

Missouri Grown Programs Help Producers Increase On-farm Profits

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What is Missouri Grown? Missouri Grown is a University of Missouri Extension educational program geared towards small farm families that focuses on successful techniques, and marketing high value horticulture crops best suited to Missouri's climate conditions.

Program Objectives

- Increase on-farm profitability within three years of attending an MU Extension program.
- Make changes based on concepts learned at an educational program or tour.



Participants learned about bee hives at a local bee farm during the advanced beekeeping workshop.

Program Activities

For years, northeast Missouri fruit and vegetable producers were selling traditional crops like tomatoes, peppers, beans and pumpkins, etc. and not seeing much of a profit increase. Extension saw a need to assist producers to increase on-farm profits. For the past three years, numerous Missouri Grown program activities were held in the counties I serve. These included workshops, farm tours, farm visits, farmers' market visits, tomato festival and a grafted tomato project.

- FSMA-Produce Safety Training held in 2017 for local growers.
- A grafted tomato research project in 2017 and 2018 proved that grafted tomatoes are best suited for the commercial grower.
- A Tomato Festival held in 2018 showcased 55 different varieties of tomatoes grown in the area, including the grafted tomatoes. Participants sampled and voted on the variety they liked best. 'Sun Sugar' won the best tasting tomato.
- Beginning and advanced beekeeping workshops were held 2015-2019.
- A mushroom production workshop in 2018 taught individuals how to grow edible mushrooms.
- Vegetable farm tours were held in 2018 and 2019 in different locations of the region. Participants learned about shiitake mushroom production, high tunnels, grafted field grown tomatoes, heirloom tomatoes, Asian vegetables, bees and more. Participants learned production methods and strategies they could use in their operation. They also learned how a produce auction operates.
- A Garlic Production workshop in 2019 taught individuals how to grow and sell garlic.
- A Blackberry Production workshop in 2019 taught producers how to grow and sell blackberries.
- A Fruit Tree Grafting workshop was held in 2019 to encourage producers to graft fruit trees or purchase grafted trees for higher yielding fruit crops.
- Three workshops on "Understanding Weed Growth, Identification and Control" were presented in three locations throughout the region in 2019.

Teaching Methods

Multiple teaching methods were used to teach these concepts because this particular audience is quite diverse. Teaching methods included:

- classroom instruction with lecture and slides
- producer panel discussions at workshops
- hands-on grafting of apple trees
- hands-on inoculation of shiitake mushroom logs
- farm visits with hands-on plant and insect diagnostics and marketing discussions
- farmers' market visits to producers to see what changes needed to be made to customer service skills, booth set-up, item displays
- tomato festival where individuals sampled 55 varieties of tomatoes grown by local producers
- farm tours where individuals could see how crops are grown in a high tunnel and the field



Participants learned how to graft fruit trees.



Participants sampled 55 tomato varieties at the Tomato Fest.

Evaluation

In the evaluations, all participants indicated practice changes. Follow-up visits were made to producers on their farms and at the farmers' markets to see what changes they made and to determine if on-farm profits were increasing. In the past three years, 80% of the producers who had attended a workshop or tour indicated on evaluations that they added new products to their operations, which helped increase their overall sales. New products included honey, honey-based products, edible mushrooms, hydroponic lettuce, microgreens, Asian vegetables, cut flower bouquets, dried flower arrangements, dried spices, specialty melons and more. Growers indicated an increase in sales between \$1,000-5,000.

Program Outcomes and Impacts

In the past three years, 2016-2019, 414 individuals representing 28 counties in Missouri attended one or more of the Missouri Grown workshops, tours or activities in northeast Missouri. In 2019, two producers sold to a Hy-Vee grocery store, 21 producers were selling to local farmers' markets, 1 operated on farm produce stand, and 1 operated a u-pick blueberry operation. Growers reported an increase in sales between \$1,000-5,000.

Quotes: "I knew nothing coming into this workshop so I am going to try to put everything to use".
"The tour was very good and enjoyable. I love the interaction between farmers. I met and made new friends and contacts".