Advanced Grain Marketing

Proposal for development and administration of an on-line agricultural economics learning experience

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Problem:

Educational opportunities targeted at agricultural professionals, farmers and agribusiness clients, are difficult to target with regards to specific skill set enhancement.

Ag marketing courses are among the most difficult because of two major constraints. The first constraint is the difficulty of clients to accurately self-select appropriate courses based on their experience and understanding. The second constraint is the inability to put together a learning group of sufficient size that will carry through a multiple module course in a traditional meeting format.

Correspondence courses like the Hog Marketing Study Course available via the Iowa Pork Industry Center web site are one way of addressing the self-selection constraint. However, a persistent shortcoming of correspondence courses whether administered by mail or on-line is the completion rate and difficulty in providing support to students.

Advanced Grain Marketing (AGM) will address the identified constraints with peer reviewed instructional materials in an intensively supported learning environment. AGM will provide a consistently rich learning experience allowing for multiple learning styles.

Objectives:

• To implement on-line self-assessment tool that will help potential students to self-select for the course to avoid frustration and increase satisfaction
• To encourage active learner participation in the learning environment in each module
• To utilize a team teaching system based on existing areas of specialization
• To utilize both the new on-line and time proven face-to-face technologies
• To increase critical and creative thinking skills of learners and teachers

Method:

AGM will have a core of ten on-line modules and a face to face marketing simulation/debriefing. The experience will be advertised from late November through mid-January. The experience will be operational for pilot testing in early to mid-October. Learners will have access to the modules from mid-January to early April with a mid-April marketing simulation/debriefing.
WebCT will be utilized to manage the learning experience. Modules will focus on a single concept and provide multi-media resources to help students learn and apply the concept. A typical lesson will include text explaining the concept using a format successfully applied in the Webmonkey (http://hotwired.lycos.com/webmonkey/) how-to library. The text will include links to key data sites, real-time examples, short audio explanations by the instructors, graphical explanations, quizzes with instant feedback, and links to a glossary of technical terms.

Questions, concerns, and feedback will be handled primarily via email. Instructors with primary and secondary responsibility for a given module will provide the on-line communication. Each component will utilize at least one threaded discussion allowing for questions to be asked and answered in a way that is available to the whole group. Chat rooms will be used on a regular basis to provide “office hours”.

Progress and completion will be monitored via WebCT’s reporting functions. Each individual student will have an ID and password. This will allow the administrator to provide progress reports to the instructors with primary and secondary responsibility for each module. They can then provide encouragement and support to the students via email or phone calls. This is considered to be the primary advantage of using this teaching method. The success and expense related to encouraging process and completion will be well documented.

Modules:
• When Should I Market My Grain?
• Financial Concepts
• Marketing Tools I and II
• Probability Concepts
• Crop Insurance Alternatives
• Other Risk Management Topics
• Weather and Agronomic considerations
• Using outlook information
• Marketing Plan Development

Resources:
The primary resource that will be consumed by this project is the time of the team members in designing, implementing, and facilitating the learning process.

Material developed by Bob Wisner and Dean Baldwin for the Managing Risks and Profits (MRP) course delivered via the Data Transmission Network (DTN) will be a starting point in constructing the modules. MRP is one of many content sources that will be utilized. Team members will be assigned to adapting/constructing modules in their areas of interest and expertise. The full team will then review each module. Tests, quizzes, and discussion threads will be constructed and reviewed by the teaching teams.

Elaine Edwards will provide editorial assistance.
Relevant publications will be linked where appropriate. Marketing and risk management publications available through ISUE and other sources will be utilized in their present form except where updating is critical. Many of these publications are already available in pdf format. Those that are not can be scanned and converted into pdf format by an associate under Elaine’s supervision.

Audio will be captured by Doug Cooper or Tim Eggers and converted to RealAudio format. Depending on time sensitivity information will only be available on the web or on the enrollment CD-ROM.

Doug Cooper will publicize the course on WOI Midday. Elaine Edwards will develop news releases with the assistance of teaching team members to help publicize the course.

Tim Eggers, perhaps with the help of a student or associate, will facilitate the adaptation of material developed by the teaching teams to WebCT. Tim Eggers will also administer WebCT to provide module teaching team members with the information necessary to maintain a feedback loop with the students. This will keep the learning experience dynamic.

Outcome:
Participants will have:
• Enhanced marketing and risk management skills
• Additional confidence in their marketing and risk management decisions
• A useable marketing plan that they constructed with expert assistance

The teaching team will have:
• Enhanced on-line teaching/learning skills
• Additional confidence in the ability to use emerging teaching/learning technologies
• Rapid feedback regarding the use of the materials in a lesson
• Regularly scheduled discussion sessions on narrow topics

Replication:
It is our plan to make this course available to any group that can provide its own local support. For example, if a community college instructor or high school ag teacher wished to utilize the course, they could do so as long as they had the expertise to facilitate the experience. We could help to build that expertise in a train the trainer setting.

The method used to construct the course will be well documented and transparent. This will allow for development of other extension on-line learning experiences using our experience as a guideline. We are building on the experience of Steve Drazkowski and Anita Dincesen, Extension Educators from the University of Minnesota Extension Service. Steve and Anita converted an existing ruminant nutrition correspondence course to a WebCT course.