The Wisdom of Crowds: Can the Public Guide Successful Research and Extension Ag Programs?

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Crowds
What do we know about Crowds?

A lot smarter than we might think

Can solve problems

And that the successful programs of tomorrow depend on effective collaboration
Can a Crowd be Consistently “Smarter” than a “Smart” Person?

Yes, if ...

• The crowd is diverse

• Group members make independent judgments

• There is a method for aggregating decisions
Missouri’s Dairy Industry

- 89,000 cows
- $260 million in farm receipts
- 875 grade A producers
- 23,000 jobs associated with the industry
- Annual retail value of $5 billion
Missouri’s Beef Industry

- Third-largest cow-calf herd in US
- 52,000 producers
- 1.7 million cows
- Use about 11 million acres for pasture and hay
- Annual farm-gate value of $2.1 billion
The Wisdom of Crowds

forage/beef/dairy producers
producer organizations
local businesses
consumers
Walmart
agri-businesses and industries
government agencies

Program Development
summer pasture
grazing systems
pasture-based dairies
winter-feeding systems
fescue toxicosis
Program Planning Philosophy

Needs assessment

Hypothesis

Curriculum development

Teaching

Experimentation

Evaluation - Impact
Research Approaches
(Answering the Crowd’s Questions)

- Graze cover crops
- Breed more efficient animals
- Reduce feed waste
- Grow more grass in autumn
- Extend pasture use

Winter Feeding Systems
Training Materials
(Tapping the wisdom of the crowd)

• Easy to use manuals
• Interactive web resources
• Video training sets
Peer-to-Peer Learning
(Crowds learning from each other)

- Recruit 25 interested producers
- Initial training workshops
  - Grazing management
  - Animal nutrition
  - Financial management
- Facilitate regular meetings
- Collect on-farm data
Train the Team (Crowd)
Technology Adoption
(What the crowd is implementing)

"Learning how to use stockpiled tall fescue saved me more than $10,000 in the first year. That’s a lot better than my savings account!" – Jody South, beef producer, Greene County, MO.
Program Impact

• Producers have greater quality of life (the crowd is happy)
  – 72% report greater profit margin (More than $1.2 billion in the past 5 years)
  – 64% say they use natural resources more responsibly
  – 54% report having more time to spend doing “non-farm” activities
Link to YouTube Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2iEEU9c4H1Q
So...can a diverse group guide successful research and extension programs?

Yes, they can.

When we work together, they do.

And it makes us better.
How can you be part of a Smart Crowd?

Kindly tell each other what you think.

Offer your solutions.

Work together to find the answers.

Stronger communities and a better world
Winter Feeding Systems