



Soil Health

Planning Successful Field Days and Workshops



Organization is critical to hosting a soil health field day or workshop. The following tips can help you plan and stage a successful event.

Logistics

Form a Planning Committee

Use the experience and resources of individuals in your office.

Set Goals

To keep everyone on the same page when planning an event, list your goals for the event or tour. Refer to the “Messages and Demonstrations That Work” companion piece.

Identify the Audience

- The event will only be successful if the right people know about it and the activities appeal to their interests.
- Determine who should attend
- Focus discussion on your audience’s needs or the actions you want them to take
- Speak in a language your audience will understand. Use less jargon.

Develop an Agenda

Outline key program areas and topics that can be covered in the time available.

- Keep your target audience in mind! Is this the information they want or need?
- Determine the length of the tour or workshop; be sure to include travel time to sites.
- Schedule breaks. Give people enough time to use restrooms and get refreshments. If you make breaks too short, people will arrive late once you resume the program. Presentations should be in blocks of no more than two hours.
- A central theme may be used for the event. If so, tie presentation titles in with the theme.
- Plan plenty of time to arrange the room before the meeting, and to switch equipment between speakers.
- Prepare fact sheets, brochures
- Collect other already printed materials.
- Put materials together as an information packet to hand out at registration, before presentations, or to place at each seat.

Select a Date

Consider the time of year and the time of day that would best suit both your audience and your office.

- Plan field days to avoid harvest and planting times. Consider hunting seasons as well.
- Transportation may be a factor in the winter; heat and humidity can be uncomfortable outdoors in the summer.
- Meeting facilities may be difficult to reserve at certain times of the year
- Setting an event date at the peak of an office deadline can make planning difficult, as staff may not have time for the added work.

Determine Food and Refreshment Needs

Note: NRCS cannot purchase food or refreshments. Consider asking local conservation partners and agricultural organizations to pay for and provide refreshments.

Is a meal necessary or will a snack be enough? Will the meal be catered or will participants make their own plans? How much food do you need?

If you are going to have food, make participants RSVP, then add five meals to the number who RSVP. Most of the time the no shows and the number who show up without an RSVP will about equal each other. Planning too many meals can put you well over budget.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Contact your local NRCS office to learn more about the technical and financial assistance available.

The following are a few more things to plan for.

- Arrange for payment
- Seating arrangements, tables placed for easy flow of traffic
- Utensils, plates, napkins, cups, table cloths
- Condiments for both food and drinks
- Drinks
- Trash/recycling receptacles

Choose a Location

Don't skimp by not renting meeting rooms. It is critical that the room is dark enough for PowerPoint presentations to be visible. Open-sided buildings do not work. The entrance to the room should be in the back, not the front or side, to minimize distractions to the speaker when people arrive late. Make sure the location has ample parking and is handicap accessible.

Contact Prospective Speakers

Identify possible presenters for all topics. Having an outside speaker is highly recommended. It gets people to see and hear about things they might not have seen in their local areas, but which might also work on their farms. These speakers also tend to be a little more forthright. It is also beneficial to have a couple of local farmers on a panel to assure the audience that, yes, it will work here.

Once speakers are selected, discuss the subject matter of their presentations, find out what audiovisual equipment they will need, get the speakers' biographies for introductions, and provide the speakers with any needed background material.

Determine Equipment Needs

The following is a list of equipment that may be needed.

- Computer, LCD projector, screen
- Easels, markers, masking tape and flip charts
- Dry erase boards, markers, chalk and chalkboards
- DVD player
- A good PA system with good microphones. (Make presenters use them, no matter how loud they think they talk!)
- Electrical cords, plug adapters, internet connections
- Photocopiers
- Tables and chairs
- Staging, platforms, a podium
- Is electricity available? A generator may be required

Before the day of the event, make sure that all equipment works properly. Check everything, and have a backup on hand for everything. At the very least, have a backup plan. For example, have hardcopies of a PowerPoint presentation in case the computer-LCD does not function properly

Promote the Event

There are many ways to promote your event to your target audience. Choosing a combination of marketing methods may be the most effective and efficient way to reach them. Options include:

- Articles and ads in partner newsletters, newspapers, magazines, etc.
- Direct mail (flyers, brochures, invitations, registration materials) to prospective participants
- Press releases
- Signage (billboards, posters)
- Web site
- Radio or TV public service announcements

Finalize and Confirm All Arrangements

- Event facility
- Caterer
- Presenters
- AV assistants
- Photographer

Day of Event Check-In

Have a check-in table. For large crowds, have a few tables with each table handling a few letters of the alphabet. When the people check in, give them nametags, information packets, provide directions to the event location.

Special Considerations for an Outdoor Event

- Post signs showing directions to event locations, if needed.
- Seating arrangements for audience
- Parking facilities
- Handicap accessible restroom or port-a-potty
- Transportation to/from location
- Tables for showing displays, laying out brochures, registering participants, or eating and serving refreshments
- Trash receptacles
- If a driving tour, supply good map with description of field practices

After the Event

Survey participants

- You may want to include a short survey in the information packet that participants can fill out and hand in before leaving the event. Survey questions should concentrate on the effectiveness of the event and suggestions for improvement.

When appropriate, thank you notes can also be sent after the event.