

Understanding the Barriers of Florida Extension Agents to Conducting Sustainability Programs

Savanna Turner
Matt Bengé

Introduction & Purpose

The President's Council on Sustainable Development defines sustainability as “...an evolving process that improves the economy, the environment, and society for the benefit of current and future generations” (Sustainable Development in the United States, 1998). According to Harder et al. (2010), one of the major competencies of an Extension agent is technical subject matter expertise, which would include sustainability science. The purpose of this study was to understand the barriers Florida Extension agents face to conducting sustainability programming.

Methodology

- Exploratory qualitative study
- Participants: 10 Extension agents representing different program areas and Extension districts in Florida.
- An expert panel that consisted of University of Florida Extension faculty who have worked in fields related to sustainability were selected to assist with review of interview guide and recruitment of participants
- The interviews had 5 questions and lasted approximately 30 minutes each.
- The authors analyzed the data individually and then met to discuss the themes, with one researcher serving as an external check.

Findings

- The four main themes that emerged from the interviews were:
- Inconsistent descriptions of sustainability,
 - State-level resources and professional development
 - Expert personnel
 - Statewide plan of action

Recommendations

- Florida Extension needs statewide leadership and expert faculty to lead the way in creating curriculum and resources for county faculty members.
- Florida Extension is encouraged to consider evaluating their sustainability programming initiatives and create a statewide plan of action to reduce the barriers of Extension agents.
- The absence of a needs assessment means statewide sustainability programming initiatives are unable to move through the program planning section of the program development model.