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## Field Tours--An Old Tool That Can Still Work

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## Field Tours--An Old Tool That Can Still Work

### Abstract

Field tours and workshops continue to be useful tools in Extension education. But holding such events requires careful planning and follow-up to make a successful experience for all involved: planners, presenters, and participants. The authors developed a simple timeline and checklist to help keep the organizers on track.

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Extension professionals have acquired new tools of information delivery over the past 15 years in the form of electronic media and the Internet. Although predictions by Patton (1987) of electronic information distribution have come to fruition, county Extension offices have not disappeared as predicted. Having new tools does not mean that old tools do not still work.

Traditional Extension methods are still significant in reaching progressive producers and diffusing research findings and new practices through influential producers. Focused, commodity-specific field tours using multiple disciplines have been identified by several authors as the best use of clientele contact time (Braund, 1995; Suvedi, Lapinski & Campo, 2000).

Francis, Carter, Carusi, and King (2000) discuss the considerations speakers need to establish before accepting an invitation, but that is just one aspect of a meeting or field tour. Once the Extension professional has identified the need for a field tour or workshop, planning a successful event requires assembling the necessary components. The organizers and speakers need to consider specific topics, learning goals, audience, location, content, and evaluation.

We developed a timeline (Table 1) that outlines the necessary tasks involved in planning a Field Tour and specifies the dates by which these tasks should be accomplished. The timeline shown is used for a major field tour that occurs in late summer each year and involves numerous speakers from various disciplines. It can be adapted to less (and more) ambitious educational programs.

**Table 1**  
Timeline for an August 25th Field Tour

Task	Date(s)
Hold Initial Planning Session	Jan-Feb
Select Topics, Tour Stops, and Speakers	May 1
Develop Budget and Assign Duties (See Table 2)	May 1
Send Topic List and Date to Ag Communications	May 1
Contact and Confirm in the Speakers in Writing	June 1
Develop Flyer/Mailer	June 20
Apply for CCA, CCH, PAT Credits	June 20
Develop News Articles	July 1

Send Flyer/Mailer for Special Printing If Needed	July 1
Do Not Contact County Educators During County Fair	July 1-7
Confirm Lunch Vendor	July 15
Distribute Flyer/Mailer	July 20
Confirm Speakers' Audio-Visual Needs	July 20
Confirm Extra Facilities (e.g., Chairs, Tables, Toilets)	July 20
E-mail Reminders to Speakers and Extension Staff	August 1
Clear Up Any Loose Ends	August 1
Do Not Contact County Educators During State Fair	August 9-20
Check on Lunch Vendor	August 15
Schedule Set-Up Day If Needed	August 24
Enjoy the Field Day	August 25
Send Thank You Letters	August 26
Complete Clean-Up	August 26
Analyze Follow-up Evaluations	August 30

We also identified specific areas of responsibility (Table 2) that, if carried out by one individual, could be overwhelming. We have a different individual in charge of each responsibility area, which simplifies and streamlines overall coordination. This group also performs the follow-up evaluations.

**Table 2**  
Checklist of Field Tour Areas of Responsibility

<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Individual in Charge</b>
Chairperson	
Program Content	
Facilities	
Publicity - Media Contact	
Food/Refreshments	
Continuing Education Credits	
Displays &/or Equipment Vendors	

A timeline and checklist such as the ones we developed may seem like merely a matter of common sense, but they ensure that everything that needs to be considered is considered and help keep the organizers on track. Last fall, we distributed the timeline and checklist to Purdue Extension field staff. Some of them have already started using these simple tools in planning sessions for their 2001 Field Tours. They might help you, too.

### References

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