

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Idaho's Cultivating Success™ program increases digital outreach to small farms

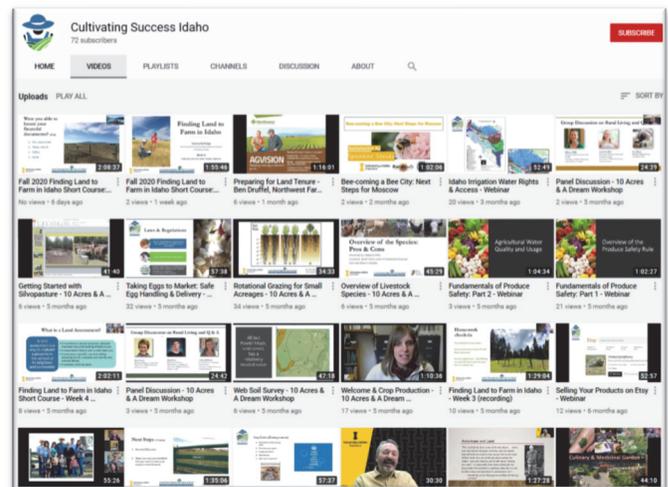
AT A GLANCE

University of Idaho Extension's Cultivating Success™ uses digital platforms to increase outreach to small acreage farmers and ranchers across Idaho's vast geography.

The Situation

For 20 years, the Cultivating Success™ program has been offering experiential educational to increase the number and success of sustainable small acreage farms and ranches throughout the state. In recent years the program's extension faculty have made significant progress in eliminating geographic barriers to education for small farmers and ranchers by increasing remote learning opportunities through virtual courses and workshops, webinars, and hybrid in-person and online learning models. These educational offerings have successfully provided farmers and ranchers with research and experience-based information and opportunities for regional and state-wide peer-to-peer networking.

Innovations in technology and the growing number of virtual information and networking platforms has created an opportunity for the Cultivating Success™ program to stay better connected to past and current program participants and connect with new audiences throughout the state. These virtual platforms have been crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic as they have created multiple channels for disseminating research-based information and allowed the program to respond quickly to support small farmers and ranchers



A screen capture of videos available on Idaho's Cultivating Success™ YouTube channel. Photo credit: Mackenzie Lawrence.

who are geographically isolated, working remotely or quarantining due to the pandemic.

Our Response

The Cultivating Success™ program significantly expanded its digital outreach to participants and engaged with new, more diverse audiences in Idaho and across the northwest. This digital outreach is done primarily through the program's four key platforms: website, email newsletter, YouTube channel and Facebook.

Idaho's Cultivating Success™ website was updated to be more user-friendly, interactive and engaging. The website is central to the program's digital presence. It is the home-base for finding program educational offerings and small acreage production resources.

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In November 2019, the biweekly Cultivating Success™ [email newsletter](#) was initiated. The newsletter features a wide range of research-based information, resources for small acreage producers and upcoming educational opportunities or events. It also highlights University of Idaho Extension publications appropriate for small farm and ranch audiences.

People of all ages are turning to YouTube for small farm education. Idaho's Cultivating Success™ [YouTube](#) channel offers 135 recorded videos from the program's small farm and ranch webinar series, workshops, and courses. Videos are sorted into 11 playlists making it easy to navigate and find information.

The Cultivating Success™ [Facebook](#) page is another way that the program engages with its small farm and ranch audience. This page is an important tool for communicating educational opportunities, sharing resources offered on the program's other platforms and connecting with new clientele.

Program Outcomes

The growth of Idaho's Cultivating Success™ program's digital presence has significantly increased the program's audience and reach. Over a 12-month period, from November 2019 to October 2020, each of the four platforms have gained new subscribers, seen more web traffic and widened their statewide reach.

The website platform has been instrumental in meeting producers' research-based information needs during the pandemic. Program leadership was able to quickly launch a comprehensive COVID-19 resources page and recorded webinars providing critical information about safe farm operations and market access.

The newsletter is an effective way for UI Extension to stay connected to program participants and to grow its diverse audiences. The program has sent 23 biweekly newsletters and five special announcements since

November 2019 with an average audience of 449 individuals.

Increases in Idaho's Cultivating Success™ digital engagement between November 2019 and October 2020

Outreach Platform	Reach as of Oct. 31, 2019	Reach as of Oct. 31, 2020	Percent Increase
Website	8,625 page views	17,414 page views	202%
Email newsletter	269 subscribers	900 subscribers	355%
YouTube channel	367 video views	2,079 video views	567%
Facebook page	5,731 total reach	16,784 total reach	239%

The YouTube channel is a critical platform for the program because it extends educational opportunities beyond their scheduled times and supports self-directed learning by allowing participants to engage with content when it is most convenient for them. The channel has 72 subscribers.

With the increased use of smartphones and digital social networking, Facebook has become an important platform for marketing UI Extension programs and reaching new audiences. The Cultivating Success™ Facebook page has 821 followers.

The Future

The Cultivating Success™ program will continue to expand UI Extension's digital presence to grow its network of small acreage farmers and ranchers and to support sustainable production. The program is exploring the potential of digital platforms, such as podcasting, Instagram or Twitter, to further expand outreach to new audiences and to support small farm and ranch resiliency throughout the state.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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