

# Federation Questions to Administration - December 14, 2012

## SPECIALIST CONCERNS

### *Ed. Training In County / Publication*

1. There are times when specialists from the University go to counties and conduct research, conduct educational programs for private industry, or meet with crop consultants and never inform the CED and/or the agent responsible for that subject matter. In the past standard operating procedure was a specialist would inform the CED and/or agent when they were going to be working in their county. What has happened to change that model? (NCACAA)
2. How can we get timely research updates from specialists? Sometimes we hear about new information that clients received before agents hear about it from specialists. (NCACAA)
3. We are concerned about a disconnect between state specialists and extension agents. There are fewer specialists and those specialists don't even have a relationship with their agents. In addition to NCSU specialists, we need to utilize specialists and their publications from other universities if it is relevant to our needs. Also, state staff/specialist come into our county to conduct a program and never share this information with the county agent. What can be done to increase our working relationships? (NCAE4-HA)
4. Are you aware that publications are being created and posted to Departmental web sites with no mechanism for informing agents the publications even exist? In addition to keeping agents in the dark, this also creates the situation where Internet searchers won't find certain publications if they use the search feature on the main Extension website. (NCACAA)

## ONE STOP SHOP CONCERNS

### *Calculator / Impacts / Efforts*

5. On One Stop Shop there is a calculator for pesticide credits when we do impact reporting. Can we get more standard formulas or number values as a basis for impacts such as pesticide disposal, etc.? (NCACAA)
6. It appears that a lot of emphasis is being placed on conducting series based programming to better document program impact. While I am in favor of this effort, I do have some concerns about securing funds to operate programs like:
  - ◆ Give your heart a Healthy Beat
  - ◆ Cook Smart Eat Smart
  - ◆ ESMMWL
  - ◆ Dining with Diabetes

The above programs all cost monies that many of our consumers cannot afford to pay. I have received an innovative grant to implement one program but would love to implement more series type programs for needy families. What funding strategies/ideas do you suggest for agents in high poverty areas with limited resource? How do we garner funds to support programs that are

not user fee based? Are we moving toward having agents write grants to support programming efforts when there is no funding base? **(NCEAFCS)**

7. ERS does not accommodate all FCS programming focus areas. Agents search for areas to enter data from some programs they offer. Efforts go undocumented. Need specific training in how to report and lead FCS agents to report similar programming offerings under the same ERS report. Achieve more impact. Need training in using calculators. **(NCEAFCS)**
8. Where should youth livestock events be reported under Outcomes and Impacts? Livestock shows, livestock judging and skill-a-thon. Please be specific for not only which objective but which outcome description. Is this area no longer one of importance? **(NCAE4-HA)**
9. Why aren't ERS objectives released earlier? We have our planning/calendar meetings for the next year in the fall but we don't know what objectives we are reporting under until we are 1/6 of the way through our programming year. **(NCAE4-HA)**

### **TRAINING CONCERNS**

10. Agents in other disciplines need to go through a workshop of some type on working/teaching kids. What is age appropriate and what is not?

The example given was a Horticulture agent talking about plant enzymes to a group of 5 and 6 year olds. Is the 4-H Code of Conduct, Medical Release Form, Rooming Arrangement, and etc. best management practices or are they extension policy?

An extension administrator who has supervisory responsibilities over other agents should share this information with extension agents or disseminate it to CEDs to share. It is not the 4-H agent's job to share this information with their equals. Right now it appears that there is a set of standards that applies to 4-H agents working with youth and the other agents choose rather or not to participate in these standards. **(NCAE4-HA)**

## **CROSS COUNTY AGENTS CONCERNS**

### ***Covering Surrounding Counties / Criteria of CCA***

11. How should agents handle when there are no agents in surrounding counties covering their area of expertise? Some county stakeholders feel like they are paying that agent for that county and don't want them "helping" other counties or other states for that matter. **(NCACAA)**
12. What are the criteria on creating cross-county agents? We feel like there should be criteria such as Ag. income, geographic size, and county input. One size does not fit all. **(NCACAA)**

## **TITLE PROMOTION CONCERNS**

### ***Process / Changes***

13. Any change on how title promotion is going to be handled in the future? It seems the process is so tedious that Extension loses excellent young agents to the private sector because there is no way to advance except through mounds of paperwork. **(NCACAA)**
14. What are the efforts being made by Extension Administration to address the changes that were identified in the promotion and advancement process by the Promotion and Retention Committee that met over the past 1-2 years? **(NCACAA)**

## **FUNDING CONCERNS**

### ***Salary / Travel / Hires / Staffing Plan***

15. At one time agents moved from one county to another as an opportunity to either better themselves or to move into a more focused or specialized position and got a raise to do so. It seems that an unwritten policy is now in place that prohibits agents who move from receiving any type of compensation adjustment across the state. Many of the younger agents are not going to stay in their position if there is no advancement or salary increase within NCCE. When and why did this policy take effect? **(NCACAA)**
16. Why can directors no longer use county funds to increase an agent's salary greater than what Raleigh deems appropriate? This is a strike against hiring or more especially retaining agents when the county partner is willing to "pick up the slack" by increasing an agent's salary to keep quality personnel in the county. Why does administration take the stand that everybody is supposed to be making the same amount of money? **(NCACAA)**
17. Why is there extra compensation for agents who take on an Interim CED position but when an agent must assume additional responsibilities because another agent leaves, they are expected to pick-up the additional workload (as well as their normal responsibilities) without additional

financial compensation? The perception is that there is preferential treatment for administration positions and reduces moral. **(NCACAA)**

18. How can a DED/admin bring a new agent into a county and start them off at a higher base salary than an experienced agent with longer tenure serving in that county? **(NCACAA)**

19. Why were area agents given raises and others not?

- Do they work any harder than the other agents?
- Do they work more than 40 hours per week?
- Do they have any more overnight travel than other agents, being away from families?
- Has administration considered those agents who are not titled area agents but do A LOT of cross county programming and assistance to clientele in other counties? **(Additional)**

20. Question is - retirees helping to fill many positions that were being left vacant because of budget concerns. This was a helpful solution. In addition, we are pleased that some positions are now being filled. However, there is some concern where funding is coming from OR is contracting with retirees taking away from the funding pot to hire full time agents in needed positions, as things are improving? **(ESP)**

21. One issue I think needs to be discussed is the non-prioritization of FCS positions for refilling at the county level. Ag and 4-H Agents are getting higher priority and FCS agents are being asked to cover multiple counties and all subject matter. This diluting of the FCS presence in every county will make our county partners think that FCS agents are not valued by the state and then they will start pulling their money if they hear that their next door neighbor county doesn't have an FCS agent - why should they be supporting one if their neighbor doesn't have to. **(NCEAFCS)**

22. Is there a strategic plan for filling positions? Is there any transparency to what the priority is for filling positions? We as agents would like more communication about where the vacant positions that we are helping to cover stand as far as a status for getting filled (a staffing plan). **(NCAE4-HA)**

23. There needs to be a consistent set of guidelines and procedures for the interview process so that they are all similar between counties and districts. There should be a "to do" list including who is invited to sit in on the interview. (ie. County Manager, County Commissioners, ALC, Co-workers, Volunteers, secretary, etc.). There should also be a set list of questions that all candidates for each subject matter are asked. Other job specific questions could be added, but there should be the same core set of questions for 4-H agents, livestock agents, FCS agents, etc. Is there an interest in moving toward this? If yes, who on the administrative team will take this charge? **(NCAE4-HA)**

## **POLICY CONCERNS**

### **Travel / County Credit Cards / Time**

24. There also needs to be protocols for cross-county agents. As per the NC travel policy agents are eligible to receive travel reimbursement from home to another county office that is not their home base. With the current county travel allocation, it will limit the ability of cross-county agents to travel or reduce the ability of other agents in the office to attend conference and meetings. Has administration discussed issues like this with DED's, CED's and counties?  
**(NCACAA)**
  
25. Why does policy allow NCSU Agents to use up to 15% of their travel allocation on professional development while A&T Agents can use 60% of their travel for professional development?  
**(NCACAA)**
  
26. Counties need to be allowed to maintain a private checking account through a paid accountant. Extension agents should NOT have to pay for food and lodging for youth participants for 4-H events out of their pockets because county policies prevent utilizing county credit cards for food or hotels even for program participants. In addition to 4-H agents, this affects agriculture agents through forestry judging teams and livestock judging teams. We teach people not to use credit cards yet we sometimes have to float the county a loan for up to \$1,000 (this is not an exaggeration) to do our jobs making a credit card almost a necessity. **(NCAE4-HA)**
  
27. Is someone on the state level still looking at getting credit card systems for all extension centers so that payments could be accepted for pesticide schools, Master Gardener training, 4-H events, etc.? **(NCAE4-HA)**
  
28. There needs to be more consistency for professional scheduling across the state. A formula that said if you worked over X number of hours you can take off Y number of hours. This should include 4-H agents that are "on-call" as 4-H camp cabin counselors, with teens at over-night events and chaperoning dances until 11 at night. **(NCAE4-HA)**

## MARKETING CONCERNS

### *Branding / Social Media / Websites*

29. For counties that have both Extension A&T State University and NC State University Agents, need for continuity in marketing. Example: different business cards. (NCCEAPA)
30. What is being done to build our brand? (NCACAA)
31. Need for more stock photos and graphics for marketing programs in flyers and newsletters available from Communications and list of resources available nationally that are not copyright materials. (NCCEAPA)
32. In this age of technology and social media, why isn't Extension Administration using social media to communicate both with the faculty and staff and with the public? It seems like there isn't much transparency in the organization when we have to submit our questions through associations and have them answered through a forum. Could we be more transparent in the workings of Extension and use Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and soon Google+? Would any of those be appropriate for improving internal communications? (NCACAA)
33. What changes and interactive pieces do you see coming to the extension and to our departmental websites? We have a lot to offer the public and we need to showcase it on our website in a more positive manner. (NCAE4-HA)

## PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS CONCERNS

### *Funding Support / Time*

34. Sometimes it is difficult to get state officers to fill positions due to limited or no funding to support meetings and associations responsibilities: for example PILD Leadership Conference, JECF, American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences, and serve as on a number of number of executive committees, boards, and foundations etc. (NCEAFCS)
35. Some counties are **NOT** given time to attend association meeting but asked to take annual leave. Is there a way to communicate the policy to county directors that this is an approved issue? (NCEAFCS)

## ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT CONCERNS

### Agents / Extension Calendar / MOU

36. Who is the advocate for us the extension agent?

- Who supports us in our role as a county educator? Our CED, our DED, Extension Administration?
- As agents in the county we feel that it is each for their own. We are seeing more top down programming without agent input that results in low morale. **(NCAE4-HA)**

37. Advocates - as agents - who serves us as advocates. Some of my experience says the CED should advocate for me - but when there is conflict there, the DED should advocate for me - but the experience has been that the DED advocates most importantly for the CED. The State leaders seem to advocate at the state level for those folks. So - who advocates for the agents?

This would just be one small example of how it affects agents to have no one to advocate for us: This year - the camping system made a big change within the program - and solicited no input (or very little) from the FRONT LINE people (agents) who have to implement the changes. Agents are the people who recruit the kids to attend camp. Agents are the ones who go to camp (or will be required to now - at least at BJP) - however, decisions were made at the state level - by people who are not charged with going to camp - who never are expected to recruit for camp - WHO ARE NOT EVALUATED on whether they go to camp or not. If I had an advocate - I don't think it would have played out this way. **(ESP)**

38. Is there not a master extension calendar that administrators and department heads look at when scheduling extension events? This issue was brought up last year and it appears that there has been no improvement this year. For example: The Carolina Meat Conference is being held December 3 and 4th which conflicts with the Eastern Carolina Cattle Conference on December 4th. Both program to similar audiences and would be professional development opportunities for livestock agents. Ex. 2, scheduling Annual Conference on top of what seems like 15 livestock shows (thank you for rescheduling this by the way). **(Additional)**

39. The MOU needs to be reviewed. Are county extension employees protected? ARE WE County employees? Do we have the right to drive county vehicles and receive county benefits? Can you show this to us in writing? If we loose the ability to utilize county 15 passenger vans it will have a very negative impact on our programming. **(NCAE4-HA)**

## COMMENTS??

40. Shifting of districts without taking into account history of counties that have worked together productively makes it harder to maintain continuity for programs and hard for ECA organization to shift in district working relationships. Also makes for longer drives. **(NCEAFCS)**
41. Continuing to lose FCS positions. Less FCS specialists available to support programs and provide updated training. FCS agents may take on new responsibilities and are challenged to get training in programs previously introduced. **(NCEAFCS)**
42. Many county staff will not fill out the CED appraisal form - because when it is shared back in the county - CED's try to find out WHO SAID WHAT - and get accusatory - so agents learn not to fill it out - to avoid the whole blame game. **(ESP)**