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Floral Arrangement Collaboration Sharpens Consumer Connection to Locally Grown Flowers

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Cover Page Footnote

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Floral Arrangement Collaboration Sharpens Consumer Connection to Locally Grown Flowers

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Abstract. Our statewide floral design training program aimed to raise consumer awareness and appreciation of locally grown fresh flowers and to promote extension floral programs through delivery of workshops and demonstrations. Initially, trainees used artificial rather than fresh flowers, necessitating development of a streamlined floral design project plan. Through collaboration with three flower farmers, we developed a floral design prototype. Our growers produced the flowers based on this model and extension provided registration support and media that facilitated locally grown flowers use in workshops. As a result, we connected 47 consumers directly to our producers. Flower growers felt the project was worthwhile and desire future extension partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

Producers rely on Extension for cut flower production information (Fisher et al., 2012; Fitzgerald & Hutton, 2016; Lindberg et al., 2018; Wagner, 2019), but information related to buying and using flowers—aimed at consumers—is less common (Bodkins, 2015; Citrowske, 2016; DelPrince & Knight, 2018). Floral design training raises awareness about locally grown flowers and helps increase cut flower sales (Etheredge et al., 2020).

We designed and implemented a statewide, one-day, in-service floral design curriculum for Extension agents and volunteers in order to raise awareness about flowers and floral design. Motivation for this training was due to the implementation of two new under-utilized Extension floral programs for consumers and a marketing program spotlighting flowers, cut foliage, and floral containers from our state.

The training workshop curriculum was peer reviewed for content accuracy and includes projects suited for consumer home decoration, including how to make bows, dried-flower wreaths, and fresh floral arrangements using three different techniques. The curriculum also included contact information for three participating flower farms located in the north, central, and southern parts of the state. One hundred Extension agents and volunteers completed the training and agreed to deliver related content to at least 10 clients through demonstrations and/or hands on workshops. Trainees submitted quarterly floral demonstrations or workshop reports during an 18-month period from June 2018 through September 2019.

The first quarter (June 2018) showed promising results with 10 Extension agents and/or volunteers training 136 people. The programs reflected curriculum content and exhibited learning transfer, but upon closer inspection, they did not emphasize the use of locally grown flowers. This alerted program creators of the need to facilitate fresh flower usage in upcoming workshops, which was confirmed in the second quarter (September 2018). Five agents trained 109 people. However, of those 109, only 12 (11%) consumers gained knowledge about fresh flowers. The use of locally grown fresh flowers seemed obvious in the planning and implementation of the training but was not an immediate objective of the trainees. We needed a way to insert the use of fresh flowers into the remaining workshops and demonstrations to help our local flower farms.

A CONSUMER CONNECTION COLLABORATION

In July 2018, we held a conference call with our Extension/grower team to begin development of a standardized flower bunch that could be produced in bulk, sold to our agent/volunteer offices, and used in hands-on workshops.

We discussed flower types and quantities that would be colorful, easy to grow, available from spring to fall, and have good yields. The group decided that the bunches needed to be packaged for protection; freshness; and ease of pick up, delivery, and distribution to students. We felt that consumers would find a \$20–25 class fee agreeable if they were provided with flowers, floral container, and instructions. Still, our growers needed guidance on specific types and quantities, asking Extension to devise and hone the final product of the workshop and share the results.

Wire services such as FTD® and Teleflora® develop and market floral arrangements that are copied by their member florists and sold to consumers. The process for their development begins with a floral design prototype developed by skilled floral designers. After the design stage, the contents of the arrangement are recorded and shared not only with florists, but also with flower growers so that they can be aware of floral crops that may be in demand. We used the same method to draw locally grown fresh flowers through our stakeholder chain of growers, trainees, and consumers statewide. The arrangement prototype would become a visual aid for workshop participants, add value to the bouquet, and help to facilitate the grower-consumer connection. Our Extension floral specialist made a model of the design and photographed it for reference and workshop promotions (Figure 1).

The model consisted of six zinnia stems (*Zinnia elegans* varieties), three marigold stems (*Tagetes erecta* varieties), and six ageratum (*Ageratum houstonianum* varieties) or similar filler flower stems. The workshop teachers provided students with foliage snippet accents to keep the bouquet retail price at \$10. Our growers agreed to rubber band and/or sleeve the bouquets and transport them in water if the workshop teachers would transfer the flowers to their own buckets.

Growers deemed it not possible to produce the flowers in time for the first year of the project, so the infusion of local flowers had to wait until the following year. The local flowers were available from June through October 2019. We used the delay to develop additional support and training materials centered on the fresh, locally grown floral design project. Within Extension, we set a standardized fee of \$25 per kit (which included a flower bunch and a glass bowl); organized registration listings online; and funded distribution channels, container procurement, shipping, and bulk flower transport. Finally, we contacted our trained agents and volunteers about the new opportunity.



Figure 1. Workshop floral arrangement prototype.

Floral Arrangement Collaboration

RESULTS

Five Extension professionals have advertised our newly collaborated workshops. Of those, one in an urban area held two separate workshops, two in rural areas offered workshops that were cancelled due to low enrollment, and the remaining two (urban) held single-session classes. The flower growers grew, packaged, and sold 47 bouquets, netting \$470. Attendees agreed/strongly agreed that they would recommend this workshop to others (94%) and nearly everyone (98%) agreed that they increased their knowledge about floral design. People agreed that they were going to make a floral design within three months of the workshop (85%) and over three-fourths of all participants want to participate in additional training. Our three flower growers thought the effort was worthwhile and client participation will increase in future workshops. Another felt the overall process was easy and will share workshop images on her farm's website.

DISCUSSION

Flower farmer collaboration can increase the success of Extension floral design trainings by developing a prototypical arrangement one year in advance of program delivery. Their suggestions of suitable crops and availability schedules can help introduce their flowers to Extension clients. While trainees felt the broad, multi-project instruction was valuable, this approach offers a concise project for easier implementation. Workshop participants can be provided with a coupon redeemable at participating flower farms to track consumer purchases. Our efforts facilitated direct producer-Extension-consumer partnerships and our participating flower farmers found benefits in the program and are willing to participate in future Extension efforts.

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