

KANSAS ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY AGRICULTURAL AGENTS (KACAA) EARLY CAREER DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

FEEDBACK FROM KSRE AGENTS, FACULTY, & ADMINISTRATION ON IMPROVEMENT OF NEW AGENT TRAINING

"I just started as a new agent in January. I am working 1/2 Ag and 1/2 Hort in ----- County and I have several ideas. We spent most of our time in conference rooms learning what department does what (such as where to get newsletters published and who to report a case of discrimination to). This is necessary and we need to know these types of things, however - most items did not help me with my position and learning the necessary things for day-to-day tasks. I would like to see the conference trainings limited to a time about 1/4 in length. The knowledge could be presented in an abbreviated form with the additional information attached for reading on our own time. There was a significant amount of "reading to us" from powerpoint presentations that could easily be read by us.

The training session that I really benefited from was on newsletter writing, presentations, radio, etc. I think it was called communications. We did hands on training and coming from a more technical background, this was very helpful - the creative aspects are hard to get a handle on if you have never used this before. All other new agents agreed with me that this was a great training. All of the other training sessions at K-State could have been abbreviated into one session (instead of three). We should spend the remainder of our training time working w/ folks that have great knowledge in what I am doing every day - I would like to have a week w/ Ward Upham or Gary Kilgore - just to listen to them answer questions, learn what kinds of questions people ask, and to get ideas about what this position is all about. This time would be more beneficial to me than spending time in other counties. That went well for me b/c I went to counties w/ great agents, but I know some did not have the same experience. I think a week in plant pathology with Judy would be fabulous as well. Anything with a more hands-on aspect will be more helpful for a new agent. I hope that the trainings can be changed to a much more efficient format"

"Hope all is well over in your country. Thanks for taking the time and effort to work on this deal. I had just a couple of quick thoughts regarding this issue.

I wish there was some sort of a standardized checklist to follow. I have only had to train a couple of new agents but I catch myself wondering if I am forgetting to tell them something and would like to have a checklist to work against.

The other thing is having the new agent train with an agent that deals with many of the same common production issues. I fully believe that training with another agent in your nearby geographic vicinity is great but after that is completed, I think it would be good to have the new ones train with somebody that is in the same type of a production area. That would allow the training agent to share helpful links, publications, program ideas, etc. regarding the specific programs of interest."

"Something that I noticed was that the trainings were mostly led by FCS & 4-H people. We very rarely saw any Ag specialists at the training and if you don't meet them there it is hard to feel comfortable to ask them to do a program for you or ask them a question that you don't know the answer to. Also, no one really ever told us how to find all the info that others use in newsletters and columns...that would be helpful! We spent one training "learning" how to use PowerPoint. For some this is helpful, but for those of us who have put together a ton of them, it was a waste of time! I liked the policies/laws training. It helped me understand what needed to be done for annual mtg, etc."

"A group of us were just discussing this not too long ago. Many, many years ago when I started in Extension, you had to be "trained" by a neighboring county agent. These were usually people with many years of experience. You trained for a month. You were their little shadow at everything. While at times that seemed extreme, you really built a relationship with that person, someone you could call with stupid questions and they wouldn't make fun of you. And the mentor agent has so much time invested in you, they tried their hardest to make you successful. I'm not sure if those relationships are happening with today's new agents."

"We talked at office conference about the questions you raised regarding new agent training. With 3 of the 4 agents here having been through training in the last 2 years or so, we had a few recommendations. Here goes:

Mentor Training:

- Have more than one mentor for new agent to learn different styles/perspectives.*
- Have mentor agent come to office of new agent to go through resources, programs, etc.*
- If agent will have several mentors, have them discuss together what each will cover for new agent.*
- Guidelines from campus on what mentor should cover might help.*

Campus Training:

- Its too long. 2-3 days at one time would be better, not 5.*
- Logic model should be one of the first trainings because agents have to start doing board reports immediately; would help to know how. Have hands-on RETORIC training. Conference call doesn't help.*
- UTILIZE EVALUATIONS! Make changes accordingly. Seems most suggestions given by new agents after training are not used.*
- Totally redo public speaking session in the Communications training. Currently, it's completely useless."*

"We always welcome new agents to visit our county as part of their training. I believe they should visit from small to large counties, so when issues arise during their careers they have an appreciation for the differences that exist. I am not sure this happens now, but know they are welcome here."

"Having been through new agent orientation in another state that does extension like Kansas (New York), I have nothing but praise for the training here! The only suggestion I could make would be to have Kris Boone include/adapt some of her crisis communication stuff. Knowing how to handle the press during a crisis (like food poisoning at a 4-H BBQ) is invaluable stuff these days."

"I have some thoughts on new agent training to share. Specifically, new state specialist that have extension tenths in their responsibilities. When new state specialist that have extension responsibilities are hired I think it would be beneficial if they received training/input from existing state extension specialist on meeting the needs of agents and fulfilling their extension related duties. As you know, many state specialists are hired with a mix of research and extension tenths, and too often little or no emphasis is given to the extension side of the equation. A push from administration in this regard would benefit all parties concerned."

"Hello! As a new agent, I would like to say that I'm glad Extension offers orientation and training for its new employees because I have worked for organizations before that have very weak orientation and training for new employees. However, I think it would be nice to be in the office a few days before going to train with agents in your surrounding area. That way, the agent would at least have a general idea of what their office is like and how it works.

Also, the agent would then know what program material is already in the office. After being in the office a bit, the new agent might also generate questions to ask their training agent when they go to their county. My other suggestion is to improve the mentoring agent system. I think it needs to be better defined what is expected of the mentoring agent. I wish that mine would have made a better effort to keep me informed of things that are going on that I may not understand or just to check and make sure everything was running smoothly. I actually ended up finding my own "mentor" agent(s) to go to with questions. I know that the mentor agent system is being worked on, and I'm glad to hear it. Otherwise, I don't think the new agent training program needs changed a lot. Thanks!"

"I think the purple "A Guide to New Agents and their Mentor" is a useful resource, if the training agents use it. I remember I trained with one agent for an entire month when I first started. I believe that is too long, but I guess I would suggest new agents spend a week with one agent, and another week with a second agent. One of these trainers should be designated as a mentor, so both the trainer and new agent know this fact."

"When I did the new agent training, some of it was useful, most of it was just time consuming. I feel that there really needs to be more time spent focusing on each agents area - ANR, FACS, and 4-H.

Also, a calendar of when things should be done would be great – like plan wheat plot tour for this time of year, hold this type of meetings at this time - that would have been very helpful to me when I started.

Also, a list of agents (and their specialties) in the new agents area would be helpful. When I started, I had little time to work with my 'mentor' agent, so knowing who to call with questions on specific subjects would have been nice."

"I've thot for sometime that in SE area, we have missed a chance to have newer agents spend some time with Kilgore. Say, some sort of mini-sabbatical - maybe they spend a summer with him and help with some plot work, etc. basically the same as Joe Smith does. Of course, there are other specialists that could probably use some help - this would give that new agent some extra zip to their "soon to be" area of expertise.

Obviously, this would require some planning, and should not replace sabbaticals. Other than that, I don't have any suggestions over what we're doing now. Some sort of "mentoring" agent might work, but I think we've tried that before."

"With just recently completing the new agent trainings I think it would have been helpful to do more practical, hands-on work with reporting my time. For example, I am just now getting a chance to do my 5-year action plan. Granted, I have been here a year and should have gotten it done earlier and I had circumstances such as maternity leave that delayed me in starting this. But it would have been helpful to have at least started this at one of the trainings in Manhattan, so I could have assistance and instant feedback to get the ball rolling. I also would have liked to learn more about using Retic while at training in Manhattan. I still don't have a clue about using it and I feel that if I am to make reporting a priority, I need to learn how to do it. I tried a couple times to participate in one of the telephone trainings on Retic, but always seemed to have a meeting that got in the way."

"I think the majority of the training month should be spent with one or two agents. I've seen cases where an agent has spent no more than 3 days with any one agent.

New agents need to build a mentor relationship with an agent somewhat close, but not necessarily next door that they feel comfortable visiting with as issues and ideas pop up. Additionally they need to experience the monthly cycle and practice it such as writing articles for a newsletter or paper, reviewing monthly finances and learning the ins and outs of extension law.

Additionally the training agent needs to feel some "ownership" with the new agent and help them get started by visiting there office with them and reviewing programs etc. If we only work with someone a day or three we're not as likely to follow up with the new agent and take some responsibility for there success."

"I am a returning agent so I have gone through new agent orientation two times done two different ways. There are positive and negative to both.

My first orientation in 1981 was done as a whole month with one agent. I liked this system as I saw all the day to day routine things that I would need to know how to do. It also created a bond between me and that agent. I always felt comfortable asking questions and/or bouncing ideas off this agent. It worked great because I had a great agent to learn from and we got along well. I can see problems if the training agent wasn't the best and/or there were personality problems.

My second training was in 2005 in which I spent short bits of time with many agents. Getting the different perspectives/ideas from everyone was good but I missed out on getting information about several of the routine things that agents do. (Things have changed from 1988 - We had just gotten our first computers etc!!!!) Also I didn't really establish a bond with anyone new - some of the "old" agents are still here.

My idea, which may be totally wrong, would be to sort of combine the two. Have a primary agent that the new agent reports to everyday for a month and the two of them work together to work out visitations to other local agents to get perspective on how their county works, their specialization, etc."

"As you well know this is no easy answer as we are all different and all our counties or districts are diverse. I am a bit older than the average new agent. I think it would be beneficial to have more presentations from agents that had been successful out in the field dealing with how they got things done. It was also bennificial to me to tour and get acquainted with the offices and labs on campus which can help answer our questions 'out here'.

Possibly this was of more use to me because I am not a K- State graduate. Most of the writing and program presentation areas were good and useful. We had one or two instructors in that area who went awfully fast and a couple who were pretty intense in their critiques. (Past the point of constructive criticism). Possibly the use of networking could be stressed more. Another good topic area might be " How to get a feel for what your county/district wants and needs".