Growing for Profit: Agribusiness Development Series

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Jacksonville’s urban landscape lends itself to agricultural production methods that can generate more income on less land, which is one reason the city is home to a diverse array of agricultural enterprises, including hydroponics, aeroponics, aquaponics, beekeeping, Community Supported Agriculture, market farms, U-pick farms, and small livestock operations. While the crops and production methods may vary drastically from farm to farm, one commonality is the need to have a comprehensive understanding of the business aspect of farming for their enterprise to succeed.

Growing for Profit (Fig. 1) is a program in which UF/IFAS Extension partners with the University of North Florida (UNF) Small Business Development Center to deliver a comprehensive program that provides agricultural producers the tools, information and resources necessary to succeed at the business of farming. The overall objectives of the program are to support entrepreneurship and economic development of small farms by providing programming on agribusiness development, as well as promote awareness of and increase knowledge in agricultural regulations.

The educational approach was a series of workshops conducted by UF/IFAS Extension and other industry affiliates. This program was offered in both 2015 and 2016 at Duval County Extension. It was organized differently each year to enable comparison of the successes and failures of each program’s implementation.

While the program content varied somewhat each year, the backbone of the series included business start-up basics, business plan development, financial management, marketing, agricultural resources and financing, agricultural regulations and permitting, and legal strategy basics. In 2015, the 3-workshop series was attended by 18 individuals and had 18 presenters. In 2016, the 5-workshop series was attended by 18 individuals and had 16 presenters.

Program evaluations and follow-up surveys reflected solid program outcomes. Evaluations for the 2015 Growing for Profit workshop series demonstrated that, of 9 participants, 100% increased their knowledge of marketing, business taxes, and farm financing; 100% increased their awareness of resources provided by UF/IFAS and of the importance of creating a food safety program for their farm; and 78% increased their knowledge of the Cottage Food Law and pesticide laws. A post-series survey, distributed five months after the Growing for Profit series culminated, demonstrated that of six respondents, at least one started a new business, used Florida Market Maker to market their farm product, began selling a cottage food product, utilized UF/IFAS analytical resources and/or applied to the NRCS cost share program.

As a result of the 2016 program, 6 participants demonstrated that 100% (6 of 6) can more accurately access the key factors involved in establishing their agricultural enterprise and intend to develop and/or finish a business plan; 83% (5 of 6) intend to set and prioritize goals for their business and to advertise their product via internet marketing; 67% (4 of 6) intend to market their product via direct marketing avenue; and 50% (3 of 6) intend to obtain a Grower’s Permit and liability insurance for their farms.

This program could easily be adapted for other counties. The local industry affiliates would change, but the program outline and the topics addressed could stay consistent, with room for adaptation to the specific needs of the community.

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