas 75% of current 4-H agents

interviewed reported good community support. One agent, who is still employed, yet reported a lack of community support, has since been transferred to a different county.

From those who have left extension:

“I followed directly behind another agent, and some of the community had a hard time adapting to anything I did because it was different. That makes it difficult to get support.” (00A).

“I came in the middle of a school year. At the time, the superintendent was new, and she didn’t necessarily want me to go into the school system and push 4-H and extension in the middle of the school year.” (00B).

“I worked with a public and a private school. The private school parents did not want their kids participating in camp and stuff. They told me, our kids would love to go to camp, we would love for them to go to camp with you, but we’re not going to let them go with the public school kids.” (00C)

“In the 4-H program, and this was one of the things that was so frustrating to me, it never really got going. Two things were- we had some schools that really appreciated the program and others that wished we would go away and there was no support from the school administration.” (00D).

Balancing Personal and Professional Time

The issue of balancing personal and professional time among Cooperative Extension Agents is common in the literature. In these interviews, no relationship emerged between an individual reporting difficulties balancing their time and their decision to terminate their employment. However, it is worth noting that while the researcher did not directly ask a question about this topic, six of the eight individuals interviewed brought it up unprompted. None of the individuals interviewed who mentioned this issue could remember having completed any formal training in this area through Cooperative Extension.

“My biggest challenge is managing my time! I’m not good about saying no and learning when to draw a line. The CEC is very good about flextime in the office, but I’m not good about it.” (002).

“Every January I’m here until about 8 or 9 every night. I stress myself out too much!” (003)

(Regarding orientation with PDC) *“We discussed professional time and trying to balance time so I don’t get overwhelmed...well heck, that’s too late!”* (004)

“I left because things got hard because I felt like my heart was at home with my baby and it was hard constantly getting numbers preached to us. I wish administration was a bit more sympathetic.” (00A)

“Could something be talked about burnout? Don’t overwork yourself? Maybe something in the new agent orientation that specifically addresses that.” (00B)

Informal Mentors are Useful

In addition to the formal mentors assigned to new Agents by Cooperative Extension District Administration, three respondents (all still employed by Cooperative Extension) reported their success in obtaining and utilizing their own informal mentors.

“I’ve found it helpful that there are several agents near me that were all hired at about the same time, who are around the same age. So it makes it easier to call each other with questions, and just get feedback. It’s a lot less stressful when you’ve got someone you can call that’s going through the same things at the same time.” (001)

“I got more from informal mentoring.” (than formal). (002)

“I think my CEC was more my mentor.” (than formal mentor). (003)

Respondents that specifically cited having obtained informal mentors are all still employed. Building this network of support can attribute to their overall feeling/motivation regarding their job. Others reported on their strong bonds with colleagues and its positive affect on them as a professional.

(In regards to county office situation) *“I wouldn’t say that it has kept me or made me leave...more of what would keep me would be the other 4-H agents.”* (002)

“Internally, in the organization, I think the relationship that’s most rewarding is the relationship you build with other 4-H agents. That internal Extension family that you can build and mold. I think it starts with a good PDC and then branches out to local pockets of friendship or whatever.” (00B).

Quantity Vs. Quality

Two of the respondents no longer employed by Cooperative Extension specifically cited the felt necessity of obtaining certain quantities of participants in programs and number of activities/programs as one of their major frustrations with 4-H.

“My biggest challenge was getting the “numbers” we are pushed to get. It’s frustrating when you feel you are doing everything you can to get numbers of participants for things, and you are getting more and more pressure from the top to have certain numbers and you can’t attain them.” (00A)

“Biggest challenge as a 4-H Agent was the philosophy of quantity over quality. I don’t just mean number of participants, I mean number of programs, types of programs, number of interactions...all that stuff.” (00D)

Lack of Resources

Two interviewees who have terminated their employment with Cooperative Extension cited a lack of necessary resources as a particular struggle they experienced during employment.

“I guess when you look over the last year or two- the budget constraints...that puts more challenges on you to look for outside resources to get things you may need or to travel to different events” (00C)

“I needed resources. Tangible resources in hand. As opposed to the thought process of something being made available at some point.” (00D).

Additional Emergent Themes

Suggestions from Interviewees

Interviewees provided a breadth of suggestions that could be beneficial for Extension Administration to examine as they evaluate the UGA New Agent Training Program. As follows are several suggestions offered by respondents:

“My biggest challenge is supervising adults. I would suggest for Foundations- a course of supervision, because you are just thrown in this position as a supervisor” (004).

“We don’t get any training on livestock but we are expected to handle that, so it’s tricky. The people in the community know they are supposed to come to me, and they come wanting answers, and then I don’t have answers.” (001)

“Could something be talked about burnout, don’t overwork yourself? Maybe something in the new agent orientation that specifically addresses that.” (00B)

“Hire more agents in bulk, hire them by the training class.”(002)

“If they really wanted to improve the training system they need to go back and do exactly what you are doing and ask those who have through it, what did you need, and what didn’t you need? And do it a couple of years down the road, once they’ve actually gotten a chance to get their feet wet. And utilize that as opposed to a survey questionnaire right after the training. It doesn’t do anything at that point and time.” (00D)

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate what effects the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension's New Agent Training Program might have on the retention of 4-H Youth Development Extension Agents. This chapter discusses the findings of the study and implications for further research and practice.

Summary of the Study

Past research has uncovered possible reasons for turnover among Cooperative Extension Agents, but no previous study has attempted to determine what effects, if any, the new Agent training methods have on 4-H Agents within the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension system. For the purposes of this study it should be noted that the "New Agent Training Program" included formal in-classroom trainings, web-based orientation, mentor assignment, and orientations with county and district faculty. The specifics of the program are as outlined in Chapter 1.

Specific objectives of this study included:

Objective One: Determine which parts of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program was perceived as most valuable to 4-H Youth Development Extension Agents.

Objective Two: Determine which parts of the total University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program were criticized by 4-H Agents or perceived as not beneficial.

Objective Three: Determine how New Agent training may have affected participants' decisions to remain employed by University of Georgia Cooperative Extension as a 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent or to terminate such employment.

Review of Methods

In an effort to meet the research objectives, a qualitative study was designed to uncover the perceptions of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program among 4-H Youth Development Agents who had completed said program since 2004. Eight alumni of the program were interviewed by the researcher. Four of the interviewees are currently employed by the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension, and four have terminated their employment. Interviewees were purposefully selected by the researcher and her committee as a) representing multiple Cooperative Extension districts (and thus interacting with multiple district cooperative extension faculty), b) being perceived as individuals who would serve to be "information-rich," and likely to provide a certain breadth and depth of information (Patton, 1990).

Interviews were conducted by the researcher, tape recorded, and immediately transcribed thereafter. Interviews were between thirty to ninety minutes in length, dependent on the responses offered by the interviewee. During the interviews, the researcher attempted to develop a relationship with participants in order to truly understand their feelings and thoughts surrounding the topic at hand. Interviewees were made aware the topic of research study, and at the end of each interview, were invited to offer any other feedback, observations, and suggestions they deemed relevant that the researcher might not have already covered.

After transcription by the researcher, each interview was analyzed to determine which themes should be extracted. The transcriptions and themes were reviewed through peer

debriefing, and triangulation was employed, as a measures of added credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Summary of Findings

Results from the data were presented in Chapter 4. After all interviews were read and analyzed, all interviews were compared to see which emergent themes existed. After the complete analysis and data coding, thirteen relevant themes were pulled from eight interviews. The thirteen themes found are presented below in order of frequency of occurrence and divided by each objective they addressed:

Objective One: Determine which parts of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program was perceived as most valuable to 4-H Youth Development Extension Agents.

1. Mentors are useful in acclimating new agents to the career.
2. 4-H Program Development Coordinator Orientation was useful.
3. Formalized Extension and 4-H Trainings were useful.

Objective Two: Determine which parts of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program were criticized by 4-H Agents or perceived as not beneficial.

1. District Extension Director/Orientation was not useful.
2. Overwhelming amount of material/training.
3. Timing of training.

Objective Three: Determine how the New Agent Training Program may have affected participants' decisions to remain employed by the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension as a 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent or to terminate such employment.

1. Previous Work experience is beneficial to being successful as a 4-H Agent.

2. County office situation and its impact on retention.
3. Community support and its impact on retention.
4. Balancing personal and professional time.
5. Informal mentors are useful.
6. Quantity vs. quality of work.
7. Lack of resources.

Objective One

Determine which parts of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training program was perceived as most valuable to 4-H Youth Development Extension Agents.

Three major themes emerged in this area. The first and most prevalent theme was regarding mentors. While some respondents reported very positive mentor experiences, and others described more negative experiences, all respondents were unanimous that in theory, and if matched correctly, assigned mentors are beneficial to new 4-H agents. Interviewees who reported that they experienced a negative mentor-mentee relationship cited a failure to have commonalities in program interests, county situation, etc. or simply not feeling comfortable with that person as a mentor. While one interviewee suggested that it might be good to have a schedule of what to discuss and when, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension does in fact provide such a schedule and as well as suggested topics of discussion and activities (See Appendices G-H) which are to be returned to the District Extension Office of the participating mentee. However, many new agents may not be aware of this site, and therefore it is up to the mentor to see to it that he/she follows the guidelines appropriately.

Interviewees by and large reported finding their orientation with their district 4-H Program Development Coordinator a useful part of the New Agent Training Program. One

respondent criticized her orientation, but this was offered based on the fact that the timing of her training was earlier than normal due to other external factors, and therefore she was not ready to process some parts of the orientation. 4-H PDCs were reported as being open, helpful, and as informal mentors to new agents.

Overall, agents reported finding formal in-classroom new Agent trainings useful. Within the University of Georgia's Cooperative Extension program, new Agents complete four formal trainings: Extension Foundations Phase One, Extension Foundations Phase Two, Basics of Youth Development, and a fourth training based in each particular Agent's major program area (i.e. 4-H Agents receive additional training in 4-H Youth Development concepts). While multiple Agents cited finding the fact that they were trained as 4-H Overnight Chaperone Trainers particularly useful, there were not additional specific sections of the trainings which emerged as particularly well-received across the board of interview participants. Interviewees did report that the amount of training they received within the first year made it difficult to remember what they learned where, and in many instances, to retain and absorb said information. Multiple interviewees mentioned extending the New Agent Training Program over multiple years, as compared to receiving all components in a relatively short span of time. This would be comparable to the proposed Florida Competency-Based New Agent Training Program which spans 36 months (Brodeur, Higgins, Galindo-Gonzalez, Craig, & Haile, 2011).

Objective Two

Determine which parts of the total University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent training program were criticized by 4-H Agents or self-perceived as not beneficial.

Three themes emerged relative to this objective of the study- the DED orientation was not useful, new agents received an overwhelming amount of material/training in the first year, and the timing of the training was not always effective.

The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension has developed a very comprehensive training program for new agents, which utilizes several tools available on the web. Many sections of the program (i.e. Orientations and meetings with District Extension Directors, 4-H Program Development Coordinators, County Extension Coordinators, Mentors) have accompanying checklists which are to be completed at the time of the training/meeting and submitted to the District Extension Office. One part of the New Agent Training Program which was criticized by alumni were their orientations with the DED. Few were able to recall much of what was discussed, and those who did, did not find it particularly relevant to what they needed to know at that point of their employment. It was not clear from interviews whether or not DEDs followed the checklists as designed, but based on respondents from interviewees, the researcher theorizes that, a failure to follow the provided checklist as and when suggested, results in a poor quality orientation.

A significant amount of responses were generated from interviews to suggest that new Agents felt overwhelmed at the amount of training they received within the first year of employment. Multiple interviewees suggested extending training over multiple years to better absorb the material being covered.

Interviewees were fairly split as to how effective they found the timing of their trainings, in reference to whether or not they were receiving trainings on things that mattered to them at that point in their career. Interviewees were so split, some even spoke positively and negatively of the timing in the same interview. The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension system

employs a very detailed schedule of which new hires receive which trainings when. The split amongst respondents suggest that individual situations and preferences may alter how they perceive the timing of their trainings.

Objective Three

Determine how the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program may have affected participants' decisions to remain employed as 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent or to terminate such employment.

Six themes emerged from the research relative to this objective- previous work experience is beneficial, county office situation, community support, balancing personal and professional time, informal mentors, and quantity vs. quality of work.

All research subjects held some belief that previous relative work experience made it easier to function as a 4-H Agent. Specifically mentioned skills were the abilities to teach others and manage self in a professional setting. Some also mentioned previous 4-H experience (i.e. having served as a Georgia 4-H Camp Counselor) may give an added edge in the realm of networking to expand their programs.

Individual county situation and community support appear to have greater possible relationship with the retention of new 4-H Agents than the total New Agent Training Program in Georgia. This supports previous research in Georgia (Johnson, 2009). All agents interviewed who are still employed specifically cited a positive, supportive working environment, whereas three of the four who have left Extension mentioned a variety of county-based issues. Similarly, 100 % of the Agents who have terminated employment referenced some difficulties with community support, whereas 75% of current 4-H Agents interviewed reported good community

support. One Agent, who is still employed, yet reported a lack of community support, has since been transferred to a different county.

While no obvious relationship was found between individuals who left Extension employment, and a lack of balancing personal and professional time, this was an issue presented by several respondents. Interestingly, none reported remembering ever having received any training in this area through Cooperative Extension. One respondent did indicate that she thought she'd heard something at a professional association meeting once, but countered that if you were not a paid association member, you would not have been privy to the information.

Two interviewees reported feeling pushed by administration to generate certain numbers of participants in their activities and programs which was an apparent cause of some frustration. While suggested quotas for certain events exist (i.e. residential 4-H camps) these are generally set by individual Agents in agreeance with their 4-H Program Development Coordinator. This may be explained as differences in philosophies regarding breadth vs. depth of educational experiences for youth, and what some agents perceive as being valued by administration.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study prompted further questions that could be investigated to help understand best practices in the training and acclimation of new Cooperative Extension Agents and how such programs can affect retention rates of 4-H Agents. The small sample size of this particular study could be addressed by repeating this study with a larger audience, using the themes identified here as constructs on a quantitative questionnaire. As follows are possible research topics to be considered for future study:

1. Replicate this particular study with a larger sample size to determine whether or not similar themes emerge.

2. A qualitative evaluation of other state new Agent training methods to determine if similar themes arise.
3. A quantitative study on county office situation satisfaction and the correlating retention rates of Cooperative Extension Agents.
4. A qualitative study of community support and possible effects on the retention rates of Cooperative Extension Agents.
5. A mixed-method study of necessary County Extension Coordinator competencies as perceived by subordinates.

Recommendations for Practice

The purpose of this study was to determine what effects the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension's New Agent Training Program had on retention rates of 4-H Agents. Although the results of this study are specific to Georgia, it is likely that best practices can be useful across state line boundaries. Further, seeing as Extension Agent positions have been frozen for the last couple of years in Georgia, there has been no one to train. As the economy improves, and the floodgates of the job market re-open, we are approaching an ideal time to revisit and revamp the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training Program. The following are recommendations presented by the researcher:

1. This study has demonstrated that individual county situation may have a great impact on whether a 4-H Agent stays or leaves cooperative extension employment. Therefore, it is necessary to increase and improve training of County Extension Coordinators. Specifically target how to mentor and coach employees. Because County Extension Coordinator positions are appointed positions, care should be taken during the appointment process to select those individuals not merely on the basis of their success as

a programmatic agent, but on the basis of their management and leadership aptitudes and proven behaviors.

2. If there is indeed, a definite relationship between an Agent's satisfaction with their county office situation and the likelihood of them staying with Cooperative Extension, add a component to New Agent Training Program regarding staff relations and conflict resolution.

3. All interviewees mentioned at some point feeling overwhelmed with the amount of training they received in their first year. Previously in the history of the University of Georgia's Cooperative Extension program new Agent trainings were extended over multiple years. This system should be revisited to determine whether it would be a more viable option now.

4. Create a culture which encourages informal mentors. Extension administration should make attempts, when possible, to group new hires into training programs so they may find support in one another

5. Add a component to the New Agent Training Program and to the CEC training which addresses what an Agent should be able to expect from their CEC, and what a CEC should expect to provide, so as to prevent mistaken expectations.

6. Rather than collecting an immediate satisfaction survey among New Agent Training Program participants, revisit alumni a year or more later to receive their feedback at that time, as to what they found beneficial, or contrastingly what they needed but didn't get within the first year of training.

7. Introduce new Agents to the County Operations website which provides all orientation checklists (i.e. mentors, DED's, in-county orientations, etc) upon beginning employment,

so they can help to hold those who “train” them accountable and know what they have a right to expect.

8. Add a component on balancing personal and professional time into formal in-classroom new Agent training.

9. Because previous research has indicated agents who do not have adequate time management skills may experience the most stress, add time management as a component of new Agent training. In that Agents who already feel overwhelmed, may not feel as though they can find the time to attend a time-management in-service, investigate the possibility of using social media websites (i.e. Twitter, YouTube) to mini-blog or create short informational videos on the topic.

Conclusion

This study explored the effects the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension New Agent Training program has on the retention of 4-H Youth Development agents. It appears from the research that the New Agent Training Program is a well-thought out and thorough program, which new agents find useful. However, all those who participate in the training of a new Agent (DED, PDC, CEC, mentor) must be well-versed in the entire training process and what is expected of them, to ensure that each new Agent is receiving the quality professional development opportunity intended. It appears as though individual county office and community support situations may play a greater role in the retention of 4-H agents, and therefore new agents should be helped to develop coping skills, and County Extension Coordinators should be trained in coaching and mentoring skills.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

NEW AGENT TRAINING PROGRAM TRAINING DESCRIPTIONS

“Foundations”

(Descriptions taken directly from the UGA Cooperative Extension website:
<http://www.caes.uga.edu/intranet/foundations/ftrainings.html>)

Within the First Week of Employment

Mentor is Assigned and Initiates Contact with Mentee: Assignment of mentor to each new agent. Mentors are assigned by an agent’s District Extension Director to guide new agents through the first year of employment. During your first week of employment, the Mentors are to contact new agents by phone to provide a welcome and to schedule the first visit. The first visit should occur within the first month, with a minimum of two more visits scheduled during the next six months. During the second six months mentor and mentee should communicate as needed. Topics for discussion may include organizational development, time management, public relations/marketing, programming and professional development. (Foundations trainings).

During the First 30 Days of Employment

“Getting Your Bearings” A web-based training, designed to be completed by new employees within thirty days of beginning UGA Cooperative Extension employment.

In-County Orientation with County Extension Coordinator (CEC). Agent and CEC are required to complete and submit a checklist to the District Extension Director at 2 weeks, 60 days, and four months.

In-County Orientation with County Extension Secretary.

Initiated Within the first 30 Days of Employment but Spanning the First Six Months

Orientation with the District Extension Director. The DED is to meet with new agents to share information on the various roles of individuals statewide, policies to adhere to, as well as strategies for professional development.

Within the First 60 Days of Employment

Orientation with 4-H Program Development Coordinator. Discussions focus on subject matter resources, program development, teaching techniques, trainings, volunteer utilization, networking with related organizations and agencies, and other information related to 4-H Youth Development. Generally, an initial group orientation will take place, followed by an individual visit to each new agent in the new agent’s county by the PDC.

Within the First Four Months of Employment

- ***Basics Of Youth Development.*** Formal Classroom Training for all new Cooperative Extension Agents. This three-day training, required of all new county faculty, includes an overview of the Georgia 4-H program and the basic tools all county faculty need to know as they work with youth audiences in their particular subject matter area. Topics include working with youth; policies and risk management (including screening volunteers); certifying overnight chaperones; insurance; and handling sensitive issues. Project achievement and judging events are also features of this training, as well as an overview of all educational opportunities offered through 4-H.

Within the First Six Months of Employment

- ***Fundamentals of 4-H Youth Development.*** Formal classroom training for those hired on as 4-H Youth Development Extension Agents. This three-day training provides an understanding of and appreciation for the 4-H and Youth Development program in Georgia, as well as the tools needed to effectively lead a county 4-H program. Content includes a discussion of club delivery at the cloverleaf, junior and senior levels; 4-H camping; community collaboration and teacher relations; working with the Agriculture and Natural Resources (A&NR) and Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS) faculty; money management; recognition of 4-H youth; marketing your 4-H program; data management; event management; and volunteer recruitment and management.
- ***Extension Foundations, Phase 1.*** Formal classroom training for all new Cooperative Extension Agents.
 - Phase I, "Skills and Tools" focuses on professionalism, interpersonal relations, media skills, funds accounts management, public service, promotion and managing work and personal time.

After Being Employed for One Year

- ***Extension Foundations, Phase 2.*** Formal classroom training for all new Cooperative Extension Agents.
 - Phase II, "Program Development" provides in-depth training on the Extension program development process, including needs assessment strategies, working with advisory committees, program development and implementation, teaching strategies and program evaluation techniques.

(The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, n.d.b.)

APPENDIX B
INFORMATIONAL LETTER

Dear Georgia Cooperative Extension's New Agent Training Participant,

You are receiving this letter as a previous participant in Georgia Cooperative Extension's New Agent Training program. During Summer 2010, I will be conducting interviews regarding the experiences of 4-H who completed this program between the years of 2005-2008. This research will be conducted through the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication of the University of Georgia. The reason for this research study is to examine Georgia's New Agent training system to determine whether or not the total training program affects the retention rate of 4-H Youth Development Agents within Georgia Cooperative Extension.

The interview will take approximately one hour and will give me a more in-depth look into your experiences in the Georgia Cooperative Extension's New Agent Training Program, and explain how your participation in the program affected your job performance and satisfaction.

Your interview is completely voluntary and is valuable to researching the affects of this program. It is my hope that this interview will suggest new ideas on how we can continue to improve Extension Agent training programs.

I will be contacting you soon and hope that you will agree to participate in this study. If you have any questions concerning this interview or would like to contact me, please feel free to reach me through email or phone. Your experience and opinions regarding the program are invaluable to us, and I thank you in advance for your time and interest.

Sincerely,

Stacey Ellison
University of Georgia Graduate Student
Ph: (478) 987-2028
E-mail: sellison@uga.edu

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled " Effects of Georgia New Agent Training Program on Retention of 4-H Youth Development Extension Agents " conducted by Stacey Ellison, County Extension Agent 4-H Youth Development, under the direction of Dr. Maria Navarro from the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication of the University of Georgia. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this research study is to examine Georgia's New Agent training system to determine whether or not the total training program affects the retention rate of 4-H Youth Development Agents within Georgia Cooperative Extension. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to:

1. Answer questions about:
 - a. My overall impression of overall training and how it did/did not prepare me for my position as a 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent.
 - b. The effectiveness of my assigned Agent Mentor as it relates to my job success.
 - c. How effective was the in-county orientation process in your particular situation?
 - d. County office situation/personnel and how it related to my job success.
 - e. What changes can be made within the New Agent Training program to increase effectiveness?
 - f. What did you find as your biggest rewards/challenges as a 4-H Agent?
 - g. How supportive did you find the community/clientele in your working situation, and how did this contribute to your job performance?
2. Participate in a follow-up interview of about 10 minutes if the researchers consider it necessary.

There are no direct benefits to me for my participation in this study. The indirect benefit to me is that the results of this study could be very beneficial to 4-H Youth Development and Cooperative Extension programs on the federal, state, and local levels as we examine our continually growing emphasis on agent training and retention. This study may begin to help answer the question of how to put our growingly limited funding to best use in terms of appropriate training of new employees.

No risk or discomfort is expected for me or any other participants from this interview, and no incentives will be given to any participants including myself.

No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission. All responses will be compiled and reported as a group. No identifiable information will be kept in the interview notes or audio tapes, and all information contained on the tapes will be erased following transcription of the results.

The interviewer will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project. If I need to contact the researchers for any questions concerning the research or the process, I can reach them at 478-319-2294 or sellison@uga.edu (Stacey Ellison) or at 706-583-0225 or mnavarro@uga.edu (Maria Navarro).

My signature below indicates that the researcher(s) have answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. When did you begin your employment with Cooperative Extension?
2. Please give your impression for the overall training and preparation you received from UGA Cooperative Extension? Describe the usefulness of the Foundation Training (Intro to Extension; Foundations Phase 1 & 2). What about subject matter training (Basics of Youth Development; 4-H Fundamentals)?
3. Was there too much training? Too little training? Just right? (Please explain).
4. How was the timing of the training?
5. Was your assigned mentor useful to you? Describe your interaction with your mentor.
6. Did you complete the in-county orientations with your county secretary? Your CEC (1, 3 and 6 months)? Describe the usefulness of these. Did you follow the checklist?
7. Did you have orientation visits with your Program Development Coordinator? How was this done? Did you use the checklist?
8. Did you have an orientation with your District Director? What was the format and what did you discuss?
10. Describe your county office situation- personnel; support; atmosphere.
11. Did you feel welcomed upon arrival to UGA Extension? Why or why not? How can this be improved?
12. Describe your community and the community support for you. For Extension.
13. What do you find/ did you find most rewarding about being a 4-H Agent?

14. What is/ was your biggest challenge as a 4-H Agent?
15. Do you feel that you brought skills and/or job experience with you to the 4-H Agent position that made you more successful? What were they?
16. What did you need in the first 12-18 months of employment that you did not receive?
17. If you could change the UGA Extension Training Process, how would you improve it?
18. Any other input you would like to give or feel would be useful?

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT THANK YOU LETTER

119 Quinelle Drive
Perry, GA 31069
Phone: 478-987-2028
Fax: 478-987-8099
E-mail: sellison@uga.edu
Date

Dear First Name Last Name,

Thank you for your recent participation in the research study regarding the effects of Georgia New Agent training programs on the retention of 4-H Youth Development Extension Agents. Your input will be very beneficial in helping 4-H Youth Development professionals as they examine the continually growing emphasis on training and retention of quality employees.

If you have any questions concerning the study or results of the study, please feel free to contact me at (478) 987-2028 or sellison@uga.edu.

If you would like to see results of the completed study, I will be happy to share them sometime after August 1, 2011. I will be happy to make these available to you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stacey Ellison". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "S".

Stacey Ellison
Masters of Agricultural Leadership Candidate
The University of Georgia

APPENDIX F

CEC CHECKLIST (TWO WEEKS)

(Taken directly from the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension In-County Orientation Website at: <http://www.uga.edu/intranet/foundations/incounty.html>)

University of Georgia Cooperative Extension
FOUNDATIONS PROGRAM
In-County Orientation
County Extension Coordinator (Within Two Weeks)

Name: _____ **County:** _____
District: _____ **Date Employed:** _____
Date(s) Discussed: _____

CEC Sends Copy to: DED

| DISCUSSION TOPICS | COMMENTS OBSERVATIONS/ FOLLOW UP |
|--|---|
| DAILY OFFICE ROUTINE Office Hours Keys Parking Files Breaks Holidays/ Office Closings | |
| COUNTY PERSONNEL PAPERS Complete County Employee Papers | |
| STAFF MEETINGS Purpose Date Time Location | |
| SECRETARIAL REQUIREMENTS Secretarial Assignments/ Responsibilities Priorities Preparation Filing Newsletters | |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATIONS Office Calendar Mail Routing Cc Procedures Equipment/ Making Room Reservations Itinerary</p> | |
| <p>EXPENSE ACCOUNTS County Procedures Accuracy Timeliness</p> | |
| <p>TRAVEL REGULATIONS AND POLICIES In-County Travel Cluster Travel Out-of-Cluster Travel (Authorized/ Unauthorized) Out-of-State Travel Requests/ Deadlines</p> | |
| <p>COUNTY BUDGET Budget Cycle Reimbursement Policies/ Procedures (Personal Tax Issues) Supplies Equipment Travel Professional Development Dues Purchase Orders</p> | |
| <p>EMPLOYEE BENEFITS Introduction to Extension Web-based Training Ag Business Office Contact</p> | |
| <p>COMPUTER PROCEDURES E-mail Procedures Individual E-mail Addresses Computer Access Inappropriate Use of Computers (CAE Policy) When to Use Computer in County Office How to Use Computer in County Office</p> | |
| <p>SPECIAL PROCEDURES Sick Leave Annual Leave Specialist Requests Purchasing Supplies (All Sources)</p> | |
| <p>JOB EXPECTATIONS & PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITIES Multi-County Responsibilities Special Assignments (Committees, Boards, etc.) Projects Programs</p> | |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>EXTENSION OFFICE BANK ACCOUNTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> County Accounts Policy County Accounts Access Investments 4-H A&NR/ FACS Special Interest Funds (Livestock Shows, Master Gardener, etc.) User Fees Fund Raising | |
| <p>FILING SYSTEM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer to Manual Maintenance | |
| <p>MENTOR SUPPORT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentoring Process Scheduling Visits | |
| <p>TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foundations Training In-Service Training Winter School | |
| <p>APPROPRIATE DRESS CODE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reason Importance Impact Name Tag | |

(The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, n.d.c.)

APPENDIX G

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR MENTORS

(Taken directly from the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Mentor Support website at: <http://www.caes.uga.edu/intranet/foundations/mentor.html>)

MENTOR SUPPORT - SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

Organizational Development

- " Daily Planning (Calendars)
- " Organizing Work Area
- " Setting Up Personal Files
- " Handling (Returning) Phone Calls

Time Management

- " Scheduling Meetings and Programs
- " Office Conferences
- " Reporting (Data Management System)
- " Deadlines
- " Balancing Job and Family
- " Mail, E-mail
- " Farm/Home Visits (Purpose, Techniques, Skills, Approaches)
- " Volunteer Utilization

Public Relations/Marketing

- " Community Involvement
- " Professional Image
- " Relationships With Key Leaders (County and State Officials)
- " Relationships With Local Media
- " Relationships With Co-workers
- " Customer Service, Response To Clients
- " Newsletters/News Articles

Programming

- " Program Techniques
- " Program Development Process (Advisory Systems, Impact Planning and Evaluation)
- " Programming For Special Audiences (Disabled, Migrant, Seniors)
- " County Delivery System
- " Utilizing Specialists and Other Resources
- " Utilizing Volunteers
- " Delivery Methods
- " Evaluation, Thank You's, Reporting
- " Networking With Other Agencies/Associations/Departments

" Co-sponsoring Of Programs With Other Agencies/Associations/Departments

Professional Development

" Membership in Agent Associations

" Public Service Promotion

" Advanced Degrees

" In-service Trainings, Winter School

" Self-directed Study (Community Workshops, Continuing Education Classes)

(The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, n.d.d).

APPENDIX H

SUGGESTED MENTOR ACTIVITIES

(Taken directly from the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Mentor Support website at: <http://www.caes.uga.edu/intranet/foundations/mentor.html>)

MENTOR SUPPORT - SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Visit / tour Mentor county office.
- Job Shadow (accompany Mentor in daily activities).
- Assist with reports / paperwork (staff activity reports; impact statements, etc.);
- share record keeping strategies.
- Discuss “Extensionese” terminology.
- Review resources (notebooks; web resources - bookmark sites).
- Host Mentee at district/ area meetings, Winter School, professional association meetings.
- Share knowledge between Mentor and Mentee (prepare educational program; team teach”; learn hands-on skills).
- Attend County 4-H club meetings, judging events, portfolio workshops, etc.
- Promote building contacts with specialists and potential subject matter mentors.
- Socialize to build positive relationship (lunch, birthdays, cards notes, etc.).
- Share copies of newsletters, brochures, awards programs, etc.
- Attend county advisory committee meeting.
- Attend cluster staff meeting (if Mentor is in a different cluster).
- Train how to handle difficult situations with clientele (allow Mentee to listen in on speaker phone).
- Make home / farm/ site visits.
- Observe activities from all program areas.
- Share systems for clustering.

(The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, n.d.d.).