

Theme Overview: The Future of Farm Management Extension

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JEL Classifications: Q10, Q16

Keywords: Administration, Diversity, Extension, Extension economists, Farm management, Nontraditional, Technology, Training

The idea for this *Choices* theme was born out of a strategic planning session held by the North Central Farm Management Extension Committee. We have many issues to deal with in coming years, and giving some thought to and opening discussion of these topics could benefit the entire agricultural economics profession. Change tends to happen gradually in academia, but the demands from the industry for education and engagement can arrive quickly on our doorstep. We have to be ready to meet those needs so we can train the next generation of extension economists and design our programs to remain relevant to our audiences in the face of new and emerging technologies.

The first article in this series describes the farm management audience of the future, its challenges, and its opportunities. Changes are occurring in the demographics of farm and ranch clientele as the producer cohort ages and fewer young people enter the farming profession due to farm consolidation and high costs of entry. With farmers able to farm more acres with less labor, the demands on their time will tighten and extension will have to be flexible to deliver high-quality, timely information. How will technology in education affect program delivery? Will in-person meetings be feasible with smaller audiences and fewer resources for extension at universities? Plastina, Leibold, and Stockton address these questions and discuss future extension audiences and their needs.

The second article addresses the impact of changing technology in agriculture on farm management. Cost economies and the reconfiguration of the value chain are accelerating farm consolidation and structural change in production agriculture. Many economists have described scenarios in which key innovations and technologies could revolutionize business organization and productivity. Langemeier and Shockley address how an individual farm's management team copes with these changes. This article has three main sections: the first highlights major current upcoming technological developments, the second discusses the importance of technological change for productivity and financial performance, and the third discusses challenges faced by farm managers when dealing with new technologies, farm consolidation, and growth.

The third article focuses on training future extension economists for engagement and applied research in the field of farm management. Taylor and Zhang look at the changing faces of extension farm management specialists and recognize that most of our faculty and graduate students do not come from farm and ranch backgrounds. How effectively we recruit professionals for extension positions will depend on our willingness to work with previously nontraditional candidates such as women, minorities, and foreign students. The discussion centers around recruitment, resources, and training for applied research to prepare the next generation of farm management extension professionals.

The series concludes with a unique perspective from three extension directors on the coming changes in farm management extension. Lawrence, Hadley, and Henderson describe the roles of extension specialists in the future and how they will deliver their educational materials. They also discuss future farm management economists and how administrators can actively recruit, incentivize, and support extension faculty in their execution of the land grant mission.

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