

The Oregon State University Extension Service

As Others See Us

A Statewide Survey

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The Oregon State University Extension Service As Others See Us: A Statewide Survey

K.K. Kingsley

A common thread among successful organizations—both public and private—is the attention paid to clients. It's important to know who your clients are, what they know and think about your organization, and how they feel about your product.

The OSU Extension Service is especially aware of the need to be client-oriented. A "marketing emphasis" over the past several years has pointed out the benefits of knowing what the market thinks. Our market is the users and potential users of our educational programs and materials.

In late 1986, Extension, in cooperation with the OSU Survey Research Center, contracted with the Portland marketing research firm of Bardsley-Haslacher to do a statewide public opinion poll of Oregon adults over 18 years of age. The goal was to find out who knew about Extension, who had used Extension's services *in the past year*, how they rate Extension's product (informal education), and the value they place on the kinds of programs Extension offers.

Conducted in November 1986, the survey involved in-home interviews with a random sample (804) of Oregonians. The questions about Extension were a part of a more detailed questionnaire. Here's what we learned:

Nearly all Oregonians know Extension exists

More than 91% of the sample were aware of Extension (this compares to a 1982 Federal study that showed an awareness of 87% nationally).

Extension is best known in eastern Oregon, where 100% of the respondents were aware, followed by 97% in coastal counties; 94% in southern Oregon; 92% in the Willamette Valley (minus the three Portland metro counties); and 86% in the Portland metro area. See figure 1.

The lower awareness of Extension in the metro area is caused partly by the limited access Extension staff have to the news media (compared to other areas of the State).

Awareness of Extension was generally uniform across demographic groups, except slightly higher among older adults (45 years and over), retirees, and college graduates.

Extension is heavily used in Oregon

43% of the sample said they had used Extension in the past year (the 1982 Federal study indicated only 10% use of Extension nationally).

Ken Kingsley, Extension communication specialist and associate director, Agricultural Communications, Oregon State University.

Figure 1.—By where they live
Who's aware of Extension? Who uses it?

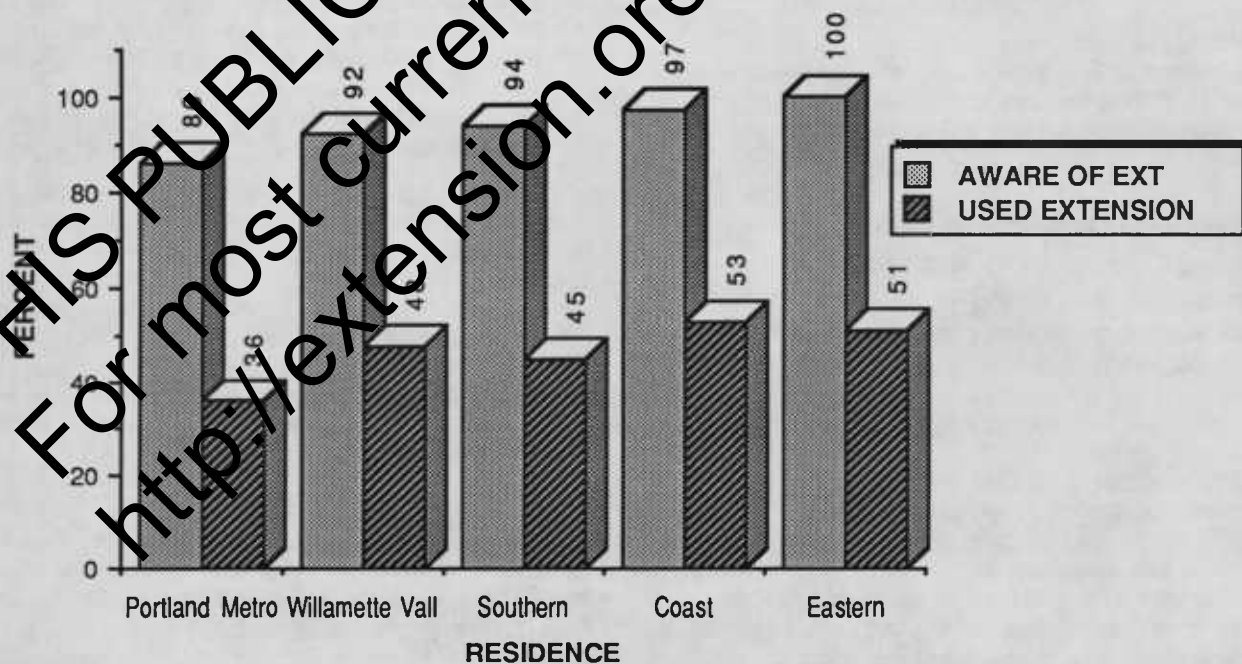


Figure 1 shows the breakdown. Highest use was among coast (53%) and eastern Oregon (51%) respondents, followed by Willamette Valley outside the metro area (48%), southern Oregon (45%), and the Portland metro area (36%).

The lower use rate in the Portland metro area is probably caused by the ratio of agents to potential clients. The 36% of metro county residents equates to 385,000 clients.

Extension's users are representative of Oregonians in general. The survey shows that Extension users as a group share certain key demographic and geographic traits with all Oregonians. The exceptions are that Extension users include:

- fewer renters (as opposed to home owners),
- fewer people earning \$15,000 or less,
- fewer with a high school education or less,
- slightly fewer in the "18 to 34" and "65 and older" age groups, and
- fewer living in the Portland metro counties.

These characteristics tend to reflect a homogenous group (those with lower incomes tend to have less education and tend to rent instead of purchase housing; retirees and those early in their careers generally have less income; etc.). See figures 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Oregonians value Extension highly as a source of information

98% of Extension's users and 89% of nonusers say it is a "good" source of information.

Respondents were asked to rate various sources of information as being "good" or "poor" sources. Extension was given a "good" rating by 98% of the users (2% said "poor") and 89% of the nonusers (5% said "poor" and 6% had no opinion). Presumably, most nonusers based their opinions on prior use (more than a year previous) or word of mouth.

Ratings for other sources of information were not as high. High schools and community colleges were rated "good" by 79% of the sample, followed by newspapers and magazines (62%), neighbors and friends (60%), and radio/TV (50%).

Oregonians are willing to fund the kind of programs Extension offers

Given a list of six subject-matter areas in which Extension offers educational programs (see figure 6):

- 83% were willing to fund programs dealing with the wise use and conservation of ocean resources.
- 76% would fund educational programs on using energy wisely.
- 75% would agree to fund programs dealing with reestablishing forests on cutover lands.
- 70% would fund educational programs on eating food that is safe and nutritious.
- 67% were willing to fund programs designed to improve farmers' management and marketing skills.
- 59% would fund programs to help citizens make informed decisions on public policy issues.

When asked which one of the six programs was most deserving of being funded, respondents did not agree—only 10 percentage points separated first and sixth places (figure 6). The rankings were:

1. reestablishing forests on cutover lands
2. improving farmers' management and marketing skills
3. helping citizens make informed decisions on public policy issues
4. eating food that is safe and nutritious
5. ensuring wise use and conservation of ocean resources
6. using energy wisely

Oregonians who don't use Extension say it's because they have no need

Of those who hadn't used Extension in the past year:

- 75% said it was because they had "felt no need" to do so.
- 16% said they were unaware of Extension (specific comments included: "Didn't know where to call," "Didn't know what kind of problems they deal with," "Hard to find," and "Didn't think of them").
- 4% said they used other sources.
- 3% said they lacked confidence in Extension.
- 2% said Extension was difficult to contact (of this 2%, most were in the lower income category, from the Portland metro counties, and in the craft/clerical/sales/labor, 9-to-5 category).

Extension's tie with Oregon State University is not well known

When asked which organization (from a list) administers Extension:

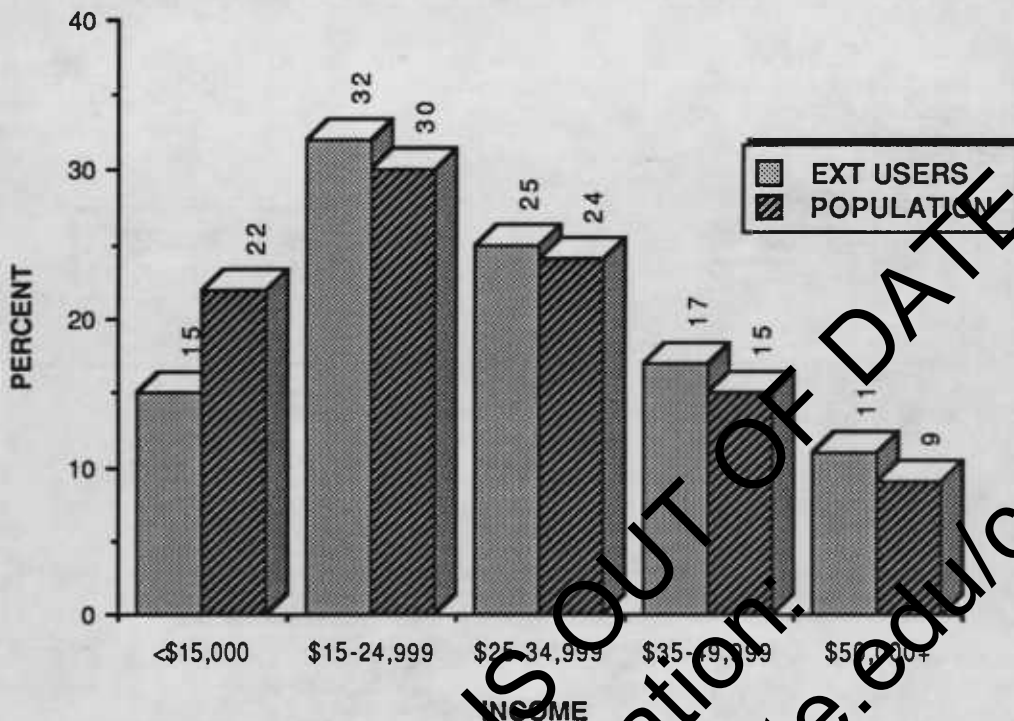
- 34% said Oregon State University,
- 25% said the Oregon Department of Agriculture,
- 10% said the Department of Human Services,
- 5% said the University of Oregon,
- 4% said the Oregon Farm Bureau, and
- 20% were undecided.

Of those respondents who have used Extension, 40% were aware of the tie with OSU. Only 29% of those who hadn't used Extension in the past year could make the connection.

Extension's tie to OSU is best known among older, college graduates, higher income, home owners (as opposed to renters), and those in the Willamette Valley and the coast. Those least aware of the tie tend to be younger, to be less educated, to have lower income, and to live in the Portland metro counties.

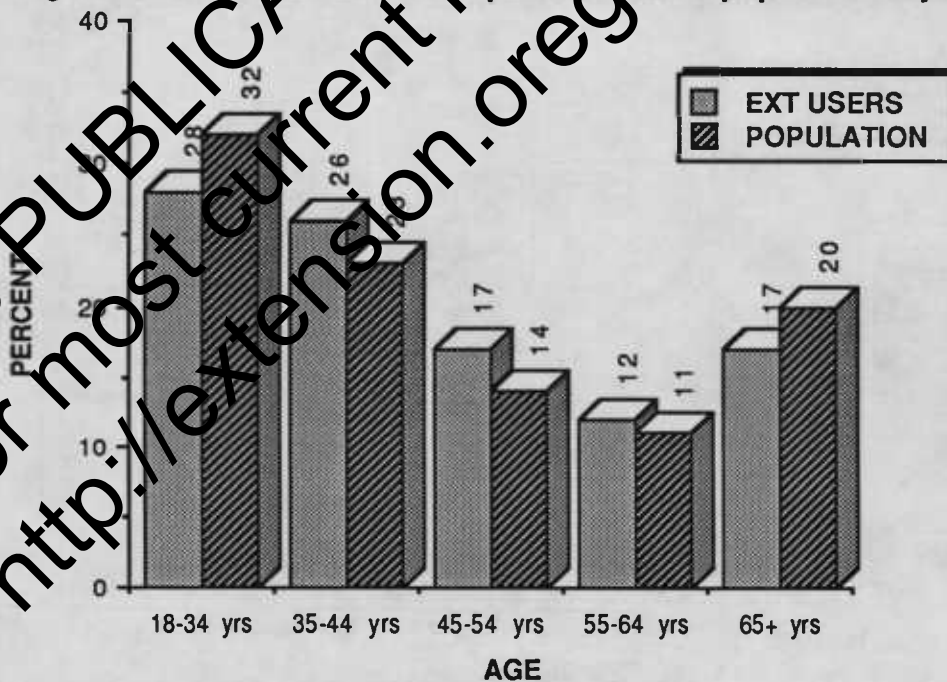
As a tax-supported organization, Extension must make every effort to create awareness among those who might benefit from its educational programs. With the information from this survey, Extension can better market itself to those audiences.

Figure 2.—Ext. users compared to Oregon's population: By income*



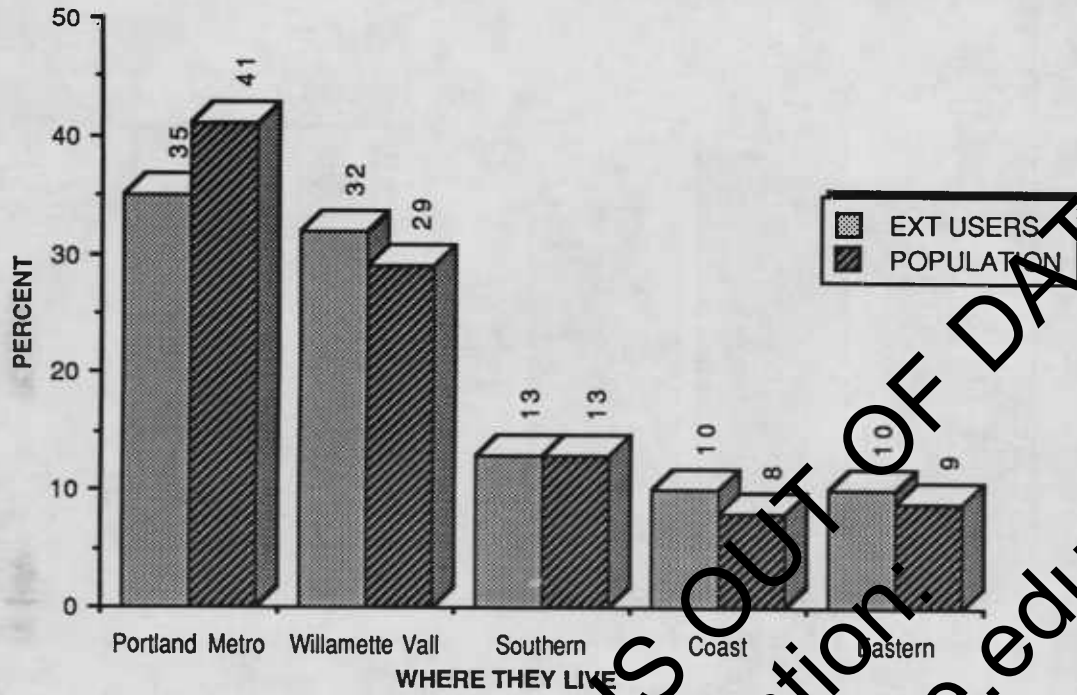
*This comparison shows distribution, by income group, of total users and total population. It indicates, for example, that 15% of Extension's users earn less than \$15,000, while 22% of all Oregonians are in that income category.

Figure 3.—Extension users compared to state's population: By age*



*This comparison shows distribution, by age, of total users and total population. It indicates, for example, that 28% of Extension's users are between the ages of 18 and 34 years, while 32% of all Oregonians are in that group.

Figure 4.—Ext. users compared to Oregon's population: By residence*



*This comparison shows distribution, by place of residence, of total users and total population. It indicates, for example, that 35% of Extension's users live in the Portland metropolitan area, while 41% of all Oregonians live there.

Figure 5.—Extension use patterns by place of residence

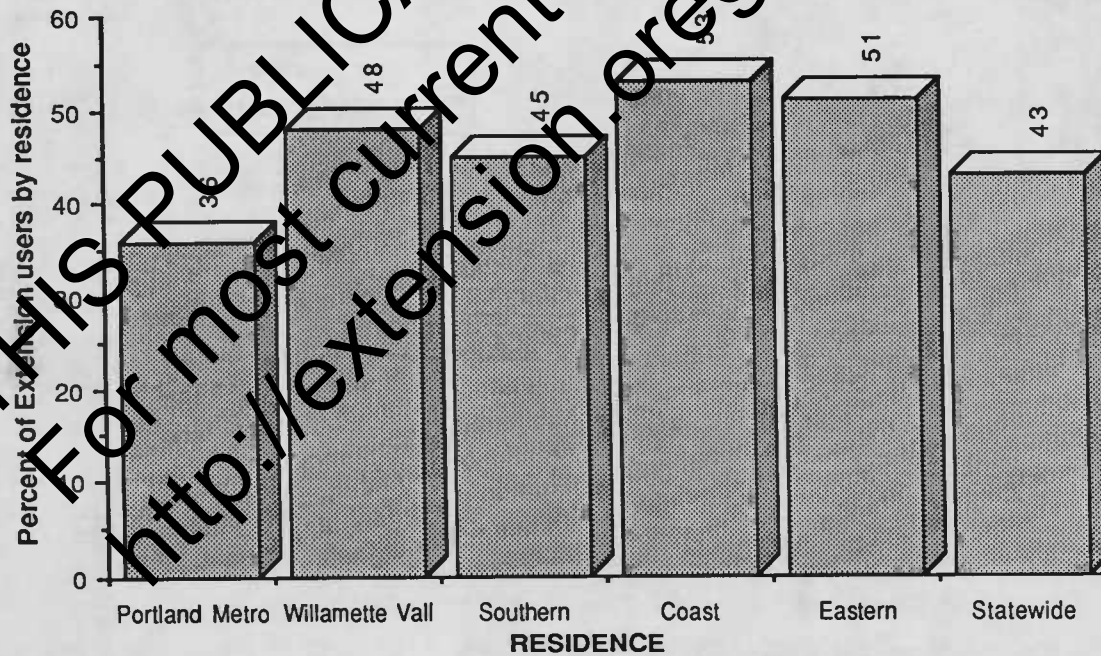
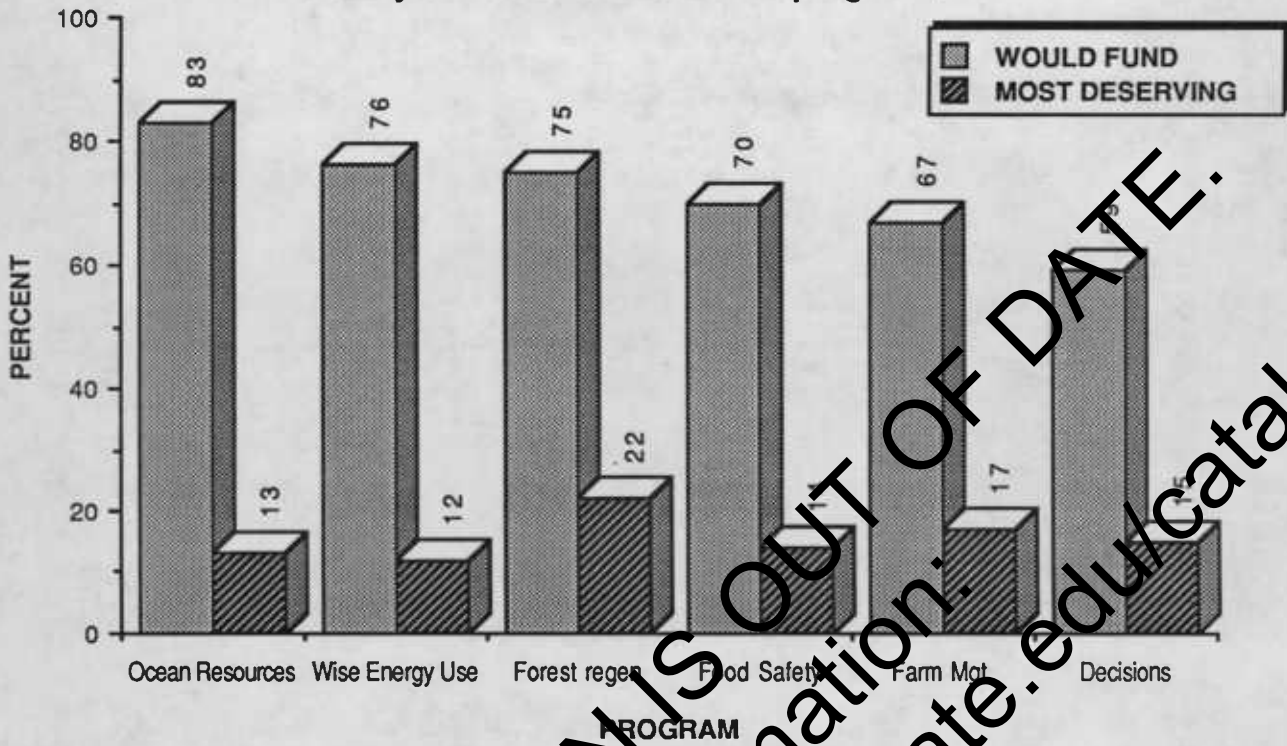


Figure 6.—Voters' willingness
"Would you fund this educational program?"



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