

Saskatchewan Farming to Win Course

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Abstract

Farming to Win is a farm business management program designed to improve the financial management expertise and goal-setting skills of the farm business manager. The course consists of eight one day seminars spread over two years, with consultations available upon completion of the program. It was discovered that there was no significant relationship between personal and farm characteristics of participants and the knowledge gained as a result of taking the course. Personal traits used in the study include age, education and farm management experience. Farm characteristics utilized are farm size, land ownership, farm type, recent land purchases, recent land sales, and debt/asset ratio. In addition it was determined that the amount of knowledge gained in the goal and financial aspects of the course was significantly less than the importance rating given to these aspects.

Introduction

Background

The Farming to Win program is a farm business management course designed to increase the level of financial management expertise and goal setting skills of Saskatchewan farmers. The current program was initiated in 1986 and by early 1990, total enrollment had exceeded 2800 (Farming to Win) Major portions of the course have also been taught in the degree and diploma farm business management courses offered by the University of Saskatchewan since 1988.

Farming to Win emphasizes setting up management teams of people (usually farmer and spouse or farmer and son) from each farm to share in creating goals and participating in the management process. Not only does the creation of management teams foster cooperation in setting and attaining goals, but it encourages more interaction between participants in the group. The course consists of eight one day seminars, spread over two winters. In the first year of the program, participants meet four times. Meetings are held approximately once per week, giving teams an adequate amount of time to complete assignments. Topics covered in the first four sessions include identifying and prioritizing goals, completing a net worth statement, performing a cash flow analysis, and developing a management plan. In the second year of the program, participants choose an area of specialization relevant to their particular type of farm operation. Specific choices include performing an enterprise analysis, beef production, farm business planning, and marketing.

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Upon completion of the Farming to Win program, up to six hours of individual on-farm consultation is available to course participants along with further counselling by course instructors and hired farm management consultants. These follow-up services are designed to assist the farm business manager in monitoring the progress of the management plan.

Objectives

The main objective in this study is to determine whether there is a relationship between personal and farm characteristics, and participants' ratings of knowledge gained from participating in Farming to Win. The purpose served by this objective is to eventually determine whether the program facilitates higher levels of learning in some types of participants more than others. A second objective of the study is to determine the extent of the relationship between knowledge gained from major sections of the course and the importance of these sections as rated by participants. Noticeable differences between these variables could provide information on sections of the program which might require restructuring as a result of farmers already possessing significant knowledge in that area.

Methodology

Source of Data

The data used in this study was obtained from a questionnaire which was distributed to course participants in the fall of 1987 by the instructors of Farming to Win. Ninety-four surveys representing an eighty percent return rate were utilized in the study. The questionnaire obtained information regarding personal characteristics of farmers, characteristics of farm operations, evaluation of the course and instructors, and levels of knowledge gained.

Questions pertaining to personal characteristics gathered information on age, education, and farm management experience. The farm characteristics dealt with total acreage, percent land owned, recent land purchases and sales, as well as type of farm enterprise and debt/asset ratio. Farmers also provided their impressions of the objectives of the course, the quality of course instructors, and knowledge gained as a result of participating in the course. The answers to these questions provided feedback that proved useful in evaluating the program.

Results

Knowledge Gained

An important variable in this study is knowledge gained. Most participants enrol in the course to increase their understanding of financial management and goal-setting. The

Table 1. Rating of Knowledge Gained

	Excel/ V Good	Avg/ Fair	Poor
1. Understanding the mgt decision process	64%	36%	0%
2. Setting long term farming goals	66%	32%	2%
3. Setting short term farming goals	65%	33%	2%
4. Development of a management plan	58%	40%	2%
5. Preparation and understanding of a net worth statement	75%	23%	2%
6. Understanding of financial ratio analysis	62%	36%	2%
7. Projection and understanding of projected cash flow statement	76%	24%	0%
8. Preparation and understanding of accrual income statement	61%	35%	4%

eight activities included in Table 1 are the yardsticks by which measurements of knowledge gained are recorded. Participants rated these and other aspects of the course on a scale of one to five, recorded as follows: 1-excellent; 2-very good; 3-average; 4-fair; 5-poor.

Participants' ratings of knowledge gained are an important tool for determining which areas of the course are successful and which may require upgrading or deletion. By comparing personal and farm characteristics to knowledge gained, one can obtain a general idea of any factors which may influence the effectiveness of the course for a target group.

Importance Rating of Course Activities

The second objective of this study, knowledge gained in major sections of the course is also compared to the participants' importance ratings of these sections. The ratings of importance were drawn from the same questions utilized for knowledge gained.

The investigation of possible determinants of knowledge gained as a result of participating in the Farming to Win program yielded somewhat unexpected results. Multiple regression analysis was utilized in an attempt to discover possible relationships. For each of the eight knowledge gained questions, a number of multiple regressions were performed. These regressions employed various combinations of the nine independent variables. Not all possible combinations of the independent variables were analyzed because time was a factor and it eventually became clear that

Table 2. Importance Rating of Course Activities.

	Excel/ V Good	Avg/ Fair/Poor
1. Understanding the mgt decision process	73%	27%
2. Setting long term farming goals	84%	16%
3. Setting short term farming goals	85%	15%
4. Development of a management plan	75%	25%
5. Preparation and understanding of a net worth statement	88%	12%
6. Understanding of financial ratio analyses	75%	25%
7. Projection and understanding of projected cash flow statement	89%	11%
8. Preparation and understanding of accrual income statement	78%	22%

Table 3. Multiple Regression Results of Determinants of Knowledge Gained.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
R2	0.046	0.082	0.054	0.137	0.061	0.074	0.102	0.082

1. Management Decision Process; 2. Long Term Farming Goals; 3. Short Term Farming Goals; 4. Development of a Management Plan; 5. Net Worth Statement; 6. Financial Ratios; 7. Projected Cash Flow Statements; 8. Accrual Income Statement

no combination would yield a significant value for the coefficient of determination (R2) (Table 3).

Importance of Course Activities vs. Knowledge Gained

When responses on importance of the financial and goal oriented aspects of the course were compared with the responses of knowledge gained in these sections, levels of correlation were not found to be significant. Initial simple regressions yielded coefficient of determination values well below 0.01. A t-test was then used to determine whether there was a significant difference in how the participants rated the financial versus the goal oriented aspects of the course. Results showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the way goals and financial statements were rated. An average of sixty-three percent of farmers rated knowledge gained high (excellent or very good) and seventy-nine percent rated importance high in the goal setting sections. In the financial sections, knowledge gained was rated high by sixty-eight percent while eighty-two percent rated importance high. It is useful to determine whether the difference is statistically significant rather than

Table 4. Differences Between Knowledge Gained and Importance Rating of Goal and Financial Aspects of the Course.

Questionnaire Question #	Goals T-test Values	Financial T-test Values
Management Decision Process	3.371	
Long Term Farming Goals	4.655	
Short Term Farming Goals	4.566	
Development of Management Plan		5.1
Net Worth Statement		4.1
Financial Ratios		3.9
Projected Cash Flow Statement		4.1
Accrual Income Statement		4.4

simply making a judgement based on percentages. The reason for this is that performing a t-test in this case provides for a consistent and standardized mathematical interpretation of the data. The t-test results clearly show that there is a statistically significant difference in the way farmers rated the importance of activities and the way they rated the knowledge gained from these activities. Any t-test value above 1.96 indicates that there is a significant difference (Table 4).

Conclusions

Factors such as age, education, and debt/asset ratio had virtually no bearing on the level of knowledge gained from the program. The most probable explanation is that all participants like the course regardless of their personal and farm characteristics. Another possibility is that participants

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A Food Industry Rapidly Turning Global Suggests Internationalizing the Food Industry Curriculum

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Abstract

A survey of the top fifty food companies in the United States would suggest that they are already global in nature or rapidly moving more in that direction. It would seem appropriate, and the food industries surveyed suggest, that the curriculum of university students specializing in the food area should be internationalized.

The question of how internationalized a university food curriculum should be has become a matter of debate on most university campuses. In previous published research (Ockerman, 1988) it was found that undergraduate university food students could locate on a blank world map only 35-40% of the countries recently in the news. When four countries were presented, only 6 to 7% of the student could locate all four correctly. Thirty-three percent of the students did not place Nicaragua in either North, Central, or South America and 12% did not place France in Europe. When shown photographs of landmark buildings that are symbols of specific countries, only 4.5% of the university students knew which country they were from. When international students were members of a class, only 44% of the domestic students at the end of the quarter knew their home countries. Even if the international student's country was known, little knowledge

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who answered the questionnaire may have interpreted their choice of responses differently. Some participants might have rated what they learned as very good while others who learned approximately the same amount of material may have rated knowledge gained only average or fair. Additionally, some respondents may have simply forgotten how much they learned in a specific area of the course.

The results of completing the second objective (comparing importance of activities with knowledge gained) showed that goal sections and financial sections of Farming to Win were rated in a similar manner. Both received a very high importance rating and a moderately high rating of knowledge gained. The results of the statistical operations proved that in general, importance ratings were significantly higher than knowledge gained in both the financial and goal setting areas of the course. Therefore, participants stated that overall, the course covered important aspects of a farm business operation, but may still need improvement in increasing knowledge gained.

References

Farming to Win Management Committee. "Final Project Report." Regina, Saskatchewan: March, 1990.

about the international student's country, such as size, which hemisphere, the capital, religion or agricultural products was transferred. To summarize, this previous survey would strongly suggest that the current interaction of domestic and international students does little to internationalize American students and that American students have minimal knowledge of things outside of the U.S.

The next question becomes, "How important is it for a university food student to possess knowledge of an international nature?" This report is an attempt to answer the question, "How internationalized are the large food companies in the U.S. today?" To assist in determining this, the largest food companies, as listed in the July issue of Prepared Foods (Messenger, 1987), were surveyed. Of the 50 largest food companies, 49 had American addresses and the other had a London address. Therefore, only 49 survey forms were mailed. The survey was kept short and included non-threatening questions in order to encourage responses. It contained 10 yes-no answer questions and one question requesting comment. All yes-no questions were designed to solicit information on the internationalization of the company and covered such areas as ownership, operation of divisions outside of the U.S., export and import practices, desire to hire people with international education, and importance to a company of an international perspective. A request for a copy of the summary of this global food industry survey was included. To rank companies on a provincial to international scale, a percentage of positive answers to international questions was also calculated.

Results and Discussion

Of the 49 surveys sent out, 55% were returned and 45% contained useful information (Table 1). This was considered a very respectable response and shows the food industry's willingness to help guide the education of their future employees.

Table 2 shows the percentage of returned surveys with responses concerning international organization and export-import activities. Fifteen percent, or one in every 6.6 of the U.S. largest food companies, are owned by multi-national conglomerates or by a company whose parent corporate headquarters is located outside the U.S. Three out of every four (77%) of these large food companies operating in the U.S. own or operate divisions outside the U.S. and 86% of the companies export some of their product either directly or via brokers. Importation is a little harder to track particularly if the product passes through several hands and is not labeled as to country of origin, but responses ranged from 35% of the companies importing some of their packaging material to 95% of the companies importing some of their raw material and with both imported production equipment and imported