Horticulture classes designed for rural communities help reduce food costs

The Situation
With the downturn in Idaho’s economy, and an overall decrease in many people’s income, there has been an increased interest in home food production to help reduce grocery costs and be more self sufficient. Many of the people trying to save money on grocery costs through home food production were either first time or novice gardeners. They lacked either basic skills for successful garden food production or needed further skill development to have increased garden yields. In an attempt to meet this need the Master Gardener Program was offered in Fremont County, but unfortunately the signup response was very low, and the program was canceled. After a needs analysis it became evident that clientele wanted home gardening and food production information without the time and cost requirements of the Master Gardener Program.

Our Response
A schedule of low cost horticulture classes were created with the purpose of being affordable and allowing attendees to choose which topics they wanted to learn about. The gardening classes were held in three different locations to reduce the distance participants would be traveling to attend. The sites were St. Anthony, Ashton, and Island Park. The majority of classes were held in St. Anthony and Ashton, with fewer classes offered in Island Park due to that areas restricted growing season.

There were many class topics covered with the first being Fruit Tree Pruning. This class consisted of a lecture of how to properly prune many types of fruit trees, and then a hands on demonstration pruning an entire apple tree. The next class taught was greenhouse construction and starting your own plants at home. The instruction also covered how to use greenhouses to extend your growing season, reduce energy costs, and increase the success of home gardeners starting their own plants at home. Beekeeping was the next class offered, which covered starting your own hives, bee management, and honey production. Landscaping with Native Plants covered many types of plants native to the Fremont County area which can be used in homeowners landscape for a naturalistic appearance. Garden soil, organic amendments, and fertilizers was the following class which gave attendees information on how to feed their plants by feeding the soil. Weed Control in Lawns and Gardens taught the students basic practices of managing weeds through the proper application of chemicals, good weed prevention techniques, and overall integrated pest management. Vegetables part 1 and 2 were taught next, and covered the cultural requirements of growing a successful crop of many different types of home produced vegetables. Herbaceous ornamentals was the next class to be of-
ffered, and taught attendees about the varieties and growing requirements of Annual and Perennial Flowers and Ornamental shrubs, in Fremont County. Raised Bed gardening was offered next in the schedule, and gave instructions on everything from construction to crop rotation practices. The Small Fruits class covered growing techniques of proven varieties of raspberries, strawberries, blackberries, and other small fruits that can be grown in the Fremont County area. It consisted of a lecture, and then concluded with a walking tour of a retail berry production farm. The Home Landscape Ideas class instructed students how to design their home landscape using color, texture, and shapes to beautify their properties. Classes on Home Canning and Food Dehydrating were offered at the end of the gardening season to assist gardeners in safely preserving their produce.

**Program Outcomes**

- In total over 400 people attended the classes offered in the three different locations.
- 90% of responding attendees reported having changed some of their gardening habits from attending these classes.
- 93% of responding attendees reported having some increased success since having used the information presented at these classes.
- Over 95% of responding attendees reported having saved money on grocery costs, with 18% of them reporting a savings of more than $75.
- 83% of responding attendees reported having changed their pruning methods from having attended the fruit tree pruning class.

**The Future**

Horticulture programming will continue to be a needed area of extension instruction in Fremont County. Horticulture classes will continue to be offered to the community to answer this educational need.

**Cooperators and Co-Sponsors**

- Dr. Steve Love, U of I Extension Specialist
- Ashton Garden Club, (Good Earth Managers)
- Targhee National Forest Service, Island Park Ranger Station
- Wayne Jones, U of I Extension Educator
- Fremont County, Idaho
- Reed Findlay, U of I Extension Educator