



extension
IMPACTS

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Weed and pest professionals utilize UW CES to enhance horticulture knowledge

Situation:

The dynamics of rural Wyoming are changing. Weed and pest professionals have typically served the farm and ranch community with answers and solutions to difficult weed and pest issues. As agricultural operations flatten, there has been a historic increase of rural small-acreage development. In 2008, weed and pest professionals from Goshen, Converse, Weston and Carbon counties asked the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service's Converse, Natrona, and Niobrara (CNN) area extension educator to help them build their horticulture repertoire for this clientele shift.

The CNN educator worked closely with these professionals to develop a series of three, one-day seminars. Each seminar focused on typical examples of horticultural-related problems and solutions on a rural acreage. Topics included soil problems, water conservation, weed control in the lawn and garden, tree and shrub choices, and on-site problem solving. Six weed and pest professionals attended the trainings in Douglas in March, April, and May. Since this was a small but intensive class, the CNN educator was able to work with each individual professional to hone his or her horticultural skills and apply those skills to local issues in the respective counties.

Impacts:

End-of-session evaluations indicated 100 percent of the students believed the knowledge gained would help them do their job more effectively. Using a Likert scale (1 to 5 scale, where 1 is having no knowledge/skills and 5 is having a high degree of knowledge/skills), these professionals indicated prior to taking the seminars their collective understanding was 2.4. At the conclusion of the series, it climbed dramatically to 4.9.

Three months after the seminars, the educator conducted a phone survey of these professionals. One hundred percent indicated the time spent in these seminars helped them in their work with small-acre landowners. Quantitatively, they assisted 133 people with horticultural-related issues. An assistant weed and pest supervisor said this about her experience this past summer: "These classes gave me the confidence to really help people with their questions. As a result, my stress level went down and my fears evaporated. I would strongly recommend to my colleagues to take this sort of training. These classes opened up a whole new world to me." Another assistant supervisor said, "The knowledge I gained was powerful. Already, people are looking at me as an expert in horticulture problem solving. My board is very thankful that I took this training."

As the rural dynamics continue to evolve and extension educators perform in areas of specialization, finding alternative means to educate new audiences will mean finding new alliances. The work performed with weed and pest professionals from the four counties is a great starting point. Future work could very well be expanded to accommodate more areas of the state.

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— *Seminar participant*

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