

Sharing Resources and Expertise for Regional Communications Projects

Emily E. Eubanks, Communications Coordinator
University of Florida
Center for Landscape Conservation and Ecology
PO Box 110675
Gainesville, FL 32611
PH: (352) 392-1831 ext. 246
FAX: (352) 392-1413
eee@ufl.edu

J. Faith Peppers, Team Leader of Public Affairs
University of Georgia
College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences
Office of Communication
116 Hoke Smith Building
Athens, GA 30602
PH: (770) 640-4840
pepper@uga.edu

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Abstract – In February 2009 the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and University of Florida IFAS/Extension will introduce a regional gardening television program. The program will air on public broadcasting stations in north Florida and across Georgia and will pull from expertise and talent in both states. This new show is an expansion of a 10-year-old Georgia show that is highly successful and proven. The project offers the opportunity for neighboring states to acquire this known-commodity at relatively low risk. For a 26-week fully produced package that requires minimal time commitment from partner institutions, the cost is extremely low and cost recovery opportunities are ample.

This program gives us a chance to showcase land-grant universities in the region as a cooperative system of teaching, research and extension that can capitalize on the strengths of each institution to provide the broadest education for the region and the nation.

Key Words: television, gardening, partnership, cooperation, maximizing, resource-generation

Sharing Resources and Expertise for Regional Communications Projects

As landgrant communications budgets continue to face challenges, sharing resources and expertise is one way to get the most for our communications dollars. That is the idea at the heart of a regional project started this year by the University of Georgia and the University of Florida.

In February 2008, the UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and University of Florida IFAS/Extension began talks about working together on a regional public television gardening show. In February 2009, the show will begin airing in Florida and Georgia.

How'd we do that so fast? We had a 10-year head start.

History of the show

In 1998 the UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences introduced a new television show "Gardening in Georgia" in partnership with Georgia Public Broadcasting. Over the past 10 years, the show has consistently been one of GPB's top rated, locally produced shows.

Between 2002 and 2006 show production was put on hiatus due to state budget cuts. Yet, even in reruns "Gardening In Georgia" remained at the top of GPB's ratings.

The show banks its success on two key components: the expertise provided by college experts and the exceptional production quality and talent of the crew.

Show host Walter Reeves retired from UGA Extension in 2002 after 30 years as a county extension agent. His vast horticultural knowledge, report with UGA Extension specialists and connections with gardeners around the state make him a respected resource. Reeves also is host on one of Atlanta's highest rated call-in radio shows, "The Lawn & Garden Show with Walter Reeves," which airs on clear channel WSB-AM and is a weekly columnist in the *Atlanta*

Journal-Constitution which give him instant and wide name recognition. The chance for cross promotion is enormous.

The show production is handled by Bob Molleur, who also retired from UGA Extension in 2002 after 30 years as a video producer. Having these capable, known commodities handle the production of the show makes it possible for us to have 26-weeks of programming taped, edited and aired with minimal commitment of time or resources from the college.

The show is supported by funds from UGA, GPB and corporate underwriters. As we approached local companies for support we were told time and again that they could offer must larger financial support if the show were regional and not state-specific. As we approached our 10-year anniversary, it was clear the time was right to expand the show to a regional audience.

Audience

Demographics for PBS viewers show that audience members tend to be 35 and older, highly educated, and upper income. According to the National Gardening Association, these demographics also fit the gardening audience. With Reeves's personality and approach to the show, he relates directly to this audience.

Research conducted by the University of Florida (Meyers, Irani, & Eckhardt), showed that "through mass media, Extension can provide more information to more people, but the programs must attract attention and fulfill audience members' needs." *Your Southern Garden* (working title) will provide all of these things through a fun and informative format, as well as providing public value to Extension and the land-grant system.

Other long-time PBS shows, such as *The Victory Garden*, are popular with home horticulturists. But, these shows do not address regional or localized gardening needs and

information. Meyers, Irani, and Eckhardt found that gardeners prefer to receive customized information that will help them in their own backyard. *Your Southern Garden* (working title) will address gardening concerns and issues for USDA hardiness zones 7, 8, and 9 providing a much more applicable approach for our audiences. They also found that gardeners are information seekers and prefer to receive their gardening information in multiple methods – television, radio, web, etc. Because of this a coordinated integrated marketing campaign will be developed to benefit both University of Georgia and University of Florida.

Expansion

In February we pursued talks with University of Florida, Auburn University and Clemson University about joining us as partners in expanding the program to a regional production. In June, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with University of Florida IFAS/Extension and shooting in Florida began immediately.

As partners, each institution works with the production team to identify segment ideas, provide specialists to appear on camera and help set up pre-arranged shoots. The total time commitment is usually 10 to 12 days a year. In return, each partner institution gets 15-second promotional spots at the open and close of each episode and is featured in weekly promotion materials, exhibits and printed materials. The show has a corresponding Web site that is very popular and provides interesting feedback on what spurs viewers to action.

We hope to continue expanding production of the show into neighboring states in 2010.

Advantages

There are clear advantages to this partnership. First, we are able to pool our resources to provide a high-quality program with tremendous educational value to citizens of our states. We

are able to provide that programming with relatively low financial input that offers ample opportunity to be self-supporting through outside support of the institutions' portion of the cost.

Second, it widens the potential pool of corporate underwriters which lessens the financial responsibilities of the participating institutions further.

Third, the experienced production staff is fully aware and committed to the land-grant mission. They know the types of segments that need to be aired and are able to do much of work without requiring time commitment from university communication staff.

Challenges

Writing and getting consensus on MOUs is not easy. Once we got the agreement signed and enacted, the production work flowed easily. To date, our two biggest challenges have been working through Florida's difficult configuration of public broadcasting. Many states have a single public broadcasting system that provides programming for all of the state's public broadcasting stations. Florida has many independent stations. We have been fortunate in that many of the stations we want to target with this program have a single programming broker.

Another challenge is finding a name. So far, every name we audience tested and sought was already trademarked. We still looking.

Summary

Expanding a highly successful, proven gardening television show from state specific to regional offers the opportunity for neighboring states to acquire a known-commodity at relatively low risk. For a 26-week fully produced package that requires minimal time commitment from partner institutions, the cost is extremely low and cost recovery opportunities are ample.

This program gives us a chance to showcase land-grant universities in the region as a cooperative system of teaching, research and extension that can capitalize on the strengths of each institution to provide the broadest education for the region and the nation.

References

Meyers, C., Irani, T., & Eckhardt, E. (2006). Using Focus Groups to Develop an Extension Home Horticulture Public Radio Program. *Journal of Applied Communications*. Volume 90. Pages 39-53.

Appendix

1. MOU sample
2. Promotional DVD with show preview available at presentation

APRIL 2008

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

BETWEEN

INSTITUTION NAME

AND

**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL AND
ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES**

Regarding regionalization of CAES-produced gardening television program.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

FOR

REGIONAL TELEVISION GARDENING SHOW

Whereas, urban agriculture continues to be a fast growing segment of the economy across the Southeast; and,

Whereas, home gardening is a vibrant part of the economy with great demand for educational information and training from our colleges; and

Whereas, ‘Gardening In Georgia’ has proven over the past 10 years to be a highly rated, successful program across the region where it has aired; and

Whereas, the educational material delivered through the program is applicable beyond the borders of Georgia and present the opportunity to create a more diverse show that appeals to gardeners in the Southeast region;

The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and Georgia Public Broadcasting as coproducers of the show and the production team of Bob Molleur of Mfocus Consulting LLC and host Walter Reeves seek to expand the reach and benefits of a regional gardening show to neighboring land-grant institutions.

Institutional commitment:

UGA CAES will continue to work with the production team to produce a high-quality, educational program based on sound science. Each season consists of 26 30-minute episodes. The show will be customized to include segments tailored to supporting landgrant institutions. Each episode will include recognition appropriate to the level of funding provided as agreed in Sponsorship Document A.

Supporting landgrant institutions will work with designated UGA CAES communication faculty to identify, train and organize faculty and other guests who will appear on the show.

Supporting landgrant institutions will coordinate local arrangements with the production team to make maximum use of available facilities, guests and time during prearranged video shoots.

Supporting landgrant institution will designate a faculty member to serve as a liaison with the show's production team to identify and arrange potential segments each year.

Supporting landgrant institution will coordinate with their state public broadcasting outlet(s) to secure airing time. The CAES, GPB and the production team will provide support as appropriate.

Supporting institution, with support from the UGA production team liaison, will publicize the show weekly and will coordinate an annual premiere media push with originating institution.

Publication rights:

All copyright and duplication rights remain as stipulated agreed under terms of preceding contract.

Effective date:

June 1, 2008

Partners:

Each institution represented will contribute funds annually based on terms of involvement. Budget is subject to renegotiation every 36 months or as airing system requires.

Approvals:

J. Scott Angle, Dean and Director
University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

PERSON, TITLE
INSTITUTION

Document A

RE: Funding for proposed regional gardening TV show

Listed below are levels of partnership offered to appropriate land-grant institutions for production of a regional gardening television show.

Co-producer level – Funding institution will appoint a liaison to the production team who will contribute to content decisions and facilitate opportunities to have their college specialists featured as appropriate. Funding institution is recognized in opening credits as a co-producer and has one 15-sec. spot at either the opening or closing of an equal distribution of shows based on the number of funding partners. Funding institutions not airing in underwriter segments will have a mention in closing credits. Funding institution's logo is included on all publicity materials, links on web sites, etc. The funding needed at this level for 26 shows per season is \$75,000. (Subject to increase with required change to HD in 2010.)

Underwriter – There are two levels of underwriter status:

\$50,000 – Funding institution will be noted in closing credits and publicity materials as a sponsor and will get 13 state-specific segments included in show content over the 26-week season. (Subject to increase with required change to HD in 2010.)

\$25,000 - Funding institution would be recognized in the closing credits of each show and will be included in all promotional and publicity materials, and would have 7 state-specific segments included in the show content over the 26-week season. (Subject to increase with required change to HD in 2010.)

At any level we expect a communication representative from the funding institution to help coordinate locations, talent and topics suggested to the production team.