

SUSTAINABILITY OUTREACH IN EXTENSION: NATIONAL SUMMARY

National Network for Sustainable Living Education

Delivered by: Roslynn Brain, Utah State University Extension, *Results analyzed by:* Roslynn Brain & Clark Dove, Utah State University

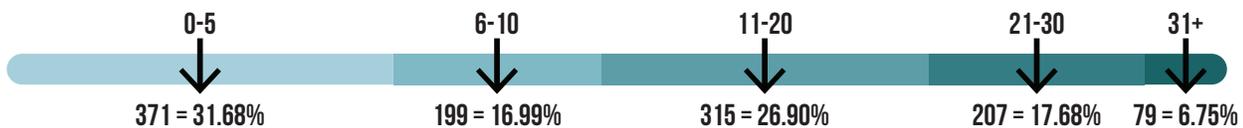
The Sustainability Outreach in Extension: National Survey was developed with input from colleagues attending the 2016 National Extension Sustainability Summit in Portland, Oregon, Community Development Extension Institute in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals conference in Burlington, Vermont. The survey was designed in qualtrics and emails to Extension directors in every state were administered following Dillman's (2007) Tailored Design Method for internet surveys. This included a personalized pre-notice email, first and second survey link emails, and a final contact. Emails were drafted in an easy cut-and-paste format for directors, with the request that they send the survey to all Extension educators in their respective states. The survey was also sent to the chairs of the Association of Natural Resources Extension Professionals, National Family Consumer Sciences, National Association County Agricultural Agents, and the National Network for Sustainable Living Education, with the request to copy and paste the main email content and send to their respective members. All contacts were made during the month of January, 2017. Of the 1,693 responses received, 1,395 agreed to participate and completed at least 75% of the survey. This summary report includes the national highlights, analyzed using Python and the Pandas, Numpy, and NLTK libraries within it.



DEMOGRAPHICS

Most respondents to the survey were either county/regional educators (n = 510, 42%), state specialists (n = 302, 25%), county directors (n = 127, 11%), regional specialists (n = 116, 10%), or administrators (n = 62, 5%). Forty states were represented, with 56% (n = 667) female and 44% (n = 526) male. Most respondents had worked either 0-5 or 11-20 years in Extension.

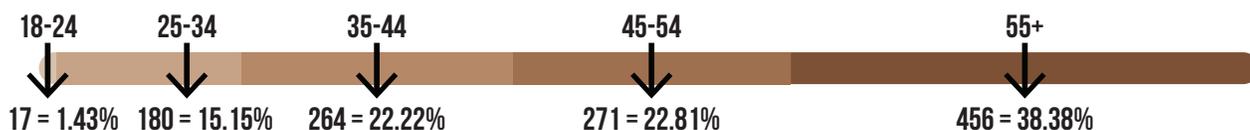
YEARS WORKED



Note: The median range of years worked is 11-20 and the mode is 0-5.

AGE

The final question asked "What is your age?", 1,188 respondents answered, most were over 55 years of age.



Note: The median age range is 45-54 and the mode is 55+



UtahStateUniversity
EXTENSION SUSTAINABILITY



TOP 10 RANKED SUSTAINABILITY AREAS

The top 10 ranked sustainability areas state Cooperative Extension systems are currently doing a good job at addressing, in the perspective of Extension educators, include (n = 1,191):



Nutrition Education

890 74.73%



Water Quality

724 60.79%



Soil Health

685 57.51%



Environmental Education

637 53.48%



Consumer Education

630 52.90%



Local Food Systems

619 51.97%



Health Education

606 50.88%



Increasing Youth's Interaction with Nature

541 45.42%



Food Access

538 45.17%

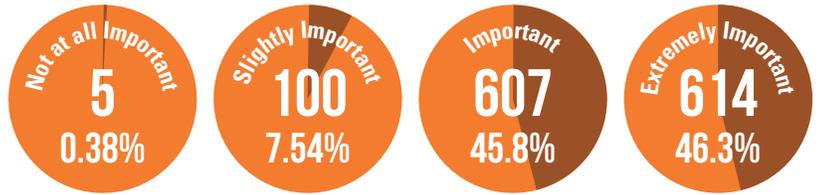


Economic Development

535 44.92%

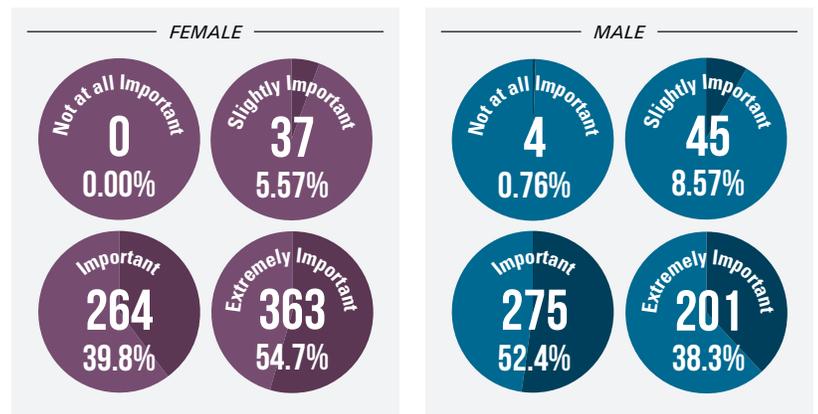
IS SUSTAINABILITY IMPORTANT?

The overall majority of Extension employees nationally believed it was either "important" or "extremely important" to engage their clientele in learning about sustainability (n = 1,326). When subdivided by gender, more females than males felt it was "extremely important" to engage their clientele about sustainability. When subdivided by years worked in Extension, the majority of newer employees who had worked 10 years or less rated this as "extremely important," whereas the majority of employees who had worked 11 or more years rated this as "important."



Note. Median rating was 'Important' and mode rating was 'Extremely important'.

GENDER



Chi Square Results: Test Statistic = 35.776045750211317, P-value = 8.3509046385381772e-08 (statistically significant), Degrees of Freedom = 3

	f	%	M	SD
Female	664	55.9	1.51	.84
Male	525	44.2	1.72	.93

Note. Importance measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Extremely important), 2 (Important), 3 (Slightly important) and 4 (Not at all important) to calculate mean and standard deviation.

YEARS WORKED

	0-5 Years		6-10 Years		11-20 Years		21-30 Years		31+ Years	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Extremely Important	221	59.89	103	51.76	138	43.95	63	30.73	34	43.04
Important	129	34.96	86	43.22	148	47.13	121	59.02	37	46.84
Slightly Important	18	4.88	9	4.52	27	8.60	20	9.76	8	10.13
Not at all Important	1	0.27	1	0.50	1	0.32	1	0.49	0	0.00

Chi Square results: Test Statistic = 52.701455289991678, P-value = 4.6548863823501655e-07 (statistically significant), Degrees of Freedom = 12

Years	0-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	31+
f	369	199	314	205	79
%	31.65	17.07	26.93	17.58	6.78
M	1.46	1.54	1.65	1.80	1.67
SD	.87	.86	.92	.87	.91

Note. Importance measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Extremely important), 2 (Important), 3 (Slightly important) and 4 (Not at all important) to calculate mean and standard deviation.

WHY SUSTAINABILITY IS OR IS NOT IMPORTANT

When asked why it is or isn't important to educate their clientele about sustainability, 925 responses were coded into five major themes:

SUSTAINABILITY IN TERMS OF USING RESOURCES

- "It is important to ensure that we are able to continue to utilize resources."
- "It enables clientele to make informed decisions about their and society's management of resources."
- "Resources are limited, population is growing, so we all need to be practicing carrying-capacity thinking to be a successful species."
- "Every day decisions impact our natural resources. Cumulatively, peoples' decisions can make a difference."

SUSTAINABILITY FOR ECONOMICAL AND PROFITABILITY PURPOSES

- "Support of natural resource industries over the long-term has always been a central focus of extension activities. in the public interest it is critically important that our work helps to guide these industries toward practices that are profitable and sustainable in the long-term as research based information helps to clarify this over time."
- "If we think of sustainability with a large emphasis on economic sustainability, I think it is important for clients to be able to remain in the business of agriculture of the long run."
- "Vibrant local economies depend upon the ability to sustain themselves through various economic cycles."
- "We are a rural community that depends on agriculture for our local economy. If we don't keep agriculture and keep it clean we cannot support the community."
- "Sustainable agriculture is important to our state's economic stability."

PROBLEMS WITH THE WORD SUSTAINABILITY

- "I feel like people are confused by the definition and that "sustainability" is this bad word as it relates to agriculture. I think it is very important to educate the public."
- "There has been a bias that sustainable is only good for the environment and not the farmers who work in it."
- "Sustainability is just the 21st century buzzword for stewardship—Haven't we always been about good stewardship?"
- "Sustainability is too vague to be useful. Everyone from anti-gmo activists to vegans to proponents of modern technologies to increase efficiency claims that they are promoting sustainability. I find it more useful to educate on appropriate management practices for local farms."

IMPORTANCE FOR COMMUNITIES

- "It is critical for the future prosperity of the community."
- "It is the basis for economic, social and environmental health of all within the community - and if the members of the community enjoy good health in all these aspects one would expect there to be less serious conflict and strife."
- "It is important to educate our clientele about sustainability in order for the community as a whole to move forward in knowledge and action. To help our communities come together and have a healthy future."
- "We are a rural community that depends on agriculture for our local economy. If we don't keep agriculture and keep it clean we cannot support the community."

SUSTAINABILITY FOR THE FUTURE

- "A healthy environment = a healthy community. when sustainability is integrated it takes that concept and extends to future generations."
- "No program or project stands alone in time and place. all human endeavor is impacted by the future. to be prepared for the future is being aware of sustainable practices and planning."
- "Survival of the planet, our species, other species, quality of life depends on looking at the impact on the future by what we do now."

SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAMS

When asked "Do you offer any sustainability-focused programs where sustainability is the focus, not just one part or an association?", 259 (21%) indicated they did. Programs identified were added to the National Sustainability-Focused Extension Programs Database: <https://extensionsustainability.usu.edu/national-sustainability-focused-extension-programs>

To enhance communication of sustainability information to the public, respondents ranked listed tools. The following table displays the top five tools (N = 1,201) ranked from highest value downwards.

<i>Rating of Tools:</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>State specialist to refer to</i>	2.77	1.61
<i>Fact sheets</i>	3.25	1.99
<i>Professional development training on how to incorporate sustainability with current county or state programs</i>	3.49	1.70
<i>Youtube videos</i>	4.54	1.87
<i>Online courses</i>	4.56	1.95

Note. Importance measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Extremely valuable), 2 (Valuable), 3 (Somewhat Valuable), 4 (Neutral), 5 (Not at all valuable) and 6 (Don't know) to calculate mean and standard deviation. Only 49 (4.08%) selected Other to write-in a tool. Of those, the most common tools listed were face-to-face interactions, workshops, and trainings.

EXTENSION LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

When asked “How supported by state Extension leadership do you feel in educating about sustainability?,” 1,328 responded with “supported” receiving the majority of responses.

OVERALL RESULTS



Note. Median and mode rating were ‘supported’.

SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

When asked to rank the top 5 emerging sustainability issues for their respective state Extension service to address, 1,142 people responded. The top five listed emerging issues include: Water quality (442), Climate change impacts (373), Environmental education (282), Economic development (277), and Nutrition/health education (276).

1,180 respondents weighed in on the biggest challenges to educating about sustainability in Extension. Below lists the top 5 challenges ranked from highest to lowest:

Highest to Lowest Challenges to Educating About Sustainability	M	SD
Communication (this includes maintaining a clientele base while talking about politically charged issues, how to tie in sustainability with various clientele values, etc)	2.77	1.61
Lack of community interest/competing priorities	3.25	1.99
Community collaboration (this includes having time to engage and find what is important to communities, a two-way feedback loop between your office and the community, etc)	3.49	1.70
Lack of staff professional development	4.54	1.87
Overcoming institutional barriers (this includes needing upper administrative support, the need to expand Extension’s traditional role, etc)	4.56	1.95

Note. The mean and standard deviation were calculated using a ranking scale of 1 (highest challenge) to 9 (lowest challenge).



USDA REGIONAL CLIMATE HUBS

Only 33 percent (n = 411) of national Extension employees had heard of the USDA regional climate hubs, while 67% (n = 825) had not. For those who had heard of the hubs, only 161 (38.8%) indicated they had worked with anyone or used materials from the hubs. Of the 161 respondents who had worked with the hubs, suggestions for Extension’s role in working with the hubs included:

SUPPLY INFORMATION

- “Helping to connect community members and clients with deeper understanding of data and implications.”
- “Conduit to various client groups as a useful resource to share fact based info.”
- “Educate end users about climate related information and provide resources and knowledge for extreme events.”
- “Obtaining and providing science based information and putting climate issues in a context that producers and others in the community can understand and are willing to work with.”

COLLABORATION BETWEEN CLIMATE HUB AND EXTENSION

- “Extension can work with hubs to consolidate research. Extension can provide leadership in developing outreach strategies and materials as well as conducting outreach programs and sharing materials in states and regionally.”
- “Team up. Use their resources and also produce new materials to populate their tool box. Form teams to apply for grants and to influence or inform agencies on the need of them working together on planning and working towards a sustainable economy and society.”
- “2 way, as outlets for information generated through the hubs and setting priorities for hubs work.”
- “I think they should work hand-in-hand. We are beginning to in my state. Very good ties exist between the climate hub and extension.”
- “Working together to develop high-quality educational materials based, and cooperating on educational events related to climate science.”
- “I believe we should be integrally tied to them and use their resources to inform and educate our clientele as well as conduct research from the field to inform the hubs of what is needed in the field.”

DEVELOPMENT OF RESOURCES

- “Help develop educational material and disseminate it.”
- “Help gather data.”
- “Participation and use of resource in education.”