Forage School provides a source of research based information for hay producers

The Situation
Hay production is a major agricultural commodity in eastern Idaho. Statewide hay is the 3rd largest revenue producing crop with cash receipts of more than $526 million in 2012. The price of hay and forage has been at an all time high for the last several years, due to strong demand and competition for acreage from other crops. The cost of production and revenue generated by alfalfa hay and other forages has dramatically increased within the last five years. Producers are faced with the challenges of increased fuel and fertilizer costs, water shortages, market volatility, and competition from high dollar commodities. Farm managers need a continual source of new, relevant, and non-biased information to maximize their profit per acre.

Our Response
To meet producer needs the University of Idaho Extension and Brigham Young University — Idaho annually collaborate to host the Forage School. BYU-Idaho provides the onsite venue for the event, catering, and student presenters. The University of Idaho Extension provides the promotion and marketing, forage and agronomy specialists to teach, obtains state pesticide credits, and event registration. The Forage School consists of presentations which are selected based upon the previous year’s survey data and current issues faced by farm managers. In 2012, the forage school topics included comparison of alfalfa herbicides, integrated pest management in alfalfa, sainfoin production, cereal crop diseases, seeding rates of alfalfa, pasture and range management, insect management, and pest identification. In 2013, topics included weed control for seeding establishment, chemical seed treatments for forage crops, using compost and manure as sustainable fertilizer sources, dual purpose cover crops, noxious weed free hay, irrigation studies on alfalfa, alfalfa nodulation, and nitrogen fixation.

Program Outcomes
Attendees are surveyed at the end of each Forage School. In 2012, 98% of attendees reported they learned something new from forage school, and in 2013, 100% reported having learned something new from forage school. In 2013 attendees were asked what information they gained from forage school that they will utilize in their management practices. Responses included: proper timing of weed control during planting, achieving low lignin levels alfalfa, efficient water use, correct timing of water application for crop growth, compost usage information resources, non-traditional forage crops, dual purpose crops, improved alfalfa varieties, importance of seed treatments, and harvest timing for protein.
Attendees were also asked to indicate what particular topics were of most educational value to them. They reported the following percentages:

- 52% - Reduced lignins in alfalfa, tannins in alfalfa, and drought tolerance
- 50% - Responded that weed control for successful seedling establishment was most important.
- 47% - Using compost and manure as sustainable fertilizer sources.
- 44% - Annual forages: varieties, uses, and dual purpose crops.
- 41% - Irrigation studies on alfalfa.
- 36% - Insect control on alfalfa.
- 27% - Chemical seed treatment for forage crops to prevent disease.

The Future
The annual forage school will continue to be held in Rexburg, to support producers in Eastern, Idaho. Topics for future presentations include seed treatments, proper handling and cutting of alfalfa, marketing, protein levels of harvested hay, forage fungicides, forage in a silage situation, micronutrient needs in forage, and using corn as a potential forage crop.

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