

WRITING PROGRAM SUCCESS STORIES – (Impact Statements)

Introduction

The satisfaction that is obtained from observing success among our clients or community as a result of Extension program efforts is very gratifying and one of the reasons individuals make a career of Extension. These successes take many forms and can focus on an individual, a group, or a larger population. However, the underlying theme in any success story (impact statement or “bullet”) is the positive change which occurred as a result of our program efforts, and not the programming effort itself.

Success

The dictionary defines success as "...the achievement of something planned or attempted...something that turns out as planned or intended." Extension employees indicate that success is seen in many forms. However, for a success story to convey significant success, actions by clients, impacts on clients, or “what are people doing differently as a result of involvement in our programs” should be indicated. This may be in the form of the adoption of a new practice or changed behaviors. Even higher level impacts may be indicated as financial gains; taxpayer savings; efficiencies gained; environmental enhancements or protection; individual life enhancements; resources preserved; or societal improvements.

When evaluating programs, we evaluate for outcomes (impact) as well as the success of the process itself – the facilities, educational materials, presenters, etc. The outcome (impact) evaluation is what is used for communicating success stories to administrators and stakeholders. The process evaluation is important for improving how we attract and educate our audience, but not the subject of success stories.

Developing Success Stories

It is clear that success can be interpreted in many ways for many different audiences and stakeholders. While an Extension Agent might consider success as 50 producers attending a workshop, 100% of Homemakers donating to the Ovarian Cancer Fund, or the fact that 4-H Camp came off with no 4-Hers receiving injuries beyond cuts and scrapes, we rarely write success stories about these things. Stakeholders will be looking more closely at success stated as the positive practice changes, dollars saved or reduced burdens on society that occurred as a result of Extension educational program efforts. This positive impact most likely will be individuals doing something different expressed in social, environmental, or economic terms with these outcomes easily recognizable and understood as a positive result of Extension's program or programs. Thus, in identifying and reporting such positive program impacts, some general guidelines should be kept in mind:

- When developing a success story, conciseness, brevity, informative, focused, and impact oriented should be the guiding principles – 1/3 page or less is ideal.
- A success story should include a **very brief** description of :
 1. the problem,
 2. the educational program response,



3. the participants,
4. other partners (if applicable), and
5. program impact or participant response.

A conclusion statement or sentence can help tie all of the above together. The participant response may be stated as a testimonial if available, but testimonials rarely stand alone well and should be included to reinforce the items stated above. Testimonials should never include the name of the individual, since these are public records.

Success Stories should be written to communicate program impacts to lay audiences who may not be readily familiar with Cooperative Extension programs. In other words, program acronyms and program titles we are commonly familiar with should be avoided or at least explained. Also, it is important to think about the message that is really being conveyed by the success story. Inadequate or inappropriate statement of the problem can give the reader mistaken impressions as to why the program was undertaken or what prompted the initiative to begin with. It is also very easy to convey the impression that we were sitting idly by waiting for a problem to arise rather than conveying the image that we were educating to prevent problems and to produce positive program results. Conveyance of the message that Cooperative Extension is making a difference in people's lives in a positive manner with demonstrated impacts should be the intended purpose of writing a success story. In the following example of a success story, each of the key components will be identified:

Heart Healthy Program Successful

Heart disease is the number 1 killer in Robertson County [**Problem**]. As part of the Weight-the Reality Series Program, Cooperative Extension in cooperation with Meadowview Regional Health Center and the Robertson County Health Department [**Partners**] is sponsoring quarterly "heart healthy" cooking workshops for the general public. Emphasis is on healthy recipes and cooking techniques participants can use in their daily lives [**Program**]. Forty-nine consumers participated in the three workshops [**People**]. Participants were surveyed following the classes and 73% indicated they had used class recipes or modified their own recipes to reduce fat, sodium, or sugar. An example of these modifications is that there is a 43% decrease in participants utilizing lard in cooking. Due to interest of participants, workshops will continue quarterly [**Conclusion**].

In telling the story of this program success, the writer chose to state the problem and then the partners. Of course, every program does not always have a partner. Also, the concluding sentence may be omitted if space is limited or the impact statement adequately explains the success.

It is imperative to always include a statement of the problem, the Cooperative Extension program, the people it serves and its actual impact. Program successes are stronger when focused on the entire educational program rather than on a single activity. Success should be demonstrated by actual outcomes, meaning actions taken, rather than intentions or in the educational gains alone. That means follow-up contact with the clientele is essential in capturing this information. That the information was actually used to make a positive difference should be indicated. Happiness about an activity or statements of intentions to change are not sufficient to indicate a program success story.

Success Story Examples

The following examples are meant to illustrate possible outcomes and impact that could be reported from a variety of Extension Educational Programs. Although actual Kentucky names and places are indicated, most stories are not factual.

4-H Career Program Makes a Difference

Many high school students do not have the opportunity to see first hand what is involved in a career of their choice. The Wayne County Cooperative Extension Service 4-H Program collaborated with the Monticello Lions Club to conduct a shadowing program in which 102 high school students experienced a day with an adult in a career of their choice. The day ended with a luncheon to honor the students and recognized the adult volunteers. Each student had to write an essay about their experience and included remarks such as: "This day has helped me decide what I want to go to college for". Another student commented, "Through the 4-H career program I learned that what I thought I wanted as a career was not really for me. This program helped me see this before I invested my time in college preparing for a career."

4-H Program Credited With Success of Child

A 13 year old Fulton County 4-H'er was selected to represent 80 students from her middle school at the Annual County wide Human Relations Banquet. In a letter from her parents, the Fulton County Cooperative Extension 4-H program was given credit for allowing her to shine in the interview/selection process by stating: "...(Her) success comes partially from the skills and values she is taught from school teachers, coaches and parents. However, we attribute (her) ability to really SHINE from the following opportunities in 4-H: Camps, Exchange programs, International programs, public speaking, project records, 4-H congress, leadership training, presentations and district and county meetings. Without these opportunities...her talents would have taken many more years to be noticed." The growth of this one 4-H member is an indication of the true impact 4-H can have on developing life skills and responsible adults for our future.

Plastic Waste Collection Program a Success

Each year thousands of ornamental plants are planted into Oldham County landscapes. The result is a stock pile of plastic nursery pots. Unfortunately these pots are not included in the current city recycling program. They are frequently disposed of through the county landfill. To prevent this, a Recycling program was established by Cooperative Extension, with the cooperation of Plastics Revolutions, a recycling company which handles this type plastic. Radio spots were conducted as well as newspaper articles published to alert people to handle these pots in a more environmentally friendly manner by means of a one day collection program. There were 5,500 lbs. of plastic collected which will be used to make new nursery pots and parking car stops. There were also 300 lbs collected which will be reused by backyard propagators for producing landscape plants.

Pesticide Container Recycling Program Saves Landfill Space

Used pesticide containers can be a major environmental hazard. In order to assure that farmers and others properly dispose of such containers, the Caldwell County Extension Center is in its second year

of conducting the Rinse and Return pesticide container recycling program in cooperation with the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. This year, two educational programs were held to educate producers on the proper methods of recycling containers. Of the 128 that attended, 120 stated they will or are taking part in the program. So far this year, the program has resulted in the recycling of 700 two and one-half gallon containers, 100 five gallon containers and 6 fifty-five gallon drums. This has saved the county approximately 1150 square feet of landfill space. At \$17.50/sq foot, the resulting savings is more than \$20,000.00 for landfill space alone. In addition, these materials will not find their way into sinkholes and thus will not have a negative impact on ground water in Caldwell and surrounding counties.

Family Budgeting Program Stimulates Action

Moving families off of welfare to work is a goal of Franklin County. The Cooperative Extension Service partnered with the Department of Social Services, Goodwill Industries, and the JobLink Center to educate young mothers so they can improve their financial status. Classes were held at Goodwill Industries focusing on basic budgeting for parents who will be entering the work force. Two hundred participants increased knowledge of the family budgeting process as a means for developing a budget to fit their family's needs. At the end of the series, 150 limited resource participants stated they were now making a budget which is helping them to prioritize their bills and start paying bills on time, which will improve their credit record as well.

Weed Control Program Increases Profits

Many species of weeds have developed resistance to commonly used pesticides in Scott County. New technology has enabled farmers to control weeds that were previously impossible to manage with currently available herbicides. As a result of Cooperative Extension meetings, newsletters, and consultations with growers, producers were able to increase their net profit, and reduce the amounts of conventional herbicides applied. One grower increased his yield over 100 pounds per acre as a result of utilizing this new technology and following Extension recommendations. This resulted in increased net profits of \$105,000 for his operation alone. This use of new technologies in weed control greatly reduces the use of more conventional pesticides that are more likely to move through the soil and contaminate groundwater.

Sawmill Efficiency Program Increases Income

There is a great need to increase the competitiveness and profitability of Kentucky's forest products industry. Extension programs focused on educational and technical assistance to Kentucky forest products manufacturers resulted in 8 wood products operations making modifications to their moulder systems. The results reported by this one process in 8 small plants indicated a production gain resulting in increased gross income of \$8,000,000 per year. While the entire wood products industry is served by Extension, this one example is indicative of the many impacts accruing as a result of useful educational opportunities being provided in a timely and inclusive manner.

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