

A Needs Assessment of Aquaculture Extension Agents,
Specialists, and Program Administrators in Extension Programming

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify continuing education and training needs of aquaculture Extension agents, specialists, and program administrators on the list serve AQUA-EXT. Ten competency areas were evaluated regarding perceived importance, and need for continuing education or training. In addition, 14 resources on the Aquaculture Network Information Center (AquaNIC) Web site were evaluated from this population for frequency of use and recommended improvements. Lastly, demographic data were collected to determine possible relationships to continuing education and training needs.

The survey population was the AQUA-EXT listserv membership (N = 223), of which 174 responded. AQUA-EXT is a Web based mail group established by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service as a means of disseminating information to the Extension community with work and interest in aquaculture.

Data were collected with an online survey conducted via the interactive and encrypted Web site www.survey.vt.edu/. Upon completion, data were exported into, and analyzed via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

A majority of Extension agents, specialists, and program administrators did not require significant continuing education or training to accomplish their work effectively. However, general agreement among the three groups was for continuing education in the areas of program evaluation, information technologies, and human development.

Regarding the AquaNIC Web site, 52% of Extension agents, 71% of specialists, and 81% of program administrators reported having used AquaNIC, however, use was infrequent. Recommendations to enhance Web site utility focused on requests to update and incorporate more comprehensive and in-depth information for all resource areas.

Demographics indicated mean ages for Extension agents, specialists, and program administrators were 47.9, 50.5, and 51.5 years respectively. Sixty three percent of agents indicated having master's degrees, and 63% and 72% respectively of specialists and program administrators indicated having doctorates. Means for years in their present position were 13.4, 13.2, and 8.4 years respectively for Extension agents, specialists, and program administrators, and 16.6, 16.1, and 15.5 respectively regarding total years in Cooperative Extension or Sea Grant.

No statistical relationships between demographics and continuing education and training needs for Extension specialists, specialists, and program administrators were found.

DEDICATION

First and foremost, I hereby dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Brigitte Gerda and Helmut Eric Schwarz, and brother Rainer Hans Schwarz, for providing the guidance, love, and support throughout my life which provided me the ambition, confidence and ability to embark upon and accomplish this significant achievement in my life. I further dedicate this dissertation to my two beloved children Mason Dalton and Piper Delaney Schwarz, who combined are the greatest joy in my life. Of the most significant disappointments in my life was the inability to keep my children's family united. It is my highest hope that this dissertation grants me not only the opportunity to provide as best I can for them, but also to demonstrate by example how anything is possible with sufficient character, determination, and love and support from family and friends. I will always be there for you, and pledge my utmost to help you achieve your greatest aspirations for a full and happy life.

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