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Final Report to SRSFC: 2017 Arkansas Blackberry School Webinar, County Agent Training

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Description of Webinar and Attendance

The Blackberry School webinar course was developed from recordings made during a four part workshop series held during 2017 at the University of Arkansas Fruit Research Station in Clarksville, AR. Speakers were instructed to make their talks widely applicable to the surrounding region in anticipation of using the talks to train agents from across the Southeast. The resulting 13 recorded talks and 4 “How-to” videos were used to conduct a webinar series with county agents from across the SE. The webinar series followed the seasons of the year, with each class focusing on production topics related to blackberry production during a season (winter, spring, summer & fall). The webinars were held in 4 sessions on consecutive Thursdays over 4 weeks in late October to mid-November. Each class consisted of a mixture of 3-4 recorded lectures and one “How-to” video to demonstrate a specific skill or concept. For each class the recorded talks were played and then followed by 5 minutes of a Q&A session live with each speaker. Each class was 2 hours long and a 5 minute break was held around half-way through. County agents were asked to complete pre-tests prior to the webinar and a post-test after the webinar to evaluate the effectiveness of our teaching style via the web-based medium. The recorded videos, and slide hand-outs were posted to the SRSFC website immediately following the live webinar.

On a per class basis attendance was the highest at the first webinar, *but on average we trained 43 county agents per each 2 hour long class.*

Attendance at each webinar class:

1 st Class	2 nd Class	3 rd Class	4 th Class
57	45	39	33

We asked agents to pre-register and had 118 sign up. Of those, 71 participated in at least one of the webinars. Of those 55 attended two webinars, and of those 36 attended 3 webinars. We had 20 county agents who attended all four live webinars. Several agents told us that for webinars they had to miss due to scheduling conflicts they went back and watched the live recordings once they were posted to the SRSFC website in order to stay up with series. We do not have a good way to track this but results from our final evaluation indicate 84.37% of agents who participated have “gone back to watch at least one webinar they missed”.

We awarded certificates to county agents who attended all 4 live webinars and who completed all pre- and post-tests. We had 16 county agents who received certificates. We used the pre- and post-tests as a measure of *active* participation, as we were limited in our ability to know how engaged participants were in the web-based format.

Demographics of Agents Who Participated

Overall the highest participating states were Tennessee, Arkansas and North Carolina, but all of the states in the SRSFC were represented. We also trained a few agents from states outside the SRSFC.

Participation by state:

AR	IL *	KS*	GA	LA	NC	OK*	SC	TN	VA
13	1	1	6	6	9	1	1	27	6

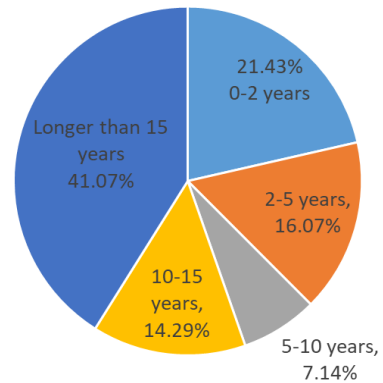
** Registration was opened to agents outside of the SRSFC, after interest was expressed by agents in those states.*

We asked agents how long they had been working in extension to gauge if we were targeting only new or experienced agents with this type of web-based training. “Experienced” agents or those with more than 15 years of experience made up 40% of our participants. However, 37% of participants had 5 years or less experience.

Of the county agents who participated a majority “only sometimes” or “rarely” work with horticultural crops, thus for many of our participants this was an introduction to blackberry production and for the remainder of participants it was a topic they knew a lot about already.

How regularly do you work with horticulture crops in your job?

How Long Have you Been a County Agent?



Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Full Time
5.36%	48.21%	19.64%	26.79%

Assessment of Learning, Pre and Post-Tests

Five to six questions related to major concepts that were covered in each class were given in a pre-test prior to the start of each class and then those same questions were given again for the post-test. We compared the class average scores on the pre-test to the class average scores in the post-test as a means to gauge learning. *The average improvement over the four week class between the pre and post-test was a score increase of 15.95%.*

Class	Avg. Pre-test Score	Avg. Post-test Score
1	56.99	86.59
2	68.38	83.80
3	55.32	71.14
4	87.37	92.76

Individual Class Evaluations

At the end of each class we asked participants to evaluate the speakers and videos presented during that class. The average rating for each class was 4.42/5.0.

Average rating of speakers (out of 5) by class session:

Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4
4.74	4.53	4.17	4.28

Final Course Evaluation

At the end of the class we asked all those who participated to complete an end of class evaluation. It was open to all participants, even those who only attended one class. We had 56 responses out of 71 participants (79% response rate). Only major results of the final evaluation are presented here for brevity.

Webinar Content, (% of respondents rating each question is reported)

How would you rate your overall experience of participating in the webinar series?

1-Poor	2	3	4	5-Exceptional
0%	0%	7.14%	37.5%	55.36%

How would you rate the quality of the material presented?

1-Poor	2	3	4	5-Exceptional
0%	0%	3.57%	35.71%	60.71%

How would you rate the usefulness of the material presented?

1-Not Useful	2	3	4	5-Very useful
0%	0%	3.57%	30.36%	66.07%

After your experience using ZOOM (webinar software) for the blackberry school webinar series, how likely would you participate in other future extension presented sessions using ZOOM (webinar)?

Probably Wouldn't	Probably Wouldn't	Probably Would	Definitely Would
0.00%	1.79%	30.36%	67.86%

Was the webinar series worth your time?

Answer	%
Yes	100.00%
No	0.00%

Do you plan to use the provided materials to hold your own blackberry training?

Answer	%
Yes	69.64%
No	30.36%

Webinar Format

The webinar was 2 hours long and 83.93% felt that was “about right” in terms of length, the remainder said the webinar was too long. A majority of participants (78.57%) said the course format (4 classes, over 4 weeks) was “very satisfactory”. The agents who participated were satisfied with their ability to interact with the speakers, other participants and the majority (83%) were able to stay engaged for the full 2 hour webinar. Some participants asked for the webinar to be slightly shorter and to have more webinar sessions, to have longer Q&A sessions or to have a consistent break time. When asked “What was your *least* favorite part of the webinar class?” some agents expressed issues with: audio quality on certain videos, inconsistent internet quality (likely due to their local connection), wanting slightly shorter class lengths or in-ability to make all sessions due to scheduling conflicts.

Summary

On average we trained 43 county agents per each 2 hour long session, with a total of 71 agents trained in at least one session. The 13 videos are posted on You-Tube and as of this writing, the number of “Views” on the videos ranged from 127 to 13 per video. Now that the series is posted online I have been contacted by local growers who could not make the live classes we held in Arkansas who are watching the recordings online. There seems potential to have a long-term impact from the series due to easy accessibility of the recordings online. I recently spoke with NARBA and they plan to advertise the series in their next newsletter, which we hope will increase visibility.

The web-based format did not seem to exclude any one type of agent, and we reached both newly hired agents, agents with more than 15 years of experience, and agents who do not exclusively work in horticultural crops.

We received many nice comments and requests to do further trainings in this format. Agents expressed that they liked being able to learn from their desk and have the recordings and “How-to” videos for future use. The favorable response that 67.87% “definitely would” would participate in another ZOOM webinar is a good indication that the web-based format was conducive to learning for most participants. Additionally we were able to demonstrate that this format was conducive to learning through the comparison of our pre- and post- test results.

In the future, webinars should probably be shortened to 90 minutes and an incentive or course credit provided through the local University Extension office that encourages participation may help our success rate for getting agents to attend the full set of classes. Here in Arkansas we set it up so that agents would get in-service training credits for attending and TN made it an option to get credit. However, after speaking with Dr. Lockwood of the Univ. of TN, agents seemed to be more motivated by the need for information on small fruits than by potential credit. More information is needed to know how we could have increased participation in other states. In the future a collaboration between several University’s specialists may help draw agents from across the region.

The videos are posted on the SRSFC website at: [www. www.Smallfruits.org/blackberryschool](http://www.Smallfruits.org/blackberryschool) and on the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service website at www.uaex.edu/blackberryschool

For Future Reference, these are two other questions we asked during the final evaluation:

“If future webinars are planned using this format, what crops would you like to focus on? (pick your top crop)”

Answer	%
Strawberries	26.79%
Table Grapes	16.07%
Wine Grapes	7.14%
Muscadines	17.86%
Blueberries	32.14%

“What topics related to horticulture production do you need more information on? (pick your top 3)”

Answer	%
Fertility Management	15.61%
Irrigation	8.09%
Soil Management	6.94%
Weed Identification and Control	8.67%
Disease Identification and Control	21.39%
Insect Identification and Control	13.29%
Choosing Varieties	12.72%
Trellising Equipment (bed layers. air blast sprayers, etc)	12.72%
Other	0.58%