

# Kentucky Association of County Agricultural Agents



## Tips for Success as a New Agriculture or Horticulture Extension Agent

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## *General Information*

The following general information will help you understand what is expected of you in your new career. Some basic responsibilities are mentioned here but this is not meant to be a complete list of all duties.

- Become familiar with the Agent Resources Web site. There is quite a bit of helpful information here, including what you should do during your first day, week, month and six months on the job. [http://www.ca.uky.edu/ANR/agent\\_resources.htm](http://www.ca.uky.edu/ANR/agent_resources.htm)
- Your clients and District Director will expect you to know some general information about your county. This information will also be helpful in preparing certain presentations and year-end reports.
  - Demographics  
<http://www.ca.uky.edu/snarl/>  
<http://www.city-data.com/countyDir.html>  
<http://cedik.ca.uky.edu/CountyDataProfiles>
  - Agriculture activity  
[http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/Kentucky/index.asp](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Kentucky/index.asp)  
<http://agcensus.usda.gov/>
- Your District Director and his/her staff are points of contact for any questions you have on reports, expectations, etc. District deadlines, management tools and other helpful info can be found online by selecting your district from the list at [http://ces.ca.uky.edu/extension\\_district\\_directors/](http://ces.ca.uky.edu/extension_district_directors/)
- You will likely be assigned an agent mentor to provide guidance in your new job. Make sure to ask your District Director about getting a mentor following New Agent Orientation.
- In addition to your mentor, other agents in your office and in surrounding counties are good resources when you have questions or need advice.



- Clients think agents have the answers to all questions. Even if you don't have the answer, make sure to return all phone calls within a reasonable amount of time. **\*This is very important!\***
- Don't be afraid to tell someone, "I don't know but I will find out and get back to you ASAP."
- To make better use of your time, consider setting aside a block of time each day for checking e-mail and/or returning phone calls. Treat this as an appointment so it remains a priority.

- Try not to leave e-mail open all day long since new message notifications can divert your attention from the task at-hand.
  - Avoid duplication of service. Many client questions are best answered by other agencies, like Kentucky Fish and Wildlife <http://www.kdfwr.state.ky.us/> and Natural Resources Conservation Service <http://www.ky.nrcs.usda.gov/>. For example, Fish and Wildlife can answer questions about protected species or hunting seasons; and NRCS will give advice on pond construction, sinkholes, etc.
  - Dress appropriately for client visits and meetings. Jeans are acceptable for farm visits. Clothing and shoes should be in decent shape. No holes, rips, tears, frayed edges, etc. Make sure to dress appropriately (khakis or business casual at a minimum) for all administrative functions, including your monthly district staff meetings, etc.
  - Obtain a Category 10 Pesticide Applicator's License. <http://pest.ca.uky.edu/PSEP/welcome.html>. You need to be licensed before you can administer Private Applicator training and testing to your clientele. Dr. Lee Townsend, UK Department of Entomology, is our contact for this program. The web site referenced above also contains information on Commercial and Non-commercial Applicator Training (conducted by KY Department of Agriculture, Division of Environmental Services).
- A simple line drawing of a green, cylindrical pesticide sprayer. It has a pump handle on top and a nozzle attached to the side by a hose.
- Become familiar with making soil test recommendations. Use the online soils site at <http://soils.rs.uky.edu/index.php> to calculate fertilizer recommendations using either bagged or bulk fertilizer analyses. Consult Dr. Frank Sikora at Regulatory Services for questions about online soil tools/soil testing. Contact Dr. Edwin Ritchey or Dr. Josh McGrath (UK Plant and Soil Sciences Dept.) for questions on fertilizer needs for specific crops.
  - Determine if there is an Agriculture or Horticulture Advisory Council in your county. If not, identify people who are informed and who represent different sectors of agriculture/horticulture and invite them to become council members. Advisory council members are helpful in identifying programming needs for your county's Plan of Work. Agents are expected to have a functioning program advisory council.
  - If your position is new, don't rush to set up an advisory council right away. Get to know your clientele, existing leadership or potential leaders and needs of the county. Work with your district director for guidance in this area. Ask about a timeline of when you should have it completed.

## ***Building Relationships***

It is extremely important to build relationships with the folks in your county. Following is a list of people and/or organizations you should get to know:

- Co-workers
- Agriculture Departments of Local Colleges (if applicable)
- Farmers
- District Conservationist (Natural Resources Conservation Service)
- Fish and Wildlife Officer
- Farm Service Agency employees
- Division of Forestry employees
- Vo-Ag Teachers
- Magistrates/City Council Members
- County Judge Executive/Mayors
- Farm Store Employees
- Adult/Community Education Director
- Chamber of Commerce
- Library Director
- Farmers Market Director/Participants
- County Fair Board Members
- County Farm Bureau Members
- Other County Agriculture-related Associations/Councils
- Local Media Contacts – Newspaper, Radio, etc.



You can potentially work with these people to carry out extension programs and events. For example, vo-ag teachers may be able to teach a parliamentary procedures class for your clientele. Or the district conservationist may help you plan and hold a field day. Farm stores may provide sponsorships for your field days as well.

How do you get to know these people? Give them a call and find out a good time to visit. There's no deadline associated with building relationships, but it is helpful to start making some connections during the first 1 - 3 months on the job.

Remember to stay in touch with the people you meet. Go to a county Farm Bureau meeting occasionally. Drop by the farm store. Ask the employees what's new and introduce yourself. Invite magistrates and other elected officials to field days or open house events.



Last but not least, don't forget extension co-workers. FCS and 4-H agents, program assistants and staff assistants often work with Agriculture and Horticulture Agents to hold programs and events. Some examples are Earth Day activities, Leadership Skills classes and Farm Safety Field Days.

You and your co-workers will also work together to carry out administrative duties such as working with county extension council, budget planning, and marketing extension in your community.

### *Working with Councils and Boards*

You will receive more information on working with councils and boards during new agent training and associated in-services. In the meantime, here are a few tips to get you on the right path.

- Again, determine if you have an existing Agriculture or Horticulture Advisory Council in place. Advisory Council members will help you identify county needs that extension can address in the Plan of Work. In order for the council to function effectively, you will need to meet with them periodically, advise them of current extension programs, and keep them informed to get their input on future programming.

- In most counties, the Extension District Board has fiscal responsibility. This means they oversee expenses of your office in some shape or fashion. Talk to other agents in your county to find out how county funds are administered.



- When applicable, get estimates and have printed quotes available at District Board meetings when making purchase proposals. Be ready to tell board members why you need to make this purchase. It will likely be program enhancement related.



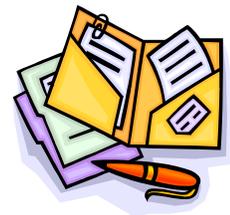
- Even though one agent in each office is considered the County Extension Council (CEC)/District Board contact, all agents should be involved in County Extension Council and District Board activities and meetings.
- County Extension Council members, like program advisory councils, have input in the county's plan of work.
- It is advisable to establish by-laws to clearly define operational standards for all councils and boards. Among many other items, by-laws should also establish term limits for members. Ask other agents for guidance or view sample state-level by-laws at the UK Extension Program and Staff Development website [http://www2.ca.uky.edu/psd/advisory\\_councils.php](http://www2.ca.uky.edu/psd/advisory_councils.php). There is also good information about working with state, county and program area councils there.

## *Staying on Top of Reports*

As an agent you will be pulled in many different directions on a daily basis. Walk-in and phone-in questions, researching answers, planning programs, preparing presentations and educational material will take up much of your time. In the midst of all this, don't forget about required monthly reports in the Kentucky Extension Reporting System (KERS).

The following tips will help make your reports much easier to prepare:

- Keep a daily call and visit log (name, race, gender, reason for call or visit, etc.). Log into KERS Reports – Statistics – and look at required information. This will help direct your record-keeping efforts.
- Reporting for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-ED) hours is required and each agent is expected to contribute at least 100 hours toward it. The following link contains some useful information:  
[http://www2.ca.uky.edu/hes/internal/FSNE\\_FAQ/](http://www2.ca.uky.edu/hes/internal/FSNE_FAQ/)
- Keep a notebook and/or your calendar in your vehicle to record mileage.
- Designate appointed times on your calendar to complete monthly reports in KERS (expenses, travel, meetings/activities, and statistics). Treat these as appointments so that reporting remains a priority. Monthly reports should be entered by the 10th of each month.
- Make a file folder (electronic and/or paper) for each program or class that you offer. The following information should be kept in this file:
  - Advertising material (flyer, brochure, newsletter, column, etc.)
  - Where advertised? (Farm stores, library, community education center, newspaper, etc.)
  - Registration list and/or copy of attendance roster
  - Educational materials and presentations used
  - Program Evaluation
  - Summary of evaluation responses



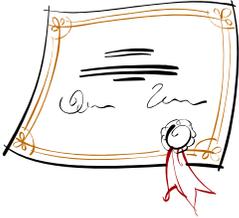
Keeping files about programs that you conduct will help tremendously when it's time to write your success stories and complete performance evaluation materials. It will also help you remember what was done the previous year if it is a reoccurring event.

- Don't forget to evaluate programs by surveying participants. You may need to wait several months before mailing evaluations so that participants have time to put new knowledge into practice. Generally, evaluations should ask questions that indicate:
  - What participants learned
  - Changes or improvements made on their farms or businesses
  - Participants' input on program and ideas for future programs
  - Economic impact, if possible

### *Professional Improvement*

Being an agent means being a leader. It also means learning new things to better serve your clients. As you identify your own learning needs, take advantage of professional improvement opportunities. Most counties have funds budgeted for professional improvement for each agent.

Here are some professional improvement options:

- UK CES Agent In-service Trainings
  - KACAA and NACAA annual meetings
  - State and/or County Leadership programs (often offered through your Chamber of Commerce, for example)
  - Specialized certifications such as Certified Crop Advisor or Certified Arborist
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- Recognized management seminars such as Franklin Covey's Seven Habits, etc.
  - Additional college coursework
  - M.S. or Ph.D. programs

Discuss your plans for additional college classes or enrollment into a degree program with your District Director. Also review the Agent Career Ladder and see how your professional improvement goals fit here. <http://districts.ca.uky.edu/agent>

Agent In-service training opportunities are abundant and are required for career ladder advancement. Make sure you enroll for each training as it becomes available so that you receive credit for participation. <https://warehouse.ca.uky.edu/KERS/login.aspx>

***Top 20 Things to Remember as an Extension Agent***  
***by Steve Moore, Former Henry County Agriculture & Natural Resources Extension Agent***

1. Remember that you are the portal to “The University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service” and therefore are part of the past, present, and future of this educational institution. Don’t forget who signs your check.
2. Don’t be afraid to say “I don’t know”, but don’t leave it there. Get the answer or direct them to where the best answer can be obtained.
3. It’s cliché, but remember “people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”
4. Cultivate relationships with UK Extension specialists.
5. Honor commitments.
6. Be on time and start meetings on time.
7. Be courteous at all times, to all clientele.
8. Don’t gossip or betray confidence.
9. Develop a specialty/field of expertise.
10. Dress professionally.
11. Write personalized extension news columns.
12. Don’t say “I’m too busy”.
13. Return all calls in a timely manner (but take care of the folks who come by to see you first).
14. Get the required reports in, and on time.
15. Be an Extension family member and a team player.
16. Get along with and appreciate your secretary/support staff.
17. Do business from the office.

18. Develop relationships with other county agencies, school districts, etc.
19. Consider joining a local civic club.
20. Work through councils/leadership.

As an agent it is important to be able to maximize your efforts and work in an efficient manner. Sometimes this is easily accomplished through a little thought and planning. There are many tools at our disposal that allow us to work smarter so we don't necessarily have to work harder.

## *The Code of Ethics*

My professional standards shall note an understanding for our common humanity. My work, ambitions and relations shall always cause me to take into consideration my highest duties as a member of society.

In every position of business life, in every responsibility that comes before me, my chief thought shall be to fill that position and discharge that responsibility to lift the level of human ideals and achievements a little higher than I found it.

### **I shall:**

**FIRST:** Consider my vocation worthy and as affording me distinct opportunity to serve society.

**SECOND:** Improve myself, increase my efficiency, and enlarge my service.

**THIRD:** Remember that I am a professional and want to succeed, but that I am first an ethical person and wish no success that is not founded on the highest justice and morality.

**FOURTH:** Respect and hold in high esteem science in all its phases and to recognize that Experiment Station and U.S.D.A. findings constitute professional authority in agriculture and to respect the opinion of those who have established themselves as authorities in this branch of science.

**FIFTH:** Be loyal to our State Universities, the U.S.D.A., our local, state, and national government.

**SIXTH:** Hold in high esteem the callings of both rural and urban activities.

**SEVENTH:** Recognize that the development of leadership and the building of communities is the highest service I can render as a County Extension Agent.

**EIGHTH:** Maintain an open mind, seeking always to understand the viewpoints of others.

**NINTH:** Not engage in any activity which will interfere with the proper fulfillment of my professional duties and bring discredit to my office.

**TENTH:** Support and contribute to strengthening my State or Regional and National Association of County Agricultural Agents in their efforts to improve and advance the Extension Service Program for the betterment of our nation.

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## *Notes*