



Training of Small Farmers and Minority Agroforestry Landowners in Southeastern U.S. – an Evolving Model

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, extension activities are aimed at the transferal of knowledge from professionals to small-farmers and landowners. This process is supported by the Forestry Extension Model (FEM), which posits that professionals know what small-farmers and landowners need to learn, are the most credible source of land management information, and that small-farmers'/landowners' education leads to sustainable land management practices. Although recent studies have supported a shift to peer-to-peer landowner education, there is still a need for initial professional-to-small-farmer/landowner training. Many underserved landowners lack forestry knowledge and practice and are usually unfamiliar with the available federal and state programs and resources. Therefore, they would require training before mentoring fellow small-farmers/landowners and gaining access to available resources. This paper, based in part on the results of a questionnaire survey and small-farmers/landowners training initiatives, outlines elements of an evolving 'landowners training model' – a model where aspects of the FEM have been applied in a setting conducive to peer-to-peer mentoring.

Keywords: agroforestry, minority landowners, small farmers, Southeastern U.S, training, underserved landowners.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a continuous decrease in the land acreages owned by minorities, particularly among the African American population, during the last half-century (Christian, Fraser & Diop, 2013a; Asare-Baah, Zabawa & Findlay, 2018). Several factors have contributed to this land loss trend. These include a lack of knowledge and awareness among underserved minority landowners (Christian et al., 2013a; Christian et al., 2013b; Asare-Baah et al., 2018), challenges associated with the low level of income and profitability realized from the land, lack of information about alternative land management strategies, unfair legal maneuvering and social injustices (Reid, 2003), and the fact that historically, minority landowners have not had access to professional technical assistance and guidance in respect of participation in government landowner assistance programs (Dwivedi, Arundhati & Schelhas, 2016). The general lack of guidance concerning heir property and the absence of estate and forest management plans among members of this socially disadvantaged group (Thomas, Pennick & Gray, 2004) were also contributing factors.

Consequently, the enhancement of the knowledge base, the training and skill development of underserved minority agroforestry landowners and small-farmers are perceived to be among the possible tools for reducing the land loss rate among minorities. This paper outlines the strategies used and the impact of an innovative landowner training model introduced in the Southeastern United States, explicitly targeted at underserved, minority agroforestry landowners and small farmers.

The literature suggests that there are differences between children and adult learning and education. Consequently, the assumptions about adult learners and those about child learners are different (Machynska & Bioko, 2020). Adults are generally perceived to be “more motivated, pragmatic, self-directed, and task-oriented than pre-adults” (Beder & Darkenwald, 1982:142). Adult learners need learning to be meaningful, have prior experiences that are a rich resource, are centered on problems, and are motivated to learn, often because they are at a transition point in their lives or performing a task (Kerka, 2002). Against this background, teachers and facilitators teach adults differently from children and adolescents (Beder & Darkenwald, 1982).

The training and sensitization of underserved minority landowners and small farmers in agricultural and agroforestry practices have been challenging. Many minorities and small farmers are unaware of the resources available to them for the sustainable and profitable management of their lands (Hughes et al., 2005; Measells et al. 2005; Asare-Baah et al., 2018). The majority of these landowners/farmers fall under the USDA’s definition of underserved producers. This category encompasses limited resource farmers or ranchers, beginning farmers or beginning ranchers, and socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers (Christian et al., 2013b).

A study conducted in the Southeastern United States between 2002 and 2003 revealed that 75% of landowners in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee were ‘underserved’ (Measells et al., 2005). In that study, a landowner was deemed ‘underserved’ based on their use of a professional forester’s services, information previously attained relating to forestry, membership in a forestry-related organization, and participation in a forestry-related educational program (Measells et al., 2005). Other studies found that most minority farmers do not consider themselves eligible for many available programs (Odeh & Okpebholo, 2013;

Asare-Baah et al., 2018). Odeh and Okpebholo (2013) also discovered that many farmers, 87% of respondents, did not consider themselves eligible for many federal and state funded assistance programs because of the label ‘socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher’. While this term applies to a member of a group that has been subject to racial or ethnic prejudices because of their identity as members of that group, in the survey, many respondents misidentified the term to be synonymous with a disability, poverty and relying on government assistance.

The apparent misunderstandings and misconceptions among small farmers and minority agroforestry landowners suggest that before landowner/farmer training begins, target demographic groups’ problems and issues must be identified, thus allowing their concerns to be addressed in the proposed training.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ADULT TRAINING

Based on adult learners’ characteristics and learning styles, training workshops structured on the theories of Andragogy, Project-Based Learning, or Transformative Learning Theory/Constructivism should provide the required elements for active adult learning. Each of these theories is learner-centered, considers the differences in learning styles, and addresses the dissimilarity in teaching adults versus teaching children.

The Andragogy theory examines the differences between adult and child learners and focuses on the needs of the adult learner (Ota et al., 2006). The authors identify six critical assumptions concerning adult learning made by this theory:

1. Adults need to know why they are learning;
2. Adults are in control of their lives and desire to be seen as capable and therefore must be allowed to develop their self-directed learning skills;
3. Different life experiences create a greater need for individualized teaching techniques that incorporate those experiences;
4. The ability to apply learned information to their current situation;
5. The real-life application of knowledge learned;
6. Internal and external motivators.

Workshops can address these assumptions and provide the ideal environment for adult learning by including a combination of learning strategies, including lectures, problem-based learning, case studies, educational games, role-playing, and open discussions (Ota et al., 2006; University of Washington, 2012).

Project-based learning theory calls for the in-depth discussion and study of a topic that the learner sees as worthy (Grant, 2002). This gives the learner more control over what they learn, which leads to maintained interest and more responsibility for their learning (Grant, 2002). Control over what is learned also allows adult learners to easily incorporate prior knowledge and experience into the learning process (Helle, Tynjala, & Olkinuora, 2006). Participants’ control can be addressed by allowing the topics explored at workshops to be chosen by workshop attendees. Presenting information that landowners want to learn about or already have some experience in will encourage participants to be more invested in learning and applying new knowledge to their current situation. Project-based learning begins with a question or problem and can go on for an extended period. Project-based learning is learning by doing and concludes with an end product (Helle et al., 2006). This theory states that

individuals learn better when constructing something personally meaningful, can be shared with others, and reflected upon (Grant, 2002).

Transformative Learning Theory/Constructivism is based on experiences and cultural factors that can affect a learner (Cercone, 2008; University of Washington, 2012). This theory also states that individuals gain knowledge through their interaction with their environment (Grant, 2002). So, through study, conversations, and activities, new knowledge is continuously being formed. Transformative learning takes these steps further, requiring the learner to use past experiences to learn more and examine them, investigate why they think the way they think, and update their current thinking (Mezirow, 1997). For new information to be meaningful, learners must apply it to their current state (Mezirow, 1997). It is the active incorporation of details into the old (Cercone, 2008).

RECENT EXPERIENCES IN SOUTHERN USA

Workman, Bannister and Nair (2003) looked at the potential of developing an agroforestry extension and training program in the subtropical Southeast USA. The authors used needs assessment surveys based upon a previous analysis of demographic issues directly related to land use in the region. Surveys were administered to landowners and extension professionals in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. The study results allowed researchers to identify the respondents' perceived benefits and concerns towards agroforestry and the practices that landowners were either involved in or unaware of (Workman et al., 2003). A 2015 study found that Mississippi landowners with lower income levels, less formal education, and smaller parcels of land were less likely to have a written forest management plan. These characteristics indicated that such landowners could be a target audience for increased attention and training from government agencies (Joshi et al., 2015).

Additionally, an understanding of the landowners' knowledge base, their awareness of potential resources, their relationships with local forestry professionals, and their current land management practices are also necessary. A study conducted by the USDA using data from the Forest Service's National Woodland Owner Survey found that the Forest Stewardship Program (FSP), whose goal is to promote the long-term stewardship of privately-owned forestland, is only successful in reaching a fraction of eligible landowners (Butler et al., 2014). That study indicated that landowners utilizing the FSP were predominately those with a prior interest in implementing land management practices. The FSP was unsuccessful in influencing eligible, inactive forest owners to become active managers of their land. One implication of the study was that more concentration should be placed on reaching a greater portion of eligible landowners. This could be accomplished by fostering relationships between forestry professionals and landowners through one-on-one visits and technical support, educational opportunities, and peer guided learning. This conclusion is supported by several studies that identified a gap in communication between forestry professionals and landowners (Measells et al., 2005; Hill, Hishaw & Hargrove, 2013; Odeh & Okpebholo, 2013).

Measells et al. (2005) identified a communication gap between underserved landowners and forestry professionals through a mail survey sent to 6,000 landowners who owned ten or more acres. The study was developed through focus group sessions in each target state and then pre-tested on a small group of landowners before being revised. Survey results indicated that the primary reason why landowners did not participate in available programs was that they were

unaware of the programs and services available to them, even though they had good attitudes towards forestry and forest management (Measells et al., 2005). Similarly, Odeh and Okpebholo (2013) found a lack of knowledge of programs dedicated explicitly to socially disadvantaged groups and the technical assistance programs available in rural communities were reasons for non-participation.

An assessment of the USDA's implementation of the 2008 Farm Bill's Diversity Initiatives and the work of focus groups at a Tuskegee University's Agricultural Workers Conference found that while new programs and set-asides within already established programs were available, the customer service of forestry professionals towards underserved or socially disadvantaged farmers was still inadequate (Hill et al., 2013). In general, African Americans and underserved landowners distrust government officials and felt that they were at a disadvantage because of their race (Christian et al., 2013b; Odeh & Okpebholo, 2013).

AAMU's EVOLVING LANDOWNER TRAINING MODEL

Guided by the theoretical principles which govern adult learning and the findings of earlier relevant studies, Alabama A&M University's (AAMU's) Forestry, Ecology and Wildlife Program (FEWP) embarked on a training program targeted at underserved minority agroforestry landowners and small farmers. The training program aimed to address the recognized need for more structured landowner training among the community of disadvantaged and underserved landowners, small farmers, and ranchers. The two main components of this training program are discussed below.

Landowners Management Training Program

In 2005 AAMU, through FEWP, began a series of Land Management Training (LMT) workshops for disadvantaged and underserved landowners throughout Southeast USA. Workshops were held in Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Georgia (Table 1 and Figure 1). LMT's objectives were to identify minority landowners' needs, deliver training on land management issues, develop peer-guided learning networks, and build social capital across landowners' networks in the Southeast.

The LMT program primarily used workshops to reach landowners. Workshops or classes are avenues frequently used to reach several landowners at a time. They are often conducted at local landowners' request who desire more in-depth training in a specific area. Workshops and classes are short programs and more easily fit into the schedules of working professionals, landowners, and part and full-time farmers. The LMT workshop venues were carefully selected and provided the learning environment and training format conducive to reaching adult audiences. For example, LMT workshops were held in community centers, church facilities, and training centers which were familiar to participants.

Adults need to know why and what they are learning and how it will help them succeed (Voegel & Wagner, 1997). Thus, workshops at which the landowners' dictate the topics covered, instead of topics being arbitrarily selected by workshop developers are often very effective. Hughes and Monaghan (2001) used group meetings and local landowners and agency contacts to identify potential attendees' obstacles to develop their workshops' agendas. LMT's final report and participants' survey informed the second phase of our evolving module.

The results of learning and implementation of practices presented at workshops must be seen as physically and financially attainable and case-specific (Voege & Wagner, 1997). Landowners desire easily followed advice and guidance, which are not full of technical jargon and overwhelming requirements.

Table 1: The Number of Participants at each LMT Workshop by State, County, and Site

State	County (City)	# of participants	# of participants per state
Alabama	Crenshaw (Luverne, AL)	22	30
	Dallas (Selma, AL)	8	
Mississippi	Rankin (Brandon, MS)	17	43
	Winston (Louisville, MS)	26	
North Carolina	Duplin (Kenansville, NC)	40	76
	Pender (Maple Hill, NC)	36	
Tennessee	Hardeman (Brownsville, TN)	7	38
	Hardeman (Stanton, TN)	14	
	Hardeman (Bolivar, TN)	17	
South Carolina	Orangeburg (Santee, SC)	33	61
	Williamsburg (Nesmith, SC)	28	
Georgia	Peach (Fort Valley, GA)	19	35
	Putnam (Eatonton, GA)	16	

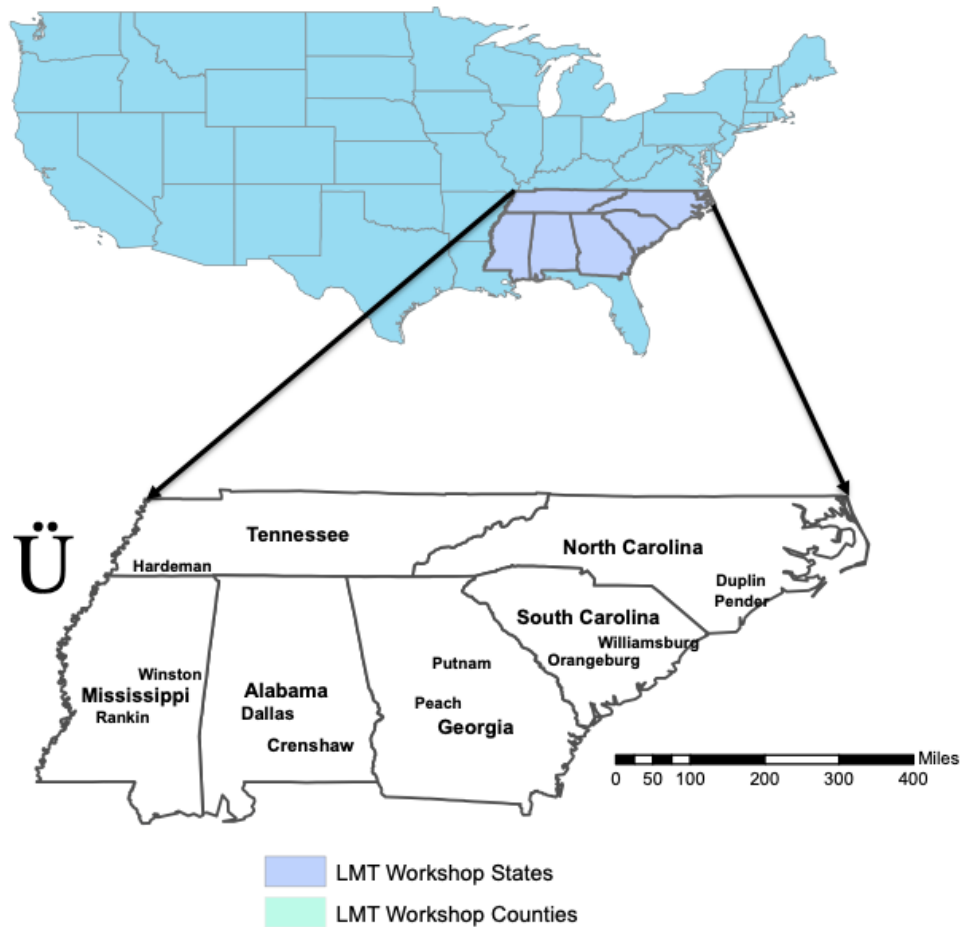


Figure 1: Land Management Training (LMT) Workshop States and Counties within the Southeastern United States

Odeh and Okpebholo (2013) found that overly long application processes and the lack of technical skills to access information were significant factors responsible for minority ranchers and farmers not utilizing the programs available to them. Landowners also see professional agencies as most useful when they suggest, educate, and demonstrate instead of making final decisions concerning their land (Voegel & Wagner, 1997). Other factors contributing in some way to minority landowners, ranchers and farmers not utilizing the programs are the lack of marketing and outreach efforts, inadequate communication between landowners and government agencies, and a lack of trust in such government agencies (Christian et al., 2013b; Odeh & Okpebholo, 2013; Asare-Baah et al., 2018).

Workshops can alleviate many of these concerns and be very effective when agencies and local professionals are active in the development and planning phases and are also present to address any individual participant's interests. Research indicates that when members of different groups such as USDA representatives, local farmers, and academic professionals work together and openly communicate, many positive changes can be made (Hill et al., 2013). Workshops, conducted across the Southeast between 1998 and 2000, utilized forest professionals and government agency personnel, and landowners and community leaders on planning committees to promote and develop practical and successful workshops (Hughes &

Monaghan, 2001). The initial LMT workshops as well as the evolving AAMU model as a whole adopted a similar planning framework.

A program similar to the LMT program established at Mississippi State University used workshops to educate landowners on recreation business development, habitat management practices, and the integration of agricultural and forestry practices (Jones et al., 2008). The Natural Resource Enterprises Program (NREP) targeted landowners, informed agency professionals, and community leaders and provided an environment for landowners and professionals to interact (Jones et al., 2008). Another study in Mississippi used short courses in a workshop setting to address landowner training needs. These short courses incorporated lectures, hands-on exercises, and fieldwork into a full day's experience. Since the first workshop in 2001, 81 workshops serving 1840 participants, have been held (Londo, 2004).

Intensive Southeastern Training Expansion Program.

The Intensive Southeastern Training Expansion Program (InSTEP) continued the work started under the LMT program. The LMT program report identified four critical areas of landowner and small farmer needs which were adopted, in part, by the follow-up InSTEP. These critical areas of training needs were: (i) Heir Property and Estate Planning, (ii) Forest Resource Management, (iii) Cost-share Programs for Landowner Assistance, and (iv) Alternative Land Management Strategies. These issues were deemed critical because of their high level of importance in the small farmer and minority agroforestry landowner community.

InSTEP is a multi-phased project geared towards reaching minority and underserved landowners in the Southeastern United States. The target states for InSTEP Phases I and II included Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia. One of the primary goals of InSTEP was to identify and work with underserved and socially disadvantaged landowners within their communities to make their land management practices more relevant, productive, and self-sustaining.

Phase I implemented in 2010-2011, resulted in the hosting of two workshops in Alabama and two in Mississippi. Participants were selected primarily from previous LMT workshop attendees. Phase II, implemented during 2014-2017, resulted in one workshop in Alabama and two in Georgia. InSTEP offered technical natural resource management training to participants by providing landowners with personalized technical assistance and expertise on developing draft plans (such as estate and forest management plans) and or cost-share program applications; documenting and disseminating lessons learned from past endeavors; and enhancing and fostering relationships between landowners and local, state, and federal agencies. In the process, this project facilitated the development of a database of workshop participants, resource persons, and relevant government agency representatives that can be used in future outreach efforts.

InSTEP was flexible in addressing individual landowners' needs. An important element of the evolving training model is the inclusion of guided individual 'hands-on' activities, resulting in attendees leaving the workshop with 1-3 'deliverables', intending to solicit professional assistance in future to finalize of these 'deliverables'. Deliverables included a draft estate plan, draft forest management plan, draft hunting lease, or draft cost-share application. By committing to act on these deliverables could move a participant from the 'interest stage' to the 'action and implementation stages'.

Besides providing templates for these deliverables, professionals were on hand to provide technical assistance in preparing documents, providing background information, and resource contacts to help landowners with each issue. Cost-share programs, in particular, is a topic that generated a high level of interest. Representatives from agencies that offer these programs provided landowners with valuable information such as currently available programs, submission timelines, practices that qualify for reimbursement, reimbursement processes, and ranking and selection procedures.

Despite the LMT program's successes, follow-up activities such as continued fostering of relationships between forestry professionals, government agencies, and landowners were still necessary. Presenting learning and skill enhancement opportunities for new small farmers and minority agroforestry landowners were also important considerations. InSTEP sought to provide the environment to facilitate such learning opportunities, long-term interactions, and relationships among stakeholders.

RESEARCH COMPONENT – METHODOLOGY

Project States, Data Collection and Analysis

In the process of developing the roadmap for the InSTEP workshop series, it was decided to seek to establish contact with former participants of LMT workshops in Mississippi and Alabama. The primary reasons for this approach were (i) to survey past workshop participants to assess their perspectives about the impact of LMT, and (ii) to gauge the level of interest in similar, future workshops.

Cover letters and questionnaires were mailed to all past LMT participants in Alabama and Mississippi, for whom mailing information was available. If the initial package was returned as 'Unable to Forward (UTF)', an alternative approach, such as through known acquaintances or resource professionals, was made to obtain valid mailing addresses for these past participants. If no valid mailing address was obtained, the landowner was removed from the mailing list. If no contact was made (i.e., no UTF, but no completed survey was received), a follow-up letter was sent approximately three weeks after the initial mailing. Landowners who failed to respond to initial complete package and follow-up letter were sent a second complete package. If no response was received after this third attempt, a fourth and final attempt was made in the form of a follow-up letter.

Once a landowner's completed survey was returned, the landowner was added to the list of potential invitees to InSTEP workshop planned for their area. Workshops were planned and held in two Alabama counties: Crenshaw and Dallas, whereas in Mississippi, Winston and Rankin were the host counties.

Following the pattern set by LMT, InSTEP workshops spanned two days and covered a variety of topics relevant to most minorities and underserved landowners. Topics explored include Estate Planning, Business and Financial Planning, Hunting Permits and Leases, Forest Management Planning, and Cost-share Programs. Resource persons included presenters from AAMU faculty, state and federal agency representatives, extension agents, practicing attorneys, and guest speakers from financial and business planning establishments. Participants completed evaluation forms at the end of each workshop.

Findings and Discussion

Several challenges were encountered when trying to administer surveys. One problem faced was invalid mailing addresses. Out of an initial 73 complete packages mailed to former LMT program participants, 18 were returned as 'Unable to Forward', 24 recipients did not respond, and one LMT participant's death was recorded. It is possible that some of the LMT participants had relocated or that their addresses were initially transposed incorrectly or misread from the registration forms. However, the major challenge faced was simply non-return or no response. The majority of persons in that category, it was assumed, included individuals who received survey packages because packages were not returned.

In an independent Mississippi study, 50 randomly selected non-respondent participants were asked why they did not complete the survey. Reasons advanced included the lack of time, lack of interest in the investigation, and land ownership changes (Joshi et al., 2015). It is assumed that some of these reasons were relevant to our study. In comparison to our four attempts at contacting landowners, Measells et al. (2005) only sent one follow-up letter and questionnaire after three weeks. The response rate of 41.1% (Table 2) for this InSTEP study is acceptable, considering that lower response rates of 30% (Measells et al., 2005) and 28.8% (Joshi et al., 2015) for similar studies were judged acceptable.

Table 2: Surveys Mailed and Received from Alabama and Mississippi LMT Participants.

City, State	Workshop County	Number Mailed	Responses Received
Luverne, Alabama	Crenshaw	22	7
Selma, Alabama	Dallas	8	5
Brandon, Mississippi	Rankin	17	7
Louisville, Mississippi	Winston	26	11
		N= 73 (100%)	N=30 (41.1%)

Overall, we received 18 returned surveys from Mississippi and 12 from Alabama. The county with the most completed returned surveys was Winston County, Mississippi, whereas the county with the lowest number was Dallas County, Alabama. However, the ratio of completed surveys to mailed surveys was the highest in Dallas County, with a response rate of 62.5%. Crenshaw County had the lowest response rate of just over 31%.

A summary of survey results is reflected in Table 3. Most participants who utilized information gained at LMT workshops made use of the land-use maps they produced at the workshop. Among Mississippi participants, cost-share and Environmental Quality Initiatives Program (EQIP) were the preferred USDA assistance programs, whereas there was no clear preference among the Alabama participants. The other available USDA assistance programs in Southeast USA were Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program (WHIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Both Mississippi and Alabama participants were very interested in information on available assistance and land-use practices. Both groups indicated an interest in gaining more information about local resource persons.

The data suggest that Mississippi landowners are more actively engaged in managing their lands than Alabama landowners. Furthermore, Mississippi participants seem to utilize the information they gained from past workshops more often than Alabama participants (Figure

2). Among all participants, several across each workshop site had at least one type of active plan for their property, and many had participated in some type of cost-share program (Figure 3).

Most past participants seemed to have been very satisfied with the LMT workshops (Table 4). The organizing of more workshops and extensive advertising to ensure that landowners were aware of scheduled workshops were highly recommended. Use of past workshop attendees, possibly contacting the initial group of surveyed landowners, using more local advertising, and utilizing local contacts in workshop locations could all be viable options for promoting future workshops.

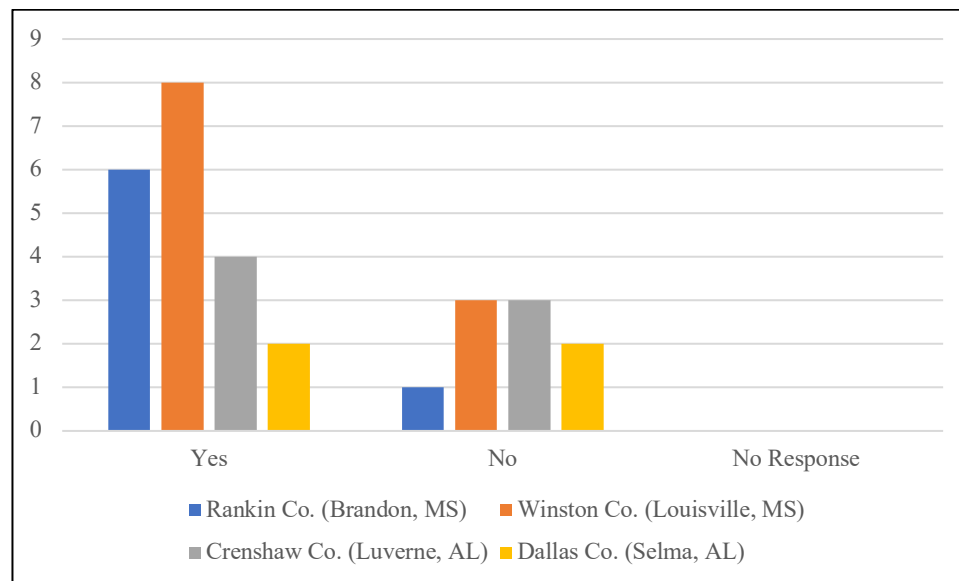


Figure 2: Graph based on responses to survey question: Have you been able to apply some of the information gathered and strategies presented at past LMT workshops in the management of your land?

Table 3: A Sub-set of InSTEP Survey Responses Presented by Questions, States, and Counties.

Questions	Mississippi	Mississippi	Alabama	Alabama
	Rankin Co. (Brandon)	Winston Co. (Louisville)	Crenshaw Co. (Luverne)	Dallas Co. (Selma)
	% Response	% Response	% Response	% Response
Do you undertake land management?				
Yes	85.7	63.6	57.1	50.0
No	14.3	27.3	28.6	50.0
No Response	0.0	9.1	14.3	0.0
Have you applied information from LMT?				
Yes	85.7	72.7	57.1	50.0
No	14.3	27.3	42.9	50.0
Do you currently have any of these plans?				
Estate Plan	20.0	9.5	0.0	20.0
Lease Agreement	0.0	14.3	11.1	10.0
Business Plan	6.7	14.3	0.0	20.0
Forest Mgmt. Plan	20.0	9.5	22.2	10.0
Living Will	20.0	23.8	11.1	10.0
More than one	20.0	9.5	11.1	20.0
No Response	13.3	19.0	44.4	10.0
Have you completed cost-share?				
Yes	57.1	45.5	57.1	50.0
No	42.9	54.5	42.9	50.0
Have you completed any of these programs?				
EQIP	44.4	33.3	16.7	25.0
WHIP	11.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
CSP	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
CRP	11.1	16.7	33.3	25.0
Other	11.1	16.7	33.3	0.0
More Than One	22.2	0.0	16.7	0.0
No Response	0.0	33.3	0.0	50.0
Do you wish to undertake any of these activities				
Estate Planning	17.6	16.1	15.8	21.4
Business Planning	23.5	16.1	26.3	14.3
Forest Mgmt. Plans	17.6	16.1	21.1	14.3
Will	17.6	12.9	0.0	7.1
Cost-share	0.0	12.9	5.3	14.3
No Response	0.0	3.2	5.3	7.1
More than one	23.5	22.6	26.3	21.4

Although participants in both Alabama and Mississippi were generally satisfied with workshops, 59% reported that their needs and access to information as landowners were not being met. Many of the questionnaire respondents showed interest in topics previously

discussed at LMT workshops in addition to some new issues. These results will help focus attention on issues of most significant interest to landowners, which will attract participants to future workshops.

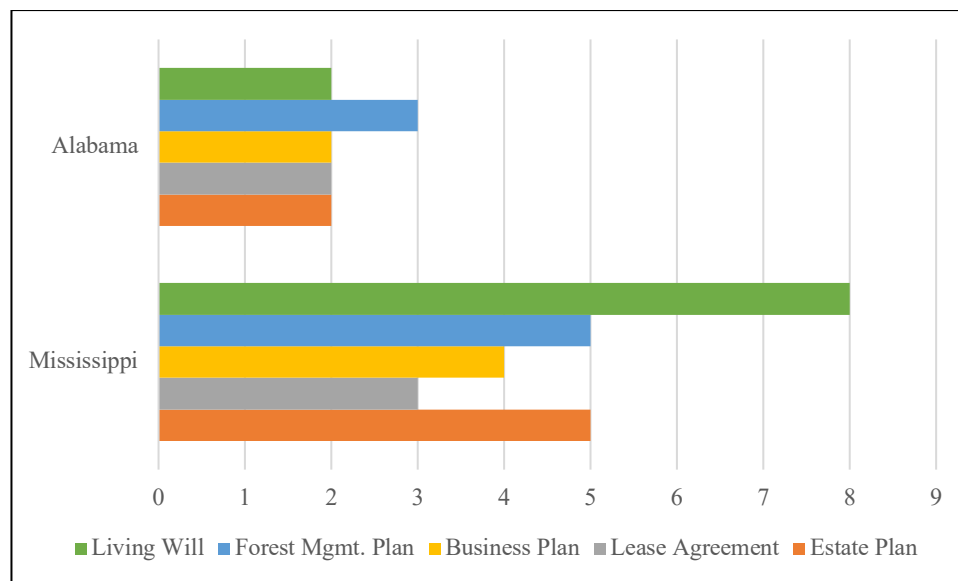


Figure 3: Graph based on responses to survey question: Do you have any plans in respect of your property?

Unlike this study, in situations where it was practical, one-on-one interactions have been explored by conducting surveys as interviews rather than through the mail. A study of minority farmers surveyed 52 participants in Macon and Bullock counties in Alabama (Gan & Kolison, 1999). Using the personal interview approach, they ensured a 100% response rate and made sure that questions were understood and that the researchers were receiving the information they sought.

An exciting approach to soliciting information from small landowners was adopted in a northeast Nebraska watershed study. Local landowners were used to reaching out to their neighbors to enlighten them on the benefits of streamside buffers and other conservation practices (Shelton et al., 2009). Four local landowners were selected as ‘Advisors’ and trained in conservation buffer benefits, practices, installation and maintenance, and design basics. They were also briefed about open government and other program availability, cost-share programs and incentives, aerial photo interpretation, buffer location recommendations in different situations, and sales/promotion techniques. This program resulted in 42 on-site farm visits, which led to contracts for 16 conservation buffer practices and three other conservation practices (Shelton et al., 2009).

Table 4: Sample of past LMT participants' comments and suggestions to open questions.

Positive Feedback	Concerns and Suggestions
The workshop was excellent.	Give out the information when, what time, and location of workshops.
Doing fine.	Have workshops more often.
Keep up the good work.	We need to be updated on what's available.
Your workshops are good; do enjoy them, also the staff. Thank you.	Adapt workshops to the needs of local farmers where the workshop will be held.
It was a great workshop.	Advertise in local media and pass out flyers.
Just keep doing what you are doing.	More information for landowners.
	Have workshops more often with more information.

LMT and InSTEP acknowledged and were guided by the relevant theories' characteristics and assumptions that impact and govern adult learning. Thus, the Andragogy theory, which examines the differences between adult and child learners, dictated that our evolving landowner training model focused on the adult learners' needs. Training and awareness building were accomplished through presentations from forestry professionals, agency representatives, knowledgeable resource persons, and open discussions in a workshop setting. This was complemented by peer-to-peer exchanges, professional-to-participant interactions, and agency representatives-to-participant connections in informal settings. Following the principles of the 'project-based learning theory,' the workshop agendas for both LMT and InSTEP concentrated on topics and issues identified by landowners and prospective participants.

Transformative Learning Theory/Constructivism emphasizes the influence of past experiences and cultural factors on adult learners. Consequently, our evolving model is designed to be sensitive to and benefit from the cultural factors that can affect a learner. Workshop participants were small farmers and underserved minority agroforestry landowners whose past experiences and culture have influenced their current socioeconomic status and way of life. The model explores the opportunities of using farmers' skills and experiences as 'roadmaps' for areas of improvement and breaking down barriers caused by those experiences. Based on participants' feed-back, one of the most enjoyable and relaxing elements of the LMT workshops was an evening of storytelling and folk music presentations by participants, in some instances supported by local 'cultural elders' or artists.

Ensuring that information reaches the target audience is of utmost importance in any awareness-building initiative. InSTEP's phased approach of collecting data from potential attendees and organizing workshops based on information received has been utilized in similar studies and has proven to be very successful (Odeh & Okpebholo, 2013; Hughes & Monaghan, 2001). Other researchers such as Hughes and Monaghan (2001) used questionnaires to identify the perceived obstacles within their target audience and based workshop topics on these issues. Their workshops resulted in 96% of attendees planning to consult a professional forester in the future, and 100% of attendees expressed a willingness to attend future workshops. Our evolving small farmer and landowners training model, as encapsulated in LMT and InSTEP workshop series, has stimulated similarly high levels of interest and support among participants (Table 4).

CONCLUSION

Continued interest among landowners in the topics discussed at previous LMT workshops is still evident within the underserved, small-farmers, minority agroforestry landowner population. Thus, disseminating information through many channels is critical for attracting a large number of attendees. Studies that used different forms of advertising were very successful in attracting high numbers of attendees (Hughes & Monaghan, 2001; Jones et al., 2008). In addition to contact through direct mailings, both studies used local news outlets, radio advertisements, flyers/brochures, and contacts in local extension and agency offices to advertise their workshops. Most of these avenues were utilized by our team. Like other landowners' training initiatives, our evolving landowner training model will continue to adapt to the apparent shift to more peer-to-peer landowner education (Ma, Kittredge & Catanzaro 2011; Kueper et al., 2014; Kittredge, 2004), without necessarily totally abandoning the positive elements of the Forestry Extension Model.

Enhanced skills training and expansion of knowledgebase are critical for assisting and preparing underserved, minority agroforestry landowners, and small farmers to be more productive and be better equipped to retain ownership of their lands and small farms. Furthermore, such training, among other things, introduces landowners and farmers to the merits and feasibilities of "integrating enterprise operations with agriculture and forestry" (Jones et al., 2008:5). As implied earlier, existing guidelines for "federal landowner assistance programs do not match the needs of African American family landowners" (Dwivedi et al., 2016:89). Our evolving training module created awareness among participants of the range of government programs for which socially disadvantaged farmers and landowners may qualify.

Land grant universities, along with community-based organizations, are often expected to fill the gaps left by federal and state agencies in providing service to underserved communities and socially disadvantaged landowners. The evolving small farmer and agroforestry landowner training model, coordinated by Alabama A&M University, an HBCU and land grant institution, seeks to help fill the small farmer and landowner training gap. Through structured workshops that incorporate hands-on training, one-on-one assistance, storytelling, and fostering peer-to-peer collaboration in targeted communities in Southeast USA, the evolving training model leads to an informed and more knowledgeable small farmer and agroforestry landowner community. In the long-term, the growth and expansion of these communities will translate into higher levels of land retention, operation of more sustainable small farms, and improved quality of life for the small farmers, minority landowners, and their families in the region.

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