

Summary of Findings for Research / eXtension Connections Task Force?

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Introduction

An eXtension work group is investigating the need for developing web-based tools to facilitate publication of research summaries to the eXtension Website. The group has focused on three potential tools for researchers to connect their ongoing or completed research with eXtension CoPs' content:

- 1) Research Projects Updates,
- 2) Research Links, and
- 3) Research Publication Summaries.

These potential products will target researchers that want to have a modest engagement with eXtension.

Conversations at the 2009 eXtension conference suggested an additional need for those researchers directly engaged or leading a CoP. Participating researchers identified the need for a collaborative workspace that requires "low activation energy". This was defined as an easy to use environment for navigation, collaboration on content, and publishing. This need has not been addressed by our work group

Proposed Tools for Researchers

Research Project Update Provide eXtension clientele with a connection to ongoing and recently completed projects. These one-page summaries would identify: research purpose, current and future plans, what has been learned, why this is important, and contact information. *Example:*

http://www.extension.org/pages/Orienting_Buildings_Perpendicular_to_Prevailing_Winds_May_Reduce_Odors

Research Link: Provide eXtension clientele with a very brief description and link to an existing research summary published on another server. These brief descriptions would provide a title, short paragraph and link to an existing web accessible summary or recent report. *Example:*

http://preview.extension.org/pages/USDA-ARS_Bee_Labs

Research Publication Summary: Provide eXtension clientele with a short summary of a research publication by including the title, citation, brief description and a web link (if accessible without copyright infringement).

Example:

http://www.extension.org/pages/A_Framework_for_Promoting_Retirement_Savings

Survey of Value of Three Tools

A survey was completed of College of Agriculture administrators and faculty and USDA NIFA national program leaders. The survey was distributed through Extension and Research Deans from the Land Grant Universities, eXtension Content Management Board members, and ARS to scientists. The survey was answered by 366 responses (206 from land grant universities and 160 from USDA ARS).

Approximately 50% of those surveyed agreed that there was value to be gained from each of the three proposed tools (Figure 1). However, only 30 to 40% of responses believed that there was a high likelihood that these tools would be used by faculty (Figure 2). The research links and publication summary models were identified as being the more likely reporting tool to be used.

Figure 1. Value of research reporting tools?

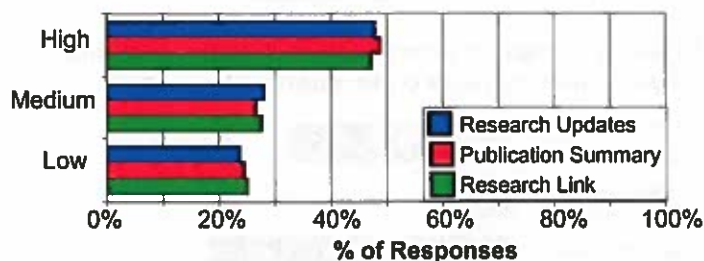
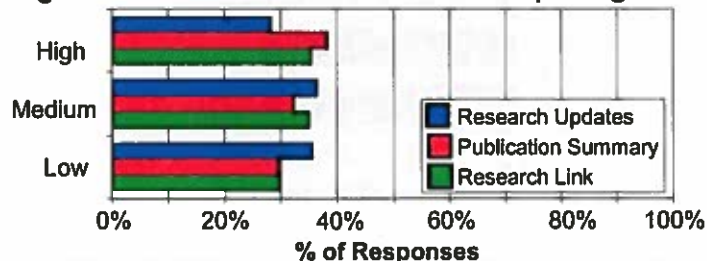


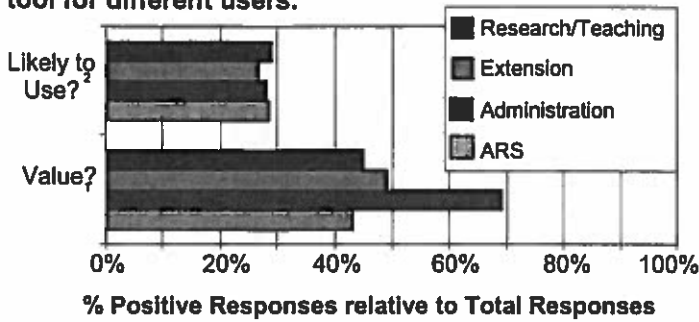
Figure 2. Likelihood of use of research reporting tools?



Administrators saw greater value resulting from the application of Research Updates. However, all groups responded similarly as to the likelihood of the tools use by faculty (Figure 3). ARS scientists responses were very similar to their land grant university research colleagues for all tools including Research Updates (Figure 3). Similar results were observed by group for research links and publication summaries.

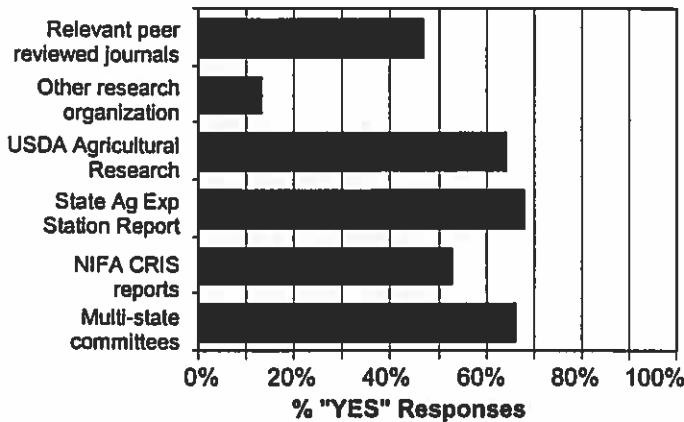
Anticipating that connecting eXtension research products with existing reporting mechanisms for researchers would improve participation, the survey asked for preferred organizations or products with which

Figure 3. Positive responses to Research Updates tool for different users.



eXtension CoPs might cooperate for production of research targeted web pages. Those surveyed suggested that ARS research summaries, state agricultural experiment station reports, and multi-state research reporting might be the most important collaborations to build. The Financial Security for All CoP collaborated with the Journal of the Association for Financial Counseling and Planning Education and the Journal of Consumer Affairs to produce approximately 38 research publication summaries and the Animal Manure CoP has cooperated with a multistate research committee (S-1032) to produce 30+ research updates.

Figure 4. Research products that eXtension should target in developing a connection with research.



Many comments were received from participants. The following three comments capture the most commonly expressed responses:

- *Must be SIMPLE and easy to use - idiot proof.*
- *What incentive is there for researchers to publish on eXtension?*
- *... the likelihood of researchers doing this will be significantly greater if they have joint research/extension appointments.*

Survey Lessons Learned

The lessons learned from the survey include:

- Moderate value seen in improving the research and eXtension connection
- Significant skepticism exists about potential for use of proposed tools

- If it is to be used, “Keep It Simple” principle must be applied.
- Linking to existing research products (publications or existing reports) may have best value.

What are the Benefits?

For many faculty to see value in utilizing eXtension as a means of sharing progress and products resulting from research, the benefits of engaging with eXtension will need to be clearly shared. The work group has created a first draft summarizing benefits to several key stakeholder groups including researchers. These benefits are introduced below:

Clientele Perspective

1. Ability to make decisions based upon access to most current science.
 - a. Access is especially critical to clientele who do not attend professional meeting or read professional journals.
2. Recognition as to when recommendations are based on research.

eXtension/Extension Perspective

1. Adds to research foundation and credibility for eXtension/Extension resources
2. Provides starting point for future eXtension web pages – potential authors and content

Researcher Perspective

1. Contributes to impact (and value) of research
 - a. Implementation of research results validates the applicability of the researchers work. Research connection to eXtension/ Extension is especially valuable to implementation by clientele groups that do not attend professional meeting or read professional journals.
2. Increases visibility of research to a national and international audience
 - a. eXtension provides the tools for web content to be competitive among search engines
 - b. eXtension’s broad base of content allows it to be marketed as the electronic “front door” to land grant university, research-based information.
3. Makes researchers’ work accessible to clientele groups who influence research and funding priorities

Administrative Perspective

1. Provides visibility of institution’s research to eXtension clientele (5 million web page views per year and 46 contributing CoPs in 2009)
2. Increases likelihood that public will find access to research on the web
3. Insures institution’s research is accessible to a national/international audience.