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The Role of Texas Panhandle Extension Economists in Implementing the 2014 Farm Bill

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***Selected Poster prepared for presentation at the Southern Agricultural Economics
Association's 2016 Annual Meeting, San Antonio, Texas, February 6-9, 2016***

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The Role of Texas Panhandle Extension Economists in the Implementation of the 2014 Farm Bill

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Introduction

The Agricultural Act of 2014 is considered by many to be the most complicated farm bill in history, requiring both landlords and tenants to make multiple strategic choices and understand a great deal of information. This poster outlines the methods, challenges, and impacts of a successful Extension effort to provide timely educational and technical support to thousands of Texas Panhandle producers facing policy implementation decisions.

Data and Methods

The Texas High Plains farm bill educational plan was developed through a coordinated effort between several agricultural entities. It began with 78 producer meetings set up through county Extension agents and conducted by local FSA directors and Extension economists. The sessions were partially funded by state commodity groups and covered legislative provisions as well as the Texas A&M Ag and Food Policy Center's Farm Program Decision Aid. During these meetings it became evident that many producers required a more individualized approach. They simply lacked the technical skills needed to run a computerized decision model or fully understand the legislation. Since there were not enough Extension economists to meet this need, nine intensive workshop sessions were conducted. Two targeted county extension agents and the remaining seven focused on commodity groups and agribusinesses. Participants gained a solid understanding of farm bill provisions and decision aid techniques, then were able to return home and assist local producers. A list of all trained parties was also placed in every FSA office within the District. Through the development of a technical support network, Extension economists could reach a much larger number of farmers.

Figure 1. Survey Results



Figure 2. Producer Demographics

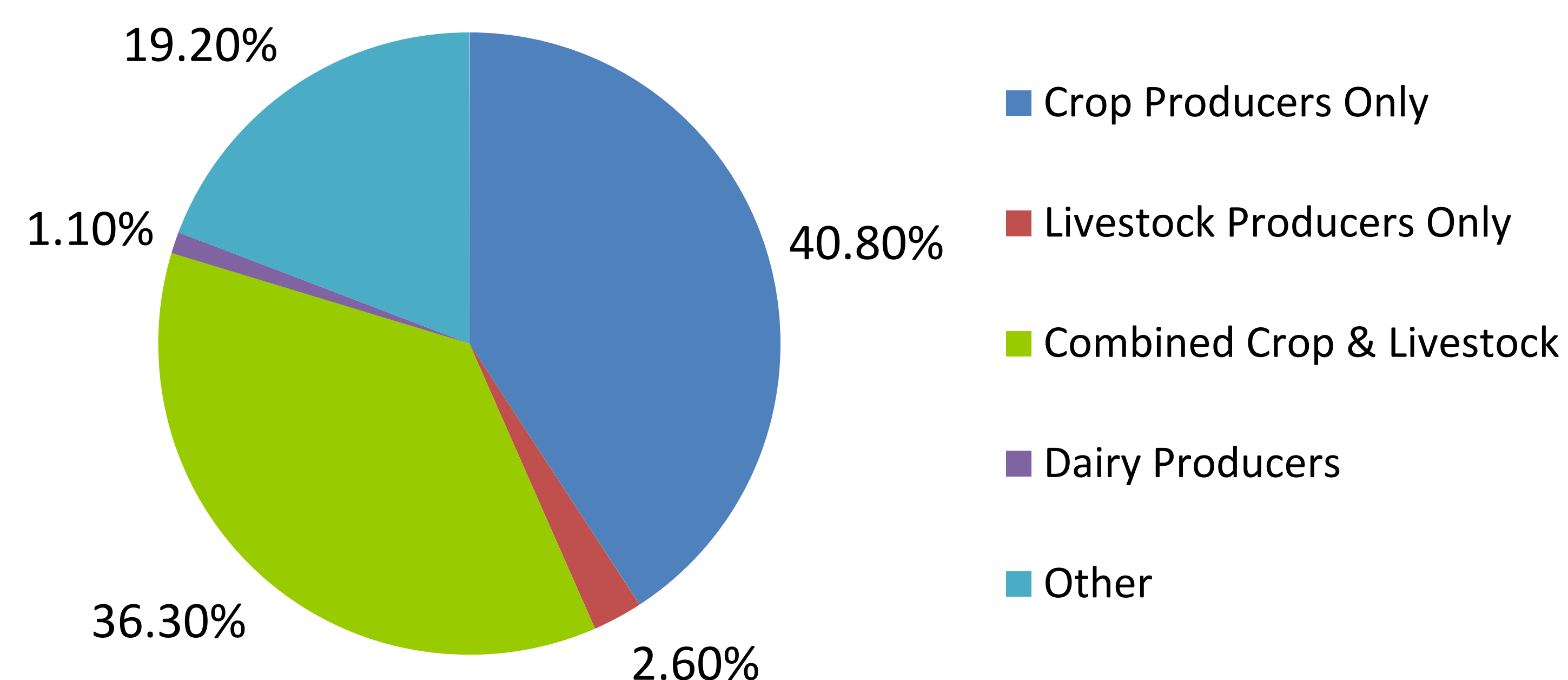
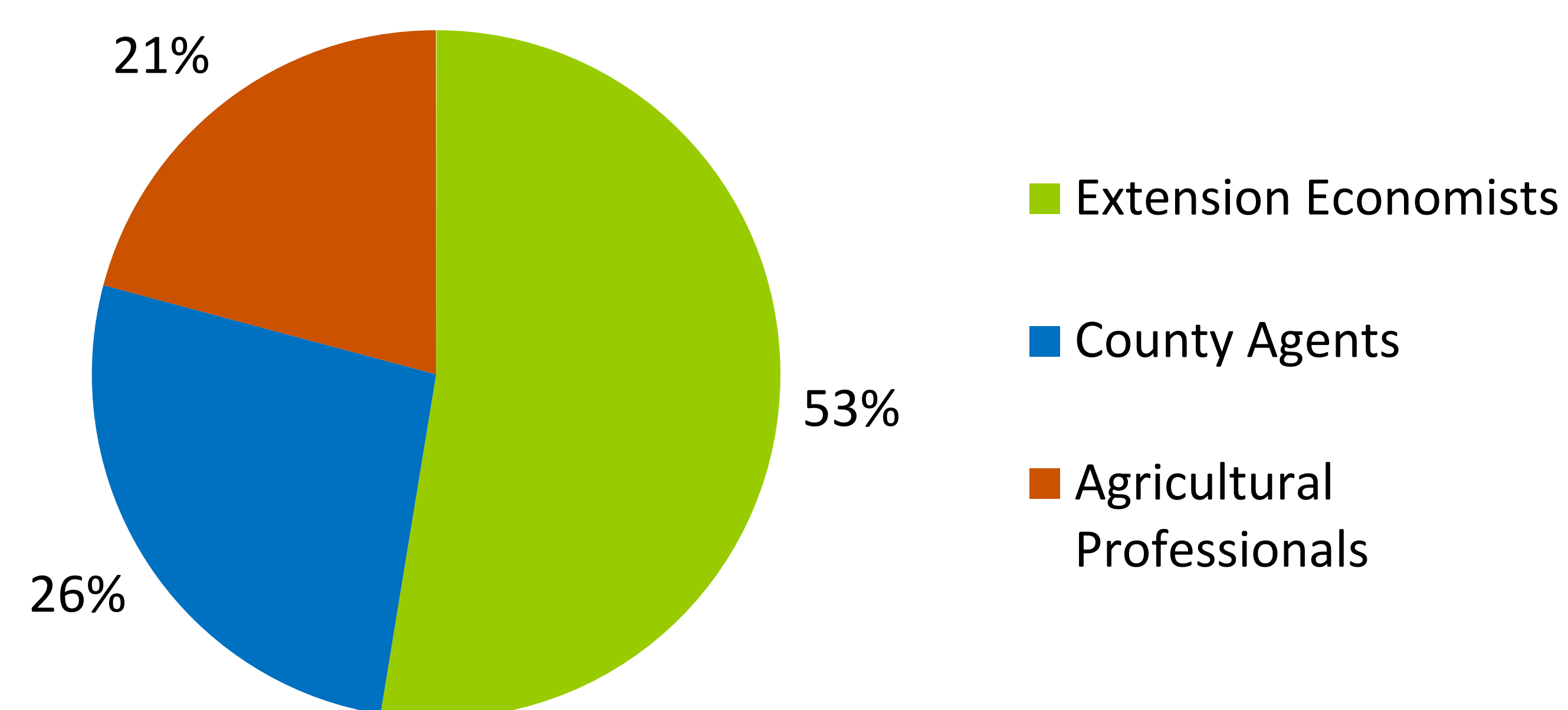


Figure 3. Percentage of District 1 FSA Farms Analyzed



Results and Projected Impacts

The Texas Panhandle farm bill educational effort appears highly successful. Approximately 2,500 producers attended coordinated policy meetings. Survey results showed that 83% of participants planned to utilize the information learned when making sign-up decisions, 70% anticipated an economic benefit from materials provided, and 69% intended to use the decision aid (Figure 1). Overall, pre and post test results indicated a 40% increase in knowledge gained. The intensive workshops were also well received. Extension economists trained 22 county agents and 98 agribusiness professionals, mostly made up of crop insurance agents, bankers, and commodity groups. Using the Texas A&M decision aid, Extension economists then partnered with workshop participants to analyze more than 4,400 FSA farms representing 1,105 producers. Of the operations evaluated, the five-year financial impact based on projected market prices totaled \$200,000,000 (Table 1).

Summary and Conclusions

A coordinated effort between Texas Panhandle agricultural groups resulted in an effective farm bill educational effort. With the help of several agencies, Extension economists reached a large, diverse number of producers (Figure 2) through policy overview meetings. Additional trainings of county agents and agricultural professionals created a wide network of support personnel to assist farmers and ranchers with policy sign-up decisions. This group analyzed 47% of all district FSA Farms represented in the decision aid, almost doubling the output possible with Extension economists alone (Figure 3).

Table 1. District Impact Summary

Total Projected Payments	\$200,000,000
Number of FSA Farms	4,434
Average Payment per Farm	\$45,000
Number of Producers/Clients	1,105
Average Payment per Client	\$180,691