

IMPACT



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Fieldmen's Luncheon Benefits Magic Valley Agriculture

The Situation

Crop consultants, fieldmen, agronomists, and company representatives make up a significant portion of the agriculture industry. This group of agricultural professionals does a great service to the industry by providing producers with expertise and assistance to ensure that the best level of production possible is achieved while maintaining environmental integrity. Continual education and professional development allows these professionals to stay abreast of new knowledge and information and to broaden their understanding and awareness of sustainable production practices.

These individuals need to be aware of what problems are occurring or are highly probable to occur in the area. This information would allow time for preventative measures, strategic planning and treatment so that impacts on crop production can be minimized, and surface and groundwater resources could be protected from off-site movement or leaching of nutrients and pesticides.

Additionally, it is important for the agriculture lenders to understand the challenges that their clients have to overcome and how those challenges and decisions will influence the farm's finances. This program also educates lenders on necessary and alternative practices to help ensure successful production and assist them in understanding the financial planning decisions that will influence the farm.

Our Response

In 2002, a University of Idaho Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant supported the Magic Valley Fieldmen's Luncheon. The Fieldmen's Luncheon was designed to provide quality, research-based educational information regarding crop production, natural resources, and sustainable agriculture to fieldmen, crop consultants, agronomists, and agriculture lenders for professional development. Another goal of this program was to provide a medium for agriculture professionals to network information. This network will benefit a large number of individuals including crop consultants that were unable to attend the luncheons, and ultimately the growers of the Magic Valley.

The program was conducted in Twin Falls at a local restaurant every second and fourth Wednesday from May through August. Each luncheon began at 11:30 a.m. with lunch. At noon, Extension educators, Extension specialists, crop consultants, or agency representatives delivered an educational presentation. Topics included crop production, natural resource management, integrated pest management, nutrient management, and other critical issues that affect the sustainability of agriculture in the Magic Valley. Idaho pesticide applicator recertification credits and Certified Crop Advisor credits were offered for appropriate topics.

For the remaining 20-30 minutes of each luncheon, the Extension educator facilitated and moderated an organized group discussion on the current status of crops, pests, water supply, and other timely issues.

Mailings were sent to the targeted audience just prior to each luncheon. This mailing provided them with a reminder notice and information about the topic and presenter for the coming luncheon. Public service announcements were also distributed to local news media.

A news correspondent from the Ag Weekly, a regional agricultural newspaper, was present at each luncheon. This weekly agricultural newspaper printed an article about the topic covered at the luncheon.

Program Outcomes

Program evaluation results indicated that this program is valuable (4.1; 5 = very valuable) in helping agriculture professionals increase their knowledge of crop production topics. One hundred percent of the respondents signified that they increased their knowledge of the topics covered in the program. Furthermore, they indicated that the program is effective (4.2; 5 = very effective) at increasing their awareness of crop production issues and sustainable agriculture practices. This implies that the format of the program is conducive to the education of these professionals, and that the topic selection is appropriate and timely.

Additionally, the greater understanding and awareness of sustainable agriculture practices will lead to more recommendations of the sort made to Magic Valley producers. These recommendations will benefit producers, their operations, and the natural resources of south central Idaho.

Sharing the knowledge gained through this program with peers and producers is an important part of educating the industry. The Fieldmen's Luncheon did foster the utilization of an information network among agriculture professionals, University Extension, and producers. One hundred percent of the respondents indicated that they did share, or relay the information that they had received at the luncheon with others. Seventy-seven percent shared this information with both agriculture professional colleagues and producers. All in all, there were more than 500 contacts that received information presented at the Fieldmen's Luncheon. This

information network is working effectively to educate the agriculture industry in south central Idaho.

Lastly, program participants indicated that the luncheon is beneficial (4.3; 5 = very beneficial) to Magic Valley agriculture. Participants believed that the program is an excellent source of information and that it "is very beneficial and valuable to ag professionals," and that the program needs to continue.

The Magic Valley Fieldmen's Luncheon is positively impacting the agriculture industry by delivering professional development education to its fieldmen, crop consultants, agronomists, and agriculture lenders. The betterment of these agriculture professionals is leading to more effective and efficient production, which in turn will lead to a more prolific and sustainable industry in the Magic Valley.

The Future

This program will continue on an annual basis. Each year improvements will be made so that the program will be increasingly useful for the target audience. As a result, there will be more participation, more networking, and Magic Valley agriculture will continue to reap benefits.

For More Information

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