

IMPACT



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Ornamentals Nursery Workshop Supports Growers

The Situation

Nursery production has a major and growing impact in Idaho, particularly in the northern counties of Boundary, Latah, Bonner, Kootenai and Benewah. The nursery industry in these counties comprises 20% of statewide production. The industry also contributes significantly to county economies, particularly in Boundary County which ranks 2nd statewide in nursery production. The industry is composed of a few large growers, who are full-time nurserymen, and many small growers who have converted some of their acreage to nursery crops to diversify farm income.

In order to remain competitive, growers must keep up to date on nursery trends, changes in regulations, emerging pests, new technology and business practices. Much of this information is provided by the Idaho Nursery and Landscape Assn. (INLA) through the annual Idaho Horticultural Expo, the premiere conference and trade show for the nursery industry in Idaho. However, many small growers do not have the funds to travel to Boise to attend this conference and unfortunately the local grower organization, the Kootenai Valley Nursery Growers (KVNG), does not have an event or conference that meets these needs.

In the early 1990's Dave Wattenbarger, UI Extension Educator in Boundary County, started a workshop to address these needs. Input from stakeholders in 2000 indicated that this was one of the most valuable programs that extension provided for nursery growers. One grower referred to it as "a

gem." Unfortunately, when Professor Wattenbarger retired in 2001, the workshop was left without leadership.

Our Response

Since the Ornamentals Nursery Workshop was viewed as a valuable extension program that was worth continuing, the extension educator in Bonner County chose to continue the workshop. Nursery growers are an active and involved stakeholder group. This program provides an efficient means to reach a large percentage of growers with timely and pertinent information. It is offered at a time of year, following the trade shows but before field work begins, when many growers are able to attend.



To continue this workshop, it was necessary to develop support, both in participation and funding, and to build this on a sound understanding of the industry's needs.

Initial information on priority issues and needs was obtained through personal visits with nursery growers in northern Idaho as well as attendance at the KVNG meetings. In addition, nursery growers were surveyed through a mail-in survey to get a more comprehensive picture. The overall response indicated interest in a wide variety of topics with no strong consensus of where the emphasis should be placed. Based on this input, the Ornamentals Nursery Workshop was developed to include a variety of topics.

To support the workshop, funding was obtained from the INLA, KVNG, and horticultural supply businesses. From 2001 to 2004, funding was sufficient to cover the entire workshop at no cost to the participants. In 2005, however, a nominal \$5 registration fee was initiated.

The program was held at the Boundary County Extension Office until 2001 when it outgrew the facility. Annual participation increased to 55-60 people and the event moved to a larger building. By 2006, the event required an additional room to accommodate the growing attendance.

Each day-long workshop covers 6-7 topics. It is a priority to include at least one business-related topic and enough pest management information to offer 2-3 pesticide license recertification credits. Speakers include UI extension educators, UI specialists, and representatives from the horticultural industry and government agencies.

Program Outcomes

Workshop participants were given an evaluation form at registration which they were asked to complete and turn in when they left. Long-term indicators were added to the evaluations in 2005 and 2006, which provided information to evaluate program outcomes. Unless otherwise indicated, results are from the 47 evaluations received in 2005 and 2006.

The Ornamentals Nursery Workshop continues to be well attended and appreciated with 99% of participants (2001-2006) indicating that the workshop was worth their time to attend. In 2005-2006, 59% of attendees said that they try to attend every year and 28% were attending for the first time.

The 2005 group collectively owns and manages nearly 1800 acres of nursery stock and Christmas trees.

Growers attend this workshop for a variety of reasons. When asked to select the one most valuable benefit they gain from the workshop, growers responded:

- 41% to improve production practices
- 19% keep up to date on industry changes
- 17% network with other growers
- 16% pesticide license credits

(Although these workshops typically offer 2 or 3 pesticide license credits, this apparently is not the primary reason people attend.)

When asked which practices they intend to put into practice, and what practices they have learned in past workshops that have improved their operation, there was a great variety of responses. However, the majority dealt with pest management. Improved pest recognition and better pest management practices helps growers improve pest management, decrease pest losses, and decrease inappropriate pesticide use.

As evidenced by participation and support, this workshop is appreciated and valued by growers in northern Idaho. It will be continued annually with updated stakeholder input to ensure relevance. As the nursery industry continues to grow in the area, the workshop is expected to grow with it. In addition to the information it provides, the workshop offers growers an excellent chance to network and share in new information. It is a local resource that growers can count on.

For More Information

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