

NRCS and IPM Working Group - Conference call notes from Friday, Feb. 1, 2008

Workgroup url - <http://www.ipm.msu.edu/work-group/home.htm>

Workgroup listserv: EQIP@LIST.MSU.EDU

Corrections/additions to Tom Green, ipmworks@ipminstitute.org

NEXT CALL: Friday, Apr 4, 9:00 AM Central, 10:00 AM Eastern.

Thanks to the North Central IPM Center for our renewal funding. This will enable us to fund specific activities in states in our region to increase grower participation in IPM through EQIP and other NRCS programs.

SAVE THE DATE, MARCH WORKING GROUP MEETING: Tuesday-Wednesday, March 11-12, location Detroit Metro Airport, hotel TBA. Meeting will convene with lunch on Tuesday and run through Noon on Wednesday. See draft agenda items below. This will be an important meeting to finalize our approach to replicating Wisconsin/Michigan successes in addressing resource concerns through IPM throughout our region. A limited amount of funding is available through our grant from the North Central IPM Center to support working group member travel. More details to follow.

Participating: Tony Bailey, Mike Brewer, Paul Duffner, Dave Epstein, Tom Green, Ruth Hazzard, Regina Hirsch, Jim Jasinski, Lynnae Jess, Bill Kuenstler, Joy Landis, Ana Legrand, Michelle Miller, Kathy Murray, Barb Stewart

1. Annual working group meeting. Preliminary draft agenda, suggestions requested to ipmworks@ipminstitute.org. See background on agenda items a-d below.
 - a) Review website with updated "how to." Joy, Mike on lead. Review updates of state-specific information, revise as needed.
 - b) Review three generic sets: Fruit, Vegetable, Field Crops. IPM Institute taking lead on developing drafts and getting input from others on drafts prior to meeting.
 - c) Review, finalize plan to replicate WI, MI success in other states in our region. Come to consensus on where to focus our resources.
 - d) National update, progress and plans.
 - e) Cooperative Ecosystems Study Units as mechanisms for cooperation between NRCS and CSREES.
 - f) Update on contribution agreements as mechanisms for cooperation.
 - g) Update on 2007 Conservation Innovation Grant to develop a grower/advisor friendly, on-line national pesticide product evaluation tool.
 - h) Review, update priorities set at November 2006 meeting, finalize overall work plan for 2008.

Background on agenda items a-d from prior calls:

- a) Upgrade the website regarding how to succeed with EQIP. We currently have a PDF

document from Michigan (<http://www.ipm.msu.edu/work-group/pdf/Guide-generic.pdf>) with steps for specialty crop producers. Goal is to update, expand and reformat this information so that it is useful and novice-friendly for all states in the region and for field crops. Links will be added to state incentive rates for IPM practices with information on how to pursue increases in incentives for IPM.

b) Develop three sets of “generic” IPM checklists: one for fruit, one for vegetables and one for field crops, identifying IPM tactics for each cropping system. These checklists can be used by growers to document their current and planned practices for NRCS review and potential incorporation in a pest management plan. Link each practice to resource concerns (soil, water, air, etc.) so that NRCS professionals can identify which impacts are mitigated by the practice. Develop these draft documents in committee over the winter, review at a working group meeting in late winter, and finalize by April 30.

c) Replicate successes in Michigan and Wisconsin to new states in our region. Targeted states will be invited to negotiate a statement of work and budget (up to \$5000) with the working group to expand opportunities in their states. Reimbursable expenses could include working group member and grower representative travel/time to meet with state NRCS contacts and attend state technical committee meetings to pursue access, increase incentive rates, etc.

d) Mike Brewer will continue representation for our region – including a leadership coordinating role - in the national task force. This task force of national NRCS and IPM leaders and regional representatives has met in person and by conference call over the past year. Support will continue the momentum that has been created to develop greater understanding, collaboration and opportunities for IPM in NRCS programs.

2. Draft notes regarding unique contribution agreement between NRCS and University of Connecticut to deliver technical assistance to Connecticut growers. Thanks to Ana Legrandt, IPM Coordinator, University of Connecticut, for her time and excellent overview of the program. These notes are a draft to be reviewed by Ana for accuracy prior to posting on our website.

BEGIN DRAFT: The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical assistance and incentives to agricultural producers to mitigate impacts on resource concerns, including soil, water, air, plants, animals and humans. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an important approach to mitigating impacts of pest management, including pesticides, on these concerns. State NRCS offices have some latitude within national guidelines for meeting program goals within their states. Over the past five years, Connecticut Cooperative Extension and NRCS have developed a unique partnership to increase IPM adoption and protect resource concerns in that state.

In 2003, the Connecticut state NRCS office approached the IPM program at the University of Connecticut about meeting IPM training needs in the state to help advance IPM in the state as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP has been a successful mechanism to implement a wide variety of conservation practices on farms nationwide through grants and contracts to producers and others. IPM has been a relatively small component of the EQIP program to date.

Connecticut is a comparatively small state with smaller, diverse ag operations scattered throughout the state. Since the mid-1980s, Cooperative Extension in the state has provided IPM training to growers through a one-on-one training model, with Extension specialists providing intensive, hands-on training with growers at their farms, over a three-year period for each farm. Visits are more frequent during the first year and include training on pest identification, monitoring, sampling, thresholds and control measures. Up to 50 growers participate in any one year. This approach allows customization of the training to meet individual grower needs and has been a very efficient process given the diversity of operations within the state.

Since 2004, nearly 40 Connecticut growers have had their training supported by a “contribution agreement” funded in equal shares by the University and NRCS’s EQIP. Under this agreement, Connecticut CES is the technical service provider, supplying training and monitoring supplies to growers, using its well-established three-year training model. Up to 16 growers have been enrolled in EQIP-supported training in any one year.

Under the agreement, Ana Legrand, IPM coordinator for the University, directs IPM program staff including Jude Boucher (vegetables), Lorraine Los (fruit), LeAnne Pundt (greenhouse) and Richard Kiyomoto (winegrape) who work directly with growers. Field crop, organic vegetable and small fruit growers have also been enrolled. Ana is also responsible for securing the University’s 50 percent funding contribution to the agreement.

Each year, Connecticut NRCS staff informs Ana’s program which growers in the state have signed EQIP contracts. To qualify for the IPM training program, growers may not have received the training in the past.

Along with the regular educator visits, participating growers may also receive production guides, reference books, and monitoring tools including hand lenses, monitoring traps and weather stations and software free of charge. Weather stations are typically rotated to other sites after the grower is trained on its use, with the expectation that the growers may purchase their own after the initial experience demonstrates the benefits. University of Connecticut IPM educators also provide recommendations on specific pest management options to address pest problems evident on the farm.

Under the agreement, UConn educators are not required to become certified Technical Service Providers (TSPs) by NRCS, a process which many crop advisors and others must go through to provide services and receive payments under the TSP program generally.

To fund their share of the agreement, NRCS uses EQIP program dollars specifically designated for technical service delivery. These funds support University of Connecticut staff time, travel and supplies provided to growers. Growers also receive additional cost-share and incentive funds directly from NRCS under their EQIP contracts.

Funding for the University’s contribution must be from non-federal sources and requires annual effort to secure from the legislature, university and other sources. Funding development is complicated by the fact that the University can’t be certain of the need until NRCS announces its EQIP contracts, generally around the first of the calendar year.

Variations on this contribution agreement model for providing IPM training are in place in Wisconsin and California, and perhaps other states. We'll research those further and provide more information on subsequent working group calls.

On the web: University of Connecticut's IPM website: <http://www.hort.uconn.edu/ipm/> Click on "educational opportunities" on the navigation bar and scroll down to "IPM Training & Incentives for Growers" for more information about the EQIP/Extension joint program.