

IMPACT OF THE POTATO CONFERENCE SPANISH SECTION

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PURPOSE OF SPANISH SECTION

As farm size increases farm managers are relying more on hired hands to make day-to-day decisions. Many hired hands are seasonal migrant workers that have difficulty understanding technical instructions in English. Agriculture, as in most other fields, is becoming more technical and a thorough understanding of pest, soil, and irrigation management is increasingly important to farm laborers. There is a real need for technical training in Spanish so that hired hands can make informed decisions based on understanding the concepts behind the management practices.

Topics chosen for each year are selected on the basis of current issues facing migrant workers as well as basic concepts such as need for proper irrigation, insect and disease recognition, proper application of pesticides, basic soil concepts, etc.

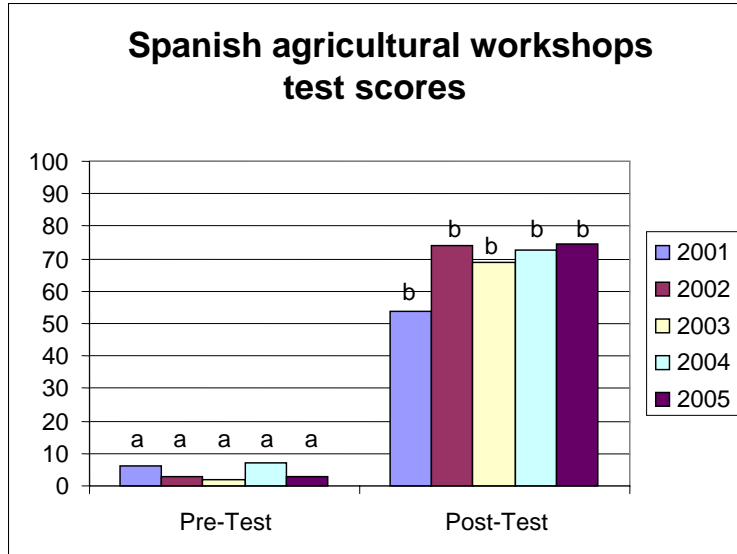
CLASS CONTENT FOR 2006

For 2006 it was decided to determine the amount of learning that had taken place in previous Spanish sessions. A jeopardy game was constructed around questions covering integrated pest management, insects, potato pathology, weeds, and scouting for problems. The class was divided up into teams and small prizes were offered to those who won.

The instructors were very pleased with the abilities of those present to answer the various questions in each of the categories. It was encouraging to see that real learning had taken place and those present were able to recall things discussed in previous classes held at potato conference, as well as the follow-up on-farm workshops held each year during the summer months.

A course was also taught concerning the maintenance and repair of irrigation equipment. Costs of not repairing leaks in pipe, proper cleaning of nozzles, pump performance and resulting problems to the crop were discussed at length.

For the past five years we have evaluated the course by giving the students pre- and post-tests. Each year the students have demonstrated a statistically significant increase in knowledge following this educational program. We are getting better at teaching Spanish-speaking students, and each year we are more successful in bridging the language barrier. New subject matter is incorporated each year. The following graph shows the learning that has taken place over the course of the program.



The pre- and post-tests are designed to determine the level of understanding of the subject matter. In most years the tests are designed to be given at the beginning of the class and then the same test administered at the end of the sessions. This effectively tracks the knowledge gained in each of the areas taught. Many of the students lack formal learning in most of the subject areas covered at the conference as evidenced by the low pre-test scores. The post-test scores show a dramatic increase in knowledge gained. We interpret this increase in knowledge to mean there is a desire on the part of the participants to learn, and also that we are effective in teaching the subject matter. Typical questions refer to what things are needed for disease to occur, soil type and water holding capacity, disease and insect (both beneficial and pest) recognition, weed identification, irrigation equipment repair, pesticide application, drift, safety, sprayer calibration, etc.

There were 60 attendees at this year's Spanish session. There were 41 participants at the first Spanish session held in 2000. This may be indicative of the value realized from attending the program.

This programming has received state and national recognition. It is the hope of the organizers of the Spanish sessions that more growers will take advantage of the opportunity to train those in their employ.