

8-1-2016

Collaboration of Extension and Grape Industry Members to Create a New Extension Publication

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Recommended Citation

Stafne, E. T., Ingels, G., & Carroll, B. (2016). Collaboration of Extension and Grape Industry Members to Create a New Extension Publication. *Journal of Extension*, 54(4), Article 16.

<https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol54/iss4/16>

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Collaboration of Extension and Grape Industry Members to Create a New Extension Publication

Abstract

Collaboration is an important part of the interaction between Extension and industry. Successful sharing of workload can provide benefits for both parties. A project to create a workbook to address vineyard sustainability was initiated by members of the Oklahoma grape industry with assistance from land-grant university Extension. Productive interaction between Extension workers and industry members included quick turnaround of rough drafts, praise and constructive criticism, give-and-take on ideas for content, active listening relative to problems and suggestions, and offering of advice when needed. The collaboration led to incorporation of new perspectives in a helpful final publication.

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True collaboration is desired, but rarely achieved, when Extension workers and industry members interact. Successful sharing of workload can reduce stress and enhance learning experiences (Murphrey, Miller, Harlin, & Rayfield, 2011). Authors have described Extension and industry collaboration as cosponsorship (Penrose & Hollingsworth, 1995; ZoBell, Chapman, Bagley, Heaton, & Whittier, 2004), prioritization of funding (Sammis, Shukla, Mexal, Bosland, & Daugherty, 2009), logistical support, educational presentations (ZoBell et al., 2004), program preparation, programming efforts, leadership activities, and program planning (Murphrey et al., 2011). Creating a collaborative environment requires that several factors be successful, including common interests, trust between the groups, dedication to openness, established expectations, strong leadership, and clear benefits for both sides (Mentzer, 2001). Herein are 10 steps to effective collaboration as outlined by Strieter and Blalock (2006), with descriptions of how Oklahoma State University (OSU) Extension, Mississippi State University (MSU), and the Oklahoma grape industry collaborated to produce a new Extension publication.

Steps Implemented for Collaboration

Step 1: Clearly define the problem. Two Oklahoma grape industry members recognized the need for more sustainable vineyard management and initiated the idea of producing a workbook. The workbook would outline the best management practices for Oklahoma grape growers and help foster better management that would produce better grapes and local wine.

Step 2: Identify core partners to develop the program. The Workbook Committee initially consisted of 11 members. Two members were from OSU Extension (with one later from MSU), one member was from Redlands Community College, and the remaining members were from the Oklahoma grape industry.

Step 3: Develop a common vision of the project to increase feelings of shared ownership. The vision for the project was to help grape growers better their vineyard management via self-study and self-evaluation. Discussion was held at the first committee meeting on the purpose of the workbook, topics, participation, and authorship.

Step 4: Ensure that everyone has a voice and is treated respectfully. It was hoped that everyone on the committee would play a role in the creation of the workbook. Unfortunately, due to time commitment conflicts and other priorities, many individuals did not fully participate.

Step 5: Clearly define program and collaboration goals. A collaborative goal was for industry members to invest in the education process as well as develop stronger ties to the OSU Vineyard and Enology program. The workbook content was based on *Lodi Winegrower's Workbook: A Self-Assessment of Integrated Farming Practices* (Ohmart & Matthiasson, 2000), the VineBalance (www.vinebalance.com) program (Wise, Martinson, Hawk, Weigle, & Tarleton, 2009), and the Ozark Mountain Vineyard Sustainability Assessment Workbook (Johnson, 2010). Industry collaborators provided input as to what they thought was relevant from these publications.

Step 6: Define the process and plan of work. The initial plan was to gather the committee to assign responsibilities for writing of each chapter and other related activities. The committee would produce a rough copy of the workbook to send to experienced growers for comment. Following the review process, a final version of the workbook would then be published. The workload was divided among three authors (G. and J. Ingels, Stafne), with various contributions from others.

Step 7: Establish and nurture trusting working relationships among collaborators. Quarterly face-to-face meetings provided a sense of commitment to the project. Follow-up communications were established via phone and email. Constructive interaction between Extension and industry included quick turnaround of rough drafts, praise and constructive criticism, give-and-take on ideas for content, active listening relative to problems and suggestions, and offering of advice when needed.

Step 8: Provide benefits to members, and align a reward structure with collaborative goals. The ultimate desired outcomes of the workbook were to help grape growers produce higher quality grapes, leading to better local wine; to improve record-keeping practices; and to enhance environmental sustainability. In the end, the remaining collaborators were recognized as published authors on the final document, received recognition among their peers for their efforts, and had the satisfaction of knowing that the work will help their colleagues.

Step 9: Evaluate the program and collaboration to provide evidence of outcomes and impact. The Oklahoma Vineyard Management Workbook was published in 2014 (Stafne, Ingels, & Ingels, 2014). The workbook is primarily a self-evaluation document. The workbook reinforces more than 100 management topic areas and thus has field application in many situations. It is being used in the OSU Grape Management Short Course (GMSC) (Stafne, McGlynn, & Mulder, 2009). A certificate program was initiated for those who completed the self-evaluation. After evaluation of their vineyards, managers are awarded a certificate from OSU's Vineyard Management Program. At the time this article was written, five vineyards had earned a certificate. Feedback from vineyard managers who have used the workbook indicate that as they recognize, digest, and implement techniques outlined in the workbook, they view their management more critically. Thus, self-evaluation scores

may decrease as shortcomings are fully realized by users, even though overall management is improved. Overall barriers to publication included lack of industry members' time to devote to the project, shifting priorities, and lack of desire to pursue the project to the end.

Step 10: Use evaluation results to modify, expand, and/or drop the collaboration in order to maximize success and/or sustainability as required by the program mission. At the time this article was written, more than 120 copies of the workbook had been distributed to vineyard managers. As use of the workbook increases, data collected via the certificate program will be compiled and analyzed. This research will enable further collaboration by targeting management areas that need the most reinforcement in future editions of the workbook as well as new educational programs.

Conclusions

Even though the workbook was published, getting it published took longer than desired. Generally, barriers to effective collaboration include differing approaches to problem solving, time management, outcome implementation, and lack of trust (Jones & Clulow, 2012; Murphrey et al., 2011). However, in the end, the collaboration between Extension and industry was successful in incorporating new perspectives into a final publication. The participating industry members had familiarity with academia, were retired, displayed exemplary attention to detail, had a strong commitment to bettering the industry as a whole, and appreciated having Extension as a partner in the process leading to a successful outcome.

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