

Professional Development Training in Sustainable Agriculture in Oregon

Brian Tuck (Oregon State Professional Development Program Grants)

Title: Professional Development Training in Sustainable Agriculture in Oregon

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Context and Overview

Agriculture in Oregon continues to be a dynamic industry with significant changes in cropping systems to reduce soil, water and wind erosion; movement toward more specialty, high value crops grown on small acreages; exploration of value-added opportunities for traditional and specialty crops; and development of a sustainable oil seed and ethanol crop production and processing industry, to name a few.

The Oregon Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Advisory Committee has recommended a three-year strategy for the use of SARE PDP funds for area, state and bi-state educational programming that will promote agricultural and environmental sustainability in these key areas:

- organic production
- value-added production and marketing economics
- small farms
- integrated pest management
- soil quality and health
- water and air quality
- agro forestry
- alternative livestock health
- whole farm and ranch planning
- impact analysis for new farm and ranch enterprises
- community based food systems
- biofuels.



This new emphasis begun in 2006 continued in 2007-08 with the funding of workshops on Farm Direct Marketing, Organic Production and Certification and Understanding of Learning Styles Across the Generations.

Activities, Methods, Impacts and Contributions:

The Oregon SARE PDP program supported these workshops:

Direct Marketing Workshop

This workshop, conducted on the OSU campus, has become an annual event. The Participation was a record in the workshop's six-year history, drawing participants from across the Northwest. Of the 358 attendees, half were farmers and ranchers and more than a quarter with agricultural professionals.

Evaluations were received from 176 participants who offered these rankings on a scale of 1 to 5:

- Overall conference ranking 4.10
- Increased or expanded knowledge 3.67
- Expect to apply knowledge gained 3.91



Qualitative assessments were also favorable with respondents appreciating:

- Knowledge and experience of the speakers
- Quality and direct applicability of the information provided
- Value of the networking opportunities provided
- Organization and smooth functioning of the event.

Organic Production and Certification Workshops

Two workshops were held on the OSU campus. More than 50 participants included OSU and WSU faculty and staff, students, agricultural suppliers, other government agencies and members of the agriculture professional community.

Evaluation responses, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best, were:

- Did the workshop increase or enhance your knowledge of organic certification - 4.8
- Do you expect to use what you have gained in this event in your work - 4.5
- How useful were individual sessions
 - Certification Procedures - 4.7
 - Organic Crop Standards - 4.7
 - Organic Livestock Standards - 4.8
 - Organic Processing Standards - 4.5
- What is your overall rating of this workshop - 4.7



Qualitative assessments were also highly favorable and included these comments:

- Very informative, would encourage more workshops like this in the future
- Materials presented and conversations provided me with the information necessary to advise the public in my office
- Good handouts, good information in presentations
- Maybe team up with WA to do regional workshops

Providing Educational Opportunities Across Generations

This very novel and intriguing statewide workshop, held in Klamath Falls, OSU faculty and staff and affiliated agencies, was developed to explore learning between the various generations and how we can be more effective in our educational programs. Because of the huge success, the program was scheduled again in 2008.

Of 17 evaluation responses, 16 said the value of the training outweighed the cost of attending. On a scale of 7 (very helpful) and 1 (not helpful) the overall program rating averaged 6.7. On how much material presented would be incorporated into the operation or job (7 = a great deal and 1 = none), the evaluations averaged 6.4.

A sample of what people liked about the conference included:

- Explained different generations and how they think
- The practical insights; applicability to everyday life
- How the different age groups interact with each other based on values
- Learning about the different thought tracts of each generation
- Concrete strategies for each "generation" to work effectively
- Understanding what each generation values
- Learning the characteristics of each generation

Recommendations:

For 2009, this focus is changing, with most Oregon SARE PDP funding used to support professional development tours at the 2009 Association of County Agricultural Extension Agents Professional Development Conference in Portland, Oregon.

In 2010, it is further planned that the Oregon PDP program will go through another adjustment with a focus on larger and broader based programs including grant writing etc.



Participants in a Western SARE Farmer/Rancher Grant on pasture management are, from left, Woody Lane, Karen Murphy and John Neumeister at Neumeister's Cattail Creek Farm.



Grant recipient Margaret Magruder of Clatskanie displays a catchment made from off grades of wool through her SARE Farmer/Rancher Grant.