

# Improving field crop extension connectivity and outreach through enhanced in-season communication

## Principal Investigators

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## Executive Summary

Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) educators are Cornell University's front line in helping New York field crop producer clientele with crop production and pest management issues. Keeping CCE personnel informed on the latest information and developments helps us meet Cornell's high standards for extension outreach and provides clientele with quality, pertinent, timely and user-friendly programs and resources that maximize our educational impacts. Enhancing communication opportunities between CCE county and campus personnel helps strengthen the outreach network and is an important component of CCE's professional development. This year marked the 12th year of the call series, involving 22 weekly conference calls held from May through September 2019. Each weekly 45-minute call averaged 18 participants. As a result of these conference calls, participants were better equipped to conduct their outreach efforts and meet the field crop pest management needs of their stakeholders. Enhanced communication among CCE personnel, Cornell faculty and NYS IPM staff with field crop responsibilities improved the effectiveness of outreach efforts regarding timely pest and crop management issues. In addition to direct communication during the conference call, topics discussed were summarized and highlights made available to other stakeholders weekly through on-line NYS IPM Weekly Pest Report blogs. Articles from the Weekly Pest Report are frequently used in various extension newsletters and other media including Facebook and Twitter postings with an estimated outreach of 5,000 plus subscribers. End of season surveys and discussions with participants were very positive with much interest and support to continue the conference call series in 2021. And, based on positive feedback from the initiation of off-season calls that focus on specific topics relevant to field crops pest and disease management, this monthly call series was continued into 2021 with six guest speakers from November 2020 – April 2021. For those calls, guest speakers were invited from various organizations including Cornell University, American Farmland Trust, BASF, Bayer, and local crop consultants.

## Issue

County and regional CCE field crop educators are Cornell University's front line in helping New York field crop producer clientele with crop production and pest management issues. Keeping CCE personnel informed on the latest information and developments helps us meet Cornell's high standards for extension outreach and provides clientele with quality, pertinent, timely and user-friendly programs and resources that maximize our educational impacts. Regular communication between CCE staff, NYS IPM staff and campus faculty helps strengthen the outreach network and is an important component of CCE's professional development. CCE

personnel translate knowledge gained from these educational opportunities into outreach materials and other resources to effectively meet needs of clientele.

Integral to regular communication and team building is an open exchange of information between individuals with varying levels of experience. Seasoned experts are able to help new extension personnel gain a statewide perspective of production issues and opportunities in real time. Regular dialogue provides a forum for review and discussion of new information and technologies, including strengths, weaknesses, and advantages of adoption. Frequent communication assures our unified vision and strengthens our consistent outreach message. These exchanges are often instrumental in helping to identify applied research needs, local demonstration opportunities, and the development of outreach resources and programs.

## Progress Summary

This year marked the 13th year of the in-season weekly call series, and the 2nd year of the monthly off-season call series. In 2020, 22 weekly conference calls were held between May and September to improve campus and field staff communication regarding field crop pest and crop management issues during the growing season. Each call averaged 18 participants and lasted at least 45 minutes.

Enhanced in-season communication improved the effectiveness of outreach efforts regarding timely pest management issues and recommendations. In addition to direct communication during the conference call, topics discussed were summarized and made available to all subscribed stakeholders through 20 on-line NYS IPM Weekly Pest Report blog posts available at the NYS IPM Program field crops website and through Cornell's [fielcrops.org](http://fielcrops.org) blog. The Weekly Field Crop Pest Report 2020 reached over 450 subscribers directly via blog and list-serves, and over 5,000 more with reposts to other newsletters, Facebook and Twitter. Subscribers and stakeholders include statewide CCE staff, Cornell faculty, crop advisors, scouts, industry representatives, and agribusiness associates.

This year's call was particularly effective in communicating timely in-season information on pest activity such as outbreaks of soybean diseases, black cutworm in corn, western bean cutworm damage in corn, potato leafhopper and foliar diseases in alfalfa, weed identification and management, soybean cyst nematode, and early season small grain diseases. End of season discussions with participants confirmed overwhelming support and interest to continue the conference call series in 2021. Targeted topics for 2020-21 off season calls include Measuring Economic Benefits and Impacts of Research and Education Programming, Updates on Proposed Legislative Bans on Pesticides, Updates from Crop Consultants and Seed and Chemical Company Reps, Zone Management Research Results, Managing Herbicide Resistant Weeds, and Precision Agriculture Prescriptive Mapping Systems.

## Expected and Observed Impact

The expected impact of this effort was to improve the timely statewide communication of pest management and crop production among field crop CCE, faculty and NYS IPM personnel during the growing season, and now expanded into the off-season with a modified format.

Since 2008, CCE and NYS IPM staff and Cornell faculty with field crop responsibilities took advantage of the weekly opportunity to share observations, gain insights, acquire and present practical knowledge and technical information in an in-house professional development environment. These timely efforts enhanced field crop extension personnel communication and awareness on current pest and crop conditions. In addition, the timely forum allowed for discussion of anticipated pest, crop and weather issues, integrated pest and crop management and potential extension and research programming opportunities. The majority of those involved participated every year with new extension field staff joining in the discussions along the way. A total of 29 individuals have actively participated and contributed to this projects' success over its 12-year duration. Project evaluations each year have documented that participants highly value the timely updates, discussion, professional development and team building aspects of the conference calls which could then be used to increase potential extension outreach impacts with stakeholders. Surveys also indicated that Cornell field crops staff and faculty feel that this conference call series is the most appreciated contribution from the NYS IPM field crops and livestock program, highly benefiting all participants.

The primary benefit of the conference call program lies in the enhanced communication and professional development of the extension personnel involved. Stakeholders ultimately benefit from this effort through the potential enhanced extension outreach impacts related to an increased timely awareness of pest issues, pre-emptive monitoring and management of potential pest problems that help grower stakeholders minimize or avoid pest impacts, better address pesticide use decisions and protect net profitability.

Weekly calls provided regular access to input from Cornell faculty field crop specialists, Gary Bergstrom (plant pathology), Elson Shields (entomology), Quirine Ketterings (nutrient management) and Margaret Smith (plant breeding). Weekly Field Crop IPM Conference Calls included an in-depth weather outlook (Northeast Region Climate Center), participant sharing of statewide field pest and crop observations, general project updates and timely discussion on particular pests and diseases, followed by a review of the following week's pest watch list. The weather outlook was provided by Jessica Spaccio and others from the Northeast Climate Center. Highlights of current pest status discussions were summarized for inclusion in the "View from the Field" feature of the NYS IPM Weekly Field Crop Pest Report blog. The target audience for this on-line newsletter are field crop professionals including producers, extension, agribusinesses, consultants, federal, state and local personnel and the general public. Articles from the Weekly Pest Report are frequently used in various statewide extension newsletters and other media including Facebook and Twitter postings. The Weekly Field Crop Pest Report 2019 reached over 450 subscribers directly via blog and list-serves, and over 5,000 more with reposts to other newsletters, and re-tweets to Facebook (1116 followers) and Twitter (522 followers).

Articles were written for specific pests, diseases and weeds of concern in any given week, including management recommendations, and were disseminated within the weekly pest report and Field Crop News blog. These articles were further circulated through county and regional newsletters and via Cornell's fieldcrops.org blog and Facebook page, potentially reaching thousands of farmers, crop consultants and agribusiness associates.

## Project Conclusion

2020 marked the 13th year of this project. Participation in these calls is entirely voluntary, and the duration of this project speaks to the value of the commitment made by participants and the outcomes of participation. The objective of this effort is to improve the timely statewide communication of pest and crop production management issues among field crop CCE personnel during the growing season. Feedback from surveys of participants is overwhelmingly positive, and these calls will continue into 2021.

Over the 13 seasons of field crop conference calls, CCE personnel, Cornell faculty and NYS IPM staff with field crop responsibilities contributed to this weekly opportunity to share observations, gain insights, acquire and present practical knowledge and technical information in an in-house professional development environment. Dairy cattle pest management issues of timely significance were also discussed on occasion. In addition, the timely forum allows for discussion and identification of research and resource needs and potential extension programming opportunities.