Vegetable Producers Round-Up: Expanding Markets and Improving Production in NW Florida

Situation:
Growing vegetables for profit is making a resurgence in Northwest Florida as the “local foods” movement grows. Many of the small vegetable producers have had trouble identifying new emerging markets they have not worked with in the past. The farmers also need to receive training to improve their crop production. New local extension agents can aid in marketing, IPM, food safety, and post harvest if and when contact is made with the producers.

Objectives:
- The new Extension Agents will make contact with the producers in order to provide necessary training.
- Producers will gain knowledge on topics of marketing, food safety, and IPM. Producers will network with local vegetable buyers.

Methods:
The Vegetable Producers Round Up was a half-day training that consisted of educational, networking, and demonstration sessions. The educational components were presentations on marketing, food safety, and IPM. There was also a panel of local produce buyers that answered questions for the growers, followed by a time of networking for the growers and the buyers. Demonstration consisted of showcasing a new “build-it-yourself” produce cooling trailer.

Results & Conclusion:
A total of 61 people attended the event. The evaluation indicated that 78% of attendees met their local extension agent, 65% gained knowledge of fresh produce marketing strategies, 69% gained knowledge of IPM techniques, and 50% gained knowledge of food safety regulations. The Vegetable Producers Round Up was very successful from an evaluation stand point. It also enhanced extension/producer and producer/buyer relationships.