Growing Mushrooms for Fun and Profit

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Nationwide there is a demand for locally grown food and demand for gourmet mushrooms such as shiitake and oyster species has been on the rise. Florida’s climate is conducive to growing shiitake and oyster mushrooms. A few Florida Extension Agents have taught mushroom production on natural logs, but there have not been any Extension programs using straw in bags to grow oyster mushrooms. Therefore our objectives were to 1) develop a variety of educational materials for various learning styles; 2) promote and deliver at least three shiitake and oyster mushroom production programs for farmers, Master Gardeners, and hobbyist growers annually; 3) increase (by 50%) knowledge of 100 farmers, Master Gardener volunteers, and gardeners on small-scale shiitake and oyster mushroom production each year; and 4) have class attendees produce 200 lb of oyster or shiitake mushrooms annually. PowerPoint presentations for specific audiences were developed. Two tri-fold brochures were designed to deliver information on oyster mushrooms grown in bags of wheat straw and shiitake production on natural logs. A third brochure was created to promote workshops. A pop-up vertical banner and a horizontal banner were created for marketing. Agents also developed a learning module and distributed a notebook. A mushroom toolkit that included mushroom spawn, sealing wax, a specialized drill bit, and two inoculated natural and synthetic logs was also created. Results and impacts included 516 small farmers and gardeners attending a total of 14 workshops to increase their knowledge of small-scale shiitake and oyster mushroom production, processing, and marketing (Figs. 1, 2). The locations for these workshops included four counties (Alachua, Columbia, Duval, and Suwannee), one multi-county location (2013 Agritunity), and two statewide locations (University of Florida, IFAS, Suwannee Valley Agricultural Extension Center and 2012 Florida Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises Conference). The average knowledge gain in these workshops was 79%. An end-of-program survey at 2012 Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises Conference found that a very high percentage (96%) of participants responded positively to the information on edible mushroom production with 61% indicating plans to initiate production based on this information. Similar 8-h workshops offered by the private industry are valued at $400 per farmer. When this value is multiplied by...

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163 (the number of participants in workshops) the total value is $65,200. Agents have given out 350 inoculated oyster mushroom kits and 252 inoculated shiitake mushroom logs valued at $24 and $26, respectively, a total value of $14,952. The “Growing Mushrooms for Fun and Profit” exhibit at the multi-state 2012 Sunbelt Agricultural provided over 1,000 producers, gardeners, and students with educational information and upcoming class information. Attendees have grown around 1,050 lb of oyster mushrooms and 3,740 lb of shiitake mushrooms valued at $38,320 ($8/lb). Agents can duplicate this program provided they plan for the time and labor of securing the substrate to grow mushrooms on. Providing toolkits for participants to take home reduces the amount of equipment needed for hands-on activities, but it may also reduce the success rate of mushroom production. A very high success rate was obtained through the hands-on activities where the participants followed step-by-step instruction in class.