

# Field Day Planning Guide for Conservation Educators

## Overview

Extension personnel across the country are charged with developing, coordinating, executing, and evaluating outreach and educational events. As stakeholder needs, technologies, and the desire to demonstrate impact evolves, so too must our planning and processes for delivering engaging educational events.

Peer-learning is a gold standard across many disciplines, and the cross-pollination of ideas and technologies through on-farm conservation demonstrations is no exception. Creating an engaging agenda and documenting the outcomes of Extension events has been evolving at a rapid rate with the advent of social media, virtual formats, and online registration

and evaluation tools. For many Extension educators, planning events with evaluation and impact in mind can fall through the cracks with the breadth of logistical and technical considerations.

This publication serves as a brief playbook for planning on-farm conservation field day events through the lens of evaluation. Keep in mind that while sharing information and technologies is often transactional, building lasting relationships and partnerships at the local level is relational work. At each task point, foster those relationships by creating a safe, inclusive, and accommodating space for people and perspectives.

**Figure 1. Field day events take place throughout the year. Photo by Joby Czarnecki.**



## Event Planning Guide

### 2–3 Months before the Event

- Consider gathering feedback from local clients to identify the most desirable conservation topics.
- Identify an innovative landowner or producer leader to host the field day and specific conservation or stewardship practices to highlight.
- Confirm the following:
  - Farmer participant/host and address for the event
  - Field day learning objectives
  - Date and time of the event
- Identify all potential demonstration sites and local partners, critical program expertise, and potential speakers.
- Invite and confirm speakers/critical partners for specific topics. Be sure to communicate event goals and anticipated outcomes to the speakers.

### 1 Month before the Event

- Draft the agenda and share it with event partners/speakers.
- Check in with the landowner/producer host to confirm plans.
- Secure venue reservations, address logistical issues (restrooms, tents, tables and chairs, food, transportation, provisions, hydration needs, technology for presentations, portable microphone, etc.), and review supply needs. Consider an inclement weather alternative plan.
- Determine how to track registration and populate all critical fields on registration forms. If hosted by MSU, request a registration link for the event via the MSU Extension intranet. If an external partner will run registration, determine the tracking system and generate a link and QR code.
- Finalize the registration form and open registration.
- Draft the necessary advertising materials (social media, email listservs, local flyers, mailouts, etc.). Include visuals, address, and event details. Consult with the MSU Extension Office of Agricultural Communications on advertising materials to ensure that MSU branding standards are followed.
- Advertise for the event and track registrants if you have an attendance cap. Be sure to advertise the event through various mediums and networks. The Extension network is a great place to start, as are local governmental and non-governmental organizations. Consider digital, print, radio, and television marketing.
- Develop and review the program evaluation tool or survey. The evaluation tool is critical to capturing the impact of the event and should align with field day goals and objectives.

### 1 Week before the Event

- Check the weather and have a backup plan for inclement weather.
- Ensure payment methods/invoicing are understood and all service contracts are in place.
- Remind all speakers of the time and place of the event.
- Finalize and print agendas, sign-in sheets, and surveys (or have a QR code printed for attendees to digitally complete surveys).
- Determine who will be the primary facilitator, and develop a facilitator guide/run-of-show for the hosting team if necessary. Develop two to three questions per topic/practice to help facilitate discussion.
- Secure signage to help guide attendees to the field site in remote areas.
- Assign additional roles for your team on the day of the event. These may include adding key participants to facilitate discussion, capturing pictures, and taking notes.
- Pack all supplies for the event, and plan to arrive early to set up and organize materials.

### Day of the Event

- Plan to arrive at least an hour before the event starts to set up—signs, seating, tents (if needed), and registration table—and welcome attendees.
- Ensure restrooms are open and accessible.
- Ensure hosts and speakers have everything they need.
- Load presentations and test technology.
- Ensure the facilitator is ready to guide transitions, stay on time, and remain flexible to accomplish the event goals.
- If serving food, determine who will set up and assist attendees during the meal.
- Save time after the program for attendees to complete the event survey.

### 1 Week after the Event

- Reflect on the event discussions and review your survey data to determine if the event achieved the original goals and objectives, plan future event topics based on feedback, and address local resource concerns or stakeholder needs.
- Log outcomes and outputs in the impact management system.
- Send a thank you email to all speakers, and include the survey, attendance, summaries, and images.
- Digitize all sign-in and survey details from the event; store all data and images on a secure computer/server.



# Event Planning Guide



## 2–3 Months Before

- Gather feedback from local clients to identify the most desirable conservation topics.
- Identify innovative landowner or producer leader and specific conservation or stewardship practices.
- Confirm farmer participant/host and address for the event.
- Confirm field day learning objectives.
- Confirm date and time of event.
- Identify all potential demonstration sites and local partners, experts, and potential speakers.
- Invite and confirm speakers for specific topics.
- Communicate event goals and anticipated outcomes.

## 1 Month Before

- Draft agenda and share with event partners/speakers.
- The landowner/producer host has confirmed plans.
- Secure venue reservations, address logistical and technical issues for presentations, and review supply needs.
- Determine how to track registration and populate all critical fields on registration forms.
- Finalize and open registration.
- Draft the necessary advertising for social media, email listservs, local flyers, mailouts, etc.).
- Advertise for the event and track registrants if you have an attendance cap.
- Develop and review program evaluation tool/survey.

## 1 Week Before

- Check the weather and have a backup plan for inclement weather.
- Payment methods/invoicing are understood.
- Speakers know the event time and place.
- Finalize and print agendas, sign-in sheets, and surveys (or have a QR code printed for attendees to digitally complete surveys).
- The primary facilitator has been selected.
- Addition roles have been assigned.
- Pack all supplies for the event to arrive early to set up and organize materials.

## The Day Of

- Set up signs, seating, tents, and registration table.
- Ensure restrooms are open and accessible.
- Check that the hosts and speakers have everything they need.
- Load presentations and test technology.
- Verify that the facilitator is ready and has everything they need.
- Determine who will set up the food and assist attendees during the meal.
- Save enough time for attendees to complete the event survey.

## 1 Week After

- Reflect on event and survey to determine future events topics and assess program efficacy.
- Log outcomes and outputs in the impact management system.
- Send a thank you email to all speakers, and include the survey, attendance, summaries, and images.
- Digitize all sign-in and survey details from the event; store all data and images on a secure computer/server.

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