

Farmers Teaching Farmers – A Hit

The Situation

Land in the Inland Northwest is a combination of large farms and smaller urban fringe parcels. Owners of both are seeking information and training on how to be good stewards of the land and earn income from it. Many have not had any experience or training in farming and or direct marketing.

Our Response

In 1998 Kootenai County Extension offered an 11-week, 33-hour small acreage farming and market gardening course in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. It was co-sponsored by the Kootenai County Farmers' Market Association, and farmer-members of this association helped teach the class. The course topics included goal evaluation, land evaluation, marketing options, business and farm planning, financing, and production of herbs, vegetables, tree fruits and small fruits, and value-added products.

The course was offered again in the fall of 1999. It was supported, in part, by a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Risk Management Office. Several topics were added including pastured poultry, sheep & goat production, and Internet marketing, and farmers taught many of the production classes. In addition, three Saturday and two Wednesday evening farm tours were offered to class members. The 1999 class members were also encouraged to develop farm plans.

Evaluations were conducted at the end of each course. A follow-up evaluation was sent to the participants of the 1998 course in the fall of 1999.



Class Demographics

- ✂✂Forty-two participated in the 1998 course. The 1999 course was limited to 25. Participants came from eight counties in northern Idaho and eastern Washington.
- ✂✂Eighty two percent of the 1998 class and 80 percent of the 1999 class were exploring ideas for their land.
- ✂✂The 1998 class members sought ideas for an average of 7.7 acres while the 1999 class average was 10.8 acres.
- ✂✂In 1999 participants were asked to indicate where they fell on a household gross income scale. Gross income was from on-farm and off-farm sources. Thirty-three percent had gross income between \$25,000 and \$50,000, 14percent had less than \$25,000, and 40percent had more than \$50,000.

Achievements

- ☞☞ All members of both the 1998 and 1999 classes indicated they would recommend the class to others. Comments included " It was very informative and I especially enjoyed the practical way in which it was presented by having actual farmers come in and tell their ways of doing things and what successes and failures they'd realized for that."
- ☞☞ Ninety-four percent of the 1998 indicated the taking the class helped them proceed. In the follow-up evaluation all but one person moved forward with their farm plan. For several "moving forward" meant putting the commercial farm venture on hold.
- ☞☞ Other comments from the 1998 class in the post evaluation included the course taught them to "plan carefully - plan ahead;" "the course was invaluable in starting to tame some steep acreage and experiment with trees and vegetables...", "our farm plan is on slow forward but I have definite plans and 'unplans' that I hope to accomplish. This was a great class - I might even take it again if we change sites."
- ☞☞ Fifty-three percent of the 1999 class indicated they would proceed. Comments from this class included "course was very informative - more research on my part needs to take place," "I need to settle on something specific instead of a shotgun approach," "I realize that what I am interested in is more the horticulture side of farming - perennials - nursery flowers, etc."

The Future

- ☞☞ A post evaluation of the 1999 class will be conducted in the fall of 2000.
- ☞☞ The course will be offered at two locations in the fall of 2000.
- ☞☞ The course is being expanded to include an on-the-farm experience and a formal certification process that will "mean something" to agencies/businesses that provide start-up or operational funds.

For More Information

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