Introduction

According to the 2012 Kentucky Equine Economic Survey, Kentucky is home to 242,400 horses and estimated the total value of Kentucky’s equine and equine-related assets at $23.4 billion. The survey’s results identified 35,000 equine operations and 1.1 million acres devoted to equine use (KY Equine Survey, 2012). As might be expected, there is a concentration of horses in the Bluegrass area of Central Kentucky. Since 2009, Extension Specialists and County Extension Agents from the University of Kentucky in the Southeast United States have conducted an annual educational field day, the Kentucky Equine Farm & Facilities Expo. This annual event has provided practical, hands-on demonstrations and seminars for 135-250 members of the equine community per event. Participants have been a mix of horse owners in relation to farm size, number of horses and business vs. recreation.

Methods and Materials

The University of Kentucky Extension Equine Forage Working Group, comprised of Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agents and Extension Forage Specialists, have planned the Equine Farm & Facilities Expo which has been hosted by various horse farms in central Kentucky. Partnerships have been established with many equine related businesses, with over 30 companies, participating in trade shows, displaying their products and services at the events. The educational programs at these events have been conducted by Extension Specialist, industry experts and Extension Agents and have included timely topics important to horse owners and equine farm managers.

Results and Discussion

One of the major draws of the Farm & Facility Expo field days has been the host sites, which have included various well-known Thoroughbred, Sport-Horse and Quarter Horse farms, with an increased number of participants observed when the event was held at well-known farms. Some of the Central Kentucky horse farms that have served as hosts for the Expo include; Margaux Farm, LLC in Midway, the Kentucky Equine Humane Center in Nicholasville, Magdalena Farm in Lexington, Old Friends Thoroughbred Retirement Farm in Georgetown, New Vocations at Mereworth Farm in Lexington, Knapper Farm in Harrodsburg and Olive Hill Sporthorses in Lexington. Many of these venues have been selected after their participation in the UK Horse Pasture Evaluation Program which has performed over 170 evaluations on 110 unique farms in 21 Kentucky counties (Lea, Keene and Smith, 2016).

Topics that have been presented at the Equine Farm & Facilities Expos have been selected based on current needs in the equine industry as indicated by calls received in County Extension Offices and by State Forage Extension Specialist. Some topics have included information on pasture management, surfaces for working areas, pasture seeding, weed control, barn design, farm site planning, rotational grazing, on-farm solar energy and others.

Post- event evaluations have been conducted and, of the more than 2,400 persons who attended these events, 84.25% of the respondents have found the information presented useful in the management of their horse operation, 78.5% planned to make at least one change in their horse operation and 90% were very satisfied with the event. Many participants have not been previous consumers of Extension educational programming.

Conclusions

The University of Kentucky’s Equine Farm & Facilities Expo, has continued to meet the training needs of the Central Kentucky equine community with timely topics. It has also significantly strengthened the relationship between the University of Kentucky and the equine industry. This is demonstrated in the large attendance at the annual Equine Farm & Facilities Expo, held at various well-known horse farms in the central Kentucky region.

References
