



Cooperative Extension's *effects on* Farmer Retention

Farmer Retention: Why does it matter?

Between 1984 and 2010

490,000

farmers exited farming

Due to technological advances, fewer farmers than ever are growing our food.

Since the middle of last century, the number of US farm workers has declined by 78%, even while agricultural output has more than doubled.

Even so, there may be a *critical minimum* number of farmers to maintain a viable agriculture.

What can be done to keep farmers on the farm?



The federal Cooperative Extension program was set up in 1914 under the Smith-Lever Act to translate and transmit state-of-the-art research findings from the Land Grant Universities.

A new study shows that investment in Cooperative Extension was directly associated with higher net farm income, which helped farmers stay in business.

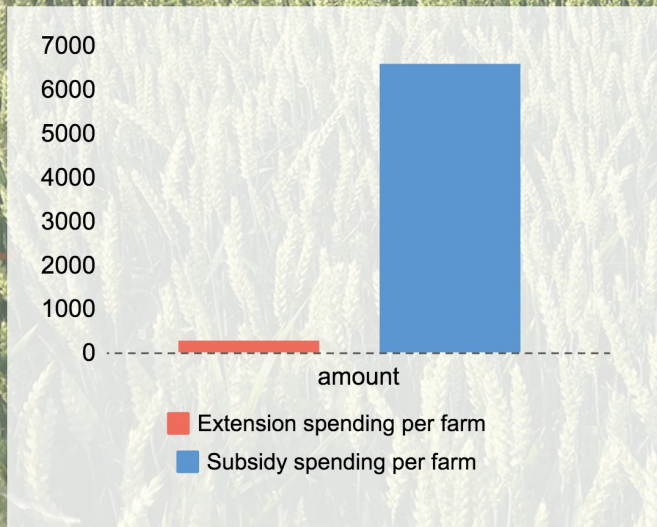
Between 1984 and 2010

137,700

farmers stayed in farming

as a result of Extension and associated research programs

How much does Cooperative Extension cost relative to other federal investments in farmers?



Researchers found that Cooperative Extension programming costs **\$266 per farm**, while farm commodity programs and subsidies cost **\$6,572 per farm**.

The same study found that higher levels of commodity payments or subsidies to farmers were associated with more farmers *leaving*, rather than staying in agriculture.

Between 1984 and 2010 **55,000** additional farmers would have stayed in farming if \$100 of commodity spending per farmer was shifted to Extension spending.

This research shows that public investments in farmers are better made through the research and educational programs of the Land Grant University system, rather than through direct subsidies to farmers, if the policy goal is to keep farmers on the farm.



Source: Goetz, S.J. and Davlasheridze, M. State Cooperative Extension Spending and Farmer Exits. Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy, published online April 19, 2016.

Top image: USDA; Middle image: Sven Owsianowski; Bottom image: Penn State



©Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or those of other funders.