

**Cooperative Extension**  
**University of Wisconsin-Extension**

***GUIDELINES FOR COUNTY AGENT SPECIALIZATION***

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In their several roles as county-based University of Wisconsin faculty, county agents require increasingly enhanced subject matter competency as well as strong teaching and group process skills. Agent specialization within a limited content or process area can be a way to heighten skills, increasing both the quality of programming and the efficiency of Extension delivery. With specialization, agents can take advantage of advanced professional development and applied research opportunities. The system can benefit from sharing specialized agents across counties.

Specialization is not appropriate for all agents or all programs. Consequently, Cooperative Extension will not mandate agent specialization. But Cooperative Extension will encourage specialization where it is appropriate and facilitate agents' acquiring and maintaining specialized skills. The following guidelines, which will evolve as experience is gained, provide general administrative direction for agent specialization.

1. Agent specialization within defined core areas is appropriate and will be encouraged under the following conditions:
  - a. Where there is a clear, strong customer expectation that the exclusive or primary responsibility of an agent is to provide research-based information and advice of a technical nature.
  - b. Where there is a clear common interest among adjacent or near-by counties in specialization and a clear willingness to share specialized agents in order to maximize benefits.
  - c. Where agents have a strong interest in specialization.
  - d. Where there is an adequate and committed specialist base to support agent specialization.
2. In addition to specialization within a core area, hiring or developing a uniquely specialized agent may be appropriate where a specific problem or issue demands local expertise of a highly specialized nature. In such cases, specialist support may be from other institutions.
3. District resource management plans should identify positions that will be filled by specialized agents.
4. Cooperative Extension must identify a limited set of core specialties that will be supported. These should be developed within program areas by academic departments, but should recognize cross-program area specializations. Core specialties may include process as well

as content capacity.

5. The following are essential elements of the specialization process:
  - a. Agents who want to specialize must develop a plan for attaining and maintaining requisite skill levels.
  - b. Cooperative Extension must identify appropriate professional development opportunities and provide funds for facilitating specialization.
  - c. UW campuses and campus-based specialists must be willing and able to provide appropriate educational experiences, including on-campus collaborative experiences with specialists and research faculty, to support agent specialization.
6. Specialized agents are expected to devote a significant portion of time to their specialized area, but they will continue to perform more general duties as appropriate to their assignment.
7. Specialization must not occur in a way that might weaken Cooperative Extension's strong county support base. In particular, Cooperative Extension must maintain a physical presence in counties. However, in appropriate circumstances, specialized agents may be located at a facility that promotes their specialization.
8. Specialization must be accomplished in a way that is complementary with other educational/information providers and that recognizes the public good nature of Extension education.