



Roadside Reflection: Tips and Action Steps for The Solid Road: Research as Our Foundation for Innovation

Why It Matters:

In Extension, we must be both reliable and relevant. Research grounds our credibility, while innovation keeps our work responsive and fresh. When we build our programs and practices on solid evidence—and allow space for creative application—we earn trust and make meaningful impact.

Tips for Staying Grounded in Research While Innovating

1. Start with Curiosity and Questions

- Ask: What problem are we solving?
- Look for what's already known before creating something new.
- Seek out both academic research and practitioner insight.

2. Keep Your Radar Up

- Stay current on literature in your field and adjacent disciplines.
- Subscribe to journals, newsletters, or alerts that align with your topic areas.
- Set aside 15–30 minutes weekly for professional reading.

3. Partner with Researchers and Specialists

- Reach out to Extension specialists or university faculty to explore collaborations.
- Invite them to co-present or co-author with you.
- Use their expertise to validate or challenge your assumptions.

4. Bridge the Gap

- Translate complex research into accessible, relevant tools for your audience.
- Use storytelling and real-world examples to bring research to life.
- Ask yourself: How would this work on a farm, in a kitchen, or in a boardroom?

5. Test and Tweak

- Pilot innovative ideas on a small scale, informed by the evidence.
- Gather data as you go—both qualitative and quantitative.
- Be willing to adapt and improve based on feedback and findings.

6. Build a Culture of Evidence-Informed Practice

- Model using research in your own work.
- Celebrate team members who try new things and ground them in data.
- Include evaluation and reflection in every program cycle.

Action Steps You Can Take This Month

- Connect with a specialist or researcher and ask what they're currently working on.
- Share one evidence-based insight with a colleague or stakeholder in plain language.
- Audit one of your programs: Is it grounded in current research? Where could it be strengthened?

Reflection Prompt:

How are you balancing research and innovation in your work right now? What's one step you could take to better connect the two?