

Identifying Master Gardener Training Priorities for Volunteering with Youth

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INTRODUCTION

- Master Gardeners are cooperative extension volunteers that gain & maintain certification by attending trainings & providing volunteer services in their communities⁶
- Tennessee Master Gardener Program encourages volunteering with youth through annual awards & handbook guidelines^{9, 11}
- Two required training manuals do not provide training material on volunteering with youth^{10, 11}
- Purpose of research was to identify skills with highest training priorities needed by Master Gardeners to volunteer with youth

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Master Gardeners served as judges in state & national FFA career development events⁷
- Oregon Master Gardeners volunteered in community gardens that were maintained by at-risk youth¹²
- Master Gardeners around the country have volunteered as teachers & leaders in school gardens^{1, 5}
- Junior Master Gardener program has greatly expanded the role of Master Gardeners as volunteers with youth^{4, 8, 13}
- National 4-H Program has identified 43 skills needed by adults to volunteer with youth known as the Volunteer Research, Knowledge, & Competency Taxonomy³

METHODS

- Survey research method utilized
- Population: approximately 2,000 Tennessee Master Gardeners
- Stratified random sample: 360 Tennessee Master Gardeners from three Extension regions (east, central, west)
- Pilot study conducted with Master Gardener Association presidents
- Five contacts: pre-notice postcard, survey invitation e-mail, & three follow-up e-mails
- Survey instrument constructed using the National 4-H Program's Volunteer Research, Knowledge, & Competency Taxonomy³
- Master Gardeners asked to rate on five-point Likert-type scales the importance level of & their ability level in the 43 skills
- Reliability coefficient for the instrument was .972 on 86 items²
- 64% response rate

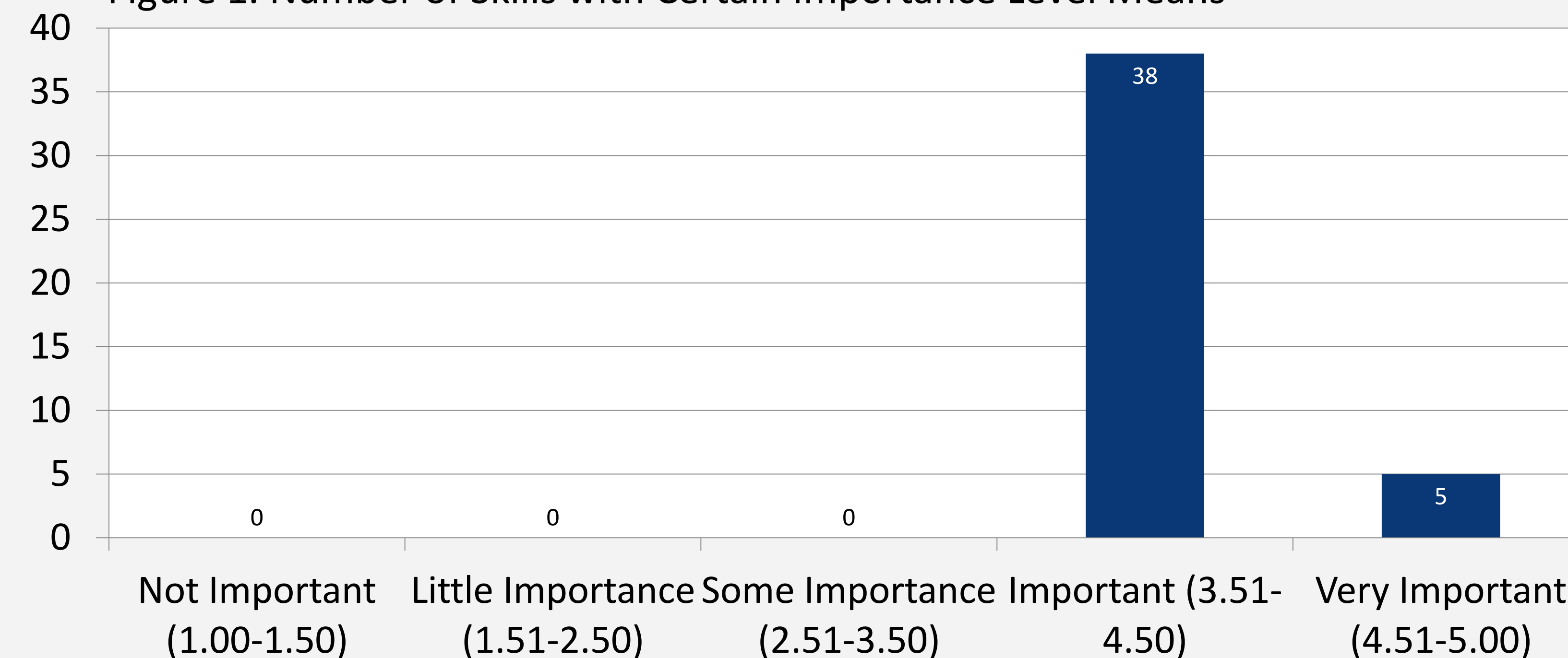
RESULTS

Table 1. Current Volunteer Experiences that Tennessee Master Gardeners Participate in with Youth

Activity	f	% responses	% respondents
Community garden	64	22	39
None	40	14	25
School garden	38	13	23
Other	29	10	18
Junior Master Gardener Program	27	9	17
4-H club	21	7	13
4-H judge	21	7	13
4-H activity	19	7	12
Camp	15	5	9
Youth club	11	4	7
FFA club	3	1	2
FFA judge	3	1	2

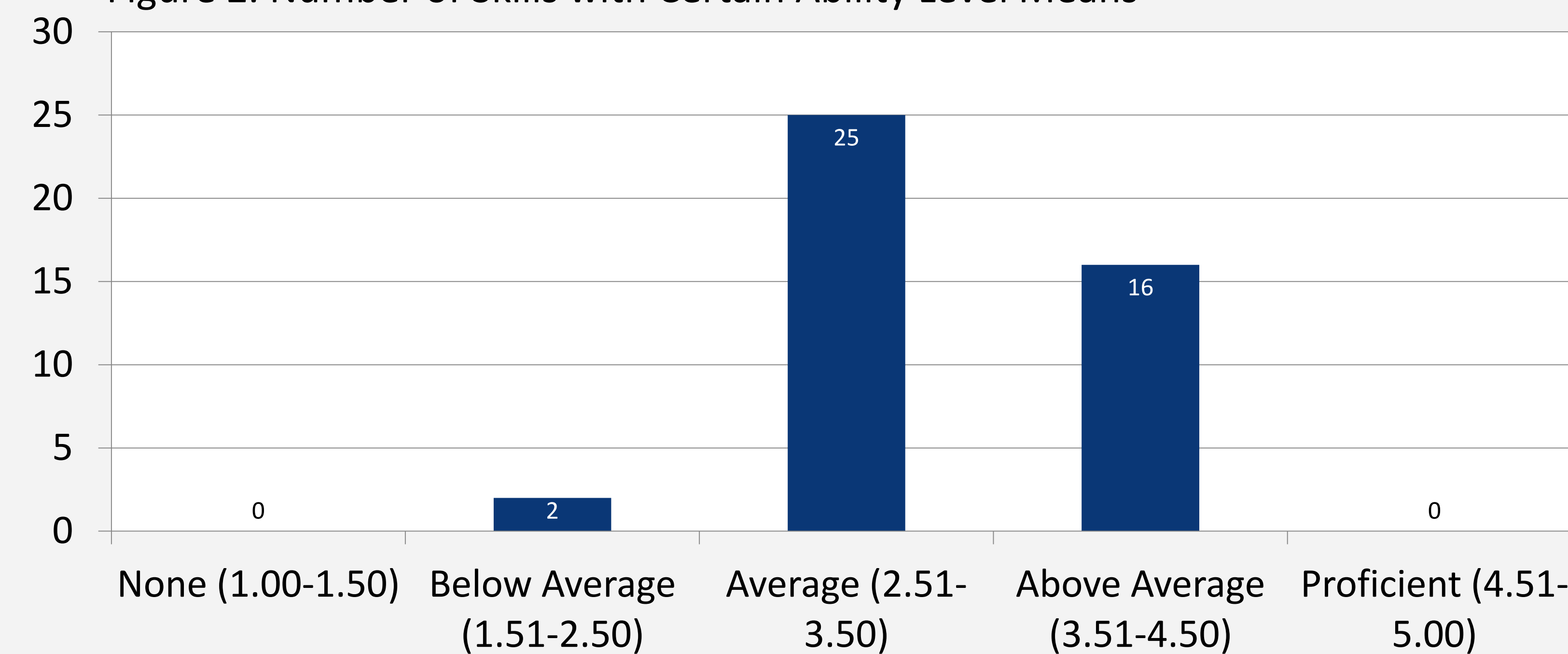
Note: f = frequency. % responses is out of 291 total responses. % respondents is out of 163 completed in entirety surveys.

Figure 1. Number of Skills with Certain Importance Level Means



Note. Total number of skills is 43.

Figure 2. Number of Skills with Certain Ability Level Means



Note. Total number of skills is 43.

Table 2. Six Highest Mean Weighted Discrepancy Scores

Skill	Mean Importance	Mean Ability	MWDS	n
Upholding the mission of 4-H	3.87	2.49	5.42	156
Knowledge of subject matter	4.55	3.46	4.94	153
Knowledge of 4-H organization & structure	3.63	2.42	4.43	156
Motivate & encourage youth	4.38	3.40	4.33	153
Youth club management	3.76	2.62	4.29	156
Use of age-appropriate activities	4.23	3.28	4.04	154

Note. The importance scale is 1 = not important, 2 = little importance, 3 = some importance, 4 = important, & 5 = very important.

Table 3. Six Lowest Mean Weighted Discrepancy Scores

Skill	Mean Importance	Mean Ability	MWDS	n
Technology use	3.83	3.37	1.60	162
Time management skills	3.99	3.62	1.38	161
Compassionate nature	4.37	4.06	1.34	153
Speaking skills	4.07	3.74	1.32	173
Nonverbal skills	3.77	3.47	1.19	169
Writing skills	3.79	3.75	0.13	172

Note. The ability scale is 1 = none, 2 = below average, 3 = average, 4 = above average, & 5 = proficient.

CONCLUSIONS

- Majority of Master Gardeners volunteered in community & school gardens & 4-H activities
- Some Master Gardeners are not volunteering with youth at all
- All skills were deemed as either important or very important
- All ability levels in the skills were deemed as either below average, average, or above average
- Mean weighted discrepancy scores indicated which skills have the highest & lowest training priorities



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide training in volunteer work in community & school gardens & 4-H activities
- Collaborate with 4-H agents & 4-H programs
- Focus specific training on skills with highest mean weighted discrepancy scores
- Training material & power points from National 4-H's Volunteer Research, Knowledge, & Competency Taxonomy can be found here: <http://www.4-h.org/resource-library/professional-development-learning/4-h-volunteer-development/volunteer-research-knowledge-competencies/>

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