

CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS Semiannual Progress Report

Grantee Name: Heifer International
Project Title: Enhancement of Resource Management on Livestock Operations of Limited Resource Farmers through Training on Prescribed Grazing, Animal Habitat and Well-being
Period Covered by Report: Final report
Project End Date: 6/30/10

Summarize the work performed during the project period covered by this report:

- Conducted 4 workshops for limited resource ruminant producers from 5 states at Heifer Ranch. Two were train the trainer workshops, focused on utilizing individual farmers natural resources, one was an animal well-being workshop and one was a birthing workshop, where student were able to see cattle, sheep and goats give birth. Forty to fifty producers in attendance in each one.
- Conducted one workshop at PD's farm to demonstrate grass-finishing beef for 25 producers from OK.
- Sequential training sessions were conducted in MS, LA, AR and OK over the course of two years.
- PD attended farmer group meetings to assist them with their livestock production issues
- Multiple limited resource farmers attended Management Intensive Grazing workshop in Chattanooga TN, Zachary LA, and OKC, OK, presented by PD and HPI Louisiana field coordinator.
- Ruminant research and grazing demonstrations continued at Heifer Ranch.
- HPI US country program staff toured participating farmer projects in OK, MS and AR to observe the training and implementation of training given by this funded project. Staff was able to hear how the collaboration with Heifer Ranch, NRCS and field staff has helped these producers be successful and sustainable.
- Five farmers in OK have had individual consulting and mentoring done by PD to help them start the process of producing grass-finished beef .

Describe significant results, accomplishments, and lessons learned.

We forget that when people become adults, they still need individual instruction, help and support. We have seen the vast benefits from working with individual farmers over the last 3 ½ years. But there are many more new farmers to take their place. It requires technical knowledge and skill in working with these beginning, limited-resource farmers. That knowledge and those skills are not learned overnight.

The biggest accomplishment from this project and the previous one is the formation of two organizations, one in Oklahoma-Oklahoma Farmers and Ranchers Association

(OFRA) and one in Louisiana-Pelican State Farmers Association (PSFA). These organizations are made up of the limited resource/socially disadvantaged farmers that these projects have worked with for the last five years. These producers have learned so much and understand the need to continue the training and education they have received. These are two organizations that NRCS can partner with and work with to reach out to more limited resource and socially disadvantaged producers.

A major lesson learned is that creating lasting change in the way that limited resource farmers manage their farms requires a long period of time. Hearing and reading about how to do things only goes so far. They simply understand better when they can see the practice being carried out. Having demonstration farms where the practices are in place AND working is the key to changing how they do things. This means that the demonstration farms have to be those of more experienced farmers, not beginners. But the individual farmers still need individual assistance in putting the practices into place. Step by step instruction is needed. This constant assistance is time consuming which is difficult for agencies to do. Rushing the farmers will fail though. Cultural differences must be recognized even if not understood.

Workshops are important as they present the whole system at one time. A piecemeal training session without that “big picture” presentation causes haphazard learning and is more confusing than if no training had occurred. The workshops at Heifer Ranch provided that whole system experience. Now, as the work of this project continues past this project, workshops will still need to be carried out. This time, though, there is a group of limited resource farmers that can be called on to show their farms and relay their experiences.

Compare actual accomplishments to the project goals in your proposal:

Project Objectives

1. To develop and test a comprehensive training program for limited resource farmers on prescribed grazing and animal well-being for the purpose of addressing the resource concerns of animal habitat and animal management.
2. Demonstrate forage harvest management by increasing animal grazing days on a pasture, prescribed grazing to enhance fertility of pastures, manure monitoring through the NUTBAL tests and other beneficial practices at Heifer Ranch to "train the trainers" of limited resource farmers.
3. Train limited resource farmers through an intensive week long workshop on how to teach limited resource farmers in their communities.
4. Test the best training intervals with these groups of limited resource farmers: monthly, bimonthly, quarterly

All projects but number 2 were completed as written. NUTBAL tests were carried out at Heifer Ranch and show to workshop participants but not done at the individual farms. Getting the manure samples collected and sent off without the project director being present proved to be an insurmountable barrier.

There were multiple train the trainer workshops, both at Heifer Ranch and in different state locations. So objective 3 was carried out several times over.

We found that bimonthly training intervals were effective. Monthly was better, but time constraints of the farmers made monthly trainings more difficult to carry out with adequate participation. Quarterly was too long, with farmers forgetting about meetings and losing interest. Bimonthly meetings are easier for both students and instructors to carry out.

The curriculum was developed, tried out, and adjusted twice. We feel we have an effective curriculum and mentors are becoming more comfortable with the information they have to present. Mentor farmers are also more interested in taking the next steps to fine tune their own operations.

Recognizing the camaraderie that occurs with these workshops has helped with other workshops the project director has been involved with at Heifer Ranch. In fact, that is one of the main goals of workshops that bring limited resource farmers together. The communication and assistance that occurs after everyone goes home, is a major learning tool. This crosses state and county lines. This is a repeat of previous reports but is so important it needs to be repeated. Meeting others who have the same life experiences and seeing and hearing how they have made changes in their farming operations is one of the keys to success of the limited resource farmers.

Describe the work that you anticipate completing in the next six-month period:

OFRA and PFSA will be conducting trainings across their respective states
New community based organizations will be assisted by OFRA and PFSA
PD of this project will continue contact with Delta Sprouts CBO in Arkansas in assisting them with their continuing livestock production needs.