

# Conducting Needs Assessments to Direct Extension Programming Efforts



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## Abstract

Needs assessments are an important tool for Extension Educators. A formal assessment can help with program development, resource allocation, staffing plans and professional development.

Over the past 5 years University of Maryland Extension has conducted a number of needs assessments with a variety of audiences. This poster details the needs assessment process, activities and findings.

## Lessons Learned

- Survey design and process is important to the success of the needs assessment. This includes making decisions on the number of questions, content of questions, delivery of the survey and desired results.
- All surveys created were peer reviewed, IRB approved, and strategically delivered to the particular audience.
- Identifying audience contacts and providing notification and reminders of the assessment is important for response rate.
- Know your audience: what survey method and time of year will achieve the highest response rate?
- Search the literature for similar surveys and replicate one or two of their questions to allow for comparisons.
- Provide incentives when possible including gift cards or promotional items.
- Question design is very important for analysis. Reduce the number of write in responses and use set ranges.
- At the end of the survey allow respondents to “enter any additional comments”.

## Needs Assessment Findings

Assessment Name:	Eastern Shore and North Central	Beginning Farmer	Urban Agriculture	Dairy Industry
<b>Purpose:</b>	Survey farmers about general challenges and educational needs	Determine current needs of beginning farmers and provide validation for future programming	Learn more about the urban agriculture audience and Extension program development	Determine the educational needs and preferences of Maryland dairy farmers
<b>Target Audience:</b>	Farmers in 9 Eastern Shore counties and 6 North and Central	Beginners farmers that registered through the UME listserv	Urban farmers in Maryland	Dairy farmers in Maryland
<b>Date:</b>	2015 and 2017	2014	2018	2019
<b>Distribution:</b>	Online and Paper Based	Online	Online	Paper Based
<b>Response Number/Rate:</b>	467 Farmers (29% response rate)	56 Beginning farmers (42% response rate)	29 Urban farmers (60% of known urban farms)	89 Farmers (26% response rate)
<b>IRB Number:</b>	854335-1 and 647897-1	443446-3	1013685-1	1441978-1
<b>URL:</b>	<a href="https://extension.umd.edu/about/extension-impact/agriculture-needs-assessment">https://extension.umd.edu/about/extension-impact/agriculture-needs-assessment</a>	<a href="https://extension.umd.edu/newfarmer/about">https://extension.umd.edu/newfarmer/about</a>	<a href="https://go.umd.edu/urban-ag-needs-assess">https://go.umd.edu/urban-ag-needs-assess</a>	Analysis in process
<b>Top Education Needs for Respondents:</b>	Crops Finance/tech skills Family relations	Laws and regulations Crop production Finance management	Specialty crop production High tunnel management Farm equipment Recordkeeping	Soil fertility Forage production
<b>Greatest Challenges for Respondents:</b>	Farm transfer Loss of farmland Consumer knowledge	Available farmland Access to financing Crop production	Access to credit and financing Access to land	Low profits Land cost Government regulations
<b>Desired Method for Information:</b>	Newsletters Seminars/workshops Hands-on training	Hands-on training One-on-one education Field days	In-person winter classes On-farm summer workshops	Newsletters

Thank you to UME Educators and teams for assisting with these surveys and to farmers who took the time to complete these surveys and share this important information.

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