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FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Growing Your Small Market Farm Business Planning Program

Abstract: Small farm business enterprises receive technical advice and planning assistance.

Question & Answer

Q: What does an Iowa farmer need to know about business planning?

A: Developing a farm business plan takes more than reading a book. It takes the right business planning program for your business. Every farmer can take positive steps toward building their business skills and making good, sound business decisions in order to build a profitable farm business.

- One-on-one assistance throughout the year with a summertime site visit to each business,
- Assistance with marketing design and production of a promotional piece, and
- Building the GYSMF network by incorporating 2005 class participants, distributing a newsletter, and providing a one-day learning opportunity.

Results and discussion

The program enrolled 21 farm businesses and 42 people. The formal curriculum was expanded from 11 to 15 weeks. Information on promotional pieces was presented and appreciated by the participants. Nearly all businesses received personal visits and counseling from the program administrator in 2006 and 2007.

Promotion and recruitment efforts for the 2006 and 2007 classes were expanded, including visits with several

Background

Grow Your Small Market Farm (GYSMF) Business Planning Program is the only business planning program in Iowa whose main focus is to support specialty food/fiber/value-added farmers and their farm businesses. Begun in 2001, GYSMF has achieved a strong reputation with farmers for helping them build their enterprises.

The goal was of this project and the GYSMF program to create a business planning program for specialty crop/livestock producers and provide one year of extensive support for improving business skills.

Approach and methods

The project components included:

- GYSMF classes held from January through April 2006 and 2007,



Farmers who were in the GYSMF class in 2005 and 2006: Blue Gate Farm, Chariton - Jill Beebout and Sean Skeehan

Principal Investigator:

Sharon Shafer
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Co-investigator:

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Ames

Budget:

\$19,600 for year one
\$20,600 for year two

county economic development directors. A presentation was made to a state legislature committee to encourage support for specialty farm businesses.

A Lunch and Learn program in November 2006 was attended by 50 people. One of the suggestions that emerged from the event was to form a steering committee that would focus on identifying value-added opportunities for those participating in the program.

Impact of results

Impacts are seen in each farm business and how the farmers are able to meet their personal business mission. This program is focused on building the local food supply and public demand. Four newsletters were published to expand participant business skills, in Iowa and via the Internet. A GYSMF Steering Committee was created to identify value-added opportunities for those participating in the program.



Farmers who were in the GYSMF class in 2005 and 2006: Kathy's Pumpkin Patch, Donnellson - Kathy and Greg Hohl

Those who participated have learned how to:

- plan and set goals and objectives to build their business's profitability,
- say "NO" to ideas that distract their business from achieving its goals,
- understand their market potential,
- promote their products and services,
- use Quick Books Pro to keep track of their financials,
- increase their business's profitability, and
- develop relationships with other like-minded farmers around the state.

Education and outreach

The program has been part of national network project through the ISU Sociology Department. It also was included in a 2005 national grant managed by the University of Nebraska to continue studying producer networks. Participation in this program allowed the GYSMF program to hire a graduate student.

Leveraged funds

An Iowa Department of Natural Resources grant for \$5,000 in program support was secured in 2006.

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