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Motivating Change in Horse Owners: The Horse Farm of Environmental Distinction Awards Program

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Motivating Change in Horse Owners: The Horse Farm of Environmental Distinction Awards Program

Abstract

The Horse Farm of Environmental Distinction Awards Program may serve as a model for other states and is an effective and innovative way to improve environmental stewardship abilities of horse owners. Changes in environmental management result when horse owners are educated about best management practices and offered rewards for their efforts. Winners may be more motivated to continually improve their practices. Sending additional educational material, providing on-farm visits, and offering educational workshops may also strengthen the program and help horse owners become better stewards of their natural resources.

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Background

The Connecticut Horse Farm of Environmental Distinction Awards program is an innovative and effective way to improve environmental stewardship of horse owners. The Connecticut Horse Environmental Awareness Program (HEAP) and a \$15,000 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) educational grant, first received in 1998, currently support this program.

The Connecticut Horse Environmental Awareness Program is a coalition of federal, state, and local agencies and horse owners and businesses interested in educating horse owners about how to protect the environment. The program has accomplished many goals since its formation, including the production and filming of a video about managing manure to protect the environment, organizing and teaching three workshops, administering the awards program, and improving best management practices on a demonstration farm.

The Horse Farm of Environmental Distinction Awards Program was designed to enable awardees to take pride in their farm and hopefully share their ideas with others. The program awards those horse owners who are using best management practice on their farms. The first year, a packet was sent to 1,500 horse owners in Connecticut that included a glossy brochure complete with score card to be used in judging, a schematic of pollutants' destinies in the water cycle, and the image of the handsome sign to be awarded to the winners. Reading this information was the educational equivalent of a 2-hour workshop for these horse owners. This packet was sent in subsequent years of the program as well.

Approach and Outcome

There were 23 applicants over a 3-year period (1999-2001). The brochure with an application inside was sent to 1,500 horse owners. Interested horse owners sent back an application, indicating that they would like their farm to be judged. No application fees were charged. In 2003,

the application was reformatted to allow horse owners to indicate that they was not interested in being judged, but would like either more information on best management practices to be sent or an on-farm visit to determine where improvements could be made if needed.

The chair of the committee made arrangements for a farm visit to judge the facilities. These visits occurred in April. Three judges were selected from the committee for each day of judging, and judges visited a maximum of four farms per day. Once on site, judges completed an evaluation of the farm, toured the farm with a manager or owner, asked questions, and awarded points to each area. A score sheet was given to each judge (Figure 1). Results were averaged from all three judges, and the result was the final score of the farm.

Figure 1.
Judge's Score Sheet

Date: _____
Farm: _____
Address: _____
Judge: _____
Acreage:
Farmstead/Buildings: _____
Pasture: _____
Wooded: _____
Total Acreage: _____
(Use attached aerial photograph to place structures, pastures, etc.)
DIRECTIONS:
Score each category individually and provide written comments. Give the farm an overall score.
To compute final score average the total score with the overall score. Please give as much feedback as possible.
Additional comments may be written on the attached sheet.
Score Sheet
1. Manure Storage
_____ Pile covered
_____ Adequate buffer from surface water
_____ Water diverted away from pile
_____ Adequate buffer from well
25 points _____
Comments:
Manure Disposal/Utilization
_____ Manure composted and spread
_____ Manure composted off site
_____ Manure taken off site
15 points _____
Comments:
2. Pasture/Lot Management
_____ Adequate buffer from surface water
_____ Healthy vegetation in paddocks
_____ Sacrifice area

- _____ No signs of erosion
- _____ Pastures rotated
- _____ Manure picked up/spread regularly

25 points _____

Comments:

3. Facility Management

- _____ Gutters
- _____ Wash stalls, etc. drain to dry well/septic tanks
- _____ Erosion control structures around storm drains and erodible areas

25 points _____

Comments:

4. Other

- _____ Pesticide/fertilizer use minimized
- _____ Habitat improvements made on property
- _____ Soil test conducted

10 points _____

Comments:

TOTAL SCORE (out of 100) _____

(Addition from above)

OVERALL SCORE (out of 100) _____

(What you **feel** the score should be)

FINAL SCORE _____

(Total score + Overall score divided by 2 = Final score)

Do you recommend this facility for a HEAP Award? _____

Are you willing to write up the recommendations for this farm? _____

Additional comments:

A minimum score of 70 or greater was required in order for the farm to receive the award. Fifteen (65%) received awards. Award winners were allowed to reapply and be evaluated in subsequent years. Six (40%) were repeat applicants. The award given was a colorful, aluminum 18-inch by 24-inch *Horse Farm of Environmental Distinction* sign with an aluminum year placard attached by chains.

A simple questionnaire was mailed to all award applicants in 2002. The instrument was determined to be valid and reliable by random visits to past participants during 2003. Participants were asked if and how they changed practices as a result of the awards program in each of the following categories:

- Location or management of manure handling,
- Location or management of exercise lot,
- New grazing system in pasture,
- New buffer width from streams and ponds,
- Site of waste accumulation from wells, and
- Soil type of the farmstead studied for risks.

A follow up telephone call to non-respondents yielded an overall 65% return rate from award applicants. Telephone calls tended to last from 15 to 45 minutes. Fifteen of the 23 award applicants responded.

Ten (67%) had changed their practice as a result of the awards program. Four (27%) changed more than one practice. Table 1 presents the changes in practices made as a result of attending a workshop.

Table 1.

Practice Adoption by Participants in a Horse Environmental Awards Program
(N=15)

Practice	Number adopting practice	%
Manure Storage/Removal	5	33
Exercise Lot Location/Management	2	13
New Grazing System in Pasture	5	33
New Buffer Width From Streams/Ponds	2	13
Site of Waste Accumulation from Wells	1	8

For manure storage removal, changes mentioned included:

- Buying a small manure spreader (1),
- Building a portable structure over the manure (1),
- Covering the manure (2), and
- Moving a manure compost heap further from a wetland (1).

For exercise lot location/management, changes mentioned included:

- Changing the footing and putting in sand (1) and
- Adding an exercise lot (1).

For using a new grazing system in the pasture, changes mentioned included:

- Adding fence for another pasture (2),
- Clipping the field (1),
- Fertilizing (1), and
- Refining the rotational grazing system (1).

For new buffer width from streams/ponds, changes mentioned included:

- Moving manure further from streams/ponds (1), and
- Placing a horse-safe wire across the stream (1).

For distance of waste accumulation from wells, changes mentioned included:

- Moving manure back 150 feet and to a higher elevation (1).

Four (27%) did not change their practices as a result of the awards program. Winners tended to make more changes (8 out of 11) than non-winners (1 out of 4). This is an interesting observation. We speculate that this might be due to the desire of these individuals for continued improvement. It often seems that Extension programs that focus on motivating change tend to attract individuals who have often already begun to bring about positive change.

Eight horse owners attended a workshop and also applied for the awards program. Of these, six (75%) changed their practices. This shows that a combination of attending a workshop and participating in the awards program may be the most effective approach to encouraging horse owners to improve management techniques.

Conclusion and Implications

The Horse Farm of Environmental Distinction Awards Program has been found to be an effective way to encourage horse owners to adopt changes in practices. Despite low participation in the early years of this program, it is expected that the program will continue to grow as more horse owners find out about the program, ask for advice about their farms, or read the information provided about best management practices.

In the case of environmental awareness, it might also be suggested that even a small number of changes could have significant long-term effects on the environment. For example, if only 10 horse owners improve their practices, this could result in 10 water bodies having better water quality!

A combination of attending a workshop and participating in an awards program may be even more effective. More long-term research will need to be gathered to see if this trend and these changes in practice continue.

The Horse Farm of Environmental Distinction Awards Program may serve as a model for other states and is an effective and innovative way to improve environmental stewardship of horse

owners.

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