

NRCS and IPM Working Group Conference Call Notes from May 1, 2009

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

Workgroup listserv: EQIP@LIST.MSU.EDU

Corrections/additions to Amrita Batra at abatra@ipminstitute.org

Next Call: Friday, June 5, 9:00 Central/10:00 Eastern.

Participating (10): Anastasia Becker (MO Dept. of Ag), Barbara Stewart (NRCS), Bill Kuenstler (NRCS), Tony Bailey (IN NRCS), Jim Jasinki (OSU), John Lundvall (ISU) Tom Green (IPM Institute), Amrita Batra (IPM Institute), Michael Brewer (MSU) and David Lamm (NC NRCS).

Agenda:

1. Update on the Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs):

NRCS created a new pilot program for “Conservation Activity Plans” (CAPs), available during the 2009 growing season. The pilot allows each state to choose one or more (up to eight) of 11 types of plans that they will help fund on a local level, including IPM, forestry, organics, energy and others (see <http://techreg.usda.gov/RptActivityPlans.aspx> for the full list).

- i. Once the plan is complete and the local field office has signed off on it, the payment for the plan can be issued to the farmer immediately.
 - ii. Plans are not competitive; any EQIP-eligible producer may sign up for a plan. Cost-share amounts available are set by each state. States may decide to make CAP funding competitive if demand increases.
- b. The IPM Institute is drafting a work plan to support completion of a plan during the pilot in FY 2009. Tom Green will circulate the plan which includes curriculum development, training, model IPM CAP plans, model IPM elements for other CAP types, and outreach to the private sector.
- c. Role of TSPs:
- i. TSP qualifications have been revised; individuals who are currently qualified to write plans will need to update their credentials. A very limited number of TSPs currently meet NRCS qualifications to write pest management plans. In California, there are only five or six TSPs, in Wisconsin, there is only one qualified TSP.
 - ii. NRCS does not have funding to train individuals to become qualified TSPs to write CAPs, the intention is that the private sector or the TSPs will pay for this

training. To make the opportunity attractive to the private sector, NRCS cost share rate with landowners (75 % paid by NRCS, 25% paid by landowners) must be realistic and include the amount spent by TSPs for training.

- iii. In the past, TSPs have been paid from limited technical assistance funds. CAPs are funded from financial assistance dollars which should increase the overall dollars available.
- iv. Under CAPs, TSPs would do conservation and cultural elements of the plans which are currently completed by NRCS staff.
- v. Training would need to address qualifying for TSP status and plan preparation. Tools could include model IPM CAP plans and IPM plan elements for other CAPs with IPM elements including transition to organic, forestry, fish and wildlife habitat, aquaculture.

d. Role of Extension:

- i. In states such as Connecticut, Extension is heavily involved in putting together the 595 EQIP plans. There is a concern about whether Extension will qualify to write CAPs.
- ii. NRCS will pay the 75 % cost share rate to landowners, who will in turn, pay the TSP. Potentially landowners might hire Extension to create a plan. We need to determine if this would be of interest to Extension/fit with Extension policy.

2. Update on mini-grants for Iowa, Indiana and Ohio.

a. Ohio (Jim Jasinki):

- i. IPM elements were updated and a new set developed for strawberries. These elements are now available online.
- ii. A draft scoring sheet has been developed.
- iii. Two news releases were written by Jim Jasinski and one by the NRCS to increase awareness.
- iv. Extension agents were encouraged to provide the program information to specialty crop growers they were working with.
- v. The EQIP program opened on April 8 this year. After the sign up closes on May 8, they will have a better idea of the number of applicants, contracts and how they are faring.

- b. Indiana (Tony Bailey):
 - i. EQIP guidelines were posted this week.
(See: http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/IN_2009_EQIP_Guidelines4-28-09.pdf for Indiana 2009 EQIP guidelines.)
 - ii. There have been discussions with Purdue to create specific IPM assessment tools.
 - iii. Will follow up with Purdue about publishing newsletter releases, along the lines of Ohio.
 - iv. The EQIP program closes on May 29.
 - v. Indiana is participating in the organic CAP.
- c. Iowa (John Lundvall):
 - i. Following preliminary meetings between Iowa NRCS technical staff and Iowa State tech management specialists in January, there has been ongoing collection of feedback from corn and soybean growers about their previous involvement in EQIP and the challenges they faced while getting more involved in the program.
 - ii. A meeting to review the compiled feedback and how to best move forward has been scheduled between Iowa NRCS technical staff and Iowa state tech management specialists in May.