Increasing the Effectiveness of Field Agent Response to Producer Requests for Alternative Marketing Assistance

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Need: Expertise in alternative marketing is considerable and continues to increase in Extension and other organizations in the Four Corners states. Yet, a significant number of field agents—Extension, as well as NRCS, NGOs, and others with direct contact with producers—feel that they have little depth to their marketing knowledge, especially for alternative marketing, so they quickly refer producers to whatever marketing specialists they know of. This initial contact is a critical point for the potential alternative marketer—a point at which they are best served by well-informed initial guidance from the agent and the most direct referral to the specialists—wherever they may be—that can help them most. The aim of this project is to make this interaction among producers, agents, and specialists more informed and effective.

Objectives:
1. To increase the ability of agents (and similar service providers) to provide well-informed initial responses to producers asking for advice with alternative marketing questions, and to make referrals as appropriate.
2. To help agents better understand the unique marketing needs of small-scale and minority producers.
3. To allow agents to establish familiarity and good working relationships across state and reservation borders in order to maximize resources available to assist producers.

Outputs to be made available on SWMN website:
1. Marketing Assistance Guide
2. Directory of Expertise
3. Marketing Topics Resources

Project Plan:

1. Recruit field agents and a smaller number of marketing specialists and producers to attend the SWMN conference where they attend a group workshop as well as 5 additional alternative marketing workshops selected from the conference offerings.

2. Solicit feedback from participants on field agent info needs and known sources of information.

3. Develop draft web-based resources and gather feedback from participants.

4. Repeat in year two with SWMN conference sessions, and refine final web resources and guidance document.

5. Evaluate outcomes.

* National Center for Appropriate Technology <www.ncat.org>