

Improving Field Crop Extension outreach through Enhanced Growing Season Communication Opportunities 2008 Progress Report

Project Leaders:

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Cooperators:

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

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-four 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, J. Dennis) 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 (milestones, activities, etc)

1. Meeting format and schedule were modified from the original approach. Implementation of the Adobe Connect portion of the program was postponed until 2009. Meetings were held weekly and meeting length extended to 45 minutes per call. A series of twenty-five conference calls, were conducted April 24 – Oct. 2, Nov. 6, (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.

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. Approximately 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. Links and supplemental information discussed during the conference call were shared with participants via follow up email.

Plans for 2009: increase number of participants, incorporate additional features such as use of Adobe Connect collaboration software and presentations by additional 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 38% 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: armyworm infestations in wheat and field corn, delayed development and prolonged presence of alfalfa weevil populations, identification of white mold in alfalfa and soybean, potential nematode problem in field corn, cereal leafbeetle of wheat, observations on effectiveness of biological control of leafy spurge by flea beetle, bird damage in field corn, lack of potato leafhopper and soybean aphid populations, 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 overview, summary and invitation to participate presented to Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) educators and faculty during field crop pest management section of the 2008 Cornell Cooperative Extension November InService.

Appendix: Project evaluation survey and Results (38% response return)

1. The **2008 NYS IPM Field Crop Weekly Conference Call series** was: Very Useful 8, Somewhat Useful 0, Not Useful 0.

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

- Hearing the statewide pest issues to include in the NYS pest report was great!
- It allowed us to hear what was going on around the state. We also did a lot of collective problem solving that was very timely and useful.
- Conversation w/ colleagues from around the state and that the call always stayed on schedule each week.
- Observations from the field. Chance to talk through problem diagnosis and recommendations.
- Everyone on each call had the chance to participate, and calls were not dominated by a few people
- Calls were the same length each week, and were kept on schedule for ending on time
- Russ and Gary were available most weeks to answer questions that came up, and we all learned from the questions people asked
- It made writing “The View from the Field” for the weekly pest report easy
- Most calls led to suggestions of websites to visit for more information
- The informal chit chat prior to the actual start of the agenda was nice for setting a comfortable tone for group participation
- Chance to interact with field crops folks from around the state on a weekly basis.
- Hearing reports from other educators. Helpful follow-ups shared resources...links on websites etc.
- I think that all of it was productive. Try to increase participation on campus and off campus. Try using adobe connect to help teach its use in programming
- The Thurs. conf. calls were extremely helpful in:
 1. both review of IPM tech. info as well as new learning. Most ag.educators cover many, many subject areas and are involved in multiple programs, which makes it difficult to keep up with pest management. Having the support of specialists and other educators helps hugely to overcome that. Especially the more experienced helping the newer staff.
 2. synergistic effect of sharing pest observations from across the state. In some instances, this helps to see regional patterns.
 - *3. building professional camaraderie and a team spirit in a way that can't be done by e-mail. I value this HIGHLY.

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

- I think we diverted off IPM too often to discuss Integrated Crop Management... which is also a good thing but maybe we need to add some more time to the meeting so all topics can be covered.
- I thought it was great.
- It was all relevant.
- It is too bad that we did not have the good fortune to have our Extension Entomologist available on any of the calls I participated in to answer questions
- It could be frustrating and slightly disruptive when people joined in late (10 to 15 minutes) (there isn't much that can be done to fix either of these, perhaps they aren't worth mentioning).

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

- It was fine! (5 responses)
- Yes, it gave us a chance to start the day with a conference call and then go to the field and make regular farm visits. This is by far the best time of day to have conference calls.
- The time of day was convenient although I think Wednesday would be better to give more time to follow up in the field, etc.
- I wonder if earlier in the week might be useful?
- No matter what time it is it will always be inconvenient at some point in the summer but I think this was just as good a time as any.

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 rating: Weather Outlook 3.4, County Updates 5.0, Featured Pest 4.5, and Follow up Information Links 4.6.