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**Natural Resource Conservation Service / IPM Working Group
Ohio Mini Grant Report**

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The Ohio State University Extension (OSUE) Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program entered into a contract on July 31st, 2008 with the IPM Institute of North America to further interactions with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) on matters pertaining to IPM practice adoption in specialty crops. The following report details those efforts over the past 12 months.

The NRCS / IPM Working Group generally recognizes IPM can deliver many long-term benefits including environmental, economic, and social benefits to both growers and society. To that end, Ohio was awarded \$5,000 by the Working Group to support new partnerships and collaborations between IPM professionals and NRCS staff to increase participation primarily in the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), particularly as it pertains to the Pest Management Standard - 595. With support from the Working Group, Ohio NRCS staff and the Ohio State University Extension fruit and vegetable specialists met on October 20, 2008 to discuss how EQIP could be made more accessible to Ohio specialty crop growers.

The initial meeting was coordinated and moderated by Jim Jasinski. Regina Hirsch, from the University of Wisconsin, helped facilitate the meeting, acting as both a coach and consultant on behalf of the Working Group to ensure certain target issues were discussed and resolved. There were seven OSU IPM related staff at the meeting, including the State IPM coordinator, and two staff from NRCS. After introductions, each of the nine participants identified their interests and expectations. Next, Mark Scarpitti, NRCS State Agronomist, and Angel Arehart, Resource Conservationist, explained the EQIP program, including the enrollment and payment process, program requirements, and intended results. This essential part of the meeting introduced University specialists to EQIP and specifically pointed to how specialty crops could be eligible for enrollment. At the same time, NRCS staff were shown the Ohio IPM Elements for fruits and vegetables, which succinctly list specific pest management practices growers could adopt to increase their overall utilization of IPM. At the conclusion of the meeting, the OSU IPM Program staff were given a deadline of two weeks to have four IPM scenarios outlined in order to qualify for inclusion in the 2009 EQIP program. These four scenarios were completed by the deadline and are as follows: General Vegetable IPM (cabbage, carrots, cucumber,

lettuce, pepper, potato, radish, snap bean, squash, pumpkin, and tomato), Sweet Corn IPM, Tree Fruit IPM (apples, pears, peaches, plums and cherries), and Strawberry IPM. Incentive payments based on the type of IPM scenario chosen were \$121 per acre for General Vegetable IPM, \$42 per acre for Sweet Corn IPM, \$227 per acre for Tree Fruit IPM, and \$158 for Strawberry IPM. In addition to receiving incentive payments for Pest Management - 595, growers may qualify for additional incentive payments if they also adopt any of the following practices: Conservation Crop Rotation, Cover Crops, Micro irrigation, Bedding, Nutrient Management, No-Till, and Mulch-Till.

Several articles were written by the IPM Program staff for the Ohio VegNet Newsletter, Fruit Growers News, and Vegetable Growers News, informing growers of the opportunity to apply for EQIP funds. Growers were directed to the self-assessment tools that the OSU IPM Program offers on their website (<http://ipm.osu.edu/pageview.asp?id=10>) to establish their benchmark IPM score. If growers were offered a contract they would be required to increase their IPM adoption score by 10% each year of their EQIP contract and reach at least 60% IPM adoption by the end of the third year.

Although not officially confirmed by Ohio NRCS Staff, it appears eight specialty crop growers received 2009 EQIP funding for approximately \$250,000. This is a fair start for such a new program, but we would like to see the enrollment increase for 2010, particularly if specialty crops is not pooled with other general EQIP signups.

There are three things we continue to work on in Ohio even after the grant requirements have been fulfilled. First, many IPM practices such as crop rotation, no-till planting, use of mulch, drip irrigation, etc., are listed as separate “standards” within EQIP. Some of these standards are not available in Ohio yet, and some of them have no cost incentive associated with them. Bringing those standards to Ohio and establishing fair costs is critical over the next year. Creating a broader IPM “package” standard would acknowledge these separate standards, could be an effective way of improving the current Pest Management Standard - 595. Additionally, most NRCS personnel have little to no IPM training in fruit and vegetable crops. When OSU sponsors an appropriate fruit or vegetable field day, NRCS staff are invited to attend in an effort to increase their knowledge and familiarity with those crops. The last impediment which remains is the need for a pest management conservation plan for growers who are offered pest management contracts through EQIP. Very few people in the country are qualified to write these plans, and although efforts have been made to streamline the process by use of templates and boilerplate documents, training additional staff or outsourcing plan development to IPM consultants needs to be the first priority addressed by the Working Group in the next 3-6 months.