

**An Assessment of Virginia Cooperative Extension's
New Extension Agent Training Program**

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Abstract

This study is an assessment of the New Extension Agent Training (NEAT) program in Virginia. Although new Extension agents have exceptional subject matter training, they often lack skills needed to be effective Extension professionals (Bennett, 1979). The NEAT program provides a way for new agents to receive hands-on experiences that will facilitate a smooth transition into their respective roles. There is currently no specific data that has the NEAT program. Therefore, an evaluation of the program by its participants to determine its importance and effectiveness may be utilized to enhance the effectiveness of the NEAT program.

The survey utilized to collect data in the study was developed by the researcher. The instrument was put on a website where participants could access it during a given time frame. The population consisted of new Extension agents, training agents, and administrators who participated in the NEAT program and are currently employed by Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE).

Participants were asked to rate the importance and effectiveness of the NEAT program in facilitating new Extension agents' growth in a series of goals needed for a new agent to be proficient. These goals were then divided into eight competencies as outlined by National Policy Statement on Staff Training and Development (1968). Participants were asked to provide demographic information and suggestions that would be useful in designing future programs.

Data were analyzed using SPSS. The data showed that communication was rated the most important competency while human development was considered the least

important. The data related to the ratings of effectiveness of the NEAT program in relation to the eight competencies also demonstrated that respondents rated communication as the most effectively taught competency covered in the NEAT program, and human development as the least effectively taught competency.

Significant differences among ratings by position in the NEAT program were measured at the 0.05 alpha level. Significant differences were observed both between new Extension agents and Extension administrators and between Extension training agents and Extension administrators were in the importance of a selected competency and the effectiveness of the NEAT program in teaching the some of the competencies.

Dedication

With all of my love, I would like to dedicate this work to my *God*. You have shown me the true meaning of the word *faith*. You have placed the people, things, and ideas in my path so that this part of my journey has come to pass. For all that You have done, are doing, and will do through me, I simply say, thank You.

“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap,
if we faint not.” Galatians 6:9 KJV

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