

12-1-2004

Bringing People with Common Interests Together at a Trade Show

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Recommended Citation

Khan, M. F. (2004). Bringing People with Common Interests Together at a Trade Show. *The Journal of Extension*, 42(6), Article 32. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol42/iss6/32>

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December 2004 // Volume 42 // Number 6 // Tools of the Trade // 6TOT6



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Bringing People with Common Interests Together at a Trade Show

Abstract

The International Sugarbeet Institute was developed as a "one-stop" meeting place for growers and providers of goods and services required for sugarbeet production. Growers are provided with the opportunity to discuss their needs and requirements with providers. For 2 days, individuals and companies make available all the machinery, equipment, technology, and services required by the sugarbeet industry. Popular national figures inform growers of issues that affect the industry. Participants share and discuss ideas on how to improve sugarbeet production and maintain a viable sugarbeet industry. Trade shows like the International Sugarbeet Institute are a great tool for Extension educators.

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Introduction

In the 1950s, Paul Wagner, an agent for the railroads, made this comment:

The beet farmers of the Red River Valley are the most active grower group between Minnesota and the west coast. This Red River Valley gang includes the best farmer-managers in the region. Their leadership could result in several more factories in Minnesota and North Dakota in the next 20 years. These farmers have the kind of stuff it takes to turn the ailing sugarbeet industry in the United States around--they could own and operate their own factories" (Youngquist, 1989).

Wagner's words became reality. Sugarbeet production in the bi-state area increased from 114,165 acres in 1957 (Youngquist, 1989) to over 730,000 in 2003 (Anon., 2004). Four sugar factories were constructed, and starting a trend in 1973, sugarbeet growers purchased and successfully managed all sugar factories in Minnesota and North Dakota.

History of the ISBI

The International Sugarbeet Institute (ISBI) started in 1963 as educational seminars on sugarbeet production and was part of the Red River Valley Winter Show. In 1969, the program was named the Red River Valley Sugarbeet Institute to reflect that machinery, equipment and other allied services were demonstrated at the trade show. In 1986, to recognize the participation of sugarbeet growers of Canada, the program was named The International Sugarbeet Institute. Initially, the ISBI was held 1 day each at the Fair Grounds in Fargo, North Dakota, and the 80,000 square feet National Guard Armory at Crookston, Minnesota. Since 2002, the ISBI has alternated annually between the Fargodome in Fargo, North Dakota, and the Alerus Center in Grand Forks, Minnesota.

Objective and Focus of the ISBI

The ISBI was initiated to provide a forum whereby growers and all allied industry services representatives can meet face-to-face over 2 days to discuss issues of mutual interests. Growers have the opportunity to compare machinery, equipment, and service providers. Growers informed

service providers of their particular needs and any special requirements. New machinery, equipment, services, and innovations are introduced to growers at the ISBI.

The ISBI focuses on improving sugarbeet production. Consequently, only machinery, equipment, and services directly related to sugarbeet production are showcased at the event. The exposition receives great coverage in major sugarbeet magazines and agriculture newsletters. About 3,000 to 4,000 growers and allied industry personnel participate annually in the event, where about 130 exhibitors showcase more than \$3 M worth of machinery and equipment, and the entire spectrum of services provided for sugarbeet production. The Fargodome and the Alerus center, each with 100,000 square of display space, provide excellent trade show facilities. The timing of the show in March is ideal for invited motivational and inspirational speakers who put growers in a positive mood to start the growing season.

Management of the ISBI

The ISBI is a non-profit organization. Exhibitors pay a small fee to cover the expenses of renting the facility and other necessary services. Volunteers managed the affairs of the ISBI. The broad-based management committee comprised of representatives from the following:

- Growers and management of the three sugar cooperatives in the bi-state area
- Exhibitors,
- North Dakota State University and University of Minnesota Extension Services,
- Northwest Research and Outreach Center, University of Minnesota, and
- Red River Valley Sugarbeet Grower Association.

The committee has successfully managed the ISBI over the past 40 years.

Discussion

The ISBI serves as a unique educational tool for bringing together sugarbeet growers and allied industry representatives who share and exchanged ideas and discuss new production practices, new technology, industry plans, and goals. Prominent leaders and policy makers are invited to inform participants of current issues affecting growers and agriculture. The interaction and education of policy makers and growers have resulted in strong national support for the sugar industry.

The Grower Idea Contest is a common feature at the ISBI. The contest serves to rapidly share new, grower-developed ways to conduct common practices among growers of the entire industry. Alan Dexter, a 35-year veteran of the ISBI committee, once stated that the ISBI "served as a catalyst for improvement of the sugarbeet industry" (Youngquist, 1989).

The ISBI has been nurtured over the past 40 years and become the largest and most successful sugarbeet trade show in the world. The success of the ISBI can be gauged by the participation, over decades, of growers and representatives of all segments of the sugarbeet industry. The unselfish contribution of the ISBI committee that plans and manages for all eventualities has played a significant role in making the ISBI a success.

Lessons Learned

- People are willing to volunteer their time, energy, and talent for a good cause.
- The management committee has been successful because it is comprised of representatives from all groups that participate in the event.
- The management committee works as a team for the sole purpose of making the ISBI successful.
- Participants return year after year because the program has been developed to attract their interest.
- Face-to-face discussions and meetings have led to the development and adoption of many innovations that contribute to the economic viability of the sugarbeet industry.

Usefulness of Trade Shows

- Trade shows like the International Sugarbeet Institute bring together a large number of people of similar interests together at one location.
- Trade shows provide a great opportunity for Extension educators to solicit views and inputs on particular issues, topics, or programs that affect the participants.
- Extension educators could use the opportunity to implement new programs or provide updates on topics or areas that would be of interest to the attendees.
- Trade shows provide an excellent venue for participants, including Extension educators, to

renew old acquaintances and develop new relationships.

- Most trade shows get great media coverage. Extension educators could use the media to highlight specific programs and influence policy makers.

References

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