Youth and conservation methods

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Woodbine Community Schools

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Youth and conservation methods

Abstract
How to get young people interested in conservation and environmental preservation is a concern for educators and environmental groups. One possibility explored here was to encourage students to speak with people who are carrying out agricultural conservation practices and then try to summarize these ideas and experiences in a videotape.

Keywords
Human systems, demographics and beginning farmer programs

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Youth and conservation methods

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Background

Don Groff’s fifth and sixth grade students at Woodbine (Iowa) Community School were enlisted to carry out the project. Groff had experience in getting students interested in conservation issues. He had previously supervised a class project about the Loess Hills of western Iowa. Those students set up a home page on the Internet for the Iowa Sesquicentennial project (http://www.woodbine.kl2.ia.us) and sent information packets to schools in the United States and foreign countries. They also created a CD-ROM about the Loess Hills and gathered information on soil types and conditions for all 99 counties in Iowa.

The main objective of this project was to teach Woodbine students the importance of conservation methods by seeing these practices being used on farms. Students were to create a video that would demonstrate environmental conservation from their point of view. After editing and review by agencies such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), the video was to be distributed to other schools, 4-H clubs, FFA classes, and soil conservation districts.

Approach and methods

Students conducted interviews with several local farmers who used or installed special features to conserve agricultural resources. Other students videotaped the interview sessions. Specific projects that the students initially hoped to report on included:

- Dam construction
- Terrace construction
- Tree planting
- New CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) planting
- Interseeding shrubs into existing CRP
- Seeding filter strips along perennial streams
- Installing buffer strips
- Native prairie planting and reconstructing prairies

Results and discussion

Technical difficulties and lack of experience with filming posed many problems for the novice videotapers. There were repeated difficulties with wind noises covering up conversations on tape. The students learned that the interviewers need to look at the camera when they are speaking. The camera operator needed to set the camera on a tripod to avoid shakiness on the film.

These are some of the results for each segment of the interviews:

- Dam construction. The students visited two dams: Dana Sturgill’s dam was much older than the one on the Tony Smith farm. Smith provided “before” pictures that showed how the dam had affected his land.
Terrace construction. On the Randy Coenen farm, the wind noises posed a lot of problems during the taping session. Tree planting. The students had some difficulty locating the trees, which turned out to be near the extreme back of a field on the Greg Pinkham farm. New CRP planting. Tony Smith told students what grasses he planted and why he used the Conservation Reserve Program. He explained what benefits might result from the CRP. Interseeding shrubs into existing CRP. The students made two visits to the Marvin Kelley farm and ended up filming out of a pickup truck because Kelley was very busy. Seeding filter strips along a perennial streams. The farmer renting the land reported that weeds covered the filter strips and they would not show up very well. Russ Kurth later helped students videotape watershed construction that showed a lot of grass growing and the mesh still in place.

• Installing buffer strips. The students were not able to find a farmer to interview for this practice.
• Native prairie planting and reconstructing prairies. Tim Sproul gave a good accounting of his experiences and answered questions.

Conclusions

The students were unable to complete the project. Even though they had shot quite a bit of video footage, they were not equipped to edit the material into one usable tape. A person who had initially offered to help backed out, and they were not able to find another film editor to assist in finishing the project.

Groff says that despite the fact that no videos were created to share the information gained, the students learned a good deal about interviewing people and videotaping effectively and about conservation practices.