

Grain Crops Academy Premier A Success

PRINCETON, KY.

The 2008 premier of the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture's Grain Crops Academy proved successful and already plans are under way for several sequels.

The three and a half day educational program allowed farmers to delve into agronomic topics to better understand the science of grain crops production. The goal is for this knowledge to translate into improved farm profitability and sustainability.

McLean County farmer Gerry Hayden said the program was a good refresher course for him on many things he already knew and it reminded him of what he should be thinking about. Hayden's son, Ben, said the program took producers to another level of thinking. The Haydens said the interaction with other producers also provided an opportunity to learn what's working on other farms across the state.

"It gives you a lot to think about," Gerry Hayden said.

Participants in the academy came from seven counties in the western area of Kentucky. These producers account for more than 25,000 acres of corn, 22,000 acres of soybeans and 4,500 acres of wheat grown in the state.

Warren Whitaker, program coordinator and UK research specialist, said with the pilot program, county agents selected a small group of farmers who were willing to participate in the first run of the program. The county agents and counties in the pilot program are the ones that showed early interest and were involved with the initial planning and development of the program, he said.

In the future, the program will likely be offered on a regional basis so producers across the

state will be able to take advantage of the educational opportunity, he said. They anticipate holding up to three next year in various locations around the state. Whitaker said he's already been contacted by UK Cooperative Extension Service agents interested in having the academy in their area in 2009. Feedback from participants and specialists conducting the training will be used to fine-tune the program for the coming year.

"Overall, it seems like everybody's been really interested and involved," Whitaker said. "They've asked a lot of questions. Some topics are better received by some producers than are others. It's off to a pretty good start. We're pleased with the turnout and with the reception it's gotten from the producers involved and from the interest it's generated from other agents. It can only get better with the information provided by the producers and agents involved."

Even this year, trainers altered their presentations at times to incorporate questions from the participants, Whitaker said. Each topic will be reviewed to determine if more or less time should be spent on the topic. Additional topics will also be considered along with the format. Daylong meetings may not work in all locations, he said.

The two-year pilot program is being conducted by UK and funded by the Kentucky Corn Growers Association from funds approved by the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board.

Henderson County producer Garry Eblen said he thought the program was worth the time he invested in it.

"I think it would be even better for my son who's been farming for a couple of years," he said. "There was a lot of good information." Δ