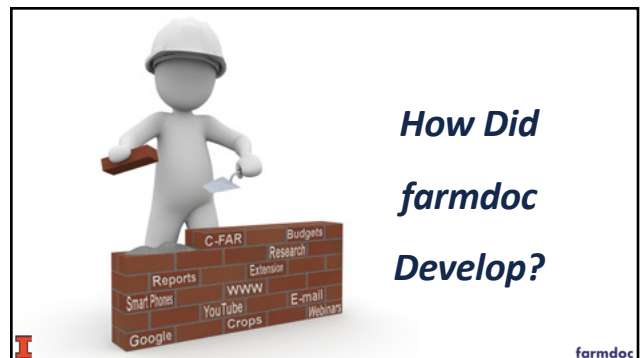
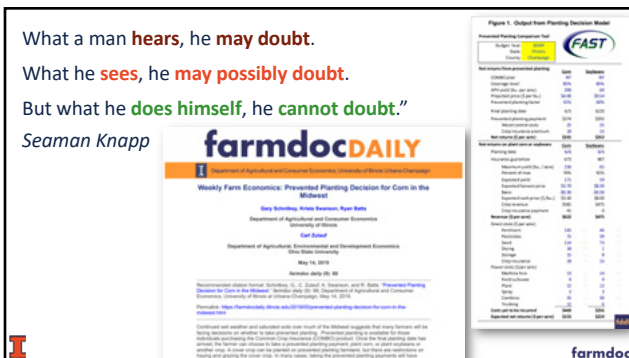
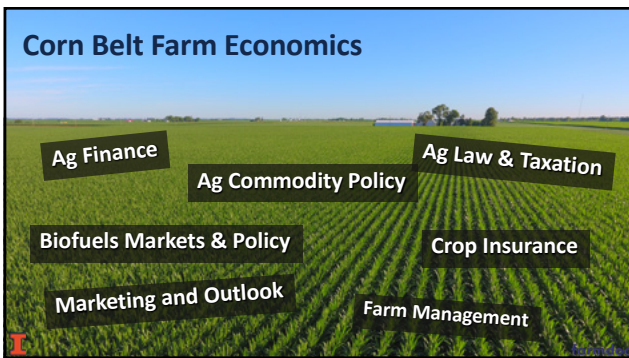


Is farmdoc the Future of Agricultural Extension? by Scott Irwin



Is farmdoc the Future of Agricultural Extension?

by Scott Irwin

Back to the 1990's

1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
CERN introduces the World Wide Web to the public.	The first audio and video are distributed over the Internet. The phrase "surfing the Internet" is popularized.	The number of websites reaches 600 and the White House and United Nations go online.	Netscape Communications is born. Microsoft creates a Web browser for Windows 95. Yahoo! is created.	CompuServe, America Online and Prodigy begin to provide Internet access. Amazon.com, Craigslist and eBay go live.
		Marc Andreesen develops the Mosaic Web browser at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana.	Windows 95	CompuServe PRODIGY Interactive Personal Service

ILLINOIS farmdoc

Extension preparing for multimillion-dollar budget cut from state

1996	1997	1998	1999
A 3D animation dubbed "The Dancing Baby" becomes one of the first viral videos.	Netflix is founded as a company that sends users DVDs by mail.	The United States has a budget surplus for the first time in thirty years.	People prepping for Y2K
	The first Harry Potter book is published by author J.K. Rowling.		

ILLINOIS farmdoc




ILLINOIS farmdoc

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
- Marketing
- Production
- Legal Considerations
- Crop Insurance
- Enterprise Analysis

These providing input to this site include: [Dann Good](#), [Scott Irwin](#), [Greg Schmitzer](#), [Paul Eltinger](#), [Donald F. Lichtman](#), and [Chai Hui](#). The site is designed and maintained by [John Noshay](#); please send suggestions, comments, and questions, to him at johnn@uiuc.edu.

FARM.DOC is produced at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Related sites include:

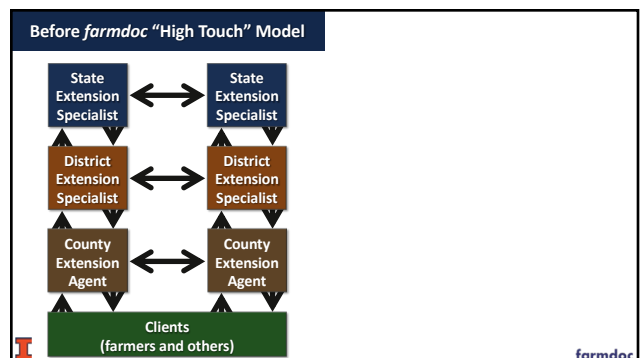


ILLINOIS farmdoc

farmdoc version 2.0 2000

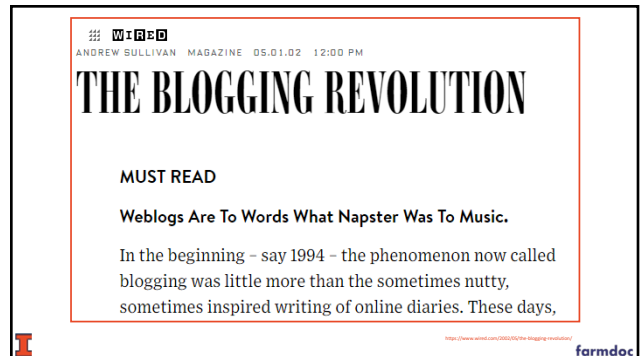
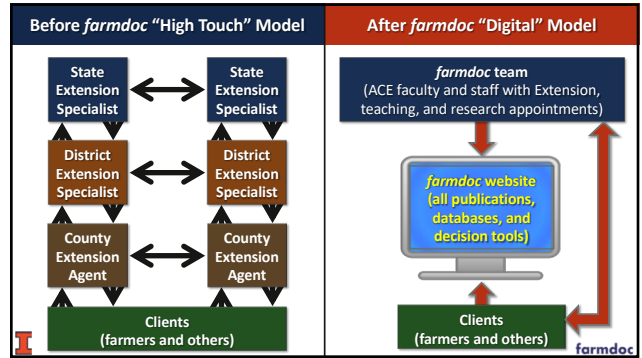
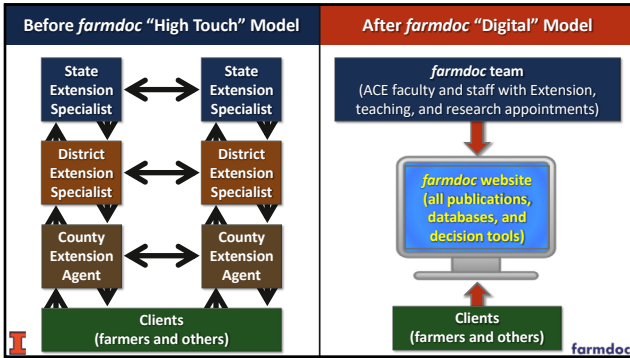


ILLINOIS farmdoc

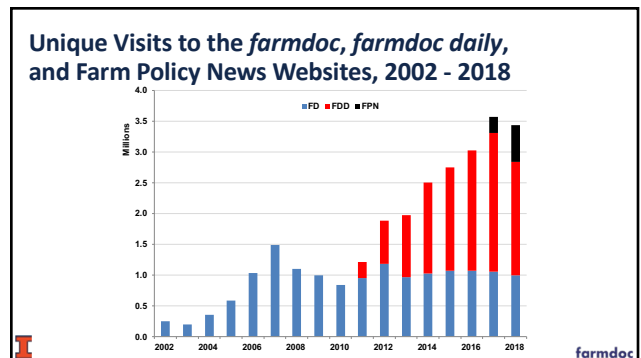
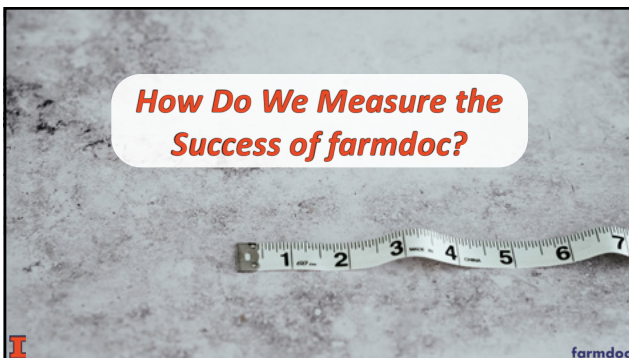
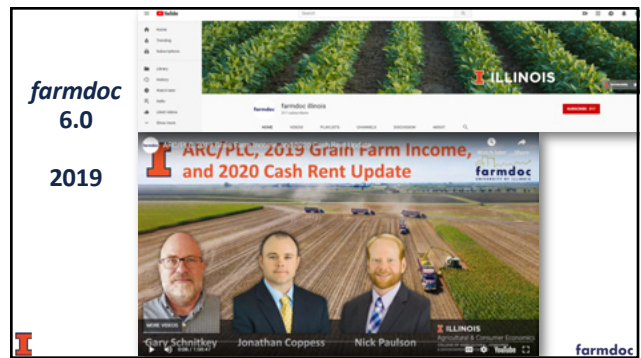
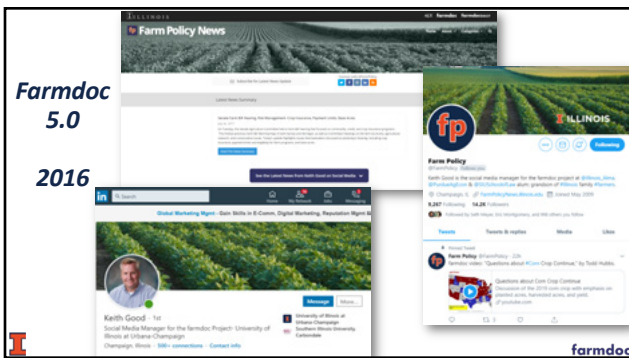


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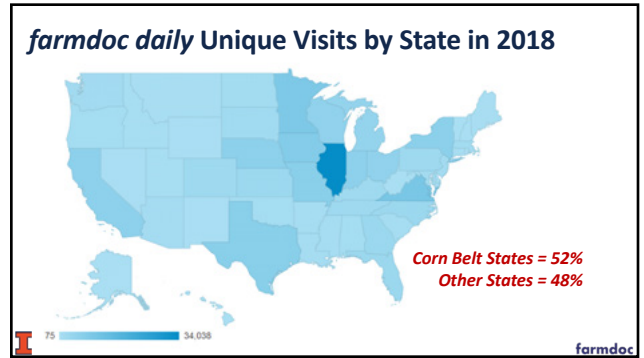
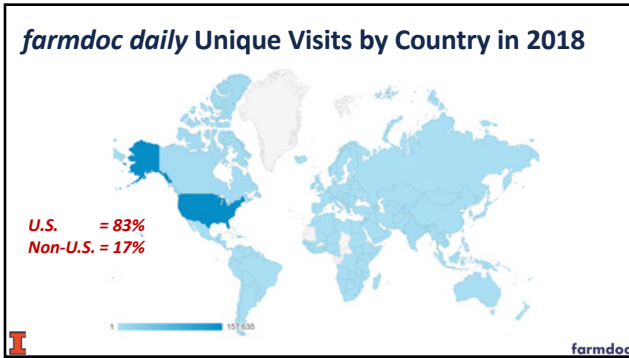


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Digital Contacts for farmdoc, 2014-2018 (millions)

Year	Website Page Requests				Twitter Impressions	Total
	farmdoc	farmdoc daily	Farm Policy News	farmbill Toolbox		
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

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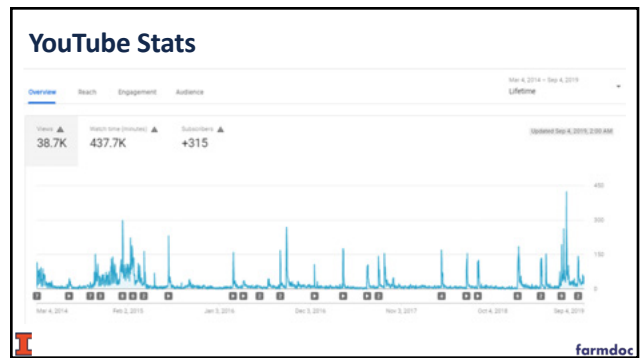


Table 3. Farmer/Landowner Awareness, Use, and Evaluation of Online Tools (N=721)

	NCPE APAS & Farm Bill Toolbox
Awareness of Tool (%)	64.2% (n=463)
Usage of Tool ^a (%)	43.3% (n=312)
Evaluation of Tool^b	
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)

^a Usage and Evaluation of Tool questions were only available to respondents who indicated they were aware of the tool.
^b 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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Is farmdoc the Future of Agricultural Extension?

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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



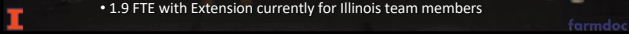
What are the Keys to the Success of farmdoc?



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



ILLINOIS EXTENSION



Current Budget

5 farmdoc Staff Members

- 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

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



Is farmdoc the Future of Agricultural Extension?

by Scott Irwin

Key to Success #4: Freedom

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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

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The High Touch Extension Model

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

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The Digital Extension Model

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

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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

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Is farmdoc the Future of Agricultural Extension?

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Challenge #1: Preference for Face-to-Face Meetings

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

Educational Resource	Average Ranking (5=Most Preferred; 1=Least Preferred)	% Ranking as Most Preferred or 2 nd Most Preferred
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. Schnitzkey. "Evaluation of Educational Offerings Associated with the 2014 Farm Bill." *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy* 13(2017):547-558.



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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



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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



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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



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