

An Overview of Risk Management Workshops for Small and Underserved Producers in Southeastern North Carolina

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INTRODUCTION

Small and Historically Underserved Producers continue to face the challenges of managing risk as they face historically high input and energy costs, fewer off-farm employment opportunities, and increased financial and marketing risks. They need the ability to deal with risks that come with attractive farming opportunities. To assist producers with these challenges, North Carolina Cooperative Extension conducted series of Risk Management Workshops in 2014, 2017, and 2022 in partnership with National Crop Insurance Services and Digital Extension Risk Management Education. These educational programs were developed to help these farmers respond to the five special emphasis areas of risk.

OBJECTIVES

The definition of small farmers is farmers with a gross income of \$250,000 or less. USDA policy identifies four groups as “historically underserved”: Beginning; Socially Disadvantaged; Veterans; or Limited-Resource. The primary objective was for participants to acquire the skills and understanding their own operation sufficiently to establish a written goal for each of the five areas of risk and for each decision variable of marketing risk specific to the farm, delineate for each goal at least specific actions to reach goals, and commit to follow through and implement their personal risk management marketing plans and strategies.

DELIVERY METHODS

The delivery of this education program consisted of two major components: 1) workshops and 2) individual study. Due to the COVID pandemic, applied education which was originally scheduled to be all in-person in 2022, eventually consisted of eight sequential workshops (7 virtual, 1 in-person; 30 hours total) supplemented by homework assignments and individualized counseling was delivered to producers via a partnership of subject matter experts and local extension agents. The in-person workshops were located at the North Carolina Cooperative Extension - Robeson and Sampson County Centers in 2014 and 2017 and Robeson and Duplin County Centers in 2022.

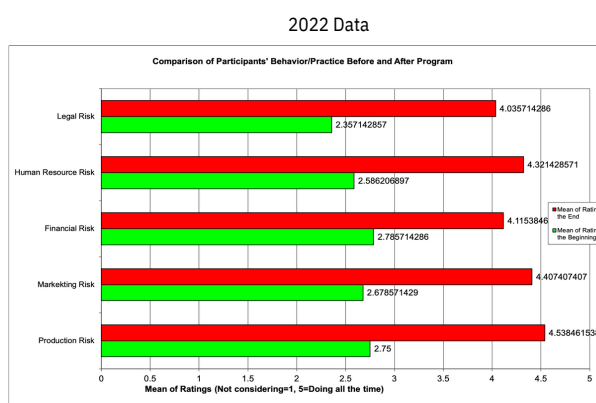
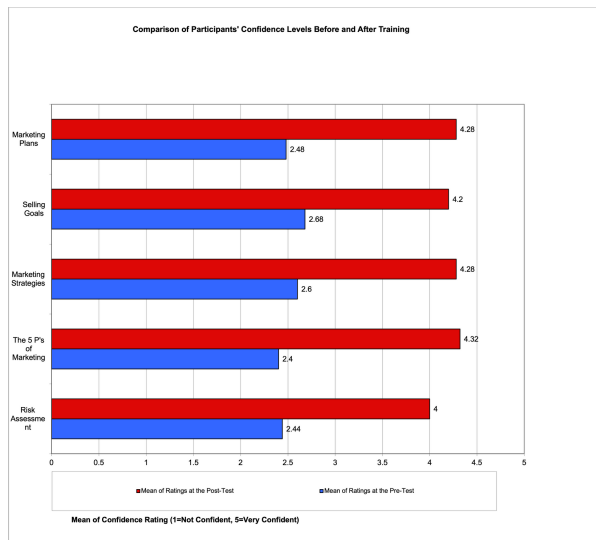


Figure 2. Farmers receiving their certificates after completing the Risk Management Training on May 24, 2022 at the Duplin County Extension Center in Kennesville, North Carolina.

RESULTS

Project outcomes show that 156 producers attended at least one of the series and acquired the risk management and market analysis skills and understanding of their own operations to set a goal for each of the five areas of risk and five key marketing mix variables. Evaluations conducted at the beginning and end of the series of workshops showed that participants behavior and understanding of risk had increased from an average of 2.4 to 4.0 in 2014, 2.5 to 4.2 in 2017 and 2.4 to 4.1 in 2022 on a scale of 1 to 5. At the conclusion of the workshops, several farmers commented orally and on the written evaluation form that they had learned lots of informative information to help with their farm operations, this was the best and most comprehensive course they have ever attended.

FOLLOW-UP EVALUATIONS

Interviews were conducted with participants six months after the end of each project showed that 117 of the 156 producers had completed at least half of their actions in their personal risk management plans which included: installing high tunnel greenhouses and deep well irrigation systems, receiving financial assistance, having roadside marketing signs printed, and developing personal webpage and social media pages. Follow-up evaluations were completed in March 2024. A total of 81 participants completed the evaluations. They reported a total amount of \$608,300 earned or saved by completing the actions in their personal risk management and marketing plans.

CONCLUSIONS

With these risk management and marketing tools, local farmers can build the confidence they need to deal with future risks and opportunities. Future plans are to conduct another series of risk management workshops with special emphasis placed on one of the five areas of risk. Small and Historically Underserved Producers will continue to benefit from Cooperative Extension Programs.

