

Issues, Concerns and Suggestions for
Extension Administration Consideration and Response to the
NC Federation of Cooperative Extension Associations for
at the Federation Forum, Friday, December 12, 2003, in Sanford.

Submitted by the Presidents of each Association, compiled by Robert Lopp, Federation President, and James Cochran, Federation President Elect, and submitted to Drs. Ort and McKinnie and copied to Dr. Zublena.

About 11 pages of issues (various type sizes) were submitted to the Federation from the six Associations and condensed into what became five major topical areas of interest to most all association members.

There are numerous other issues identified that were either only mentioned once, and/or are isolated to interest of only one particular association. These are listed at the end of this document, and while important, we prefer to spend valuable Forum time in Federation/Administration exchange on the higher ranked items which affect the larger membership.

Note: Some responses last year partially address this year's issues as well, and are noted in the second section of this document with more detailed information about each of the top five concerns. It is probably noteworthy when items are repeatedly identified. Either/or: the item is still of concern and/or slightly different; any action taken did not suffice the membership or remedy the concern; the response was not what the membership wanted to hear; the administrative response was not suitably communicated to the inquiring association ('s) membership.

Previous years and this 2003 document can also be found on the Federation's webpage as an Acrobat, ".pdf" file:

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/assn/federation/forum.shtml>

Five areas were identified by 2 or 3 of the associations with each of the top two being identified by four of the six associations. They are ranked in such order.

OVERVIEW / SUMMARY of Five Main Areas of Concern:

1. Bonus Leave and Bonus Pay
2. Staffing - Handling Open Positions & Workload.
3. Increased cost of health insurance premiums to staff with families.
4. Employee Support. In the four areas of :
 - a. Travel, b. Salaries, c. Computer Technology & d. Specialists
5. Increasing Disproportionate County Support

DETAILS of the five main areas listed above follows. (Much is quoted from association member emails and discussions, so, the messenger is not responsible for all the language used.)

1. Bonus Leave and Bonus Pay

Questions and concerns basically pertaining to the county share and portion.

Is the \$550 received by Administration for each employee or only for the percentage of the salary funded by the University (e.g., "FTEs") ?
What happens to any bonus funds/hours not distributed?
Why do "lock-in, send-in" have to request county share?

Comments/Suggestions: Some staff prefer any salary increase vs. "bonus benefits". The General Assembly needs to plan for disasters and not use state employees' salaries and benefits to balance budgets (strongly convey this message to them). Utilize State Employees Association more ??

2. Staffing

A. Handling Open Positions

- decision process, length of time a position remains open, which positions closed, etc.

This was somewhat answered last year (Issues # 3 and 4, under Staffing Patterns/Program Delivery, pages 5 and 6 of 2002 Federation Issues & Opportunities Responses – http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/assn/federation/2002/issues_response2.pdf but, please address again with any updates.

Suggestions: consult with/include programming staff in vacant position decisions, not just CEDs and DEDs.

- B. PAATs basically performing a vacant agent's duties without any additional compensation.

This was also somewhat answered last year (Issue # 2, under Staffing Patterns/Program Delivery, page 5 of 2002 Federation Issues & Opportunities Responses – http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/assn/federation/2002/issues_response2.pdf but, please offer any other response.

- C. Increased agent workload (subject matter and/or counties) due to vacated agent positions without additional compensation.

- 3. Increased cost of health insurance premiums to staff with families.

Choice of county plans with state paying that portion (even cheaper for the state).

Employees should be a large enough group to negotiate better rates. Suggestions: Shop around. Have a spouse only rate and then a family rate.

- 4. Employee Support. In four areas of (A. – D.):

- A. Travel (identified based upon last couple years and before the 03-04 allocations, so, probably not as “much” of a concern, now, assuming no reversions later in the year ? ?)

But, still a concern when compared to travel dollars received five years ago compared to increased coverage areas today.

B. Salaries

-Compression. Time frame of addressing compression due to increased starting salaries.

Applauded addressing starting salary issue. Concerned that no short-term plan for dealing with compression exists and that a span of four or so years will result in reduction of morale and, thus, also a reduction of experienced agents. (Or, IS that the plan?)

C. Computer Technology (training)

Lack of training for maximum new and different system utilization and for new hires, since Information Management Agents have been occupied with new system installation and troubleshooting. Will these positions continue? Concern with the amount of time county computer contacts spend troubleshooting.

Computer Technology issue responses from last year can be found on the final four pages at:

http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/assn/federation/2002/issues_response2.pdf
(Issues # 1 - 4, pages 10 – 13, of the 2002 Federation Issues & Opportunities Responses.)

Suggestions: Keep IM agents and increase training now new systems intalled.

D. Specialists (responsiveness to calls, emails and notification when working in county; work relationships with subject matter consultants in counties)

Two associations/two program areas identified.

This issue addressed last year (Issue # 1, under Staffing Patterns/Program Delivery, bottom of page 3 of the 2002 Federation Issues & Opportunities Responses –

http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/assn/federation/2002/issues_response2.pdf

Add any other responses.

Suggestions: Include agents and field staff in specialists' evaluations. More visibly reward and award specialists that best support agents and field staff.

5. Increasing Disproportionate County Support

A. Counties required to assume more of the traditional "state share" cost of:

- Bonus Leave and Pay
- Publication printing expense (e.g., off websites)
- Travel

B. "Privatization" or "out-sourcing" of Extension as an alternative looked at in some counties.

C. Concern over Standardization of MOAs / MOUs

-Resulting in some counties losing out on already well functioning relationships.

End of details on the five major areas of concern.

Other issues and concerns identified either mentioned only once and/or pertaining to just one association's interest. The remaining in no particular order following number 6.

6. EMAPS too subjective; inconsistency across state and districts; too much time spent preparing for reviews (better spent serving clients).

(#6 only identified by one association, but was the number one concern by that association, which found it difficult to believe the other associations did not identify as an issue this year).

7. Horn of Plenty. Is it worth it? Are we getting enough out of the effort? Suggestion: If it is highly prized by County Commissioners Association, then use some leverage to gain access and exposure to other times on their meeting agenda to present, inform and discuss.

8. Out of date publications. Need a review schedule.
9. Other ways of recognition since no pay raises.
10. Advancement opportunities for subject matter agents.
11. What is / determines a program associate vs. a program assistant? Is it a promotion? Is it in writing?
12. Specialist leaving the Vernon James center for Raleigh campus after a few years. Enticement to stay ? (e.g., aquaculture, small fruit, potato breeding, plant pathology and horticulture (cover crops and organic).
13. Different interpretations of professional scheduling.
14. No system in place, such as a 501c, to place grant monies vs. placing money with the University or county.
15. FCS programs losing value as evidenced by the disproportionate loss of FCS positions and forced transition to other program areas.
16. How will the concept of Engagement change or impact what is done at the local level.

END