A Helpful Spark: Managing Cybersecurity on the Farm

INTRODUCTION
The digitization of agriculture and the exponential rise in the number of internet connected devices on Iowa’s farms and rural businesses are raising concerns. Recent cyberattacks on Iowa’s agribusinesses and farmers sparked urgency in securing cyber ecosystems. This spark led the farm management team to develop a project to increase awareness of cybersecurity and help farm managers take steps to minimize risks.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES
- Partnered with Center for Cybersecurity Innovation and Outreach.
- Completed cybersecurity training to improve farm management team skills.
- Created Ag Decision Maker articles, videos, and presentations.
- Introduced cybersecurity at Farmland Leasing Meetings.
- Introduced cybersecurity at regional Managing Farm Margins meetings in partnership with Farm Bureau.
- Included cybersecurity at Women in Ag Leadership Conference.
- Included cybersecurity module in Annie’s Project courses.
- Planned one-day conference on cybersecurity in Ames for September 2023.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
Participants will increase cybersecurity literacy and awareness.
Participants will gain best practices to proactively manage cyber ecosystems.
Participants will learn practical steps to prepare for cybersecurity threats.

PARTICIPANT QUOTES
“I used to leave my settings on my social media pretty wide open because I thought it would help my business. Now I keep them more secure and only share privately to my friends.”
--Darcy

“No matter how good you think you are they are always learning ways to get your information, so you have to make yourself a hard target.”
--Mike

“I thought I was being nice when I shared a post about a lost puppy. I had no idea I was leaving myself and my friends open for cyber attacks! Alexis helped me change my security settings and I feel much safer now.”
--Carolyn

AWARENESS MEASURED
- 50% intend to make changes to home or business to protect from cybersecurity attacks.
- 94% feel it is important to have unique passwords on sensitive accounts.
- 96% feel it is important to know the source of an email before clicking on links or opening attachments.

LESSONS LEARNED
“How to create a secure password.”
“How to interact with banks, co-ops, and businesses online safely.”
“How to recognize phishing scams.”
“To not stick my head in the sand, but to participate in online activities without being completely afraid.”
“To have back-up systems and other safety measures that makes me a hard target.”
“To have a plan for when, not if, my farm experiences a cyber event.”

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE VALUE
Extension has an important role in supporting farmers and giving them the spark and encouragement they need to learn new cybersecurity skills.

With increased awareness, economic losses due to lost or mismanaged decision-making data, identity theft, malware attacks, production delays, and physical system failures, can be minimized.

All Iowans can benefit from a more secure food supply and stronger economy.

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