

Online Ten Acres & a Dream workshop extends audience, increases knowledge gains

AT A GLANCE

Ten Acres and a Dream was developed in response to resource requests by new rural landowners. Originally offered as a day-long workshop, it was offered online in spring 2020 due to the pandemic.

The Situation

New rural landowners often encounter challenging new situations in pursuit of their country living dreams. Led by a group of Idaho Master Forest Stewards and UI Extension educators, Ten Acres and a Dream was developed in response to resource needs of an increasing cohort of rural homesteaders in north Idaho. It was offered in two locations in 2018 (Sandpoint and Post Falls), one location in 2019 (Bonners Ferry) and was slated to be presented in St. Maries in spring of 2020. Due to pandemic-related closures, the in-person workshop was canceled.

Our Response

Based on successes migrating other face-to-face programming to the Zoom platform, Ten Acres and a Dream was restructured as an online workshop. Three-hour Zoom sessions were held on Friday mornings two weeks apart (May 1, May 15 and May 29, 2020). Additional UI Extension educators from southwest Idaho were invited to present on specific topics, expanding our outreach to this area. Master Forest Stewards and rural landowners with expertise relative to northern and southwest Idaho were invited to participate in the producer panel.



UI Extension Forester Chris Schnepf leads a panel discussion with local landowners at the 2019 Bonners Ferry workshop.

UI Extension's Cultivating Success Sustainable Small Farms Education program, under the direction of Collette DePhelps, community food systems area Extension educator, sponsored the workshop as part of their Land Stewardship programming (see <https://www.cultivatinguccess.org/land-stewardship>). Support for producer honoraria was obtained from Idaho's Western SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) Professional Development Program.

Program Outcomes

In 2018 and 2019, Ten Acres and a Dream served 97 attendees in three locations who managed 1,965 acres of private forest land and 3,196 acres of other rural land. In 2018, participants reported an average 32% increase in their knowledge of various topics before

and after the class. In 2019, 52 participants at the Boundary County location reported a 38% increase in rural land knowledge.

In fall of 2019, a follow-up mail survey was sent to participants from 2018 and 2019 to determine which practices were actually put in place. The survey had a 35% response rate with 34 surveys returned. In terms of using resources from the workshops, 78% of respondents used recommended web resources, articles and books. Two-thirds visited their local UI Extension office. Practices put into place by more than 50% of respondents included starting or expanding a vegetable garden, starting a new fruit planting, using agency resources recommended in class, attending forestry courses, and practicing forest thinning and pruning techniques discussed in class.

In 2020, the online Ten Acres and a Dream workshop had 43 participants in the first three-hour workshop, 33 in the second and 24 in the third. A pre-workshop survey asked about their land ownership, their general interests in terms of crops and livestock, and generating income from their property. Poultry production was an area of interest for 89% of those surveyed. Three-quarters were interested in supplying the majority of their family's food from their homestead. In priority order, respondents were interested in crop production, livestock production and forest management.

The first workshop consisted of an overview of rural land ownership, forestry fundamentals and homestead planning. The second and third workshops focused on crops and livestock production, respectively. On average, participants reported a 71% increase in knowledge of rural land management topics. This is more than double the 32% stated increase in

knowledge for 2018 workshop participants, and slightly less than twice as high as the 38% reported gain for 2019 participants.

The majority were satisfied with the online delivery via Zoom. Many participants expressed gratitude that the course was free and did not require travel. Here are some comments provided in the follow-up surveys after each session.

- Enjoy this format over in-person — much less travel time! The typical in-person options are hours away and thus I usually don't participate.
- This was an excellent format. I loved it, and really learned a lot. I look forward to the follow-up email with resources.
- Thank you for your hard work delivering this class on Zoom.
- I enjoy this format, I would attend more like this in the future, even after the stay at home order is lifted. It is convenient to be at home sometimes.

The Future

Given the feedback from post-workshop surveys, an online option should be available even when programming returns to the classroom. However, online producer panels pose technical difficulties. Future offerings will explore a hybrid delivery mode where producer panels can participate from a University of Idaho facility to reduce technical challenges associated with rural locations and lack of experience with online platforms.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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