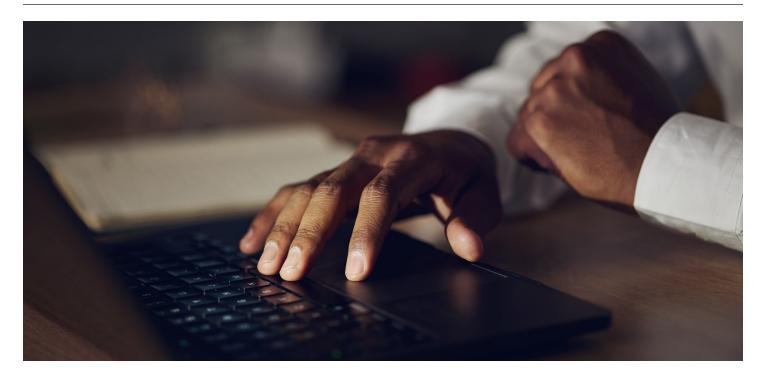
Writing Effective **Success Stories**

Cooperative Extension Service

Omolola A. Adedokun, Community and Leadership Development



A success story is a tool for communicating program impacts with stakeholders including local, state, and federal legislators; county leaders; advisory groups; university administrators; program partners; and funding agencies. An effective success story is brief and concise—it should be about three-quarters of a page and no more than a page. An important key to writing a compelling success story is to answer four core questions: What was the issue, need, or opportunity that the Extension program or outreach addressed? What did Extension do (and who did Extension partner with) to address the issue or opportunity? Who participated or benefitted from Extension's efforts to address the issue or opportunity? What changes occurred in individuals, groups, families, businesses, or in the community because of Extension's efforts?

The purpose of this publication is to provide Extension agents and specialists with guidelines for writing effective success stories.

This publication uses three hypothetical scenarios to illustrate how to write each component of an effective success story.

Illustrative Scenarios

Table 1 presents an overview of three illustrative program scenarios. Scenarios 1 and 2 (an adult financial education program and a youth substance use prevention program, respectively), provide examples of formal Extension programs that involve the implementation of a curriculum, typical of most Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) and 4-H Youth Development programs. Scenario 3, an integrated pest and weed management program, provides an example of brief Extension contacts and outreach, typical of the work of most Agricultural and Natural Resource (ANR) Extension agents and specialists.

Table 1. Three Illustrative Scenarios. 1

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Scenario 1: Mind Your Money Program	Scenario 2: Rowland County Stay Up Program	Scenario 3: Marlon County Soybean Outreach
A recent community survey indicated the need for adult financial education in Gregson County. The county FCS Extension agent addressed this need by implementing Mind Your Money, a curriculum that teaches limited-resource adults the skills and behaviors needed to make informed financial decisions.	The people of Rowland have prioritized substance-use awareness and prevention for at-risk school students as an immediate need. Rowland County Extension collaborated with three local middle schools to deliver Stay Up, an after-school substance-use prevention program for middle school students.	Marlon County is home to about 400 mid- to small-scale soybean farms. The county ANR Extension agent collaborates with state specialists to provide research-based information to help the farmers reduce diseases and pests and increase yield and profitability.

¹ The programs and data described in these scenarios are hypothetical.

How to Write Each Component of an Effective Success Story

An effective success story must include four components: An issue statement, description of the program or education response (and partners), program reach and statement(s) of outcomes or impact. Following are guidelines for writing each component, along with examples based on the three illustrative scenarios (see Appendix A for a success story worksheet).

Issue: Briefly describe the situation, need, or opportunity in the community that your program or outreach addressed. If available, use local data or data from a needs assessment to describe the issue and why it is a priority. Table 2 provides issue statements for the three illustrative scenarios.

Table 2. Issue Statements for Illustrative Scenarios.¹

Scenario 1:	Scenario 2:	Scenario 3:
Mind Your Money Program	Rowland County Stay Up Program	Marlon County Soybean Outreach
Most families and adults in Gregson County have little to no personal savings available to endure financial emergencies. A recent community survey reported that two in three families in Gregson lack any type of emergency savings and 63% of adults live paycheck to paycheck. The situation is very dire for limited resource families in the county, with 80% reporting that they live paycheck to paycheck and are overburdened with debt.	Rowland County exhibits the fourth-highest drug overdose death rate in the state. In a 2024 survey of local middle school students, roughly 45% reported they have been tempted, at least once in the school year, to smoke, drink, or use an illicit substance. Moreover, 40% reported knowing at least one student in their school who skips classes regularly because of substance use. In addition, 57% reported lack of motivation to complete schoolwork.	Marlon County boasts about 400 small- to mid-scale soybean farms generating approximately \$22 million per year (Marlon Department of Agriculture, 2022). The Marlon County Soybean Board conducted a needs assessment that revealed the need for research-based information on integrated pest and weed management practices to help farmers reduce diseases and pests and increase yield and profitability.

¹ The programs and data described in these scenarios are hypothetical.

Program/Outreach Response and Partners: Briefly describe what you [UK Extension] and partners did to address the issue described in the previous section (see Table 3). It is important to name all partners that contributed to the development or implementation of the program or outreach and provide brief descriptions of their roles in the program. Do not mention or describe volunteers here—you will provide information about volunteers in a later section.

Table 3. Program/Outreach Response and Partners for Illustrative Scenarios.¹

Scenario 1:	Scenario 2:	Scenario 3:
Mind Your Money Program	Rowland County Stay Up Program	Marlon County Soybean Outreach
Gregson County FCS Extension agent, with participant recruitment support from the Gregson County Family Financial Wellness Coalition, delivered Mind Your Money (MYM), an evidence-based curriculum, to a group of Head Start parents. MYM teaches limited-resource adults the skills needed to make informed financial decisions and adopt financial behaviors that can have positive effects on their financial well-being. Program activities occurred over 16 weeks and included weekly MYM workshop sessions, two field trips to a local bank, and hands-on budgeting activities.	Rowland County Extension collaborated with three local middle schools to deliver Stay Up, an after-school positive youth development program for middle school students. The local Rotary Club provided a \$2,000 grant to support program implementation. Program components included group activities that teach substance use prevention and refusal skills, sports and leisure education, and life skills (e.g., decision making, goal sequencing, problem solving, and conflict resolution).	Marlon County ANR agent invited Dr. J. Doe, an Extension Specialist, to deliver a 2-hour in-person training session on best strategies for preventing soybean weed and pest infestation. The training was followed by a field day where Dr. Doe demonstrated best practices in sustainable weed and pest management to the farmers. The ANR agent and specialist also provided the farmers with research-based information and resources to support effective, environmentally responsible management of soybean pests.

¹ The programs and data described in these scenarios are hypothetical.

Target Audience and Reach: Provide the number of participants (and volunteers) in the program/outreach (see Table 4). If available, include gender, age, race, and other demographic descriptions of the participants (and volunteers).

Table 4. Target Audience and Reach of the Illustrative Scenarios.¹

Scenario 1:	Scenario 2:	Scenario 3:
Mind Your Money Program	Rowland County Stay Up Program	Marlon County Soybean Outreach
One hundred (100) Head Start parents (male = 55 and female = 45) completed the program. The program also trained 25 volunteers who supported the FCS agent and specialists in program delivery.	One hundred and twenty-five (135) students across three local middle schools (45 students per school) participated in Stay Up.	Eighty-seven (87) soybean farmers, including twenty (20) from the Amish community, participated in the Marlon County Soybean program.

¹ The programs and data described in these scenarios are hypothetical.

Statement(s) of Outcomes: Describe the documented change(s) that occurred in individuals, groups, families, businesses, or in the community because of this program or outreach (see Table 5). The statement of outcomes <u>must include at least one</u> of the three tiers of outcomes:

- *Short-term Outcomes*: Describe the immediate knowledge, awareness, attitudes, opinions, skills and/or aspirations that participants gained or improved because of their contact with the program or outreach.
- *Medium-term Outcomes*: Describe the new or improved practices, behaviors, or choices that occurred in participants or communities because of the knowledge or awareness they gained from your program or outreach. Note that medium-term outcomes are behavior change outcomes that are measured in follow-up evaluations because they require time to mature.
- Long-term Outcomes: Describe the economic, social, physical, or environmental situations that changed because individuals or communities adopted new (or improved existing) actions, practices, and behaviors. Note that long-term outcomes are changes or improvements in situations and are measured in follow-up evaluations because they require time to mature.

See the companion publication CLD 4-3: Identifying Extension Program Outcomes for detailed descriptions and guidelines for identifying each of the three tiers of program outcomes.

Table 5. Statements of Outcomes for the Scenarios.1

Outcomes	Scenario 1: Mind Your Money Program	Scenario 2: Rowland County Stay Up Program	Scenario 3: Marlon County Soybean Outreach
Short-Term Outcomes	Program evaluation results showed gains in participants' knowledge of personal finance concepts. Specifically, 92% of participants increased their knowledge of how to write a monthly budget and 95% improved in their understanding of credit card interest rates and fees.	Results indicated that 95% of participants increased their knowledge of the harmful effects of substance use and 93% reported an increase in their knowledge of academic goal setting. Moreover, 90% of the participants reported increased awareness of the benefits of physical and leisure activities.	Program evaluation results indicate that the program was a worthwhile learning experience for the farmers. All the participating farmers (100%) reported that the training increased their awareness of pest resistant varieties, 93% increased their knowledge of soybean pest identification, and 95% gained enhanced knowledge of safe pesticides handling practices.
Medium-Term Outcomes	A six-month follow-up survey indicated that 96% of 88 respondents have consistently developed monthly spending plans since participating in the program. About 93% have implemented their monthly spending plans; 90% reported that they now pay their bills on time. One respondent to the follow-up survey commented that the program was "the first time they had the opportunity to learn how to manage their money" and that they plan "to teach my children these skills I never had the opportunity to learn when I was their age."	A three-month follow-up evaluation was conducted to understand academic and substance use behavior change. One hundred and fifteen (115) of the participants responded to the follow-up survey. About 80% reported increased substance use refusal skills; 89% reported improved study habits (e.g., completing and submitting school assignments by deadlines) and 91% reported increased participation in physical activity and family leisure activities.	During the growing season, Marlon County ANR agents contacted 55 of the 87 participating farmers via phone calls, farm visits, and email to check the extent to which they implemented the IPM strategies discussed at the training. The results showed that 80% (44 out of 55) integrated biological control into their soybean weed management practices and 95% (52 out of 55) grew pest resistant varieties. Among the respondents, chemical use decreased by an average of 33%.
Long-Term Outcomes	A one-year follow-up with program participants showed positive changes in their financial situations. Approximately 75% of respondents reported that they have saved at least \$1,000 for financial emergencies and 80% reported improvements in their credit scores.	Year-end analyses of attendance and assessment records conducted by school partners indicated positive program impacts. At the end of the school year, school attendance records indicated decreased truancy and unexcused absence among Stay Up participants. Also, School assessment records showed that the average GPA of Stay Up program participants was about 20% higher than the previous year, before their participation in program. Moreover, comparative analyses conducted by school partners found that Stay Up participants' GPA was about 0.65 points (about 12% difference) higher than the GPA of a matched sample of non-participants.	Based on existing research, the 44 farmers who adopted the weed control practices taught at the training are expected to have increased yield and profit. In the absence of any weed management tactics, soybean yield would be reduced because of weed interference by about 52% (Soltani et al, 2017) ² . In Kentucky, this translates to soybean loss prevention of about 29 bushel/acre (given an average yield of 56 bushels/acre in KY). With the price of soybean at \$16/bushel and average farm size of 120 acres, these weed management efforts are estimated to result in an average savings of \$55,680 per farmer and total savings of \$2,449,920 for the 44 farmers.

¹ The programs and data described in these scenarios are hypothetical.

² Soltani, N., Dille, J. A., Burke, I. C., Everman, W. J., VanGessel, M. J., Davis, V. M., & Sikkema, P. H. (2017). Perspectives on potential soybean yield losses from weeds in North America. Weed Technology, 31(1), 148-154.

Putting the Components Together

Boxes 1, 2, and 3 present complete success stories for Scenarios 1, 2, and 3, respectively. While these examples include all three tiers of outcomes (short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes), your success stories do not have to include all three but must include at least one of the three tiers of outcomes. Your success stories can also report a combination of two of the three tiers of outcomes. In general, the tiers of outcome to report depend on program implementation and evaluation progress. For example, medium- and long-term outcomes take time to mature and report, hence you may not be able to gather data or report these outcomes until a few months after implementation (Appendix B presents the success stories for the scenarios with only one or two tiers of outcomes).

BOX 1: Success Story for Scenario 1

Mind Your Money Program Improves Financial Wellbeing

Most families and adults in Gregson County have little to no personal savings available to endure financial emergencies. A recent community survey reported that two in three families in Gregson lack any type of emergency savings and 63% of adults live paycheck to paycheck. The situation is very dire for limited resource families in the county, with 80% reporting that they live paycheck to paycheck and are overburdened with debt.

To address this need, Gregson County FCS Extension agent, with participant recruitment support from the Gregson County Family Financial Wellness Coalition, delivered Mind Your Money (MYM), an evidence-based curriculum, to a group of Head Start parents. MYM teaches limited-resource adults the skills needed to make informed financial decisions and adopt financial behaviors that can have positive effects on their financial well-being. Program activities occurred over 16 weeks and included weekly MYM workshop sessions, two field trips to a local bank, and hands-on budgeting activities. One hundred (100) Head Start parents (male = 55 and female = 45) completed the program. The program also trained 25 volunteers who supported the FCS agent and specialists in program delivery.

Program evaluation results showed gains in participants' knowledge of personal finance concepts. Specifically, 92% of participants increased their knowledge of how to write a monthly budget and 95% improved in their understanding of credit card interest rates and fees. A 6-month follow-up survey indicated that 96% of 88 respondents have consistently developed monthly spending plans since participating in the program. About 93% have implemented their monthly spending plans; 90% reported that they now pay their bills on time. One respondent to the follow-up survey commented that the program was "the first time they had the opportunity to learn how to manage their money" and that they plan "to teach my children these skills I never had the opportunity to learn when I was their age."

A one-year follow-up with program participants showed positive changes in their financial situations. Approximately 75% of respondents reported that they have saved at least \$1000 for financial emergencies and 80% reported improvements in their credit scores.

BOX 2: Success Story for Scenario 2

Promoting Positive Youth Development in Rowland County

Rowland County exhibits the fourth-highest drug overdose death rate in the state. In a 2024 survey of local middle school students, roughly 45% reported they have been tempted, at least once in the school year, to smoke, drink, or use an illicit substance. Moreover, 40% reported knowing at least one student in their school who skips classes regularly because of substance use. In addition, 57% reported lack of motivation to complete schoolwork.

Rowland County Extension collaborated with three local middle schools to deliver Stay Up, an after-school positive youth development program for middle school students. The local Rotary Club provided a \$2,000 grant to support program implementation. Program components included group activities that teach substance use prevention and refusal skills, sports and leisure education, and life skills (e.g., decision making, goal sequencing, problem solving, and conflict resolution).

One hundred and twenty-five (135) students across three local middle schools (45 students per school) participated in Stay Up. Results indicated that 95% of participants increased their knowledge of the harmful effects of substance use and 93% reported an increase in their knowledge of academic goal setting. Moreover, 90% of the participants reported increased awareness of the benefits of physical and leisure activities.

A three-month follow-up evaluation was conducted to understand academic and substance use behavior change. One hundred and fifteen (115) of the participants responded to the follow-up survey. About 80% reported increased substance use refusal skills; 89% reported improved study habits (e.g., completing and submitting school assignments by deadlines) and 91% reported increased participation in physical activity and family leisure activities.

Year-end analyses of attendance and assessment records conducted by school partners indicated positive program impacts. At the end of the school year, school attendance records indicated decreased truancy and unexcused absence among Stay Up participants. Also, School assessment records showed that the average GPA of Stay Up program participants was about 20% higher than the previous year, before their participation in program. Moreover, comparative analyses conducted by school partners found that Stay Up participants' GPA was about 0.65 points (about 12% difference) higher than the GPA of a matched sample of non-participants.

BOX 3: Success Story for Scenario 3

Marlon County Soybean Pest and Weed Management Outreach

Marlon County boasts about 400 small- to mid-scale soybean farms generating approximately \$22 million per year (Marlon Department of Agriculture, 2022). The Marlon County Soybean Board conducted a needs assessment that revealed the need for research-based information on integrated pest and weed management practices to help farmers reduce diseases and pests and increase yield and profitability.

Marlon County ANR agent invited Dr. J. Doe, an Extension Specialist, to deliver a 2-hour in-person training session on best strategies for preventing soybean weed and pest infestation. The training was followed by a field day where Dr. Doe demonstrated best practices in sustainable weed and pest management to the farmers. The ANR agent and specialist also provided the farmers with research-based information and resources to support effective, environmentally responsible management of soybean pests.

Eighty-seven (87) soybean farmers, including twenty (20) from the Amish community, participated in the Marlon County Soybean program. Program evaluation results indicate that the program was a worthwhile learning experience for the farmers. All the participating farmers (100%) reported that the training increased their awareness of pest resistant varieties, 93% increased their knowledge of soybean pest identification, and 95% gained enhanced knowledge of safe pesticides handling practices.

During the growing season, Marlon County ANR agents contacted 55 of the 87 participating farmers via phone calls, farm visits, and email to check the extent to which they implemented the IPM strategies discussed at the training. The results showed that 80% (44 out of 55) integrated biological control into their soybean weed management practices and 95% (52 out of 55) grew pest resistant varieties. Among the respondents, chemical use decreased by an average of 33%.

Based on existing research, the 44 farmers who adopted the weed control practices taught at the training are expected to have increased yield and profit. In the absence of any weed management tactics, soybean yield would be reduced because of weed interference by about 52% (Soltani et al, 2017). In Kentucky, this translates to soybean loss prevention of about 29 bushel/acre (given an average yield of 56 bushels/acre in KY). With the price of soybean at \$16/bushel and average farm size of 120 acres, these weed management efforts are estimated to result in an average savings of \$55,680 per farmer and total savings of \$2,449,920 for the 44 farmers.

Summary

A success story is a tool for communicating program/outreach outcomes and impact. An effective success story includes a description of the issue or need in a community and why it is a priority, what Extension and partners did to address the issue, the reach of the program, outreach, or intervention, and how it has improved the lives or livelihood of program participants and/or those affected by the issue. As Extension continues to face strict requirements for accountability and increasing demand for impact documentation to justify continued funding, it is important for Extension agents and specialists to develop effective success stories and impact statements to report program outcomes and impact to justify continued funding. This article should serve as a useful resource for Extension personnel in writing each component of an effective success story.

Additional Reading

Richardson, J. G. (1999). Developing and communicating effective program success stories for enhanced accountability. *Journal of Applied Communications*, 83(4), 1. Available at: https://new-prairiepress.org/jac/vol83/iss4/1/.

Appendix A: University of Kentucky Extension Success Story Worksheet

A digital version of this worksheet is available here.

Instructions: An effective success story must include the components listed in the table below. Limit your response to each question to about one paragraph. Your success story should be about three-quarters of a page but no more than a page. Remember to provide a title for your success story.

Title: Provide a "catchy" and positive title for your success story: ______

Components (and Guiding Questions)	Your Response
Issue: What was the need or opportunity in the community that the program addressed? Why was the need/ opportunity and program a priority in the community?	
Program Description (Education Response) and Partners (if applicable): What did you/Extension do to address the need identified above? Provide a brief description of the program and its key components. • Partners (if applicable): Did you/Extension partner with any local organization(s) to develop or implement this program? If yes, provide the name(s) and/or description of the partner(s) and a brief description of their role(s).	
Target Audience & Reach : Who participated in the program? Provide the number and description of the participants (e.g., gender and other relevant characteristics that link them to the program).	
 Outcomes (Impacts): What changes occurred in participants (e.g., individuals, groups, families, or entire community) because of the program? This section must include at least one the following: Short-term (Initial) Outcomes: Knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations/opinions gained from the program. Medium-term (Intermediate) Outcomes: Practices, choices, actions, and behaviors that occurred because of the program. That is, what participants used the knowledge they gained from the program to do. Long-term Outcomes (Impacts): Changes in individual or community economic, social, and/or environmental conditions or situations. This may include sustained improvements in intermediate outcomes, economic benefits, and/or policy, systems, and environmental changes. 	

^{**}After completing this worksheet, copy and paste your responses into a new Word document.

Appendix B: Examples of Success Stories Reporting Only One or Two Tiers of Outcomes

Marlon County Soybean Pest and Weed Management Outreach

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Marlon County ANR agent invited Dr. J. Doe, an Extension specialist, to deliver a two-hour in-person training session on best strategies for preventing soybean weed and pest infestation. The training was followed by a field day where Dr. Doe demonstrated best practices in sustainable weed and pest management to the farmers. The ANR agent and specialist also provided the farmers with research-based information and resources to support effective, environmentally responsible management of soybean pests.

Eighty-seven (87) soybean farmers, including twenty (20) from the Amish community, participated in the Marlon County Soybean program. Program evaluation results indicate that the program was a worthwhile learning experience for the farmers. All the participating farmers (100%) reported that the training increased their awareness of pest resistant varieties, 93% increased their knowledge of soybean pest identification, and 95% gained enhanced knowledge of safe pesticides handling practices.

Mind Your Money Program Improves Financial Knowledge and Behavior

Most families and adults in Gregson County have little to no personal savings available to endure financial emergencies. A recent community survey reported that two in three families in Gregson lack any type of emergency savings and 63% of adults live paycheck to paycheck. The situation is very dire for limited resource families in the county, with 80% reporting that they live paycheck to paycheck and are overburdened with debt.

To address this need, Gregson County FCS Extension agent, with participant recruitment support from the Gregson County Family Financial Wellness Coalition, delivered Mind Your Money (MYM), an evidence-based curriculum, to a group of Head Start parents. MYM teaches limited-resource adults the skills needed to make informed financial decisions and adopt financial behaviors that can have positive effects on their financial well-being. Program

activities occurred over 16 weeks and included weekly MYM workshop sessions, two field trips to a local bank, and hands-on budgeting activities. One hundred (100) Head Start parents (male = 55 and female = 45) completed the program. The program also trained 25 volunteers who supported the FCS agent and specialists in program delivery.

A 6-month follow-up survey indicated that 96% of 88 respondents have consistently developed monthly spending plans since participating in the program. About 93% have implemented their monthly spending plans; 90% reported that they now pay their bills on time. One respondent to the follow-up survey commented that the program was "the first time they had the opportunity to learn how to manage their money" and that they plan "to teach my children these skills I never had the opportunity to learn when I was their age."

Promoting Positive Youth Development in Rowland County

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Rowland County Extension collaborated with three local middle schools to deliver Stay Up, an after-school positive youth development program for middle school students. The local Rotary Club provided a \$2,000 grant to support program implementation. Program components included group activities that teach substance use prevention and refusal skills, sports and leisure education, and life skills (e.g., decision making, goal sequencing, problem solving, and conflict resolution).

Year-end analyses of attendance and assessment records conducted by school partners indicate positive program impacts. At the end of the school year, school attendance records indicated decreased truancy and unexcused absence among Stay Up participants. Also, School assessment records showed that the average GPA of Stay Up program participants was about 20% higher than the previous year, before their participation in program. Moreover, comparative analyses conducted by school partners found that Stay Up participants' GPA was about 0.65 points (about 12% difference) higher than the GPA of a matched sample of non-participants.

Pest Weed Management Outreach Improves Soybean Profitability in Marlon County

Marlon County boasts about 400 small- to mid-scale soybean farms generating approximately \$22 million per year (Marlon Department of Agriculture, 2022). The Marlon County Soybean Board conducted a needs assessment that revealed the need for research-based information on integrated pest and weed management practices to help farmers reduce diseases and pests and increase yield and profitability.

UK Extension provided in-person training sessions and field demonstrations to illustrate best strategies for preventing soybean weed and pest infestation. Eighty-seven (87) soybean farmers, including twenty (20) from the Amish community, participated in the Marlon County Soybean program. During the growing season, Marlon County ANR agents contacted 55 of the 87 participating farmers via phone calls, farm visits, and email to check the extent to which they implemented the IPM strategies discussed at the training. The results showed that 80% (44 out of 55) integrated biological control into their soybean weed management practices and 95% (52 out of 55) grew pest resistant varieties. Among the respondents, chemical use decreased by an average of 33%. Based on existing research, the 44 farmers who adopted the weed control practices taught at the training are expected to have increased yield and profit. In the absence of any weed management tactics, soybean yield would be reduced because of weed interference by about 52% (Soltani et al, 2017). In Kentucky, this translates to soybean loss prevention of about 29 bushel/acre (given an average yield of 56 bushels/acre in KY). With the price of soybean at \$16/ bushel and average farm size of 120 acres, these weed management efforts are estimated to result in an average savings of \$55,680 per farmer and total savings of \$2,449,920 for the 44 farmers.

Agriculture and Natural Resources Family and Consumer Sciences 4-H Youth Development Community and Economic Development

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