High- and Low-Tech Approaches to Soil Health Extension

The Situation
In extension, we are constantly challenged with reaching our audience in an effective way using multiple approaches. These may include more traditional, low-tech approaches such as face-to-face contact or more high-tech approaches such as social media. To reach as many farmers as possible and to broaden our reach beyond state boundaries, we need to be flexible enough to use multiple approaches within our programs.

Extension Response
Within the NDSU Soil Health Extension Program, we are using both low-tech (Café Talks and on-farm visits) and high-tech (video and Twitter) approaches to reach farmers with timely, relevant information. Twitter was recently incorporated into the program in July 2015, while videos, Café Talks and on-farm visits have been utilized since January of 2014. Café Talks, which are farmer-based discussion groups, have been held in Cass, Grand Forks, Richland, Sargent, Stutsman and Traill Counties.

Impacts
Using high-tech approaches like videos and Twitter has helped extension reach farmers with every day observations and short bursts of information to spur interest in soil health. Using the more personalized, low-tech approach of Café Talks and on-farm visits has allowed specialists and agents to follow up with more personalized information that can be implemented on-farm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>People Engaged</th>
<th>Hours Invested</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Café Talks/On-Farm Visits</td>
<td>176 meetings</td>
<td>1,088</td>
<td>608</td>
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<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>30 videos</td>
<td>26,117</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>2,697 tweets</td>
<td>110,740</td>
<td>270</td>
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</tbody>
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Impact from the café talks (details shown below) has resulted in 25-31% of attendees adopting management approaches such as growing barley on saline soils, diversifying rotations to include cover crops, establishing cover crops in standing corn and using cover crops for weed control. Another 24-48% of attendees are considering adopting these practices as a result of information obtained at the café talks.

Twitter analytics was used to determine the number of impressions made upon individuals viewing tweets. A total of 1.7 million impressions were made within a year and a half, leading to 1,000 replies to fuel a discussion. There were also 1,454 re-tweets of information posted by NDSU Soil Health to reach a larger audience.

Feedback
Thank you for your efforts. I definitely feel that covers and a reduced tillage system is the way to go. It’s the details such as rotation and herbicide interactions as well as equipment limitations that keep me on my toes. I love the collective sharing of information. Thanks again!

Dr. Wick, Thanks for all of your great ideas over the past year! (Since I discovered you!) The way you share all of your information is so helpful, even for those of us a long way from ND! And congrats on the accolades you have received as well!

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