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## **State Specialists' Views of Minnesota's Evolving Extension System**

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# State Specialists' Views of Minnesota's Evolving Extension System

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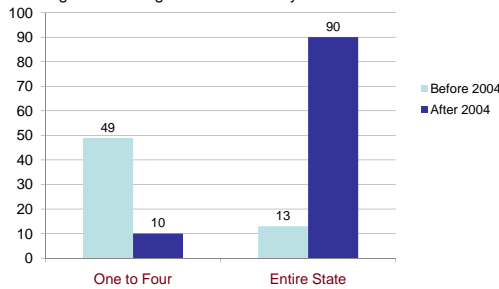
In 2004, Minnesota Extension shifted from a county based delivery model to a regional/county model (based on club theory). This evolving delivery system encourages much greater regionalization/specialization of Extension field staff. This project explores how these changes in the field delivery system impact state specialists. Does the new delivery system increase collaboration between campus specialists and field educators? Does this result in improved program quality, more scholarship, and/or greater public support? These questions are explored here using data from a 2009 survey of Minnesota state extension specialists.

MN County Cluster vs. Regional/County System

Feature	County Cluster Model (Before 2004)	Regional/County Model (2004 and After)
Office Location & Funding	Counties w/ 25% county, state and fed \$	REEs in regional office, State and fed \$
Specialization & Focus	Self selected & covers 1-3 counties	RFPs hired for specific expertise, larger areas
County positions	All positions	86 (of 87) counties have 307 positions
Supervision	District Directors	State specialists
Program teams & Business Plans	Rarely are statewide	Required
Promotion	Not required, time in rank major criteria	Required, new criteria
Regional Directors	Supervised educators	External relations and supervise clerical staff

As shown above, regionalization was the tip of the iceberg and complimented by seven other major policies. Details are in "The Minnesota Response" Chapters 3 to 9.

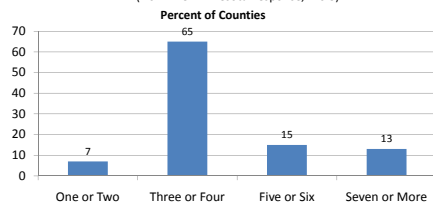
Agricultural Regional Educators by Counties Covered



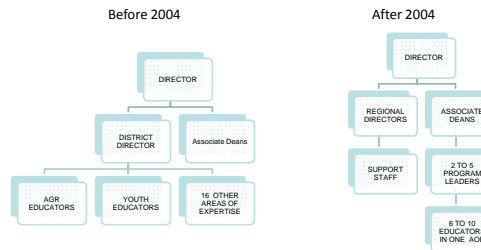
Agricultural regional extension educators, including those in ABM, shifted from covering a few counties to the entire state.

Minnesota's club theory model allows counties to hire as many local educators as they wish but they pay the full tab.

MN Extension's County Positions, 2008  
(from The Minnesota Response, T. 6.3)



Supervision is based on area of expertise and not geography.



A key to specialization of field staff is the shift to supervision by state specialists by area of expertise. Kent Olson, Professor of Agricultural Economics, supervises the 8 ABM regional educators located around the state.

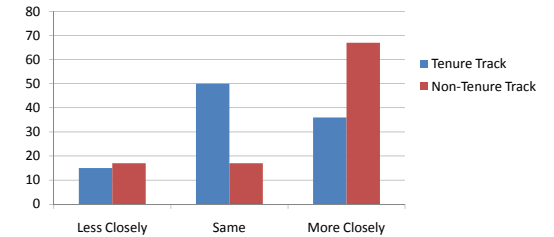
There are more opportunities for Regional Educators and State Specialists.  
(From Table 10.1)

Nature of opportunity	Regional Educators (% more)	Tenured State Specialists (% more)	Non-tenured State Spec. (% more)
Focus on area of expertise	74%	77%	87%
Focus on program's target audience	71	59	87
Do scholarship	69	70	60
Work as part of a team	63	60	93
Learn about target audiences	62	41	60
Work with State Specialists	53	67	80

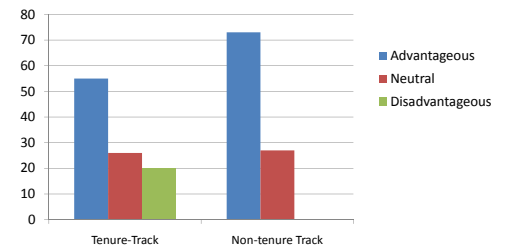
State Specialists see more collaboration from Regional Educators on various programming aspects.

Program Aspect	Tenured State Specialists (% More)	Non-tenured Specialists (% more)
Delivery of programs	55%	87%
Program development	55	73
Promotion of programs	48	67
Ed Materials Development	45	73
Evaluation	45	60

A 2009 survey of State Specialists (tenure track and non-tenure track) showed that Regional Educators were working more closely with them on research than in the past.  
(from The Minnesota Response, T. 11.1)



By over a 2 to 1 margin, State Specialists found new system advantageous to their work.  
(from The Minnesota Response, T. 11.7)



Conclusions: Regionalization and Specialization of Field Staff Appears to Result in:

- Higher quality programming – (10\*)
  - More evaluation and scholarship (11\*)
  - Greater access to specialists (12\*)
  - Stronger public support for Extension (13\*)
- \* Chapters in "The Minnesota Response"

Details on the survey questions are in:

Morse, G., J. Markell, P. O'Brien, A. Ahmed, T. Klein, & L. Coyle. *The Minnesota Response: Cooperative Extension's Money and Mission Crisis*. iUniverse, Bloomington, 2009. (Free preview at [www.books.google.com](http://www.books.google.com))

Future Multi-state Research Planned

Researchers interested in participating in a national study of the consequences of specialization and regionalization of Extension field staff can contact:

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