

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES AND STRATEGIES TO SERVE EXTENSION CLIENTELE. Christy L. Sprague, Assistant Professor, Department of Crop and Soil Sciences, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, MI 48824.

The model of an extension specialist in weed science has changed substantially over the last three decades. No longer are the days of face to face meetings with growers in every county of a state. In fact, counties in many states have moved away from having agricultural agents or even providing agricultural programming. Additionally, where there once was a strong agricultural chemical industry we have seen a considerable decline in the number of companies and personnel that used to provide a substantial role in training and support of the agricultural clientele. With this downsizing in personnel in both the public and private sectors, there are many gaps that need to be filled. These gaps leave tremendous opportunities for extension weed scientists, may be even making our roles more important than they have been in the past. So as extension weed scientists, how do we fill these gaps and best serve our clientele? In order to answer this question, we first need to identify who our clientele is and what they need. I believe that we all think that our ultimate clientele is still the grower. Now how the information is disseminated to the grower is different than it has been in the past. Many times, this information is not coming directly from extension weed scientists, but from agrichemical dealers and agronomists. Getting the appropriate information and recommendations to these advisors is important. With fewer extension specialists how do we disseminate this information? Methods of dissemination have become increasingly important. This is the information age; we need to provide timely, accurate, cost-effective information to clientele. We have been able to do this in more recent years through the use of the world-wide-web. This technology has given us access to growers and other clientele that we otherwise wouldn't have been in contact with. However, not everyone has access to this technology. Are there other methods of information delivery and training that we can use? Balancing dissemination methods is important in not to leave out any clientele. There are other technologies, such as distance learning that have also made extension programming effective to large audiences without having to travel to several distant locations. As extension weed scientists we need to be open minded and adopt some of these newer technologies to better serve out clientele.