

Santa Rosa Small Farm School



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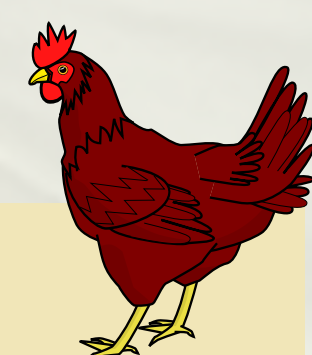
Introduction

The specialty crop industry in Santa Rosa County includes production of fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, and nuts on small acreages, generally of 5 acres or less. There are many issues affecting new and seasoned producers, such as business and marketing planning, food safety regulations, pesticide use regulations and licensing, labor challenges, and changing production technologies and practices. A five-part, weekly Small Farm School instructed beginning farmers on fruit and vegetable production practices and whole farm management.



Objectives

- Participants of the school will gain knowledge of suitable and marketable crops for the Florida Panhandle.
- Participants of the school will make better business decisions resulting in cost savings and/or increased profits for their respective farms.
- Participants of the school will network with each other and other members of the Santa Rosa County farming community resulting in better accessibility to available resources and better business decision making.



Methods

Classes began in October to coincide with fall produce availability. Instructional methods included lectures, hands-on activities, and a farm tour to accommodate different types of learners. Classes started with PowerPoint lectures, followed by discussion and hands-on activities.



Class Topics

Suitable and Marketable Crops for the Florida Panhandle

Fertility and Soils

Irrigation Installation and Management

Whole Farm Pest Management

Business and Marketing



The farm tour was a valuable aspect of the school and gave participants a first-hand look of crops grown in the area and valuable farm management recommendations. The tour visited a local vegetable farm, a hydroponic lettuce operation, and the fruit tree plots at the West Florida Research and Education Center.

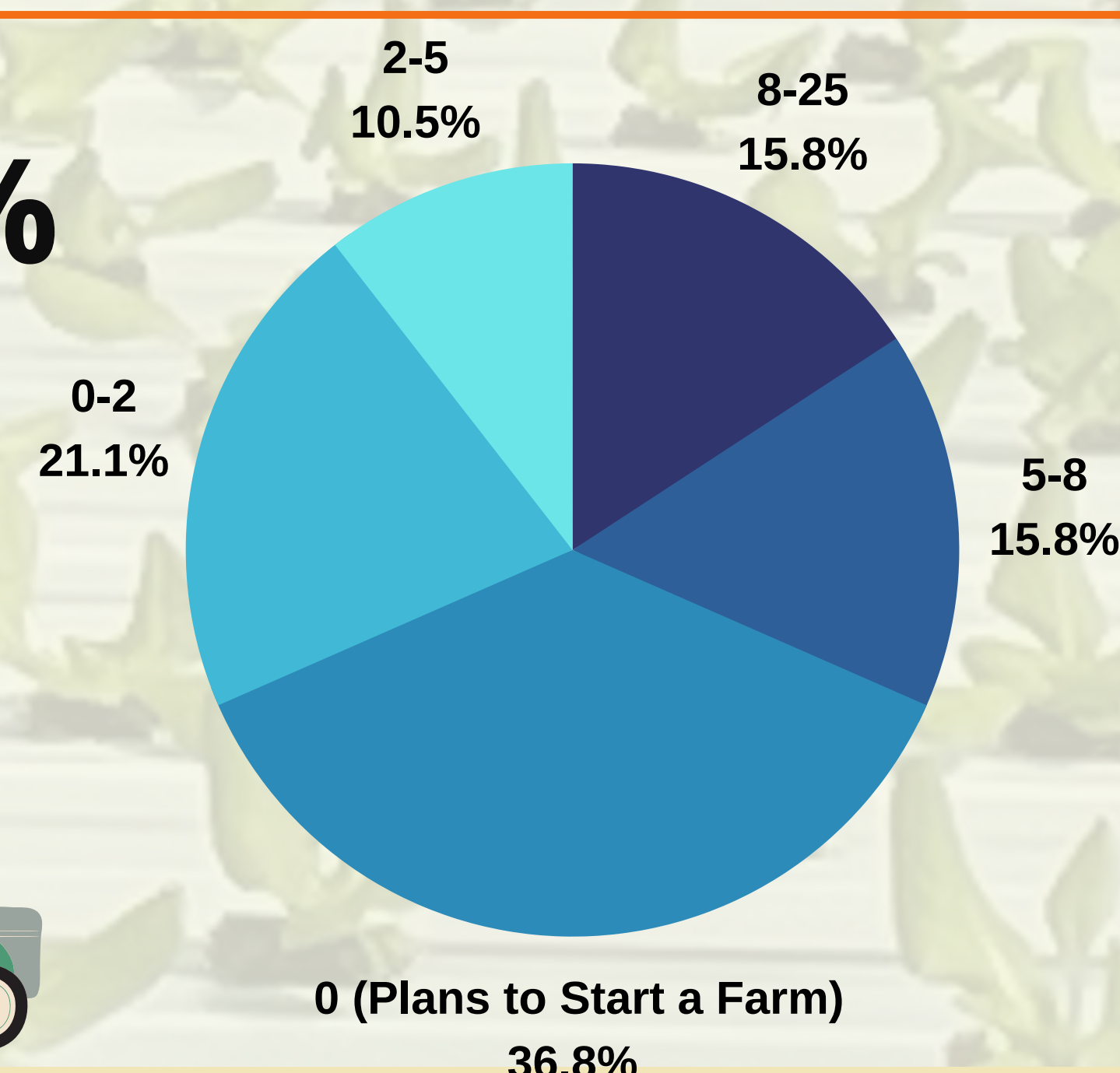
Results

An evaluation was administered upon the completion of the school to gauge change in self-reported knowledge and intent for change in production practices.

Overall self-reported farming knowledge increased by 95% across all topics

95%

22 participants attended each of the 5 two-hour classes and the farm tour.



The average acreage farmed by each participant was 7.5 acres.

Impacts

Participants of the school gained knowledge of production techniques and suitability of various fruit and vegetable crops for the Florida Panhandle.

Program participants indicated a value of \$7,099 per year, in the form of savings or increased profit, from the knowledge they gained from the school.



As a result of cropland property value information discussed in the school, one of the participants was able to purchase a 16.18 acre parcel for \$2,685/acre below asking price for a total savings of \$43,443 for the parcel.

A Facebook group was established to allow networking and collaboration among class participants, established farmers, and the Extension Office.

