

Building Relationships Between an Equine Advocacy Group and Cooperative Extension to Facilitate Adult Education Programming: A Pilot Study

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

Transporting horses can be a hazardous endeavor. The activity requires proper planning and infrastructure to avoid accidents and maintain high standards of animal welfare (Miranda-de la Lama et al., 2009). Mishaps involving horse trailers can be a dangerous problem resulting in serious injury or death which could negatively impact the perception of the animal industry. Accidents can arise from mechanical failures and improper weight balance between the vehicle and the trailer (Braver et al., 1997).

Appropriate programs should be developed and contain educational topics which can help maximize loading and hauling safety procedures and potentially minimize accidents. These types of programs can be beneficial because of the valuable information and demonstrations taught by experts such as those within the Cooperative Extension industry and university agriculture research and extension centers (ARECs). When it comes to adult equine education programs in a non-formal setting, Cooperative Extension and ARECs should be one of the first resources/outreaches because of their time-tested, strong relationships in agricultural communities and experience providing non-formal education. Extension agents network with other community expertise to provide in-depth, experiential trailer safety programs that provide owners and haulers access to peer reviewed research, well-educated speakers and professional development opportunities. However, the MARE Center and VCE Loudoun needed assistance in promoting such events with organizations that have more presence/influence in the community. As such, the MARE Center and VCE Loudoun reached out to a more vocal equine organization, the Loudoun County Equine Alliance (LCEA). Having this partnership would be valuable on both ends because LCEA would assist in the Center's and VCE Loudoun's publicity efforts while the MARE Center and VCE Loudoun would be able to share our educational opportunities and research findings.

How it works/Methods/Steps

The goals of this program were to teach adult learners better trailer safety methods and for the MARE Center and VCE Loudoun to establish a professional alliance with LCEA. The need for this program was identified during a tour of the MARE Center with the LCEA. LCEA members and VCE Loudoun developed an educational program sponsored in part by the MARE Center, VCE Loudoun County and Blue Ridge Trailers. The outcomes of this program would be better trailer safety measurements, a professional, ongoing alliance between the MARE Center, VCE-Loudoun and LCEA and more awareness of the organizations and Center.

The planning committee prioritized offering meaningful educational experiences and opportunities. To increase the benefits and takeaways of this program and partnership for all parties involved, it is important to understand the motives behind why adult learners want to participate in agriculture education programs. Franz et al., (2010) found from their focus group members that farmers were motivated to learn more from agriculture educators if the educators helped with interpreting information, increased knowledge of established topics, helped with relationship building, local support for problem solving and opportunities to save time and money. Farmers also wanted to learn more about the latest research, engage in social aspects of agriculture and have hands-on learning methods during programs. Topics in the trailer safety program included lecture and hands-on trailer safety components, guest speakers that would

discuss the safest, most efficient trailering techniques, handouts that covered the latest trailer technology and social engagement with the agriculture educators that would build relationships. All these components were put together to help motivate participants to attend and share with others in the community so more people are aware of not just Cooperative Extension but also the MARE Center and LCEA. During the demonstrations, participants received informational packets, evaluated different types of trailers, inspected a hazardous trailer, changed a tire and interacted with the Extension and industry experts.

Results to date/implications

A pre-program trailer safety survey was distributed through QuestionPro to thirty registered participants. There were five questions consisting of yes/no responses and multiple-choice questions with pre-selected answers. Question content asked participants their knowledge about the program sponsors, how they heard about the event, program expectations, interest in trailer technology, if participants would share the program invitation and the level of interest in Extension education opportunities in equine nutrition and pasture management. Participants took on average two minutes to complete the survey and the completion rate was 100%. The survey results showed that most participants were aware of LCEA (~32%), heard about this event primarily through LCEA networking (40%) and wanted to learn more about trailer technology (~41%). Participants also stated they would share this event (89%) and were interested in learning more about trailer technology such as cameras and health monitors (90%). Participants were asked to fill out a post program survey of five short answer questions. Participants said everything was organized, enjoyed the guest speakers and trailer examples. They wished for loading demos, information on future events, more in depth discussion and demonstrations about technology other than handouts and trailer/vehicle weight calculations. Trailer safety actions they plan to incorporate into travel plans were updating trailer first aid kits, pre-drive checklist, reviewing weight ratings, tire pressure and gauge plus other trailer and vehicle maintenance inspections.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

This was a pilot study program to determine a partnership between the organizations. Based on the success of this program, future plans will include another opportunity to host another trailer program at the MARE Center that will feature more topics and hands-on learning opportunities. Additionally, the partnership between these three organizations will continue into other programs, outreaches and other educational programs so the public is more aware of the MARE Center's and VCE Loudoun's resources and opportunities for adult learning. We advise that other ARECs and Cooperative Extension services consider offering a similar program since it could be beneficial to the public in terms of adult learning programs.

Cost/resources needed

Program sponsorships were provided by CFC Farm and Home, VCE Loudoun County, LCEA, the MARE Center and Blue Ridge Trailers. CFC donated \$250 which funded the speakers' and volunteers' lunches. All meetings were organized through Zoom and done during regular office hours. Guest speakers, agents, staff members and volunteers donated their time and equipment to organize and present the day of the program and coordination between all organizations was done as part of the study. The program cost participants \$15 which covered lunch.

References

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