The Project
This project aimed to gain an understanding of programming needs of larger producers in the Intermountain West, focusing on identifying the risk factors that lead to their vulnerability and to identify effective methods for delivering outreach education. The project would aid in the identification of the risk management needs of Extension clientele and their learning preferences. In 2006 a mirror image of the current study focused on the growing small farm sector ($50,000 sales and below) with the principal objectives of the study to assist in the discovery of new extension clientele in the West.

Agricultural operator demographics are changing; large operations are becoming larger and the number of small operations is increasing. Managers in the middle are under increasing pressure to become more competitive as a result, simultaneously elevating the risks they face. Educators and administrators may gain a better understanding from these results of what educational needs exist so that programs may be created that are of value to changing rural populations. Complete results are forthcoming and are available at RuralFamilyVentures.org.

Key Insights
- There are 63,760 farms in Wyoming, Colorado, and Arizona (USDA-NASS, 2007).
- Making a profit was the most frequently stated reason for engaging in rural family enterprises.
- The preferred source for receiving information is one-on-one communication, while the preferred form is print.
- The majority of large operations are organized as sole proprietorships, almost always family-owned or closely held.
- The highest level of education most often reported was high school for all operators, with a significant number indicating they earned a 4-year degree or more (37 percent for the primary operator and 39 percent for operator #2).
- Primary operator age was most often reported as 55 and over, with 45-54 years of age for operator #2.
- A total of 92 percent indicated at least one member of the primary operators’ household currently holds an off-farm job.

The Survey
To better understand the characteristics and needs of larger agriculturalists, the Rural Family Ventures Team conducted a survey of farm operations in Wyoming, Colorado, and Arizona in the spring of 2008. The target population was operations with annual sales greater than $50,000.

The eight-page survey instrument was developed by the Rural Family Ventures Team. The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) conducted the survey with the Wyoming and Colorado Field Offices completing the project. The survey was mailed to farm operators selected by NASS from its various data bases. A follow-up postcard was mailed two weeks later. Finally, telephone interviews were conducted with operators to obtain the desired 50 percent return rate.

The Respondents
- The majority of larger operations indicated their operations were completely rural or mostly rural.
- Most large operators live in a residence located on property (79 percent). Those with off-farm residences are most often located 5 miles from the property.
- Respondents most often reported the distance to the nearest metro area as 20 miles.
- A total of 92 percent indicated that at least one member of the primary operators’ household currently holds an off-farm job.
- The most commonly reported number of operators involved in day-to-day decision making was one, with that person typically a white male. Operator #2 was most often reported as a white female (61 percent).
- The primary operator age was most often reported as 65 and over. Operator #2 most frequently indicated they were 45-54 years of age.
- The highest level of education most often reported was high school for all operators, with 37 percent of primary operations indicating a 4-year college degree or more. Fully 20 percent of those listed as operator #2 indicated a 4-year college degree or more.
- The primary operator most often reported tenure on the property as 10 years, while operator #2 most often listed 30 years’ tenure. Primary operators reported their tenure in the community most often as 50 years, while the most frequent response for operator #2 was 30 years.
- The relationship of operator #2 to the primary operator was most often reported as “spouse” (59 percent).

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Profiling the Evolving Characteristics and Needs for Risk Management Education of Commercial Agricultural Producers in the Intermountain West
John P. Hewlett & Cole Ehmk
Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources