

RESULTS

Demographic and Descriptive Characteristics of Participants and their Extension Units and Communities

Participation in the PAEP was voluntary. Position announcements were sent to all states and distributed in various ways within states. Some organizations were more proactive in sending announcements to select individuals and inviting participation, other organizations just responded when interest was shown. This recruitment process resulted in very different patterns of participation across the extension system and in a cadre of participants from very diverse backgrounds with differing sets of attributes.

Profile of Participants

The participants in this study were the group of extension professionals who worked in Poland for six months or more on assignments in individual ODR offices. This population was very well represented in this study. Out of 70 possible respondents, 67 persons contributed to the study (96% response rate) by providing data through the mail survey questionnaire. Of those participating, 78 percent were males and 22 percent were females. Married participants accounted for 73 percent; while 27 percent were separated, divorced, widowed or single. In total, 41 of the 48 married participants had family members accompany them on the assignment. Additionally, 69 percent of participants had visitors from the U.S. while on assignment. The group was very well educated as 54 percent of the participants had or were in the process of obtaining a Masters degree, 43 percent had or were in the process of obtaining a Doctorate degree, and only 3 percent represented professionals with Bachelor degrees (Table 1). This educational distribution would be typical of extension professionals given that both campus and field-based staff were involved. The group represented a wide range of ages, although the majority (61%) was 50 or older. The average time of employment with extension was 19 years and ranged from one to forty years (Table 1).

Demographics of Participants' Extension Unit and Locality

The majority of the participants (60%) were county-based while 40 percent were university-based. The rural-urban mix of their home unit was slightly more likely to be rural with 39 percent representing rural areas, another 39 percent representing mixed rural and urban areas, with 15 percent representing urban areas (Table 2).

Geographic job coverage ranged from 1/3 state coverage, 1/3 county coverage, and 1/3 district, regional or multi-county coverage. The position breakdown of participants' immediate supervisors reflects the geographic coverage of their roles: 35 percent reported to regional directors; 35 percent reported to department heads; 18 percent reported to county extension directors; and 5 percent and 8 percent respectively reported to a dean for extension or an "other" category. Agriculture (74%) was the primary extension program responsibility due to the nature of the PAEP. Other program responsibility areas included family and consumer sciences at 8 percent; community development at 8 percent; natural resources at 3 percent; 4-H and youth at 2 percent; and other areas approximately 5 percent (Table 2). As far as can be documented, this project included the largest number of female and non-agriculturally trained personnel of any international technical assistance project organized within the Land Grant System.

Table 1. Demographic and Educational Characteristics of Polish-American Extension Project Participants.

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	52	77.6
Female	$\frac{15}{67}$	$\frac{22.4}{100.0}$
Martial Status		
Married	48	72.7
Separated/Divorced/Widowed	10	15.2
Single	$\frac{8}{66}$	$\frac{12.1}{100.0}$
Highest Educational Level		
Bachelors	2	3.0
Masters in progress or completed	36	53.7
Doctorate in progress or completed	$\frac{29}{67}$	$\frac{43.3}{100.0}$
Age of Participant		
30-39	10	14.9
40-49	16	23.9
50-59	25	37.3
60-69	15	22.4
Over 69	$\frac{1}{67}$	$\frac{1.5}{100.0}$
Years of Employment with Extension		
Mean = 19.22; SD = 9.35; Min.=1;	Max. = 40; Mode =	12

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Polish-American Extension Project Participants' Assigned Extension Unit.

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Assigned Extension Unit		
County	38	58.5
Academic department	23	35.4
Administrative unit	4	6.2
	<u>65</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Extension Unit Demographics		
Mostly rural	26	39.4
Mostly urban	10	15.2
Mixed	26	39.4
Not applicable	4	6.1
	<u>66</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Geographic Job Coverage of Participant		
County	22	33.3
Multi-county	13	19.7
District or region	9	13.6
State	22	33.3
	<u>66</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Primary Program Responsibility		
Agriculture	45	73.8
Family and Consumer Sciences	5	8.2
4-H and Youth	1	1.6
Community Development	5	8.2
Natural Resources	2	3.3
Other	3	4.9
	<u>61</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Title of Immediate Supervisor		
County Extension Director	12	18.2
Regional Director	23	34.8
Department Head	23	34.8
Dean for Extension	3	4.5
Other	5	7.6
	<u>66</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Respondents described the characteristics of the local communities from which the participants lived and worked as moderately responsive to international involvements. Generally 55 percent of the communities were judged to be *slightly* to *somewhat* identified by the ethnic backgrounds of the population, and 68 percent could be considered *slightly* to *somewhat* economically stressed. A mix of global awareness was noted among home communities. Only 7.5 percent felt that their communities were *very open* to global issues and international involvement; whereas, 66 percent were perceived to be *somewhat open* or *neutral* and 28 percent were *somewhat* or *very closed* (Table 3).

Prior International Interests and Experiences of Participants

The group of Extension professionals who participated in PAEP varied in their past international experiences and interests. Overall they could be considered to have limited international experience. Over half of the group reported having traveled abroad (53%) and less than half (42%) indicated that they had lived or worked abroad. For the majority, this was their first in-depth international experience. When combining ratings of *extensive* and *some*, individuals rated their prior experiences and interests as follows; interest in international activities (87%) was widespread, although participation in professional development about international activities (58%) was more limited. Interest in developing foreign language skills (51%) was rather high although only 24 percent indicated that they had foreign language skills.

A modest number had experience in hosting exchange groups in the U.S. (39%), and in programming with extension audiences about international issues (39%), although fewer reported participation in civic, professional, church or social groups with international interests (28%). Less than one quarter of the group included foreign nationals in extension programming (22%) or had experience in traveling with or chaperoning extension groups aboard (15%). In general, these professionals were motivated and interested in international activities, but had little international experience (Table 4).

International Exposure of Extension Units

The Extension professionals who participated in the PAEP came from communities and Extension units with limited international experience. The overall rating for the experience of the Extension unit with international activities had a mean of 1.93 on a four-point scale, meaning that only a few (2-5) instances of international exposure had been realized. The types of international exposure included some experience with hosting visitors and involving international students in programming and a few experiences of involving youth in international exchanges, staff taking international assignments and receiving announcements or reports of international activities. Extension units were not likely to receive staff development activities or resources related to international interests. Respondents judged that on the average, approximately 1/3 of the professional staff in the county units were internationally involved (Crago, 1998, pp. 46-48).

These estimates of limited international experience were verified by administrators during the on-site interviews. "There has been a moderate level of involvement in international projects. For the most part, projects have included only state and regional specialists. County agents are not usually involved." "Until our county agent went to Poland, there was very limited activity of any Extension agents in international programs."

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of Polish-American Extension Project Participants' Locality during the Assignment.

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Level of ethnic identity of the participants' local community		
Very much	11	16.4
Somewhat	17	25.4
Slight	20	29.9
None	<u>19</u>	<u>28.4</u>
	<u>67</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Degree of local community economic stress		
Very much	4	6.2
Somewhat	24	36.9
Slight	22	33.8
Not evident	<u>15</u>	<u>23.1</u>
	<u>65</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Nature of global awareness among the local community		
Very open and aware	5	7.5
Somewhat open and aware	28	41.8
Neutral, equally open and closed	15	22.4
Somewhat closed	14	20.9
Very closed	<u>5</u>	<u>7.5</u>
	<u>67</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Table 4. International Interests and Experiences of American Extension Professionals Prior to Participation in the Polish/American Extension Project.

	<u>Extent of Interest and Experience</u>				Mean*	S.D.
	<u>Extensive/Some</u>		<u>Slight/None</u>			
	N	%	N	%		
Interest in international activities	58	86.6	9	13.4	3.24	0.72
Other experience in traveling abroad	35	53.0	31	46.9	2.42	1.18
Interest in developing foreign language skills	34	50.7	33	49.3	3.42	0.94
Participation in professional development about international activities	28	41.8	39	58.2	2.57	1.06
Experience living and working abroad	28	41.8	39	58.2	2.28	1.18
Experience hosting exchange groups in the U.S.	26	38.8	41	61.2	2.13	0.90
Participation in civic/professional/church/social groups with international interests	18	27.7	47	72.3	1.99	1.01
Foreign language skills	16	23.9	51	76.1	1.93	0.93
Inclusion of foreign nationals in extension programming	14	21.5	51	78.5	1.79	0.89
Experience in traveling with or chaperoning extension groups abroad	10	15.0	57	85.0	1.48	0.93

*Scores could theoretically range from a low of 1 to a high of 4.

Nature of Assignment in Poland: Similarity of Roles

When participants were asked to rate the degree to which their role in Poland compared to their stateside role in Extension, most responded that their roles were similar (mean of 3.34 to 3.43 on a 4-point scale). Most similar were the *people skills required*, *the degree of autonomy and independence* and *the technical skills required*. Less similar were *content area responsibilities* and *client groups served* (means of 3.11 to 2.70 on a 4-point scale). Participants provided a list of the typical roles that they assumed in Poland. These roles would be similar to roles of extension agents in the U.S. however, in Poland, agents often were stretched. In Poland they assumed responsibilities independently for activities that others would assist with or undertake in their offices at home. These roles included:

- Program development and evaluation including strategic and annual program planning processes and establishing advisory groups.
- Educator roles such as serving as advisors, mentors or consultants to staff or clientele.
- Production of educational programs, news articles, fact sheets and media releases.
- Computer training and software development.
- Developing marketing plans, business analysis training, business plan development, product promotions and working with cooperatives.
- Teaching about extension methods, teaching methods and demonstration design.
- Conducting leadership and administrative training.
- Building linkages with other educational, research or business related groups.
- Assisting in organizing a variety of programs in areas such as youth development, family living, nutrition, home based business, horticulture, agricultural based tourism, community development, volunteerism, family financial management, water quality or community leadership development.

What Extension professionals liked best about their assignment included in rank order:

- Their ability to take personal initiative (means of 4.6 and 4.3 on 5 point scale).
- The orientation provided in Washington D.C. and Warsaw (means of 3.97 and 3.84 on a 5 point scale).
- The support of U.S. counterparts and U.S. technical resources (means of 3.88 and 3.82 on a 5 point scale).

Ease of Working in Poland

Participants found it relatively easy for them to work with Polish counterparts, translators and administrators (means of 4.00 to 4.47 on 5 point scale), but more difficult to work with local leaders in Polish communities (mean of 3.75 on 5 point scale). Concerning the ‘*openness to change*’ of Polish people, participants rated local families (mean 3.42 on 4 point scale) as more open to change than Polish Extension ODR staff (3.10) or local officials (2.98).

Participant Satisfaction

Participants were extremely satisfied with their assignment on the Polish-American Extension Project. Of a possible ten-point satisfaction scale ranging from 1 (*very dissatisfied*) to 5 (*neutral*) to 10 (*very satisfied*), respondents rated the assignment 9.29 or *very satisfied*. Most participants (48%) rated the experience 10, and another 42 percent rated it 9, demonstrating an extremely high rate of participant satisfaction with the international assignment ($m = 9.29/\text{std. dev. } 1.02$). Written comments, anecdotal reports, and data obtained from random on-site visits serve to substantiate these findings. Their satisfaction was reflected in the large number who would take another international assignment (51% *responded definitely*), and who would recommend an international assignment to others (85% *responded definitely*)!

Generally participants felt that they were successful in their work in Poland. Based on mean ratings in descending order, participants felt most successful in: *modeling and sharing of skills* (mean of 3.56 on a 4 point scale), *contributing to programming* (3.52), *creating a climate for change* (3.37), *introducing innovations* (3.31), and *enhancing staff creativity* (3.16).

Support, Visibility and Interactions with Local Units

Participants were generally satisfied with the level of support for the international assignment received within the United States among family, friends, colleagues and their organizations. Mean scores from a five-point satisfaction scale, revealed the following ratings (from highest to lowest): family and friends, 4.69; USDA staff in Washington, DC, 4.42; local U.S. citizens, 4.33; community members (churches and civic groups), 4.02; state extension systems, 3.99, and; colleagues in the home office, 3.95 (Table 5). It is interesting to note that the Extension organization itself, both at the state and county level were perceived to be less supportive than family, friends and clientele!

In terms of barriers or negative pressures a similar pattern was noted. The overall rating across five items had a mean of 1.73 (s.d. .64) on a five-point scale, meaning there was only slight negative pressure. Barriers were more likely to be perceived as coming from peers, colleagues and administrators rather than from family, clientele or local supporters. Often times these perceived negative pressures resulted from concerns for program coverage. As most Extension offices across the U.S. had experienced severe downsizing, these concerns might be justified. The mean averages to barriers from lowest to highest, based on a five-point scale were: family, 1.52; extension supporters, 1.68; clientele, 1.71; extension administration, 1.86, and; peers and colleagues, 1.92. The greatest standard deviations were also observed among extension administration (1.18), and peers and colleagues (1.26) depicting variable pressures and attitudes for PAEP participants within the organization (Table 6). In general participants felt that their organizations were supportive but not proactive or encouraging.

These perceptions that the organization was ambivalent about international assignments can be verified in participant interviews. For instance, participants remarked, "I really don't think [our Extension administration] gives a lot of thought to international." "I would say my colleagues were somewhat indifferent to it, supportive but indifferent." "I think most people [Extension staff] are more concerned about local issues and see international activities very distant and very unimportant." Among coworkers these same themes were repeated. "I think a lot of people are indifferent, don't care one way or the other. I say the majority are positive." "It is essential to be positive. We are living in a global society, we owe it to our clientele." "There were mixed feelings. You had some people that thought he should've been back here taking care of business here. But, then, you know there were people out in the community that thought it was real good."

Table 5. Participant Satisfaction with Domestic Support for the International Assignment in Poland.

Source	Mean*	Std. Dev.	Rank
Family and Friends	4.69	0.68	1
USDA staff in Washington, DC	4.42	0.63	2
Local U.S. Citizens	4.33	0.78	3
Community members (church, civic groups, etc.)	4.02	0.99	4
State Extension System	3.99	1.12	5
Colleagues in home office	3.95	1.28	6

*Mean computed on a scale that ranged from 1 = Not at all satisfied; 2 = Somewhat satisfied; 3 = Slightly satisfied; 4 = Satisfied; to 5 = Very satisfied.

Table 6. Level of Perceived Barriers, Pressures and Negative Attitudes toward Participation in the Polish-American Extension Project.

Source	Perceived level					Mean*	Std. Dev.
	None	Slight	Some	Moderate	Very Much		
Peers and colleagues	53.1	23.4	9.4	6.3	7.8	1.92	1.26
Extension administration	56.1	18.2	12.1	10.6	3.0	1.86	1.18
Clientele	50.8	3.2	15.4	3.1	Ñ	1.71	0.84
Extension supporters	53.8	32.3	9.2	1.5	3.1	1.68	0.94
Family	63.6	24.2	9.1	3.0	Ñ	1.52	0.79

* Mean was computed from the five-point scale of 1 = None; 2 = Slight; 3 = Some; 4 = Moderate; and 5 = Very much -- perceived barriers, pressures or negative attitudes.

Even Extension administrator comments during the on-site interviews reflected mixed messages. “The contributions of universities to these programs is not generally recognized.” “I think the experiences of an individual that went on an international trip would be good if they could apply some of those experiences back in the county or local area. That would make it a positive experience.” “It offers our faculty an opportunity to experience different parts of the world. It helps to build the reputation of the University.” “We’re just trying to reorganize and getting ourselves together, and we’ve had so much downsizing and things. I don’t think we have a stable enough base in some ways to start into it [international programming].” “[I’m] between positive and indifferent. I guess it would be what an individual would desire. I think it is a positive thing...if you desire to do that type of Extension work.”

Factors Concerning the Participation in an International Assignment

A number of factors were listed in the questionnaire reflecting attitudes within the U.S. Extension system concerning the participation in an international assignment. A rating scale of five points reflected *very negative attitudes* (1) *not sure or neutral* (3) *very positive attitudes* (5). Mean ratings suggest that most factors fell within a neutral to positive attitude. Most positive was *guaranteed continued employment and benefits upon return* (mean of 4.48) followed by slightly positive attitudes such as *viewed as enhancing professional development* and *having pride in being selected* (means of 3.93 and 3.92 respectively). The international experience was perceived as *providing value to the whole organization* (mean 3.63) and as *enhancing career opportunities* (mean 3.44) at a slightly positive level. Some slightly negative attitudes also were perceived: an assignment as *inhibiting your career or inhibiting local extension programming* (means of 2.75 and 2.73, respectively). At least these negative attitudes were identified as being negative! However the item, *valued in performance appraisal* (mean 3.05) was viewed as neutral or not sure, thus reflecting the potential ambivalence of the organization toward the international assignment. Interviewees also noted this ambivalence, in that the international assignment was not considered in professional performance reviews. One participant noted during the on-site interviews, “It [the international assignment] was considered “dead time” by my former supervisor. It didn’t count towards anything. Since that time I have included the project in a promotion package.” However another participant noted, “That international work and recognition...I think was a significant part of why I received the promotion.” “We were in a transition period and I was just not present and accounted for. Not negative, not positive, just total indifference.” However, recognition of this void was mentioned by one administrator, “I think revision of the evaluation instrument will give us an opportunity to be sure that these kinds of things are a part of the acknowledgment system on a yearly basis. So I think we are making improvements.”

Importance for Extension to Support International Efforts

A scale that has been used in other studies was inserted in the questionnaire to inquire as to the importance for Extension systems to provide support for international involvements. The overall mean for this four item scale was 3.28 (s.d. 0.61) between *somewhat important* and *very important*, a very high rating overall. Based on the combined percentage of those noting an *important* or *very important* role for Extension, the largest percent recognized the importance for *Universities to participate in international exchanges and cooperation* (91%). A slightly lesser percent noted *the importance of clarifying public awareness of the University’s role in international activities* (81%). Finally, the *incorporation of international dimensions into regular programming* (72%) and *preparing agents for work in developing countries* was viewed as important by 69 percent. All of these ratings were higher than reflected in an eleven-state survey of extension field staff conducted in 1986 (Andrews & Lambur, 1986). Differences of 4 to 14 percentage points existed, with this group of participants having higher ratings than the general population of agents in 1988.

Community and Organizational Awareness of the International Assignment

Awareness or visibility of the international assignment was variable. Most awareness was among the organization and close associates. There was less awareness perceived the further removed one was from the organization. Based upon a five-point overall awareness scale mean values consisted of 3.60 (s.d. .86) or somewhat to moderately aware. Individual items were rated as highly aware--immediate office or department, 4.64; slightly less aware were extension clientele, 3.74, and the entire extension system, 3.59. Extension advisory groups and leaders, 3.43, and professional associates outside Extension, 3.22 were rated the next most likely to be aware and lastly, local citizens and community groups, 2.95 were rated slightly aware (Table 7).

Awareness of the international assignment was primarily via self-promotion and the organizational grapevine whereas Extension initiated actions and local media was used less. Mean values of methods utilized derived from a three-point utilization scale are: participant, 2.65; grapevine, 2.34; immediate extension office, 2.30; entire Extension system, 2.03, and the local media, 1.98 (Table 8). Participants perceived the ease of gaining visibility about the assignment as being easy (mean of 2.99 on 4 point scale), but that it depended on their own initiative. Office and organizational initiative in gaining visibility was rated at 2.16 or between “*not very*” and “*some*” extent of involvement.

Extent of Interaction while on Assignment

While participants were on the international assignment, a moderate amount of communication and interaction occurred with their home units (Table 9). This consisted of e-mail, fax, telephone, and surface mail. Extent of interaction and its actual initiation varied among individuals as noted through the questionnaire. A five-point scale of extent of interaction with people back home was used to quantify this effort. The overall scale had a mean of 3.12 (s.d. .74) indicating a level of “*some*” on a 5-point scale. The highest rated area pertained to taking slides and notes for explaining the international assignment to U.S. clientele. A mean of 4.36 indicated a very high level of interaction in this area. Means for the categories, receiving resources when requested (3.49) and receiving communication or responses from the Extension organization (3.15) were rated at “*somewhat*” to “*quite a bit*”. Ratings of “*little*” to “*some*” interaction were reserved for involving colleagues in the work in Poland and sending newsletter or news release material for audiences back home (means of 2.92 and 2.62). The least interaction came from Extension office initiated communications (2.20)! Although actual interactions were limited, most participants and administrators were satisfied with the level of interaction. One coworker noted, “There could have been more interactions, but we were both busy and didn’t need any extra work. If we would have planned more interactions, we probably would have carried it out.” And another noted, “I’d say almost on a weekly basis we communicated primarily through FAX. He would FAX a question, I would obtain information and FAX it to him.” Thus patterns of interaction and support varied.

Accommodation, Coverage and Reentry

Examination of the difficulty or ease of accommodating to the participants’ absence and making arrangements for domestic program coverage revealed mostly positive response (Table 10). Participants felt that it was relatively easy for the office and family to accommodate to their absence (mean of 2.15 and 2.10 on 4-point scale). Coworkers and support staff also verified that through cooperation, the office managed. “Our staff has always been a very cooperative staff. We all kind of pitched in to do what was needed while he was gone.” The area confirming the

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of the Level of Awareness of the International Polish-American Extension Project Assignment among the Extension Organization and Local Community.

Category	Mean*	Std. Dev.
Immediate office or department	4.64	0.74
Extension clientele	3.74	1.31
Entire Extension system	3.59	0.91
Extension advisory groups and leaders	3.43	1.41
Professional associates outside extension	3.22	0.96
Local citizens and community groups	2.95	1.22

*Value for Level of Awareness computed from a five-point scale of 1 = None; 2 = Slight, 3 = Some; 4 = Moderate; and 5 = Very much.

Table 8. Means and Standard Deviations Depicting Information Sources Utilized to Inform Others about the Polish-American Extension Project International Assignment.

Source	Mean*	Std. Dev.
The participant	2.65	0.51
The grapevine	2.34	0.59
Immediate Extension office	2.30	0.76
Entire Extension system	2.03	0.64
Local media	1.98	0.75

*Information source value computed from a three-point scale of 1 = None; 2 = Some; and 3 = Very much.

Table 9. Interaction and Communication between the Local Extension Unit and the Polish-American Extension Project Participant while on Assignment.

Source	Mean*	Std. Dev.
Took slides and notes for explaining the assignment to U.S.A. clientele	4.36	0.92
Ability to receive resources when requested	3.49	1.11
Participant received communications or responses	3.15	1.20
Participant initiation of communication or requests	3.06	1.00
Involvement of U.S.A. Extension colleagues during the assignment	2.92	1.15
Prepared newsletters or news-releases for U.S.A. use while on assignment	2.62	1.38
Extension organization initiated communication	2.20	1.09

*Mean for interaction and communication computed from a five-point scale of 1 = Not at all; 2 = A little; 3 = Somewhat; 4 = Quite a bit; and 5 = Very much.

Table 10. Level of Difficulty or Ease Regarding Communication and Arrangements for the Polish-American Extension Project.

Source	Level				Mean*	Std. Dev.
	Very Difficult	Difficult	Easy	Very Easy		
Ability to attain family support for the assignment	—	4.5	40.9	54.5	3.50	0.59
Communicating with clientele and local supporters about the assignment	7.6	9.1	60.6	22.7	2.99	0.79
Communicating with the extension organization about the assignment	3.1	15.4	61.5	20.0	2.99	0.70
Arranging domestic program backfill	4.5	24.2	48.5	22.7	2.89	0.81

*Mean for ease or difficulty was computed from the four-point scale of 1 = Very difficult; 2 = Difficult; 3 = Easy; and 4 = Very easy.

greatest difficulty was arranging for program backfill, as 29 percent of the respondents felt this *difficult* or *very difficult*. The remaining 71 percent felt it was *easy* or *very easy*. The mean response for this category was 2.89 on a four-point scale. Coverage or backfill was an issue of broad concern to both participants and administrators. A greater discussion of this topic is included later in the report. Upon return, participants again felt that it was relatively easy to reenter their positions in the U.S. (mean 2.00); 75 percent of the participants returned to their same positions; 10 percent to another location in Extension; 7.5 percent returned and retired.

Assessments of Personal, Family and Professional Impacts

There was unanimous agreement from among the participants that positive effects resulted from participation in the international technical assistance project. Participants also reported significant levels of positive change as a result of participation. Upon project completion, individuals were highly motivated and reinvigorated, and they had gained international awareness, knowledge and understanding. This was noted by participants as well as near-associates who were interviewed. Overall, for many participants the experience was “life and career changing”!

Personal and Professional Impacts

Participants perceived that involvements in the PAEP had extremely high impacts on themselves. The mean rating on a 10 point rating scale for personal and professional impacts was 8.53 with a standard deviation of 1.36. This scale ranged from 0 (no impact) to 5 (moderate impact) to 10 (extensive impact). Thus there was no doubt that participants felt that the experience was impactful. Though not as extensive, participants felt that there was also impact on others. Perceived impact upon immediate and extended family was moderately high (mean of 6.79) while impacts on colleagues and clientele were rated more modestly, at (mean of 5.20) (Table 11).

Participants had an opportunity on the mailed survey to provide qualitative data concerning impact-on-self. Of 67 participants, 60 and 58, respectively noted that personal and professional impact had been received. Within the written personal comments, over 15 persons commented on how the experience has given them a better appreciation and understanding for other cultures and people. Ten people commented on an increased sense of global awareness and understanding of international activities and perspectives. There were also repeated references to the fact that the experience expanded thinking and improved individuals.

Some of the written comments included “Increased my understanding of people and their motivation, etc.” “I improved self-esteem, and am more patient now with greater understanding of cultures and people.” “Refreshed, new outlook, excited, reinvigorated.” “Renewed insights and appreciation for grassroots programming needs. Renewed empathy for people.”

Positive comments were also received concerning professional impact. Participants provided comments such as: “Insight how to better help citizens in this country and develop symbiotic interaction.” “Gave me a broad appreciation for the usefulness of extension methods.” “Couldn’t wait to get involved again. While back in the U.S., I renewed my commitment to program development based on expressed needs of clientele.” “Currently enhanced perception of limits and potential of Eastern Europe” “I now have better time

Table 11. Perception of Overall Impact of the Polish-American Extension Project Assignment.

Characteristic	Mean*	Std. Dev.
Participant personal and professional development	8.53	1.38
Immediate and extended family	6.79	2.78
Colleagues and clientele	5.20	2.93

* Mean was calculated from an eleven-point scale that ranged from 0 = No impact; 5 = Moderate impact; to 10 = Extensive impact.

management, planning skills and better educational programming skills.” “Appreciate our system--good and bad including the autonomy we enjoy in programming and networking.” “Better understanding of how to program effectively in different situations.” “Appreciation of international markets.” “Experience has opened additional short-term assignments.” Other comments included better cultural and international awareness and understanding, change in career path, and better appreciation for the United States and its extension system.

There were a few comments of minimal or no professional impact. Only one or two individuals did not perceive benefits.

Types of Personal Change

Based on the survey data, participants reported moderate overall change as a result of their participation in PAEP (mean of 3.09 on a four-point scale). Perceived personal change was measured via a four-point scale (1 = no change; 2 = slight change; 3 = moderate change; and 4 = extensive change). Categories depicting the greatest extent of change were *attitudes about Poland as a nation* (mean of 3.70); *new perspectives about extension’s role in international development* (3.54); *interest in international activity* (3.54); *changed attitudes about Polish citizens* (3.49); *developed new knowledge* (3.08); *changed self-perception* (2.83). Other categories showing lesser amounts of self-perceived change were *developed people skills* (2.79); *new perspectives on U.S. extension* (2.76); *attitude change about the U.S.* (2.63); and *enhanced organizational skills* (2.58) (Table 12).

In addition, comments from the questionnaire and interviews suggest a wide range of types of change, from improved knowledge, skills and attitudes, to changes in practices and changes in overall view of life. Although some participants described the experience as “life and career changing”, most indicated that the experience was indeed an important time of reflection and perspective-taking—a chance to reevaluate what is important and how to be effective as a change agent. Impact summaries from surveys and interviews are presented in Appendices I and J.

Table 12. Percentage Distribution, Means and Standard Deviations of Self-Perceived Change as a Result of Participation in the Polish-American Extension Project.

Type of Change	Degree of Change				Mean*	Std. Dev.
	None	Slight	Moderate	Extensive		
Attitude change about Poland	1.5	4.5	16.4	77.6	3.70	0.63
New perspectives about extension's role in international development	--	3.0	40.3	56.7	3.54	0.56
Interest in international activities	1.5	7.5	26.9	64.2	3.54	0.70
Attitude change about Polish citizens	1.5	6.0	34.3	58.2	3.49	0.68
Developed new knowledge	--	19.4	53.7	26.9	3.08	0.68
Changed self-perception	3.0	34.8	37.9	24.2	2.83	0.83
Developed people skills	9.1	22.7	48.5	19.7	2.79	0.87
New perspectives on United States Extension	6.0	28.4	49.3	16.4	2.76	0.80
Attitude change about the United States	13.4	31.3	34.3	20.9	2.63	0.97
Enhanced organizational skills	13.4	28.4	44.8	13.4	2.58	0.89

* Mean was computed from the four-point scale of 1 = No change; 2 = Slight change; 3 = Moderate change; and 4 = Extensive change.

Professional and Organizational Impacts

Participants perceived that the international project created some positive influences on their relationships and careers in Extension. Across most of the categories questioned, ratings were slightly to somewhat positive (Table 13). The greatest influence was noted in the category *relationships with clientele and relationships with local community* (mean of 3.84 and 3.77 respectively on a 5-point scale). Moderate influences were felt on their *position or relationship within Extension* and *within Professional organizations* (mean of 3.63 and 3.60 respectively). The international assignment was perceived to have neutral influence on *ones economic well being and career opportunities in Extension* (means of 3.34 and 3.21, respectively). Although ratings of influence were modest, there were no perceived negative influences except for *effect on health* (at mean 2.56).

It can be generalized that participation in the PAEP was viewed as a positive consideration within the Extension organization. Written and interview comments showed that the international assignment served to raise the individual's recognition and it opened doors and opportunities for them. There was concern expressed by some specialists that it may slow one's progress towards promotion and tenure. In fact, faculty facing tenure or promotion decisions usually underreported the Polish experience in their documentation. A consistent finding was that Extension personnel did not feel that their Polish experience was considered in performance evaluation processes. To some this was a disappointment; to others it seemed to fit their understanding of how the organization compartmentalized functions and they were not surprised. However, aside from performance appraisals, there was general agreement that the organization was proud of their involvements in PAEP and that being chosen for the project, in and of itself, enhanced the image of the organization. When it was noted that participants returned with renewed enthusiasm, changed attitudes about the importance of extension work and in many cases, renewed commitments to participatory, inclusive programming; the value of participation was further enhanced in the minds of administrators and associates. Formerly, participation might have been considered "good for the participant"; now, it was viewed as "good for the organization"!

Another factor that enhanced the image of participation was the reaction of clientele. While planning for the assignment, Extension administrators and coworkers were slightly apprehensive about local coverage and potential negative feelings from the community due to the absence of key individuals. However, in all interview settings, such concerns were reported as unfounded. Local coverage was not always perfect, and many adjustments were needed, but in general, once the community became aware of the situation, they supported extension's effort to be involved internationally and were willing to work with the alternative coverage available. In fact, the local support for these international assignments was indeed surprising and appreciated by local administrators.

On the other hand, there were both positive and negative reactions within the Extension organization. Coworkers sometimes questioned the value of colleagues being away so long, given that their workloads increased as a result. However, in most offices, responsibilities were often rearranged and reallocated in ways that gave staff opportunities to assume new roles and to try their hand at developing new skills. This was especially true in the area of county extension administration where opportunities were created that strengthened the teamwork within the office, gave both staff and county officers a chance to work with new people, and helped all staff appreciate some of the subtleties of management. In cases where technical personnel left, often individuals new to extension were temporarily employed, giving them a chance to learn about extension and to test their interests in this work as a career.

Table 13. Percentage Distribution of Self-Perceived Influential Factors as a Result of Participation in the Polish-American Extension Project.

Influencing Factor	Degree of Influence			Mean
	Positive	None	Negative	
Extension career opportunities	62.1	31.8	6.1	3.85
Extension position or relationships	72.3	18.5	9.2	3.91
Clientele relationships	79.1	16.4	4.5	4.16
Community relationships	79.7	18.8	1.6	4.14
Professional organization relationships	74.7	20.9	4.5	3.93
Participants' family	85.1	7.5	7.5	4.22
Participants' health	37.9	45.5	16.6	3.38
Participants' economic well-being	64.2	25.4	10.5	3.76

Clearly there were also impacts on coworkers and the organization itself. Especially when multiple staff were involved in Poland, the organizational awareness and impact was even greater than when only one person was involved. The vicarious experience alone was an educational benefit. Coworkers and office staff learned about another culture, another economy, international development and trade issues, and a wide variety of details about Extension. These experiences helped staff to identify with a worldwide system of education and development. It also helped them to recognize the roles of U.S. professionals and organizations in development. It created pride and raised aspirations for international involvements. Statements made by near associates noted, "greater understanding of foreign aid," "increased knowledge of Poland and the transitions to a market economy," "helped me learn how to use international communication systems and to feel like a global citizen," "I was proud that they [Poland] wanted to learn about our 4-H program."

Negative Feelings

A disappointing fact was that for some participants, the Polish experience came to them late in their careers. As a result they didn't expect to gain from the experience and rated their own change as small. These modest evaluations often differed from comments made by colleagues and supervisors. Many mature agents were judged to have made significant and positive changes and were viewed as positive role models for others. But if the participant themselves felt that the experience was anti-climatic, it may not have effected their post participation performance significantly.

Another disappointment was feelings of disinterest among colleagues. Some participants returned to new locations or new job responsibilities and quickly became immersed in the day-

to-day tasks of their work, and thus lost the opportunity to share and reflect on the Polish experience. Others noted that there was no interest shown in their experience or that coworkers quickly became saturated with any mention of the experience.

Family Impacts

Those participants who described the experience as being positive for them, personally, usually noted that it had positive effects on their family as well. Some noted that it brought the family closer together, it was an opportunity for the family to live and work abroad together, to learn about and respect a culture different from their own, and it broaden their perspectives. Others, especially those who were separated from their families during their assignment noted negative influences such as being out of contact with the development of their children or grandchildren, missing family celebrations and being absent during times of crisis. Yet whether their personal experiences were positive or negative, general feelings were that participants would *probably or definitely* consider another international assignment (3.95 on a 5-point scale) and would *probably or definitely* want to involve their family (4.00 on a 5-point scale).

Spouses unanimously praised the experience. Although living in Poland was extremely stressful and they often regretted their absence from family in the states, spouses generally had very positive perceptions of the impact of the experience on their families. They personally broadened their perspectives, learned new skills, developed confidence and independence, and grew to appreciate the things that they take for granted in the U.S. They reported that their children fared very well; acquired language proficiency, made new friends, learned about cultures and systems very different from their own, and developed global competencies and interests that would affect them throughout their lives. Both spouses related that the experience brought their family closer together, made them stronger and helped them to be more global citizens.

Degree of Integration into ongoing Extension Programs and into Local Communities

Most participants took extensive steps to integrate the international experience into subsequent extension programming. Resultantly, others were able to gain an increased knowledge, awareness, understanding and involvement in international efforts. Positive findings were noted among most interviewees regarding secondary effects to near-associates, the Extension organization and to clientele from the international experience.

Integration into Extension Programming

The questionnaire revealed levels from “*some*” to “*moderate*” integration of the PAEP international experience into subsequent United States extension programs. This was accomplished via meetings, presentations, linkages and joint interactions between the U.S.A. and Poland. Levels of activity were measured via a five-point categorical scale based upon the number of interactions that had occurred. Results showed that there was a great deal of communication to clientele and communities through presentations and sharing resources and information. A large proportion (46.3%) provided 16 or more presentations to local groups about the challenges and experiences of their personal international assignment.

Mean categorical values from highest to lowest levels of integration were: presentations to clientele and community groups, 3.82; sharing materials or resources about international programs, 3.37; counseling individuals, 3.28; creating linkages with Poland, 3.05; interactions with people from Poland, 2.97; media communications disseminated, 2.80; educational

programs designed or modified, 2.58; print materials developed, 2.45; input into inservice or professional development, 2.24; supporting community groups with international interests, 2.18, and; serving on international committees, 1.67 (Table 14). Additional written comments on this question included: “Authored and published a book on my experiences.” “(Used with) advising graduate students.” “Overall increased knowledge in leadership and community development”. “Increased confidence”. “Increased skills in curriculum development and training.” “Not something that can be quantified.”

Continuing Interactions with Polish People and Organizations

The positive feelings toward the Polish people that emerged during the PAEP participation continue today with amazing perseverance. Of the entire group, 95.5 percent report some continuing interaction with Polish people. Only 4.5% indicated no further involvement. On a rating scale of 1-4 points a mean of 2.97 was given for inter-action during the past year. This rating represents at least 6-10 instances of interaction during the past year for a total of an estimated 344 interactions. These data reflect strong and continuing ties between U.S. professionals and the people with whom they worked and interacted in Poland. One participant authored a book “Tomorrow Finally Came” (Braund, 1998) to describe his professional experiences with the Polish people.

Community Impacts

Levels of impact extended from within the Extension organization to the community level. In all but one state site, there had been attempts to develop social, economic and/or educational linkages. Successful attempts have resulted in a wide cadre of Extension leaders and volunteers, clientele and local citizens with increased interest in international activities and personal commitments to international exchange. These community contacts have created continued personal friendships, international dialogues among individuals in the two countries and exchanges and study tours. One successful linkage resulted in a million-dollar contract for an American business, and many contacts were made with local civic organizations, i.e., Rotary Clubs, Chambers of Commerce and many private businesses.

Clientele were impacted both by the knowledge that their “agent” was on-assignments and by the many presentations delivered by the Extension professionals when they returned. A conservative estimate suggests that 753 presentations were delivered in local communities across the U.S., an average of 11 per participant. If 20 persons attended each of those presentations, 15,000 people would have been reached! In many communities, citizens had the opportunity to visit with and host Polish visitors—an exciting and rewarding experience for most. These personal, hands-on experiences for interaction were even more educational and impactful. They helped to change the climate in communities. One Extension administrator noted in the interviews that “*clientele are stepping forward, wanting to participate in international programs*”. “*They want to be involved when visitors come to the state.*” Although not documented statistically, there seemed to be a relationship between the degree of community impact and the degree of interaction between the agent while in Poland with clientele at home. Many Extension professionals sent news letters, wrote newsletter articles or radio scripts, and in other ways shared their evolving experiences with the home community. These interactions evoked great interest in the community--some people would even call the Extension office for more details or predictions of the next communication.

Table 14. Output, Visibility and Integration of the Polish-American Extension Project into the Participants' Subsequent Extension Program.

Characteristic	Level of Integration*					Mean	S.D.
	None	A few	Some	Moderate	Extensive		
Presentations to clientele and community groups	3.0	14.9	25.4	10.4	46.3	3.82	1.25
Sharing materials or resources about international programs	6.0	28.4	19.4	14.9	31.3	3.37	1.35
Counseling individuals	6.0	26.9	26.9	13.4	26.9	3.28	1.29
Creating linkages with Poland	4.5	37.3	26.9	11.9	19.4	3.05	1.21
Level of interactions with people from Poland	4.5	45.5	16.7	15.2	18.2	2.97	1.24
Media communications disseminated	18.2	33.3	19.7	7.6	21.2	2.80	1.41
Educational programs designed or modified	16.7	40.9	21.2	10.6	10.6	2.58	1.20
Print materials developed	20.0	41.5	18.5	13.8	6.2	2.45	1.15
Input into in-service or professional development	27.3	34.8	28.8	4.5	4.5	2.24	1.05
Supporting community groups with international interests	22.7	54.5	12.1	3.0	7.6	2.18	1.07
Serving on international committees	47.0	43.9	6.1	1.5	1.5	1.67	0.79

* Levels of interaction and value labels were defined as: (1) None; (2) A Few = 1-5; (3) Some = 6-10; (4) Moderate = 11-15; and (5) Extensive = 16 or more interactions or instances.

Participants with accompanying family members were especially questioned about how the family was coping, and an extended group of well wishers evolved made up of acquaintances from church, school and community organizations. These same people were especially thrilled to hear of the family's experiences upon their return. Thus speaking engagements were in high demand. Some offices reported those well wishers called the Extension office saying that they didn't know that Extension was involved internationally. Many residents of Polish ancestry learned about Extension and what it could offer through these communications. Recognition and visibility for both Extension and the conditions of life in Poland were heightened by these communications.

Public Opinions about International Involvements

One of the interests of Extension administrators of technical assistance programs such as the PAEP, is in understanding the level of public support for such endeavors or for U.S. foreign assistance in general. This issue was documented in this study through the inclusion of three rating questions in the on-site interviews. Foreign assistance was defined as "*importance for citizens, universities or USDA to be involved in international cooperative development projects like the Polish-American Extension Project*". A five-point rating scale was verbalized, 5 being *very important*, 3 being *fairly important* and 0 being *not important*. Ratings for each respondent category were summarized and compared within and across respondent group. Generally, all ratings were very positive ranging from 4.1 to 4.9! The nonparametric Friedman test was used to determine differences across groups. No significant differences were noted cross respondent groups for the three types of involvements except for the group considered coworkers. Coworkers had lower ratings, as compared to the other respondent groups, to the importance of university involvements and USDA involvements, but no differences on citizen involvement (see Table 15). Within groups, there were no significant differences in ratings of the importance for citizens, universities or USDA. These results support the concept that involved and educated citizens are supportive of U.S. investments in cooperative assistance. It was predicted that Extension administrators would be most supportive and perhaps citizens least supportive; however, this was not the case. Troubling, however, were the lower ratings given by coworkers. Perhaps the strains of providing coverage and the other indications of indifference are a reality that Extension needs to explore.

Linkages Resulting from Secondary Contacts

The establishment of linkages between Polish and U.S. colleagues and citizens was not an expected outcome of the PAEP. However, due to the nature of Extension's method of working with people on many different levels at once, many linkages evolved. When talking with returned participants and community members, it became evident that these personalized linkages were valued products of the project. Therefore documenting perceived benefits from these linkages became an objective of this study.

One question in the mailed questionnaire inquired about how participants integrated their experience into their ongoing extension work in the U.S. Within this multi-itemed question was an item asking for an estimate of the number of instance whereby the participant "*created or maintained linkages in Poland.*" Five response categories were provided with ranges of number of instances in each. If the midpoint of each category was used as the frequency of linkages and then the frequencies were multiplied by the number of participants responding with that category, a rough estimate of the number of linkages could be derived. These estimates are presented in Table 16. Based on these calculations a conservative estimate of the number of linkages established is 531 or an average of 8 linkages per participant. This is a considerable expansion in the number of people or organizations involved in Poland because of this technical assistance project!

Table 15. Results of Friedman Test of Rank Differences across groups on Ratings of Importance of Citizen, University and USDA Involvements in Cooperative Assistance.

	Mean Ranks	Mean Ratings	N	Test Statistics
Importance of Citizen Involvement:				
Administrator ratings	4.25	4.56	27	Chi Square 8.31 df 5 Sig. .140
Participant ratings	3.25	4.62	13	
Coworker ratings	2.25	4.24	21	
Supervisor ratings	3.33	4.50	12	
Family ratings	3.75	4.58	12	
Community Reps' ratings	4.17	4.73	11	
Importance of University Involvement:				
Administrator ratings	3.42	4.50	27	Chi Square 13.64 df 5 Sig. .018*
Participant ratings	4.08	4.69	13	
Coworker ratings	1.58	4.12	21	
Supervisor ratings	3.42	4.67	12	
Family ratings	3.67	4.42	12	
Community Reps' ratings	4.83	4.64	11	
Importance of USDA Involvement:				
Administrator ratings	4.25	4.63	27	Chi Square 15.62 df 5 Sig. .008*
Participant ratings	4.08	4.77	13	
Coworker ratings	1.50	4.36	21	
Supervisor ratings	3.00	4.58	12	
Family ratings	4.58	4.92	12	
Community Reps' ratings	3.56	4.67	12	

Significant at .05 level of significance

Table 16. Estimates of Outputs: Number of Linkages and Presentations.

	Frequencies					Total
	None (0)	A Few (3)	Some (8)	Moderate (13)	Many (16)	
Creating Linkages	3 X0	25 X3	18 X8	8 X13	13 X16	531
Presentations	2 X0	10 X3	17 X8	731 X13	X16	753

*The midpoint of each rating category was used to estimate number of instances.

To learn more about these linkages, a description was needed. In both the mailed survey questionnaire and during the on-site interviews, participants in the PAEP were asked to identify persons or organizations in the U.S. with whom they referred or connected to Polish people or organizations. It was the desire of the evaluation team to contact a sampling of these individuals to further describe the type of linkage and its value to the participants. Perhaps it was because of the length of the questionnaire, or the nature of the request that demanded information not readily available, in either case, few linkages were identified. This was a disappointment to the evaluation team as they themselves were aware of linkages that were not identified. During the site visits, those participants involved were queried about linkages and often very rich descriptive information was conveyed. But in some cases participants could not recall the names or addresses of the people involved or they choose not to reveal names, as intended impacts may not have materialized. For example in one business contact, even after a visit to Poland, the U.S. Company chose not to consummate a deal. Thus the actual list of contacts for information about linkages included only 50 names. Of these 50 referrals, 28 were available to be interviewed by phone and asked to comment on their experiences. The majority of these linkages were of the social or cultural nature.

Results of Telephone Interviews with Secondary Contacts

The unanimous opinion of those interviewed was that their experiences in interacting with Polish people were extremely positive. Words such as “very positive”, “definitely positive,” “an eye opener,” and “very important” were common references in response to the question, “How would you describe these interactions?” Comments included; “It gives us new perspectives. It rejuvenates your thought processes.” “It creates more awareness between both countries.” “It’s good for both sides.” “It gives you confidence to go out and meet other cultures.” “It brought the Polish Americans together.” “It helps create understanding. We benefit from looking at the possibilities of developing new products.”

When asked, “What do you think you learned or gained from these interactions?” respondents noted the following:

- Satisfaction from helping people
- Learning about cultures, peoples and history
- Broadening world views and international competencies
- Expanding insights about the interactions of environments and people’s behavior
- Appreciation for differences
- Increased knowledge of international markets, business transactions and difficulties in maintaining labor and product supplies

This sample of involved citizens were also asked the three rating questions concerning the importance of international involvements for citizens, universities and USDA. Overall ratings were very high ranging from 4.8 for citizens, 4.8 for universities and 4.7 for USDA (on a five-point scale). There were no significant differences across any of these three groups. Interesting though, these ratings from citizens confirm the high ratings given by community representatives during the on-site interviews. Those ratings averaged 4.7, 4.6 and 4.7, respectively for citizen, university and USDA involvement. Thus both those citizens involved through linkages and those aware and supportive of extension have high regard for broad-based U.S. involvements in foreign assistance and international cooperation.