

A.M. Grev, A.O. Burk, E.N. Crowl, A.A. Kness, and J.A. Reynolds, University of Maryland Extension

## Introduction

- Maryland's equine industry is diverse, with over 79,000 horses housed on 16,000+ equine operations across the state (MDA, 2010)
- Observational field studies have reported low to moderate adoption of grazing BMPs on equine farms in Maryland (Fiorellino et al., 2014)
- The objective of this project was to implement a series of field-based forage educational events in Maryland and to collect and document the resulting knowledge gains and program outcomes
- Information from these events will help Extension develop more effective programming for equine owners and managers in Maryland

## Materials and Methods

- Events (n=4) were held between June 2021 and August 2022 (Figure 1)
- Events included a combination of pasture walks and field days designed to provide hands-on education related to grazing management
- Educational topics covered included soil health/fertility, weed control, grazing management, pasture evaluation, forage selection, pasture renovation, forage planting/establishment, and managing new stands
- At the end of each event, participants were asked to complete a short 15-question evaluation
- Survey questions were designed to collect information on:
  - Participant and farm demographics
  - Program quality
  - Participant knowledge gains
  - Anticipated outcomes

**Figure 1.** Participants learning from Extension educators at pasture walks in Baltimore county, MD (left) and Howard county, MD (middle; right)

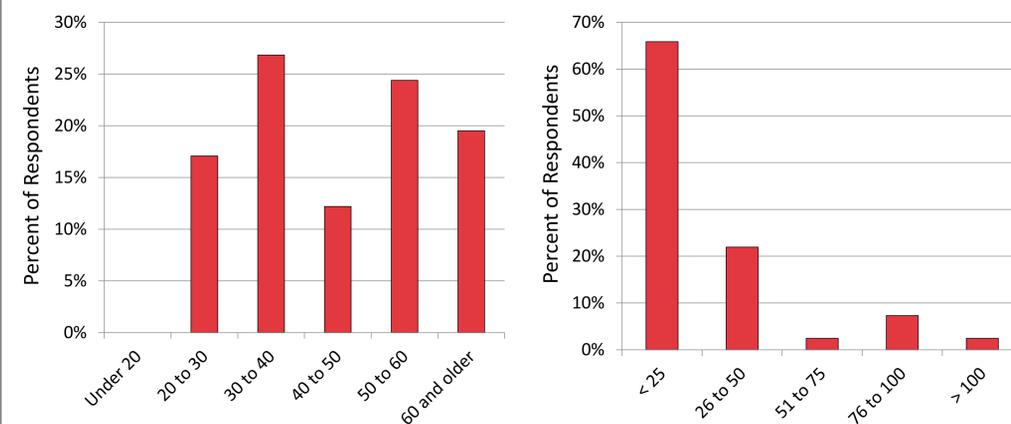


## Results

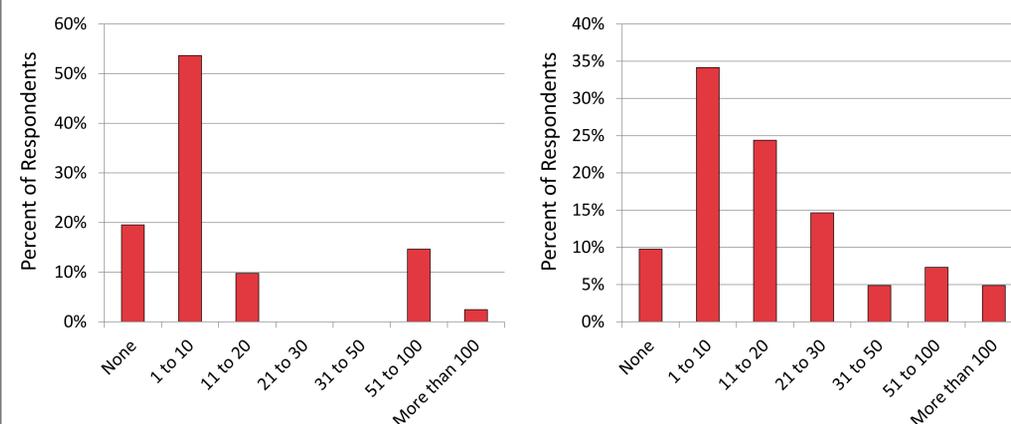
### Participant and farm demographics:

- A total of 44 responses were received out of 90 total event attendees (49% response rate)
- Participant ages varied widely but the majority of respondents were 30 to 59 years old (63%; Figure 1)
- Respondents were 68% female and 32% male
- Most respondents traveled less than 25 miles to attend (66%; Figure 1)
- Most respondents owned or managed 1 to 10 equids (54%) on properties with 1 to 20 acres of pasture (59%; Figure 2)

**Figure 2.** Participant age distribution (left) and number of miles traveled to attend an event (right)



**Figure 3.** Number of horses (left) and acres of pasture (right) owned or managed by participants



**Table 1.** Participant agreement (from strongly disagree through strongly agree; percent responses for each category) with statements evaluating programming, materials, and information provided

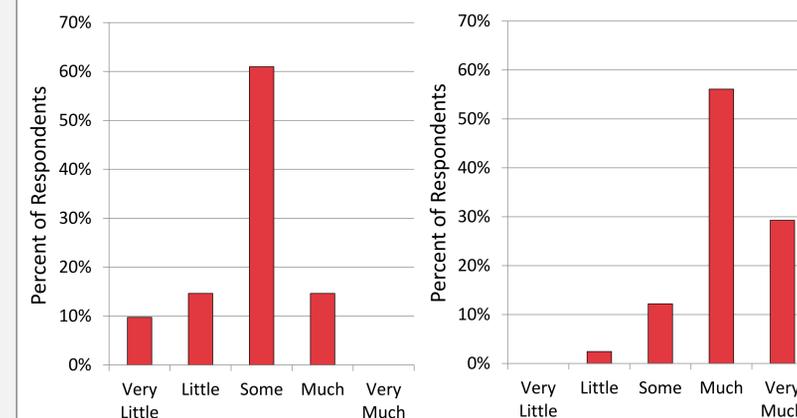
Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
This program met my expectations	0	0	5	26	70
I was satisfied with the handouts or materials provided	0	0	0	19	81
I found this information useful in the management of my operations	0	0	0	18	83
This program improved my ability to make informed decisions regarding my operation	0	0	0	23	78
The instructor(s) presented the subject matter clearly	0	0	0	10	31

## Results (continued)

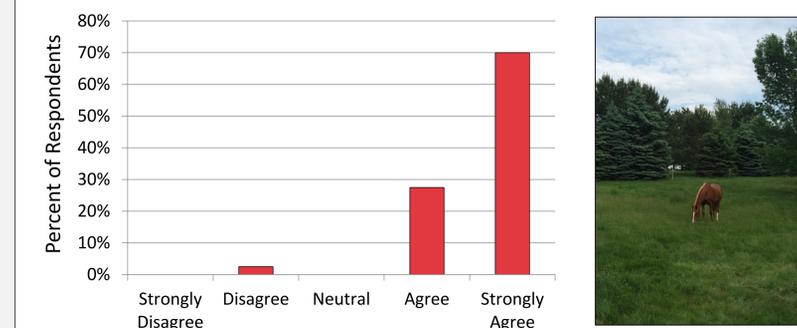
### Program quality and knowledge gains:

- Feedback was very positive, with participants noting high satisfaction with programming, materials, and information provided (Table 1)
- All participants reported that the education provided improved their ability to make informed decisions regarding their operations (Table 1)
- Participant knowledge was greater following program completion (average  $\pm$  SD;  $4.1 \pm 0.7$ ) compared with before ( $2.8 \pm 0.8$ ; Figure 4)
- 98% of participants stated they planned to make at least one change in their operations based on the information provided (Figure 5)
- Positive attributes noted included the relaxed nature of the field-based programming, the range of practical information provided, and the interactive, hands-on approach

**Figure 4.** Participant self-reported knowledge gains prior to (left) and following (right) attendance at field-based forage educational events



**Figure 5.** Percent of participants who reported that they planned to make at least one change in their operation based on information provided



## Summary

- Results indicate that Maryland equine owners and managers do find field-based forage programming useful
- Field-based forage programming can be an effective means to increase knowledge and adoption of grazing best management practices
- Results from this needs assessment will help direct future Extension programming to better serve Maryland's many equine facilities