

LERGP Coffee Pot Meetings Provide Bidirectional Education

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Location: Lake Erie Region Grape Belt

Collaborators:

Grape Growers in Chautauqua, Cattaraugus and Niagara Counties in New York and Erie County in Pennsylvania

Abstract

Informal Coffee Pot meetings held weekly during the growing season by members of the Lake Erie Regional Grape Program provide extension team members with the chance to learn about local conditions affecting grape production while growers are taking the information and seeing a positive return on investment for practices they implement in their vineyards.

Issues/Needs and Audiences

The area covered by the Lake Erie Regional Grape Program (LERGP) Extension team extends along Lake Erie from the Pennsylvania/Ohio border (Erie County, PA) to the shores of Lake Ontario in Niagara County. Growing conditions, as well as vineyard practices, can vary greatly across the 150 mile long grape belt during a single growing season. In order to reach the varied audience within this geographically large area the LERGP Extension team had devoted time and resources into electronic information transfer methods such as a weekly electronic newsletter "*The Crop Update*", development of a presence on the web for the team and team members, and videos of production practices on YouTube. While this ensured that growers across the region would be able to access production information at their convenience, a disconnect slowly formed between the team members and the areas of the belt that were not in close proximity to LERGP offices.

Extension Responses

Informal weekly Coffee Pot meetings have been developed and implemented across the Lake Erie Grape Belt at grower venues starting in April and ending in the last week of August. This face-to-face interaction has become crucial in the learning process by LERGP extension team members of the particular problems facing different areas of the grape belt, especially the difference in pest pressure seen during the growing season due to climatic differences across the region. There is no set agenda for the Coffee Pot meetings; the discussion follows questions from growers and industry members who are participating in the meeting. A survey conducted during the 2010 Coffee Pot season showed that there was a critical need for Business Planning and Succession Planning common to all regions of the belt. Armed with this information, the team had information available for use during Coffee Pot meetings in answer to questions and programming was developed and delivered at separate venues by Kevin Martin, Business Management Extension Educator with the team.

A total of 348 growers and industry representatives attended 17 Coffee Pot meetings held in locations ranging from Lockport, NY to Girard, PA. The location rotates between the 4 counties involved in the program (Chautauqua, Cattaraugus and Niagara in New York and Erie in Pennsylvania) each week to provide the team a comprehensive overview of conditions found across the belt.

At the end of the 2011 Coffee Pot Season, a phone survey was conducted to gather information from participants to determine the value they placed on the information discussed at Coffee Pot meetings. The survey asked what practices, discussed at Coffee Pot meetings, had they implemented in their vineyards. Of the 23 practices on the survey, 10 were related to IPM, 11 to Viticulture and 2 were general in nature. The survey also looked at economic impact of implementing the practices and the use of information gathered at Coffee Pot Meetings in the preparation of a written business plan for their vineyard operation. Forty-nine growers responded to the request for the survey.

Accomplishments and Impacts

- *86% of growers who implemented an IPM, Viticulture or Business management practice in their vineyard operation discussed at a Coffee Pot meeting found economic savings or positive returns on their investment through higher yields or better quality.*

- *90 - 100% of growers responding to the survey indicated they had changed their IPM vineyard program to include early season Phomopsis Sprays, prebloom fungicide applications, scouting, as well as improving their general disease, insect and weed management practices using information obtained at Coffee Pot meetings.*
- *Incorporating Soil testing (80%) and adjusting their nitrogen fertilization practices according to soil test results (74%) were the two most implemented viticulture production practices mentioned in the survey.*
- *For those practices that were not implemented, only 1 in 49 respondents indicated the decision was based on economics while 69% indicated that the practices were not implemented because they were not applicable to their operation.*
- *Five growers indicated they had developed a written business plan in response to discussion at Coffee Pot meetings with 6 others indicating they are planning on developing one in the future.*

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