COMMUNITIES: UI Horizons builds capacity, economic prosperity in rural Idaho towns

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IN THE MAGIC VALLEY, residents of Albion, Dietrich, Eden, Hazelton, Richfield, and Shoshone are learning basic concepts of personal finance through Horizons classes taught by University of Idaho Extension Educator Lyle Hansen. “Personal financial training is an important component of Horizons because of what our communities are facing,” says Hansen.

“We have a lot of people in poverty,” agrees UI Extension's Christi Falen, like Hansen, a Horizons coach. “We’re building our communities’ capacities on every front that we can.”

49 Idaho towns benefit. Horizons, a program that’s been building leadership and prosperity in rural Idaho since 2003, is a partnership between UI Extension and the Northwest Area Foundation. Through Horizons grants, UI Extension has worked with 49 towns, all with populations under 5,000 and poverty rates of at least 10%. Currently participating in Horizons in addition to the six towns benefiting from Hansen’s classes are American Falls, Arco/Moore, Ashton, Challis, Georgetown, Heyburn, Lava Hot Springs, Menan, Ririe, Roberts, and Salmon.

Barbara Petty, UI Extension’s Horizons program director, estimates that 6,000 Idahoans have participated in the current phase three of the program through study circles, leadership training, community visioning rallies, and action teams. “This has mobilized people to get things done in their communities that they’ve wanted to do for a long time,” she says.

Computer classes at Roberts’ public library have residents of this eastern Idaho community doubling up on computers to learn about word processing, spreadsheets, Internet searches, and e-mail, says Horizons coach Danel Hennis. “More people are showing up each week.” In Challis, entrepreneurial high school students are offering movies twice monthly to area residents and donating proceeds to good causes in town and even in Haiti. Challis’ farmers market, a Horizons project that’s formed a co-op, mushroomed from 5 vendors to 65 in 2009—all within an 80-mile radius and offering everything from onions to flowers to crafts. “A lot of them were making or growing these things before but never had an avenue for selling them,” says Turek. Last year’s sales: more than $15,000.

UI’s future work with Idaho Horizons communities will focus on youth college readiness and workforce preparation.

Lessons from a new Priest River garden

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A NEW COMMUNITY GARDEN planned in Priest River will provide a unique opportunity for University of Idaho Bonner County Extension to teach people how to grow the most produce for their money.

The new 6,500-square foot garden offers community members garden spaces. The garden will be created through grants from the University of Idaho’s Building Sustainable Communities Initiative (see www.bioregion-alplanning.uidaho.edu) and the Inland Northwest Community Foundation.

Mike Bauer, Bonner County Extension educator, plans a free 8-week Victory Garden class in cooperation with Priest River's Frank Chapin Senior Center.

“We’ll go over everything from how you start a garden—from preparing the soil to getting the most food production from it,” Bauer said.

The series will be offered weekly and will address gardening issues ranging from plant selection to pest control.

The class will have an emphasis on sustainability and will focus on ways to limit investments, water and fertilizer use, and other costs while maximizing the amount of produce available, Bauer said.
Idaho’s dairy industry. Research focusing on animal-waste-to-energy will fit well with other CAES efforts to find greener, more sustainable energy for Idaho, says CAES associate director Robert W. Smith.

Barley—UI Extension studies help barley growers improve profitability. For example, Crop Management Specialist Juliet Windes’s recent studies found that planting winter malt barley in 4-inch furrows provides enough protection from dry winter winds that—in a year with substantial winterkill—stands increased by 18% and yields nearly doubled.

Potatoes—Jeff Stark, a department head for the CALS’ Department of Plant Soils and Entomological Sciences, says Ranger Russet, Premier Russet, Western Russet, and Alturas are examples of russet cultivars released by, among others, the UI that greatly benefit Idaho’s potato industry, being the 2nd, 4th, 5th, and 8th most widely grown cultivars in Idaho in 2009, respectively (NASS, Crop Production, November, 2009). They account for 21% of Idaho’s 2009 planted potato acreage.

Seed Potatoes—UI Extension potato scientists helped seed potato growers choose a laboratory-based ELISA test over traditional, less effective visual inspection in evaluating their entire grow-out for PVY mosaic disease. UI Extension Seed Potato Specialist Phil Nolte calls the results “very encouraging.” Nolte says the resulting reduced PVY will mean higher quality potatoes for consumers.

Collaborators include KAIO Corp., the Idaho Barley Commission, United Dairymen of Idaho, Brigham Young University, Idaho Potato Commission, Idaho Wheat Commission, the Western Center for Risk Management Education, and USDA-ARS.