

Analyzing Extension Onboarding for Farm Management and Agronomy Professionals

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INTRODUCTION

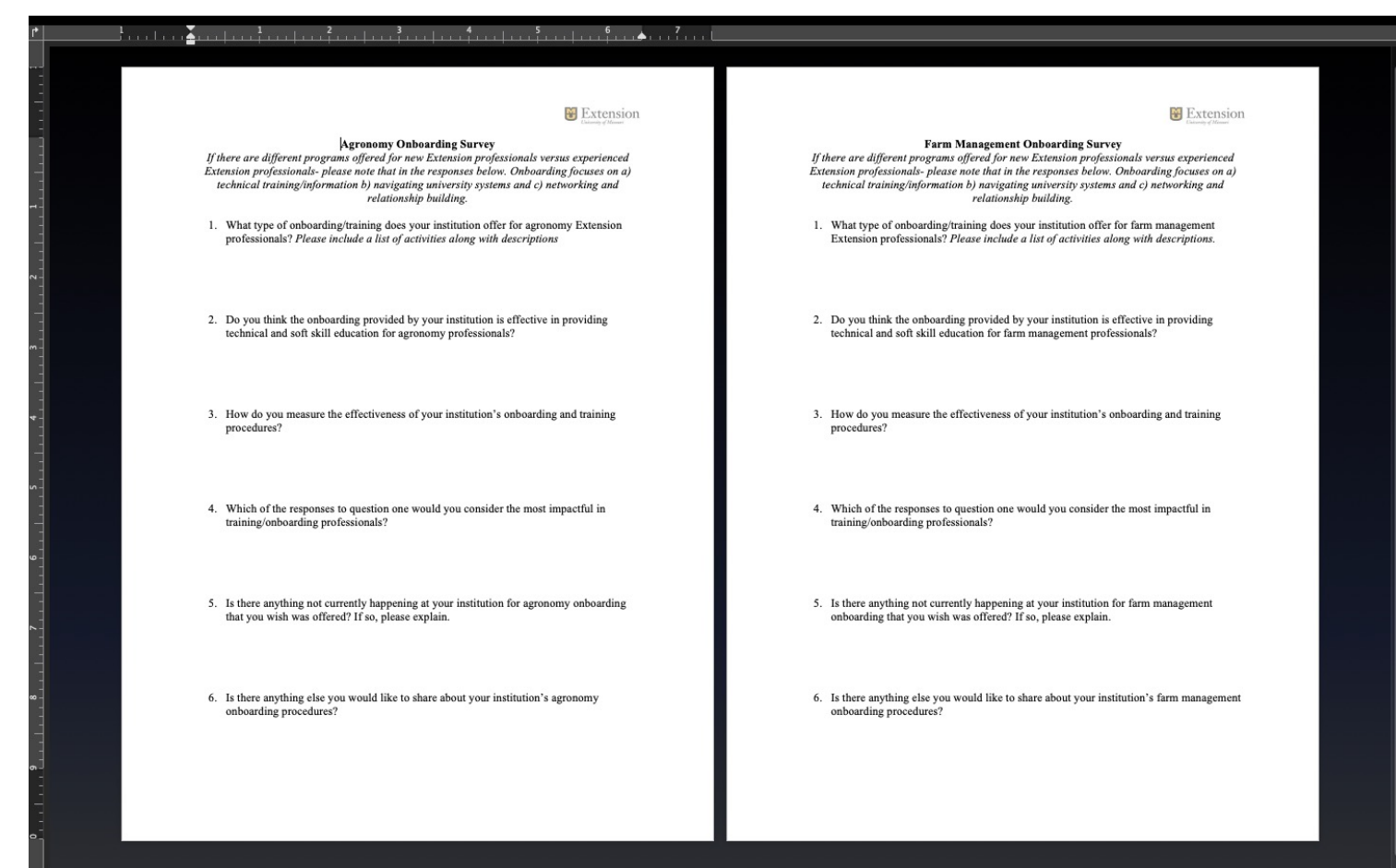
Research confirms that proper onboarding and training improves worker satisfaction and job performance, but a lack of onboarding and continued training for Extension farm management and agronomy professionals currently exists. This research project, with the guidance of my mentor Benjamin Brown, Senior Research Associate, evaluates training and onboarding practices commonly used for Extension farm management and agronomy professionals across thirteen land-grant institutions within the North Central Extension Region. This project is still being conducted. The finished project includes comparative studies across two academic disciplines- farm management and agronomy, two career longevities- 1-2 years and more than 5 years, spatial analysis across geography, and perceived educational effectiveness between trainers and trainees.

Methods

A literature review was conducted on topics related to industry onboarding and training. Research specific to Extension onboarding and training was narrow, but supportive that more resources and research was needed.

The goal of this study is to identify onboarding and training practices utilized by Extension programs within a confined geographical location and determine their effectiveness through worker satisfaction and institutional cost.

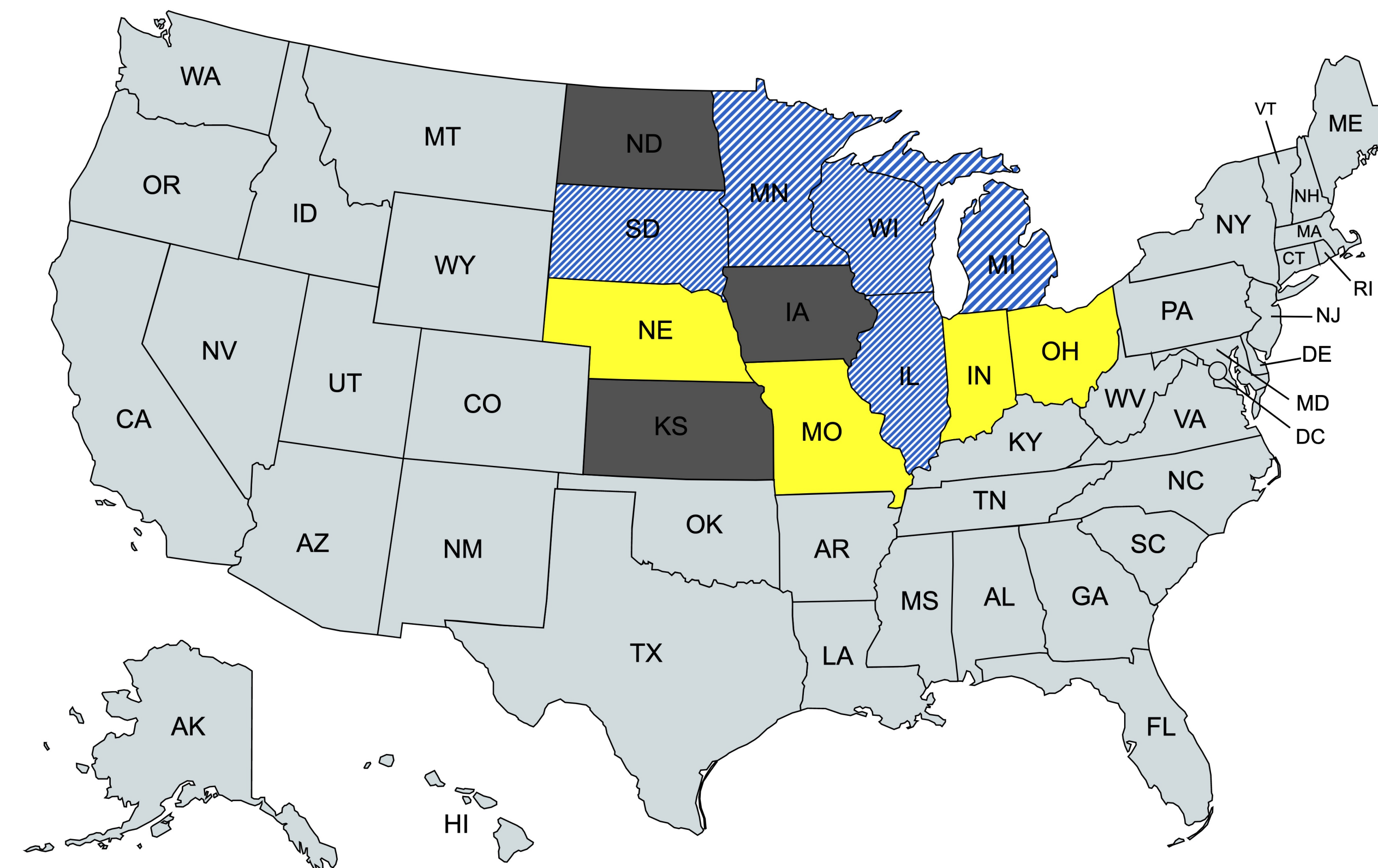
Extension education directors at each institution were asked to complete questionnaires (right) related to farm management and agronomy onboarding and continued training offered at their respective institutions.



Virtual focus groups were held with Extension professionals in two career categories: 1-2 years and more than 5 years across each academic discipline.

The focus groups aimed to capture successful training programs across the region and source innovative ideas from Extension professionals within the disciplines.

The interviews were hosted via Zoom, there were seventeen interviews completed they ranged between thirty minutes to one hour long.

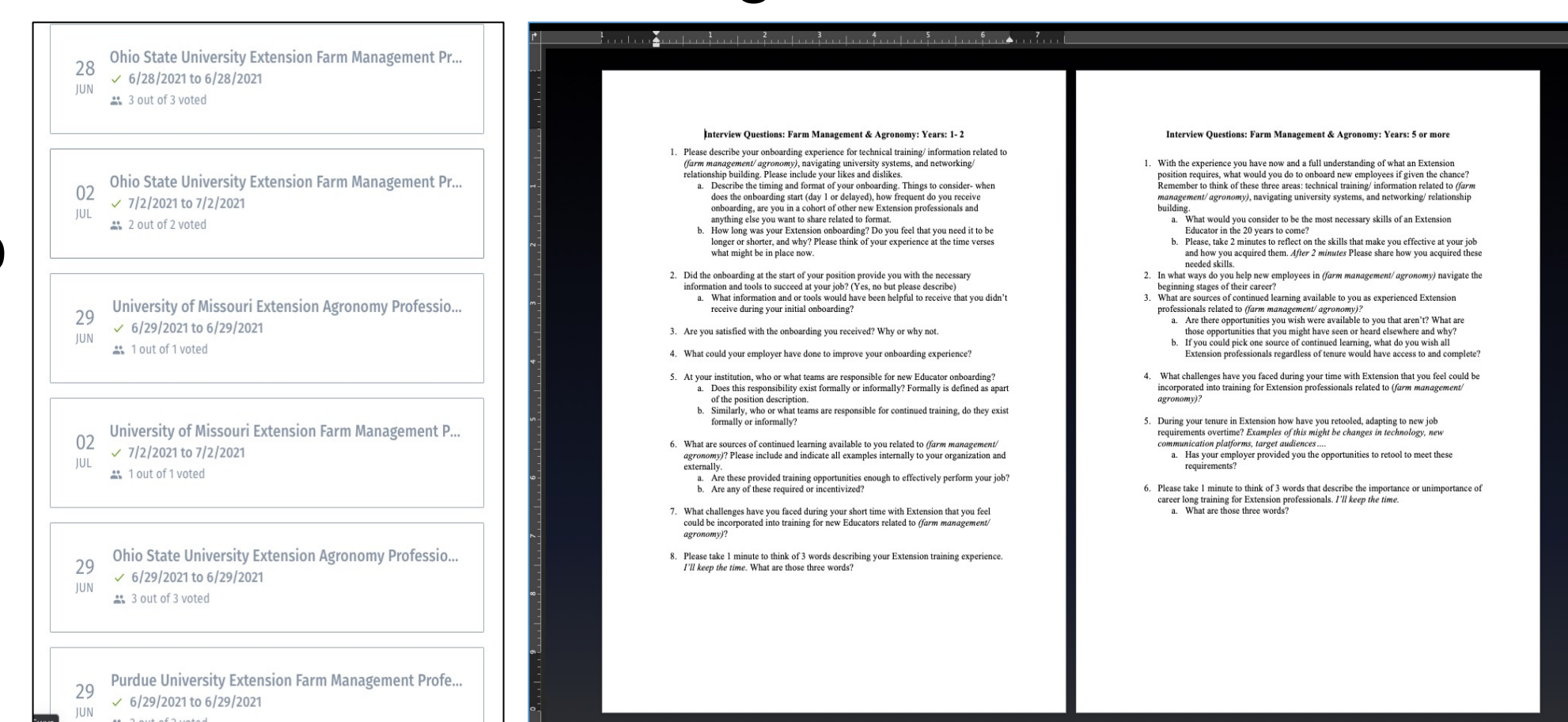


The North Central Extension Region spanning 12 states representing 14 institutions illustrated above represents participation by institution in this project.

- 28% participated in all aspects of the project as seen in yellow
- 50% of education directors completed questionnaires however three of these education directors did not provide a list of professionals are colored grey.
- 50% of the institutions have not responded to the initial email are those shaded in blue.

MATERIALS

- This research utilized qualitative methods
- Questionnaires were created via a word document and reviewed by the Institutional Review Board
- Focus group questions were created and reviewed by the Institutional Review Board before being emailed to the education directors
- Doodle polls were created to schedule each of the focus groups



CONCLUSION

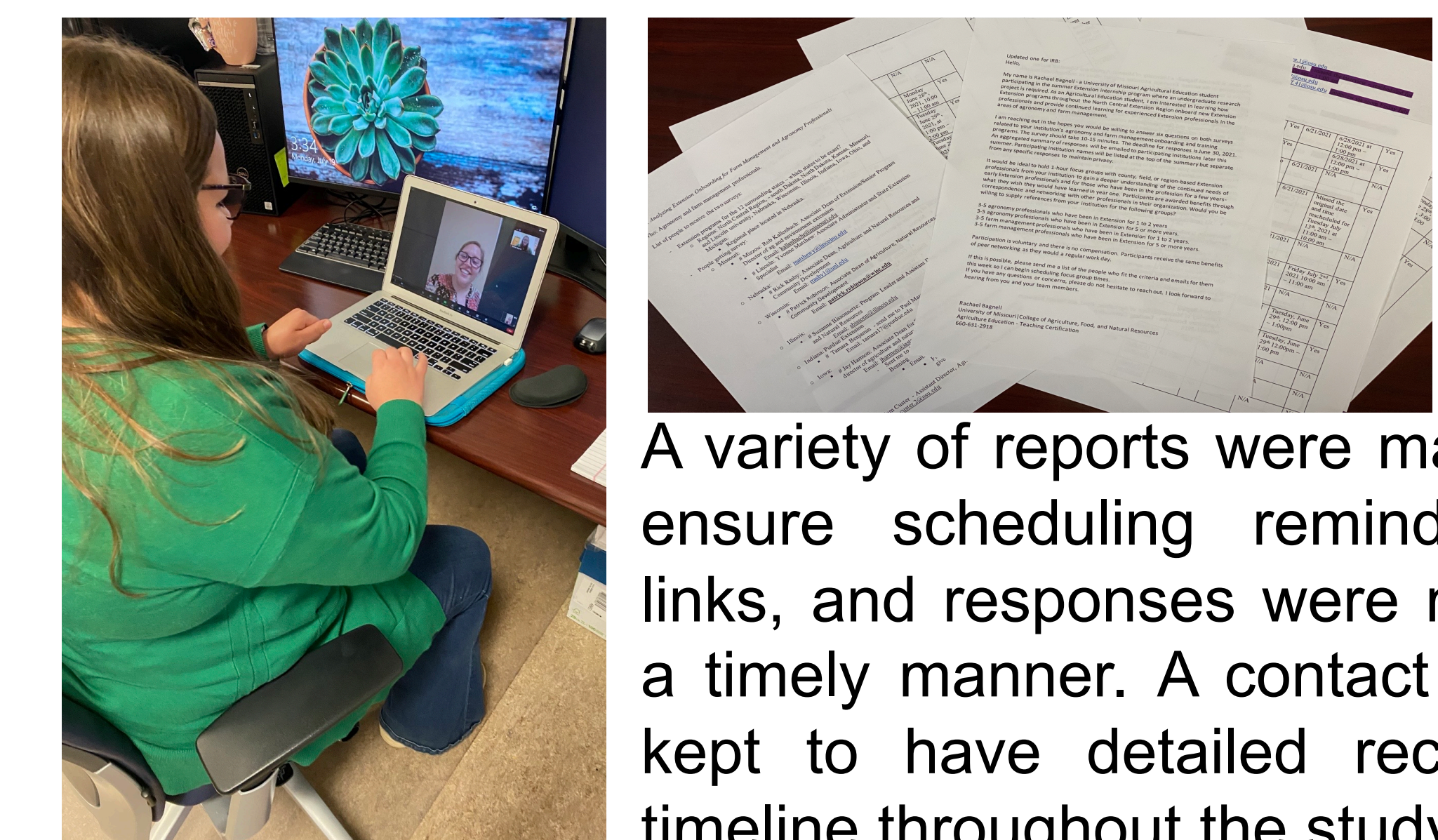
Several commonalities were found amongst the professionals.

Key takeaway #1: There is a need for a better developed mentorship programs across many states in the region. A good mentorship program needs to have qualifications for a person to become a mentor, they should be geographically located to the person and focused in their specialized area. The mentor and mentee need to be paired based on their personalities and work styles to hopefully ensure a good experience. The mentor should be made aware before determining the pairing of the two to be prepared when the mentee begins working for Extension.

Key takeaway #2: Resources to connect individuals located in regional or field offices currently lack effectiveness but are deemed important for new educator development. As well as a form of connection or communication for all professionals to reach their institutions resources. Many of the education directors acknowledged the lack of onboarding and continued training for professionals in these specific areas.

Key Takeaway #3: Creating onboarding modules and continued training resources that Extension professionals could access as they need, would be beneficial for each area in Extension.

In conclusion, farm management and agronomy professionals need more guidance when beginning their extension careers.



A variety of reports were maintained to ensure scheduling reminders, zoom links, and responses were managed in a timely manner. A contact report was kept to have detailed record of the timeline throughout the study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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