

# CUSTOMER VIEWS OF UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

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The views of Utah State University Extension customers, when segregated by urban-rural geographic units and those utilizing services by differing season, point to some differences which should be considered as Extension programs are reviewed, developed, and marketed. Customer perceptions in 27 Utah counties and eight continuing education units were surveyed in 1999-2000. During this period over 2770 customers who had utilized USU Extension were randomly telephone surveyed to obtain customer perceptions. Some of the key findings from this study are listed below.

- ❖ 94% of all geographical groups reported that the information they obtained when contacting Extension met their expectations. The highest expectations were met with rural geographical groups (96%). Expectations were lowest in the summer season (92%) vs. spring (95%) although this was not a significant difference when further analysis was conducted.
- ❖ 79% of all geographical groups found immediate application and use for the information supplied to them by Extension. Highest use of the information occurred in the spring season (82%) with the lowest use in the winter season (74%).
- ❖ Urban/semi-urban geographical groups had the highest propensity (76%) for sharing information received with someone else and rural counties a slightly lower propensity. Winter is the season with the highest sharing of information by Extension customers (74%) and spring the lowest (71%). This was not statistically significant, however.
- ❖ Of those who had not already shared the information with someone else rural and transitional geographical groups were least likely to share the information they had received while urban and semi-urban groups were the most likely. The likelihood of Extension customers sharing information with someone else was greatest among those surveyed in the winter season (51%) and lowest in the summer season (37%).
- ❖ 96% said that USU Extension handled their request exceptionally well and satisfactorily (Of this total, 70% of respondents indicated - exceptionally well). Highest customer satisfaction and responsiveness occurred with the winter season group and lowest with the summer season group although there was no significant difference between any season group on this indicator.
- ❖ 25.4% said yes, this was their first contact with Extension. Highest first contacts came with the continuing education group at 43% followed by the urban geographical group at 31%. Lowest level of first contacts with Extension came from the rural geographical group at 18%. The highest number of first contacts with Extension came with the summer season group of customers. 33% of those who had their first contact with Extension made that contact during the summer season when compared with 19% who had that contact in the winter season, 24% in the spring, and 26% in the fall.
- ❖ 60% said they had contacted Extension during the past 12 months 1-5 times. 13% had contacted Extension 6-9+ times with 22% of customers surveyed contacting Extension more than 9 times during the past year. Highest frequency of customer contact with Extension during the past 12 months was with the Continuing Education, transitional, and rural geographical groups. 40% of the transitional geographical group and 38% of the rural geographical group had contacted

Extension 4-9 times during the past 12 months. 72% of urban and semi-urban geographical groups however, were likely to contact Extension 1-5 times compared with rural and transitional geographical groups at 58%. Higher numbers of urban and semi-urban customers contacted Extension 1-5 times, which was higher than for any other geographical group. Rural and transitional geographical groups, however, tended to be a more sustained and higher frequency user of Extension overall.

- ❖ 23% said yes, this was more contact than in any other previous year. 12% said that it was less than any previous year with 55% saying it was the same as any previous year and 10% who couldn't remember whether it was more or less than any previous year. When customers who indicated that this was more contact than any previous year were factored out from those who indicated it was less contact, there was a net gain of 11% increase in customer volume over any previous year. Increased contact was highest with the spring group and tended to be lowest in the winter season. There was no significant difference when fall and summer seasons were compared on the basis of more or less contact.
- ❖ The principle ways customers used to contact Extension was via the phone, an office visit, and contact at the fair or other public venue for both urban and rural county geographical groups. The more urban geographical units became the more likely they were to utilize email and electronic technologies for contacting Extension. Urban geographical groups were least likely to contact Extension via an office visit. Semi-urban groups the most likely to contact Extension via the phone. Rural and Transitional county groups had the highest propensity to contact Extension at a fair or other public venue and were most likely to make an office visit. Office visits were most frequent in the winter season although winter also was the season reporting the highest used of regular postal mail as a means of contacting Extension. The winter season customers were twice as likely to contact Extension using a training program than in any other season.
- ❖ The reasons for contacting Extension varied somewhat between geographical groups. In descending order urban groups when contacting Extension requested information on horticulture/gardening, home economics, 4-H, and non-credit programs and conferences. Semi-urban groups contacted Extension most for gardening/horticulture, home economics, 4-H, and agriculture/environmental areas. Transitional county groups contacted Extension most for 4-H, home economics, gardening/horticulture, and agriculture/environmental areas. Rural county groups contacted Extension most for 4-H, agriculture/environmental areas, gardening/horticulture, and home economics. Contact with Extension for 4-H and youth information was highest in the winter season followed by summer, fall, and spring seasons. Contact with Extension was greatest for gardening and horticulture in the winter season followed by spring, summer, and fall seasons. Frequency of request for information on agriculture and environment in the winter season was nearly twice that of any other seasonal period. Frequency of request was greatest in the winter season of the year for home economics – family and consumer sciences followed by summer fall and spring seasons of the year. Frequency of request was greatest in the winter season of the year. Nearly three times as many customers sought information on non-credit programs and conferences in the winter than in any other seasonal period.
- ❖ 63.5% first learned about Extension via a referral from a friend or relative. The likelihood of first hearing about Extension in this way is about equal when comparing rural and urban geographical groups. The geographical group with the highest first time referral to Extension occurs in semi-urban (73.5%) and transitional (68.7%) areas. 14% first learned about Extension via a fair or

other public venue. Customers were nearly twice as likely to first hear about Extension at a fair or other public venue in a rural geographical area than in any other geographical area. 9% first learned about Extension via a USU publication or catalogue. The continuing education group and urban-based geographical group were most likely to have first learned about Extension in this way. 7% first heard about Extension via a newspaper. The continuing education group was most likely to have first learned about Extension in this way than with any other group. Semi-urban groups followed by rural groups were the least likely geographical groups to have first heard about Extension via the newspaper. 2.4% first heard about Extension via a phone book. The continuing education group and transitional geographical group were most likely to first learn about Extension using a phone book.

- ❖ 97% of Extension customers felt positive to neutral about being surveyed on their satisfaction with Extension services. 70% of Extension customers reported positive feelings about the survey. The most positive responses to the survey in descending order occurred with urban, semi-urban, transitional, rural, and continuing education groups. Generally as groups became more rural, their views became more negative.
- ❖ 1 in 5 or (21%) of Extension customers indicated that they had visited the USU web site during the past year. 53% of the continuing education center group had visited the Extension web site. Transitional (20%) and semi-urban (16%) geographical groups had visited the Extension web site during the past year. Lowest visitation came from the rural geographical group (7.8%). 61% indicated that they found the USU web site helpful. 26% thought that the site was somewhat helpful. 13.3% thought that the USU web site was not helpful at all.

### **About the Study**

*Statistical analysis and narrative prepared by Dr Dallas L. Holmes, Extension Specialist, Institutional Research, Utah State University January 2001. Survey data was collected from 2,773 Extension customers statewide in a random sample drawing with subsequent telephone interviews in winter 1999, summer 1999, spring 2000, and fall 2000. Statistical tests included an analysis of variance and secondary post hoc test utilizing the Bonferroni technique. Cross tabulations, frequency and percentage charts were created for group comparisons. Geographical groupings included urban counties with populations 180,000+, semi-urban counties with populations 179,999-75,000, transitional counties with populations 74,999-20,000, rural counties with populations 19,999 – 700, and continuing education centers. Geographical groupings were based on the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget 1998. Groups were also compared by season of the year to determine if there were differences in customer perceptions based on time of Extension services access. For further information contact Dr Dallas L. Holmes, at DallasH@Ext.USU.EDU*