ID # (assigned by CSG): 12-MW-08-SD

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: South Dakota

Assign Program Category (applicant): Natural Resources

Program Name: Legislative Agriculture & Natural Resources Outreach and Education Program

Administering Agency: South Dakota Department of Agriculture (SDDA)

Contact (Name and Title): Walt Bones, Department Secretary

Address: 523 E. Capitol, Pierre, SD 57501

Telephone Number: 605-773-5425

E-mail Address: walt.bones@state.sd.us

Web Address: http://sdda.sd.gov/

1. How long has this program operated (month and year)?
   The Legislative Agriculture and Natural Resources Outreach and Education Program (LANROEP) initiative began with a preliminary West River Tour in July 2009. This was followed by an expanded and improved East River Tour in June 2011. In October 2011, the program incorporated a new event called Harvesting with the Ag Stars (HWTAS).

2. Describe the program:
   • Why was it created?
     The two day tour was started in order to give hands-on experiences to the members of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committees in the South Dakota Legislature. The event allows for a concentrated, but thorough, tour of various sites related to the Departments of Agriculture; Game, Fish & Parks; and Environment and Natural Resources.

     The HWTAS program was created to help better involve individuals in agriculture and get them back on the farm to see where their food comes from. There has been a
growing disconnect between producers and consumers in the realm of agriculture as well as the legislators representing the general public, which this program hopes to help diminish. The legislators make important decisions in the state regarding agriculture, so they were asked to ride along in a combine with local producers during harvest season to familiarize them with agricultural practices. The farmers/industry leaders showed how they harvest their crop, discussed ideas or areas that are important, and had a general discussion about the strengths and areas for improvement regarding agriculture in South Dakota.

- Why is it a new and creative approach or method?
  This tour gives a breadth and depth of knowledge gained through experience and face-to-face interactions with individuals for the legislators to utilize during the course of their decision making opportunities in the South Dakota Legislative Session. The sites visited vary with each tour with stops ranging from looking at the building of a new power plant to seeing a demonstration on how to install agriculture drainage tile. The legislators get a range of opportunities to interact with one another and with the participants at the various sites.

  The idea of physically bringing the decision makers into the fields to have a one-on-one conversation with producers has not been done before in South Dakota. Previously it was thought that if you wanted to learn about a subject, you sat through a presentation, read articles and/or discussed the subject with several “experts.” This approach allowed for legislators to have a candid conversation with a producer to discuss the various areas of agriculture.

- What are the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order?
  The Departments of Agriculture; Game, Fish & Parks; and Environment and Natural Resources work with local sites to determine availability and feasibility of conducting a tour at a facility. They coordinate the various sites into a navigable tour route with a corresponding booklet which contains additional information, provided by the respective site, on the stops. Sponsors are obtained to fund the tour with sponsorships ranging from snacks or meals to sponsoring the tour bus. The legislators are invited to participate in the tour and should RSVP by a respective date to ensure that the hotel rooms are booked, meals reserved, and the proper size tour bus is secured.

  For the HWTAS event, SDDA contacts commodity groups to receive a list of producers interested in hosting a legislator. The commodity groups assist SDDA in obtaining knowledgeable and informed producers who can effectively articulate the needs, concerns and upcoming topics conversation for producers. Producer participants included Walt Bones, the current SD Secretary of Agriculture; Scott Vanderwald, president of the SD Farm Bureau; and David Iverson, president of the SD Soybean Association. Meanwhile, the legislators are invited to participate in this event and are asked to respond to SDDA by a certain day. Then producer and legislator are paired up based on geographic location and dates of availability. It is then up to the individuals to determine a specific date and time for the meeting. SDDA follows up to ensure that the individuals were able to meet or contacts them with another individual.

- Is it effective? Provide tangible results and examples.
  The tour is effective because it gives the legislators more in-depth knowledge about subjects. When bills are introduced in the Legislative Session, the legislators are more educated and better informed about the subjects affecting agriculture. For example, there has been more discussion concerning water management due to the 2011 tour, which resulted in a bill being passed in the most recent Legislative Session to further
study the issue and provide recommendations for courses of action. In addition, funding bills are more widely accepted because the legislators are able to go out and see where the funding is going to and how it is going to be spent. Specifically, the 2009 tour showcased the devastation caused by the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB). Due to this education, the subsequent funding bills to combat this issue along with the Black Hills Forest Initiative funding for $3 million dollars had almost unanimous approval and passage. Legislators understood the MPB issue, why it is important and the best practices to help mitigate the problem.

In the inaugural year of HWTAS, 16 legislators and 12 producers participated in the event. Numerous news articles highlighted the event and positive feedback was obtained from participants.

3. Did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number, and e-mail address.
   Harvesting with the Ag Stars was an idea created by Secretary of Agriculture, Walt Bones.
   523 E Capitol Ave
   Pierre, SD 57501
   (605)773-5425
   Walt.bones@state.sd.us

4. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

   There are probably similar Legislative Outreach and Education Programs in other states. South Dakota’s program is unique in that we combine the tour with two other departments that can have overlapping areas of interest or concern. The Departments work closely together on numerous subjects and many of the sites visited showcase this connection along with the varying viewpoints. In addition we are expanding the program to include new events such as HWTAS.

5. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter when attempting to adopt this program?
   Trying to find sites and tours that work together, are geographically adjacent, and can accommodate a larger tour size can be a bit of a challenge.

   The coordination of two hectic schedules along with trying to determine when the crops will be ready to harvest may create a bit of an obstacle. It is important to start the project prior to harvest time so that the participants can be lined up and once the producer begins harvesting they can let the legislator know.

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