

**Professional Competencies Perceived to be Important and Needed
by Female and Male Agricultural Extension Agents:
A Study from Nigeria**

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ABSTRACT Shortage of competent or well-trained agricultural extension staff is affecting food security in Benue State, Nigeria. The research was conducted to compare female and male extension agents on the importance and needs of competency categories. Simple random sampling was used to select 150 (40 female and 110 male) respondents for the research. The result revealed that high proportion of the female respondents perceived competencies in importance in the following order: ability to motivate farmers, commitment to extension work, work management, planning, organising and priority setting whereas the three most important competencies as perceived by male agents were: ability to motivate farmers, spoken and verbal communication fluency and development of instructional materials. Categories of need competencies of high rating by the female agents were: evaluation of extension programmes, subject-matter expertise and communication, where male agents rated the needed competency categories to include: subject-matter expertise, evaluation and personal qualities. To enhance the competency of the extension agents, professional values, training opportunities that are focused on areas relating to competency needs should be stressed.