

Youth Entrepreneurs in Agriculture – Grays Harbor County, Washington

Summary

The Youth Entrepreneurs in Agriculture provided a series of six farm tours, surveying a variety of agricultural operations suitable for small-scale acreage. Half of the farms were organic, or used strictly sustainable methods of production. The other half used traditional methods, with less emphasis on sustainable practices. Discussion was held both on the farm and in the classroom to compare the methods.

Objectives

- The primary objective of the farm tour program was to introduce youth to the value of sustainable methods, particularly as they relate to small-acreage farms.
- The second objective was to introduce the youth to the “business” of farming; that is, to begin to explore the financial aspects of production and marketing. The corollary to this topic is the increased value of the organic or natural product in the marketplace.
- Long-term goals of the project were to help influence future farmers to increase the number of acres locally that are in sustainable production, enhancing environmental quality; assist future farmers to increase the economic viability of the farm operations; and to make efficient use of nonrenewable and on-farm resources and integrate natural biological cycles and controls.

Results/Performance targets

A total of 22 youth and adults attended the farm tours, with 12 attending all 6 tours. One factor we did not anticipate was that all of the participants came with the whole family; no youth attended without parents. This meant that there were several younger children attending the tours as well as the original target population of teens. As a result, our program was less rigidly focused on the teen age group than we had anticipated. Each farmer took pains to have something for the youngest children to see and do; each one also addressed many questions asked by older youth and parents.

The farmers that used sustainable methods (two were certified organic, the third markets their products as “naturally raised”) were extremely enthusiastic and very articulate about why they chose sustainable methods. Additionally, each one emphasized the financial benefits of products in this market. One farmer demonstrated multi-species production, utilizing very small units of acreage. Pastured poultry contributed to fertilizing the pastures; sheep and hogs rotated on the same area as well. Each was harvested at a different time, and together they maintained an income stream that was balanced over the year. The dairy farmer emphasized the benefits of the organic coop to which he belongs, and

which contracts with him for a year in advance, adding to the stability of his operation and enabling him to successfully plan for the future. The CSA demonstrated the extremely wide variety of produce that can be successfully cultivated both in the field and in the greenhouse in our area. Additionally, they discussed the model of pre-paid membership sales, which is a unique way to market vegetable produce.

Accomplishments/milestones

We were able to complete six excellent farm visits, viewing seven separate operations. Each youth completed a notebook with activity sheets and handouts from each tour.

A short guideline/curriculum has been produced that can be used by others wanting to replicate this project. We expanded our original concept to provide activities for younger children.

Impacts and contributions

Each participating family has already made at least one change to their farm plans for the coming year, based upon information from the farm tours.

Two of the families used the farm tour materials as part of the youths' home school curriculum (totaling seven youth between 12 and 19).

Two of the families decided to try a small hog operation (using natural methods) for sale and for home consumption.

Three families decided to raise pastured poultry (also using natural methods) to augment family income.

Two families have already planted blueberries.

One family decided to create a separate 4-H club to feature the projects that specifically related to the farm tours.

One family is planning a produce farm stand.

Long-term impacts remain to be measured. The intended impact is to enhance family farm sustainability, both through environmentally sound management practices and through improved financial profitability of small acreage operations.