

Leadership Development and Challenges in Agricultural and Applied Economics in Academic Units: A Conversation with Unit Leaders

Presidential Address

For the

Western Agricultural Economics Association

Annual meeting

June 2009

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Motivation

- Six leaders in my unit at K-State in last five years
 - Cost of inaction has been very high
- My involvement on two search committees
 - Difficulty in recruiting
- My work with agribusiness firms
 - Need for talent and leadership is inherent in any organization
 - Great implications for our ability to move forward
- Started with WAEA interviews and expanded to other departments

Objective

- My objective is to discuss why the unit leader has the most critical job in the department and why this position has great challenges.
 - Provide an overview of information collected from interviews with unit leaders of departments of agricultural economics and discuss challenges being faced by these unit leaders.
 - Conducted 47 interviews with unit leaders of departments of agricultural economics in 1862 land grant universities and four other departments with large enrollments
 - Visited with eight deans about my paper and slides.
 - Thanks to a number of people
- Has not been studied widely in our profession.

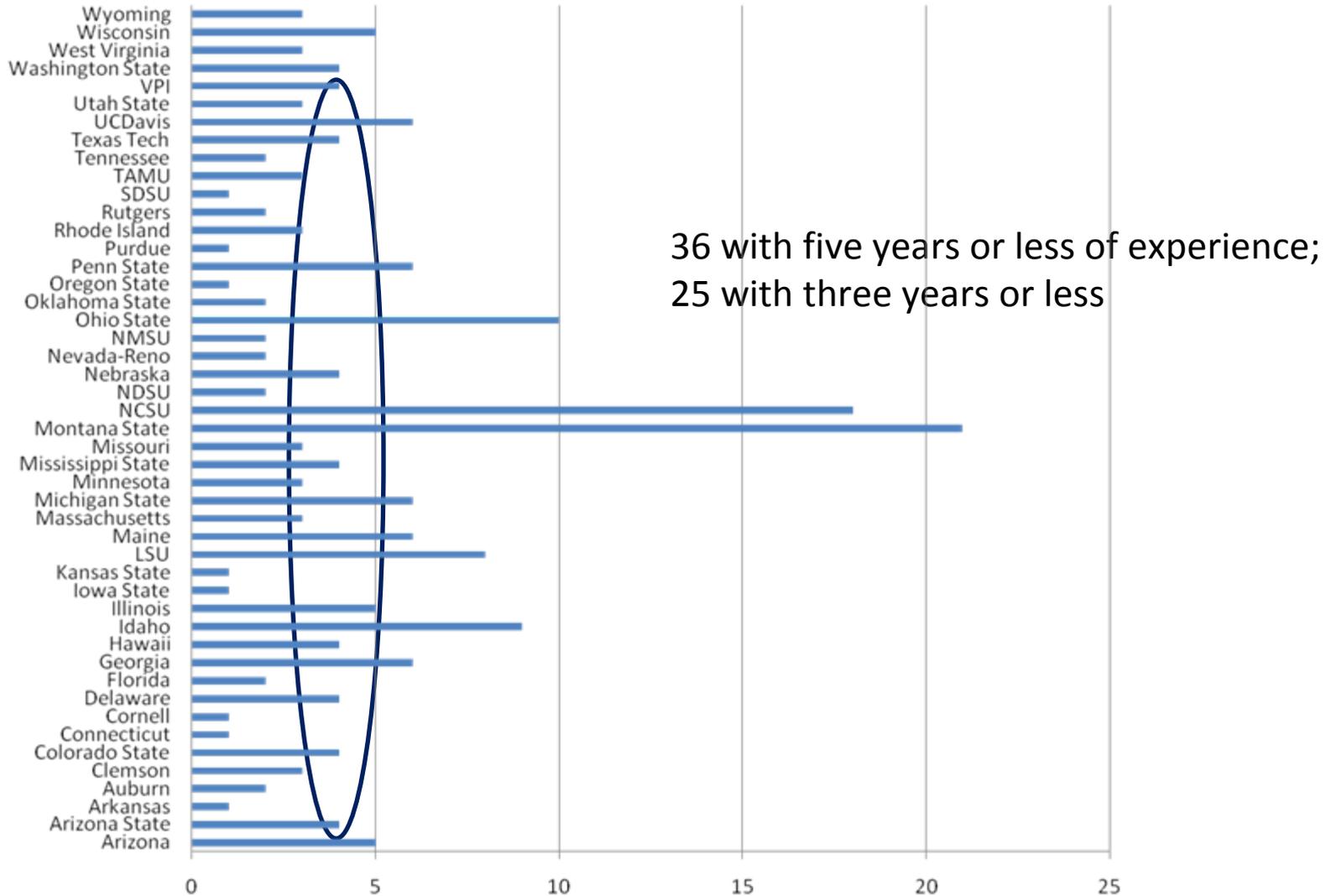
Main Points

- The unit leader position is too important a job to be left to the “last man” standing
- We, as a profession, have to be proactive in funding our graduate and extension programs and have outstanding undergraduate teaching experiences if we want the lifestyles and careers we presently have
 - Departmental service will have to matter for all of us
- Deans and provosts do want us to create a vision for our program that fits the mission of the land grant university
 - Requires a lot of work
- Need to find a way to develop leadership talent
 - There has been very little formalized process in our profession
- Be nice!

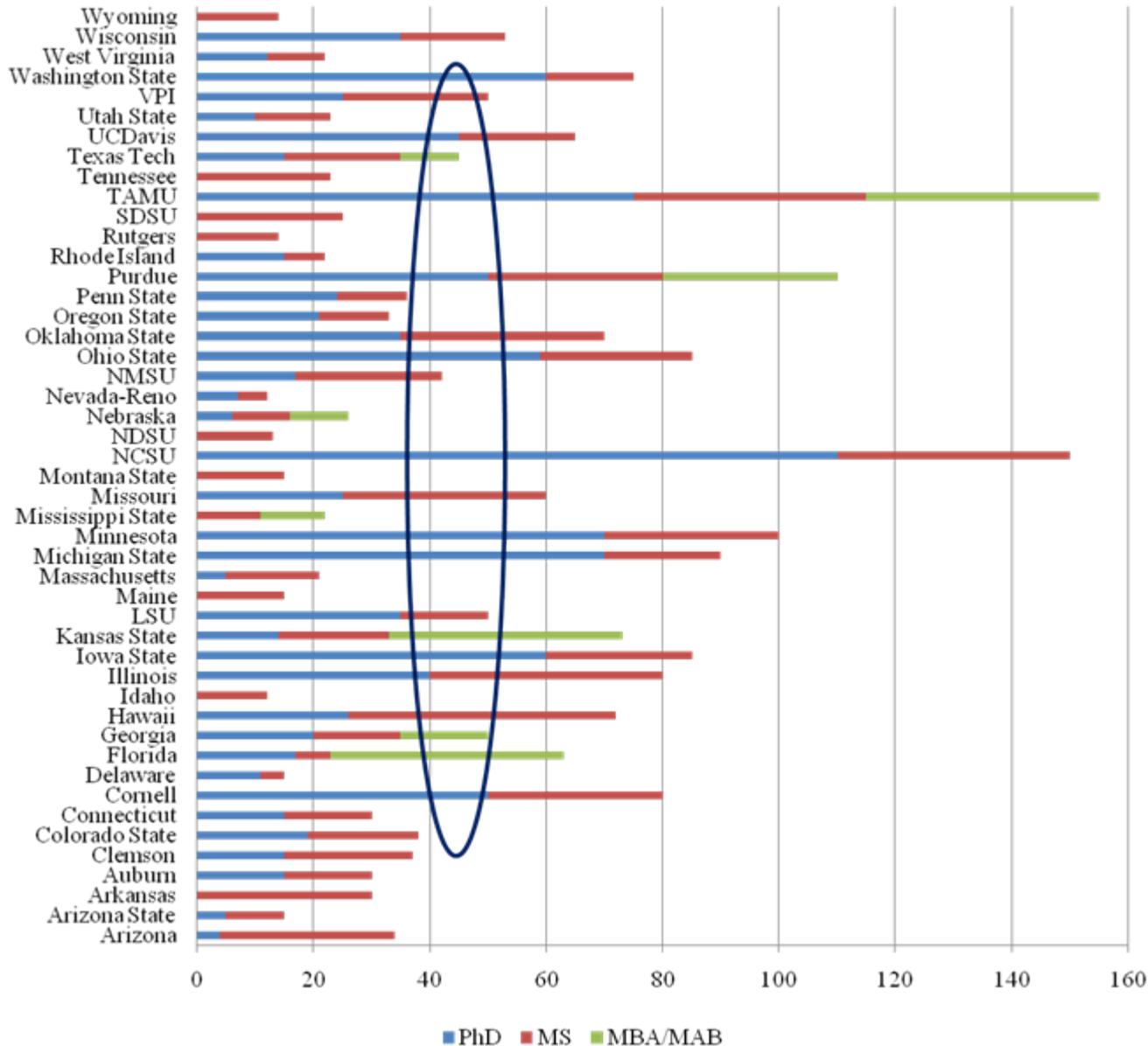
Outline

- Broad descriptive data
 - Paper has more detail
- Overview of broad issues
- My thoughts and conclusions
- Unit leader – chair, director, or head of a department of agricultural economics
 - Used “agricultural economics” because it is used in WAEA but recognize its limitations
 - Chairs and heads are used interchangeably
 - Deans make little distinction but faculty do
- Colleges of Agriculture
 - Many have broader stakeholders today
 - We will look more like the rest of the university in the future

Unit Leader Years of Experience

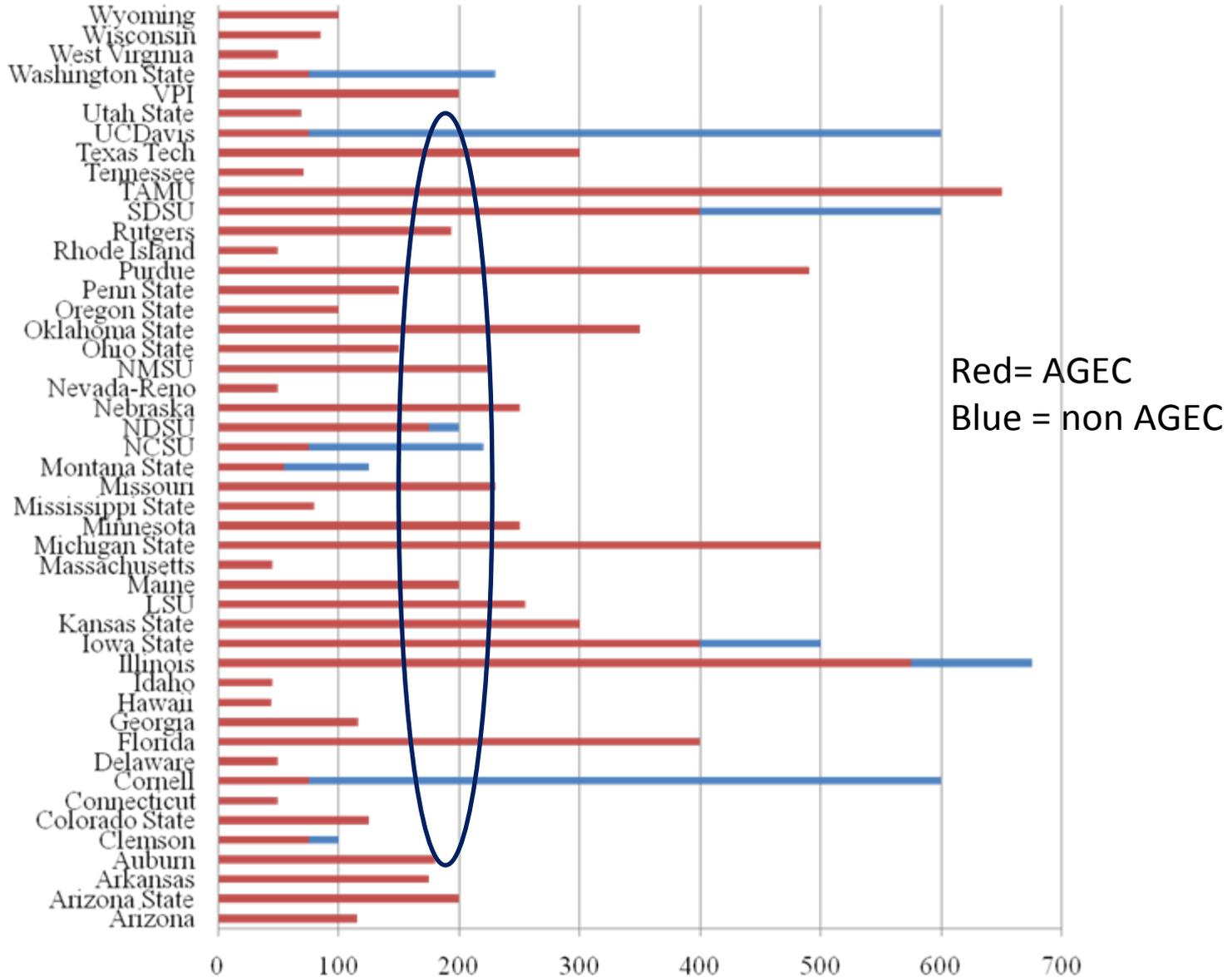


March 2009 Graduate Enrollments

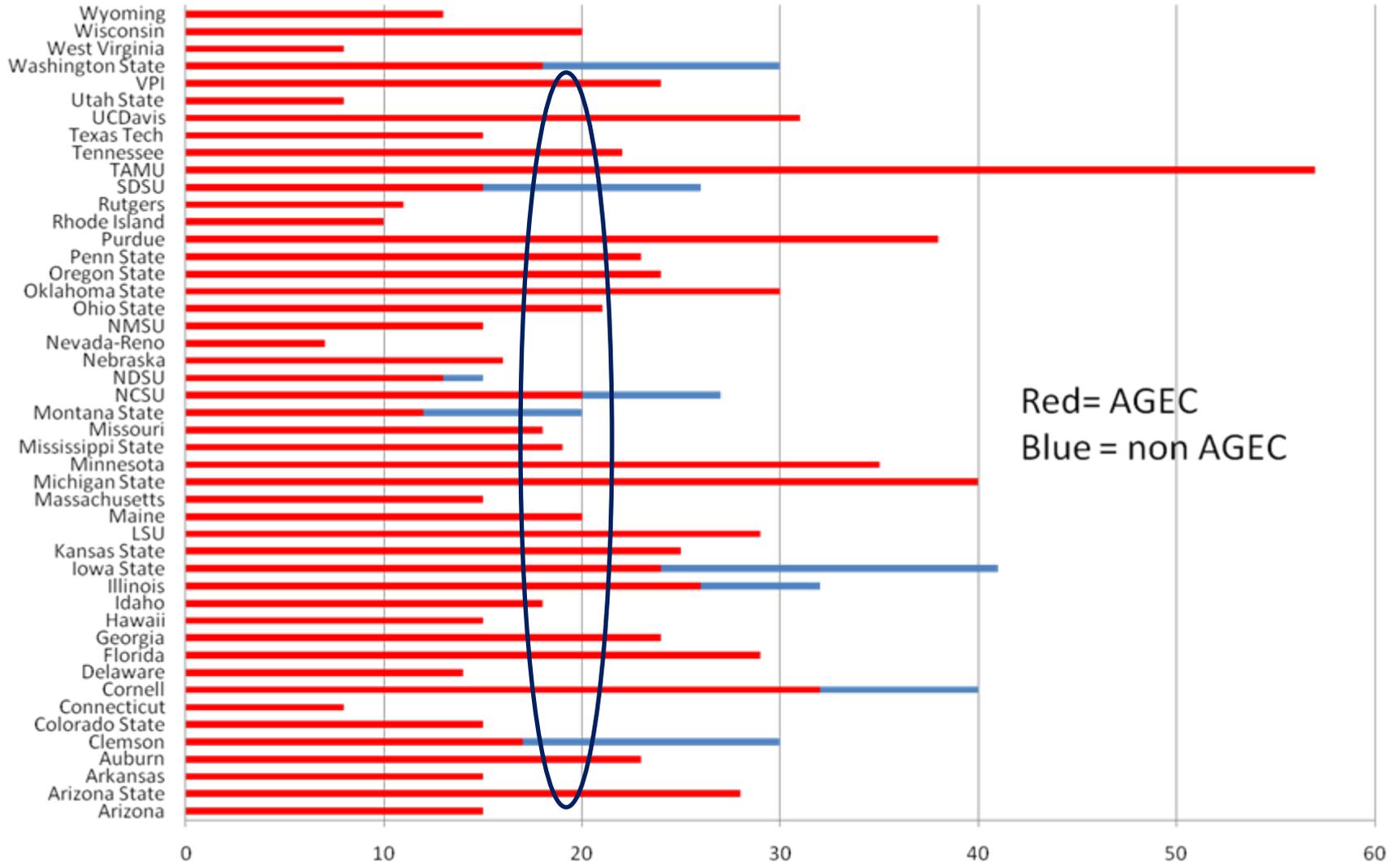


13 programs >
60 MS/ MBA/PhD
students

March 2009 Undergraduate Enrollments



Number of Faculty

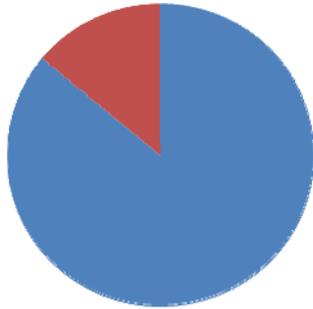


Lecturers average three or more per department

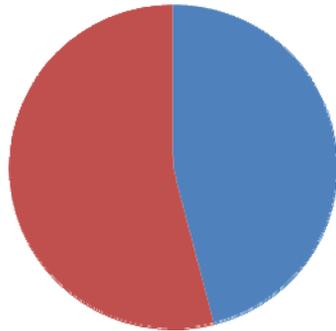
Role of Program Leaders

- Graduate program
 - Had greatest responsibilities in virtually every department (e.g., 10-50% time)
- Undergraduate
 - 16 had merged with committee chair (e.g., 10-30% time)
 - Many had a full time non-tenure track coordinator
- Extension
 - 40 had no extension state leaders (180 FTEs)
- Almost all heads reported having had some former program leader experience but this does not prepare you for the job
- Assistant or associate heads
 - Prevalent in larger departments and focused on grants and contracts and reporting
 - Better preparation for unit leader position

Graduate Student Funding



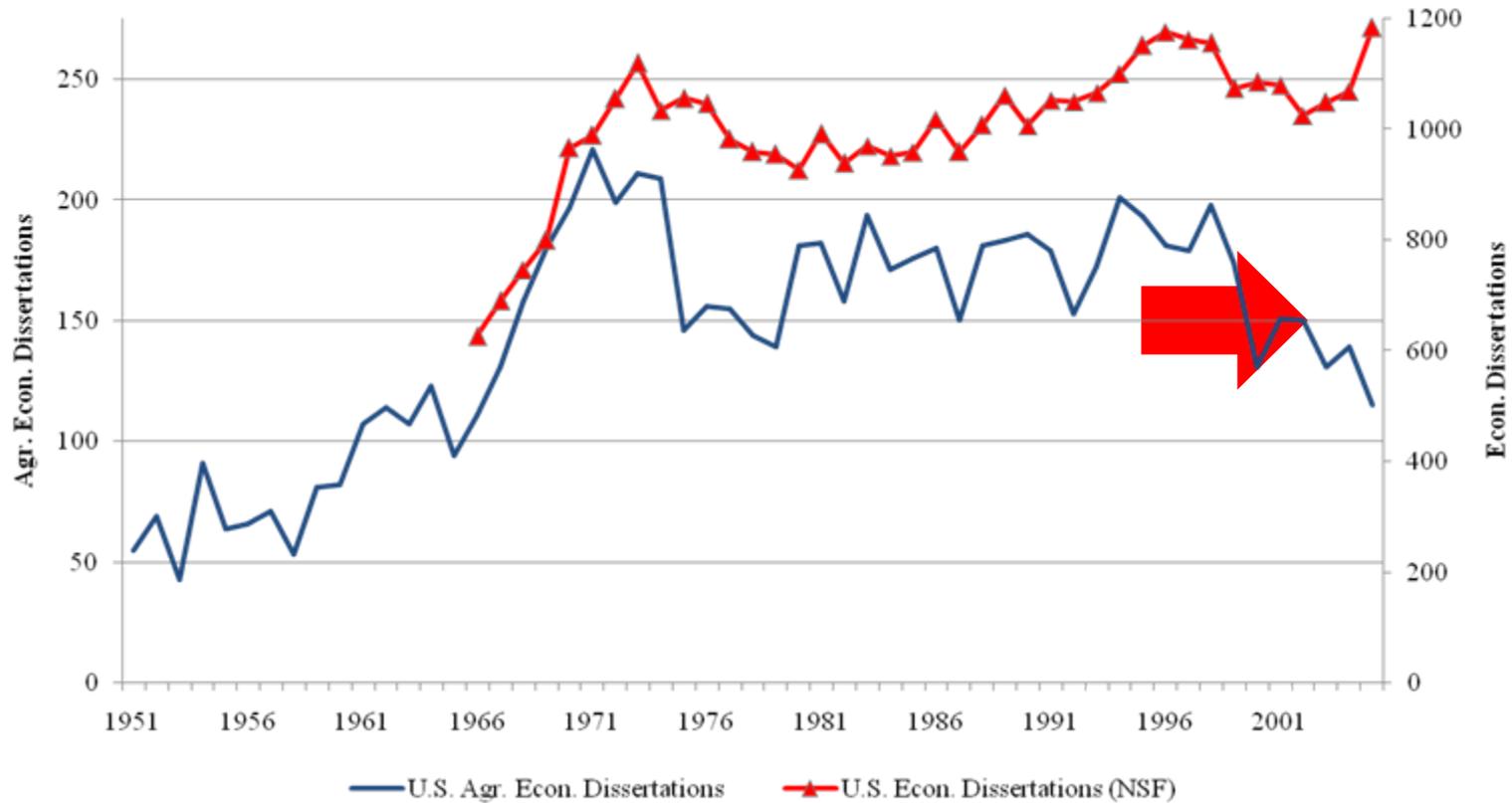
86% of doctoral students
were on funding



46% of masters students
were on funding

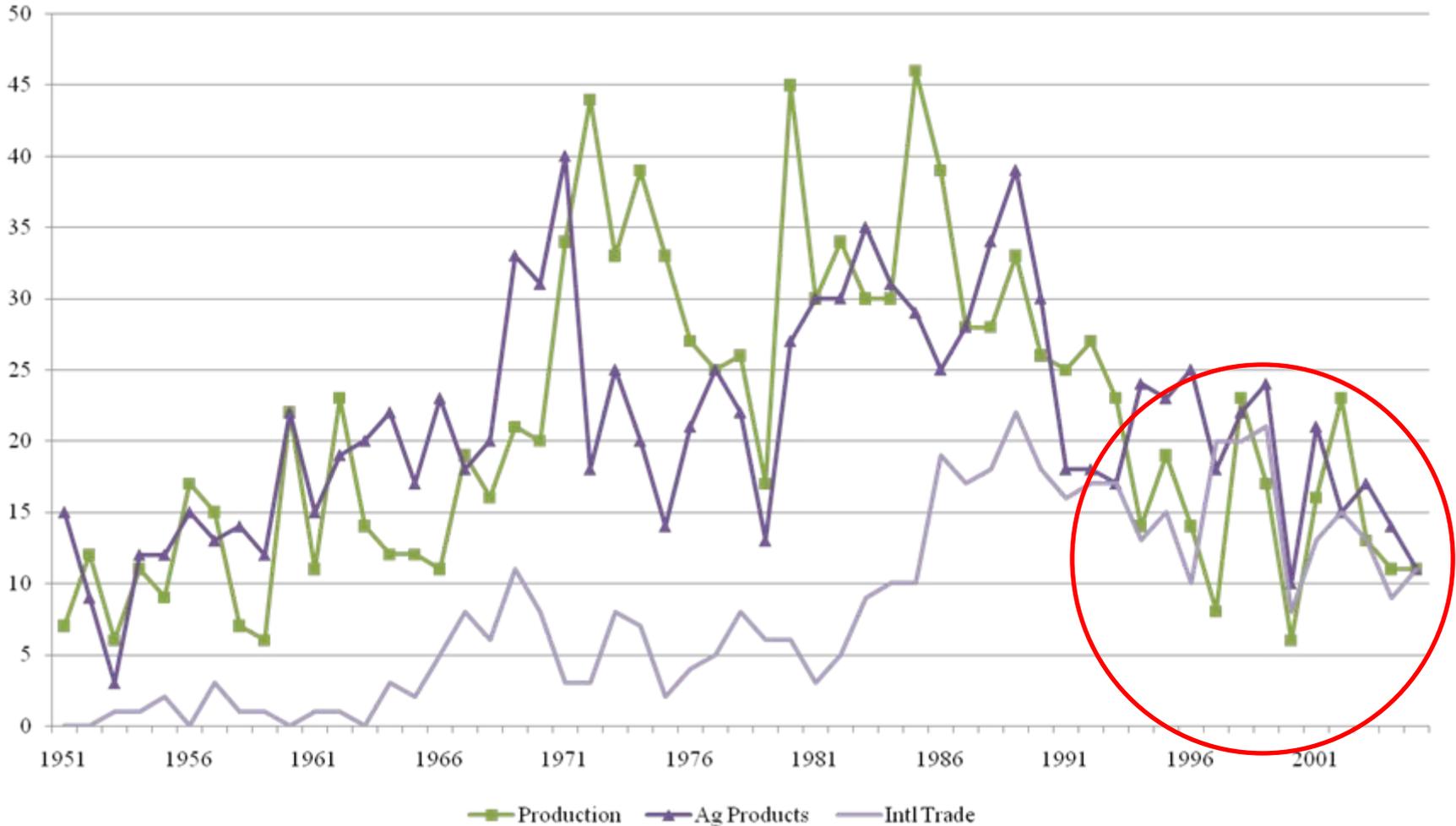
61% of all graduate students on funding;
24% of these on hard \$ with almost 70 percent being GTAs
N = 886

Supply of Agricultural Economists is Declining in Last Ten Years



2002-07 five year average is same as 1961-65.

Dissertations Written in Production Economics, Agricultural Inputs, and Trade



Measured from a population of 9,100 agecon dissertations since 1951

The supply and demand for doctorates in agricultural economics

- 921 faculty vitas were identified from 51 departments
 - 20.7% are estimated to be over age of 60
 - Almost 50% will be 65 or older by 2017 (no entry assumption)
 - Expertise in marketing, production economics, and agribusiness
- Small Farms program has more funding than Markets and Trade this year
- USDA National Needs graduate fellowships in these topics?
 - Horticulture (commercial and small farm management), agribusiness policy (international issues)
 - Teaching component
- Future hires in next five years will have more extension and undergraduate teaching appointments
- Difficult to find doctoral students in commercial agriculture

Traditional View of Units

- “Adam Smith” Approach
 - Hire independent agents in faculty who pursued individual goals that, in aggregate, resulted in the common good of the department, college, and university
 - Departments were big enough such that some faculty could pursue goals of the dean / provost (“applied research and teaching”) and some could pursue the goals of the profession (“research scholars”)
 - Unit leader and dean positions did not change much over time
 - Had some appreciation for all dimensions of scholarship
 - This worked when departments had critical mass

Today's View of Units?

- “AgEcon” units lack critical mass in many cases
 - Many departments are ½ size relative to 20 years ago
- Training fewer graduate students
 - Important role in research scholarship function
- Extension has already been reduced over time
- Unit leader position has shorter tenure
- Demands of dean and provost are more immediate with short-term objectives
- Role of development and overseeing relationships with stakeholders is a large function for departments
- Role of faculty entrepreneurship will increase in the future

- Most WAEA departments face these trends

Unit Leader has most difficult job in the university

- Increasingly difficult to reconcile the interests of faculty with interests of the organization and this is different from the traditional view
- Graduate schools and university organizations do not prepare us for leadership
- Potential for friction and conflict is very high
 - Faculty and unit leader; unit leader and dean
- Shorter shelf life
 - What should be the life of a unit leader position?
- More interims and less ability to hire external (only five outside hires)
 - The cost of inaction is too great in a department with an interim
- Need to grow talent internally
 - Rotate program leadership positions (no more than six years) and evaluate their performance
 - Develop role of associate unit leader?
- Create economic incentives and expectations

Challenge of Alignment and Relationship with the Dean

- Collective vision is needed and constant reinforcement at faculty meetings
- This is even more critical with large number of new unit leaders
- Difficulty in seeing vision with budget issues dominating the current environment
- Evaluate in hiring, promotion, tenure, and post-tenure review
 - Finding individuals with this alignment is difficult
 - Asked to tenure someone in a short period of time
 - Scholarship, grants, and instructional ability are long-term
- We are “difficult” to get along with in a college and university
 - Marc Johnson’s 2007 presentation explained why
 - But agecon is perceived as being more difficult
- Unit leaders discussed the HR issue and its daily grind as a drawback
- Need to educate us to better understand the external environment
 - We are good at understanding incentives but not the “people” factor

Expectations of a Dean in a Unit Leader are Sometimes Different than Faculty Expectations

- Unit leaders indicate the job is different than they thought when they applied
 - Interacting with stakeholders
 - Faculty motivation
 - Working with potential donors
 - Handling conflict
 - Job with maximum friction in the university
 - Evaluation process
- Has implications for search committees and “best economist” approach
- Moving forward this may be a more hostile environment if units are not careful
 - Deans control new positions
 - Lack of retirements (cannot go a decade w/o hiring)

Unit leader has to provide and implement a vision for the undergraduate program.

- Sustaining and growing undergraduate enrollment
 - Service courses must be accessible
 - Multicultural learner outcome
 - Minors must be user-friendly
 - Non-traditional teaching schedule
 - Use of labs
 - Departmental mergers to gain efficiencies
 - Can we afford to teach introductory and intermediate microeconomics in two different units?
- Quality of experiences is needed – Huge issue
 - Honors thesis
 - Study tours
 - Advising and mentoring
- Need flexible dollars (expendables) and endowments
- Difficult to have a department of teaching specialists
- What fits the WAEA units?

Unit leader has to provide and implement a vision for the graduate program.

- Graduate program needed to help recruit talent
 - Synergies with departments of economics
 - Fewer need for graduate classes (small numbers, vanity classes, etc.)
 - Faculty must generate funds to make it viable
 - Need to target students for grant projects and tasks
 - Quality of teaching assistants
- Need faculty with flexible research skills and interests
 - Difficult to have a department of research specialists
 - Some part of program must be commercial agriculture focus
 - Stakeholders demand it
- Increased need for interdisciplinary work
 - Social scientists on grants with bench scientists
 - Joint appointments?
- WAEA graduate programs?

Unit leader has to provide and implement a vision for extension and fee for service programs.

- Extension programs need to generate fee for service income
 - 2 programs with greater than \$500k;
 - Agribusiness with some commercial ag focused
 - Both programs have a distance MBA /MAB
 - Several around \$100k; remainder have much less
 - Mostly commercial ag and service providers
- More demand in US
 - Crop farming – definitely yes
 - Livestock – yes / no
 - Sundowner farmer
- Need the scholarship to generate the quality of instruction that people are willing to pay for
- Need critical mass to pursue these activities
- WAEA extension programs?

Other Challenges for Unit Leaders

- Nine month appointments asked for by new hires
 - Need to handle in evaluation of faculty performance but, in general, 11 month expectations are expected of faculty on nine months
 - Not a big issue with regard to mix of salary vs. graduate student
 - “Positive correlation” between faculty paying themselves summer salary and graduate students, etc.
- Mentoring new faculty
 - Unit leaders worried about this a lot
 - More general economists (non “traditional ag econ”) entering departmental talent pools and many leader cited a “hit or miss” philosophy
 - 16 assistant professors have exited departments voluntarily since 1999
 - Not mentored properly? Or just “bad” hires?
- Departmental rankings
 - Needed by deans for resources between colleges
 - Research is what is easy to rank

Professional Societies Need to Find Ways to Maintain Their Relevance

- Unit leaders are asking us to reduce transactions costs
 - Vital part of our networks, creativity, dissemination of new ideas, and profession
 - Page charge issues
 - Membership fees (seven departments pay membership fees)
 - Many meetings (e.g., my field of agribusiness management)
 - Find ways to eliminate duplication and cost savings
 - Less faculty funds for travel
- Define the issue of scholarship more broadly
- WAEA has family-oriented meetings with a joint meeting every third year and budget appears to be under control

Bottom Line!

- Understand and contribute to the collective vision for your unit and college
 - Professional societies can help
- Be nice to these folks! They are in difficult but very important jobs.
- Need to grow internal talent
 - Expectations of faculty regarding service in department
 - Rotate leadership positions
 - Develop an associate head position?
- Unit leader positions are too important to leave to “last person standing”
- Cost of inaction is too high

What does this mean for WAEA?

- Likely more merging of departments
 - More shared governance of graduate programs
 - Takes time to build relationships
- Difficulty in recruiting faculty who understand the issues of “West”
 - Need for some commercial ag focus
- We do not look the same in WAEA
 - Units on the eastern fringe of the WAEA have larger enrollments and faculty
 - Western fringe has more ‘econ’ focus
 - But WAEA has good attendance and relevance
- Talent and leadership is more critical for us because of our size, state budgets and location.
- WAEA schools, in general, have been hiring from higher level agecon programs and talent is not an issue but knowledge of commercial ag is

My term as WAEA President

- My overall responsibilities include
 - Planning 2010 annual meeting in Denver
 - Convening executive meetings
 - Newsletter
 - Fiduciary responsibility on the budget
 - Other duties
- The 2010 meetings are joint with AAEEA. I was WAEA VP for the last joint meetings in Portland
 - My philosophy is to ensure that WAEA has its own unique program in Denver

Our Program in Denver

- One day program (Tuesday) with no selected papers
- Two concurrent sessions offered in three time slots with four speakers per session.
 - 2 sessions * 3 time slots * 4 speakers = 24 speakers
- Each WAEA department will nominate an Outstanding Graduate Student Alumnus who will be invited to Denver for the program (easy access)
 - Criteria will be outlined in next newsletter
 - Use the WAEA council structure
 - Alumnus will speak for 15-20 minutes and 10-15 minutes for questions
- WAEA faculty moderators and hosts

Our Program in Denver

- Breakfast awards ceremony
- Two sets of speakers (2 slots @ 4 speakers @ 2 sessions)
- Luncheon program
 - Ticketed meal function
 - WAEA unit leaders will award a certificate to their alumnus and thank them
 - Speaker(s) discussing industry-university relationships
- Ensure industry guests are available for breaks and meals
- Final set of speakers
- Presidential address
- Business Meeting

- AAEA reunions

Questions?