



WASHINGTON STATE
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION



ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF EXTENSION PROGRAMMING IN ISLAND COUNTY, WASHINGTON

BY THE NUMBERS

- 293 of 503 households that previously had volunteered or participated in Extension programs responded to the survey.
- The average willingness to pay for Extension among this affiliated subsample was \$15.50 annually.
- 198 of 478 households with an improvement value of \$10,000 or more responded to the survey.
- The average willingness to pay for Extension among this general subsample was \$12.43 annually.
- Both subsamples had the highest willingness to pay for 4-H youth development at about \$9.40 annually.
- 3 focus group interviews were conducted in October 2014 in North Whidbey, South Whidbey, and on Camano Island.

2016

ISSUE

Benefit-cost analysis, return-on-investment analysis, and cost-effectiveness analysis commonly are used to evaluate efficacy of specific Extension programs or services. However, few county Extension programs work within a vacuum, and county Extension staff often are dependent on each other to meet both logistical and programming needs. Thus, materials, infrastructure, and even personnel time may be shared across programs. Similarly, benefits might be accrued in a manner not documented previously. The objective of this project is to calculate how residents of a small community value Extension as a whole, as well as how they value specific Extension programs separately. Island County provides an excellent opportunity to look at a diverse set of Extension programs, yet it is small enough to develop the basis of a model.

RESPONSE

Work began in earnest in January 2013 upon receipt of an internal grant, which allowed the principle investigator to interview Island County Extension staff, funded a School of Economic Sciences graduate student, supported mail surveys, and financed interviews with Extension volunteers, local leaders, business owners, and members of the general public. There were approximately 31,796 tax-paying households in 2012 in Island County, and a tax of approximately \$10.80 would fund the 2012 Island County Extension budget of \$343,222. Using interval regression models, we estimated the hypothetical willingness to pay for a WSU Extension office in Island County. We found that, on average, survey participants from the general population were willing to pay about \$12 annually to have an Extension office in Island County. WSU volunteers and alumni or, simply, the affiliated population, were willing to pay about \$15. Additionally, the affiliated population subsample has a greater willingness to pay for each program compared to the general population subsample, in terms of both inclination to pay and the average amount they were willing to pay. Both groups had the highest willingness to pay for 4-H youth development, at around \$9 annually. This, perhaps, indicates the community's recognition of the substantial external societal benefits of youth development programs.

Why might the affiliated population subsample have a higher willingness to pay than the general population subsample? We found that there were two underlying reasons for the difference in willingness to pay between the two subsamples – inclination to volunteer and knowledge. The willingness to pay among those who volunteer, either in WSU Extension programs or non-WSU community organizations, is higher than those who do not usually volunteer in community activities.



QUOTES

“What they (WSU Extension) have done is connect people, and we’ve heard it, not only with one program, but the different programs, the people are knowing other people who are involved in Extension programs and are listening. ... When people move into a community they’re looking for something, something to connect ... they’re looking for other people of like mind ... In terms of values ... a lot of folks, they want to give something back, but they also want it to be useful.” - Regarding volunteering for a WSU Extension program.

Second, knowledge of WSU Extension programs positively impacts the willingness to pay for WSU Extension, even among non-volunteers.

A majority of respondents reported that Extension is important and valuable to the community, and that county support for Extension is an appropriate use of public dollars. Only 6.1% of respondents from among the general population subsample and 1.8% of respondents from the WSU volunteer/alumni subsample said that having a WSU Extension office in Island County was not important, while 38% and 52.5%, respectively, said it was very important. 89.7% of respondents from the general population subsample and 97.9% of respondents from the WSU subsample said that a WSU Extension office in Island County is of value to the community. Respondents demonstrated overwhelming support for using public dollars to support WSU Extension programming, with 85.6% of the general population subsample and 94.6% of the WSU subsample supporting this view. Focus group participants corroborated these findings.

IMPACTS

Most participants in the focus groups felt that no governmental entity or business could replace Extension programming offerings, or provide the level of credibility that people associate with the university. Several participants indicated that having a WSU office in Island County is integral to the fabric of the community. We anticipate that with the knowledge we have gained, Extension programs in Island County can be delivered in a manner that increases participation among local residents and, consequently, improves the status of WSU Extension in Island County.

Focus group participants indicated that it is important to advertise WSU Extension’s programs and success stories more frequently and widely to attract participants and to imbue a sense of involvement in the community, which we plan to do going forward. Two journal articles have been prepared. One article has been published and the other is under review.

The information provided by this study has assisted in achieving a 50% increase in funding from Island County for WSU Extension there since 2013.

