

Analyzing Extension Onboarding for Farm Management and Agronomy

Professionals Rachael Bagnell and Benjamin Brown Presentation date: July 29th, 2021

Research confirms that proper onboarding and training improves worker satisfaction and job performance, but a lack of onboarding and continued training for Extension farm management and agronomy professionals currently exists. This research project, with the guidance of my mentor Benjamin Brown, Senior Research Associate, evaluates training and onboarding practices commonly used for Extension farm management and agronomy professionals across thirteen land-grant institutions within the North Central Extension Region. Extension education directors at each institution were asked to complete questionnaires related to farm management and agronomy onboarding and continued training offered at their respective institutions. Virtual focus groups were held with Extension professionals in two career categories: 1-3 years and more than 5 years across each academic discipline. The focus groups aimed to capture successful training programs across the region and source innovative ideas from Extension professionals within the disciplines. The finished project includes comparative studies across two academic disciplines- farm management and agronomy, two career longevities- 1-3 years and more than 5 years, spatial analysis across geography, and perceived educational effectiveness between trainers and trainees. This project is still being conducted; however, a couple of commonalities across results include education directors recognize a lack of formalized training provided by their institution with a desire to improve, but uncertainty as to how, enhanced mentorship programs for educators of all career longevities, and communication improvements that connect professionals to topical expertise and institutional resources.