

Youth Entrepreneurs in Agriculture

Joan Vance

Washington State University
Grays Harbor County Extension

joan_vance@wsu.edu

Funded by Western Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education



Objectives

- Introduce ways to make small acreages sustainable, both environmentally and economically
- Showcase diversity of crops and products suitable for small acreages

Objectives

- Help youth learn how to think and plan strategically
- Showcase various marketing strategies
 - Direct farm marketing
 - Farmers' markets
 - Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs)
 - Cooperatives
 - Sales to stores, restaurants, other retail outlets

Priorities & Assumptions

- Small farm families are looking for sustainable crops/produce for additional income
- Profit margin is constrained in a depressed economy
 - Traditional crops, methods and marketing are not economically sustainable
 - Niche markets hold high potential for small acreage

Priorities and Assumptions

- Youth are very influential in family decision-making
- Youth involved in all aspects of production
 - Youth often decision-makers and primary workers in family operation
 - Livestock auctions
 - 4-H and FFA projects



Target audience



Projected: Teens between 12 and 19

Target audience

Actual: Families with members of all ages



Resources

- Existing cadre of very entrepreneurial, creative farmers in three-county area



Valuable Partners

- Co-coordinator is local producer and well-known to area farmers
 - Recruitment of farms for tours successful
 - Farmers were very interested in helping youth
 - Farmers were excellent teachers



Resources

- Very interested group of families
 - Parents were involved and/or interested in farming
 - Farm tours and project became part of home-school curricula for youth involved



Priorities and Assumptions

- Theory: Youth learning new methods will introduce ideas to parents



Priorities and Assumptions

- In practice: parents attending the farm tours made this information transfer complete for whole family simultaneously



Resources / Inputs

- Resources needed
 - Very inexpensive program (total cost \$7,700)
 - Western SARE funded through a professional/producer grant
 - Extension Ag and Small Farm Program personnel advised

More resources

- Modeled on Small Farms Program's Sustainable Small Acreage Farming curriculum (adult program)
- Tilling the Soil of Opportunity
- Be the “E” 4-H curriculum

Key player

- Producer (co-coordinator) was a local farmer with degree and interest in Agricultural Economics
 - Good connections with other local farm families
 - Excellent teacher and co-planner
 - Able to craft a schedule of tours with coherent concept development

Resources/Inputs

Lessons learned

- Scheduling much affected by weather (touring farms)



More lessons learned...

- Transportation critical
- Food very important for youth, especially
- Behavior expectations should be spelled out ahead of time as a courtesy to your hosts
- Expected youth to keep a blog – 2/3 of families did not have or allow Internet access due to lifestyle choices

Program Activities & Outputs

Program implementation

- Series of six farm tours
- Blog expectations – not realized
- Assembled notebooks with activity sheets and hand-outs for each farm operation (bulb farm; sheep; pastured poultry; hogs; blueberries; vegetable/flower CSA)
- Curriculum for youth and adults

Outcomes

- Each tour presented a specific product or marketing method, or both, for consideration by small acreage farmers.



As a result of the farm tours:

- Two families used the farm tour materials as part of their home school curriculum
- Two families decided to try a small hog operation both for sale and home use
- Three families decided to raise pastured poultry (using sustainable methods) to augment family income

Outcomes

- ***Continued***
 - Two families have planted blueberries



- And one family is planning a produce stand

Impact

- Intended long term impacts
 - Increase in farmers using sustainable methods
 - Increased participation in niche markets with resulting enhanced profitability
 - Better opportunities for youth to remain in community, due to more viable production and marketing
 - Improved local economy for rural families

Evaluation

- Very basic design, based on personal interviews and survey



- Several changes in family farming practices

Program Logic Summary

