

Improving Field Crop Extension Outreach through Enhanced Growing Season Communication Opportunities - 2009 Progress Report

Project Leaders:

J. Keith Waldron, NYS IPM Livestock and Field Crops Coordinator, Cornell University
Russell R. Hahn, Department Crop and Soil Science, Cornell University

Cooperators:

Cornell Field Crop Protection Faculty
CCE county and Region based field crop educators

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Report Author: Keith Waldron

Plan of Work Area: Agriculture and Food Systems

Project Summary/Abstract

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. A series of twenty-one conference calls were held weekly to improve campus and field staff communication regarding field crop pest and crop management issues during the growing season. Each call averaged approximately 10 participants and lasted forty-five minutes.

Background and justification:

County and regional Cornell Cooperative Extension (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 county and campus personnel 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 dialogues provide 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 / programs.

Objectives:

1. Improve timely statewide communication of pest management and crop production among field crop CCE personnel during the growing season.
2. Evaluate the approach for its use and acceptance by field crop extension personnel.

Approach / Procedure

1. A combination of an audio conference call and web based “Adobe conference” will be used to provide statewide CCE bi-weekly half hour virtual meetings to share information updates between CCE Field crop educators and faculty on selected pest management and other topics and statewide observations of crop growth and development and pest status.

An advisory committee will be created, composed of CCE field crop extension educators, the NYS IPM Field Crop team (K. Waldron, K. Wise) and Cornell field crop protection extension specialists. This committee will help develop a calendar of events linked to anticipated pest management needs and opportunities. The proposed production schedule would feature particular pest management topics and other timely information of interest. The creation of a calendar time line will facilitate advanced guest speaker commitments and time to prepare their targeted presentations on special topics. Flexibility of programming would allow the ability to address new, emerging and significant pest outbreaks that might occur. Conference calls would be offered at a convenient time and regular day for biweekly meetings. Meeting reminders will be sent to field crop CCE personnel via the field crop list serve.

User connection would be by phone and internet access using Adobe Connect collaborative software. A series of 13 biweekly 45 minute meetings April through mid-October is proposed. Meeting format would include greeting & roll call, weather forecast, timely topic presented by 1–2 invited speaker(s), statewide updates by participants, a review of timely suggested IPM / ICM activities for the following week and a meeting review-synopsis. Adobe Connect software would allow use ppt’s, photos, pdf’s and other digital media and keep tally of agenda and bullets of discussion. This software would enable us to easily compile and send meeting minutes to the CCE in-house fcrop bb listserve. Highlights of the conference call would be included in the Weekly NYS IPM Field Crop Pest Report as appropriate. More information on Adobe Connect is available at the CCE Connect page: <http://hosts.cce.cornell.edu/dl/connect/index.html>

2. The program will be evaluated through weekly feedback and a more rigorous end of season survey of participants regarding program usefulness, indications of outreach impacts, and recommendations and suggestions for project improvement.

Progress Summary 2009 (milestones, activities, etc)

1. Meeting format and schedule were modified from the original approach. Meetings were held weekly and meeting length extended to 45 minutes per call. A series of twenty-one conference calls, were conducted April 30 – Oct. 1 (8:30 - 9:15 am). These 45 minute conference calls invited CCE field crop personnel and faculty to share information updates on statewide observations of crop growth / development, pest status and selected pest management and other topics. A session to update field staff on Western Bean Cutworm utilized the Adobe Connect and was well received by participants. See comments to our end of season survey questionnaire.

Conference calls were open to *all* CCE personnel with field crop responsibilities, a total of 21 CCE educators participated over the course of the growing season. An average of 10 extension educators with field crop and general agriculture responsibilities participated per meeting.

Meeting activities and agenda included: call in introductions (organized and moderated by K. Waldron and R. Hahn), weekly weather summary and outlook (Art DeGaetano, NOAA NE Climate Center at Cornell), discussion of county pest observations (contributions by CCE educators, all), topics included: statewide updates on crop growth and development, pest status and other selected pest management topics. Pest Management Specialist Observations and Updates (Gary Bergstrom, Russ Hahn, Keith Waldron). Meetings concluded with a special topic and/or suggested IPM activities for week.

Weather outlook and field observations were summarized for inclusion into the Field Crop IPM Weekly Pest Report, a publication shared with field crop extension personnel via a Cornell field crops list serve and available on the world wide web on the NYS IPM Program website (<http://nysipm.cornell.edu/fieldcrops/tag/pestrpt/default.asp>). Links and supplemental information discussed during the conference call were shared with participants via follow up email.

Plans for 2010: increase number of participants, incorporate more use of Adobe Connect collaboration software where appropriate for training purposes and presentations by subject matter specialists.

2. Project evaluation

Participants were polled regularly for feedback during the growing season for input regarding conference call. An end of season questionnaire was shared with participants with a 33% return on survey. Responses were very positive. Survey questionnaire and responses are shown in the Appendix.

Expected & Observed Impact/Outcome (economic, environmental, and social)

- Significant pest observations reported this season: tracking wheat growth / development / disease incidence, early season weed control, delayed development and prolonged presence of alfalfa weevil populations, identification of white mold in alfalfa and soybean, soybean aphid populations, western bean cutworm, updates on soybean and other fcrop diseases.
- Detailed discussions of fusarium head blight prediction model, mid to late season corn weed management, soybean rust, soybean white mold management, weed management recommendations and decision making, vertebrate damage to field crops, sharing of timely resources and field monitoring reminders.
- Weather outlook and field observations summarized for inclusion into the Field Crop IPM Weekly Pest Report (<http://nysipm.cornell.edu/fieldcrops/tag/pestrpt/>)
- Averaged 10 participants per conference call with active participation and contributions by Gary Bergstrom (Cornell plant pathologist) and Russ Hahn (Cornell weed scientist). Entire CCE FCrop listserv invited to participate, 21 different CCE educators have participated.
- End of program evaluations were very positive. See evaluation responses.

Project Deliverables:

Field observations and timely topics discussed during the conference calls were summarized for inclusion in the NYS IPM Weekly Field Crop Pest Report distributed internally through Cornell field crop listserves and available via the NYS IPM Program website at:

(<http://nysipm.cornell.edu/fieldcrops/tag/pestrpt/>). The intended audience for this newsletter are CCE personnel, crop advisors, agricultural industry, farmer. Direct and multiplier effect distribution estimated at 14,000.

Presentations (in-service, workshop, etc)

Conference call project update, summary and invitation to participate presented to Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) educators and faculty during field crop pest management section of the 2009 Cornell Cooperative Extension November InService.

Appendix: Project evaluation survey and Results (33% response return)

2009 NYS IPM Field Crop Weekly Conference Call Survey

Your input on the effectiveness of the NYS IPM Field Crop Weekly Conference Call is important. Our chief objective for the conference call series was to: “Improve timely statewide communication of pest management and crop production among field crop CCE personnel during the growing season”. How well did we do?

By providing your perspective you can help us improve our efforts to better meet your growing season field crop IPM extension needs. Please take a minute to complete the following questionnaire. Indicate your answer by placing an "X" on the line or a response to the specific questions about the 2008 NYS IPM Field Crop Weekly Conference Call. Additional comments or suggestions are welcome.

1. The 2009 NYS IPM Field Crop Weekly Conference Call series was:

Very Useful 6 Somewhat Useful 1 Not Useful

2. What did you like the most about the NYS Weekly Field Crops Pest Report?

What is going on elsewhere
I like getting current pest related information each week that would help us prepare the NYS IPM Weekly Field Crops Pest Report.
This program is very effective at bringing extension educators together to discuss and teach IPM related information as critical issues become apparent. It has helped many extension educators focus in on what and when pests are infesting fields in other parts of the state. For example soybean aphid was a big problem this year in soybeans and the weekly conference call helped many extension educators learn the important IPM information and then alert farmers to the critical issue.
The power point and discussion of the Western Bean Cut worm was very useful to get information without having to spend time traveling.
Hearing what was going on all around the state from other educators
Sharing of timely field crop information from across the state.
Combining the knowledge and expertise of a group of individuals allows more brainpower to be brought to bear on solving pest problems encountered in the field. Equally important, because of the more personal nature of the medium, it builds camaraderie in a way that e-mail can not.
Opportunity to connect with field crop folks from around the state on a regular basis

3. What did you like the least about the NYS Weekly Field Crops Pest Report?

1 comment regarding time of the call: Should be convenient but it isn't.

4 comments: Nothing bad about the call.

4. Was 8:30 – 9:15 am Thursday a convenient meeting time? Comments/Suggestions?

Five responses were favorable: e.g. Time was great. Having the meeting near the beginning of the day was efficient. Time and day work well.

No time is going to be perfect every week but I think it is as good a time as any. It allows you to report on the week and still gives you time Thurs and Friday if there is something urgent that you want to get information out on.

No. I hate to say it but the call for me was to late in the morning. I wasn't willing to give up meeting or appointments for the phone call. A 7:30 am would be better.

5. We are interested in your assessment of the following components of the Conference Call. (Rating 5 = very useful, 3 = somewhat useful, 1 = not useful)

Average of responses: Weather Outlook: 3.7, CCE County Update: 4.7, Featured Pest topic(s): 3.9, Power point presentation: 4, Links – (follow up email): 4.7.

Comments:

County Updates: 3 Took to long. Suggestion: maybe a little more structure. Don't go around to everyone as I think people feel obligated to say something and then we get bogged down.

Links: Sharing of ideas for winter

Comments

I usually take the call at home, where I am not on-line, so powerpoints/webinars aren't useful to me. But more importantly it's the live conversation I tune in for, not "teaching" time. I think we should avoid making it "instructional" time, except perhaps in the event of a pest epidemic, or invasion by a new pest we are completely unfamiliar with for which we need a "crash course".

6. Do you have any comments or suggestions to improve next season's NYS IPM Field Crop Weekly Conference Call series to better suit your field crop IPM extension needs and those of your clientele?

Yes - this was very helpful for me just starting out. <i>we need more presentations.</i>
Guest speakers on IPM topic: No -- this is not the purpose of the call. Unless it's in response to a specific knowledge gap identified in a previous call.
More use of Adobe " Connect" for meeting presentations: No, for reasons stated above. A "call" should be just that, live conversation. Given that call is short, we can't afford down time with technical difficulties, etc. Bottom line: Keep it simple:-)
Pest management is not my strong point so extra background info when we cover a pest topic is helpful for me but may be too elementary for others on the call.

7. Suggestions for Winter Meeting Field Crop and / or Livestock IPM topics:

Sharing of ideas for winter programs, news letter articles, crop storage, precision feeding, economic analysis of field crop enterprise, outlook for input prices, whole farm approach-mgmt

of field crop program, planning of on farm trials, GPS systems, calibration of equipment
Controlling aphids in organic soybeans.
Smart use of seed technology. Pick the fields where you need certain traits to help conserve these traits instead of using the same traits across your farm

8. Under consideration... Would you or your stakeholders have interest in on-line overviews on various field crop IPM topics – such as those we have provided for IPM scout training and the Dairy Fly IPM Teleconference. For example: an overview of alfalfa IPM approaches to common insect, disease and weed issues? ID, monitoring, thresholds etc.

Yes, this would be great for me to learn pest problems a week or 2 before there is potential problem. This way if pest problems came up I 'd have a heads up. - Of course I am in a different situation than others just starting out.
Not sure I understand the question -- do you mean as part of the conference call, or something else? If the former, no. If the latter, sure, but in the winter, not the summer.
This could be useful, especially if there were pesticide credits attached.

Thank you for taking the time from your busy schedule to complete this evaluation!

Keith and Russ