The 1997 growing season brought many challenges— a cold spring, a summer drought, and record potato leafhopper numbers. Farmers in 11 counties across New York State armed themselves to face these challenges and many more by participating in the Tactical Agriculture (TAG) program. Agents and Area Educators were joined by program assistants who spent time scouting fields and gathering data for use by the farmers and the agents, allowing for challenges to be addressed as they occurred.

Teams, Goals & Procedures

Each team consists of 3-7 farmers, an extension representative who facilitates the meeting, and whenever possible agribusiness and community members. Each farmer designates 1 corn and 1 alfalfa field which are monitored by the program assistants and are used as focal points of the TAG meetings. Each team meets at key points during the growing season to discuss current management issues as they arise. Topics often include crop establishment, integrated pest management (IPM), and soil fertility.

The greatest advantage of this system is that the appropriate educational moment is used to introduce or review pertinent information. By addressing key issues as they arise, the groups are able to delve deeper into the complexities of the subject at hand. The hands-on-training allows clients to apply new skills immediately as well as better judge the value of the integrated crop management (ICM) services available from other sources. These things allow us to effectively increase the client’s level of sophistication about various aspects of ICM.

In 1997 the program assistants collected data from participants ranging from planting dates to harvest yields, pest population numbers to management method. This allowed for more in depth examination of farming practices across New York State and more realistic recommendations on management alternatives.