

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO EMPLOYEE RESIGNATION (PERCEIVED AND
ACTUAL) AMONG COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AGENTS IN GEORGIA

by

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(Under the Direction of Christine A. Langone)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors contributing to employee resignation (perceived and actual) among Cooperative Extension Agents in Georgia. This study was qualitative in nature, utilizing in-depth interviews with five former Extension Agents and five currently employed Extension Agents. Major findings were the following:

1. Job characteristics providing the most satisfaction were interaction with people, sharing information and solving problems, coworker relationships and support, and job flexibility;
2. Job characteristics leading to job dissatisfaction were night and weekend work / trying to balance work and family, paperwork, and uncertainty regarding job responsibilities as leading to job dissatisfaction;
3. Factors leading to employee resignation were time demand / time away from family, salary, lack of leadership and support, and unrealistic expectations; and

4. Recommendations to increase employee retention were improve current mentoring programs, provide better leadership and support, increase Agent salaries, and create an internship program.

INDEX WORDS: employee resignation, job satisfaction, job dissatisfaction, job turnover, work/life balance, Cooperative Extension, Extension Agent

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Betsy: Thank you for supporting me throughout my time in graduate school. I truly appreciate all that you have done for me during this time. In particular, thank you for taking such good care of Benjamin and Avery and for keeping things running smooth at home. I hope that I can do the same for you when you begin graduate school. I love you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

History of Cooperative Extension

Cooperative Extension has a long history of responding to the public's needs and interests in agriculture, the environment, families, and 4-H / Youth with unbiased research-based education. Extension's history includes almost 100 years of disseminating research-based information from the nation's land-grant colleges and universities, while adapting to a changing political, agricultural, and socioeconomic environment.

In 1914, the United States Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act, cosponsored by Hoke Smith, U.S. Senator from Georgia, which created the Cooperative Extension Service. The Cooperative Extension Service served as a tool to deliver useful and practical agricultural and home economics information to all Americans. When the Smith-Lever Act passed, the Cooperative Extension Service evolved into one of the three major thrusts of the nation's land-grant colleges, in addition to teaching and research (Bennett, Driftmier, King, Murray, Tabor, 1975, p. 48).

As the research conducted at land grant colleges grew in scope, farmers and others working in agriculture and agribusiness began to look to the land grant colleges for assistance in such areas as "pasture development, grazing and forage crops for livestock, or of showing the effects of particular practices on crop or livestock production" (Bennett, Driftmier, King, Murray, Tabor, 1975, p. 48-49). County Extension Agents were the conduit by which this information was distributed to the community at large. County Extension Agents were employed

and trained by the land-grant colleges, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the local county governments. Later, Extension's programming efforts were expanded to include the establishment 4-H Clubs in an effort to teach local young people innovative farming and home economics practices so that they might be able to educate their parents (Introduction to Extension Training Manual, 2000).

Several years prior to the passage of the Smith-Lever Act, the University of Georgia College of Agriculture utilized an "educational train" to disseminate the research-based information developed on campus to the people of Georgia. This "College on Wheels" traveled across Georgia from 1908 to 1917 and "had as its purpose the promotion of good farming methods and education in general." Educational efforts included the exhibition of livestock and modern farm machinery and speeches given from a "flatcar" at various stops. "College on Wheels" attendance varied from 150,000 in 1908 to several hundred thousand when the annual tour was discontinued in 1917 (Bennett, Driftmier, King, Murray, Tabor, 1975, p. 49).

Through the current system, the land-grant colleges meet citizens' needs by providing the latest information and research findings related to agriculture, horticulture, family and consumer sciences, and youth development. Today, Cooperative Extension Agents collaborate with neighboring counties and other agencies to pool resources and share programs in the areas of agriculture, natural resources, and family and consumer sciences. In addition, approximately 200,000 children across the state now benefit from Georgia's 4-H & Youth Development Program. These 4-H members learn valuable lessons, from caring for livestock to public speaking, and gain invaluable leadership skills (Blackburn, 2001).

Cooperative Extension has played a major role in the education and development of America's youth and adults involved in agriculture, horticulture, the environment, and family

and consumer sciences. A major portion of this delivery of information to the local communities is shouldered by Cooperative Extension Agents. As noted by Igodan and Newcomb (1986), the job of an Extension Agent is not an easy one and is often stressful.

As helping professionals, Extension agents must interact with clientele in various roles and, at the same time, respond to administrative duties within the organizational setting. In doing so, they cope with enormous amounts of paperwork, answer always-ringing telephones, and meet increased service demands from both clientele and the institutions they serve (p.1).

While the organization has a strong history and a hard-working core of professionals to meet the needs of Georgia's citizens, concerns over employee resignation and job satisfaction continue to arise within Extension administration and in pertinent professional literature. However, issues of attrition and job satisfaction are not isolated to Cooperative Extension.

Statement of the Problem

Schermerhorn, Hunt, and Osborn (2005) describe the nature of careers as transforming, and more specifically, "we are in the midst of what some call a *free-agent economy* in which more and more people contract their services to a shifting mix of employers over time" (p.41). The authors also refer to what scholar and consultant Charles Handy refers to as a "shamrock organization." The leaves of the shamrock each represent a different group of people within the organization. One group consists of a core group of employees who are permanent, full-time, and tend to follow long-term career paths. The next group is made up of outside operators who are contractually engaged by the core group to form tasks essential to day-to-day operations. The third group is made up of part-time employees who are hired temporarily as needed and later terminated if business needs decline (Schermerhorn, Hunt, Osborn, 2005, p.41).

Specific to Cooperative Extension, Ensle (2005) described the majority of Extension's workforce as being part of the Generations X and Y. Ensle described Generation X agents (born

between 1961 and 1981) as “independent thinkers” who “know their shortcomings.” Generation X employees are also referred to as having a very different commitment to work and family than those in the Baby Boom generation. Ensle described Generation Xer’s as “willing to sacrifice salary increases and promotion for more time with family and friends. The Xer’s value fitness, time with their children, and the institution of marriage. To them, Extension is a way to make a living” (p.8).

With the changing nature of careers, the issue of job turnover is a major concern for many organizations, including Cooperative Extension. In a study conducted in Ohio, Kutilek (2000) noted that Ohio State University Extension experiences a 20% turnover rate for paraprofessional roles, 7% overall turnover of personnel, and a 5% turnover rate for agents. As a result, employee losses result in an interruption in program continuity and possibly positions remaining open for extended periods. Kutilek also states that “turnover and prolonged vacancies are a financial and time drain for the organization.” An Ohio State University Extension study determined net costs associated with agent resignation are approximately \$80,000 per year which reflects costs to replace all individuals minus salary savings created by the vacancies (pp.1, 4).

In Georgia Cooperative Extension, new Extension Agents are required to attend Extension Foundations training within their first year of employment. In a study conducted by M.E. Blackburn of the University of Georgia, a turnover rate of 41% was found among newly hired Extension Agents who attended this training for the time period of 1997-2001 (Extension Foundation Rosters). Understanding the factors contributing to resignation among Cooperative Extension Agents is an important first step in determining techniques to help Agents remain employed for longer periods of time and to be more satisfied in their work.

Purpose of the Study

As noted, much has been written and many studies have been conducted in an effort to determine the factors influencing job retention and those factors contributing to employee satisfaction in Cooperative Extension. This study sought to gain insight into why Extension Agents resign and what factors lead to job dissatisfaction. While national and instate research has been done examining job satisfaction, the factors that lead to actual employee resignation in Georgia have not been studied at length since the late 1980's. This study was qualitative in nature, in that it utilized in-depth interviews with both former and current employees of Cooperative Extension.

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors contributing to employee resignation among Cooperative Extension Agents in Georgia. The researcher sought to understand the following:

- 1) What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, provide the most satisfaction?
- 2) What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, lead to job dissatisfaction?
- 3) What factors lead to employee resignation among Cooperative Extension Agents?
- 4) What can Cooperative Extension, as an organization, do to increase retention among Extension Agents?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In examining factors leading to employee resignation in any organization, understanding employee turnover is crucial. Mobley (1982) defines employee turnover as “the cessation of membership in an organization by an individual who received monetary compensation from the organization” (p.10).

Mobley also outlined the four classes of determinants of turnover in organizations. These determinants include (1) external factors, such as the availability of jobs and unemployment levels; (2) organizational factors like supervisory style, pay, job content, reward system, and work environment; (3) individual non-work-related factors, such as another person’s career move or family considerations; and (4) individual work-related factors, such as a lack of job autonomy or unchallenging or uninteresting work (Mobley, 1982).

As employee turnover is important to organizations, such as Cooperative Extension, it is equally important to the individuals affected and society as a whole. On an individual level, job turnover can have both positive and negative consequences. A job change can allow the individual to move away from a stressful situation and into a position that may mesh with personal career objectives. On the other hand, job turnover can have negative effects for the employee. The individual can lose valuable benefits such as health insurance, disrupt the family’s social support, and possibly be disillusioned by a job that did not turn out to be as good as previously imagined.

Employee turnover also has positive and negative consequences for those employees who remain in the organization. Turnover may lead to negative attitudes among the remaining employees. In addition, turnover by itself may lead to additional employee resignation by causing a decline in confidence and by highlighting the fact that other job opportunities may be available. On the positive side, however, turnover often creates promotion opportunities for the remaining employees.

For society at large, turnover has both positive and negative consequences. Turnover is associated with the ability to move into new industries and organizations—which is vital for economic growth and development. If turnover is excessive, however, productivity, growth, and development could be lessened (Rousan, 1995, pp.1-2).

Turnover costs are often divided into two categories: tangible and intangible. The significant tangible costs of employee turnover are easily measured and include the costs of recruitment, selection, orientation and training, and separation. Conversely, the intangible costs are difficult to quantify, but can have considerable financial impact on the agency or organization involved. Intangible costs include low morale, disruption of work teams, increased conflicts, and lack of rapport with customers. Such intangible costs can damage the organization and can, indirectly, lead to economic losses (Roseman, 1981).

In today's society, the typical worker between the ages of 18 and 32 will have almost nine jobs on average. Fortunately, more than 50% of the job changes occur prior to age 23, the age when most young adults are entering the workforce in search of a career. Also significant, the average adult changes careers six to seven times over a lifetime (Arthur, 2001). Today's workers are also less likely to endure a job they do not enjoy. Employees are less loyal to their employers, and more loyal to their career and skills (Dribble, 1999).

Unfortunately, the reasons employees resign are, often times, not discussed and exit interviews are rarely conducted. This situation results in any existing problems being left unresolved, possibly to the detriment of future employees. Factors leading to employee resignation were found to be related to workplace conditions, personal factors, motivation and job satisfaction, and/or work/life issues including stress and lack of family time.

Employee Turnover in Cooperative Extension

As previously noted, UGA Cooperative Extension experienced an attrition rate of 41% among newly hired Extension Agents from 1997 to 2001. UGA Extension Agents who resigned during this time were distributed across the three program areas of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H / Youth, and Family and Consumer Sciences. Among those resigning between 1997 and 2002, 55% had primary responsibility in 4-H / Youth; 24% had primary responsibility in Family and Consumer Sciences, and 21% had primary responsibility in Agriculture and Natural Resources (Extension Foundation Rosters).

Not only a problem for Georgia Cooperative Extension, concerns related to employee turnover among Extension Agents have been persistent for some time. Manton and van Es(1985) note that in a three year period between March, 1979, and March, 1982, sixty-three Illinois Extension field staff who had worked 48 months or less resigned their positions (p.1). As previously noted, Ohio State University Extension has experienced problems with retention among Extension agents as well. Between January 1, 1990, and December 31, 1994, sixty-seven county agents voluntarily resigned from OSU Extension (Rousan, 1995, p.3).

The turnover rates experienced in Georgia, Illinois, Ohio, and other states may lead one to believe that Cooperative Extension is lagging behind other agencies and professions in the area of employee retention. However, national workplace trends point to several factors

affecting employee turnover rates and job satisfaction in the workforce which are not exclusive to Cooperative Extension.

National Workplace Trends

When examining attrition and retention in any profession, it is important to understand current workplace trends and workers' attitudes regarding such issues. In recent years, several organizations examined workplace trends and workers' attitudes involving the balance between work and family, work hours, desire for increased job responsibility, and likelihood of attrition. One such agency that has studied this subject at length is the Families and Work Institute.

The Families and Work Institute is a nonprofit center for research that provides data to inform decision-makers in business, industry, and government on the changes taking place in workforce, family, and community. Founded in 1989, the Families and Work Institute's research addresses emerging issues before such issues reach the forefront. One ongoing research project conducted by the Families and Work Institute is the National Study of the Changing Workforce conducted in 1992, 1997, and 2002. The Institute compared data from this study with the Quality of Employment Survey conducted in 1977 by the U.S. Department of Labor and compiled an issue brief titled "Generation & Gender in the Workplace."

In "Generation & Gender in the Workplace," several key findings stand out as important when examining attrition and job satisfaction. In the study, researchers found that Generation-X and Generation-Y are more likely to be dual-centric or family-centric, placing an equal or greater value on family than on work. In general, the study found many other indications that the workforce is becoming more family-focused, especially when one considers that fathers are spending more time with their children compared to fathers of the previous generation. Among married couples, mothers are spending about the same amount of time with their children as they

did in the previous generation. However, fathers are spending considerably more time with their children, 50% more on average, than their fathers did 25 years ago. As spending more time with family is a common reason given by many employees when leaving their jobs, these findings are significant (Families and Work Institute, 2005, p.3-4).

Another major change found in the “Generation & Gender in the Workplace” study is that fewer college-educated workers desire to move into jobs with greater responsibility as compared with the same group ten years earlier. In 1992, 68% of Generation-X, Generation-Y, and Boomer male workers sought jobs with increased responsibility, and in 2002, those seeking jobs with more responsibility dropped to 52%. A similar change was found among college-educated women with 57% seeking jobs with more responsibility in 1992 and only 36% in 2002 (Families and Work Institute, 2005, p.5).

Also significant in the “Generation & Gender in the Workplace” study is the desire among college-educated employees to work fewer hours. Eighty percent of college-educated employees would like to work fewer paid and unpaid hours than they currently do. When asked how many hours they desire to work, respondents stated “the hours they are scheduled to work, not the total hours they actually work” (Families and Work Institute, 2005, p. 6). When one considers the number of unpaid work hours that are required of Extension Agents, these findings represent a possible factor leading to job dissatisfaction and, ultimately, resignation among Cooperative Extension Agents.

A statement echoed throughout the workplace is that today’s younger employees do not have the work ethic of the previous generation and that they are more likely to change jobs frequently. However, the Families and Work Institute did not find this to always be the case. The “Generation & Gender in the Workplace” study found that Generation-X employees in 2002

were no more likely to leave their current employer within the next year than their age counterparts (workers 23 to 37 years) in 1977. In contrast, Generation-Y employees (workers under 23 years) were significantly more likely, at 70% somewhat or very likely, to leave their current employers within the next year than their counterparts in 1977, at 52% somewhat or very likely. (Families and Work Institute, 2005, p.29-30)

Another study conducted by the Families and Work Institute in 2001 and 2004, “Overwork in America,” revealed that many Americans regardless of occupation feel that they are overworked. “Overwork in America” also examined some of the consequences resulting from overwork (Families & Work Institute, 2005, p.1).

Among its findings, “Overwork in America” concluded that feelings of overwork are much more common than once thought. In 2004, researchers found that 26% of employees were overworked *often* or *very often* in the last month; 27% were overwhelmed by how much work they had to do *often* or *very often* in the last month; and 29% of employees *often* or *very often* did not have time to step back and process or reflect on the work they were doing during the previous month. The study also concluded that one-third of all U.S. employees (those with average scores above sometimes) can be viewed as being chronically overworked (Families & Work Institute, 2005, p.2).

While these findings are significant, the effects on employee performance are equally significant. The study found that the more overworked employees are “the more likely they are to make mistakes at work.” Specifically, twenty percent of overworked employees reported that they make a lot of mistakes at work, as compared to 0% of employees reporting low overwork levels. Also, overworked employees are more likely to “feel angry at their employers for expecting them to do so much” (Families & Work Institute, 2005, p.2).

While the solution to overwork may seem simple – work fewer hours, this is often not practical in many careers, including that of Cooperative Extension Agents. However, “Overwork in America” found that improvements in the workplace could lead to employees feeling less overworked. The study found that...

Employees who have jobs that provide them more opportunities to continue to learn, whose supervisors support them in succeeding on the job, who have the flexibility they need to manage their job and their personal and family life, and who have input into management decision-making are less likely to be overworked. This is true even when they work long hours and have demanding jobs (Families & Work Institute, 2005, p.5).

Extension Work/Family Issues

Similar to the studies conducted by the Families and Work Institute, the Joint Council of Extension Professionals (JCEP) funded a national research study in 1997 to identify issues concerning Extension personnel in the area of balancing work, family, and personal time. Ohio State University conducted the national study which included a national forum via electronic technology to identify key issues of personnel and family members, and a mail survey to a stratified random sample of Extension employees and family members drawn from the four national regions (Kutilek, Conklin, Gunderson, 2002, p.3).

In the JCEP study, the research sample included administrators, program professionals (Extension Agents), and support staff. A profile of the “typical” employee included the following characteristics: Caucasian, married, between 39 and 52 years old, employed with Extension for 15 years, and had obtained a Master's degree. The study also found that this composite employee worked full time (40-50 hours/week), spent 20-40 hours a week with family and friends, and spent 10 hours or less a week in personal development activities (Kutilek, Conklin, Gunderson, 2002, p.3).

In this national study, Extension employees perceived their supervisors to be supportive regarding their need to balance work and non-work activities. To a moderate extent, co-workers were concerned for one another regarding work/life balance, wanted to discuss these issues, and supported one another. Work/life challenges identified in the study included workload, time, control/balance, and personal attitude/expectations. When asked who has the greatest influence on the number of hours worked for Extension, the top three items were self, clientele, and immediate supervisor.

Regarding assistance for employees in balancing work/life issues, those sampled rated organizational support as slight to moderate. When asked what actions Extension could take to better support employees and their families, employees recommended flexible working arrangements, reduction of workload, and administrative support.

Not surprisingly, employees and administrators viewed the level of administrative support for work/life issues differently. In the national Extension study, administrators appeared to be less concerned about organizational issues related to balancing work and personal life compared to program professionals (Extension Agents). Ironically, the administrators perceived that organizational support for work/life issues was greater than was perceived by other personnel (Kutilek, Conklin, Gunderson, 2002, p.3-4).

Factors Leading to Employee Resignation

As noted, Cooperative Extension has experienced many successes over its history and continues to provide vital information to those interested in agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, and 4-H / youth development. With all this success, the organization has also experienced many challenges, none more important than the previously

mentioned concerns of employee turnover and job dissatisfaction. Next, multiple factors contributing to employee resignation and declining job satisfaction will be discussed.

Upon further examination of workplace trends and work/family issues and the factors contributing to resignation and job dissatisfaction among Cooperative Extension Agents, the relationship between the two becomes apparent. Among the factors found in the pertinent literature, three areas of concern were mentioned far more frequently – compensation, long hours (including nights and weekends), and conflicting expectations. Several other factors were also found to contribute to employee resignation and job dissatisfaction among Extension Agents.

In the previously mentioned national study examining work/life issues in Extension, Ohio State Extension researchers found that work/life issues are of great concern to many Extension employees. Sixty-five percent of the responding Extension personnel expressed this concern. Respondents identified the most critical work/life challenges as “a heavy work load, evening and weekend time commitments, and a lack of control or job autonomy.” Regarding work load, all respondents reported the number of hours worked per week at 40 hours or above. Specifically, 49% indicated they worked 40 to 50 hours per week, 27% reported working 50 to 60 hours per week, and 10% reported working more than 61 hours in a single week (Kutilek, Conklin, Gunderson, 2002, p.7).

In a survey of former Extension Agents conducted in Ohio, Rousan (1995) found a number of organizational, individual work-related, and individual non-work related factors leading to resignation among Cooperative Extension professionals. Among the organizational factors, respondents reported the following reasons for leaving the organization: “insufficient pay for the amount of work performed, too many work responsibilities, too many requirements for advancement, and a lack of recognition for a job well done.” Individual work-related factors

included “other priorities in life, too many late night meetings, and the values of the organization and personal values being in conflict.” The individual non-work related factors found in Rousan’s work included “receiving another job offer, family obligations, being attracted to more money elsewhere, work conflicting with personal responsibilities, and not having enough time for developing and/or maintaining personal relationships” (p.6).

In an Illinois study titled ‘*Why Do Extension Agents Resign?*’ Manton and van Es(1985) noted a key difference in the reasons given for resignation among agriculture agents and 4-H / youth and family and consumer science agents.

While the home economics and youth agents rarely listed alternative career opportunities as reasons for terminating Extension employment, the agricultural agents did. People whose values are more home- and children-oriented may be more likely to select careers in home economics and youth work. In addition, the choices also reflect the realities of the marketplace where alternative career opportunities in agriculture may be more lucrative and diverse than the opportunities available in home economics and youth work (p.4).

In a recent study of Georgia Cooperative Extension titled ‘*Factors That Lead To Job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction of County Extension Agents in Georgia,*’ Purcell (2003) notes several positive factors leading to job satisfaction, such as relationships with clientele and supervisors and flexibility in planning one’s schedule; however, Purcell also found several items which Extension should address, including compensation, employee turnover, night and weekend work, recent changes within the Extension system, job security, and the existing promotion policy for Extension agents (pp.94-100).

Echoing many of the findings of Purcell’s research, Fetsch and Kennington (1997) noted similar concerns among Extension Agents in their study, ‘*Balancing Work and Family in Cooperative Extension: History, Effective Programs, and Future Directions.*’ In particular,

Fetsch and Kennington point out the problem of conflicting demands. The authors report the following:

Extension work often demands long working hours, including nights and weekends. Extension faculty often find themselves with conflicting demands on their time and energy by clientele and administrators' expectations, family expectations, and personal priorities (p.1).

In a recent Journal of Extension article, '*Burnout: How Does Extension Balance Job and Family?*' Ensle (2005) brings to light several of the previously mentioned positive and negative factors relating to job satisfaction among Extension Agents. Among the positive factors, the author lists "a flexible work schedule and personal satisfaction from educating the clientele."

Ensle goes on to address the opposing factors in the following:

The enjoyment of teaching and working with the public often gets sidelined for endless paperwork with unrealistic due dates (p.1).

In a Journal of Extension article titled, '*Are You Experiencing Burnout? Symptoms and coping strategies for Extension professionals,*' Igodan and Newcomb (1986) expounded on the before mentioned problems of paper work, stringent due dates, and confining time constraints.

In particular, the authors note that Extension agents...

cope with enormous amounts of paperwork, answer always-ringing telephones, and meet increased service demands from both clientele and the institutions they serve. The pressure resulting from these demands can create a sense of physical and emotional exhaustion that often leads to burnout" (p.1).

Similarities Among Extension Agents & Agriculture Teachers

Cooperative Extension Agents are often compared to agriculture teachers, as these two groups often come from similar backgrounds and programs of study. Ensle (2005) describes agents as "teachers, counselors, information referral agents, and researchers" who work with many different groups of people including young people, parents, farmers, schools, and other youth organizations. Ensle's description of Cooperative Extension Agents is also similar to that

of agricultural education instructors (p.4.). Employee retention and job dissatisfaction are also issues in agricultural education. Norton (1999) reports, “some studies have found that as many as 25% of teachers leave their profession after only one year, and that only 50% remain after five years of service” (p.52).

Factors Affecting Agriculture Teachers

Among the factors contributing to employee resignation and job dissatisfaction among agriculture teachers, two concerns were noted on multiple occasions in the literature - compensation and opportunities for advancement. Several other factors were also found to contribute to resignation and job dissatisfaction among agriculture teachers and are supported in the following paragraphs.

In a Journal of Agricultural Education article, ‘*Temperament Type and Job Satisfaction Among Selected West Virginia Agricultural Education Teachers*,’ Watson and Hillison (1991) note “teachers seemed to be least satisfied with school policies and practices, advancement, compensation, and supervisor competence” (p.2).

In addition to Watson and Hillison’s study, a 2004 Missouri study states “a lack of administrative support” as the most frequently given reason for individuals who had left the teaching profession. This study also notes that 60% of those surveyed either had relatively no change in job satisfaction or a decrease in the level of job satisfaction over their career (Walker, Garton, Kitchel, 2004, p.8). Such a statistic should certainly be of concern to agricultural education administrators.

In a research study titled ‘*The Relationship Between Vocational Teacher Job Satisfaction and Teacher Retention Using Discriminant Analysis*,’ Berns (1990) identifies several other factors in addition to lack of administrative support. In the study of 745 current and former

agriculture teachers, Berns notes additional factors that contribute to a decrease in job satisfaction and teacher retention. When asked whether the teachers agreed or disagreed with a variety of statements, respondents disagreed most with the following statements: (1) appropriate students are placed in their classes; (2) salary is adequate; (3) promotional opportunities existing in education are adequate; (4) society has realistic expectations of us; and (5) we had appropriate professional status within society (Berns, 1990).

In concluding the discussion of factors leading to job dissatisfaction among agriculture teachers, Bennett, Iverson, Rohs, Langone, and Edwards (2002) note the following factors influencing job satisfaction and employee retention in their study, '*Job Satisfaction of Agriculture Teachers in Georgia and Selected Variables Indicating Their Risk of Leaving the Teaching Profession*':

Two characteristics were found to be significantly related ($p < .05$) to a teacher's level of job satisfaction: (1) the agriculture teachers' extended-day status and (2) the number of years the teacher had spent in an agricultural occupation prior to teaching. That is, agriculture teachers with extended-day status reported that they were more satisfied with their jobs. Also, the longer teachers had worked in agricultural occupations prior to teaching, the higher their level of job satisfaction (p.8).

Recommendations Found in Pertinent Literature

Thus far, the many challenges related to employee resignation and job satisfaction in Cooperative Extension have been highlighted. Next, the focus of this document will shift to identifying recommendations for improvement as found by those working in the field. After reviewing recent studies related to resignation and job satisfaction involving Cooperative Extension, the recommendations compiled primarily relate to administrative support.

In the study '*Factors That Lead To Job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction of County Extension Agents in Georgia*' Purcell (2003) recommended the following:

UGA administrators should assist County Extension Agents in all parts of their job as possible, such as including them more as faculty of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, giving recognition, and continuing to be supportive as supervisors especially in the area of evaluation (pp.101-102).

In addition to administrative support, Purcell's study also includes three other important recommendations. First, the author recommends exit interviews be conducted on a more consistent basis to address the previously mentioned 41% turnover rate which occurred from 1997-2001. Second, Purcell recommends a close examination of the current promotion system for Extension Agents and other public service faculty. Finally, administrators are encouraged to examine current salary levels as compensation was mentioned as a factor negatively affecting job satisfaction (p.102).

In an applied research study examining Georgia Cooperative Extension, Hill (1989) also notes the problem of compensation for Extension Agents, in particular concerning lower salaries as compared to other occupations. Hill said the following:

The salary level seems to pose a huge threat to maintaining quality county Extension agents. Apparently, the competition (industry and education) is paying a higher salary than the Georgia Cooperative Extension Service. Extension may need to invest in a compensation audit to compare their compensation package to that of their competitors (p.33).

While compensation is a well-documented concern, several experts in the field continue to stress the role of administrative support as previously mentioned in Purcell's study. In a recent Journal of Extension article titled '*Burnout: How Does Extension Balance Job and Family?*' Ensle (2005) makes several specific recommendations pertaining to Extension administration's support of Extension Agents, including a recommendation that administrators 'need to "walk the talk" and become role models for living a balanced work life.'

Several other recommendations made by Ensle to Extension administration included: (1) the establishment of a national 'Life Balance' task force, (2) university systems should develop

staff plans that include stress management, coping strategies, and wellness programs, (3) fund further research to define programs and policies that provide 'Life Balance' strategies, and (4) administrators should encourage agents to plan time away from regular work to publish and demonstrate the impact of their Extension programs (pp.9-10).

In concluding the recommendations found in the pertinent literature, Igodan and Newcomb (1986) suggest focusing employee retention efforts on Extension Agents working in 4-H and Youth Development, as these individuals frequently experience burnout. Igodan and Newcomb stated the following:

It's important for Extension agents, particularly young, single, 4-H agents who are experiencing job dissatisfaction, to be alert to symptoms of burnout. They also need to take time to develop a suitable array of coping strategies that can be used to dissipate the stress that can lead to strain and hence burnout (p.5).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Rationale for Qualitative Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors contributing to job satisfaction, job dissatisfaction, and employee resignation among Cooperative Extension Agents. The researcher sought to understand the following:

- 1) What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, provide the most satisfaction?
- 2) What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, lead to job dissatisfaction?
- 3) What factors lead to employee resignation among Cooperative Extension Agents?
- 4) What can Cooperative Extension, as an organization, do to increase retention among Extension Agents?

Qualitative methodology was selected for this study because the purpose was to garner detailed information regarding Extension Agents' views on their experience with Cooperative Extension, specifically their views and attitudes related to employee resignation, job retention, job satisfaction, and how Cooperative Extension might make improvements to better retain Extension Agents. Data collection and analysis was qualitative, which included open-ended interviews and discussion with five former Extension Agents and five current Extension Agents. A total of ten participants were selected in order to allow the researcher the necessary time to contact and interview the participants and to transcribe and code the data. Certainly, a larger

number of participants could have provided more information which may have led to saturation; however, the researcher was limited by time and the availability of the participants. The researcher wanted to determine factors that contribute to employee resignation, perceived and actual, among Cooperative Extension Agents. The researcher sought to understand “why” Extension agents resigned and the factors associated with job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. According to Canfield (1996), “Qualitative methods focus on the real-life worlds of individuals, often taking into account the meanings that the study has for them”

(<http://canfield.etext.net/Chapter9.htm>). In addition to a qualitative approach, symbolic interaction was utilized as a theoretical construct for analyzing and organizing data.

The symbolic interaction perspective puts emphasis upon human action and upon intersubjectivity and interpretation. Canfield (1996) describes symbolic interaction as “people try to make sense of the nonverbal behavior of others and of themselves attaching meaning to the behaviors. They create meanings from what they observe others doing, in what they see themselves doing”. The symbolic interaction approach provides a method of examining the world of human behavior. In particular, symbolic interaction is the concept that individuals may have identical experiences, yet view these experiences very differently, resulting in different interpretations of the experience and different perspectives of the situation

(<http://canfield.etext.net/Chapter1.htm>). In examining the factors, perceived and actual, related to employee resignation among Extension Agents, the symbolic interaction approach worked well in that actual factors leading to resignation provided by former employees were to be compared to perceived factors provided by current employees.

Limitations of the Study

1. Time, availability of participants, and travel distance limited the study to only ten participants. A greater number of participants may have led to more generalizable data.
2. Selection of former Cooperative Extension Agents to be interviewed was limited as the UGA Human Resources office could not provide contact information on former Agents. As such, the researcher utilized his own network of contacts to locate possible participants, resulting in a nonrandom selection.
3. As the researcher is an employee of Georgia Cooperative Extension and has worked with or had knowledge of the participants, potential bias existed. The researcher attempted to account for potential bias by strictly following the interview questions and conducting each interview in a similar fashion. The researcher avoided personal comments regarding the participants' responses.

Research Design

The researcher acquired information regarding job satisfaction, job dissatisfaction, factors leading to employee resignation, and recommendations to improve Agent retention among Cooperative Extension Agents. The first step was to obtain a list of former Extension Agents who resigned within the last five years from the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Human Resources Office. The researcher garnered information from Extension Agents who willfully left the organization and sought input from Extension Agents who were currently employed in an effort to compare perceived and actual factors contributing to resignation.

Data collection was qualitative, utilizing open-ended interview questions with five former Extension Agents and five currently employed Extension Agents. The researcher contacted five

agents from each group with the possibility of an additional four or five individuals if needed. Former Extension Agents were purposefully selected from a list of former employees provided by University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Human Resources Office. According to Creswell (2005), purposeful sampling allows the researcher to intentionally select individuals in order to learn about or understand the central phenomenon. In particular, study participants should be “information rich” (p.201). When selecting currently employed Extension Agents, the researcher also utilized maximal variation sampling in which participants are selected that differ on some characteristic or trait. Taking into consideration conversations with District Extension Directors, current employees were purposefully selected to achieve a representative cross-section of Extension Agents, based on gender, years of experience, and diversity of program area.

Potential subjects were identified and contacted via telephone to determine their interest in participating in this study. If the subjects were receptive, the researcher mailed the potential subject the required informed consent form and a description of the study to be conducted. If the potential subject agreed, he or she returned the consent form to the researcher who set a convenient time and location to conduct the interview. Subjects were asked seven open-ended questions (see pages 25-26) and were encouraged to comment on any subject related to their employment with Cooperative Extension. One and one-half hours was allowed for the interview so that the interviewee had ample time to share their views and experiences. Interviews were recorded, and the data transcribed. The researcher conducted a member check by allowing interviewees to read the transcript before proceeding with data interpretation. Following the member check, the researcher reviewed and coded the data for emerging themes (Creswell, 2005, p. 252).

Interview Questions

The questions used to guide the interviews were as follows:

Questions of former Extension Agents:

- * How long were you employed with Cooperative Extension?
- * At the time of your employment, how long did you expect to remain employed with Cooperative Extension? Can you explain your answer?
- * While employed as a Cooperative Extension Agent, what characteristics of the profession provided the most satisfaction?
- * While employed as a Cooperative Extension Agent, what characteristics of the profession led to job dissatisfaction?
- * What factor or factors led to your resignation from Cooperative Extension?
- * What can Cooperative Extension, as an organization, do to increase retention among Extension Agents?
- * Do you have any other thoughts on the issue of job retention and attrition?

Questions of current Extension Agents:

- * How long have you been employed with Cooperative Extension?
- * At the time of your employment, how long did you expect to remain employed with Cooperative Extension? Can you explain your answer?
- * What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, provide the most satisfaction?
- * What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, have made you dissatisfied?

- * What factors would lead someone to resign from the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent?
- * What can Cooperative Extension, as an organization, do to increase retention among Extension Agents?
- * Do you have any other thoughts on the issue of job retention and attrition?

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

This study sought to gain insight into why Extension Agents resign and what factors lead to job dissatisfaction. As previously mentioned, a turnover rate of 41% was found among newly hired Georgia Extension Agents who attended Extension Foundations training from 1997 to 2001 (Extension Foundation Rosters). Through this study, the researcher hoped to better understand the factors contributing to resignation among Cooperative Extension Agents in Georgia. This research is an important first step in making recommendations to administration on how Extension might improve employee retention and achieve a more satisfied workforce.

While national and instate research has been done examining job satisfaction, the factors that lead to actual employee resignation in Georgia have not been studied at length since the late 1980's. This study is qualitative in nature, utilizing in-depth interviews with both former and current employees of Cooperative Extension. By interviewing former and current employees, the researcher garnered information from Extension Agents who willfully left the organization as well as sought input from Extension Agents who are currently employed in an effort to compare perceived and actual factors contributing to resignation.

The research questions were as follows:

- 1) What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, provide the most satisfaction?

- 2) What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, lead to job dissatisfaction?
- 3) What factors lead to employee resignation among Cooperative Extension Agents?
- 4) What can Cooperative Extension, as an organization, do to increase retention among Extension Agents?

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The researcher utilized open-ended interview questions with five former Extension Agents and five currently employed Extension Agents. Former Extension Agents were purposefully selected from a list of former employees provided by University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Human Resources Office. After discussion with the District Extension Heads whose districts were involved, the researcher sought former Agents believed to be “information rich.” When selecting currently employed Extension Agents, the researcher used purposeful selection to achieve a representative cross-section of Extension Agents based on gender, years of experience, and diversity of program area. A synopsis of the participants by gender, program area, experience, degree, and marital status can be found in Table 1 on page 29.

Table 1

Demographic summary of interview subjects

Title	Category	Former Agents	Current Agents
Program Area			
	Ag & Natural Resources	3	2
	4-H Youth	1	2
	FACS		1
	Split	1	
Gender			
	Male	4	2
	Female	1	3
Years Experience			
	0-5 Years	4	
	5-10 Years	1	2
	11-20 Years		1
	20+ Years		2
Degree			
	Bachelor's	2	1
	Master's	3	4
Marital Status			
	Married with child at home	2	3
	Married without child at home	2	1
	Single with child at home		
	Single with no child at home	1	1

Analysis of Interview Questions

* All names have been changed in order to maintain confidentiality of respondents.

Question: At the time of your employment, how long did you expect to remain employed with Cooperative Extension? Can you explain your answer?

Responses to this question were very similar among both the former Extension Agents and the currently employed Extension Agents. Among former Agents, three respondents viewed Extension as a possible career, one was “just looking for a job,” and one was seeking work experience. Ron, a former Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) Agent, said:

I looked at it as career builder; a step in the career process. My main goal was to build my skills and gain experience.

On the other end of the spectrum, Beth, another former ANR Agent, felt very strongly about building a career with Cooperative Extension:

I thought it would be a lifetime career. It’s the reason I completed my master’s degree, because I wanted to be an Extension agent. And, I did love my job.

Among currently employed agents, three respondents viewed Cooperative Extension as a possible career and two were new college graduates simply seeking a job. Interestingly, two of the respondents who viewed Extension as a career were former 4-H club members having grown up in the program. Jennifer said:

I hoped Extension would be a career. I’m not one to job-hop. I grew up in 4-H and worked as program assistant for two years before becoming an agent.

Question: What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, provide the most satisfaction?

In examining the responses to this question, the respondents answered in much the same way. The characteristics and activities leading to the greatest job satisfaction are very similar for

both former Extension Agents and currently employed Extension Agents. The only differences which stand out as significant are in continuing education and working with young people.

Among the former Agents, the characteristics leading to job satisfaction, in order of response frequency, were the following:

1. Interaction with people;
2. Sharing information; solving problems;
3. Continuing education;
4. Support from Coworkers; and
5. Job flexibility;

Regarding interaction with people, all respondents indicated that the relationships forged with clientele were extremely important. Beth said “I loved the interaction with people on a daily basis,” and Sid felt much the same way, saying “I really enjoyed the community work, getting to know the people in the county.”

The number two response provided by the former Extension Agents was closely related to the first. Four out of five respondents indicated that sharing information and helping their clientele to solve problems also led to job satisfaction. In particular, Sid spoke of the fulfillment that comes from helping someone:

I really enjoyed helping the ‘real’ ag producers – cattlemen’s association, poultry producers, and other farmers. Knowing that I made the operation a little more successful or that I helped them save some money.

The third most frequent response given by former Agents related to job satisfaction was the continuing education provided by Cooperative Extension. In particular, several respondents who are now employed elsewhere said that the organizations they presently work for do not offer such opportunities. Bob said:

I think the staff development is second to none – allowing county agents to learn and grow through graduate programs and in-service training. Extension does a good job of trying to meet their employees’ needs in that area, and I think a lot of organizations don’t do that.

The fourth characteristic or activity leading to job satisfaction among former agents was support from coworkers. Three former Agents were very appreciative of their coworkers and felt that they knew “who to turn to for answers.” Ron said:

If there were issues coming up or problems you needed help with, there was always someone a phone call away who could help or point you in the right direction. The opportunity to work with other agents and specialists across the state was very beneficial.

The final characteristic of the job that led to job satisfaction among Cooperative Extension Agents was job flexibility. In particular, the flexibility of designing and creating your own educational program was mentioned. Bob said:

I liked it for the flexibility it allowed to be able to do things for the local county folks. Freedom to make my own programming decisions – able to start new programs.

As previously mentioned, the responses from currently employed Extension Agents were very similar to those given by former Agents. The characteristics leading to job satisfaction, in order of response frequency, were as follows:

1. Interaction with people;
2. Working with young people;
3. Sharing information; solving problems;
4. Coworkers; getting to know other agents from around the state; and
5. Job flexibility;

Much like the former Extension Agents, this group also indicated that the relationships which develop with clients and coworkers were very important. Also noteworthy, this group

also felt very strongly about the 4-H / Youth Development Program and indicated that youth work led to increased job satisfaction. Patty said:

I really enjoy working with the 4-Hers, seeing them grow and change over the years – knowing that I had a little part in that.

Much like Patty, Clark expressed a great deal of satisfaction in working with young people via the 4-H program. He said:

Watching a kid grow. Like this weekend at DPA, I saw two kids from my county make 4-H district board. Just seeing the smiles on their faces is very rewarding.

The trend of relationships continues in the third most significant characteristic leading to job satisfaction given by currently employed Cooperative Extension Agents. Specifically, three of the five respondents indicated that sharing information and helping to solve problems provided much job satisfaction. Clark said:

For me, sharing information with people and seeing it make a difference in their life, day-to-day. Seeing a homeowner bring in a bunch of stuff from their garden that they say you helped them produce just from giving them a little information; it's a good feeling.

Like the former Agents, the currently employed Extension Agents also had a great appreciation for their coworkers. Respondents indicated that the majority of their coworkers were helpful, pleasant, and cooperative, and they stressed the importance of working together as a team. Paul said:

I enjoy my co-workers and have had a good working relationship with most all the folks I've worked with over the years. Most of them are good folks, easy to get along with, and very helpful.

The fifth most important characteristic leading to job satisfaction among currently employed Extension Agents was identical to that of the former agents – job flexibility. However, the two groups appear to have a different understanding of the term. Specifically, former Agents spoke of flexibility in programming decisions, whereas currently employed

Agents referred to the flexibility the position offers in personal and family commitments. Patty indicated this:

One is the flexibility because I'm not strapped to a desk every day, all day until 5:00 o'clock, so if I need to take one of my children to a practice or a doctor's appointment it's easy to do.

Question: What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, lead to job dissatisfaction?

In response to this question, the former Extension Agents and the current Extension Agents provided similar answers regarding the characteristics and activities leading to job dissatisfaction. The order of importance of the characteristics leading to dissatisfaction is slightly different, and the two groups disagree on the frequency of training and the support for new Extension Agents at the county level.

The characteristics leading to job dissatisfaction among former Agents, in order of response frequency, were as follows:

1. Night and weekend work; trying to balance work and family;
2. Uncertainty regarding job responsibilities;
3. Paperwork; and
4. Lack of support at the county level

In reference to issues related to balancing work and family, all respondents noted the difficulty that comes with the high number of night and weekend meetings and programs, as well as 4-H summer camp. While only one former Agent had a 100% 4-H assignment, all the Agents stated that they had been required to attend 4-H camp and assist with 4-H activities related to their specific program area. Ron stated:

The big thing is you have to be able to accept some time away from home. Extension is a good job for a single person, at least for the first four or five years. It's demanding with a

young family. 4-H, in particular, is tough on young families – say being gone two weeks in row at camp – because you want to be there for them. The question I think a lot of agents ask is ‘Is all this work going to pay off on the back end, five or ten years from now?’

Bob reiterated these feelings of frustration regarding night and weekend assignments, especially involving agents with 4-H responsibilities:

The first thing that was an issue and is probably an issue nationwide is the work/family issue where folks are trying to balance family life with work issues. I felt that Extension didn’t address it head-on as far as the time that county agents spent developing programs, traveling, going to 4-H camps. They talked about it, but didn’t seem like they were committed to allowing county agents to walk away from their program for a little while and spend the necessary time with family.

The second characteristic leading to job dissatisfaction among former Extension Agents were feelings of uncertainty regarding job responsibilities. Most Agents come to Cooperative Extension with an undergraduate or Masters degree in one specific discipline, such as agronomy, horticulture, nutrition, or child development. Once hired, Extension Agents are expected to conduct programs and answer questions in a wide array of areas. In addition, every county’s clientele, office, and local government are different. These factors can lead new Agents to feelings of uncertainty regarding their job responsibilities. Ron said:

Also, knowing what’s expected of you. You think that sounds easy, but I know from personal experience that you really don’t know what to expect. If you were told what the expectations were, you could focus on those needs. I know it sounds simple, but they just don’t do it. New agents have got to know what’s expected of them.

Sid reinforced these feelings of uncertainty regarding the job responsibilities of Cooperative Extension Agents. In particular, he stressed the importance of an accurate job description:

I would also say that the job description isn’t entirely accurate. Sure, I worked in the areas mentioned like green industry, home hort, and urban forestry, but I didn’t expect to be working with cattle, poultry, and youth livestock.

Following uncertainty regarding job responsibilities, the former Extension Agents interviewed listed paperwork, specifically excess paperwork, as the third most significant factor leading to job dissatisfaction. Larry stated:

The paperwork was a big one – all the reports we had to generate. You always felt like you had to justify your job.

Among the characteristics leading to job dissatisfaction, former Agents ranked lack of support at the county level fourth in order of importance. Three of the respondents had a fairly positive experience in working with their respective County Extension Coordinators; however, two former Agents had a poor experience. Beth said:

Initially, I had very good County Coordinators. However, in the last county I was in, I thought administration was definitely lacking in lots of things. My last supervisor just wasn't a good role model and not present often.

Sid also expressed dissatisfaction in the support he received from his County Extension Coordinator, specifically regarding program direction. He stated:

My County Coordinator was not concerned with Ag programming. She just wanted me to stay in the office and answer the phone. She didn't encourage me to do any proactive programming.

The final characteristic of Cooperative Extension that led to job dissatisfaction was the low number of female Agriculture and Natural Resource Agents. While only one of the former Agents interviewed was female, less than five percent of the Agriculture and Natural Resource Agents in Georgia are female. She stated that the low number of female agents was “not very encouraging.” Beth went on to state:

I was a minority as far as the male to female ratio. I didn't like not having other females at trainings and other field days that I attended.

As previously noted, the characteristics leading to job dissatisfaction among currently employed Extension Agents were very similar to those given by former Agents. The characteristics leading to job satisfaction, in order of response frequency, were as follows:

1. Night and weekend work; trying to balance work and family;
2. Paperwork;
3. Too many trainings;
4. Promotion process; and
5. Uncertainty regarding job responsibilities

As seen in the responses from former Agents, the current Extension Agents also stated that issues related to balancing work and family, specifically the night and weekend commitments, were the most significant factors leading to job dissatisfaction. Jennifer stated, “The extra-long hours are tough – in particular the nights and weekends. It can, at times, get very overwhelming.” Clark went on to say:

Night and weekend work is not compensated. While it may not be coming from the District, you’re expected to be there by county folks – lots of people making you feel obligated to be at a variety of events. You try to make everybody happy, and you don’t really get a dime or even a pat on the back for it.

The second characteristic leading to job dissatisfaction among currently employed Extension Agents ranked third among former agents – paperwork. The more experienced agents (having worked 15 years or more) stressed that this is major problem. When asked about factors leading to dissatisfaction, Paul immediately responded:

Paper work! It gets to be a real drain. Along those lines, all the accountability requirements and reporting for every activity – number of visits, number of phone calls, just everything. It’s bean-counting.

In direct contrast of the former Extension Agents, the currently employed Agents held a very different view regarding training and continuing education. Four of the five respondents stated that Extension required too much training. Patty stated:

I am not a big fan of the trainings. I don't think they're very realistic for someone who has worked as long as I have. I've complained about that for years. Many of the classes are so basic. We almost need a tiered training system – separate classes for those that are brand new and for those of us who have been around a long time.

Following excess training, the currently employed Extension Agents ranked the public service promotion process as the fourth contributing factor leading to job dissatisfaction. Similar to the faculty tenure track, Cooperative Extension Agents and others working in public service and outreach are in a public service promotion track. This process allows Agents to apply for promotion with the possibility of three increases, if the Agent reaches the Senior Public Service Associate level. The salary increases for each level attained are \$1,500 for Public Service Assistant, \$4,000 for Public Service Associate, and \$4,500 for Senior Public Service Associate.

While it may seem fair and equitable, several agents were not pleased with the current promotion system. Clark was disappointed that a more significant raise was not involved. He stated, “The promotion process is very time-consuming. And after all that, there's not a lot of money attached to the promotion steps.”

The final characteristic leading to job dissatisfaction mentioned by currently employed Extension Agents was uncertainty regarding job responsibilities, a characteristic which ranked second among former agents. Clark stated:

The most stressful thing is not knowing exactly what your job is at times. Some of that is every county is different, but also we're expected to take on many different roles and often times, we have to take on additional work if there's not sufficient staff.

Question: What factors would lead someone to resign from the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent?

When asked, “What factors led to your resignation from Cooperative Extension?” the former Extension Agents interviewed provided a wide range of personal and work-related factors. However, several key factors were mentioned time and again. The factors leading to resignation, as stated by former Agents, included the following:

1. Salary;
2. Time away from family; family problems;
3. Lack of leadership and support from County Extension Coordinator; and
4. Opportunity to work on advanced degree

Regarding salary, the former Extension Agents mentioned several areas which need to be addressed. These factors included receiving only a minimal raise when transferred, the salary difference between Agents with a master’s degree and Agents with only a bachelor’s degree, and the cost of living differential among rural and urban counties. In reference to Agent transfer, Beth said:

The main reason I didn’t stay with Extension was that when I was transferred from X County to Y County I received a very minimal raise. It barely covered the cost of my drive to the office.

In the area of starting salaries, more than one former Agent expressed dissatisfaction with the salary difference between Agents with a master’s degree and Agents with a bachelor’s degree. Larry stated:

Back when I started, there was quite a difference in salaries for a person with a bachelor’s degree and someone with a master’s degree. I came in with a bachelor’s degree and I think the starting salary was about \$25,000, master’s was \$35,000. I started working on my master’s degree, and I never got any reassurance that the \$10,000 salary difference was ever going to be made up.

Finally, in regard to salary, former Agents also expressed concern with the cost of living differential among rural and urban counties. In particular, two former agents questioned the uniform, statewide starting salary. Bob said:

Another possible issue is salary. I worked in a very rural county and my salary was pretty good for that area, but if you put my salary in an urban county, it probably would not have been nearly enough. Starting salaries should really factor in the cost of living in that county.

As one might expect, the issue of balancing work and family came up as a factor leading to resignation among the former Agents. All the Agents interviewed stated that they enjoyed their work, but their family commitments outweighed their level of job satisfaction. Ron was very clear on this issue:

For me, the time sacrifice wasn't worth it. I had the opportunity to start a new program at the local middle school with FFA. Being on the school year calendar allowed for more time with family as my wife was also teaching at the time.

The third most frequent response given by former Agents regarding their resignation was a lack of leadership and/or support from their immediate supervisor, the County Extension Coordinator. The former Agents expressed varying degrees of dissatisfaction regarding their supervisors. Beth described her Coordinator as "easy to get along with, but not present often," while Sid felt "stifled." Sid went on to say:

I had to spend too much time in the office. My CEC did not encourage me to get out in the county and get to know my clientele.

Among former Agents, the fourth factor leading to job resignation was a desire to return to school to begin work on an advanced degree. Two respondents stated returning to school factored into their decision to leave. Bob said:

The main factor was that I was motivated to get to work on a doctoral program. I had aspirations of moving up through the organization, either a program specialist with staff development or working as a district program leader or supervisor. Time constraints

were also an issue. I felt like I was getting stretched pretty thin, and this made the decision to go back to school an easy one.

When asked, “What factors would lead someone to resign from Cooperative Extension?” the currently employed Extension Agents interviewed echoed several of the issues mentioned by the former Agents. However, due to the nature and frequency of their responses, the researcher ranked their responses differently in order of importance. The factors that might lead Extension Agents to resign as stated by current Extension Agents were the following:

1. Time demand on new agents, especially 4-H agents;
2. Unrealistic expectations; feelings of frustration;
3. Salary; and
4. Time away from family

A significant factor which was stressed by all the current Agents interviewed was the time demand on new Agents, in particular, the demands placed on Agents conducting 4-H and youth programs. 4-H Agents conduct many of their program activities on nights and weekends, and often attend one or more weeks of camp in the summer. Paul, a veteran agriculture and natural resource agent, sympathized with the schedules 4-H Agents keep. He said:

The time demand on agents is a problem, especially for new people. They’re trying to do everything and often do not know what to let go. 4-H, for example, is in real need of updating. I don’t know that we can expect our 4-H agents and staff to continue all these programs without additional help.

In addition to the time demand on new Extension Agents, currently employed Agents stated that new employees are faced with unrealistic expectations which often lead to feelings of frustration. Patty was concerned that new agents do not know what to expect. She said:

I think one (factor leading to resignation) is unrealistic expectations. They don’t know what they’re coming into. And I’m thinking in particular of an AG agent we had who left, he was totally overwhelmed. I’m not sure how much your degree prepares you.

Your college degree prepares you for one area and Extension is so broad that you don't really feel prepared for all the questions and issues you have to deal with.

While salary ranked third on the list of factors contributing to resignation among Extension Agents, currently employed Agents were somewhat mixed on the issue of salary. As a whole, younger agents felt very strongly that starting salaries and salary increases were insufficient, whereas more experienced agents felt current starting salaries were reasonable.

Jennifer, who has worked less than ten years, said:

We need to work on salary – both starting salary and pay increases. A teacher makes more than we do starting out, and most Extension agents turn to teaching because of that. And when you think about the fact that we work ourselves to death and teachers have off summers and weekends and make more money than we do. It's depressing.

On the other side of the issue, Paul, who has been employed more than 20 years, did not see Extension Agent salaries as a factor leading to resignation. Instead, Paul reiterated the issue of time demands placed on new agents. He said:

I don't think salary is a real issue. It's definitely better than it used to be, and with the promotion ladder, agents can really help themselves by going up for promotion. Again, I tend to think it's the work load and time demands as opposed to salary and benefits.

Following salary, currently employed Extension Agents ranked time away from family as the fourth most important factor that might lead to employee resignation, as compared to the former Agents who ranked time away family as second in order of importance. Among the current Extension Agents interviewed, Barbara said:

The issue of family and children could also be a factor. We do have frequent night and weekend work, and for agents with young children I'm sure this is difficult.

In particular, several Agents felt that time away from family is especially difficult on young 4-H Extension staff. Paul reiterated the issue of balancing work and family regarding 4-H agents:

Coming back to 4-H, these agents spend many nights and weekends away from home with camp, DPA, and other events. They have a particularly tough job, especially if they're newly married or have small children.

Question: What can Cooperative Extension, as an organization, do to increase retention among Extension Agents?

In closing the interviews, both former and current Cooperative Extension Agents were asked, "What can Cooperative Extension, as an organization, do to increase retention among Extension Agents?" As seen in previous questions, the two groups provided some similar answers. In particular, both former and current Agents believed that better leadership and a stronger mentoring program could help reduce attrition among new Cooperative Extension Agents. Former Agents listed the following items as possible steps Extension administration could take to increase employee retention:

1. Increase salaries;
2. Provide better leadership/support at the county level;
3. Training on how to balance work and family; and
4. Establish a more effective mentoring program

As indicated in their previous comments, all the former Extension Agents interviewed for this study stated that salaries should be increased. Specifically, former Agents recommended increasing starting salaries and salary increases. Larry, who worked in two counties, stated:

Seems like in Extension that the only time you can get a decent raise is if you move to a county that they want you to move to. In my case, when I moved from X to Y, I got a pretty good percent increase, I think it was 25%. But when you're only making \$25,000, that's not very much money. It seems to me at that point it shouldn't be based on percentage. They should try to get the salary up to a wage that someone could live on, especially if they want agents to remain in one county for any length of time.

Beth, who also worked in two counties during her time in Extension, felt strongly that Extension should improve salary increases when Agents are transferred. She said:

If someone is relocated, give them a significant raise – especially if someone has been with Extension for four years and has a masters degree. I mean they say that you'll be paid if you have a master's degree, and to not have received a significant raise during my time in Extension was disappointing.

The next recommendation made by former Extension Agents was to improve the leadership and support new agents receive at the county level. In particular, the former Agents stressed the significant role that County Extension Coordinators play in retaining good employees. Ron stressed the importance of leadership:

I think it still goes back to leadership. The County Coordinator needs to look out for the potholes that new agents may come across. They have to be very diligent in providing direction to agents for the first six to nine months.

Sid echoed Ron's statements regarding the importance of strong leadership at the county level. He did not believe the problem was one of work ethic, rather a lack of support. Sid said:

I don't feel that most new agents aren't willing to work hard. It's that you have to deal with so much stuff that's not related to your primary responsibilities. New agents also need a lot of day-to-day support in the county; someone to tell them that they can say 'No' if a request is not related to their job. New agents need time to learn what it takes to be county agent.

Following stronger leadership and support at the county level, former Extension Agents next recommended administration initiate training to address the issue of balancing work and family. As this issue was mentioned multiple times throughout the interview process, this recommendation is not surprising. Larry said:

Some of the major issues are the night meetings and weekends. Maybe some training in that area, on how to better manage your family life with your job duties, would be good.

Along the same lines as training in balancing work and family, the final recommendation made by the former Extension Agents involves Cooperative Extension's mentoring program. Specifically, the former Agents interviewed felt that the mentoring program was good, but could

be improved. When asked for recommendations, Bob's first response involved the mentoring program. He said:

Mentoring programs where county agents can work with experienced agents and get some feedback from them on what they're doing right and what they're doing wrong and get some help on issues that they're dealing with. Ideally, it should be someone who is not their supervisor; someone they can talk candidly with about issues and problems they're facing.

When asked what Cooperative Extension administration could do to increase retention among Extension Agents, the currently employed Agents interviewed listed the following items as possible steps administration could take to improve Agent retention:

1. Reinforce mentoring program; create internship program;
2. Provide good leadership; be more engaged with Agents;
3. Reduce out-of-county travel for new agents; and
4. Speed up the hiring process

When asked for recommendations to improve retention, the current Agents interviewed placed mentoring at the top of the list, and they also recommended an internship program in cooperation with the University of Georgia. Barbara, a Family and Consumer Sciences agent of more than 20 years, said:

The mentoring process is very important. I believe it is helpful now, but could be even more so. Maybe new agents need more than one mentor – perhaps an experienced agent and an agent with 3-5 years of experience who may be closer in age to the new person. It's also important for the mentor to be available when problems and questions arise. There is no need for a young agent to feel lost – there are plenty of people who can help.

Patty, another experienced agent of more than 20 years, stressed the importance of the relationship between the mentor and the new employee. Patty also suggested an internship with the University of Georgia. She said:

I think the mentoring program is a good start, just so that everybody feels like there's somebody they can talk to. But you have to be sure it's a good fit, and that the person

chosen to be the mentor takes it seriously. I also think it would be helpful if there was an internship program working with UGA, perhaps working a semester with Extension which would help potential employees to have a more realistic idea of what Extension is like.

Much like the responses given by the former Agents, the second recommendation made by current Extension Agents was to provide good leadership for new employees, specifically that District staff should be more engaged with Agents. Patty had concerns regarding a recent new hire in her office. She said:

We hired NEW AGENT back in X month (approximately four months prior). The District Extension Head hasn't been to visit her yet. And, I know the districts are big, but you've got to have some of that personal touch. I don't even think the District Extension Head called and welcomed her on her first day of work. That's not leadership.

The next recommendation made by the current Extension Agents further addresses the issue of balancing work and family, specifically the amount of time new Agents spend away from home. Those interviewed recommended that Extension administration reduce out-of-county travel for new agents. Paul suggested:

For new agents, out-of-county travel for the core trainings can be difficult – simply the time away from family. Maybe, that could be reduced somehow.

The final recommendation made to Extension Administration to increase employee retention provided by the current Extension Agents was to speed up the hiring process. Patty, an experienced County Extension Coordinator, stated:

It would be a great benefit if they could speed up the hiring process. I mean we just hired an agent, and the position advertised in X month and the person couldn't officially start work until Y month (approximately six months later). Some people just can't go six months without a job, and we could lose some good, well-qualified people because of that.

Discussion

Upon examination of the interview findings, the responses from the former Cooperative Extension Agents and the currently employed Cooperative Extension Agents were similar in

many respects. Both groups mentioned interaction with people, solving problems, and relationships with coworkers as being positive characteristics of the profession. Regarding negative factors related to the job of a Cooperative Extension Agent, the themes of balancing work and family, time demand on agents, salary, and unrealistic expectations were consistent. When asked for recommendations to improve employee retention among Extension Agents, the responses were quite different with former Agents stressing salary and county-level leadership and current Agents recommending a stronger mentoring program and improved leadership and engagement on the District level. In the next section, this study will summarize the major findings and discuss implications and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter is divided into seven sections, including (a) summary of purpose, (b) summary of procedures, (c) summary of descriptive data, (d) summary of findings, (e) conclusions, (f) recommendations, and (g) implications.

Summary of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors contributing to employee resignation among Cooperative Extension Agents in Georgia. This study sought insight into why Extension Agents resign and what factors lead to job dissatisfaction. Specifically, this study utilized interview data from former Extension Agents who willfully left the organization and currently employed Extension Agents in order to compare actual and perceived factors leading to employee resignation, job satisfaction, and job dissatisfaction. This study also sought recommendations from both former and current Agents as to how Cooperative Extension might increase employee retention among Agents.

Summary of Procedures

This study used a qualitative approach to data collection, utilizing open-ended interview questions with five former Extension Agents who willfully left the organization and five currently employed Extension Agents. Interview subjects were purposefully selected from a list of former Agents who resigned within the last five years and a list of current Agents. The researcher selected former Agents who were willing to participate and were thought to be informaton-rich. Regarding the selection of current Agents, the researcher discussed participant

selection with District Extension Directors in order to achieve a representative cross-section of Extension Agents, based on gender, years of experience, and diversity of program area.

Once selected, subjects were contacted via telephone to schedule a convenient time and location for the interviews. During the interview, subjects were asked five to seven open-ended questions and were encouraged to comment on any subject related to their employment with Cooperative Extension. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher conducted a member check by allowing interviewees to read the transcript before proceeding with data interpretation. Following the member check, the researcher reviewed and coded the data for emerging themes.

Summary of Descriptive Data

During the interview process, the following information was collected from the study participants: (a) program area, (b) gender, (c) position, (d) years of experience, (e) degree held, (f) county, and (g) marital / family status. Of the five former Extension Agents interviewed, three had primary responsibility in Agriculture and Natural Resources, one had primary responsibility in 4-H / Youth Development, and one had a split Agriculture / 4-H appointment. Four of the former Agents were male and one was female. Regarding years of experience, four had been employed with Cooperative Extension less than five years, and one had been employed between five and ten years. Highest degrees obtained by the former agents were three master's degrees and two bachelor's degrees. Marital status included two married without children, two married with children, and one single with no children.

Among the current Extension Agents interviewed, two had primary responsibility in Agriculture and Natural Resources, two had primary responsibility in 4-H / Youth Development, and one had primary responsibility in Family and Consumer Sciences. Two of the current

Agents were male, and three were female. Years of experience of the current Extension Agents included two with five to ten years, one with eleven to twenty years, and two with more than twenty years. Highest degrees obtained were four master's degrees and one bachelor's degree. Marital status included three married with children at home, one married with no children at home, and one single with no children.

Summary of Findings

The following four research questions provided the focus for the study:

- What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, provide the most satisfaction?
- What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, lead to job dissatisfaction?
- What factors lead to employee resignation among Cooperative Extension Agents?
- What can Cooperative Extension, as an organization, do to increase retention among Extension Agents?

Research Question 1:

What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, provide the most satisfaction?

The characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, providing the most satisfaction as stated by former Extension Agents included interaction with people, sharing information and solving problems, continuing education offered, support from coworkers, and job flexibility. The characteristics stated by currently employed Extension Agents are almost identical and included interaction with people, working with young people, sharing information

and solving problems, relationships with coworkers and getting to know other agents from around the state, and job flexibility.

Research Question 2:

What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, lead to job dissatisfaction?

When asked what characteristics lead to job dissatisfaction, the responses of the former and current Extension Agents were also very similar, with a few notable exceptions. Former Cooperative Extension Agents listed the following factors as leading to job dissatisfaction: night and weekend work / trying to balance work and family, uncertainty regarding job responsibilities, paperwork, lack of support at the county level, and low number of female Agriculture & Natural Resource Agents. Factors leading to job dissatisfaction as provided by current Extension Agents included night and weekend work / trying to balance work and family, paperwork, too many trainings, the promotion process, and uncertainty regarding job responsibilities.

Research Question 3:

What factors lead to employee resignation among Cooperative Extension Agents?

The next question asked of the participants examined the factors leading to employee resignation among Cooperative Extension Agents. The factors noted by the former and current Extension Agents interviewed were also similar, but were ranked differently in order of significance. Former Agents listed the following as major factors leading to employee resignation: salary, time away from family / family problems, lack of leadership and support from County Extension Coordinator, and returning to school to work on advance degree. Current Extension Agents stated that time demand on new agents (especially 4-H agents),

unrealistic expectations / feelings of frustration, salary, and time away from family were the most significant factors leading to resignation.

Regarding factors leading to resignation, the most notable difference was in the area of leadership. Former Agents expressed concern over a lack of leadership at the county level, and in particular, they did not believe that they received adequate support from their County Extension Coordinator. The current Agents interviewed did not make mention of county-level leadership. Also interesting was the issue of salary. Former Agents and currently employed Agents with less than ten years experience felt that low salary was an issue, while more experienced agents, those having worked more than twenty years, believed salaries to be sufficient.

Research Question 4:

What can Cooperative Extension, as an organization, do to increase retention among Extension Agents?

Finally, in the area of recommendations to Extension administration, the responses provided by the former and current Extension Agents interviewed varied widely. Former Extension Agents made the following recommendations to improve employee retention: increase salaries, provide better leadership/support at the county level, training on how to better balance work and family, and have a more effective mentoring program. The currently employed Agents recommended reinforcing the current mentoring program and creating an internship program, providing good leadership and being more engaged with Agents, reducing out-of-county travel for new agents, and streamlining the hiring process. In the area of leadership, former Agents stressed the need for better leadership from County Extension Coordinators, while current Agents focused on improving leadership and increasing engagement at the District level.

Conclusions

After further analyzing the data, the researcher offers the following four conclusions:

1. Among former and currently employed Cooperative Extension Agents, the common characteristics of the profession providing the most satisfaction included interaction with people, sharing information and solving problems, coworker relationships and support, and job flexibility.
2. The former and current Extension Agents interviewed reported night and weekend work / trying to balance work and family, paperwork, and uncertainty regarding job responsibilities as leading to job dissatisfaction. Notable differences included former agents reporting dissatisfaction with the support they received at the county-level and current agents reported dissatisfaction with the public service promotion process.
3. Regarding factors leading to employee resignation, former and current Agents both cited time demand / time away from family and salary as important. Notable areas in which the two groups did not agree included lack of leadership and support from County Extension Coordinator as stated by former Agents and unrealistic expectations / feelings of frustration as stated by current Agents.
4. Recommendations to increase employee retention were varied. The only similar recommendations given by both former and current Agents were to improve current mentoring programs and provide better leadership and support to new Agents. Former agents stressed improving salaries and better leadership from County Extension Coordinators, and current Agents felt strongly about reinforcing the current mentoring program and creating an internship program.

Concerns related to employee retention and job satisfaction cited in the pertinent literature facing today's Extension Agents include low compensation, difficulty in working with administrators, lack of support, long hours, and conflicting expectations from students, the community, local supporters, and state administrators. The following paragraphs include findings in the relevant literature in support of the study conclusions.

Regarding factors leading to job satisfaction among Extension Agents, similar findings have been noted by several other studies. Purcell (2003) found relationships with clientele and coworkers and flexibility in planning one's schedule as leading to job satisfaction (p. 98). Ensle (2005) noted flexible scheduling and educating clientele as providing much job satisfaction. Ensle also noted a 1995 Kansas study that identified "teamwork" and "the opportunity to be self-directed" as key factors leading to job satisfaction among Extension Agents (p. 1-3).

This study's findings also reflect some of the factors leading to job dissatisfaction found in the pertinent literature. Manton and van Es (1985) found that Illinois Extension agents who voluntarily resigned reported "dissatisfaction with administration and too much time away from family" as factors leading to job dissatisfaction (p. 4). Fetsch and Kennington (1997) identified long work hours, including nights and weekends, and conflicting demands from clientele and administrators as factors leading to job dissatisfaction among Extension Agents.

In reviewing the literature related to employee resignation in Cooperative Extension, low compensation and time away from family were mentioned in several studies. Hill (1989) noted time away from family and salary as factors leading to resignation. In particular, Hill stated, "agents felt their jobs were too demanding and, they were unhappy with the amount of time they had to spend away from their families" (p.37). Hill also remarked on the issue of salary, stating, "Apparently, the biggest disadvantage Extension has is the salary. Almost half of the

respondents left Extension and took a job with a salary increase of more than \$3,000 per year” (p. 38). While Hill’s study of Georgia Extension was conducted in 1989 and salaries have increased since that time, it is still notable as salary continues to be cited as a factor leading to resignation among Extension Agents. Rousan (1995), in a study of Ohio State University Extension, reported “insufficient pay for the amount of work performed” as a factor leading to resignation among Extension Agents who voluntarily resigned.

As mentioned previously in conclusion number four, the findings of this study pertaining to recommendations for improving employee retention were quite varied. The recommendations found in the literature are also varied, but several studies echoed the recommendations found in this study. Fetsch and Kennington (1997) recommended more open lines of communication between Agents and supervisors. Specifically, the authors suggested that employees and supervisors “work together to set goals and establish mutually agreeable priorities for work activities and job performance” (p. 6).

In “*Why Do Extension Agents Resign?*” Manton and van Es (1985) made several recommendations related to employee retention in Cooperative Extension:

1. Individuals who are appointed to a supervisory role should have formal and informal training in the area of supervisory strategy;
2. The Extension agent’s job description should be more closely tied to the actual work performed;
3. Efforts should be made to match the expectations of the individual with the reality of the Extension position. Prospective employees need to be made aware at the initial interview that the work isn’t rigidly defined and that night work is a factor of the Extension agent’s job; and

4. The concern about “too much time away from family” should be reviewed by the administration and action should be taken to resolve the situation. Efforts need to be made to strengthen the county staff’s use of volunteers and to develop a clearly defined “compensatory time” program (p. 5).

Recommendations

While the concerns related to employee resignation found in the pertinent literature are important, the findings of this study point toward increasing administrative leadership and support and improving the current mentoring program as steps which are financially feasible to address. Many of the recommendations made by study participants and researchers in the area of employee retention and job satisfaction highlight the need for improved administrative support, clarification of expectations from administrators, providing opportunities for recognition, being proactive in the evaluation process, and encouraging agents to take time off for family and personal development.

Specifically, the researcher would like to offer the following recommendations to Cooperative Extension administration:

1. Examine Extension Agent salaries and identify those employees whose compensation is markedly lower than their peers with similar qualifications and experience. Once identified, administration should make the necessary adjustments, over time if necessary, to bring those employees’ salaries up to that of their peers. Also in the area of compensation, examine the salary levels of those professions to which Agents turn upon leaving Cooperative Extension, specifically agricultural education, private industry, and other government agencies.

2. Evaluate the current mentoring program to determine its effectiveness. This evaluation should include interviews with agents who were mentored and agents have served as mentors and a review of the current mentor training program. In addition, Extension administration should examine what Cooperative Extension is doing in other states in the area of new Agent orientation and mentoring.
3. Investigate internship programs being conducted in other states, if any currently exist. Explore the options for creating an Extension internship program with UGA's College of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences, Warnell School of Forestry & Natural Resources, and other related colleges and departments.
4. Examine the current Extension Agent position description for accuracy so that potential employees will have a better understanding of job responsibilities. Allow feedback and comment from all Agents via an on-line survey.
5. Continue the existing County Extension Coordinator orientation and training program. Create an evaluation of this training to be administered approximately one year after completion of the program in an effort to determine strengths and weaknesses of the current training program. In addition, survey current County Extension Coordinators as to what information and/or education is needed in new Coordinator training.
6. Survey current Extension Agents regarding the effectiveness of Extension leadership, including County Extension Coordinators, Program Development Coordinators, District Extension Directors, and upper-level administrators. The findings of this survey would be helpful in identifying the strengths and areas needing improvement in the leadership hierarchy of the organization.

Implications

Cooperative Extension continues to mold and adapt to the ever-changing socioeconomic, political, and agricultural forces present today. While much has changed, however, much has remained the same. Extension Agents still cite relationships with clientele and coworkers as the reason for remaining in the profession, and the issues of balancing work and family, administrative leadership and support, and compensation still rise to the top when discussing areas needing improvement.

The findings of this study uphold the majority of the research found in the pertinent literature. In hearing the concerns of former and current Extension Agents in their own words, hopefully administration will take a proactive approach to addressing some these concerns. Considering this study's relatively small sample size and possible researcher bias, additional research into employee resignation and job satisfaction among Extension Agents is warranted. Specifically, a large scale quantitative study of former agents could be conducted utilizing survey questions based on the findings of this study. Additionally, Georgia Cooperative Extension administration should examine the employee trends of Extension in other states and review their efforts to address such issues. The majority of individuals working in Cooperative Extension remain in the profession for the satisfaction of working with and helping people, and if all administrators will exhibit this same desire – to help “their people”- job satisfaction and employee retention in the profession will likely improve.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled **“Factors Contributing To Employee Resignation (Perceived & Actual) Among Cooperative Extension Agents”** conducted by William D. Skaggs from UGA Cooperative Extension in Hall County (770-535-8293) under the direction of Dr. Christine Langone, Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication at the University of Georgia (706-542-0715). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to gain insight into why Extension Agents resign and what factors lead to job dissatisfaction.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- 1) Participate in an interview session lasting approximately one to one and one-half hours in length answering questions pertaining to job satisfaction, job dissatisfaction, and factors that may lead to resignation among county Extension agents.
- 2) Agree to audio recording of the interview and to review the interview transcript for accuracy.
- 3) My information will be analyzed and stored for the duration of the study – not longer than six months. During this time, all transcripts, notes, audio recordings, and other data will be stored in locked storage in the researcher's office. Once all audio recordings are transcribed, audio tapes will be destroyed.

I understand that I will receive no direct or indirect compensation for participating in this study.

This study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding factors contributing to resignation among Cooperative Extension Agents.

No risk is expected by participating in this study. I understand that I may refuse to answer any question or questions without prejudice. The results of participation will be confidential. Only the researcher will have access to the data, and any identifiers will be removed.

No information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project (office 770-535-8293; home 770-718-1170).

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
Telephone: _____	Email: _____	
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions of Former Cooperative Extension Agents:

1. How long were you employed with Cooperative Extension?
2. At the time of your employment, how long did you expect to remain employed with Cooperative Extension? Can you explain your answer?
3. While employed as a Cooperative Extension Agent, what characteristics of the profession provided the most satisfaction?
4. While employed as a Cooperative Extension Agent, what characteristics of the profession led to job dissatisfaction?
5. What factor or factors led to your resignation from Cooperative Extension?
6. What can Cooperative Extension, as an organization, do to increase retention among Extension Agents?
7. Do you have any other thoughts on the issue of job retention and attrition?

Questions of Current Cooperative Extension Agents:

1. How long have you been employed with Cooperative Extension?
2. At the time of your employment, how long did you expect to remain employed with Cooperative Extension? Can you explain your answer?
3. What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, provide the most satisfaction?
4. What characteristics of the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent, have made you dissatisfied?

5. What factors would lead someone to resign from the profession, Cooperative Extension Agent?
6. What can Cooperative Extension, as an organization, do to increase retention among Extension Agents?
7. Do you have any other thoughts on the issue of job retention and attrition?