impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Small acreage owners turn knowledge into action

AT A GLANCE

Research based education empowered small acreage landowners to adopt new management practices, creating opportunities for improved stewardship and economic success.

The Situation

The number of small acreage landowners in southern Idaho continues to grow, bringing increased demand for practical information on managing land, water, livestock and other agricultural resources. Many landowners are first generation producers or have limited agricultural experience, making it difficult to identify and implement practices that support productive, sustainable operations.

Without access to research-based education, small acreage owners may struggle with pasture productivity, irrigation management, livestock care and long-term planning. This can lead to inefficient resource use, increased costs and missed economic opportunities. University of Idaho Extension identified a need for educational programming that would help landowners make informed management decisions while protecting natural resources and improving the viability of their properties.

Our Response

University of Idaho Extension developed and delivered the seven-week Making the Most of Your Small Acreage program in the Magic Valley to provide practical education tailored to the needs of small acreage owners. Six operations were registered, resulting in 12 participants representing Jerome, Twin Falls, Lincoln and Minidoka counties.

UI Extension Educator Steven Hines presents a lesson on goal setting and planning for small acreage owners.

Weekly sessions focused on goal setting and planning, soils, water management, poultry, equine management, gardening, pasture management, cattle production, and sheep and goat production. By partnering with the Extension irrigation specialist and the North Side Canal Company general manager, educators were able to provide practical information on irrigation systems, equipment and water management options. The program concluded with a presentation from a local producer who shared how a small acreage operation was transformed into a profitable business,

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demonstrating real-world applications of the concepts presented throughout the course.

By combining university research, expert instruction and producer experience, participants gained practical tools to evaluate management decisions and improve the productivity and sustainability of their small acreage operations.

Program Outcomes

Eight participants completed post-program evaluations. Participants reported increased knowledge across all program topics, including planning, soils, gardening, pasture management, irrigation and water laws, poultry, equine management, cattle production and sheep production. Eighty-seven percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their knowledge increased in each subject area.

More importantly, 100% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they intend to implement strategies learned through the program, and 100% agreed or strongly agreed that they will change current behaviors or management practices as a result of participation. These findings indicate that participants are prepared to apply research-based practices that improve stewardship, resource management and operational effectiveness.

Participants also anticipated measurable economic benefits from adopting new practices. Fifty percent estimated a potential economic impact of $1,000 or more to their operation or business, while 75% estimated $500 or more in economic benefits or cost savings for their families. These projected benefits demonstrate how educational programming can support both responsible land management and economic resilience for small acreage owners.

By increasing knowledge and motivating action, the program equipped participants with the skills and confidence needed to make informed decisions that benefit their properties, families and communities. Through improved stewardship and management practices, small acreage owners are better positioned to achieve their long-term goals and contribute to a sustainable agricultural landscape in southern Idaho.

The Future

Interest in the program and participant feedback demonstrate an ongoing need for small acreage education in south-central Idaho. University of Idaho Extension plans to offer Making the Most of Your Small Acreage program in the Magic Valley beginning in January 2027, building on the success of the initial program.

Future offerings will continue to provide research-based information while incorporating participant requested topics such as orchard management, greenhouse production, fencing and additional opportunities for small acreage enterprise development. The program will help new and existing landowners develop the knowledge, skills and management practices needed to improve stewardship, increase productivity and strengthen the long-term viability of their operations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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