Cooperative extension programming must adapt to changing industry
Specialists can address changing demands and new audiences through online communications channels, according to a new review in Applied Animal Science

The dairy industry has undergone consolidation in recent decades, with fewer producers more intensely managing larger herds. At the same time, many land grant universities have scaled back their extension programs. Although some traditional activities are still viable, adoption of technology has provided dairy extension specialists new ways to reach their clientele.

“Dairy extension specialists have served as a source of unbiased information for producers throughout the existence of the Cooperative Extension Service, and that is still important today,” Dr. John K. Bernard of the University of Georgia, Tifton, said. “Specialists are frequently asked for information on evaluating new technologies and to provide decision-making tools to help producers better operate their businesses.”

Smaller producers generally rely more heavily on extension services than large producers do because they have less access to private consultants or agribusiness technical consultants. However, there are now only half as many dairy extension specialists in the southeastern US as there were in 2000, and most of the remaining specialists have split appointments with research or instructional duties.

Adopting new communications channels is one way extension specialists can reach their clientele. Youth programs are an important component of extension programming, but volunteer leaders usually have full-time jobs and may not have a strong dairy background. Social and electronic media provide a way to train, assist, and communicate with those volunteers outside of their normal work hours.

In one recent survey of producers, more than a quarter of the respondents said they never attend extension meetings because of time constraints or the location of the meetings. Increased access to the internet on farms, however, provides new ways to reach producers. Digital articles and concise videos have proven to be successful. Bernard cautions, “Whatever the outlet, it is important that the information provided is unbiased, based on scientific evidence, and relevant to the needs of producers.”

New clientele have also emerged in recent years. Consumers are not traditionally considered extension clientele but most do not have access to good information about modern dairy production practices. As
more producers engage with consumers through agritourism, on-farm events, and open houses, extension specialists have an opportunity to work with them to develop and provide educational materials for consumers.

Dairy extension specialists face a rapidly changing industry and they must continually identify and prioritize the needs of their clientele while fulfilling their other research or teaching obligations. The adoption of digital media allows them to provide timely and accurate information to producers who may not be able to attend traditional meetings.

# # #

NOTES FOR EDITORS


ABOUT APPLIED ANIMAL SCIENCE

Applied Animal Science (AAS) is an international, peer-reviewed scientific journal and the official publication of the American Registry of Professional Animal Scientists (ARPAS). Previously named The Professional Animal Scientist, the journal has been in continuous publication since 1985. AAS is a leading outlet for animal science research. The journal welcomes novel manuscripts on applied technology, reviews on the use or application of research-based information on animal agriculture, commentaries on contemporary issues, case studies, and technical notes. Topics which will be considered for publication include (but are not limited to): feed science, farm animal management and production, dairy science, meat science, animal nutrition, reproduction, animal physiology and behavior, disease control and prevention, microbiology, agricultural economics, and environmental issues related to agriculture. Themed special issues may also be considered for publication. www.appliedanimalscience.org

ABOUT THE AMERICAN REGISTRY OF PROFESSIONAL ANIMAL SCIENTISTS (ARPAS)

The American Registry of Professional Animal Scientists (ARPAS) is the organization which provides certification of animal scientists through examination, continuing education, and commitment to a code of ethics. Continual improvement of individual members is catalyzed through publications (including the AAS journal) and by providing information on educational opportunities. ARPAS is affiliated with five professional societies: American Dairy Science Association, American Meat Science Association, American Society of Animal Science, Equine Science Society, and Poultry Science Association. www.arpas.org

ABOUT ELSEVIER

Elsevier (www.elsevier.com) is a world-leading provider of information solutions that enhance the performance of science, health, and technology professionals, empowering them to make better decisions, deliver better care, and sometimes make groundbreaking discoveries that advance the boundaries of knowledge and human progress. Elsevier provides web-based, digital solutions – among them ScienceDirect (www.sciencedirect.com), Scopus (www.scopus.com), Elsevier Research Intelligence (www.elsevier.com/research-intelligence), and ClinicalKey (www.clinicalkey.com) – and publishes over 2,500 journals, including The Lancet (www.thelancet.com) and Cell (www.cell.com), and more than 35,000 book titles, including a number of iconic reference works. Elsevier is part of RELX Group
(www.relx.com), a world-leading provider of information and analytics for professional and business customers across industries. www.elsevier.com