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S. L. Musen
University of Kentucky

Krista L. Lea
University of Kentucky

S. Ray Smith
University of Kentucky

R. J. Coleman
University of Kentucky

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Effectively Reaching the Equine Community in Kentucky

Musen, S.L.* , Lea, K.L.†, Smith, S.R.† and Coleman, R.J.†

* University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, Jessamine County. 95 Park Dr., Nicholasville, KY 40356 USA † University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture Food and Environment. N-222 Ag. Science Center North, Lexington, KY 40546 USA

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Abstract

Since 2009, Extension Specialists and County Extension Agents from the University of Kentucky in the Southeast United States have conducted an annual educational event; the Kentucky Equine Farm and Facilities Expo field-day. These annual field-days have provided practical, hands-on demonstrations and seminars for 135-250 members of the equine community per event. Participants have been a mix of horse owners in relation to farm size, number of horses and business vs. recreation. Many participants have not been previous consumers of Extension educational programming. One of the major draws of the Farm and Facility Expo field days has been the host sites, which have included various well-known Thoroughbred, Sport-Horse and Quarter Horse farms, with an increased number of participants observed when the event was held at well-known farms. Partnerships have been established with many equine related businesses, with over 30 companies displaying their products and services at the event. The educational programs at these events have been conducted by Extension Specialists, industry experts and Extension Agents and have included timely topics such as weed identification and control, vaccination protocols, farm safety, pasture management and renovation, rotational grazing, feeding and nutrition, fencing options, barn design, on-farm solar energy and many others. Post-event evaluations have been conducted and, of the more than 2,400 persons who attended these events, 84.25% of the respondents have found the information presented useful in the management of their horse operation, 78.5% planned to make at least one change in their horse operation and 90% were very satisfied with the event.

Introduction

According to the 2012 Kentucky Equine Economic Survey, Kentucky is home to 242,400 horses and estimated the total value of Kentucky's equine and equine-related assets at \$23.4 billion. The survey's results identified 35,000 equine operations and 1.1 million acres devoted to equine use (KY Equine Survey, 2012). As might be expected, there is a concentration of horses in the Bluegrass area of Central Kentucky. Since 2009, Extension Specialists and County Extension Agents from the University of Kentucky in the Southeast United States have conducted an annual educational field day, the Kentucky Equine Farm & Facilities Expo. This annual event has provided practical, hands-on demonstrations and seminars for 135-250 members of the equine community per event. Participants have been a mix of horse owners in relation to farm size, number of horses and business vs. recreation.

Methods and Study Site

The University of Kentucky Extension Equine Forage Working Group, comprised of Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agents along with both Forage and Equine Extension Specialists, have planned the Equine Farm & Facilities Expo which has been hosted by various horse farms in central Kentucky. Partnerships have been established with many equine related businesses and over 30 companies have participated by displaying their products and services at the events. The educational programs at these events have been conducted by University of Kentucky Extension Specialists, industry experts and county Agricultural Extension Agents and have included timely topics important to horse owners and equine farm managers.

Results

One of the major draws of the Farm & Facility Expo field days has been the host sites, which have included various well-known Thoroughbred, Sport-Horse and Quarter Horse farms, with an increased number of participants observed when the event was held at well-known farms. Some of the Central Kentucky horse farms that have served as hosts for the Expo include Margaux Farm LLC in Midway, the Kentucky Equine Humane Center in Nicholasville, Magdalena Farm in Lexington, Old Friends Thoroughbred Retirement Farm in Georgetown, New Vocations at Mereworth Farm in Lexington, Knapper Farm in Harrodsburg and Olive

Hill Sport Horses in Lexington. Many of these venues have been selected after their participation in the University of Kentucky Horse Pasture Evaluation Program which has performed over 170 evaluations on 110 unique farms in 21 Kentucky counties (Lea, Keene and Smith, 2016).

Topics that have been presented at the Equine Farm & Facilities Expos have been selected based on current needs in the equine industry as indicated by calls received in county Extension Offices and by State Forage and Equine Extension Specialists. Some topics have included information on pasture management, surfaces for working areas, pasture seeding, weed control, barn design, farm site planning, rotational grazing, on-farm solar energy and others.

Post- event evaluations have been conducted and, of the more than 2,400 persons who attended these events, 84% of the respondents have found the information presented useful in the management of their horse operation, 79% planned to make at least one change in their horse operation and 90% were very satisfied with the event. Many participants have not been previous consumers of Extension educational programming.

Discussion [Conclusions/Implications]

The University of Kentucky's Equine Farm & Facilities Expo. has continued to meet the training needs of the Central Kentucky equine community with timely topics. It has also significantly strengthened the relationship between the University of Kentucky and the equine industry. This is demonstrated in the large attendance at the annual Equine Farm & Facilities Expo, held at various well-known horse farms in the central Kentucky region.

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References

- Kentucky Equine Survey. 2012. University of Kentucky, Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund and the Kentucky Horse Council, <https://equine.ca.uky/equinesurvey>
- Lea, K., T. Keene, and S.R. Smith, 2016. Improving Equine Pastures through Evaluation and Education. Proceedings of the 10th International Rangeland Congress, Saskatoon, SK, Canada.



Figure 1. A Kentucky Equine Farm and Facilities Expo field-day educational session on "What to look for in a yearling."



Figure 2. Kentucky Equine Farm and Facilities Expo field-day participants learn about 'Footing for where your horses work' from Dr. Robert J. Coleman, University of Kentucky Equine Specialist