

# *Is farmdoc the Future of Agricultural Extension?*

Scott H. Irwin  
Laurence J. Norton Chair  
of Agricultural Marketing



**I** ILLINOIS



An aerial photograph showing a vast expanse of agricultural fields, likely corn, in various stages of growth and harvest. The fields are arranged in a grid-like pattern, separated by roads and irrigation channels. In the background, a city skyline is visible, including a large white dome-shaped stadium and several high-rise buildings. The sky is clear and blue.

# *What Do We Do in farmdoc?*



# Corn Belt Farm Economics

**Ag Finance**

**Ag Commodity Policy**

**Ag Law & Taxation**

**Biofuels Markets & Policy**

**Crop Insurance**

**Marketing and Outlook**

**Farm Management**





# THE *FARMDOC* PROJECT: THIS IS STILL YOUR FATHER'S EXTENSION PROGRAM

SCOTT H. IRWIN, GARY D. SCHNITKEY, DARREL L. GOOD, AND PAUL N. ELLINGER

The agricultural-economics literature is rich with discussion and opinion relative to Extension programs. Program issues that have received the most attention include program quality, challenges facing Extension, recommendations for content changes, audiences and delivery methods, and predictions about the fate of agricultural-economics Extension programs. This literature is exemplified in the articles by Hildreth and Armbruster, McDowell (1985, 1992), Knutson, and Barry.

Much of the literature from the 1980s and 1990s has focused on Extension's role in

producers). However, this does not necessarily imply that the same program models that worked in the past are still effective today. The success of the *farmdoc* project can be attributed in large part to the development of a new program model, sometimes labeled "e-Extension," and perhaps best characterized as "integrated and web-first." The purpose of this article is to present an overview of the *farmdoc* project and draw implications from this experience for Extension programming in agricultural economics.

Irwin, Scott H., Gary D. Schnitkey, Darrel L. Good, and Paul N. Ellinger. "The *farmdoc* Project: This is Still Your Father's Extension Program." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 86(2004):772-777.



What a man **hears**, he **may** doubt.

What he **sees**, he **may** possibly doubt.

But what he **does himself**, he **cannot** doubt.”

*Seaman Knapp*

# farmdocDAILY



Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

## Weekly Farm Economics: Prevented Planting Decision for Corn in the Midwest

Gary Schnitkey, Krista Swanson, Ryan Batts

Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics  
University of Illinois

Carl Zulauf

Department of Agricultural, Environmental and Development Economics  
Ohio State University

May 14, 2019

farmdoc daily (9): 88

Recommended citation format: Schnitkey, G., C. Zulauf, K. Swanson, and R. Batts. "Prevented Planting Decision for Corn in the Midwest." *farmdoc daily* (9): 88, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, May 14, 2019.

Permalink: <https://farmdocdaily.illinois.edu/2019/05/prevented-planting-decision-for-corn-in-the-midwest.html>

Continued wet weather and saturated soils over much of the Midwest suggests that many farmers will be facing decisions on whether to take prevented planting. Prevented planting is available for those individuals purchasing the Common Crop Insurance (COMBO) product. Once the final planting date has arrived, the farmer can choose to take a prevented planting payment, plant corn, or plant soybeans or another crop. A cover crop can be planted on prevented planting farmland, but there are restrictions on haying and grazing the cover crop. In many cases, taking the prevented planting payments will have higher expected returns than planting. However, market and policy dynamics this year make forming

Figure 1. Output from Planting Decision Model

### Prevented Planting Comparison Tool

Budget Year: 2019P  
State: Illinois  
County: Champaign



Net returns from prevented planting		Corn	Soybeans
COMBO plan	RP	RP	RP
Coverage level		85%	85%
APH yield (bu. per acre)		200	60
Projected price (\$ per bu.)		\$4.00	\$9.54
Prevented planting factor		55%	60%
Final planting date		6/5	6/20
Prevented planting payment		\$374	\$292
Weed control costs		25	25
Crop insurance premium		18	15
Net returns (\$ per acre)		\$331	\$252
Net returns on plant corn or soybeans		Corn	Soybeans
Planting date		6/6	6/6
Insurance guarantee		673	487
Maximum yield (bu. / acre)		230	65
Percent of max		74%	91%
Expected yield		171	59
Expected harvest price		\$3.70	\$8.30
Basis		-\$0.30	-\$0.30
Expected cash price (\$/bu.)		\$3.40	\$8.00
Crop revenue		\$581	\$475
Crop insurance payment		41	0
Revenue (\$ per acre)		\$622	\$475
Direct costs (\$ per acre)			
Fertilizers		145	46
Pesticides		75	39
Seed		114	73
Drying		18	1
Storage		15	8
Crop insurance		18	15
Power costs (\$ per acre)			
Machine hire		13	14
Field cultivate		9	9
Plant		12	12
Spray		3	3
Combine		35	30
Trucking		12	6
Costs yet to be incurred		\$469	\$256
Expected net returns (\$ per acre)		\$153	\$219

fdd

farmdoc





***How Did  
farmdoc  
Develop?***



# Back to the 1990's

CERN introduces the World Wide Web to the public.

1991

The first audio and video are distributed over the Internet. The phrase "surfing the Internet" is popularized.

1992

The number of websites reaches 600 and the White House and United Nations go online.

1993

Marc Andreessen develops the Mosaic Web browser at the **University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana.**



**ILLINOIS**



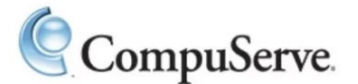
Netscape Communications is born. Microsoft creates a Web browser for Windows 95. Yahoo! is created

1994



CompuServe, America Online and Prodigy begin to provide Internet access. Amazon.com, Craigslist and eBay go live.

1995





Extension preparing for multimillion-dollar budget cut from state

illinois public media news

U of I Extension Cuts Mean Major Reorganization, Job Losses



Netflix is founded as a company that sends users DVDs by mail.



search engine is born

1996

1997

1998

1999

A 3D animation dubbed "The Dancing Baby" becomes one of the first viral videos.



The first Harry Potter book is published by author J.K. Rowling.

The United States has a budget surplus for the first time in thirty years.

People prepping for Y2K







*farmdoc*  
*version*  
*1.0*

*1999*



**Farm Decision Outreach Central (FARM.DOC) is a group of sites designed to provide comprehensive risk management information and analysis for producers, lenders, and agribusinesses in Illinois**

The site provides a one stop location for up-to-date price outlook information, evaluation of market advisory services, current government reports, historical fundamental data, crop and revenue insurance analysis, farm financial analysis, legal considerations, and instructional material.

**Farm Financial Analysis**

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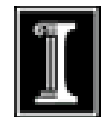


**Illinois Council  
on Food and  
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Research**

Those providing input to this site include [Darrel Good](#), [Scott Irwin](#), [Gary Schnitkey](#), [Paul Ellinger](#), [Donald L. Uchtman](#), and [Chris Hurt](#). The site is designed and maintained by [John Nwoha](#); please send suggestions, comments, and questions, to him at <mailto:%20nwoha@uiuc.edu>.

FARM.DOC is produced at the [University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign](#).

*Related sites include:*



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EXTENSION**



**StratSoy**





*farmdoc  
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FARM.DOC : Decision Outreach Central - Microsoft Internet Explorer

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**What's New**

- [Latest Market Advisory Service Report](#)
- [Illinois Regional Basis for Corn and Soybeans](#)
- [Illinois Farm Economics: Facts and Opinions](#)
- [2001 Revised Crop Cost Estimates](#)
- [Proceedings for the Farm Income 2001](#)

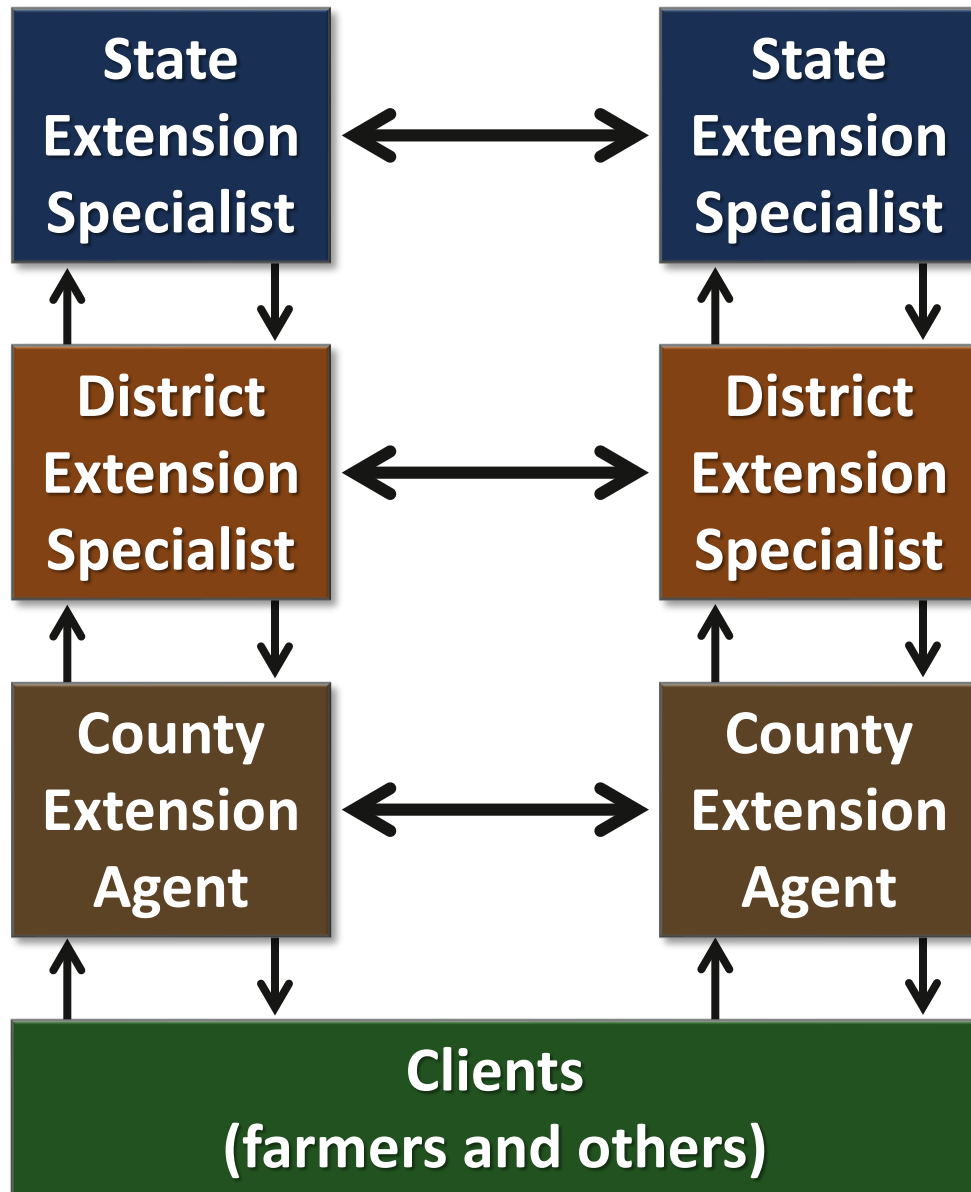
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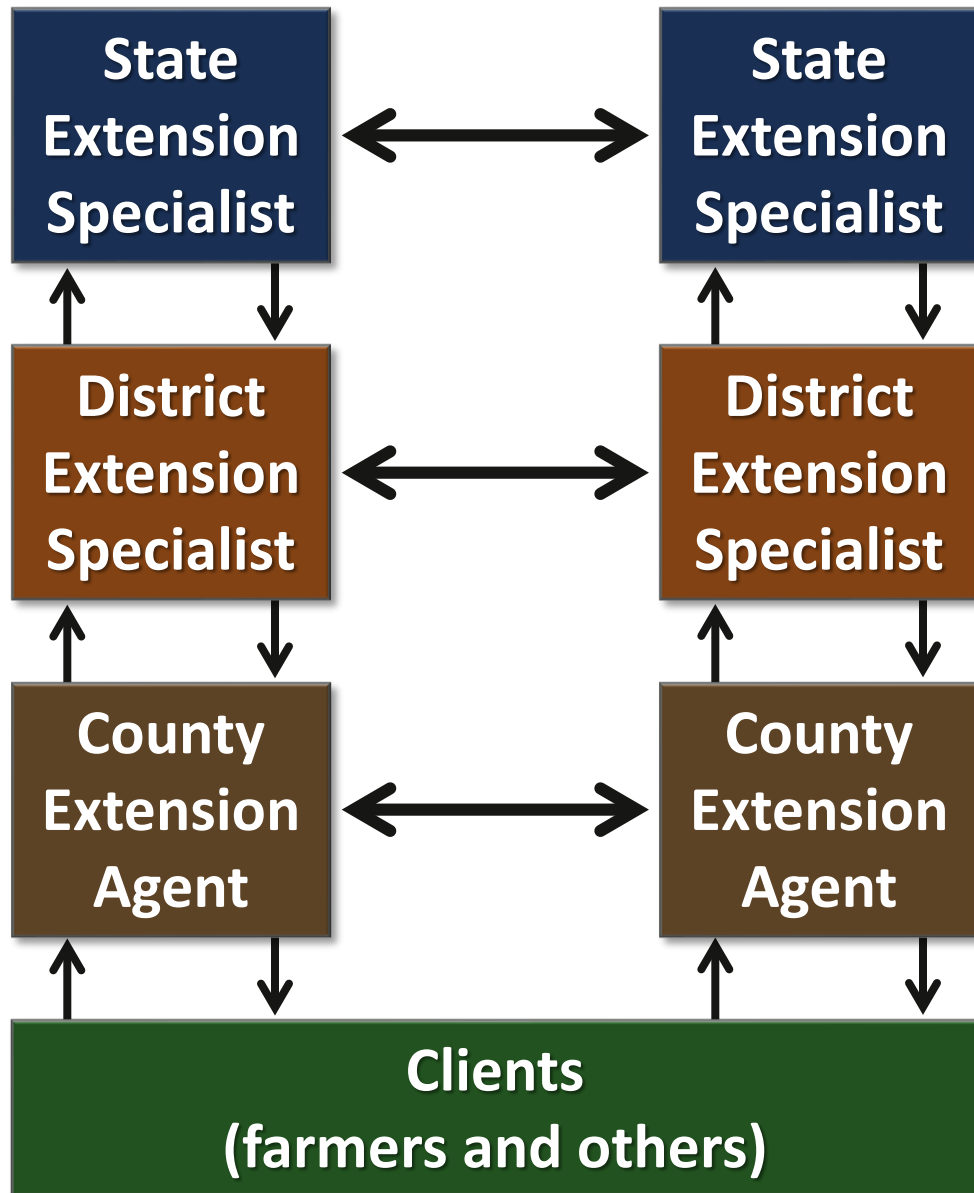


## Before *farmdoc* “High Touch” Model

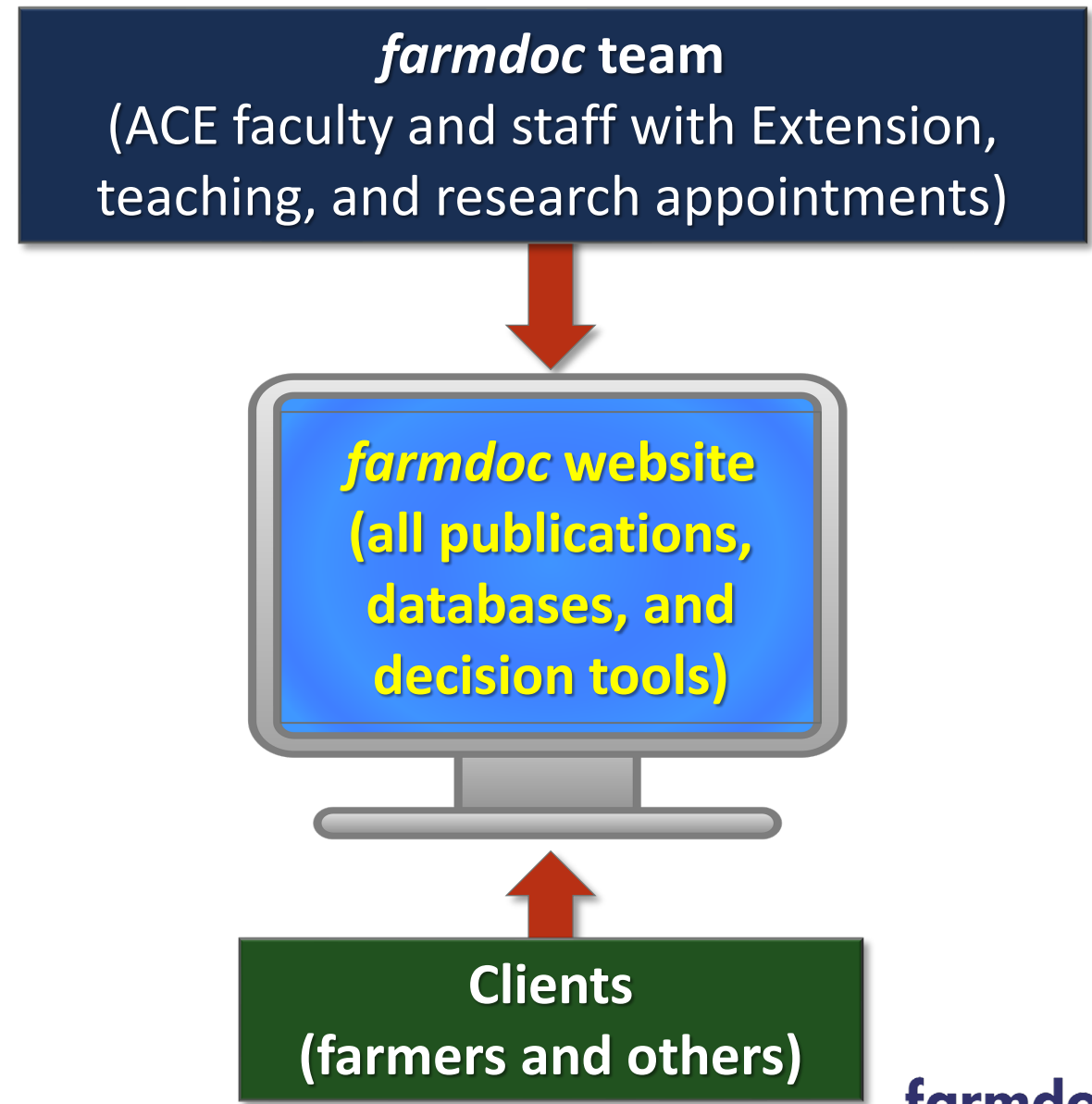




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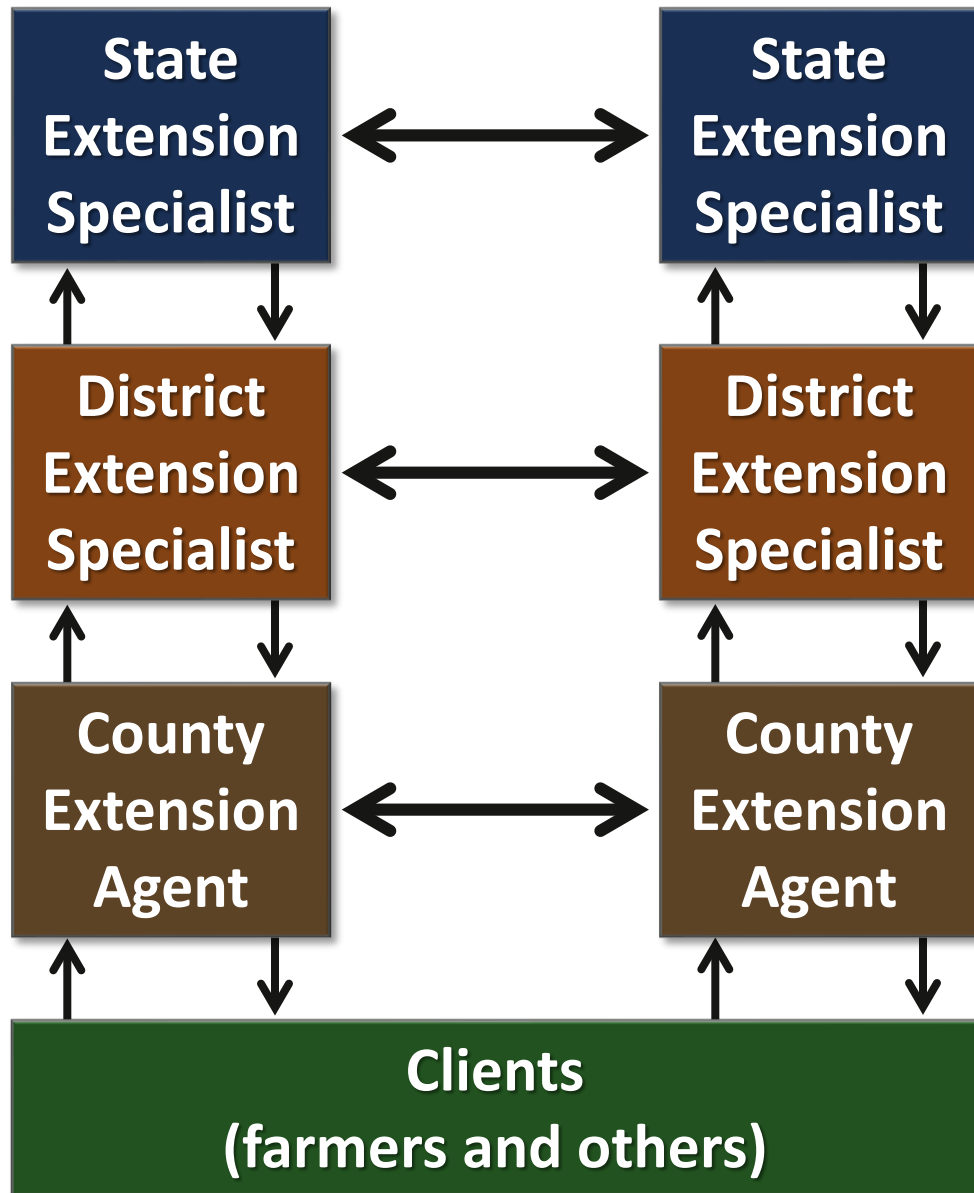


## After *farmdoc* “Digital” Model

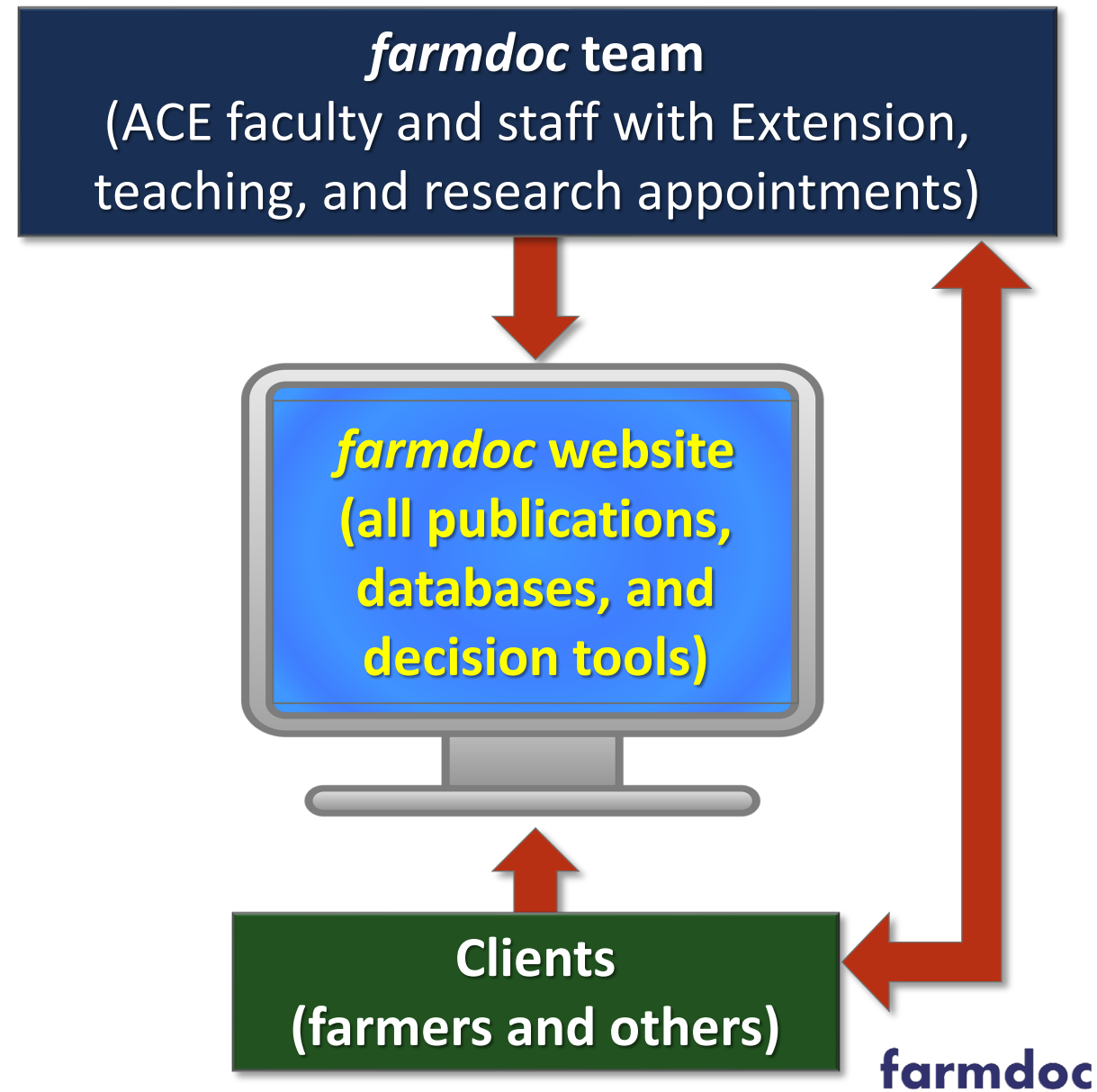




## Before *farmdoc* “High Touch” Model



## After *farmdoc* “Digital” Model









# farmdoc version 3.0

2003



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## Welcome to farmdoc

**Sunshine Replaces Gloom In Pork Outlook** (08/28/2004)  
How things change. It was just three months ago that the outlook for the pork industry was full of doom and gloom. Not only was the hog price outlook discouraging, but prospects for high corn and soybean meal price had everyone on edge. Just like the passing storms of spring, sunshine has returned to the pork industry. [Click here to read the newsletter...](#)

**New Rural Policy Digest** (08/17/2004)  
The Spring Issue of the Illinois Rural Policy Digest discusses the impact of a recent Illinois Supreme Court case on landowner liability. One article by Uchtmann and Endres concludes that new legislation is needed to reduce the liability risk of owners who selectively open their lands to others for recreational uses like hiking, hunting, and fishing. Another article by Endres provides a closer look at the Supreme Court's decision in *Hall v. Henn*. [Click here to read the digest...](#)

**Farmland Prices, Net Rents And Interest Rates Since 1970** (08/11/2004)  
Changes in net rents and interest rates suggest that farmland prices should have risen since the late 1980s. However, farmland prices may have increased faster than indicated by net rent and interest rate changes. [Click here to read the newsletter...](#)  
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# THE BLOGGING REVOLUTION

## MUST READ

### Weblogs Are To Words What Napster Was To Music.

In the beginning – say 1994 – the phenomenon now called blogging was little more than the sometimes nutty, sometimes inspired writing of online diaries. These days,





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**April 5, 2011**

## A New Era in Livestock Prices?

Our [post on March 29](#) provided updated evidence that nominal crop prices entered a new era beginning about January 2007. The increases in price levels that have occurred in this new era are generally consistent with the increases that occurred in the previous era that extended from January 1973 through September 2006. We have not previously examined livestock prices to determine if a shift in those prices has also occurred recently. Here we examine the average monthly farm prices of hogs; steers and heifers; and milk in Illinois in the accompanying three figures to identify the timing and magnitude of any previous or recent shift in nominal price levels.

[Continue reading...](#)

Posted by Site Administrator at 10:46 AM | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [Permalink](#)

**April 4, 2011**

## Focus Remains on Corn Demand

[Listen to MP3 podcast](#)

The USDA's March 1 Grain Stocks report revealed a surprisingly small inventory of corn. The smaller than expected inventory implies that consumption during the second quarter of the 2010-11 marketing year was larger than expected. It appears that consumption is progressing at a rate that cannot be sustained by available supplies.

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Posted by Site Administrator at 12:23 PM | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [Permalink](#)

**April 3, 2011**

## Production of Bioenergy Crops in the Midwest

[Listen to the MP3 podcast](#)

The Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 mandates that 79 billion liters of biofuels must be produced annually from non- corn starch feedstocks by 2022. Perennial grasses, switchgrass and miscanthus,

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Symbol	Last	Chg
<a href="#">Corn</a>	766-0	-0-6
<a href="#">Soybeans</a>	1383-4	+10-2
<a href="#">Soybean Oil (P)</a>	58.85s	-0.03
<a href="#">Soybean Meal</a>	355.9	+2.3
<a href="#">Wheat</a>	787-6	+1-4
<a href="#">Spring Wheat</a>	963-2	+1-0
<a href="#">Kcbr Red Wheat (P)</a>	950-0s	+2-0
<a href="#">Lean Hogs (P)</a>	93.700s	-0.500
<a href="#">Feeder Cattle (P)</a>	137.100s	-0.650
<a href="#">Live Cattle (P)</a>	121.750s	-0.625
<a href="#">Class III Milk (P)</a>	16.54s	+0.02
<a href="#">Ethanol Futures (P)</a>	2.719s	+0.019
<a href="#">Gasoline RBOB</a>	3.1844	-0.0169
<a href="#">Crude Oil WTI</a>	108.13	-0.21
<a href="#">Gold</a>	1,454.4	+1.9

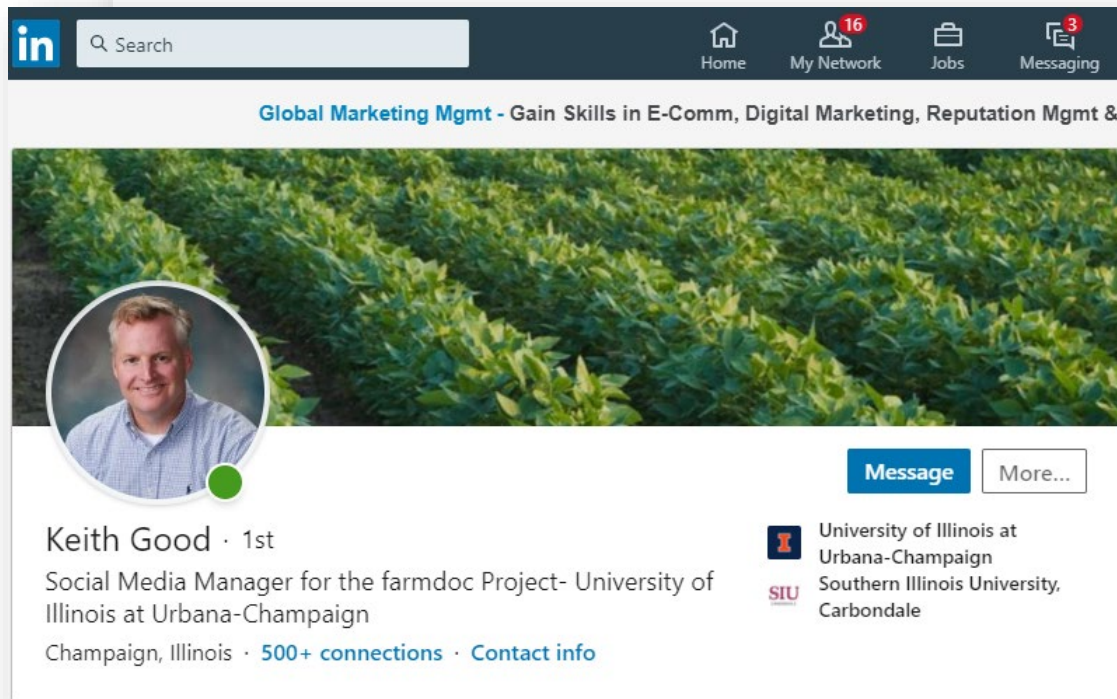
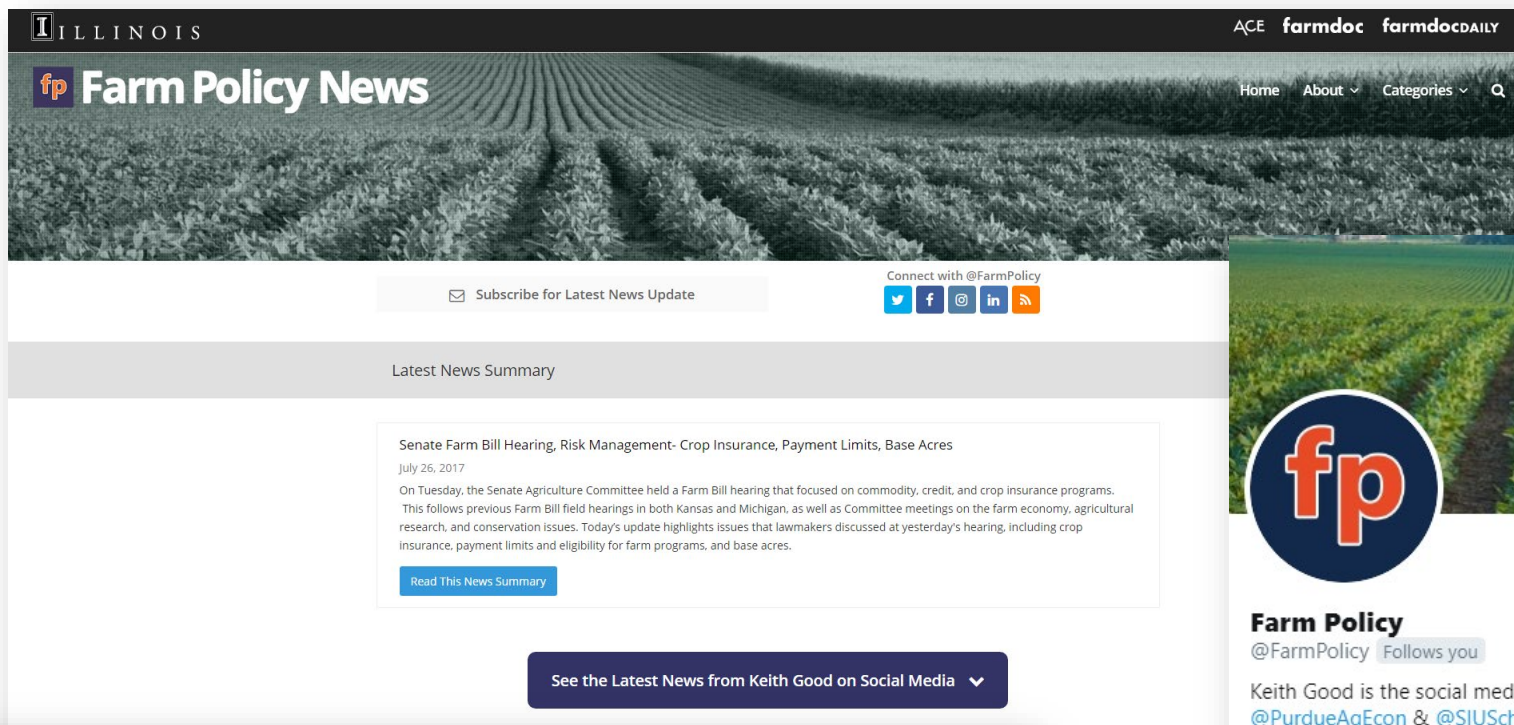
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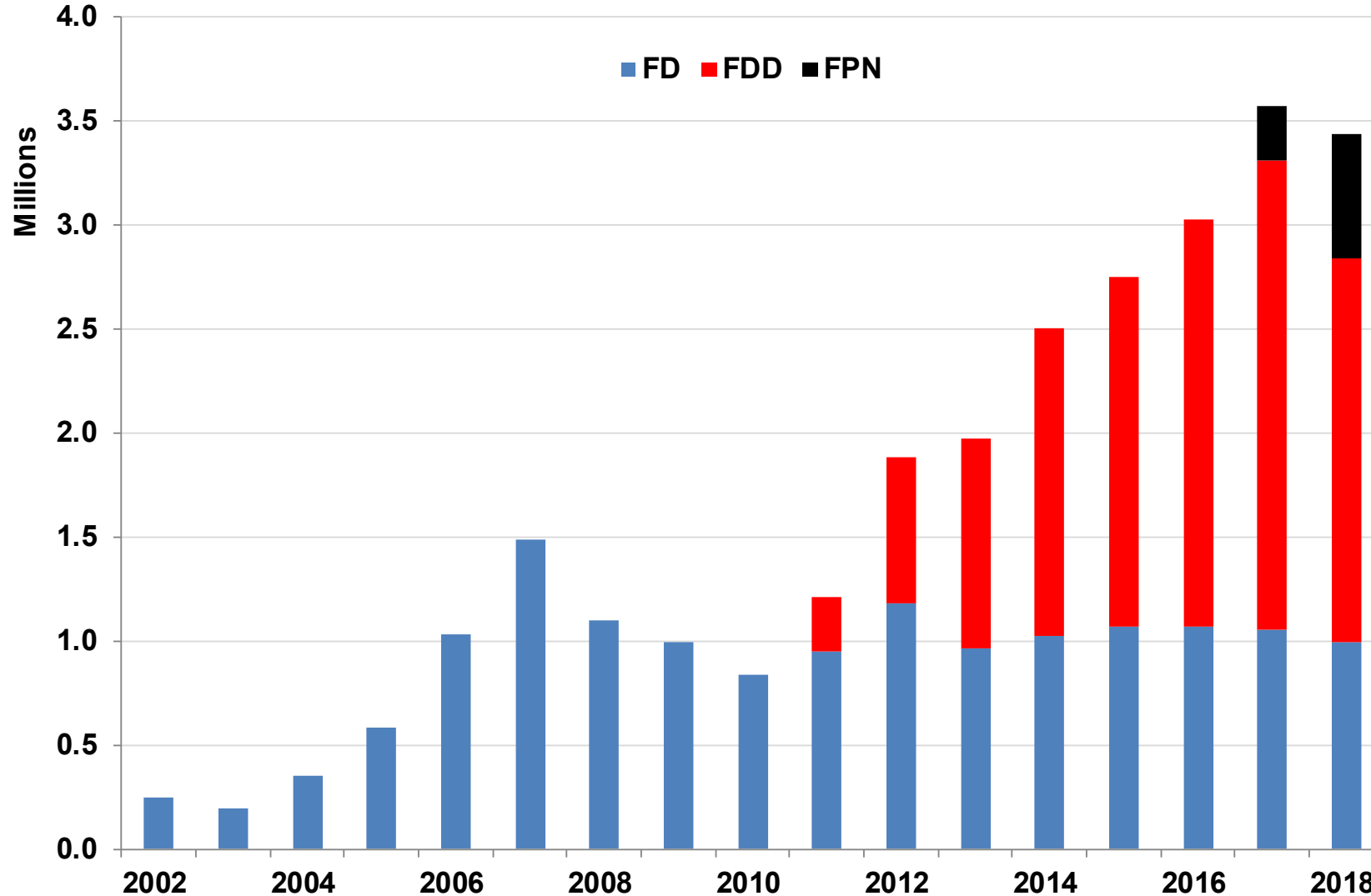


# *How Do We Measure the Success of farmdoc?*



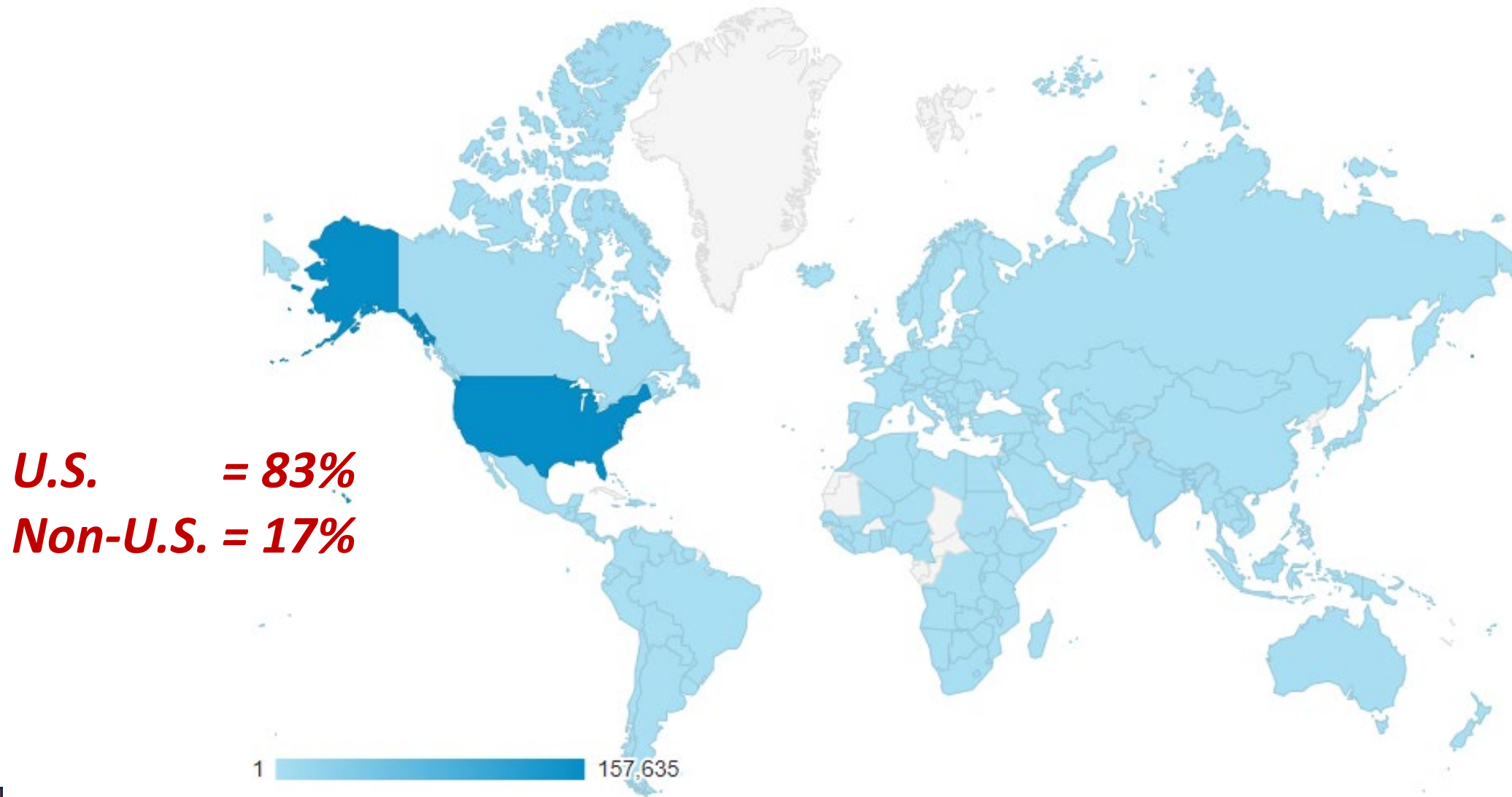


# Unique Visits to the *farmdoc*, *farmdoc daily*, and Farm Policy News Websites, 2002 - 2018

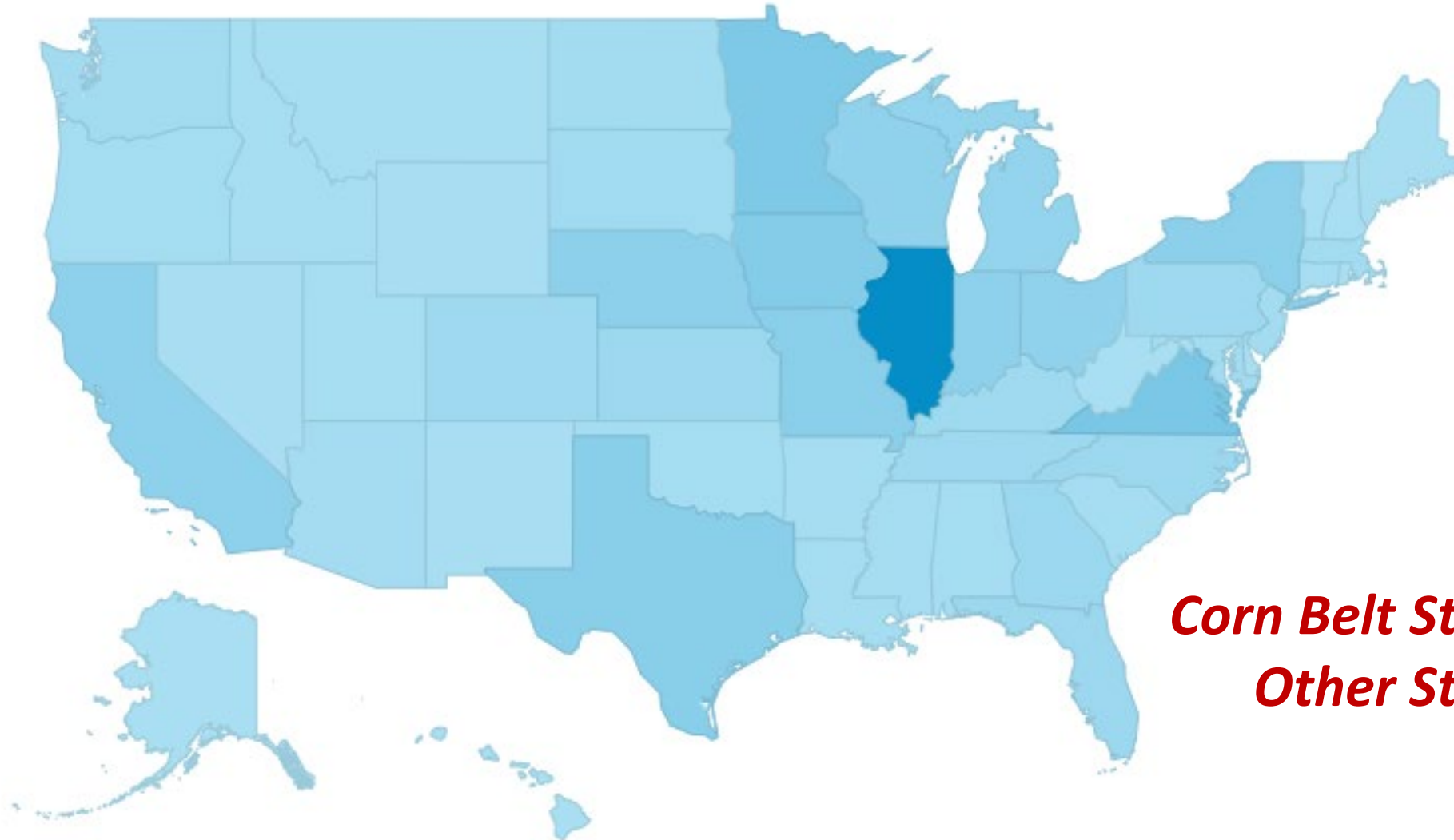




# *farmdoc daily* Unique Visits by Country in 2018



# *farmdoc daily* Unique Visits by State in 2018



75 34,038



# Digital Contacts for *farmdoc*, 2014-2018 (millions)

Year	Website Page Requests				Twitter Impressions	Total
	<i>farmdoc</i>	<i>farmdoc daily</i>	<i>Farm Policy News</i>	<i>farmbill Toolbox</i>		
2014	5.3	6.1	NA	0.4	0.2	12.0
2015	7.3	11.5	NA	0.2	1.8	20.7
2016	5.3	13.5	0.0	NA	3.6	22.4
2017	5.3	9.5	0.8	NA	9.5	25.1
2018	4.4	15.9	6.6	NA	14.4	41.2



# YouTube Stats

Overview Reach Engagement Audience

Mar 4, 2014 – Sep 4, 2019

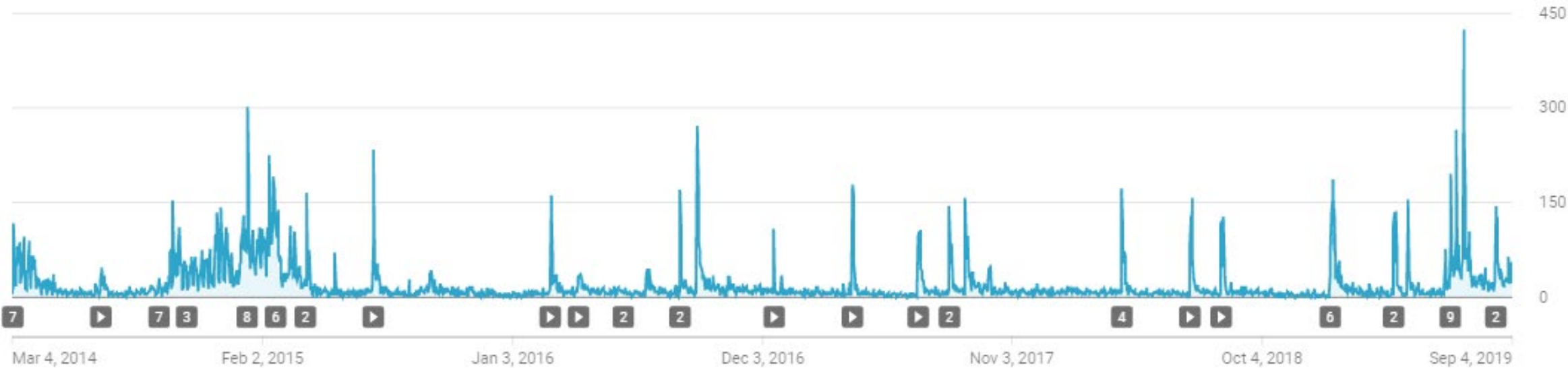
Lifetime

Views  38.7K

Watch time (minutes)  437.7K

Subscribers  +315

Updated Sep 4, 2019, 2:00 AM





**Table 3. Farmer/Landowner Awareness, Use, and Evaluation of Online Tools (N=721)**

	Online Tool
	NCPE APAS & Farm Bill Toolbox
Awareness of Tool (%)	64.2% (n=463)
Usage of Tool <sup>a</sup> (%)	43.3% (n=312)
Evaluation of Tool <sup>ab</sup>	
Not Helpful: Helpful	3.83 (n=312)
Difficult to Use: Easy to Use	3.58 (n=311)
Difficult to Understand: Easy to Understand	3.54 (n=311)
Not Valuable: Valuable	3.88 (n=310)
<sup>a</sup> Usage and Evaluation of Tool questions were only available to respondents who indicated they were aware of the tool.	
<sup>b</sup> Each evaluation criteria was measured on a 5-point scale where 1=Not Helpful and 5=Helpful.	

Brenna Ellisona, Nicholas D. Paulson, Mykel R. Taylor, Glynn T. Tonsor, Jonathan Coppess, and Gary D. Schnitkey. "Evaluation of Educational Offerings Associated with the 2014 Farm Bill." *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy* 13(2017):547-558.

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***Mean Willingness-to-Pay = \$7.32***

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# Awards and Recognitions

- Distinguished Group Extension Program Award, Agricultural and Applied Economics Association (formerly American Agricultural Economics Association): 2002, 2014, 2016
- Team Award, College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: 2004, 2010, 2013
- Donald A. Holt Achievement Award, Illinois Council on Food and Agricultural Research: 2008
- Selected as one of two organizations nationwide to develop policy decision tools for implementing the 2014 farm bill
- Team members regularly consulted by government officials regarding a wide variety of policies in agricultural trade, price support, and biofuels
- A team member recently served a term as the agricultural economist on the President's Council of Economic Advisors





*What are the Keys  
to the Success  
of farmdoc?*



# *Key to Success #1: Talented Team*



**16 member *farmdoc* team of faculty and staff subject matter specialists**

- 12 from Illinois, 3 from Purdue, 1 from Ohio State
- Variety of Extension, teaching, and research appointments
- 1.9 FTE with Extension currently for Illinois team members



# Key to Success #2: Shared Vision





# Key to Success #3: Funding



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# Current Budget

## 5 farmdoc Staff Members

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- Full-time web development manager
- Full-time FAST tool & meeting manager
- ½ time assistant web developer
- ½ time social media manager
- ½ time webinar and video manager

## \$250k annual budget for farmdoc staff

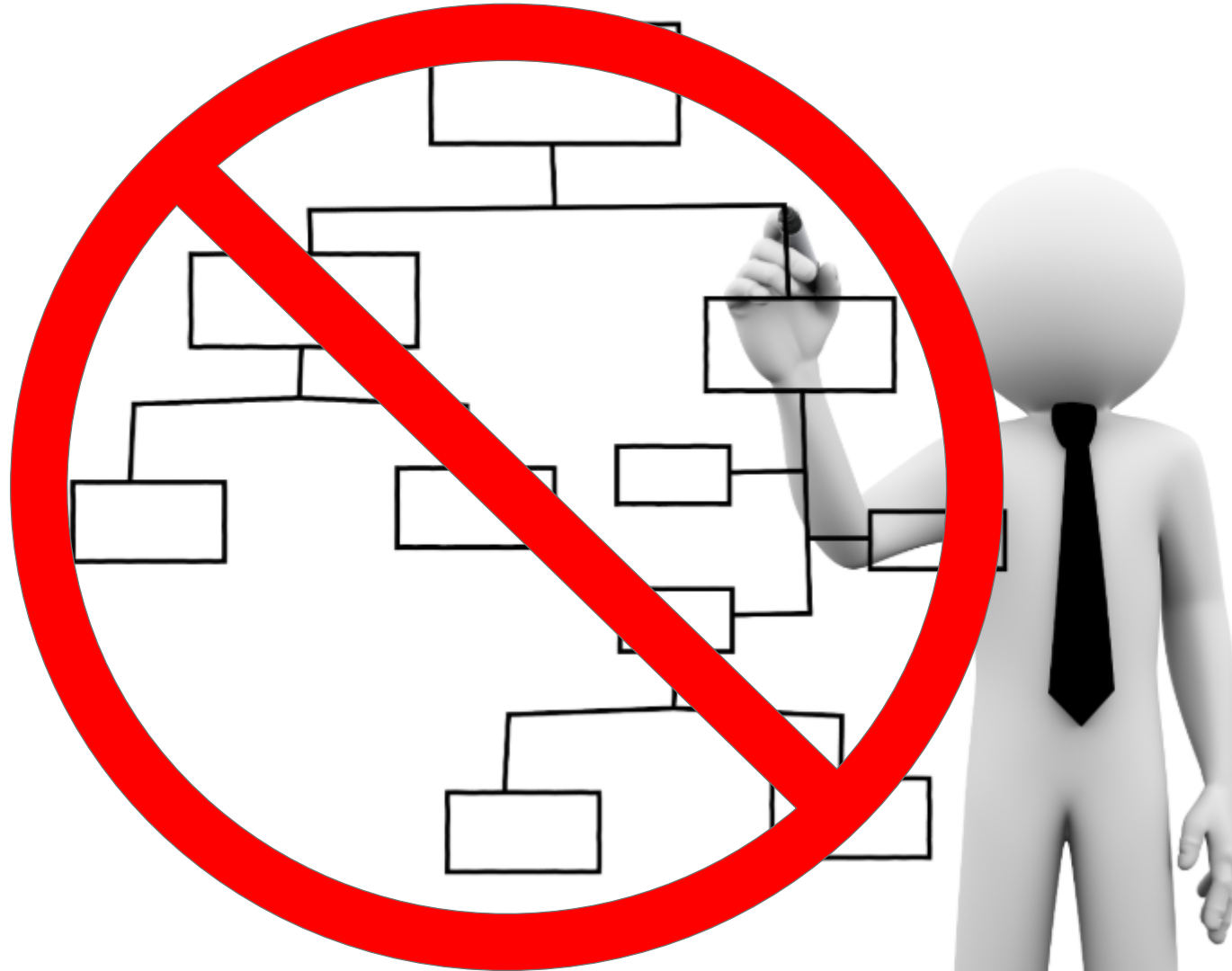
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- Sponsorships \$80k
- Extension \$60k
- Endowments \$60K
- Grants \$50k





# Key to Success #4: Freedom



# Key to Success #5: Low Overhead

- **Objective:** Minimize overhead time costs to team members
- Adopted a decentralized, flat management structure
- Maximize **flexibility** and **speed** of response  
Example: No formal editorial review system for *farmdoc daily*
  - Individual team members **100% responsible** for quality control
  - Crowdsourcing review every day
- Group calendar app: Sign up and go!
- Requires high trust level within team





# *Is farmdoc the future of Extension?*





# The **High Touch** Extension Model

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Network of professionals “on the ground”</li><li>• Programming is local “need-oriented”</li><li>• Research results and recommendations can be customized</li><li>• Feedback from local to the state level and vice versa</li><li>• Strong network for generating political support</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expensive system to maintain</li><li>• Large administrative hierarchy and overhead costs</li><li>• Difficult adjusting to changing structure of agriculture</li><li>• Attracting staff with relevant knowledge of agricultural business decisions</li></ul>



# The **Digital** Extension Model

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cheap method of disseminating information and analysis</li><li>• Not limited by geography or political boundaries</li><li>• Minimal administrative overhead</li><li>• Extremely fast response to problems as they arise</li><li>• Promotes flexibility and adaptation; easy “plug and play”</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Educational programming is more difficult to deliver</li><li>• Feedback from and to the local level is more limited</li><li>• More difficult to garner in-state political support</li><li>• Less visibility for state specialists</li></ul>

# Can the Two Models be Blended?

- Digital model is not a natural fit with high touch Extension
- Disruptive of high touch model because digital model is not limited by state borders or Extension hierarchy
- Strength of digital model is flexible and cheap dissemination of information and analysis
- Weakness of digital model is delivering educational programs and local networking
- A blended model will have to emphasize strengths of each model





# Challenge #1:

## Preference for Face-to-Face Meetings

**Table 2. Farmer/Landowner Preferences for Extension Education Resources (n=687)**

<i>Educational Resource</i>	<i>Average Ranking (5=Most Preferred; 1=Least Preferred)</i>	<i>% Ranking as Most Preferred or 2<sup>nd</sup> Most Preferred</i>
In-Person Meeting	3.68	64.92%
Talk with Local FSA Agent	3.16	48.33%
Use Online Tools/Spreadsheets	2.94	36.54%
Read Articles (Online/In Print)	2.89	31.88%
Webinars	2.33	18.34%

Brenna Ellison, Nicholas D. Paulson, Mykel R. Taylor, Glynn T. Tonsor, Jonathan Coppess, and Gary D. Schnitkey. "Evaluation of Educational Offerings Associated with the 2014 Farm Bill." *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy* 13(2017):547-558.

## Challenge #2:

# Funding for State Extension Specialist Positions

- Tenure-track Extension state specialists are the **core** of the farmdoc team
- Formal connection to Extension system
- Maintain network of personal relationships with agricultural producers and organizations (“**eyes and ears on the ground**”)
- **ISSUE:** Less visible at a local level under digital Extension model



# Challenge #3: Funding Project Infrastructure

- Staff and other project costs now total **\$250k/year**
- A struggle to piece together this funding on a consistent basis
  - Endowments
  - Extension
  - Sponsorships
- **ISSUE:** Benefits of farmdoc are diffused over a huge geographic area

# **Challenge #4:**

## **Changing Skill Set for State Extension Specialists**

**High touch Extension model: “Carry the Room”**

**Digital Extension model: “Obsessive Writer and Analyst”**

**ISSUE:** Digital model state specialists may drift toward too much of an academic focus





[farmdoc.illinois.edu](http://farmdoc.illinois.edu)

Thank You  
for 20 Years!