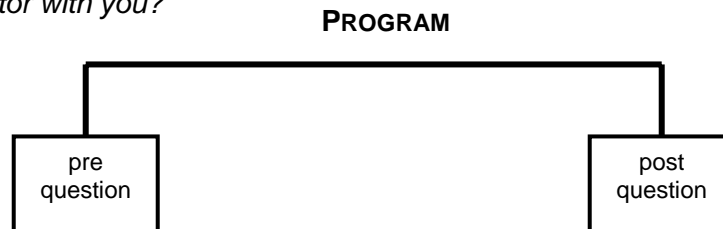




## Reduce Bias with Retrospective Questions

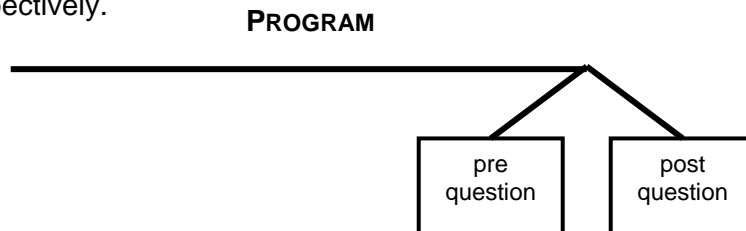
**Extension staff often ask, “Is there another way to collect data about program changes besides the pre-post method?”**

In the pre-post method, a question such as the following would be asked before and after a prevention program: *When using your tractor in the last month, how often did you have someone else ride on the tractor with you?*



An alternative approach has received attention in the literature as more valid and certainly more efficient when seeking information about behavior changes. Information about such change is applicable to extension not only because many programs have behavior change as an objective, but because people don't like to admit in an evaluation that they did something considered by educators or society as inappropriate in some way.

Although this alternative approach also asks participants about their behavior pre and post program, both questions are asked at the *same time, after* the program. This approach collects pre-program information retrospectively.



Although such retrospective data has been frowned on in the past because of memory bias (Sudman and Bradburn, 1983), recent studies show that program participants can be more truthful about their pre program behavior on the post test! One explanation for this paradoxical finding is that participants may be more willing to admit to certain (preprogram) behaviors at the *end* of the program (Wodarski, 1987).

If you plan to evaluate a program with focus on preventive behaviors or the lack of them (use of safety devices, pesticides, high fat food), and you think participants may feel inhibited about admitting to those behaviors, consider collecting data retrospectively, at the end of the program.

In a statewide program, specialists should consider trying both approaches and compare results to gain insight into the quality of their data about behavior changes.

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