

Annual Results

EW99-003

Living on the Land: Teaching Small-Acreage Owners to Conserve Their Natural Resources

Location:

Washoe County, Nevada

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Grant Award:

\$47,390

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Cooperators:

Steve and Greta Mestre
Small Acreage Owners

Peter and Ruth Clark
Small Acreage Owners

SUMMARY

This project developed a curriculum and training for NRCS, conservation district and extension personnel in eight Western states who work with small-acreage owners. It was based on key natural resources issues (goal setting, soil, water, plants and animals) and reviewed by 17 professionals with experience in these natural resource issues. Included are 15 PowerPoint lessons with lesson plans and evaluation tools and an instructor's guide. Forty-seven professionals attended training in October 2000 and learned how to use the curriculum to develop a comprehensive program for small acreage. More than 600 copies have been distributed to date.

OBJECTIVES

1. Review and develop a module-based core curriculum readily adaptable to specific state issues appropriate for teaching owners of small acreages how to attain property goals while protecting their soil, water, plant, animal and other resources
2. Publish the curriculum and make 100 copies available through the Western states
3. Provide training for Western states for cooperative extension personnel, Natural Resources Conservation Service professionals, conservation district volunteers and others to help them use the curriculum materials in community-based efforts to effectively target and reach this underserved audience

ACCOMPLISHMENTS/MILESTONES

The cumulative activities of small-acreage landowners have a large impact on soil, water, plant and other natural resources. Many people now living on the land were formerly disconnected from the land, creating a huge demand from them for information and technical assistance to help them do the right thing for their wildlife, land and water resources. Previous efforts in Western states have been largely fragmented and achieved varied success. Using the successful "Small Ranch Water Quality Program" from the Nevada Cooperative Extension as a model, this SARE-funded project is developing training materials and assistance to help this growing audience become good stewards of the land.

At their first meeting, March 30-31, 2000, project participants adopted the goal "to provide knowledge and skills to small-acreage owners to allow them to do something positive on their land." They then began to refine content and locate resources to develop a generic curriculum applicable West wide to educate "lifestylers" – those who live on small-acreage properties but do not depend on the property for major economic support. They met again Feb. 28 to March 2 and May 2-4, 2001, to develop, review and revise the curriculum. In June, the curriculum was sent to 17 professionals in eight Western states for review (Nevada, California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Idaho, Colorado and Montana).

The final curriculum includes an introduction, instructors guide, five teaching modules and a CD-ROM with all files. Each lesson is accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation; a lesson plan that includes rationale, objectives, suggested activities, materials and local resources; lists of background sources for instructors; handouts; Web sites; an evaluation; and a post-class mini-test.

Professionals from eight Western states employed by NRCS, cooperative extension and conservations districts were invited to attend a training session Oct. 2-3, 2001, in Reno. Fifty participants were identified and offered up to \$300 each in travel support. Despite post-9-11 travel difficulties, 47 people attended the training, which was conducted by major participants in this SARE grant. Topics covered were needs assessment and audience targeting, program marketing, engaging adult learners, delivery methods, evaluation, putting a small-acreage program together and module presentations and activities demonstrations.

Participants visited two local small-acreage properties, where they broke into groups and learned to inventory property and communicate with landowners. Steve and Greta Mestre, small-acreage owners who had spoken during training, provided tips on working with small-acreage owners. An evaluation was collected at the end of the training, and another evaluation in the summer or fall of 2002 will assess curriculum use, value and needed changes.

“What a wonderful conference,” wrote one participant. “Thank you for all of the preparation you went through to make this such a success.”

Since the training, at which 65 curricula were distributed, 536 copies of the CD-ROM have been requested. The wide impact of the program can be seen from these plans:

- Canyon County, Idaho, will hold a Living on the Land Class in Boise February 2002.
- NRCS will set up a demonstration in California.
- Twenty-five copies have been distributed to Western extension directors.
- CDs will be distributed to every county extension office and conservation district in Nevada, Colorado and Montana.
- CDs have been distributed to extension agents, soil and water conservation districts and watershed councils in Oregon.
- The Livestock Production Systems Workgroup discussed the curriculum during the California Cattlemen convention.
- The College of Southern Idaho is developing a for-credit course using the curriculum as a base.
- Cooperative extension officials at Michigan State University and the University of Wisconsin have requested copies of the program.
- State outreach coordinator Marsha Gery distributed 35 copies to NRCS offices in California.

Since the training was completed, the SARE project members have developed a listserve for the instructors and participants, lol@lyris.cahe.wsu.edu. They also plan to post the curriculum on the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Web site, www.unce.unr.edu as well as the Montana Cooperative Extension Web site.

IMPACTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS/OUTCOMES

Tightened standards and regulations on water quality infer responsibility on owners of small acreages to learn land management techniques that reduce nonpoint source pollution. While this grant was targeted at “lifestylers,” not producers, producers will benefit from improved land management at the suburban/rural interface. Also, the materials can be used to educate producers as well as small-acreage owners. The project’s curriculum and the training it engenders should enable professionals from all Western states to launch small-acreage programs tailored to individual communities in their states.

Initial results indicate high demand and an audience wider than the eight states targeted, says project coordinator Sue Donaldson. Each training participant has been asked to share the materials with colleagues and others engaged in small-acreage programming. In the summer and fall of 2002, the project team will evaluate the success based on use of materials and the number of small-acreage programs initiated.

“The true measure of success of this program will lie in documenting the increase in knowledge and change in behavior by local audiences as a result of programs initiated by participants making use of the curriculum,” says Donaldson in the annual report. “We expect that it will take several years to collect meaningful data on behavioral changes.”