



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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An Assessment of Educational Needs in Northern Nye County

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Introduction

Nye County is 18,064 square miles in area with a population estimated at 34,704 (2000). Northern Nye County Cooperative Extension delivers educational programs within an administrative area that extends from Tonopah and includes communities north of Beatty, NV. In May 2002, Nye County Cooperative Extension conducted a formal assessment to help citizens identify critical research and education needs from a selection of six officially recognized program areas. After formally identifying these topics, Cooperative Extension will effectively address needs through research-based educational programs.

Organization of program areas for this assessment is based on six program areas officially established by Nevada Cooperative Extension.¹

Program areas are:

- ◆ Agriculture
- ◆ Natural Resources
- ◆ Horticulture
- ◆ Community Development
- ◆ Health and Nutrition
- ◆ Children, Youth, and Families

Conducting the Needs Assessment

Four hundred surveys were mailed throughout Northern Nye County. The sample population was selected using a current list of Nye County registered voters. Due to fiscal restrictions

in conducting the mail survey, a sample size of 400 (6.5% of Northern Nye County population) was randomly selected from the complete voter list.

A questionnaire was mailed to each recipient with instructions, a cover letter explaining the purpose of the needs assessment, and a self-addressed return envelope. Of the 400 survey recipients, 75 returned completed questionnaires resulting in a 19 percent response rate.

Prioritizing Program Areas

Respondents were asked to prioritize the six program areas from highest (1) to lowest (6) priority. Table 1 illustrates the survey results. The majority of respondents (74%) indicated children, youth, and families (CYF) was the highest priority program area needed. Nearly half of the respondents (49%) assigned a moderately important priority to health and nutrition and natural resources. More than half of the respondents (64%) indicated that horticulture was the least important program area, followed by agriculture (53%).

Table 1. Percentage of responses for prioritizing Cooperative Extension's program areas^a

Program Area	Most important	Moderately important	Least important
Agriculture	26	21	53
Natural Resources	27	49	24
Horticulture	6	30	64
Community Development	39	43	17
Health and Nutrition	25	49	26
CYF	74	12	14

^aPercentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

¹ Nevada Revised Statute 549.010

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Table 2. Percentage of responses for identifying level of need for program topics ^a				
	Low need	Moderate need	Needed	Don't know
Agriculture				
Range/riparian monitoring	14	20	32	34
Technology in agriculture	13	17	47	22
Noxious weeds	11	19	54	17
Grazing management	14	25	39	21
Irrigation efficiency	12	21	47	20
Alternative crops	14	16	45	25
Financial management	9	21	41	29
Livestock production	16	29	34	21
Natural resources				
Resolving disputes	13	17	47	24
Pesticide management	13	16	55	16
Range restoration	16	21	47	16
Weed management	8	26	53	13
Water quality	9	12	64	14
Wildfires	13	14	62	11
Horticulture				
Lawn care	25	25	38	12
Water conservation	8	25	58	9
Desert landscaping	8	24	59	9
Vegetable gardening	11	24	57	9
Fruit trees	8	29	54	9
Tree/shrub care	5	26	60	9
Composting	11	28	50	12
Community Development				
Economy diversification	5	14	59	21
Development planning	8	20	61	12
Leadership	12	14	61	13
Organization and management skills	9	16	64	11
Recruiting and volunteer training	14	12	62	12
Health and Nutrition				
Food Safety	16	28	50	7
Healthy cooking	9	30	54	7
Diabetes	11	24	53	13
Childhood obesity	9	22	61	8
CYF				
4-H	5	13	70	12
Youth violence	9	21	58	12
At-risk youth	9	13	70	8
Job-seeking skills	5	15	76	4
Parenting skills	4	13	79	4
Senior citizens	9	9	71	11
Money management	8	18	67	7
Drug/alcohol use prevention	4	13	76	7

^aPercentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

Specific Program Needs

Respondents were asked also to identify the level of need for a variety of topics within program areas. Topic areas were selected from the current Nevada Cooperative Extension programs conducted around the state. Specific program titles were not listed, instead were grouped into general program areas. Respondents were asked to select a number from 1 through 5 with 1 indicating “no need” and 5 indicating “high need.” Respondents could also indicate that they “did not know.” Based on these results, the most important topics were identified within each program area. Table 2 illustrates these results. The majority of respondents rated program topic needs as follows:

- ◆ CYF
 - Parenting skills (79%)
 - Job-seeking skills (76%)
 - Drug and alcohol use prevention (76%)
- ◆ Community Development
 - Organization and management skills (64%)
 - Development planning (60%)
 - Leadership (60%)
- ◆ Health and Nutrition
 - Childhood obesity (61%)
 - Healthy cooking (54%)
- ◆ Natural Resources
 - Water quality (64%)
 - Wildfires (62%)
- ◆ Agriculture
 - Noxious weeds (54%)
- ◆ Horticulture
 - Desert landscaping (59%)
 - Tree and shrub care (59%)
 - Water conservation (58%)

Program Delivery

The final part of the survey asked respondents to identify the level of need for a variety of program delivery methods provided for them in a list. Respondents were asked to select a number from 1 through 5 with 1 indicating “no

need” and 5 indicating “high need.” Respondents could also indicate that they “did not know.” The results are presented in table 3.

Delivery method	Low need	Moderate need	Most Needed	Don't know
Newsletter	15	19	53	13
Demonstration/ workshops	4	15	69	12
Publications	11	25	53	11
Video	25	29	24	21
Web pages	20	24	41	15
Classroom	17	24	48	11
Software	21	27	37	15
E-mail	25	29	31	15

^aPercentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

The majority of respondents (69%) indicated that demonstrations and workshops are the most needed form of program delivery. Other delivery methods included publications (53%) and newsletters (53%).

Comments

The following are additional written comments and suggestions volunteered by respondents:

- ✓ Need help with soil quality, fruit trees
- ✓ Need tactful approaches to youth programs
- ✓ Keep in mind [we have] low-income and computer illiterate households
- ✓ We live in a small mining town. I believe none of this will affect us. Small towns tend to be forgotten except at voting time.
- ✓ Need education in technical skill development (i.e. secretarial, computers, legal, etc.) This would alleviate local problems of teen pregnancy, single parents, and welfare recipients. Could boost our very poor economy
- ✓ Children in this area have a very hard time because of parents’ drug problem.
- ✓ Don’t spread yourself so thin – nothing gets done.

- ✓ Classes on soil, greenhouses, tolerable plant species.
- ✓ Program delivery should be based on audience.
- ✓ Educate the BLM to Nevada

Conclusion

The results of this needs assessment indicated several program topics that would be of significant value to citizens in Northern Nye County. The program area of children, youth, and families is the most important issue to respondents. Within this program area, respondents indicated specific topics of interest including parenting skills, job-seeking skills for youth, and the prevention of drug and alcohol use.

The majority of the respondents ranked extension program areas, such as agriculture and horticulture last. The random assignment of respondents may have selected mostly citizens who live in urban/town communities and may represent the view of people not directly involved in agriculture. Although agriculture and horticulture were ranked low, the greatest perceived needs in these areas were noxious weed education, desert landscaping, and tree and shrub care.

This assessment was useful in obtaining insight into the research and education needs of citizens in Northern Nye County. It is important to use an assessment method that is objective and includes a sample population that reflects a spectrum of views among communities. However, a good needs assessment should be implemented with both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The use of an agricultural/natural resource focus group conducted in 2001 was beneficial in obtaining insight from citizens who are directly involved in the agricultural industry. Information from the focus group survey will be combined to prioritize needs and implement educational programs.

Needs assessments should be conducted periodically to observe changes in perceived needs as well as to assess progress made toward goals defined by prior assessments.

After evaluating the results of this survey, an important component of the program development from the Extension Educator, should be directed toward children, youth, and families with an emphasis on educating area youth in drug/alcohol use prevention, parenting skills, developing skills for job searching. However, the areas of agriculture and natural resources will continue to be of importance for program direction due to Extension's commitment to agriculture and natural resources. Results from the previous agricultural focus group and from this survey will be used in directing agriculture and natural resource programs such as agricultural profitability and noxious weed education.

References

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