

Educating Farmers and Landowners on the Operation of Rental Walk Behind Tractors

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most cost prohibitive factors in starting any agricultural operation is obtaining proper equipment. So at the 2018 Small Farms Field Day, hosted by North Carolina A&T Cooperative Extension, a delegation of small and limited resource farmers from Warren County, NC observed the demonstration of a BCS two-wheeled tractor and thought it would be a valuable tool to have available for small farmers and landowners in Warren County.

OBJECTIVES

The counties Economic Development Commission purchased a BCS model 739 for Warren County Cooperative Extension in order to 1). Lease out to local small farmers and landowners allowing them to temporarily avoid the cost of equipment purchase and removing that barrier for the development of small agribusinesses 2). Educate those who will use it on safe, proper, and efficient use of the equipment.

DELIVERY METHODS

Techniques used to promote the program and educate potential users on the BCS tractors consisted of: 1). Newspaper article 2). Demonstrations 3). How to video 4). One-on-one demonstrations. In 2019 demonstrations were conducted in conjunction with other programs such as the high tunnel workshop. In 2020 there was an attempt to conduct bimonthly demonstrations, but they were interrupted due to COVID. The how to video was posted on March 27 2020 on the extension social media account.



Top picture: Jean Steverson operates BCS tractor at demonstration on March 5th, 2020.
Bottom picture: Larry Davis operates BCS tractor for first time during one on one demonstration on his farm.

RESULTS

In the year 2019 the BCS tractor was used 7 times. Of those 7 operators, 4 had not previously utilized extension programming. In 2020 only two people utilized, the decrease in usage attributed to COVID-19. Of those 2 users 1 had never attended previous extension programming. The how to video posted on social media was viewed 33 times. The first bimonthly demonstration only had 4 attendees. Of those who rented the BCS tractor only 3 attended any of the demonstrations.

FOLLOW-UP EVALUATIONS

Eighteen months after the completion of the first meeting, follow-up evaluations and interviews were conducted with 31 of the 41 participants. Several of the participants stated that they had applied for and were approved for at least one USDA program. Those programs included NRCS-EQIP cost share grants, FSA farm programs, and other USDA services. Ten of them received cost share grants for high tunnel greenhouses and an irrigation system which totaled \$ 74,800.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

One of the contributing factors to low turn out to demonstrations are the amount of limited resource farmers in the county who the equipment was purchased for in the first place. The limited resource farmers and landowners were more likely to have full time jobs outside of their agricultural operations making attending a demonstration inconvenient preferring a one on one demonstration upon equipment delivery. Those who attended the scheduled demonstration asked for one on one demonstrations if they rented it.

CONCLUSION

Multiple approaches to educating user of the BCS tractors were effective. The approached preferred by those who were to operate the equipment was one on one demonstration. While the lease equipment program serves a purpose helps farmers and landowners avoid the challenge of having to buy equipment it also allows brought people to extension programming who may have never participated if not for the lease program.