

Teaching Geographically Isolated Nevada Growers and Ranchers via Virtual Workshop

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ABSTRACT

Nevada is the driest state in the United States, with an average annual precipitation of approximately 4.5 inches in the south and 7.5 inches in the north. Despite being the most arid state in the nation, agriculture remains one of Nevada's vital industries, with 3,350 farms and ranches contributing \$4.7 billion in 2020 to the state economy (NDA, 2021). Geographically, the size and composition of agriculture production and related food industries vary across the state due to differences in climate, natural resources, and population. Agriculture production is a particularly integral part of rural Nevada's economy, with the most significant number of farms and ranches in Elko County (526), followed by Churchill County (504) (USDA NASS, 2017). At the same time, the majority of Nevada's population (92%) lives in the Reno/Sparks and Las Vegas urban areas. Due to the geographic isolation of many agricultural operations across the state or other issues (Covid-19), Nevada growers and ranchers have recently expressed their interest via needs assessment to learn about cover crops and soil health via workshops as one of the preferred communication methods. Based upon identified needs, the University of Nevada, Reno Extension, hosted and offered free virtual workshop series (6 classes, 1.5 hours each) in Fall 2021 to teach producers and ranchers about soil health education. The workshop series was attended by 550 participants nationally and internationally. Participants were in 13 counties statewide (Nevada), six other states (California, Utah, Nebraska, Oregon, Kansas, Wyoming), and three other countries (UK, Scotland, Ukraine). About 72% of participants responded that they had a positive experience with the workshop series, and 82% of participants planned to use the information/skills from this workshop in their operations. Overall, producers and ranchers were highly satisfied with the workshop series, and knowledge gains among participants were significant ($P=0.000$, $n=361$).