

FINDINGS OF THE ACCI MEMBER SURVEY (ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION SUMMARY)

Jane Schuchardt, U.S. Department of Agriculture¹

Increasing ACCI's viability and vitality in the 1990s requires increased consumer policy analysis, membership diversity, and membership retention. These were the key recommendations resulting from the 1989 survey of ACCI members. Roundtable participants discussed ways to implement these recommendations.

WHY A MEMBERSHIP SURVEY?

In September 1989, surveys were mailed to the 832 individual members of ACCI. Seventy-one percent were regular voting members, 11 percent associate members, and 18 percent student members. The budget did not allow for a follow-up mailing.

The ACCI Future Directions Committee wanted a general, all-member assessment of ACCI and some specific "consumer feedback" on ACCI publications. Of special interest was the new journal, *Advancing the Consumer Interest*. One issue was available to membership at the time of the survey.

WHO RESPONDED?

Responses were received from 271 members, a rate of 33 percent. All but 7 percent of the respondents had a graduate degree. Most had a doctorate (59 percent). University or college positions (76 percent, including Extension) were most common. Only 6 percent represented the business sector; 5 percent were employed by a government agency.

The respondents were nearly equally split between researchers and practitioners. Fifty-six percent gave their primary field of interest as consumer economics; 14 percent home economics. A limited number--less than 5 percent each--identified themselves with economics, marketing, management, education, psychology/sociology, or communications.

Nearly 60 percent had been ACCI members six years or more. Another 20 percent had been members three to five years.

¹National Program Leader, Extension Service. Other members on the 1989-90 Future Directions Committee were Sheila Mammen, University of Massachusetts, and Barbara Heinzerling, University of Akron, Ohio. The committee gratefully acknowledges the efforts of Anita Metzen, ACCI Executive Director, and her staff for mailing the survey and tabulating the responses. A copy of the detailed statistical analysis is available from ACCI headquarters, 240 Stanley Hall, University of Missouri-Columbia, Columbia, MO 65211.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF ACCI

Most responses were positive, especially with relation to member services and opportunities for professional development. Members were not as positive about the responsiveness of ACCI leadership to member concerns and the chance for membership involvement.

Nearly nine out of 10 respondents said ACCI was a good investment of resources, provided useful services, and allowed for professional development. Slightly more than seven out of 10 agreed ACCI was a progressive organization.

When asked for the single most important reason for joining ACCI, common responses were professional contacts (37 percent), staying informed (35 percent), and obtaining ACCI publications (24 percent). On the topic of offering sufficient opportunities for member involvement, 65 percent agreed this was the case, 15 percent disagreed; 20 percent gave a neutral response. Sixty percent agreed leadership was responsive; 35 percent gave a neutral response; 4 percent disagreed.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR ACCI

Roundtable discussants tended to agree with survey responses calling for increased consumer policy analysis, membership diversity, and membership retention. Suggested action steps were to:

- 1) develop an agenda for applied, action research that analyzes policy impacts, focuses on critical issues facing consumers, and has direct benefit to educators;
- 2) launch an aggressive membership drive to attract academics in related fields (e.g., economics, business, consumer psychology), representatives from business, government, and law, and professionals of different races and ethnic backgrounds; and
- 3) increase efforts to improve membership commitment, leading to retention. This could include a broadening of the leadership base of ACCI, taking steps to recognize and retain new members, and offering students opportunity to develop professionally through active participation in the organization.