



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



CASE STUDY

Washington State University Extension Small Acreage Program

Funded by Clark County’s Clean Water Program in partnership with the Washington State University (WSU) Extension—Clark County, the county’s Small Acreage Program educates residents on proper land and animal management in order to reduce pollution entering stormwater and surface water from residential and agricultural properties.

Towards this effort, the Small Acreage Program conducts four annual septic system workshops. The workshops—held in partnership with the Clark County Public Health Department, which oversees the county’s septic systems—educate homeowners on general septic system maintenance and protection, as well as common systems in the county.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS

With an emphasis on practical education, the workshops allow participants to witness an actual septic system inspection, and they teach residents the necessary information to pass a certification requirement to inspect their own gravity-fed systems. (In Clark County, gravity-fed systems can be inspected by certified homeowners.)



Aaron Henderson of Clark County Public Health showed workshop participants some of the simple tools he made to do a home inspection of a gravity-fed system.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the Small Acreage Program’s education program is to teach residents best practices regarding rural land management, including management of stormwater, animal waste, wastewater that they can easily implement to save money while increasing sustainability and protecting groundwater and local waterways.

In addition to septic system maintenance issues, the workshops also educate participants on the maintenance and protection of potable water wells.



Workshop participants learn how to protect their drinking water with proper well and septic system maintenance.

PROMOTION

In order to cut advertising costs, the program “piggybacks” on public health department mailings to alert septic system owners about both their systems and upcoming workshops. Paid advertising is limited to budget-friendly local papers covering rural areas.

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Media contacts are utilized to procure local press coverage about upcoming workshops. Printed flyers, internal and external listservs, and website updates are also used to publicize the outreach events.

The program also maintains a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/smallacreageprogram) where information on workshops and event photos are posted.

Additional informational videos and publications can be found at the program's website:
clark.wsu.edu/horticulture/smallAcreageProgram.html

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

A successful partnership with the Clark County Health Department has made the Small Acreage Program's septic system education efforts low on challenges and high on reward. Advertising is often difficult on the program's tight budget, but, as described above, press coverage and grass roots promotion have lessened its impact.

The Small Acreage Program management recommends that interested organizations partner with relevant agencies when launching a septic system education program, which will help with costs, time commitments, and "provide good perspective." Businesses, non-profits, and government agencies are especially helpful with regard to providing speakers on septic-related topics.

RESULTS

Each septic system workshop has between 25 and 55 participants, with post-workshop evaluations indicating the seminars are an effective means of conveying useful septic system information. Of the 277 participants taking stand-alone septic workshops from 2007 to 2011, 80% increased their knowledge about protecting their septic system, 76% about keeping their drinking water clean, and 82% about maintaining septic systems and potable water wells.

Participants taking a septic workshop as part of a larger Living on the Land series are later surveyed again to determine if they have implemented any of the septic system best management practices detailed during the workshop. With a 77% participant response rate, surveys completed by attendees during from 2004 to 2010 concluded that:

- 52% of respondents with septic systems inspected their system.
- 57% of households tested their wells.
- Participants shared what they learned with over 2,493 other people
- Over 82% thought the class was a good use of their Clean Water fee

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE SMALL ACREAGE PROGRAM:

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<http://clark.wsu.edu/horticulture/smallAcreageProgram.html>

