A random sample survey of Iowans indicates that close to one third of the population of Iowa (about 740,000 people) used ISU Extension in some fashion within the past year. In the spring and summer of 2010, more than 800 randomly selected Iowans age 18 years and older were surveyed about their use and perception of ISU Extension. They also were asked what direction ISU Extension programming and delivery should take in the future. The methodology of the survey yielded a 95 percent confidence limit within a plus or minus 4 percent.

Who uses ISU Extension? As one might expect, the majority of people living on farms or in rural areas used Extension within the past year. Farm and rural residents were the most frequent users of ISU Extension and the most satisfied with the service they receive. Somewhat surprisingly, suburban and urban residents indicated using Extension more than small city and town residents. However, the people living on farms or in small towns indicate higher satisfaction rates with their use of Extension than people living in and near metropolitan areas.

In general, the more formal education you have received, the more likely you are to use Extension. Households with children are much more likely to use ISU Extension than those without children. Extension users are also more likely to be White and have higher household income than non-users.

While the breadth of Extension use is wide in Iowa, its depth of use is less so. Roughly only one in 10 Iowans used Extension at least four times within the past year. Slightly less than 7 percent of the respondents indicated they had used ISU Extension 10 times or more within the past year.

Anecdotal evidence from telephone inquiries fielded by the survey team indicates that while nearly all respondents were aware of Iowa State University, they were not aware...
Extension has a core of frequent users, but this is a much smaller segment of the population as a whole.

of ISU Extension as a separate unit. Thus, it is possible that respondents equate Extension products and services with Iowa State University, rather than ISU Extension. In general, these respondents had a positive perception of Iowa State University, but little to no awareness of ISU Extension. This anecdotal information tended to be supported in the survey data. When users were asked what term they would use to describe ISU Extension, the most common response (one in six) was “unknown.”

Users of ISU Extension have Internet and most prefer to receive Extension information via the Internet or e-mail. Uniquely, rural and farm users indicated preferences for individual assistance and for print materials in greater numbers than over the Web and Internet technologies.

When participants were provided with a list of potential topic areas for Extension programming, respondents provided little discernment as to relative importance. Of the 16 issue areas listed, all were, on average, indicated to be important. While some variability is noted among issue areas, the variance was not dramatic or discerning. In general, environmental quality was seen with the greatest degree of importance that needs to be addressed by ISU Extension, but all issues as presented in the survey were important to Iowans.

In conclusion, ISU Extension is widely used throughout the state of Iowa, but in most cases only occasionally. Consistent with this occasional use, there appears to be some confusion as to what is ISU Extension versus what is Iowa State University, and what ISU Extension actually has to offer. Extension has a core of frequent users, but this is a much smaller segment of the population as a whole. Rural and metropolitan usage is somewhat greater than small cities or towns, and a typical user would have higher income, children in the household, and higher levels of formal education. Once clients use ISU Extension, the overall satisfaction and perceived importance of its programming appear to be quite high.

A downloadable/printable copy of the full report, which includes this summary, is available at www.extension.iastate.edu/aboutus.html

... and justice for all

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