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Reaching the Hispanic "Green Industry" Workforce: Experiences and Practical Tools for Extension Professionals

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PREVIOUS
ARTICLE



ISSUE
CONTENTS



NEXT
ARTICLE

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Abstract

There are approximately 500,000 Hispanics living in Georgia. The Green Industry (turfgrass, ornamentals, and landscape sectors) is one of the fastest growing industries in the state. Close to 90% of all Georgia Green Industry companies employ Hispanics as their primary labor force. Language and cultural barriers hamper productivity, efficiency, and safety in the industry. The need to develop training programs in Spanish is widely recognized. We present relevant information and tools to take into consideration when implementing training programs for the green industry's Hispanic workforce.

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Introduction

There are 38.8 million Hispanics in the U.S., and now they constitute 13% of the nation's population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003; Haya El Nasser, 2003). In Georgia, there are approximately 500,000 Hispanics. State industries, including construction, manufacturing, restaurant, green industry, agriculture, and agribusiness employ Hispanics as the backbone of their workforce.

The Green Industry is one of the fastest growing industries in Georgia and has an impact of \$2.56 billion to the state's economy. Approximately 90% of all Georgia landscape, greenhouse, and nursery companies employ Hispanics as their primary labor force (Martinez-Espinoza, 2002). Language and cultural barriers hamper productivity, efficiency, and safety in the industry. There is a widely recognized need to develop training programs and publish information in Spanish while the English skills of these workers improve. Delivery of information in the primary language will facilitate learning of information and widespread use of safety practices in the workplace.

In Georgia, a series of statewide trainings in Spanish have been implemented. The programs were aimed to improve cultural awareness and to improve productivity and workplace safety. Based on analyses of these programs we present some useful considerations and hints to establish successful trainings tailored specifically for Hispanic audiences in the green industry.

Considerations, Recommendations, and Rationale

Program Content and Delivery

Use classroom settings combined with hands-on components, computer aided lectures using clear

examples, numerous pictures, and understandable text. Highlight important messages or key statements. Use of bilingual content gives an added value to lectures, increasing industry subject vocabulary in both languages.

In our training programs we found out that combining lecture with hands-on components was widely preferred. Practical examples and do-it-yourself exercises had a significant impact on learning new skill and were preferred by the participants, especially exercises held outdoors. Computer-enhanced lectures, especially with pictures and underlined remarks, had wider preference. Although content in Spanish was preferred, bilingual content was well received. Bilingual content not only helped the participant understand the subject matter but also helped in learning English. Similar observations have been noted by other professionals (Watson, 2001; Hoorman, 2002; Bairstow, Berry, & Driscoll, 2002).

Printed Material

Prepare handouts and important printed technical materials for attendees to take home or workplace.

Printed technical materials were useful, especially for future reference. Participants stated they would use the materials at work and teach co-workers or friends and family about the subject. Feedback from managers indicates that attendees become instructors and disseminators of information in the workplace.

Registration

Have a bilingual professional handle registration.

English-speaking owners or managers inquired regularly about the programs. Additionally, a considerable number of Spanish-speaking participants inquired about the program directly. The availability of a bilingual individual was essential to handle the registration.

Advertising

Advertise widely to companies directly, using printed advertisement, calling directly, or sending e-mails to Extension clients and group lists. Announce the program on Hispanic newspapers. Use bilingual advertisements.

Company contact appeared to be the most efficient way to reach participants. The second was through Hispanic newspapers. Bilingual advertisement was preferred over all-Spanish or all-English advertisement.

Contacting the Company

Emphasize the importance of the training program to company owners or managers.

Company involvement was one of the most important determinants in the training programs' success. 85% of the participants received company support in time allotted, payment of fees, and providing transportation.

Travel Distance

Plan for and expect participants from a 90-mile radius.

Analyses of data indicated that the travel distance varied depending on the subject and place of training program. Most participants were willing to travel considerable distances (average of 90 miles) if subject and nature of the program were of interest, especially if they received company support. This data could be important in selecting the region, place, and time of year to perform the training.

Group size

Expect a group of 35 participants.

Data from our surveys indicated that the average number per training was 35 participants, although the number of participants varied depending on the type, place, and advertisement of the training program. The average number of participants is important for planning future programs in the green industry and can help to determine costs, handout materials, location of training, materials and equipment needed, etc.

Characteristics of Attendees

Expect young participants of mostly Mexican background.

Analyses of surveys indicate that the Green Industry's Hispanic workforce is younger than 30 years old. Knowing the age group of participants can help to tailor the programs accordingly. Ethnic background of most participants was Mexican (73%). Knowing the ethnic background is especially helpful for selection of terminology to be used per training program as well as to point out differences in policies and safety, pesticide or other regulations between the U.S. and other

countries.

Partnerships

Develop partnerships with county Extension agents and/or local agencies.

County faculty and staff participation was crucial to the training success, and agents performed an invaluable job in local advertising. Evidence suggests that county Extension agents effectively communicated with local companies, emphasizing the importance of programs to management.

Recognition for attendees

Prepare certificates of attendance. Use bilingual "diplomas."

Participants wanted written "recognition" for their participation in the training. Therefore certificates of participation were given to most participants.

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