

Expanding Opportunities for Community-Based Educational Programs in Sustainable Small Acreage Farming and Ranching

Cinda Williams – Idaho (*Professional Development Program Grant*)

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Title: Expanding Opportunities for Community-Based Educational Programs in Sustainable Small Acreage Farming and Ranching

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Situation:

In Washington and Idaho, small acreage farmers and ranchers, and those who would like to begin farming and ranching on small parcels, comprise a large audience for which extension and academic programs are often limited. This is especially true in the areas of resource evaluation, financial planning, business management and direct marketing strategies.

Extension educator experience has found that people pondering the start of a small farm or ranch want information on goal planning, resource evaluation, an overview of options and a 'real life' look at what other farmers and ranchers are doing.

Cultivating Success – a collaborative program of Rural Roots, the University of Idaho and Washington State University – was initiated in 2002 to provide beginning and existing farmers with the planning, decision-making and research skills needed to develop sustainable small acreage agricultural enterprises.

This Western SARE-funded project seeks to propel the Cultivating Success goals by expanding agriculture professional capacity for serving current and beginning small acre farmers and ranchers.

Objectives:

1. Increase agricultural professional knowledge of concepts and issues related to a sustainable food system and the role that sustainable small acreage producers play in that system
2. Develop and disseminate an integrated set of sustainable small acreage farming and ranching educational materials to increase the number of sustainable small acreage farming programs
3. Increase the capacity of agricultural professionals to establish meaningful, experiential and community-based programs in sustainable small acreage farming and ranching
4. Increase the local impacts of sustainable small acreage farming and ranching programs by providing ongoing support and technical assistance to extension and other agricultural professionals



Brochures created to promote Cultivating Success.



Actions:

Course Materials

Comprehensive student and instructor manuals (with CDs) were developed for the *Sustainable Small Acreage Farming and Ranching* (SSAFR) and *Field Analysis of Sustainable Food Systems* courses. Instructor manuals include: learning objectives, lesson plans and assignment activities. The SSAFR instructor guide also includes teaching tips for each of 13 modules; an extensive resource list; 18 PowerPoint presentations; and worksheets that help students complete a Whole Farm Plan for their farm-based enterprise.

The *Field Analysis of Sustainable Food Systems* manual includes the course syllabus, field schedule, discussion topics, logistical information and evaluations needed for course instruction.

With leadership from a farmer with 10 years experience training apprentices, a *Farmer-Mentor Manual* was developed, to train farmers interested in mentoring beginning farmers/students or hosting apprentices. Chapters are: Adult Learning Styles, Project Planning, Agreements and Contracts, One-on-One Teaching, Conflict Resolution, Liability Insurance, Evaluations, Resources.

Training and Support

Three Cultivating Success Instructor Training workshops were conducted for agricultural professionals seeking to improve their capacity for delivering effective, participatory educational programs on sustainable food systems.

The project worked one-on-one to mentor new instructors and redesigned and enhanced the Cultivating Success website, www.cultivatingsuccess.org, to better serve their needs for access to curricula and course marketing materials.



Cultivating Success class photo.



Cultivating Success wheat tour.

Outcomes:

Training

Three instructor training workshops hosted 46 agricultural professionals. Ten of those professionals offered the Sustainable Small Farming and Ranching classes at a new location and another 10 assisted in some capacity.

Of workshop evaluations, 80% said their knowledge of sustainable food systems "greatly increased"; 90% rated their interest in offering the class as "high." In follow-up surveys, 100% of course instructors said they found the teaching manual and training manuals very useful.

Twelve farmers attended two Farmer-Mentor trainings. Five completed a curriculum for their farm production and marketing systems, becoming certified as Cultivating Success Farmer-Mentors.

Courses

From September 2003 to December 2005, 263 producers and students attended the 12- 15-week course, *Sustainable Small Acreage Farming and Ranching*, at 13 locations in Washington and Idaho.

All students said the course "exceeded expectations" and "increased my knowledge skills in this subject area." Overall learning was rated an average of 4.45 out of 5, and the quality and value rating averaged 4.8.

Impact/Benefits:

Increased capacity of agricultural professionals to understand and offer courses on sustainable agriculture systems will:

- Help farmers become more informed on alternative practices, value-added products and direct marketing options
- Foster farmer and rancher sustainability and success
- Engender farmer understanding of whole-farm systems and the impact of farming practices on the environment
- Encourage improved stewardship practices on new and existing farms
- Show how input reduction and value-added products, crops and marketing diversification can increase returns

Building on Success:

This Western SARE Professional Development Program Grant has stimulated application for and funding of two more related Western SARE grants:

SW05-039, Using Farmer-Rancher Input to Develop and Implement Experiential Educational Opportunities for Beginning Farmer and Ranchers

EW08-005, Training and Connecting Agricultural Professional Through an Immersion Field Course and the Cultivating Success Instructor Training Program in Washington

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University of Idaho
Extension

WASHINGTON STATE
UNIVERSITY

RURALROOTS
healthy food healthy communities

CULTIVATING SUCCESS™
sustainable small farms education



Harvest bounty during a Cultivating Success organic farm practicum July 2006