

Small Farmer Agricultural Leadership Institute – Leadership Development for Small Farmers

Situation

Farmers all across the country experience many challenges which often place them at a competitive disadvantage, when compared to larger producers. The larger farmers and commodity groups all have lobbyist and advocates who work on their behalf to ensure that appropriate legislation is passed and laws are enacted which protect them and their farms. Educational programs, leadership development programs, exist at the majority schools (1862 Land-grant universities) which assist these persons to become versed in the issues and to act as farm advocates. While this is good, traditionally, one segment of the farming community has not been adequately represented, the small and minority farmers.

Most of America's two million farms are considered "small" with a majority grossing less than \$250,000 per year (National Commission on Small Farms, 1998). Both the 2002 and the 2007 Census of Agriculture, show an increase in the number of small and minority owned farms and a picture of producers, who make significant contributions to American Agriculture, in spite of insurmountable challenges. If these same producers, were given the opportunity to succeed as larger producers currently have through the various Agricultural Leadership Programs offered by the various 1862 institutions, they could experience even greater levels of success also.

The leadership development programs have been very successful and have increased the number of spokespersons well versed in agricultural issues. This fact alone raises the question, "Who is

providing this type of experience for small, minority, socially disadvantaged and limited resource producers?

The Small Farmer Agricultural Leadership Institute, which began in October of 2005, now offers leadership development training to small and minority farmers in the 17 states with an 1890 institution. The overall goal is to promote small and family farm sustainability through enhanced business management skills and leadership development. This goal is achieved by helping farmers become better leaders while enhancing their business and farm management skills.

Since the program's inception, approximately ninety small farmers have enrolled in the course from 14 of the 17 targeted states.

Response –

The Small Farmer Agricultural Leadership Institute at Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center is currently conducting Class 3 which began in October 2009. To date, fifty small farmers have graduated from this unique experience. This two-year course of study, consists of training seminars, video lessons when necessary and appropriate, agricultural enterprise visits and farm study tours. The training seminars are designed as highly interactive, experiential learning workshops. Participants explore various seminar topics through group discussion, small and large group exercises, assessment tools, facilitator presentations, in-class exercises, pre / post seminar assignments and participant led discussions. Each training seminar focuses on three broad but distinct areas: farm / business management, leadership development and an agricultural experience, such as professional conferences, farm and community visits, and agricultural enterprise tours. The training seminars are held in the

months of October through March, Thursday morning through Saturday at noon. The seminars have been held at the following participating 1890 universities, Southern University Ag Center, Tuskegee University, Prairie View A & M State University, University of Arkansas – Pine Bluff, South Carolina State University, Alcorn State University, Virginia State University, and North Carolina A & T State University. The very broad topical areas are listed below:

1. Loan application processes and completion procedures;
2. Developing farm and home plans;
3. Legal Risk - estate planning, credit worthiness;
4. Insuring commodities;
5. Time Management, Goal Setting, Prioritizing;
6. Self Motivation, Self-esteem;
7. Communicating Effectively;
8. Conflict resolution & mediation;
9. Attributes of a Leader - Leadership styles & assessment; and
10. Qualifying requirements for the various governmental programs.

This project has experienced much success thus far. The first class, which graduated in March of 2007, held its graduation ceremony in Washington D.C. at the Whitten Building Patio. The former Secretary of Agriculture, Honorable Mike Johannes, was the key note speaker. Class

1 consisted of 22 farmers from ten different states. Twenty-six farmers, from 14 different states graduated from class 2. The graduation ceremony for the second class was also held in Washington, DC. where the Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture said, “It’s vital that we support programs such as this that provide the tools needed to promote the sustainability of small family farms.’ The primary purpose of this project is to assist the clientele in making the transition from being small farmers to agricultural entrepreneurs.

Impact –

As a result of participating in this class, the majority of the graduates have become highly sought after leaders, speakers and small farm advocates in their respective communities and regionally.

Appointments to Regional Advisory Boards:

- Southern Region Risk Management Education (SSRME) Advisory Board;
- Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SSARE) Advisory Board.
- Federation of Southern Cooperatives

Appointments to state and local Advisory Boards and Taskforces:

- Council of Agriculture, Research, Education and Teaching representative at Alcorn State University
- Extension Advisory Boards in Florida, Texas and Alabama
- Member of Prairie View A & M University Extension Advisory Board

- Kentucky State University Small Farm Conference planning committee
- Appointed to serve on the West Baton Rouge Parish (Louisiana) USDA / Natural Resources Conservation Service Board
- Extension Advisory Boards in Alabama
- Member of Prairie View A & M University Extension Advisory Board
- Kentucky State University Small Farm Conference planning committee

Conferences, meetings and other speaking engagements

- Invited to participate in USDA Partner meeting as a CBO represent
- Panelist at Women in Agriculture Conference
- Keynote speaker at North Carolina A & T State University Small Farm Week Program, Alcorn State University Conference
- Panelist at small farm conferences in North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Kentucky and Alabama
- ***Meeting with the Assistant Secretary for Administration at USDA, as a participant in a stakeholders meeting for leaders and colleagues that support Latino/Hispanic farmer, ranchers and farm workers***
- Presenter at small farm conferences in North Carolina, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Alabama

Serving Others

- Serves as a model farm in Kentucky, Georgia and Florida
- Class III consist of 32 farmers from 12 states and is scheduled to graduate in March of 2011.
- Graduates have been invited to serving on USDA competitive

grant panels as reviewers.

For more information about the Small Farmer Agricultural Leadership Institute at Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center's contact Dawn Mellion Patin at dawn_mellion@suagcenter.com or visit [www. Suagcenter.com](http://www.Suagcenter.com).