

2016 County Commissioner Satisfaction Survey: CSU Extension Services in Colorado

Survey Results Summary Report

March 2017



Colorado State University
EXTENSION

Introduction: 2016 County Commissioner Survey

The ninth annual County Commissioner Satisfaction Survey was conducted from September 19 to October 28, 2016. The design and methodology were approved by the CSU Research Integrity and Compliance Review Office in 2012. A five-point scale was used for evaluation. The variables studied included: (1) the quality of programs and services provided by local Extension offices; (2) the expertise and knowledge of Extension personnel; (3) the responsiveness and service level of county Extension personnel; (4) the perceived value to citizens of Extension programs and services; and (5) respondent insights and comments regarding CSU Extension.

Methodology

While the survey was designed by CSU Extension and the Office of the Vice President of Engagement, the survey was conducted by an independent contractor for the Office of Engagement. The confidential survey protocol allowed survey administrators to see which counties did and did not respond. Participants received a letter directly from the Colorado State University President containing the link to take the survey online. A hard copy of the survey and a pre-paid return envelope were also enclosed, offering the choice to complete a paper survey. The letter stressed the importance of the input, the confidential nature of the survey and the voluntary nature of the survey. Roughly two weeks after the initial letter, a second reminder letter and second hard copy survey were sent from the Chief of Staff, Office of the President, only to those counties that did not respond. A final email reminder was sent only to counties that had not yet responded. All results were received, compiled, and analyzed by the independent contractor.

Surveys are sent annually to all Colorado county commissioners/council members in counties where CSU has Extension offices or provides Extension services. The survey cover letter and email, however, recommend that only commissioners who have contact with and/or knowledge of CSU Extension complete the survey. As many counties appoint one commissioner or council member to serve as the Extension liaison, this means that not every commissioner is expected to complete the CSU Extension survey.

Per-county responses (N = 54) are calculated using the mean of all commissioner responses for that county. As begun in 2010, data is reported here as per-county response. Where relevant, commissioner responses (N = 86) are also reported in this document. Each graphic indicates the type of data calculation used.

A total of 210 surveys were sent to all commissioners/council members in counties where CSU has Extension offices or provides Extension services. Commissioners were encouraged to complete the survey if they worked with Extension, or to forward the survey to the appropriate commissioner contact if they did not work personally with Extension. The total number of returned surveys was 86, for an overall response rate of 41%.

The per-county response rate was 89%, with 54 of the 61 counties surveyed by CSU extension responding. San Juan, Lake, and Pitkin counties were not surveyed in 2016. Response rates by region were strong: Front Range region (Front Range urban corridor), 100%; Eastern Peaks and

Plains region (Southeast, Northeast Golden Plains, and the San Luis Valley), 87%; Western region (all Western Slope counties), 84%. Counties that did not respond to the survey were: Baca, Costilla, Mesa, Otero, Ouray, Pueblo and Rio Blanco.

Five additional surveys were received after the postmarked deadline. These surveys were excluded from the following analysis.

Summary of 2016 Survey Results

Overall, commissioners responded favorably to questions about Extension program value and quality, and agent expertise and responsiveness. Comparisons between commissioner level and county level data reveal no statistically significant differences, indicating a trend toward consistent scoring with no extreme highs or lows. Scores tend to form a curve at the positive end of the scale. Comments indicate that lower scores are likely tied to desires for additional services and/or better agent coverage.

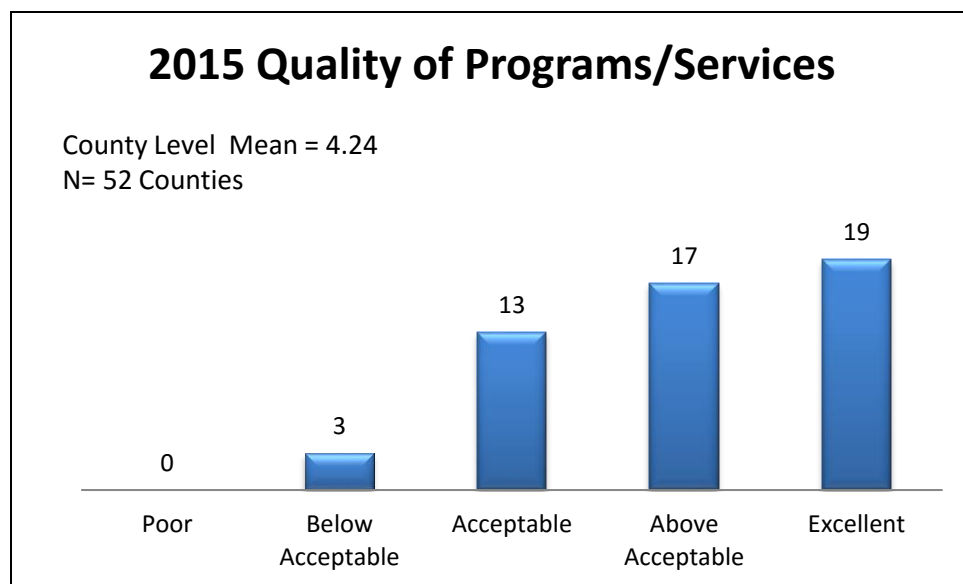
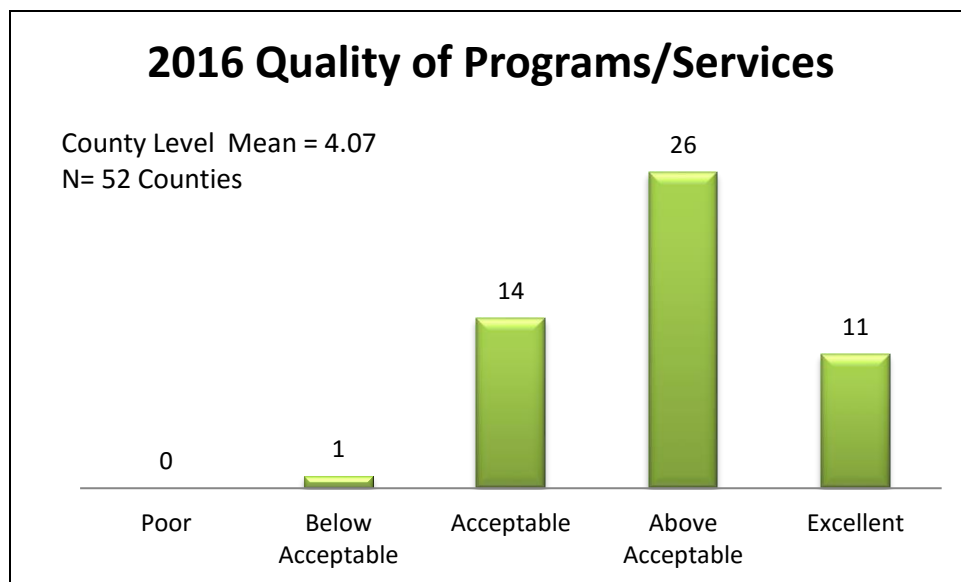
Survey Results: 2015–2016 Key Indicator Comparison of County Responses

As begun in 2010, data is analyzed primarily at the county level. This standardizes any potential systematic bias caused by some counties having a larger number of commissioners respond versus a county in which the Board of Commissioners assigns only one member to respond to the survey. This methodology levels the playing field and allows for a survey of *county attitudes and satisfaction*, rather than *county commissioner* attitudes and satisfaction.

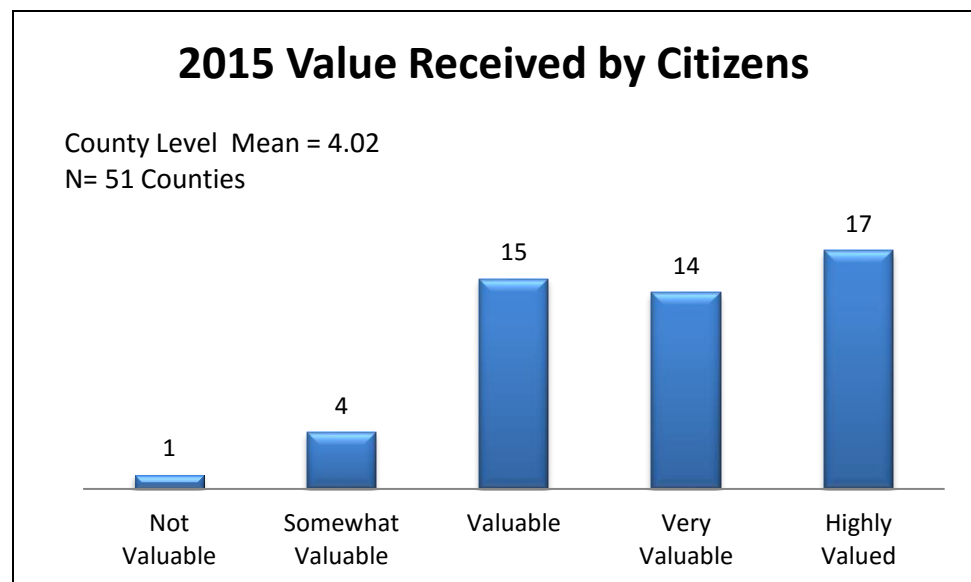
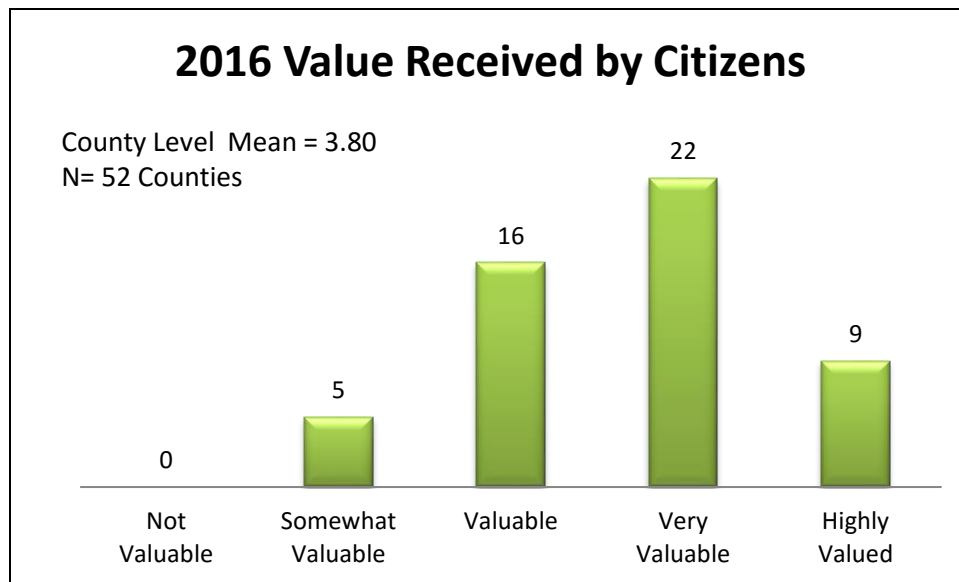
Overall, *counties* responded favorably to questions about program quality, value, responsiveness, and overall satisfaction. We compared 2016 data on four key indicators to 2015 data and found that all four key indicators for quality, responsiveness, value, and overall satisfaction trend slightly lower in 2016, trending toward a 4 on a 5-point scale. These trends can be seen in both the averaged scores and in the graphs of individual responses below. All four scores have trended consistently high since 2012. The 2016 data appears very similar to 2014 results, resulting in a 3-year pattern of small fluctuations at the top end of the scale.

The four key indicators are graphed below for both 2016 and 2015 county responses. This includes the “overall satisfaction” question used to indicate mean satisfaction with CSU Extension.

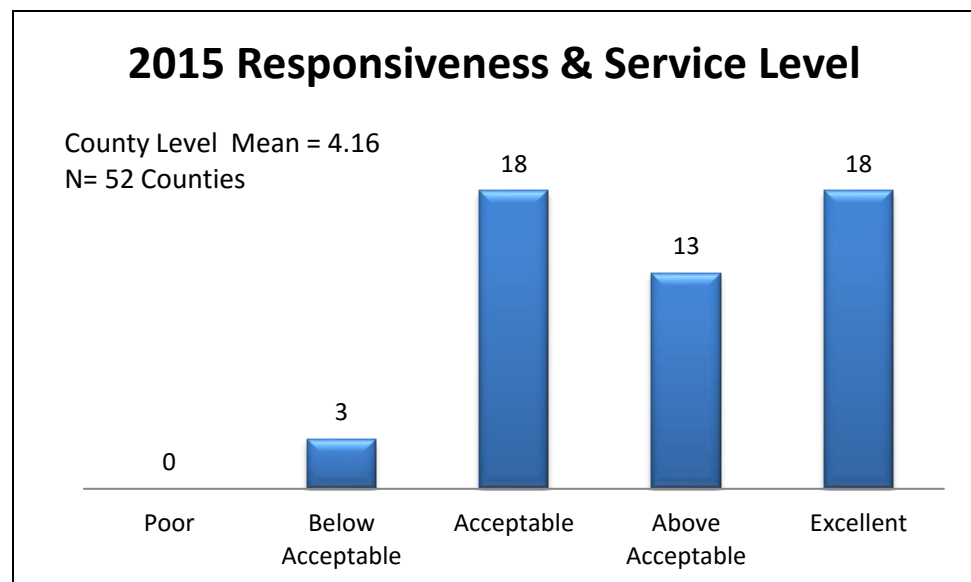
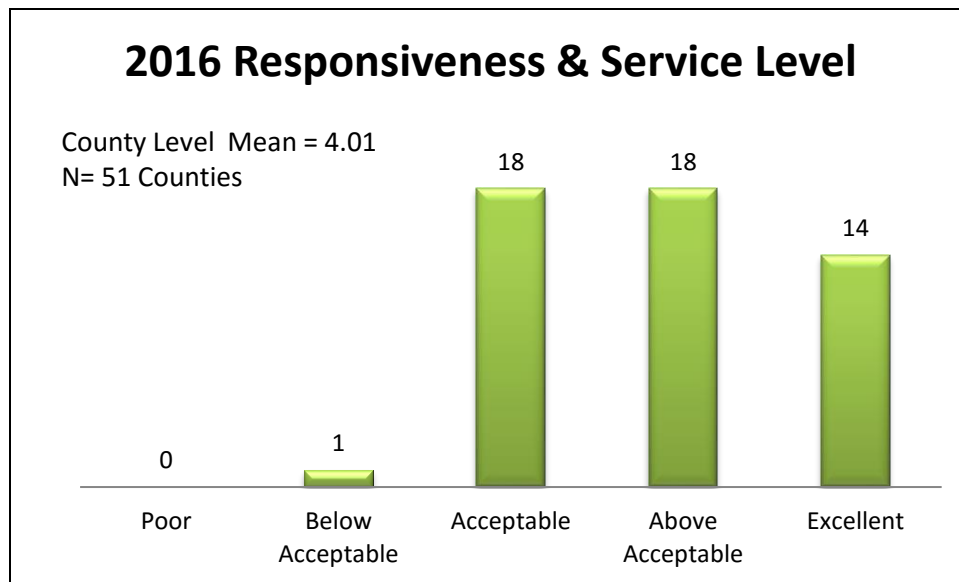
Rate the quality of the programs and services provided from your local Extension office.



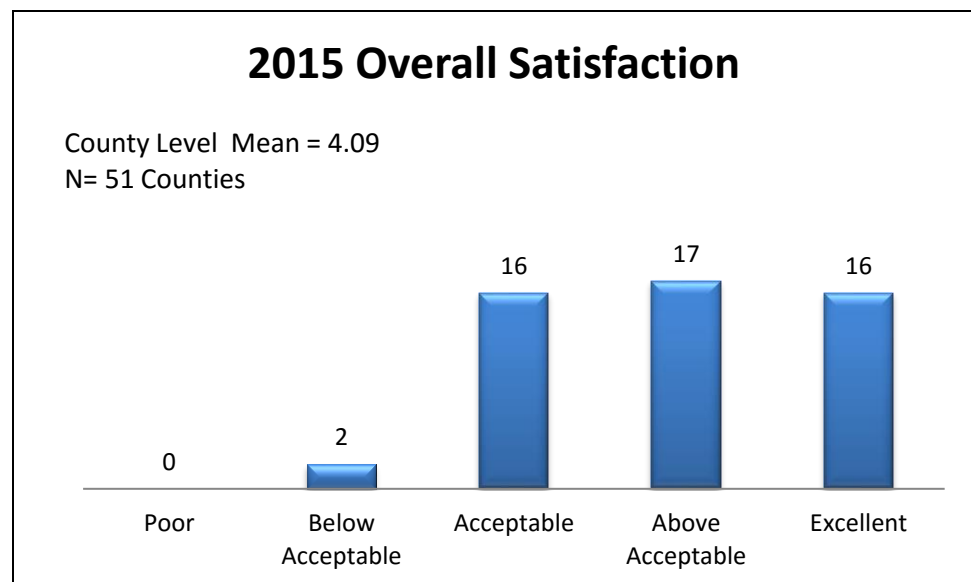
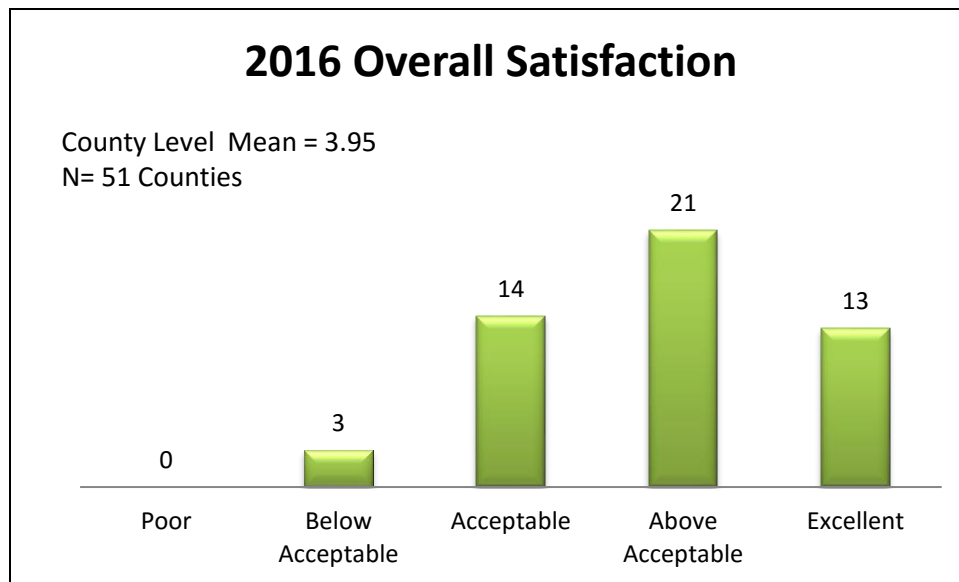
How would you rate the value received by the citizens of your county from programs and services delivered by Extension?



Rate the responsiveness and service level of your county Extension personnel in meeting the needs of your county citizens.

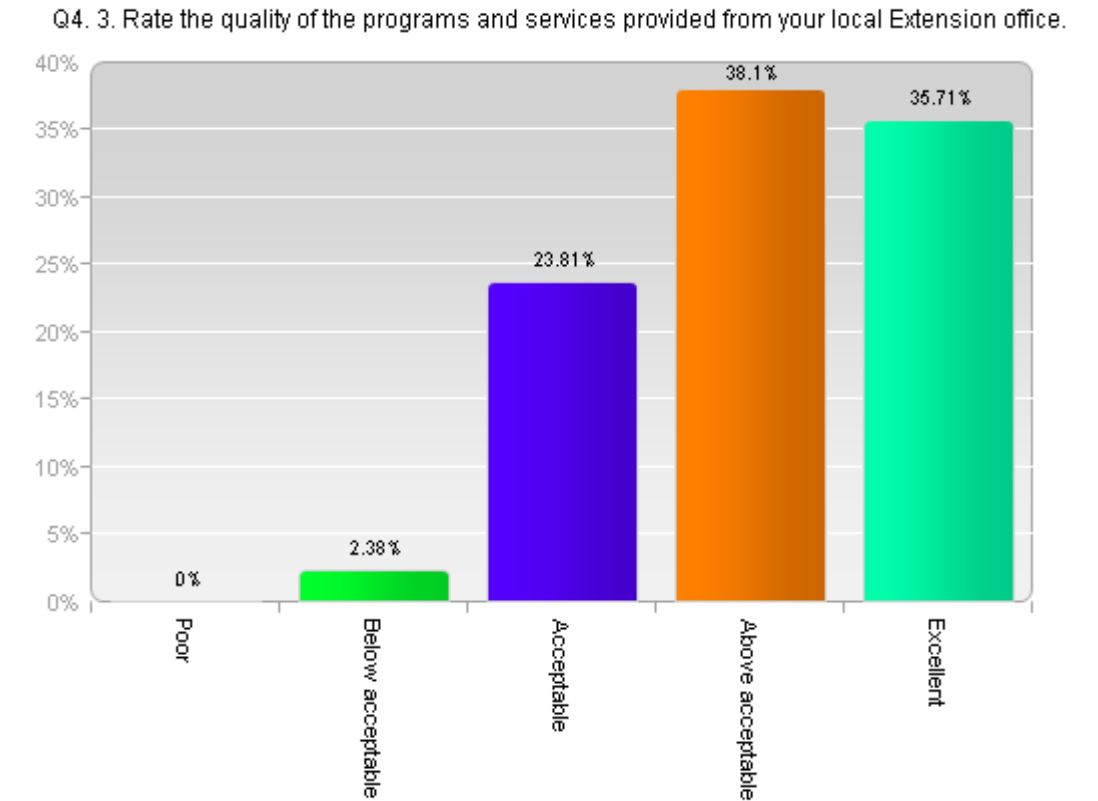


Rate your overall satisfaction with the service the citizens receive from your local county/area Extension office.

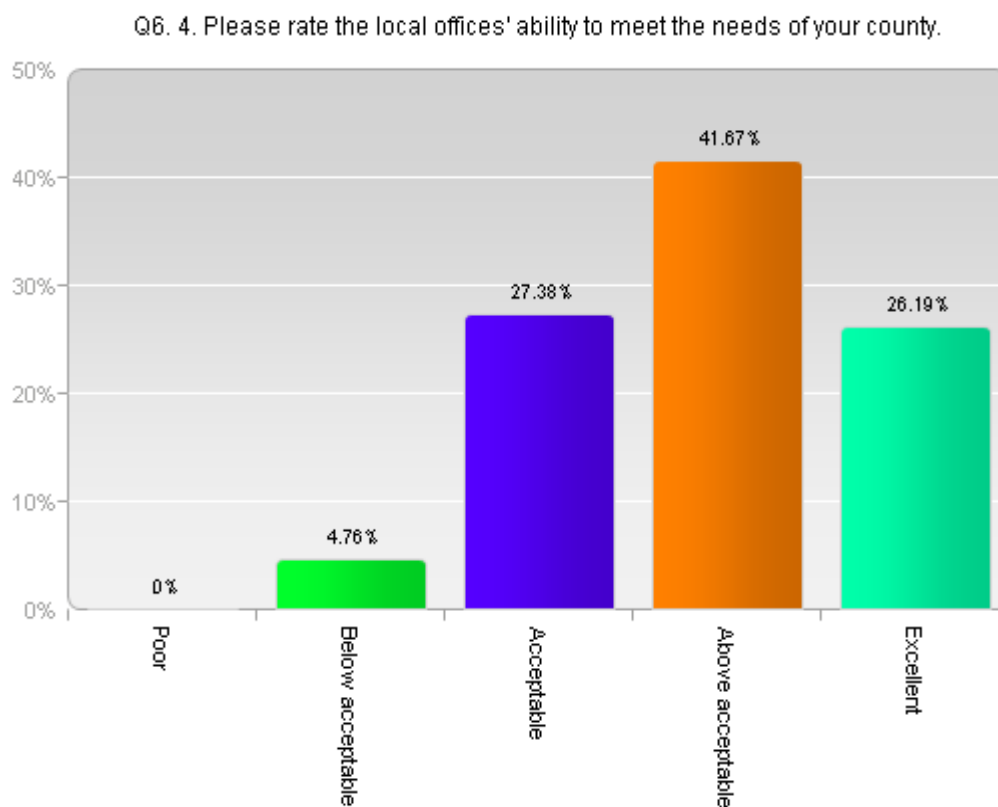


Survey Results: Commissioner Level Data on Program Quality and Agent Ability

As indicated below, commissioner responses were overall positive about CSU Extension program quality and the responsiveness of local agents.

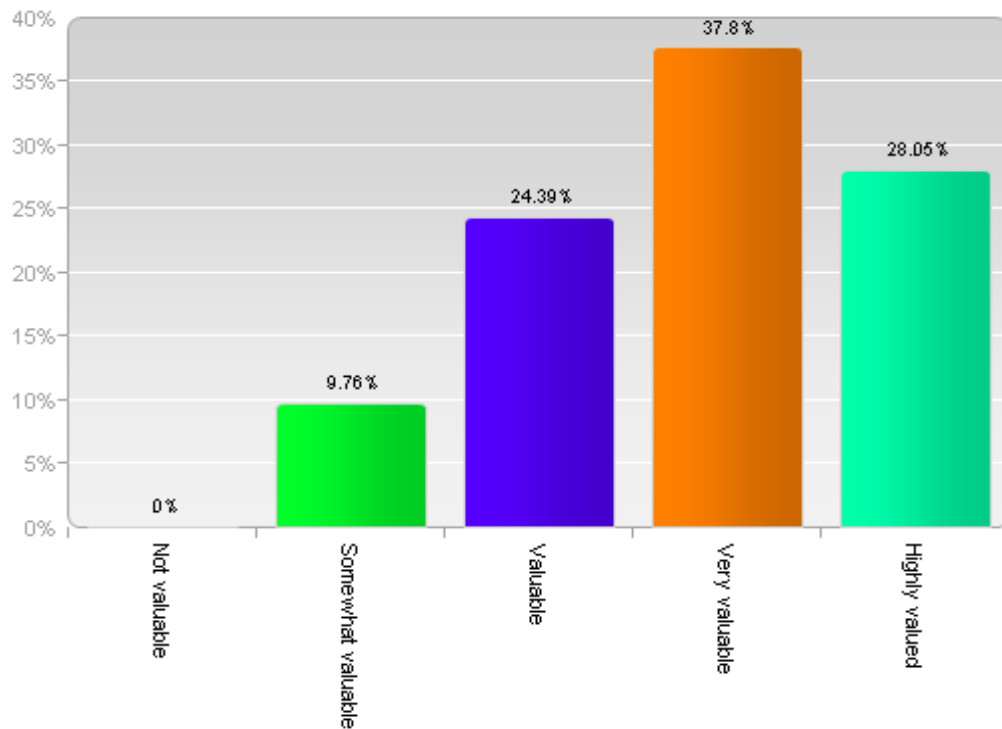


Commissioners rated the **services provided from local Extension office** favorably, with 97.62% rated as acceptable, above acceptable or excellent. As one commissioner commented: "top notch staff, programs that relate directly to what really matters in our community."



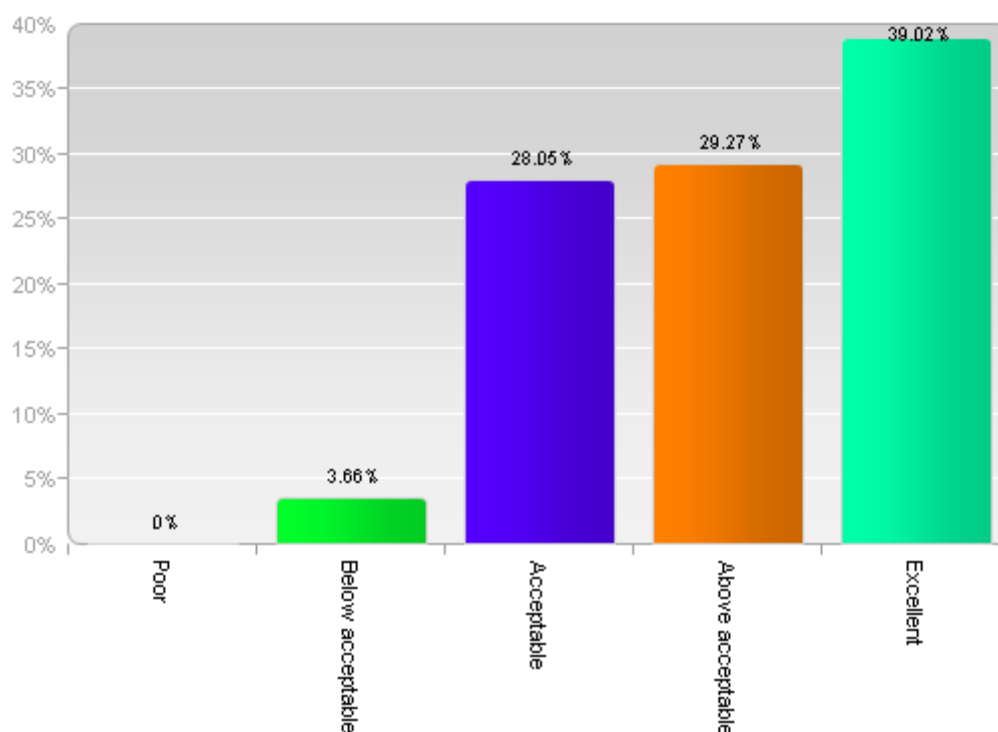
Commissioners were satisfied with the *local offices' ability to meet the needs of each county*, with 95.24% rated acceptable, above acceptable or excellent.

Q8. 5. How would you rate the value received by the citizens of your county from programs and services delivered by Extension?



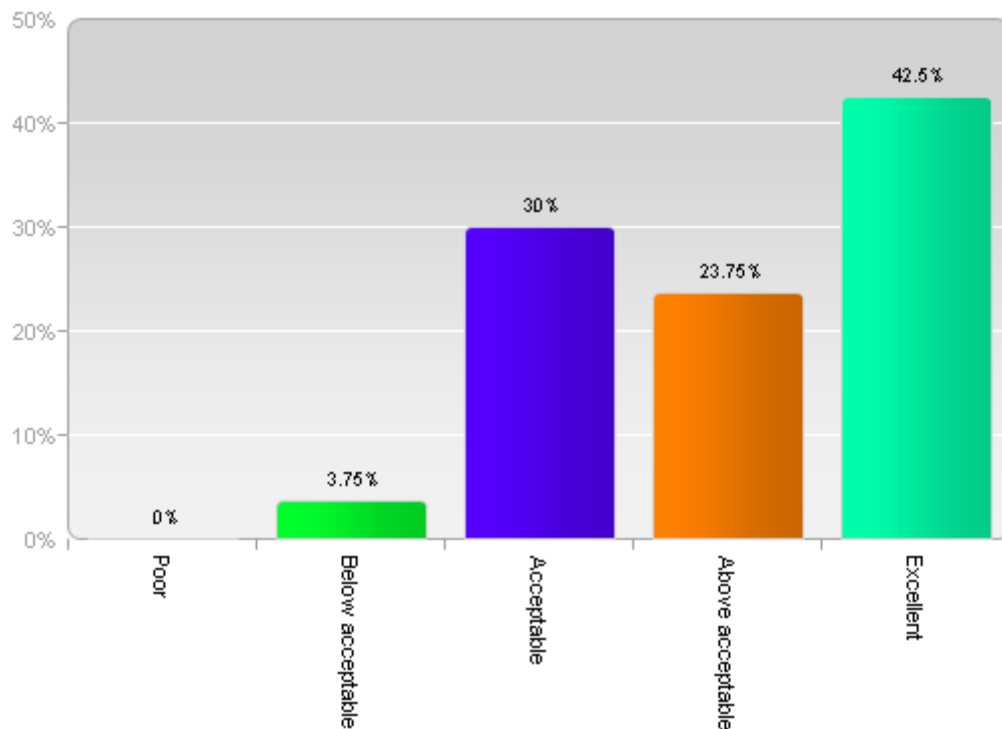
*The **value received** by the citizens from programs and services delivered by Extension was valuable, very valuable or highly valuable according to 90.24% of respondents.*

Q10. 6. Rate the expertise and knowledge of your county Extension personnel in meeting the needs of your county citizens.



Commissioners rated the **expertise and knowledge of Extension personnel** positively, with 96.34% rated as acceptable, above acceptable or excellent. One commissioner comments: "Staff are very knowledgeable in their areas of expertise, and provide a great service to the community."

Q12. 7. Rate the responsiveness and service level of your county Extension personnel in meeting the needs of your county citizens.



*The **responsiveness and service level** of Extension personnel in meeting the needs of citizens was found to be 96.25% acceptable, above acceptable or excellent.*

Regional Results Comparison: Commissioner Level Data

The table below reports commissioner responses divided into the three CSU Extension regions as percentages. As these percentages indicate, the three regions vary in their response trends. The Front Range region trends higher overall, while the Western region (all Western Slope counties) and the Eastern Peaks and Plains region (Southeast, Northeast Golden Plains, and the San Luis Valley) trend lower on all issues. Overall, regions are most satisfied with program quality and agent knowledge; scores trend lower with regard to responsiveness.

2016 Regional Results Comparison									
	Excellent/Above Acceptable			Acceptable			Below Acceptable/Poor		
	Front Range	West	East	Front Range	West	East	Front Range	West	East
Program Quality	85%	68%	72%	10%	32%	25%	5%	0%	3%
Capacity	79%	64%	65%	11%	29%	35%	11%	7%	0%
Value	78%	70%	57%	17%	22%	30%	6%	7%	14%
Knowledge	79%	67%	64%	16%	30%	33%	5%	4%	3%
Responsiveness	72%	65%	64%	22%	31%	33%	6%	4%	3%
Satisfaction	71%	69%	64%	24%	27%	31%	6%	4%	6%

Survey Comments: Kudos and Concerns

Each question on the survey allowed unlimited space for comments. Comments on local agents and offices were generally very positive. Many comments reported leveraging Extension resources to partner with county efforts in fire mitigation, weed control, and human services. Comments also raised concerns about the need to reach non-traditional audiences, and the rising cost of living/housing as a barrier to attracting and retaining agents in some areas.

Praise for Extension Agents and Services

- “Our CSU Extension office is wonderful. Our agents and the others in the office are always responsible and hold themselves to the highest standards. They are accountable not only to the Commissioners but to each program and every citizen. We couldn’t ask for better.”
- “The staff do a great job in addressing the various challenges of a large community. The staff are committed to providing exceptional services and programs.”

- “As a community, we are very proud of what Extension does. They have been the leaders in fire mitigation education and action, and STEM programming. The community loves all of the programs and are thirsty for more.”
- “Our County Community Services division works with CSU programs in nutrition programs, health issues, household management and education.”

Concerns: Appropriate Programming, Outreach, and Resources

- “As an “Ag” community the programs are very valuable. However a significant portion of our county can NOT relate to agricultural programs so they don’t see the services as valuable. To those who use Extension, it is incredible, others don’t understand why we spend money here. I’d like to find those other programs and showcase them to our community. If we successfully do that I believe Extension will become “Highly Valued” across much more of our county.”
- “Most citizens aren’t aware that Extension exists. Collectively we need to do a better job of education and marketing about Extension programs.”
- “I fear losing Extension staff as their salaries become increasingly out of sync with rising costs of living.”
- “We have been able to meet the budget demands to enjoy the services provided. As many of our counties continue to see declining tax revenues, there may come a time when we will be forced to cut back on some of the services we see today.”

Recommendations from Respondents

- “There is a growing focus on local food and organic farming in our county. We could use more help and focus from Extension in these areas to meet this demand – e.g., research on cropping techniques, emerging local markets for organic & natural crops & products.”
- “I would like to see improved coordination from CSU with human services and the County Health Department.”
- “Fill all positions, at all levels, with qualified staff. Job vacancies leave holes in the organization and their ability to perform.”
- “We need to figure out how to engage more of the urban population in Extension programs since that’s where the bulk of residents live.”
- “We know that CSU has a great Ag program, however I believe CSU has many excellent non Ag programs we could benefit from. For example, CSU is a leading university in “green” energy – Is there a way Extension could help us as a county lead in this area?”

Conclusion

Although numeric ratings fell slightly from 2015, the 2016 survey data indicate that commissioners feel positively about their agents and are highly satisfied with CSU Extension. Current county revenues continue to be based on property values that lowered during the recession and on severance taxes on the Western Slope. While we cannot draw associations between county revenues and views of Extension, we know that counties are facing tough decisions regarding budget priorities.

The Office of Engagement is working with CSU Extension to address issues raised and recommendations from respondents. This report will be made publicly available on the CSU website, through the CSU Extension and VP Engagement web pages. A link to the report is also mailed to all survey participants. The survey results are shared with CSU Extension program leaders and regional directors, to be used in planning and recommendations for 2018.