Factors of Success for Agricultural Conservation Education Events

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION

Introduction

General crop management and conservation field days at research stations in Minnesota were attracting a decreasing number of attendees. This trend was reversed with the evolution of single-theme events for farmers and agricultural professionals. This poster describes the evolution of form and factors of success of this format.

Conservation Tillage Field Days

The evolution of the single-theme format began in 2004 with field days at the locations of on-farm trial comparisons of four tillage treatments for corn following soybeans. The format included "tent talks" presenting yield comparisons of tillage systems from research plots, crop nutrient and machinery management for high residue systems, economics of conservation tillage, and incentive payment programs. Presenters included research staff, agricultural professionals, and farmers experienced with conservation tillage systems. Field demonstrations of strip-tillage equipment were usually featured. The field days were held at nine locations in 2004 and at four locations in 2005. Approximately 1200 people total attended in the two years, an average of 92 participants per field day.

Tillage field day "tent talk" at the Mark Bauer farm 2005 on-farm trial.

Evolution of Event Format

Multi-State Manure Expo

In 2005 the University of Minnesota hosted a multi-state Manure Expo titled "Manure Handling in the 21st Century" at its Southern Research and Outreach Center. The expo followed a format developed at the University of Wisconsin under a regional CSREES water quality 406 project. It included extensive equipment field demonstrations, 66 exhibitors (in buildings and in the field), and a full schedule of education events for commercial applicators and livestock producers. Total attendance was approximately 700. Financing was by a combination of exhibitor fees and funds from a manure management 319 grant. See www.manure.umn.edu/fieldday05 for photos, a list of exhibitors, and other information.

Field demonstrations of a range of manure handling and application equipment at the 2005 regional Manure Expo.

Minnesota Strip-Tillage Expos

Based on the success of the Manure Expo, field days of the Conservation Tillage project were expanded to the expo format for 2006. One technology tested in the previous on-farm trials, strip-tillage, was made the focus of two expos held at UM research and outreach centers. Publicity was expanded to statewide coverage and extended into neighboring states.

Over 300 participants at each of the two Strip-Tillage Expos in 2006 watched 9 strip-tillage implements demonstrated side-by-side in the field. Auto-guidance systems were also demonstrated. Inside presentations addressed research results from the previous yield trials, fertility management, guidance systems, and farmer experience with strip-tillage.

Farmers attending managed a total of about 350,000 acres, while acres managed by attending crop consultants exceed 500,000, as reported on event registration cards.

Field demonstrations by 12 manufacturers of strip-tillage equipment at the 2007 Northern Strip-Tillage Expo near Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

Multi-State Strip-Tillage Expos

Exhibitors and attendees of the 2006 Strip-Tillage Expos requested that they be repeated. Contacts with neighboring states resulted in two regional expos in 2007. The Midwest Strip-Tillage Expo was hosted by the North Central States Tillage Committee (NC1012) at Hawkeye Technical College, Waterloo, Iowa. The Northern Strip-Tillage Expo was hosted by the University of Minnesota and North Dakota State University at the Jerry Nordick farm near Fergus Falls, MN. Attendance was approximately 500 at each. Farmers traveled from adjacent states, some from several hundred miles, to participate. Presentations were made by specialists from four universities in Waterloo, and two universities at Fergus Falls. Equipment demonstrations were carried out by 9 and 12 manufacturers at the two Expos respectively. Several regional agricultural newspapers published articles on strip-tillage in preparation for the events. More information is available at http://wrc.umn.edu/outreach/striptillageexpo

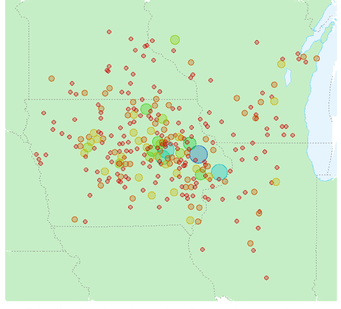
Presentations by specialists from four universities at the 2007 Midwest Strip-Tillage Expo at Waterloo, Iowa.

Note: A regional strip-tillage expo will be held at the University of Wisconsin Arlington Research Farm on August 12, 2008.

Factors of Success

We attribute success of the event format to the following factors:

- The events were focused on one topic, either strip-tillage or manure application, both of which have rapidly evolving technologies.
- Side-by-side field demonstrations of commercially available equipment were carried out by 9-12 manufacturers in the case of strip-tillage. This provided both the interest of equipment moving in the field, and a chance to see how the equipment performs.
- Experienced strip-tillage farmers described their systems and took questions in a panel format as well as individually, providing real-world credibility.
- Specialists from universities as well as the private sector provided specific and research-based information directly related to the event topic (strip-tillage or manure application).



Distribution by zip code of attendees at the 2007 Midwest Strip-Tillage Expo, Waterloo, IA.

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