

Knowledge to implementation at Farms to Food Workshop

The Situation

Small farms are an important component to the U.S. agriculture sector, contributing 38% to the value of U.S. agriculture production (USDA 1999). In south-central Idaho, the majority of farms are under 50 acres and close to half of these farms produce an agricultural income of less than \$10,000 yearly (USDA 2007).

Counties	% of farms smaller than 50 acres	% farms income less than \$10,000
Gooding	53	42
Jerome	51	42
Twin Falls	48	40
Blaine	42	53
Camas	26	57
Lincoln	21	21

Table 1. Percent of small farms and small farm income for south-central Idaho counties.

These farms typically fall under one of the following categories: retirement, residential/lifestyle, hobby farms, and supplemental income.

In order to help keep their farm economical, small-scale farmers rely on a variety of management practices to help manage production risk. These practices include Integrated Pest Management (IPM), organic farming, integrating crop and livestock systems, farm commodity diversification, and effective marketing and financial strategies. With this small-scale production and often unique management strategies, these farmers are able to contribute to local food movements, through the more than fifty farmer's markets across the state (ISDA 2010).



Raised beds for growing vegetables using poultry compost were viewed on the farm tour. Photo by Jo Ann Robbins

Our Response

The University of Idaho Camas/Gooding, Jerome, and Blaine County Extension offices developed the *Farms to Food Workshop*. This one-day workshop consisted of two concurrent presentation sessions focused on small-scale farm topics. Speakers included Extension Educators/Specialists, local producers, and industry experts. After an introduction to "what is sustainable farming," the following concurrent presentations were given: 1) Eco-pest management, 2) Backyard chickens, 3) Using compost, 4) Rodent control, 5) Soil testing, 6) Bee keeping, 7) Budgeting for success, 8) Preventing microbial contamination and 9) Hay testing. In order to help clientele who are beginning farmers or those looking to expand their operations, the workshop also featured a producer discussion panel. This panel allowed participants to ask small livestock producers about their operations, their successes, and marketing techniques. The final hour of the workshop included a small farm tour.

Program Outcomes

Forty-six participants from six counties were in attendance. Twenty-eight of the participants returned a questionnaire at the end of the workshop and 20 returned a self-addressed postcard with one or two plans they aim to implement in the next year as a result of the day’s talks.

The questionnaire asked participants to assess increase in awareness and knowledge, by indicating whether they “strongly agree,” “agree,” were “neutral,” “disagree,” “strongly disagree,” or “knew before” with the following statements:

- A. I increased my awareness of management practices important for my small farm.
- B. I increased my awareness of which parts of my current operation are sustainable.
- C. I increased my awareness of what eco-pest management is.
- D. I increased my awareness of the importance of specific management techniques presented today.
- E. I increased my awareness of how various systems in a small farm can help or harm the overall operation.
- F. I increased my knowledge of the steps to take to make my small farm work for me.
- G. I increased my knowledge of the benefits of animals to a small farm.
- H. I increased my knowledge of how to use or implement one of the techniques presented today.
- I. I now know what is meant by a “working farm.”

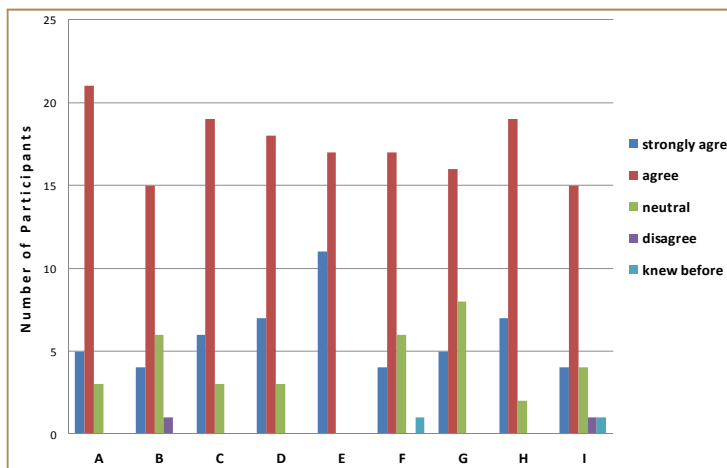


Figure 1. Participants increase in awareness or knowledge as a result of UI Farms to Food Workshop.

The workshop participants stated they increased awareness and knowledge. The majority of participants had “agree” and “strongly agree” for all or most of the above statements in the questionnaire.

The postcards revealed that the three most common plans participants aim to implement in the next year are to reduce microbial contamination, perform a soil test, and plant a new crop for intercropping and/or a new market. Conference educators plan to follow-up with participants by mailing the self-addressed postcards back to participants early spring 2011. This will help remind growers of what they learned at the Farms to Food Workshop and to remind them to implement their proposed plans; fulfilling the *Knowledge to Implementation*.

Through the day’s talks and the small farm tour, our evaluation tools proved that the majority of participants plan to implement one sustainable practice. Although response was positive immediately after the workshop, in order to determine techniques implemented and their benefit, a follow-up survey of participants one year after the workshop will be done. This will assess the mid-term success of this workshop in helping participants strengthen their farm businesses and increase sustainability.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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