Long-term impacts result from small acreage management programming

The Situation
As communities grow, land at the urban fringes is being converted from large, agricultural enterprises to smaller parcels that maintain some agricultural uses while attracting a more diverse population of owners. Small acreage landowners have a significant impact on the condition of soil, water, plants, and other natural resources through their cumulative effects. With more and more residents now “living on the land,” who were formally disconnected from the land, there is a huge demand for information and technical assistance to help them “do the right thing” for their wildlife, land and water resources.

The Living on the Land (LOTL) curriculum has been used in Idaho since 2002 as a tool to teach small-acreage landowners in Southwestern Idaho and Eastern Oregon. The program is designed to provide landowners with information and skills to implement best management practices on their small acreages. The program is coordinated by University of Idaho Extension Educators with assistance from over 20 collaborating agencies and organizations. Tours, hands-on activities, expert speakers and events were used to reinforce the classroom learning. Participants met for three hours, once a week for 15-18 weeks depending on the year. Three months following the completion of the LOTL course, site visits were made by Extension Educators to participant’s acreages. During the site visit, landowners gave a tour of their property and visited with Educators about changes they had made as a result of the class.

Our Response
Class evaluation and site visits to participants property following completion of the LOTL class in previous years have shown both a high level of knowledge gained and short term management changes. During the winter of 2009-2010 Extension Educators worked with the University of Idaho Social Science Research Unit to conduct a survey of 200 LOTL alumni from 2002-2009. The purpose of the survey was to measure the medium and long-term impact of the LOTL program. This survey was approved by the University of Idaho Institutional Review Board.

Participants were mailed a 32-question survey to complete about whether they were still following management practices learned from the class, if they were marketing products from the acreage and information about their acreage. The response rate for the survey was fifty-seven percent.

Program Outcomes
Based on survey results, LOTL alumni own or managed over 12,800 acres in eight southwestern Idaho counties, one eastern Oregon county and one eastern Canyon County, 208.459.6003, Fax: 208.454.6349
501 Main Street, Caldwell, ID 83605
Washington county. Fifty-one percent of alumni owned between 1 and 10 acres. Most LOTL alumni are still new to small acreage management with 40% being involved less than five years and 24% from six to ten years.

Changes to management practices (Table 1) show that alumni are using the practices and techniques they learned in class. All of these management changes have positive long-term environmental impacts, including water conservation, improved water quality, improved forage and livestock production and reduced spread of weeds.

Table 1. Management practice changes made by LOTL alumni as a result of knowledge gained in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Made Changes</th>
<th>Plan to make Changes</th>
<th>No Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weed control</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fertilization</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grazing</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over half of the alumni reported at least some income from farm receipts as shown in Table 2. Marketing methods used by the alumni ranged from on-farms sales, to farmers markets, cooperatives, and community supported agriculture gardens. Ten alumni reported sales directly to local restaurants and schools.

Table 2. Percentage of income for LOTL alumni derived from farm receipts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent Income</th>
<th>Percent Reporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-25%</td>
<td>53.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-50%</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76-100%</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results confirm that LOTL alumni are taking the information they have learned in class and making changes to the way they manage their small acreages. In the words of one LOTL alumni, “My success story is simply that our little farm is better managed. Improvements have been made in different aspects of our operation. They say the purpose of dog training is to train the dogs’ owner. In this instance, LOTL has successfully trained the farms’ owner.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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