

Sumter County – Where Agriculture Means Business!

Agriculture and Natural Resources Awareness Mini Grant

Project Leader

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Abstract

Sumter County – Where Agriculture Means Business is a first effort in a campaign to make Sumter county residents more aware of the scope and importance of agriculture and natural resources in their community. Data was developed using the IMPLAN Professional Data modeling and confirmed by a focus group of Sumter county agricultural producers and economic development personnel. This data was then used to develop a newspaper insert and a banner, and will be used in other publications until it is determined that the data has significantly changed. The Overall Extension Advisory Committee members plan to purchase advertisements in larger newspapers using the talking points developed from the data by the Food and Resource Economics Department.

The newspaper insert will go to 6,000 subscribers and additional inserts will be purchased for further distribution to county officials. T-Shirts were purchased to be used as an enticement to

take an online Agriculture Awareness survey, and also as a continuation of the campaign as the t-shirts are worn with the slogan “Sumter County –Where Agriculture Means Business”.

Project Goals

- To develop a publication listing the value of agricultural enterprises in Sumter County.
- To distribute an agricultural awareness publication to county officials and stakeholders in Sumter County.
- To promote Sumter County agriculture to the public through a press release and newspaper advertisement featuring highlights of the publication.

Project Activities

- Contracted FRED to develop data and talking points about the value of agriculture and natural resources in Sumter County.
- Held a focus group of agriculture community leaders and economic development personnel to validate the computer modeling data.
- Conducted research in the history of Sumter County to be included in the publication. Selected a farm family to be featured as part of the “human” aspect of the agricultural industry.
- Developed a publication to be distributed through the Sumter County Times as an insert on October 18. Additional inserts were purchased for distribution to officials and stakeholders.
- Developed a display banner featuring two “talking points” to use in events.
- Developed a short survey for readers of the publication, to determine effectiveness and what additional information is desired.
- Developed a t-shirt to use as a prompt for people taking the survey and to carry the campaign further.

Recipients/Benefactors of the Awareness Program

The recipients of the awareness program are the subscribers of the Sumter County Times, county officials and decision makers and general public in Sumter County.

Outcomes and Deliverables

One deliverable will be the results of the survey, to be finished by October 30, 2007. Delays in publication schedules prevented the insert from being printed in time for this report. The data is a deliverable that will be used in other publications and in an advertisement in The Villages Daily Sun and in The Daily Commercial. The outcome is increased knowledge of the impact of the agriculture and natural resources industries in Sumter County and the value of those industries, as will be shown in the survey.

Description of effectiveness and/or impact

The campaign began when the banner was displayed at the entrance to the Sumter County Farm Bureau Annual Meeting to 400 attendees. Although many in the audience are involved in agriculture, many people do not know the statistics or the current value of those industries. The Sumter County Times is a widely read weekly newspaper and the insert will be placed in 6,000 homes on October 18, 2007. The impact will be better known by the results of the online survey that is advertised on the back page of the insert.

This campaign is the first effort in a program to increase the awareness of the impact of agriculture and natural resources in Sumter County. The effectiveness of this campaign will be more evident as time passes and agriculture in Sumter County is affected by decisions of the public officials. Raising their awareness as well as the general public should have a positive affect on future decisions.