

Understanding equine extension needs and perceptions of extension in the horse capitol of the world, Marion County, Florida



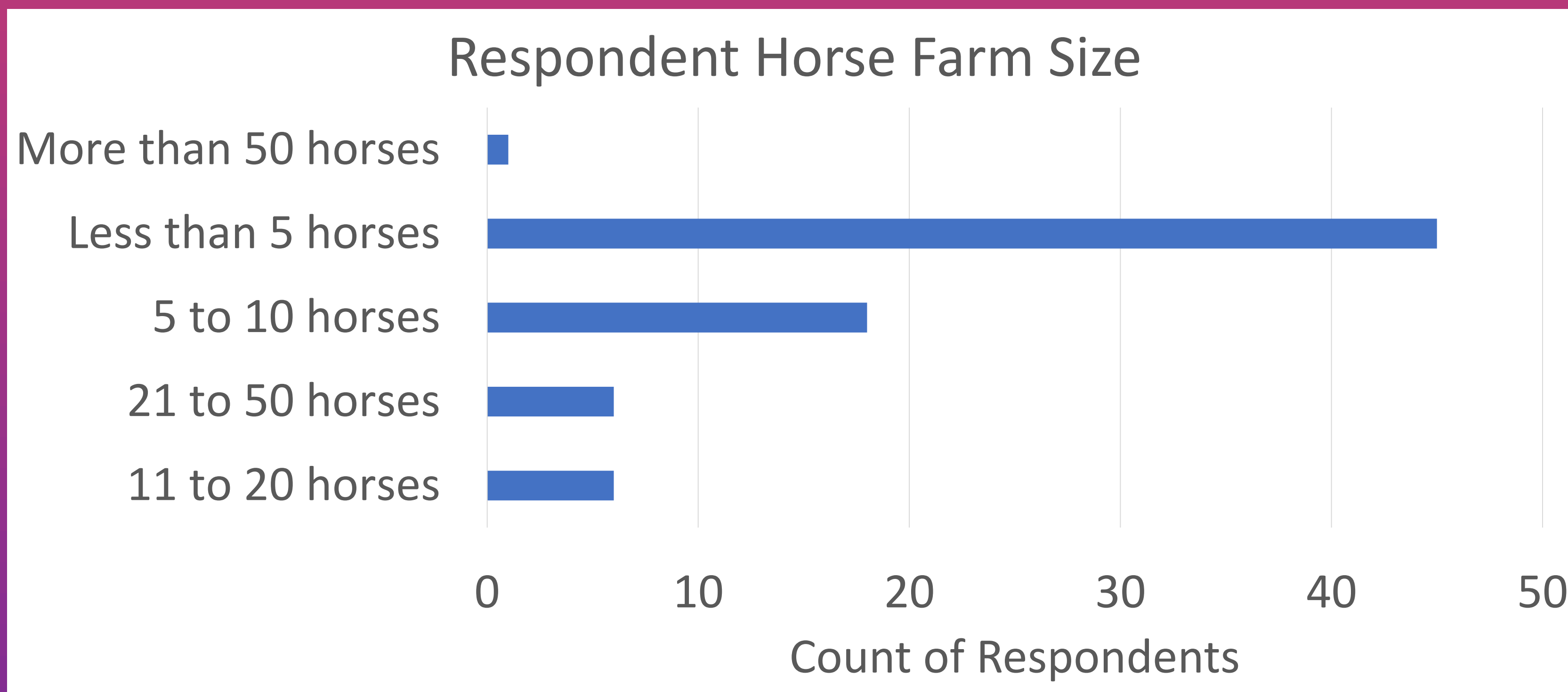
Tyler Pittman and Caitlin Bainum, University of Florida-IFAS Extension

Introduction :

- Marion County Florida is arguably the “Horse Capital of the World” and home to over 700 horse farms.
- The county is also home to two Basin Management Action plans which mandate water quality measures for agricultural operations.
- In the county there are the needs of extension clientele (i.e. horse farm owners) and conservation agencies (i.e. local, state, and federal governmental agencies).
- Extension education is a major contributor to bridging the gap between horse farm owners and water quality managers.

Objectives:

- Understand the needs of equine extension clientele (horse farm managers, horse farm owners and horse owners).
- Assess the perception of equine extension clientele as it relates to water quality and extension assistance.

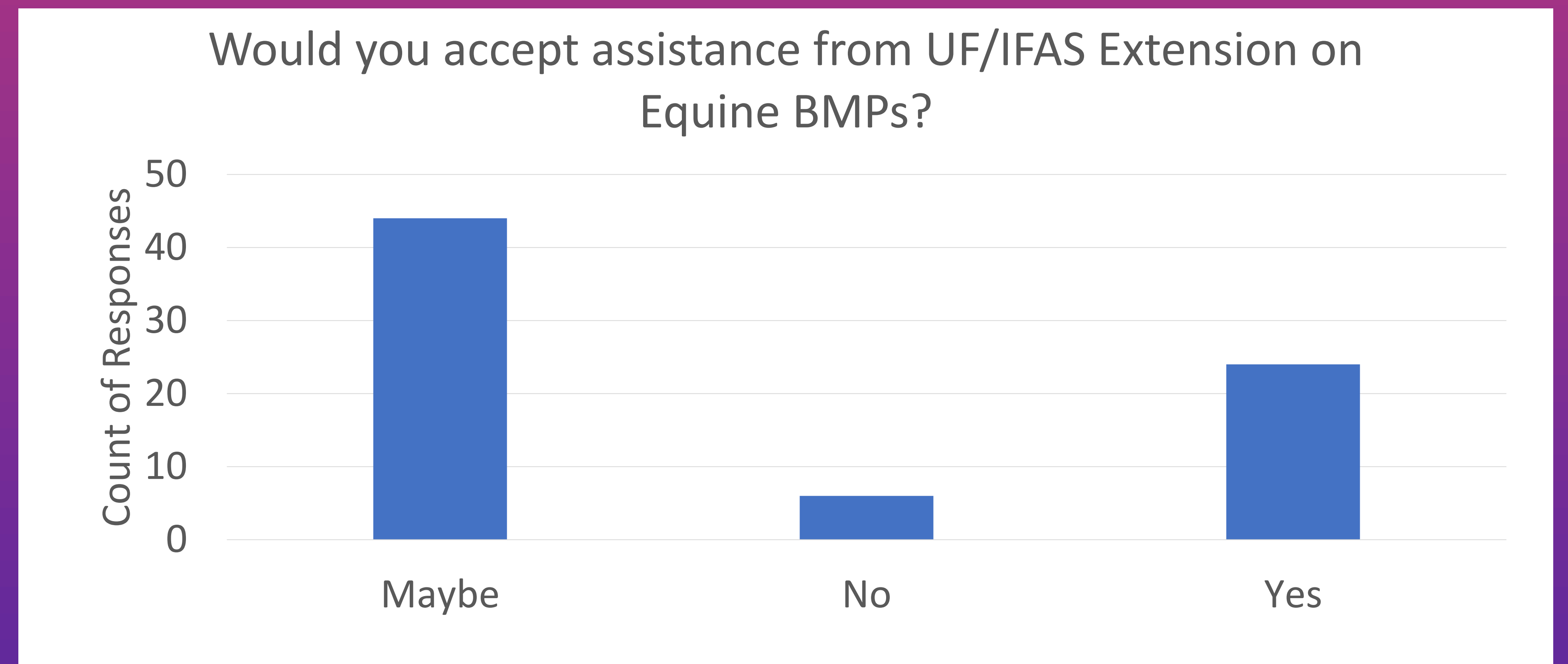
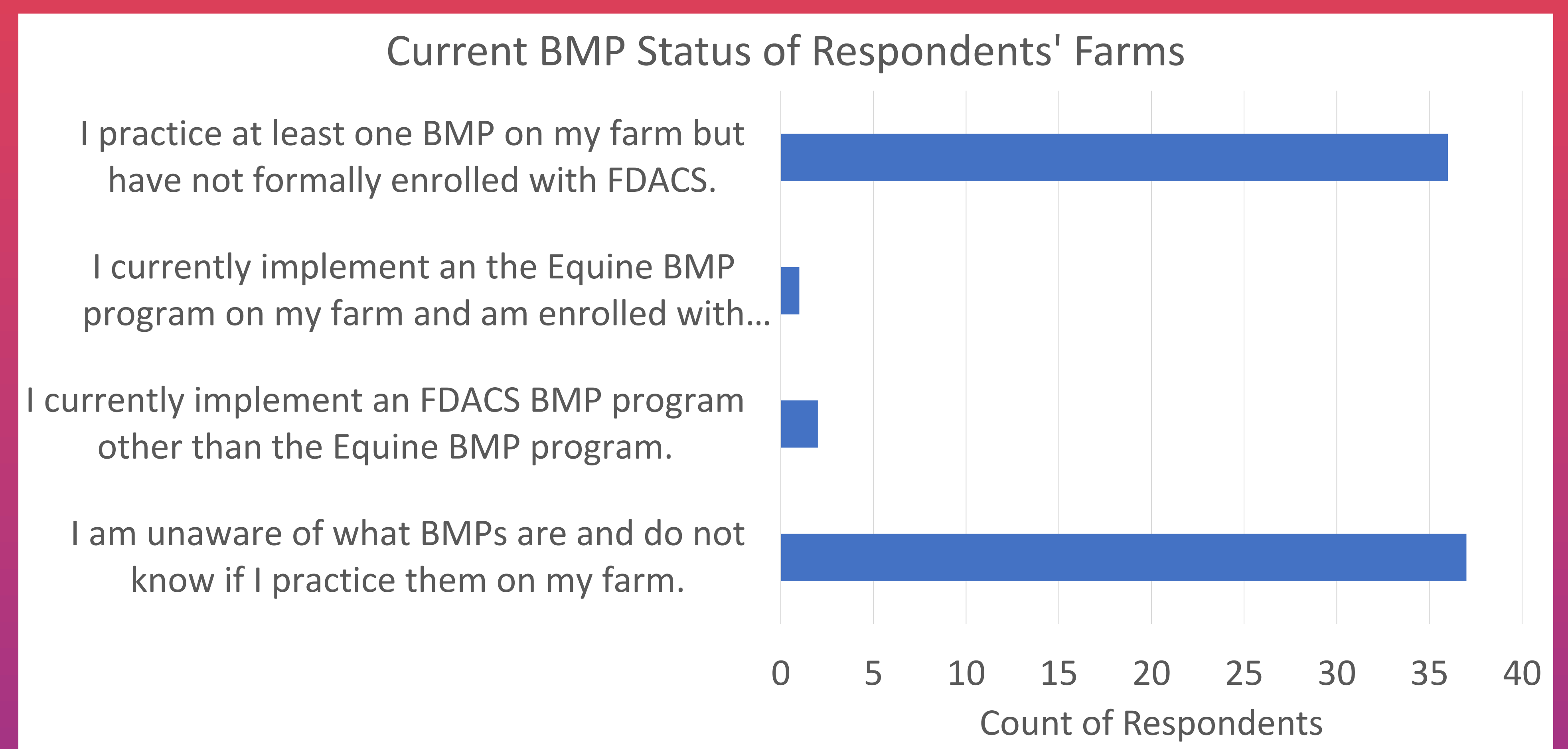


Methods:

- We conducted a survey asking horse, horse farm owners, and horse farm managers to rate their need for education and assistance on a list of different equine topics.
- Topics were in three broad categories: General equine Care, Farm Management, and Equine Business.
- We did not use a water quality category but incorporated water quality and Best Management Practice (BMPs) topics into the other categories to avoid potential bias.
- Additionally, we ask more specific question related to the perception of extension, willingness to received assistance from extension, and about equine BMPs.
- We summarized all questions across respondents and ranked topics based on their average rating.

Results:

- The most desirable topic for extension education for equine clientele were those related to farm management and general equine care.
- The least desirable topic area was equine business management.
- Six of the top 7 rated topics were related to pastures and pasture management.
- When asked about BMPs specifically, 48% of farm owners were unaware of what BMPs were, 47% indicated they implement BMPs but are not formally enrolled in a program, and only 1% indicated their farm is formally enrolled in a BMP program.
- When asked if they would accept assistance from extension to implement and enroll in an Equine BMP program only 31% indicated they would accept this assistance.



Conclusions:

- Our findings indicate that equine extension programming may have the highest interested when focused on topics related to pasture management but programs solely based on those topics might fall short in creating impacts and behavioral changes that will address environmental issues.
- Programming that focuses on changing the perception of horse farm owners to BMPs and being proactive about environmental issues are a necessary first step to obtaining behavioral change in horse farm owners.