



Training and Information Channels Preferred by Small-scale U.S. Livestock Operators

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) conducted the Small-scale U.S. Livestock Operations, 2011 study. The study focused on operations that raised livestock and had gross annual sales from \$10,000 to \$499,999. Based on the NASS 2007 Census of Agriculture, approximately 350,000 farms in the United States fit this definition of a small-scale livestock operation. Livestock included cattle, poultry, goats, sheep, swine, horses, aquaculture, and other farm animals raised for sale or home use. For the study, 8,123 small-scale operations from all 50 States¹ were surveyed.

Study participants were asked to identify their preferred methods of receiving training or additional information regarding the management of their operations and the proper care of their livestock. Local extension office² or written publication were the delivery channels preferred by the highest percentage of operations overall (56.0 and 49.4 percent, respectively) [see table]. The Internet, expert presentations, and livestock associations/clubs were preferred methods for training or additional information for 29.9, 24.9, and 21.8 percent of operations, respectively.

When study results were analyzed by region, the local extension office was the most preferred channel for receiving training or additional information in all regions except the West; a slightly higher percentage of operations in the West region (53.7 percent) preferred written publications over local extension office (48.7 percent). Due to the rural nature of portions of the West region, long travel distances to local extension offices might explain this difference in preference.

The NAHMS study results were also grouped under three levels of farm sales: low sales (less than \$100,000), medium sales (\$100,000 to \$249,999), and high sales (\$250,000 to \$499,999). The low-sales group had a slightly stronger preference for receiving training through the local extension office (56.4 percent) than the medium- or large-sales groups (52.7 and 52.4 percent, respectively) [see table]. All sales groups preferred training through their local extension office over every other form of training.

Percentage of operations by preferred channels for receiving training or additional information, and by farm sales

Channel	Percent Operations			
	Farm Sales			
	Low (Less than \$100,000)	Medium (\$100,000– \$249,999)	High (\$250,000– \$499,999)	All opera- tions
Through local extension office	56.4	52.7	52.4	56.0
Presentation by expert	23.9	31.7	37.5	24.9
Written publication	49.3	51.4	47.5	49.4
Internet	29.8	29.6	31.4	29.9
Livestock association/ club	22.1	18.7	22.0	21.8

¹ **States/Regions:** Regions were based on Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education regions:

North Central: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin

Northeast: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia

South: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia

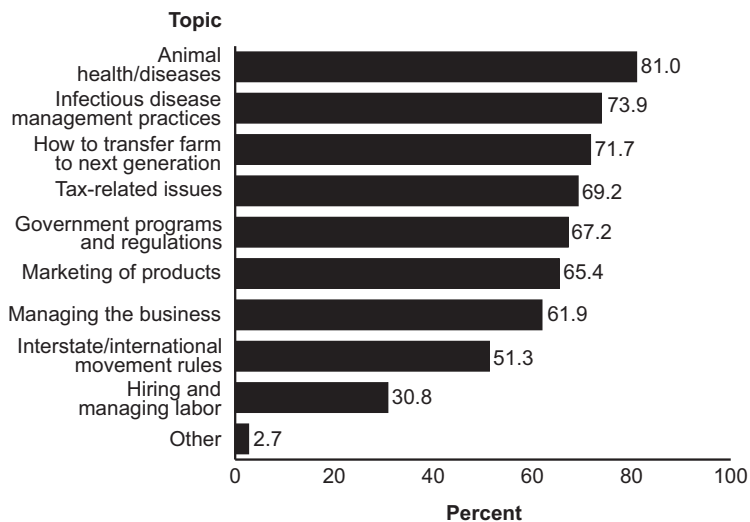
West: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming.

² The Cooperative Extension System is a nationwide, noncredit educational network. Each State and territory has a State office at its land grant university and a network of local or regional offices. These offices are staffed by one or more experts who provide useful, practical, and research-based information to agricultural producers, small business owners, youth, consumers, and others in rural areas and communities of all sizes (<http://www.csrees.usda.gov>).

Training topics identified by small-scale livestock operators

In addition to identifying their preferred methods of receiving training or additional information, operators were also asked to identify and categorize particular training topics as very useful, somewhat useful, or not useful (see figure below). Additional training in animal health/diseases and infectious disease management practices were selected as somewhat or very useful topics by a large majority of operations (81.0 and 73.9 percent, respectively). Other topics identified as somewhat or very useful by the majority of operations were: how to transfer the farm to the next generation, tax-related issues, government programs and regulations, marketing of products, business management, and rules governing interstate and international movement of animals and products.

Percentage of operations in which additional training in the following topics would be somewhat or very useful



Contacts in the event of a disease outbreak

If a foreign animal disease outbreak, such as foot-and-mouth disease, were to occur in the United States, early detection would be critical to mitigating the effects of the outbreak. Ensuring that those most likely to be contacted are aware of the appropriate procedures for reporting a potential outbreak is one of the steps that will help speed diagnosis and response. Most operators of small-scale livestock operations (85.1 percent) would be very likely to contact a private veterinarian directly if they had an animal they suspected of having a foreign animal disease. This finding is consistent with findings from previous NAHMS studies on individual commodities (USDA, 2008, 2009).

Overall, 37.1 percent of small-scale livestock operations also identified extension agent/university as a resource very likely to be contacted if livestock or poultry on the operation were suspected of having a foreign animal disease. In fact, more operators indicated that

they would be very likely to contact the extension agent/university (37.1 percent) than their State Veterinarian's office (28.5 percent) or the USDA (20.7 percent).

References

USDA, 2008. Dairy 2007, Part III: Reference of Dairy Cattle Health and Management Practices in the United States, 2007. CEAH-NAHMS, Fort Collins, CO, #N482.0908.

USDA, 2009. Beef 2007-08, Part II: Reference of Beef Cow-calf Management Practices in the United States, 2007-08. CEAH-NAHMS, Fort Collins, CO, #N512.0209.

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