

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE: A MULTI-PRONGED APPROACH TO INFORMATION DELIVERY

PROJECT LEADER(S):

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TYPE OF PROJECT: Training practitioners to use IPM techniques

PROJECT LOCATION(S): Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie and Niagara Counties in New York and Erie County, Pennsylvania.

BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION:

Issue - The demographics of growers in the Lake Erie grape industry makes it difficult to plan educational activities appropriate for this diverse audience. Because many newcomers are approaching grape growing as a part-time business venture in the beginning, attending traditional educational events such as meetings during the day or evening is often in direct conflict with their primary off-farm jobs. The type of timely, in-depth information growers need in order to make intelligent decisions during the growing season is not found in the traditional newsletters delivered through the mail. Moreover, some growers' off farm work schedules may make contact with extension personnel difficult to schedule.

PROCEDURES:

Response - In recent years the Lake Erie Regional Grape Program (LERGP) extension team has been making a concerted effort to develop programming that can be delivered via e-mail and the World Wide Web. Electronic communication has been shown to provide educational opportunities to a diverse audience and has no time restrictions on information access. However, even when combined with the team's conventional information transfer methods of twilight meetings, a winter grower conference, hard copy newsletters, publications and fact sheets, there was a void in connecting the available information with vineyard practices in the Lake Erie Grape Industry. In response to potential challenges in disease and insect management, as well as drought concerns during the growing season, weekly small group meetings (Coffee Pot and IPM Roundtable) were held across the 30,000 acres of the Lake Erie grape belt. As every growing season is typically different in the different areas of the belt, the agenda for discussions at the small group meetings are determined during the meeting by questions and concerns of those attending the meeting. This has allowed the team to provide a more hands-on approach to implementing new research-based information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Impact - 291 grape growers and grape industry personnel subscribe to the electronic newsletter, The Crop Update, e-mailed to them weekly throughout the year. On average, an additional 138 people access The Crop Update via the web each week, an increase of 32% over 2004. In addition, the Lake Erie Regional Grape Program web home page averaged 148 visits each week during 2005.

276 growers and grape industry personnel attended the 28 Coffee Pot meetings and IPM Roundtable discussions held during the 2005 growing season. Informal surveys conducted at the end of each meeting found that a majority of participants had changed at least one of their vineyard practices based on information obtained in prior small group meetings. Participants surveyed find the small group meetings to be one of the more valuable activities the LERGP extension team conducts during the heart of the growing season.