



Small Farm Programming During a Pandemic

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Background

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Extension educators within University of Maryland Extension had to work from home and cancel in-person programs. Backyard poultry, small ruminant, and other educational programs had typically been held in late winter and early spring at various locations across the state. In an effort to continue these programs during the pandemic, a series of online Zoom sessions were scheduled. Educators speculated that more time at home would drive the sales of chicks and other livestock species. As a large portion of the population shifted to working from home and most events were canceled, additional free time could allow poultry and livestock producers and new owners time to attend training. With this in mind, 31 sessions were scheduled under several Backyard Farming series spanning the backyard poultry, small ruminant, hay, cattle, and beekeeping industries. Sessions were largely focused on management, health, and nutrition for the various livestock species.

Methods

Following the Backyard Farming series, a Qualtrics™ survey was developed and sent to participants. The purpose of the survey was to determine the success of this type of online programming for livestock producers in Maryland. The survey consisted of ?? questions asking participants about their reasons for participation, if COVID-19 played a role in their attendance, whether the information learned would keep their livestock healthier and make their operations more productive, and if any behavioral changes occurred as a result of the sessions. The survey was completed by a total of ?? respondents across the various industries. Participant responses are depicted to the right.



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EXTENSION

Backyard Farming Zoom Sessions

- **Monday Moos on Mondays at noon EST**
Learn about raising cattle from birth to maturity
- **What the Hay! on Wednesdays at noon EST**
Learn about selecting the best hay for your animals and appropriate storage
- **Flock Fridays on Fridays at noon EST**
Learn about raising backyard poultry
- **Small Ruminant sessions on Thursdays at 7 pm EST**
Learn about raising sheep and goats
- **Additional topics will be held on various dates**
Beekeeping and pollinators
Gardening

For the complete Backyard Farming schedule and registration links, visit <https://go.umd.edu/backyardfarming>.

These sessions will be taught by University of Maryland Extension educators.

Registration is required. You will receive a link via email. If you do not have internet access, contact Maegan at 443-523-4389 or mperdue@umd.edu for call in options.

Sessions will be approximately 45 minutes. Stay tuned for additional sessions!

If you need reasonable accommodations, please email Maegan Perdue.

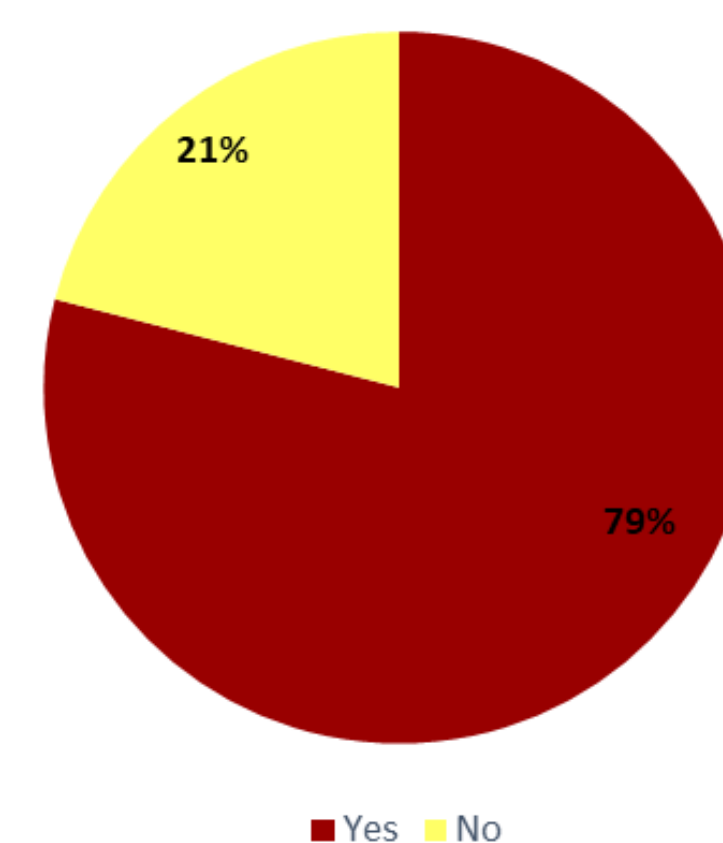
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Results

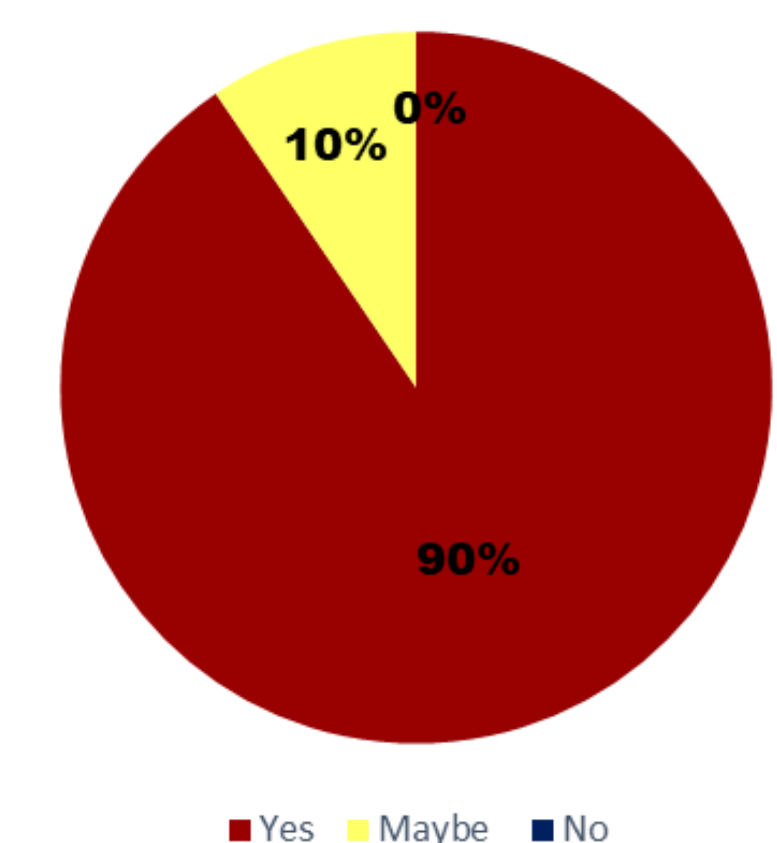
Reasons for Participating in the Backyard Farming Series Ranked in Order of Importance



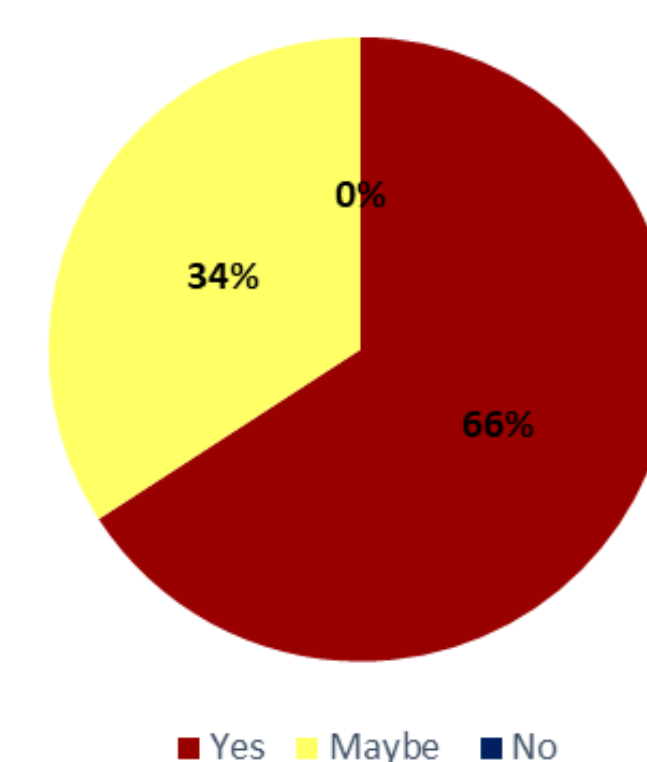
Did COVID-19 affect your decision to participate in these sessions?



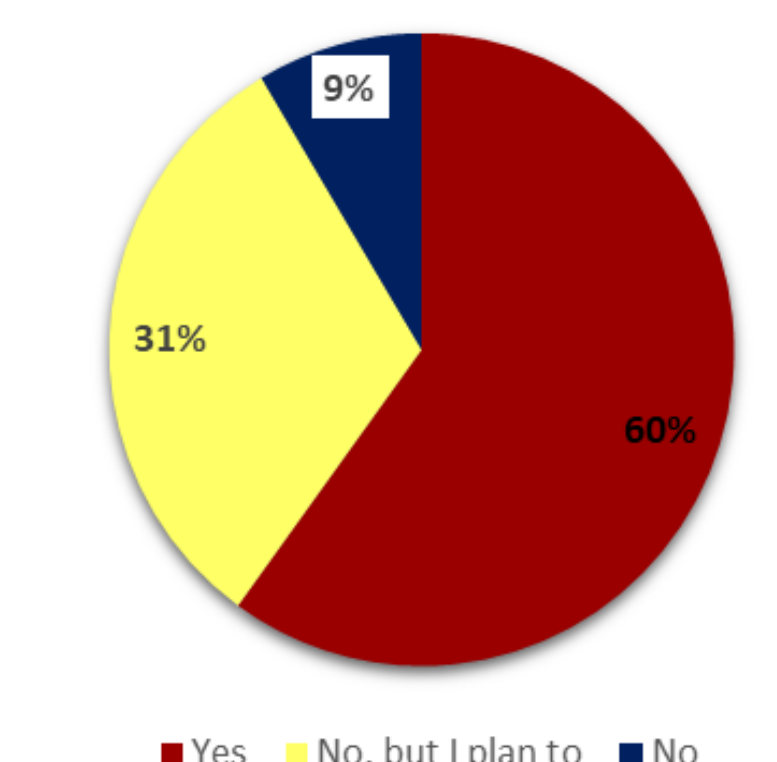
Will the information in this presentation help you keep your animals healthier?



Will the information you learned in the presentation(s) help you save money and/or make your operation more productive?



Have you changed any of the ways you manage your livestock, poultry or bees as a result of the information you received in these sessions?



Conclusions

All participants found the information valuable and reported that they would be likely to participate in future presentations. The Backyard Farming sessions allowed participants to get education from the comfort and safety of their homes, with the added benefit that information was able to be dispersed over a wider geographic audience. With backyard poultry and livestock production gaining popularity both for food production and as pets, it is vital that Extension educators provide training to both experienced and new owners to ensure proper care and decrease the chances of a disease outbreak. The online format made it possible to provide education at a time when many inexperienced owners were acquiring animals, possibly for the first time. The number of attendees along with the positive survey results show that this series is filling a needed void. Once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, in-person programming will need to be resumed to meet the needs of those who lack broad-band internet access, which is common in many rural areas. However, online programming is a viable option when in-person meetings are prohibited and moving forward can be used in conjunction with in-person programming to reach a greater audience, to allow participants to hear from speakers located further away, and to provide educational options when travel is not possible or economically feasible.