

AgKnowledge

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COMMUNITIES—Living (and learning) on the Land; classes are ‘almost imperative’

CONTACT STEPHANIE ETTER at setter@uidaho.edu; also see www.ag.uidaho.edu/sustag/smallfarms/

MARY ROHLFING’S DUCKS are called Golden 300s because that’s what they lay—300 eggs a year. They’re golden to Rohlfing because she sells each egg and because ducks are “remarkable pasture-management animals that eat weeds and insect pests and fertilize as they go.”

Rohlfing’s duck enterprise took flight after she completed a University of Idaho Living on the Land class that she calls “almost imperative” for Treasure Valley small-acreage landowners. Since 2002, more than 200 adults and teens have learned through LOTL how to sustain their land so that it can help sustain them economically. Additional classes are slated for spring.

Last April, Cheryl and Randy Redmon accompanied UI Extension educator Stephanie Etter on a LOTL field trip to Oklahoma’s Langston University—a world center of goat research. Enlightened by the tour, the Cascade meat-goat owners bought two Great Pyrenees guard dogs, improved their vaccination program, and contracted with Valley County to let their goats munch on noxious weeds.

Filer Master Gardener and U-pick owner Greg Blastock field-tested 10 varieties of watermelons for market-vegetable evaluations that are yet another aspect of LOTL. Growers at six other southern Idaho sites tested cantaloupes, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, carrots, and spinach. While it took “lots and lots of time,” Blastock says market gardeners will benefit.

In Boise, Julie Grainger led a taste-test of the LOTL produce at a Lowell Scott Middle School back-to-school night. “My passion is to try to get kids reconnected with food that didn’t come out of a can or plastic carton—and it worked, absolutely.”

Classes begin in January and meet weekly for 18 weeks at various locations. Participants learn through tours, lectures, and demonstrations. Class fees (\$275 for one or two sharing class materials) include water, soil, and forage testing on each pasture. Topics include water quality, weeds, market and organic gardening, pasture establishment and renovation, promoting a living soil, enterprise budgets, and more. Youth/adult scholarships are available.

UI students join in Horizons programs to help small Idaho towns thrive

CONTACT MARY SCHMIDT at mschmidt@uidaho.edu. Follow each town’s progress at <http://extension.ag.uidaho.edu/horizons/>

UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO Extension and the Northwest Area Foundation continue their partnership to expand the Horizons project mission to alleviate poverty in 18 communities from Cascade north to Bonners Ferry. The projects will continue for three years.

Leadership and community visioning programs drew dozens in even the smallest towns and hundreds in larger cities like Grangeville where more than 200 residents among its 3,200 citizens are participating.

In Stites, 80 people, more than a third of its population of 226, showed up to talk about the community’s future. Horizons participants

got involved, too, winning spots in city government in the November election.

Horizons also broadened to enlist university interior design students to help communities revitalize or create community centers.

“This is really exciting to have new, young ideas,” said Greg Johnson, a businessman and leader in the Kamiah community, after hearing students present plans for the town’s American Legion Hall.

Journalism students also traveled to community visioning meetings to write profiles of residents playing active roles.

University to help rural Idaho towns market strengths

CONTACT LORIE HIGGINS at lhiggins@uidaho.edu

HELPING SMALL communities capitalize on their existing talents and resources is the focus of a new initiative by University of Idaho Extension and the Western Rural Development Center.

Called “2 Degrees Northwest: Where Art Meets the Land,” the program will connect the arts, agriculture, history, food, and unique lodging opportunities with customers, said Lorie Higgins, a UI Extension community development specialist.

The area involved sweeps across northern Idaho from Harrison south to Elk City and westward from Pierce, Idaho, to Colfax and Clarkston, Wash. Both the Coeur d’Alene and Nez Perce Tribes are participants in the program modeled after North Carolina’s successful HandMade in America.

“The whole idea of HandMade in America was to bring the market to the place,” she said. Similar efforts in Oregon, Vermont, Montana, and Cape Cod have helped sustain smaller communities.

The program’s goal is to draw on the communities’ existing strengths and give travelers the opportunities to visit and do business with local artisans and businesses.

DID YOU KNOW?

4,871

NUMBER OF IDAHO FARMS UNDER 10 ACRES.

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture, 2002