

12-1-2005

Evaluating the Impact of a Community Agricultural Leadership Development Program

Keith G. Diem

Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, kdiem@clemson.edu

Mary Powers Nikola

Rutgers University, nikola@rcrc.rutgers.edu



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Diem, K. G., & Nikola, M. P. (2005). Evaluating the Impact of a Community Agricultural Leadership Development Program. *The Journal of Extension*, 43(6), Article 13. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol43/iss6/13>

This Research in Brief is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Extension by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.



December 2005 // Volume 43 // Number 6 // Research in Brief // 6RIB5



PREVIOUS
ARTICLE



ISSUE
CONTENTS



NEXT
ARTICLE



Evaluating the Impact of a Community Agricultural Leadership Development Program

Abstract

A variety of agricultural leadership development programs have been offered throughout the nation, but the impact of many has gone unevaluated or unreported. This article outlines a process used to measure the long-term benefits of the New Jersey Agricultural Leadership Development Program (NJALDP), a 2-year, Extension-led collaborative program created to help members of agriculture-related professions sharpen business skills, establish an extensive agricultural network, and develop effective marketing and communication skills. Participants from classes completing the program since 1996 were surveyed to determine the difference NJALDP has made on their lives and careers.

Keith G. Diem

Professor
Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service
Clemson, South Carolina
kdiem@clermson.edu

Mary Powers Nikola

Director, Leadership & Organizational Development (NJALDP Director)
Rutgers Cooperative Extension
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, New Jersey
nikola@rcrcre.rutgers.edu

Background and Purpose

The importance of providing leadership development for community and agricultural leaders has long been recognized. Langone (1992) stated that "Community leadership is that which involves influence, power, and input into public decision-making" and found that a leadership program established in the mid-1980's, "designed to enhance and develop skills of community leaders, also highlighted how Extension can be a catalyst for creating stronger linkages and problem-solving capabilities in rural areas." Horner (1984) described how Extension educators in one state developed a program to "do something about the gap in public policy education for adult leaders in agriculture." Kraenzel (2001) concluded that

The foremost challenge is to provide educational programs that provide new frameworks for building relationships . . . to address such subject matter areas as interpersonal relationships, working relationships, negotiations, and cooperation. Related areas include alliances, partnering, market structures, food chain structure, and food product distribution systems.

During the past 20 years, a variety of Extension educational programs have been offered throughout the nation to focus on developing the skills and leadership abilities needed by agricultural leaders. However, the outcomes of many of these programs have gone unevaluated or unreported. This article outlines a concerted effort to measure the benefits and impact of the New Jersey Agricultural Leadership Development Program (NJALDP) that was developed in 1996 to help members of agriculture-related professions to:

- Sharpen their business skills,
- Establish an extensive agricultural network,

- Develop effective marketing skills, and
- Develop oral and written communication skills.

Through a series of seminars and interactive workshops over 2 years' time, NJALDP participants explore various agricultural topics; debate key issues; sharpen communications skills, particularly public speaking; and establish and cultivate an extensive agricultural network throughout New Jersey. The program is a collaboration of Rutgers Cooperative Extension/Cook College and the New Jersey Agricultural Society, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, and the New Jersey Farm Bureau. Four classes have completed the program so far.

NJALDP participants develop skills in a variety of areas, including interpersonal communications, marketing, decision making, negotiating, and business and personal leadership. The skills that participants acquire can be used to improve their own business and personal lives and enhance involvement not only in agricultural organizations but also community and civic groups, governmental bodies, and school and youth programs. In addition, NJALDP participants examine key agricultural topics, including land use, environmental issues, agricultural economics, bio-security, agri-terrorism, aquaculture, and fisheries. As a result, participants hone their analytical and decision-making skills and develop skills in conflict resolution and negotiation as well.

Two travel seminars complete the program. Through a multi-day seminar in Washington, D.C., participants enhance their understanding of agricultural infrastructure and the legislative and lobbying processes. An international seminar provides the opportunity to observe how business is conducted outside of the U.S., study alternative agricultural methods, examine other countries' challenging issues, establish international contacts, and develop cultural awareness and an international perspective. The international seminars average 7-10 days, and, to date, the leadership classes have traveled to Chile, Mexico, Costa Rica, Germany, Belgium, and Holland.

As part of their continuing education, NJALDP participants engage in a variety of homework assignments, including readings, research, presentations, and community service projects.

Methodology

Although evaluation of individual sessions was conducted previously, the primary purpose of the study reported here was to determine the lasting impact. Participants from the first three classes were surveyed to determine the difference the leadership program has made on their lives and careers.

The study employed descriptive survey and correlational research methods and was conducted during the fall of 2003. The questionnaire was designed by the authors and reviewed by a group of individuals similar to the respondents, who served as a panel of experts. The survey was sent to a total of 63 participants from the three classes that completed the program. Multiple follow-ups were conducted with non-respondents. A total of 50 usable surveys were returned, yielding a 79% overall response rate. Response rates among the three classes ranged from 74-88%. Responses were treated confidentially.

Findings

Knowledge Gained

Participants were presented with a list of topics pertaining to agricultural-related leadership development and asked to designate a number to indicate what they knew about each item before participating in this program and also specify a number to indicate what they know after completing the program. Zero (0) represented "no knowledge" and four (4) indicated "a great degree of knowledge." The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Knowledge Gained by NJALDP Participants

<i>Topic</i>	Before	After	Change	Increase (%)
Primary functions and inter-relationships of New Jersey's major agricultural organizations	1.6	3.4	1.8	113
Federal government, legislative and lobbying process	1.6	3.2	1.6	100
Economic and social issues in New Jersey	1.8	3.4	1.6	89

Government agencies & building relationships	1.6	3.0	1.4	88
Networking techniques for building relationships	2.0	3.5	1.5	75
Applying Roberts' Rules of Order for effective meeting management	1.7	2.9	1.2	71
Techniques for effective public speaking	2.0	3.4	1.4	70
Land use, natural resources, and preservation issues	2.2	3.3	1.1	50
Characteristics of an effective team	2.2	3.2	1.0	45
Strategies for achieving farm prosperity and viability	2.1	3.0	0.9	43
Effective marketing strategies	2.4	3.3	0.9	37

Most Useful

When asked what was the most useful knowledge or skill they learned or improved during the leadership program, participants reported the following open-ended responses:

- Confidence in public speaking
- Better understanding of the legislative process
- Networking
- Learning to articulate my opinions
- Learning about another culture
- A greater degree of confidence in myself and my ability to provide leadership
- How to communicate effectively
- Time management

Practice Change

As a result of participating in NJALDP, participants reported having done the following practices since completing the program, based on a list of fixed choices related to the goals of the program:

- 98% report being able to speak more effectively.
- 86% have spoken at meetings, hearings, etc.
- 80% have advanced in their business/career or changed jobs.
- 72% have joined or increased involvement in an agricultural organization.
- 72% have contacted legislators, government officials, media, or others on behalf of agriculture.
- 72% use a network of agricultural contacts acquired through NJALDP.
- 52% have developed new products or markets.

Lasting Impacts

Typical examples of accomplishments and changes in their businesses/careers and personal lives that participants attributed to participating in this program included:

- I believe my participation enhanced my credibility within the agricultural community, built relationships that improve my effectiveness at work but also enrich my life outside of work.
- I changed my business structure and got promoted at my farm job.
- Helped prepare me for a total change of life venue and career.

- Have become more involved in a number of activities in the community.
- Stimulated my interest in ongoing professional development.
- Helped me continue setting goals for myself and reaffirm my commitment to New Jersey agriculture.
- I'm now better organized in my personal and business life.
- Improved public speaking which is important in my job.

Participant Satisfaction

As indicated by the following results, participants were very satisfied with the program:

- 94% reported that the program met or exceeded its objectives.
- 98% reported that the program met or exceeded their expectations.
- 86% reported that the NJALDP international travel seminar was effective or very effective in broadening their perspective of international agricultural and trade issues.
- Overall, participants rated this program as 9.2 on a scale of 1-10 (10=Very Effective & Worthwhile; 1=Total Waste of Time).

A comment by one of the participants was indicative of how most of the graduates felt about their participation in NJALDP: "I feel very lucky to have participated in the program. It was quite an opportunity."

Conclusions and Implications

The New Jersey Agricultural Leadership Development Program (NJALDP) has proven effective for both participants and New Jersey Agriculture at large. Of the 63 Alumni participating in the first three classes, many graduates have stepped up into leadership positions in a wide array of organizations. For example, one NJALDP alum was awarded an Eisenhower Fellowship to study land use, and another graduate was selected as a Kellogg Foundation Fellow. Furthermore, 16 Alumni now hold officer positions on 10 different County Boards of Agriculture, including six presidents and eight vice presidents. Additionally, 22 alumni are on boards of the major agricultural organizations, including the Cook College Board of Managers, New Jersey Farm Bureau Board of Directors, and the New Jersey State Agricultural Development Committee. The Jersey Fruit Cooperative Association's General Manager and the Executive Director of the Northeast Organic Farming Association also are NJALDP graduates.

Moreover, NJALDP alumni hold positions in a variety of organizations, including five members of the Board of Trustees of the New Jersey Agricultural Society, 11 board members of the New Jersey Agricultural Education Advisory Council, treasurer of the New Jersey Association of Conservation Districts, president of the New Jersey Farmers' Direct Marketing Association, and president of the New Jersey Potato Association.

Those who have completed the agricultural leadership program are making a difference in their communities and throughout the state. These alumni speak very highly of the program and strongly urge others in the agricultural community to apply. The collaboration of Rutgers Cooperative Extension/Cook College, the New Jersey Agricultural Society, New Jersey Department of Agriculture, and the New Jersey Farm Bureau has been essential in achieving these positive results.

To measure the true long-term benefit of such a program will require investigation of the decisions that graduates, and the boards on which they serve, make to achieve positive impact regarding natural resources conservation and use, citizen understanding and support for agriculture, regulations and policies affecting agricultural practices and profitability, etc. Although not planned, this would provide an important area for future study.

For others considering emulating this program, quite a commitment of time is needed. But, from the very positive results, it appears that the investment has been worth it. The key has been to focus on developing the general leadership and personal skills that are most needed by the participants and the community at large. Making the program practical and relevant is critical in attracting the participants and ensuring their commitment to completing the program and implementing what they have learned where they live and work.

References

Horner, J. T. (1984). Developing effective agricultural leaders. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 22(6). Available at: <http://joe.org/joe/1984november/a3.html>

Kraenzel, D. G. (2001). Building working relationships in agricultural marketing. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 39(1). Available at: <http://joe.org/joe/2001february/tt1.html>

Langone, C. A. (1992). Building community leadership. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 30(4). Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/1992winter/a7.html>

Copyright © by *Extension Journal, Inc.* ISSN 1077-5315. Articles appearing in the Journal become the property of the Journal. Single copies of articles may be reproduced in electronic or print form for use in educational or training activities. Inclusion of articles in other publications, electronic sources, or systematic large-scale distribution may be done only with prior electronic or written permission of the *Journal Editorial Office*, joe-ed@joe.org.

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact [JOF Technical Support](#)