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Baby Animal Days: An Innovative Approach to Funding and Marketing Urban Extension Programs

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Baby Animal Days: An Innovative Approach to Funding and Marketing Urban Extension Programs

Abstract

Extension in urban areas can suffer from a lack of exposure in addition to a lack of funding for programs. Baby Animal Days is a 2-day event created to educate the public about agriculture while generating much-needed revenue and providing powerful marketing for Extension. Attendance at the event continues to grow, with more than 8,000 people attending annually in recent years. Results from a formal survey completed in 2015 show a high positive response to all aspects of the event.

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Introduction

Extension in urban areas can suffer from a lack of exposure, and this situation is exacerbated by the fact that most Extension agents are trained to support rural programs and often are located physically distant from urban centers (Pearson, Pearson, & Pearson, 2010). In addition to a lack of exposure and marketing, a lack of funding for programs such as 4-H and horticulture can exist. Furthermore, the important role of agriculture as a foundation for a secure and durable civilization is not always apparent to those outside agriculture (Boleman & Burrell, 2003). All of these issues existed for the Utah State University (USU) Extension Davis County 4-H Program and the USU Botanical Center, located in Davis County. Davis County is an urban county located in northern Utah. The county has a population of 306,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). It is one of four counties in the metropolitan Wasatch Front mountain range corridor, which runs north and south along Interstate 15. The total population along the Wasatch Front is estimated at 2.1 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

To address the issues of lack of marketing and funding for local Extension and lack of agricultural awareness in an urban setting, the USU Extension Davis County 4-H Program and the USU Botanical Center formed a partnership. The two groups kicked off this partnership in 2012 by developing and implementing an event called Baby Animal Days. Baby Animal Days now takes place every year, for 6 hr on Friday and 8 hr on Saturday on Mother's Day weekend. Davis County 4-H livestock and horse clubs bring their animals to the event, and tickets are sold to the public so that event attendees can see farm animals, pet baby animals, go on horse rides, view sheep shearing demonstrations, and participate in additional educational and family-friendly activities.

Program Objectives

The USU Extension Davis County 4-H Program and the USU Botanical Center established four primary objectives for the Baby Animal Days program:

- Educate an urban populace on the importance of preserving agriculture and promoting local food production in urban areas.
- Provide a powerful marketing tool for exposing people living along the Wasatch Front to Extension programs, classes, and services.
- Develop a revenue source to offset funding for the USU Extension Davis County 4-H Program.
- Develop revenue for operating and maintenance expenses for the USU Botanical Center.

Program Design and Implementation

Location, Equipment, and Advertising

The Baby Animal Days event takes place on the USU Botanical Center property in Kaysville, Utah (Davis County). The event space, including parking areas, takes up no more than 5 ac of land. Approximately 2 ac are devoted to the actual event, and an additional 3 ac are reserved for parking. Temporary fencing demarcates the area in which the event activities take place. Large canopy tents are rented from a local equipment rental company and placed in various locations throughout the 2-ac area dedicated to the event activities. Advertising for the event is done through social media and appearances by Extension personnel on local news channels' morning or afternoon programming.

Activities

Attendees can purchase tickets at the main entrance or in advance online. After attendees enter, they can engage in activities at nine stations. They can view and pet farm animals, ride horses, and watch sheep shearing demonstrations. The event also offers train rides, face painting, and a climbing wall. As mentioned, Davis County 4-H livestock and horse clubs bring various farm animals to the event. Most of these animals are baby animals, such as calves, lambs, piglets, goat kids, foals, ponies, rabbits, chicks, and ducklings.

In addition to participating in the activities, attendees can visit booths to get information about 4-H, Extension programs, and university degree programs offered by USU's branch campus on the property of the USU Botanical Center. Also, a limited number of food vendors are present at the event.

Volunteers

A combination of civic volunteers and adults and youths involved in 4-H are required to operate and implement the event. On average, 100 volunteers help each day. Volunteers assist with parking, handing baby chicks and rabbits to children for petting, educating visitors to the farm animal station about agriculture, giving horse rides, and carrying out face painting.

Program Evaluation

A formal program evaluation was conducted through an email survey of attendees who provided email addresses when registering online in 2015. The survey instrument was sent to 680 people, and 182 responded (27% response rate). Results of the survey, indicating significant impacts, are shown in Table 1. Table 2 provides information about survey respondents' ratings of event stations and activities.

Table 1.
Results of Baby Animal Days Impact Survey (*n* = 182)

Statement	Agree or strongly agree (%)	<i>M</i>	σ^2	<i>SD</i>
Baby Animal Days helped you learn more about agriculture, importance of food production, and preserving farmland in Utah.	74	2.10	0.50	0.71
Baby Animal Days increased your awareness of what Utah State University (USU), USU Extension, and USU Botanical Center programs have to offer in Davis County and along the Wasatch Front.	79	1.97	0.53	0.73
Baby Animal Days increased your awareness of the USU 4-H Youth Program.	66	2.18	0.63	0.80
As a result of Baby Animal Days, you would be more willing to participate in other programs, activities, classes, and events offered by USU Extension, USU Botanical Center, and the USU 4-H Youth Program.	85	1.88	0.49	0.70
You would bring your family to Baby Animal Days again.	95	1.33	0.35	0.59
You feel Baby Animal Days is an affordable family event. Prices are: \$5 for an individual pass, 3 years old and up \$25 for a family pass for up to 6 related individuals aged 3 and up \$20 for a military family pass for up to 6 related individuals aged 3 and up \$15 for a USU Botanical Center Gardens Membership family pass	91	1.75	0.39	0.62

Note. Scaled response options were as follows: 1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *disagree*, 4 = *strongly disagree*.

Table 2.
Attendee Ratings of Baby Animal Day Stations/Activities ($n = 182$)

Station/activity	Rank	M	SD
Baby chick tent station	1	4.46	0.90
Rabbit tent station	2	4.32	1.00
Farm animal area station (a minimum of 50 farm animals of all species)	3	4.28	0.96
Horse ride activity	4	4.09	1.13
Specialty show activities (reptiles, mad science, aviary demonstration)	5	3.86	1.23
Sheep shearing demonstration and activity	6	3.51	1.33
Miniature train ride station	7	3.27	1.38
Face painting activity	8	2.85	1.38
Climbing wall activity	9	2.48	1.34

Note. For respondents' ratings of event stations/activities, 1 indicated minimum value and 5 indicated maximum value.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Attendance for Baby Animal Days has far exceeded initial expectations. Average annual attendance for the 2-day event from 2012 through 2015 was 8,000 people, with attendance surpassing 10,000 in 2015. The initial constraint for Baby Animal Days was the high cost of implementing the event. Initial costs consisted of signage, advertising, temporary fencing, and large-tent rental costs and miscellaneous costs, such as those for rental of portable restrooms and purchase of t-shirts for volunteers. After a successful first year, net profits from each annual event and sponsorships have been used to offset costs of the subsequent year's event. The net profit for the 2015 event was \$20,000. Within the 3 years following the first Baby Animal Days, the event became self-sustaining. In response to the results of the email survey, further recommendations include providing multiple activity tents for popular activities (e.g., baby chick petting, rabbit petting, and horse riding) to reduce wait times in lines. The ultimate goal is to generate enough funding to stop renting tents and build permanent barn and fencing facilities that will accommodate not only Baby Animal Days but also additional Extension-sponsored events throughout the year.

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