

A Certified Nursery Professional Training Program for Idaho
Final Report
NAC/ISDA 2011-1

Michael E. Bauer, Horticulture Educator
University of Idaho Extension
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Executive Summary

The Certified Nursery Professional program was started by INLA in 1983, with completion of a study manual. The certification process consists of a written exam, which is supported by the manual and a plant identification exam, supported by powerpoint slides consisting of pictures of the 423 plants that are distributed by INLA on a CD.

The objective of this program was to provide participants with a course to theoretically increase their success rate in taking the two exams required by INLA for certification as certified Nursery Professionals. Test score and passing rate data collected from the participants was compared to statewide passing rates of CNP candidates that took the exams after self study. The information illustrates the course significantly improves passing rates of CNP candidates.

Background

Currently there are 145 Certified Nursery Professionals (CNP) in Idaho, and there are relatively few in north Idaho. Garden Centers and other green industry employers are looking for ways to train employees for better customer service. In the current employment environment, job seekers are looking for ways to increase their value to potential employers.

In a program involving education for retail stores that sell pesticides, one study found that the audience was very receptive to educational programs. There also tends to be a high turnover rate in the green industry, making regular, ongoing educational programs very important to success (Czapar, et. al., 2004). The retail nursery is the information center on which homeowners have come to rely for dependable horticulture expertise (Iowa Certified Nursery Professional program website, 2010).

Methods

Learner outcomes will be measured by comparing participant knowledge before and after the course. Participants also had the opportunity to offer input on course strong points and opportunities for improvement. The course consisted of eight three hour sessions over an eight week period. Presenters were UI faculty and green industry professionals. Course materials and travel were covered by participants and grant funds. Exam fees were furnished by the participants.

This grant allowed for testing of educational methods for the purpose of improving course materials for application throughout Idaho. Knowledge levels and exam success rates were measured. The information from the evaluations will help other sites in Idaho develop courses for the nursery industry. By the end of the year, analysis will be made to determine if passing rates were better for the course versus self-study for the INLA CNP exam.

Until this project, preparation for the exam was through self-study. The hypothesis of this project is that candidates will be more successful if they engage in a study course. University of Idaho Extension worked closely with the Idaho Nursery and Landscape Association to offer an eight-week course using the INLA’s Certified Nursery Professional (CNP) materials to pass the written and plant identification exams. The Course consisted of eight night sessions that went over the slides and the chapter, encouraging discussion and understanding of the material. A written test was given at the beginning of the course and another at the end of the course. Using the plant identification slides, a test was administered at the beginning of the course. Due to time constraints, a plant identification test was not given at the end of the course. Instead, a hands on practice session occurred on July 7. Participants indicated this was very helpful in helping them prepare for the exam.

Results

This course trained 16 participants. Two of the participants did not take the exam because they did not have the required one year of experience in the industry. Of the 11 who took the written CNP exam, 9 passed. Of the 11 candidates who took the plant identification exam, 8 passed. Indications from INLA are that this passing rate is much higher than the statewide self-study passing rate.

Test score and passing rate data collected from the participants was compared to statewide passing rates of CNP candidates that took the exams after self study. This information illustrates the course significantly improves passing rates of CNP candidates.

CNP Training Participant Test Scores – Written Exam North Idaho and Statewide

	Written Exam	Plant ID Exam
Pre test average	61% (n=15)	35% (n=15)
Post test average	77% (n=15)	77% (n=11)*
Official exam average	80% (n=11)	77% (n=11)
Official exam passing rate	82% (n=11)	73% (n=11)

*Official exam average score was used since a post-test was not administered.

CNP Training Participant Test Scores – Plant ID Exam North Idaho and Statewide

	North Idaho		Statewide (2001-3, 2005-9, 2011)	
Exam Passing Rate	11/15	73% (n=11)	29/65	45%

Collaborators

Mike Bauer, UI Extension Educator, Bonner County (Principal Investigator)

Mike is Horticulture Educator located in Bonner County (Sandpoint), Idaho. He oversees educational programs in commercial horticulture, small farms and the Bonner County Master Gardener Program. He has worked as an Extension Horticulture Agent for Oregon State University and Colorado State University, specializing in short-season gardening, water conservation and turf management. He received his BS in Agriculture and Environmental Studies from Western Michigan University in 1983, spent time training agriculture teachers in Togo, W. Africa and received his MS in Agricultural Education from the University of Idaho in 1989.

Jennifer Jensen, UI Extension Educator, Boundary County

Assistant Professor-Extension Educator in Boundary County, Idaho. Her responsibilities include providing overall leadership and organization for educational outreach programs for Boundary County in commercial and consumer horticulture, commercial agriculture and community development. Duties include planning, developing, implementing and evaluating educational programs.

Dr. Edward R. Bechinski, UI Professor of Entomology

Coordinates statewide educational outreach for integrated pest management in agricultural field crops and landscape ornamentals; leads UI Pesticide Education & Safety program; extension entomology specialist for northern Idaho

Cooperators

Idaho Nursery and Landscape Association
 Bonner County government
 University of Idaho Department of Plant, Soil and Entomological Sciences (PSES)
 UI Extension

Appendix – Updated Expenditures

	Expense	Income
Participant fees		1400.00
INLA/NAC grant		700.00
14 CNP training manuals at \$50 each	700.00	
Plant ID CDs	422.64	
Other class materials	546.80	
Speaker travel	268.85	
Total	1938.29	2100.00