



Applying knowledge to improve water quality

New England

Regional Water Program

*A Partnership of USDA CSREES
& Land Grant Colleges and Universities*

Final Report of The 2006 New England Regional In-Service Training for Ag. Service Providers

Introduction

The Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) Program is a professional certification program offered by the American Society of Agronomy (<http://www.agronomy.org>). For the past ten years, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension has conducted a collaborative two-day annual New England Region in-service training for CCAs and other agricultural service providers and other interested participants.

This program provides New England CCA recertification credits and encourages agricultural service providers and farmers to use agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) for water resource protection with specific applications to nutrient management, crop management, soil-water management and integrated pest management (IPM). Extension educators, university researchers, consultants, and affiliates from various agencies and organizations such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) present subject matter that is integrated across all CCA competency areas.

Highlights from the 2006 in-service training program

This year's program was conducted February 6 and 7, 2006 at the Marriott Wentworth by the Sea Hotel in New Castle, NH. Over 60 people attended the conference representing a diverse audience from universities, agencies, private sector agri-businesses, non-profit organizations and farmers from New England and Canada.

A total of 15 speakers presented a wide array of current and emerging topics covering agricultural research, implementation of BMPs, policy and programs with organic forage

and grain production consisting of a core theme this year. The January 2006 issue of *AG Professional* contained an article about the need and role for CCAs to service the ever-increasing organic farming sector.

This year's program featured three presentations by a researcher from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada relating nutrient management research on potato production from the nearby Canadian Maritime Provinces of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Other highlights included presentations by the American Farmland Trust, a successful food industry processor, and a Vermont organic dairy and grain farmer, all of which continue to foster new partnerships, modes of learning, and perspectives.



John Jemison, University of Maine Cooperative Extension and organizer of the in-service training program presents a global perspective on water use and agriculture, 2/6/06.

To see the agenda and presentations visit the [Agriculture Certified Crop Advisor Proceedings Page](#).

Program Evaluation

Each year, a program evaluation is administered that allows participants to evaluate speakers, topics presented, and the overall organization and location of the training program. Every few years, we ask participants to complete an additional assessment tool to track knowledge and actions taken as a result of the program. With this tool, we also conducted a needs assessment to determine preferences for an annual summer field training program.

Speaker and In-service Training Program Evaluation Summary

39 program evaluations were returned (approximately 65% return rate). Over 80% of the respondents indicated that the speakers were very good or excellent; over 60% agreed that the presentations were very relevant to their work with presentations addressing nutrient and pest management issues and global issues receiving the highest relevancy ratings; and 97% indicated they had adequate time to network. 100% of the respondents indicated a desire to continue to hold the in-service training annually. The majority of respondents indicated an interest in next year's core theme to address soil fertility and nutrient management issues, as well as improving soil quality in continuous cropland.

Needs Assessment Summary

39 needs assessments were returned (approximately 65% return rate). 64% of respondents have attended this annual in-service training program three or more times, with 25% of the respondents attending for the first time. In addition to working directly with farmers as agricultural service providers, the majority of program participants are also involved with education, technical program administration and assistance, and product sales and development.

Approximately 44% of the respondents indicated an interest in attending a summer field training program with another 33% being interested depending on the topics presented and location. Over 50% of the respondents interested in a summer field training program would prefer a half day at a research farm followed by a half day farm tour. Respondents would like to see examples of nutrient and pest management practices and techniques, as well as practices and techniques for improving soil quality. Respondents would like the field training program to enhance their practical field skills and service to farmers.



Program participants network and exchange information and ideas during a short break, 2/7/06.

Next Steps

A New England Regional In-Service Training for Agricultural Service Providers will be planned in Southeastern New Hampshire for the winter 2007. Based on the 2006 program evaluations and needs assessments, a core theme addressing soil fertility, nutrient management and soil quality will likely be developed along with individual presentations that address other items requested by program participants. Examples include a presentation from a crop advisor to report on experiences and lessons learned, as well as a panel discussion on soil testing procedures and interpretation.

Planning for a 2006 Summer Field Training Program to be conducted by the University of Maine is underway and will consider and incorporate the preferences expressed within the needs assessment.

