

A Taste for Food Businesses: An educational opportunity to expand food businesses through the Share Grounds commercial kitchen and produce aggregation centers

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Background and Purpose

Arkansas lacks a central hub of information and resources for small businesses specializing in food processing and manufacturing. In many instances, individuals that have a food product concept are unaware of the regulatory processes specific to their food product as well as the start up investment costs associated with creating a safe and marketable food product.

The Share Grounds commercial kitchen centers are actively recruiting clients to manufacture local food products in Arkansas. To engage potential clients, the University of Arkansas, Division of Agriculture partnered with the Arkansas Food Innovation Center (AFIC), the Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center (ASBTDC) and the Arkansas Farm to School Network to design and deliver an educational workshop, *A Taste for Food Businesses: An educational opportunity to expand food businesses through the Share Grounds commercial kitchen and produce aggregation centers* to guide food entrepreneurs through the initial steps of bringing their food concepts and products into the marketplace.

Program Design and Description

Dr. Renee Threlfall and John Swenson of the UA Food Science Department offered their expertise from years of working with clients in the AFIC. Based on their past workshops and experiences, the workshop focused on two areas: food processing and business strategy.

Informational sessions included:

Food Processing Considerations

- Horticultural Considerations for Produce
- Technical, Regulatory & Legal issues of Food Processing
- How to Become a Client at the Share Grounds Commercial Kitchen

Business Strategy

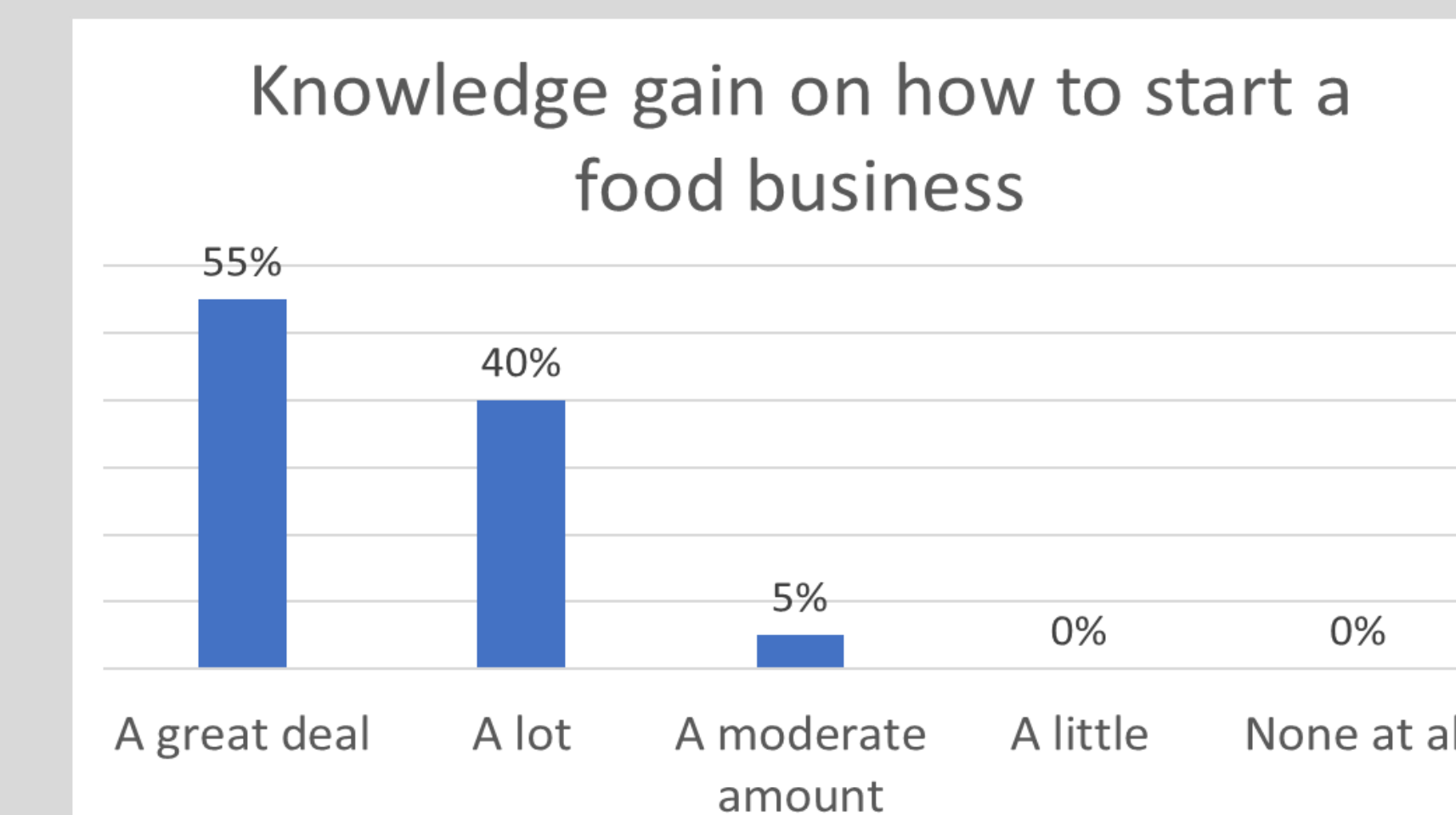
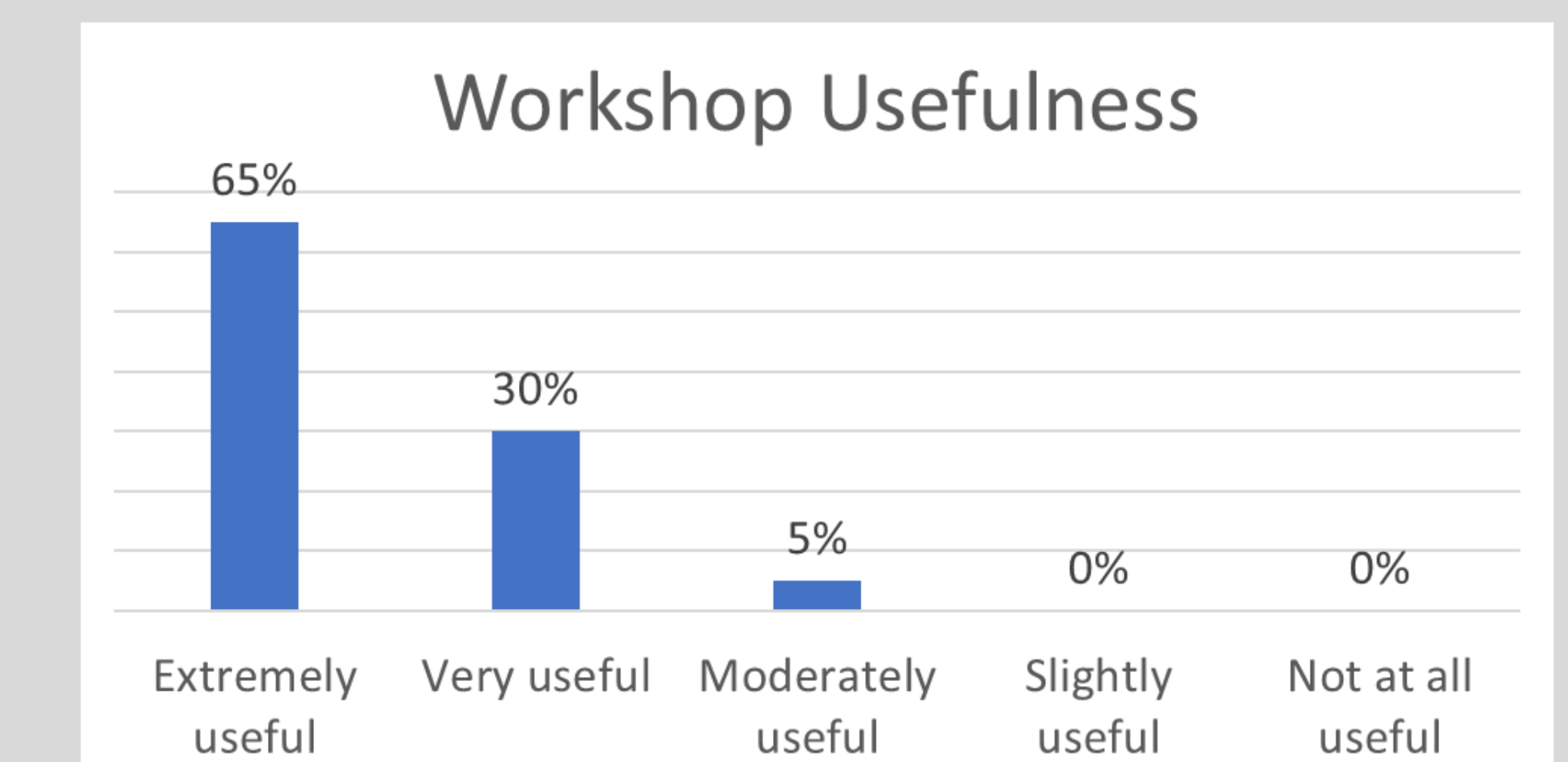
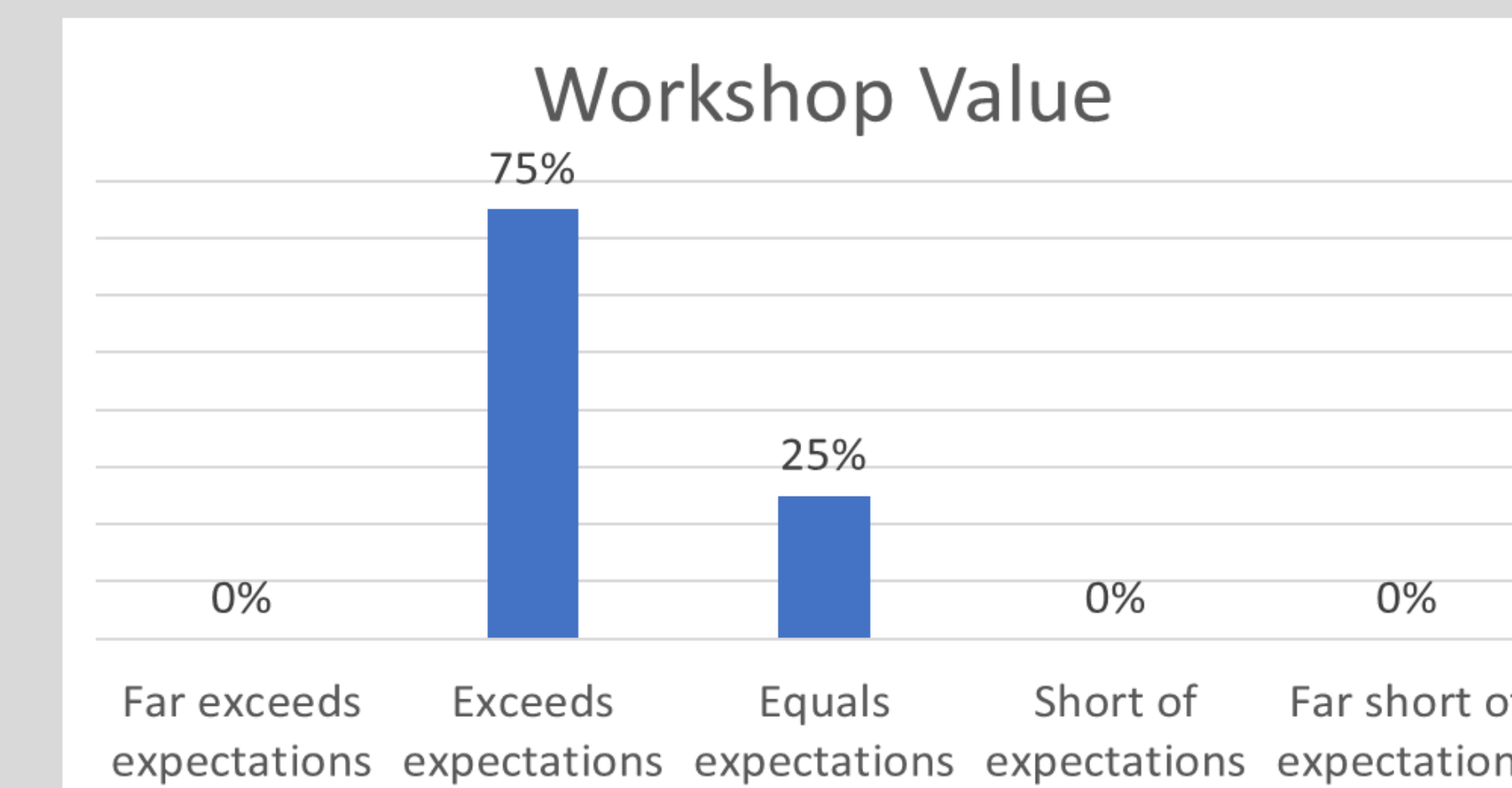
- Producing for Farm to School programs
- Food Trends for 2020
- Markets for Food Products and Produce
- How to Establish a Business

Social elements to the program included an AFIC client panel featuring a sampling of their commercial products and a tasting activity of trending food products in the marketplace.

Lastly, a workshop evaluation form and Share Grounds client application were provided to participants to complete.

Results

- 21 clients and 7 extension agents/staff participated in the workshop.
- 20 evaluations were received and analyzed for the following:



- Overall, participants stated the workshop provided a wealth of information. However, they indicated a need for additional workshops or one-on-one consultations.
- After the workshop, 8 businesses committed to testing their food concepts and 3 farmers interested in supplying produce at a Share Grounds facility.



Implications and Recommendations for Practice

- The curriculum that was developed from this workshop can be tailored for different states as an introductory program on how to start a small packaged food business.
- Based on the specific food code of a state, partners could include the state department of health and/or food science faculty at land grant universities.
- In addition, this curriculum can be expanded to an online webinar format providing access to a broader range of clients.

Project Contact

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