



Multi-year Pesticide Applicator Training Shows Broad Impact

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In Spring 2015, extension agents from four counties developed a new program to provide an annual multi-category pesticide training for clientele across the district, resulting in the Central Panhandle Pesticide Training Series. This annual series was developed to maximize the impact of the efforts of the University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension Northwest District (NWD) Agricultural Program Implementation Team (PIT). That following year, the series was hosted by the Washington County Extension Office, with agents from Holmes, Jackson, Calhoun and Gadsden Counties presenting educational content. As a four-day training series, it was designed to help clientele meet the continuing education unit (CEU) requirements for license renewal, as well as adding categories or obtaining a new pesticide license. Due to the popularity of this series in the central panhandle, another regional training was formed for the eastern part of the NWD. These two regional training series have continued to grow for the past two years and are greatly benefiting pesticide applicators in the region.

The University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Extension Program is tasked with the educational component for pesticide education. In Florida, clientele attend workshops or trainings to earn continuing education units (CEUs) and prepare for licensure exams across twenty categories in chapter 487 (Agricultural Pesticide Law). The objectives of the four-day Central Panhandle Pesticide Training Series were: 1) Meet the needs of pesticide licenses holders, both green industry and traditional agriculture, in the Northwest Extension District to obtain new licensees and/or gain CEUs; 2) Develop knowledge gain and practice change in clientele by providing education to pesticide handlers in the areas of plant identification, integrated pest management (IPM), application methods and techniques and pesticide safety and handling; and 3) Develop an educational model that would maximize the impact of agents

time and efforts in a team teaching environment. Specific groups of clientele focused on for these trainings included nursery producers, right-of-way, golf course, and ball-field turf managers.

Methods

During the first year (2015) we provided a three-day series offering CEUs and exams in right-of-way, CORE, private applicator and aquatic pesticide categories. In subsequent years, we expanded the series to offer the additional categories of ornamental and turf, agricultural row crop, natural areas weed management, and both 482 and 487 Core. In March 2016, extension agents from Washington, Jackson, Holmes and Calhoun Counties provided a four-day program called Central Panhandle Pesticide Training Series in Chipley. In September 2017, the regional series expanded to include a Big Bend Pesticide Training component as a five-day series incorporating agents from Gadsden, Jefferson, and Leon Counties. Applicator registration is \$10 for each half-day category training during the week of the series. When these two regionalized clusters were formed, they

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accounted for seven of the sixteen counties within the Northwest Extension District.

Results and Discussion

The pesticide training series is hosted annually, rotating among host counties within the two clusters. Each day covers a different license category, with multiple agents teaching throughout the three to four-hour class. Exams are offered every day at the conclusion of the class, along with corresponding CEUs. Over a three-year period, this training series has been hosted in five different counties covering seven of chapter 487 license categories. During this time, a total of 387 participants have earned 638 CEUs, with 214 exams administered. The overall pass rate of these trainings was 78%. The years 2016 and 2017 had pass rates of 74% and 77% respectively. However, in 2018 the Central Series pass rate increased to 89%. We attribute this rate increase to the inclusion of a hands-on pesticide rate and math calculation session.

Over the three-year period this program has generated \$4,090 of program enhancement funding through registration fees in hosting counties. Finally, data from follow up surveys sent out to participants in 2017 indicates that 89% (55/62) of respondents stated that having a pesticide applicator license enabled them to more effectively control pests and 70% (44/63) of respondents increased the effectiveness of their pest control practices by implementing one or more of the practice changes outlined in the pesticide training.

Conclusion

The regional training series model has been successful in the Northwest Extension District. There are currently eight extension agents across seven counties that participate in the multi-year pesticide series. To date, the average participant pass rate is 76% and we educated 60 new licensed applicators as result of the multi-year regional pesticide training series over the three-year period.