

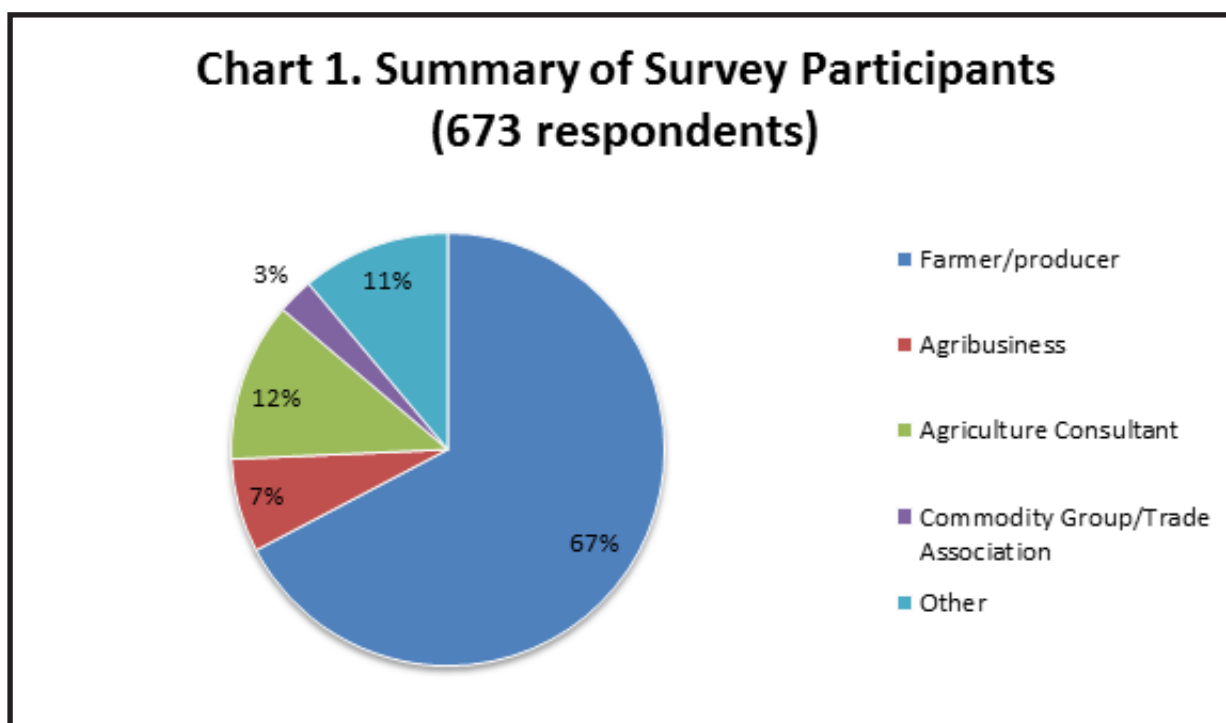
Agriculture Extension Services Survey Report

Agriculture in Saskatchewan plays a significant role in the provincial economy and the Ministry of Agriculture is looking at how it delivers extension services to keep pace with the needs of farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses. A review of the current extension delivery model will help determine what services producers need to drive sustainable growth and ensure their competitiveness in a global market.

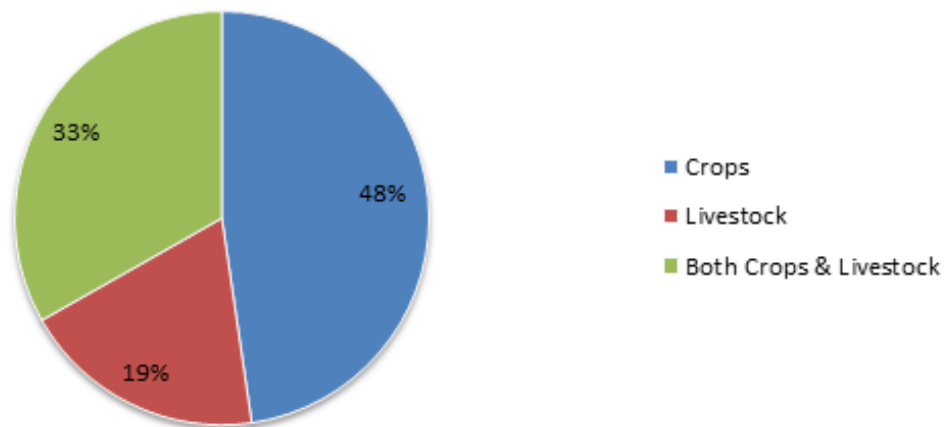
To effectively execute on future extension priorities in the next delivery model, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture requested input from farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses. As part of a broader stakeholder engagement, the Ministry conducted an online survey from March 7 to 31, 2017. The Ministry also hosted six producer focus group discussions throughout the province to further identify some of the existing services gaps the agriculture industry is experiencing when looking for information to advance their operation.

The Ministry also encouraged industry groups to provide a formal submission with their feedback. This was supplemented with conversations with industry commodity group associations.

The majority of online survey respondents identified themselves as producers, with 453 respondents. Other responses came from those who indicated they were agriculture consultants or representatives of a commodity group, trade association or agribusiness.



**Chart 2. Summary of Producer Survey
Participants (587 responses)**



The Delivery of Agriculture Extension Services

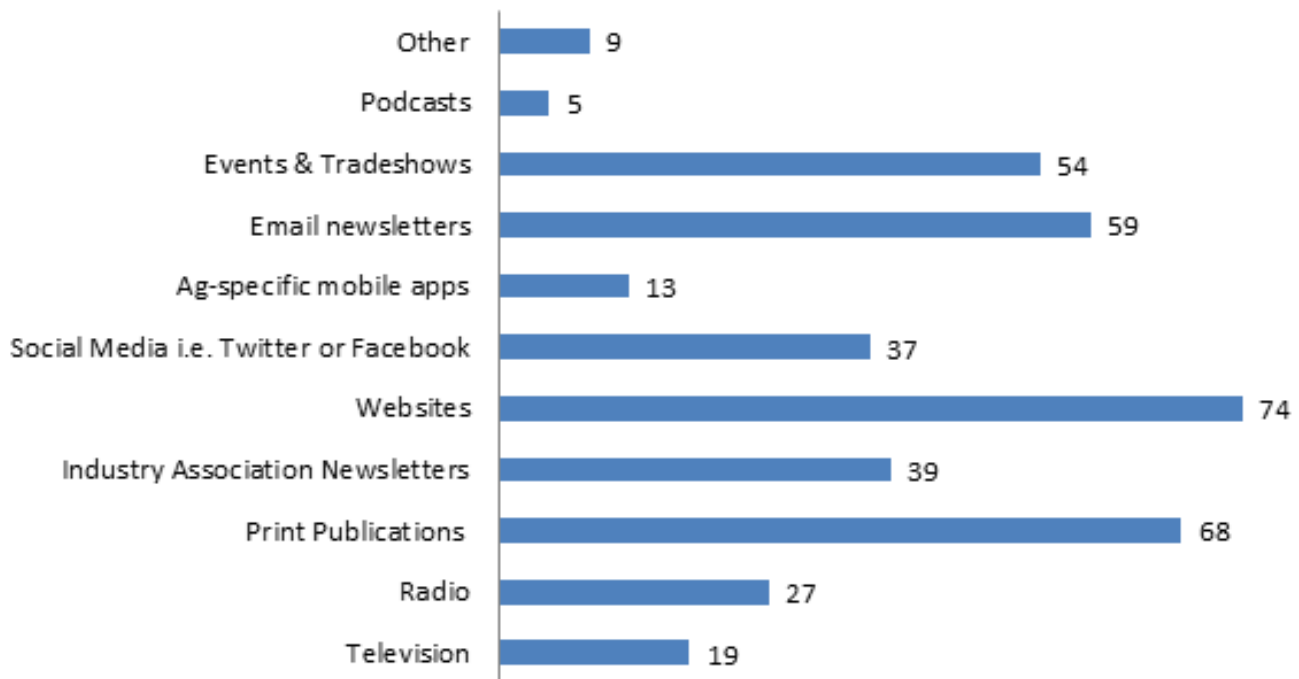
Survey participants were asked to indicate how they access agriculture extension services, not specific to the Ministry, in a series of questions. The survey results suggest that there is no one dominant source of agricultural information. Based on the survey results, as well as comments made in the focus groups, producers expend considerable effort locating information necessary to make decisions about operating their business.

The majority of respondents indicated they use digital and non-digital mediums, and static (e.g. print) and dynamic (e.g. web/social) sources. Younger producers indicated they are more reliant on digital sources of information while older respondents tend to favour non-digital sources of information, including print publications. There was no one dominant social media platform among the respondents, with Twitter, Facebook and YouTube all having a role to play.

The quality of rural internet access was noted as a barrier to the adoption of digital mediums through comments made in the online survey, focus groups and discussions with industry commodity groups.

Primary Sources of Agriculture Business Information

Per cent of Total Responses (N= 615)

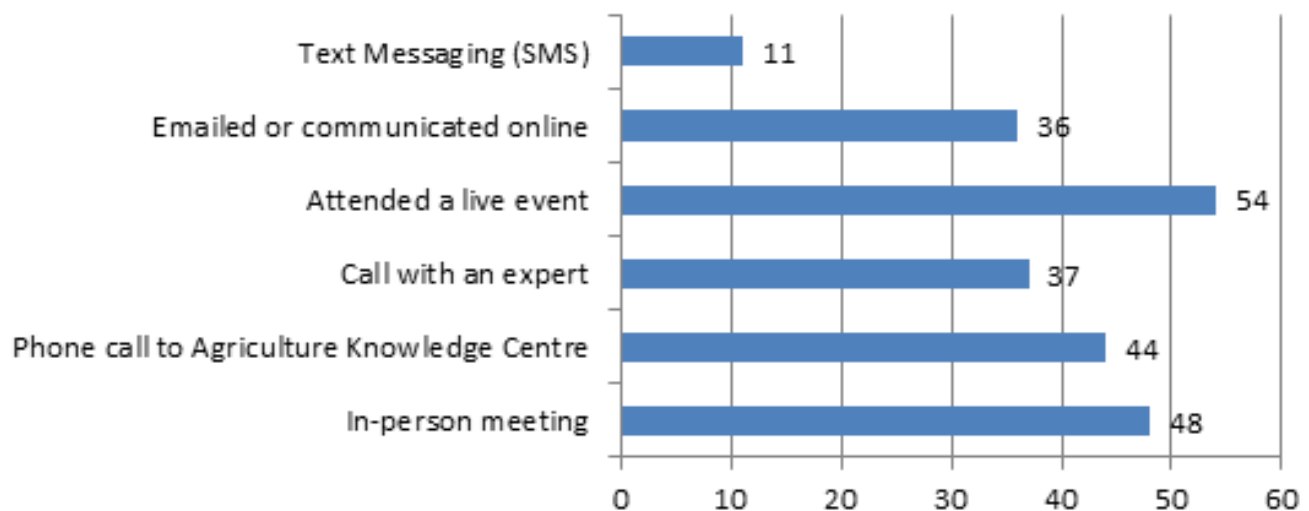


Extension Services Utilization

Almost three-quarters of the survey respondents indicated that they have used the Ministry of Agriculture's extension services. How producers are accessing the Ministry's extension services is evenly distributed across in-person, telephone and digital channels.

Methods of Accessing Ministry's Extension Services

Per cent of Total Responses (N=537)



In terms of utilization, producers have a greater array of information sources available to them than in the past. However, the Ministry is commonly a trusted source across a variety of topic areas, specifically as it relates to the need for unbiased research and production information.

Respondents are generally satisfied with the Ministry’s extension services, being most pleased with the knowledge, helpfulness and responsiveness of staff. They are also satisfied with the hours of operation. The Saskatchewan Agriculture website was the lowest-performing aspect of extension services. Issues related to website usability were also frequently mentioned in open-ended comments.

Criteria	Sample	Average Score (out of 5)	% Satisfied (4 & 5)
Helpfulness and responsiveness of staff	480	3.97	76%
Knowledge and expertise of staff	482	3.87	72%
Hours of operation	445	3.65	61%
Overall satisfaction with the services you received from Saskatchewan Agriculture	496	3.59	60%
Proximity of offices for in-person meetings	442	3.31	46%
Agriview Magazine	414	3.23	44%
Experience of using our website	452	2.91	34%

Opportunities for Extension Services for Saskatchewan Agriculture

The six focus group discussions hosted throughout the province provided the opportunity to further explore what producers identify as present service and information gaps. The focus groups identified the necessity of having an unbiased source of information, the need for enhanced research and technology transfer, better access and understanding of available funding programs and continued agriculture awareness coordination as priorities the province should consider in a future service delivery model.

The focus group participants encouraged these priorities due to what they perceived as a lack of interest by private industry to expand into these areas. The industry commodity groups identified similar priorities and echoed the need for continued access to the unbiased information the Ministry of Agriculture provides.

Many online and focus group participants highlighted the need for improved awareness of the services offered by the Ministry of Agriculture. It was also noted that there is the perception the Ministry is not keeping up with the private sector when it comes to innovative and forward-thinking practices. Some producer and industry groups would prefer the Ministry narrow the scope of their services and offer more specialized expertise.

Delivery mediums were also identified as an area the Ministry could improve, primarily as it relates to printed publications like Agriview. Producers would like to see more timely information in the monthly publication even if it meant that the information was delivered digitally and supplemented with a print feature less frequently throughout the year.

Next Steps

The feedback received throughout the consultation process will help determine how extension services should be delivered by the Ministry of Agriculture. The information will complement the internal analysis and review of existing services. The new delivery model is expected to be in place when the next federal-provincial-territorial agriculture policy framework starts in April 2018.