



## **USDA-CSREES 2007 National Water Quality Conference**

### **Measuring Behavior Change**

This poster describes an integrated, interdisciplinary, multi-state project that will apply environmental and behavioral research results to Extension efforts to reduce the application of excess nutrients by homeowners (do-it-yourselfers) in targeted, urbanizing neighborhoods throughout New England with the ultimate goal of protecting surface and groundwater quality. Environmental research will be used to develop regionally specific recommendations for fertilizer use (or non-use) that minimize water quality impacts and to develop a reliable soil based nitrogen test. Social science research will be conducted in five target communities to identify the primary drivers of homeowners' fertilizer choices and application behaviors by examining the relative strength of various influences including environmental values, attitudes and norms, the level of trust in and influence of opinion leaders (E.g. Master Gardeners, local garden centers, and mass media), and the relative influence of different types of informational messages. Extension will be carried out by incorporating the nutrient application recommendations into messages and delivery methods that have been determined to be compelling to neighborhood residents based on social science research. Extension staff will then work with those considered to be reliable, credible local sources (opinion leaders) of yard care information to deliver the messages to residents of targeted neighborhoods. The education component of the project will incorporate undergraduate or graduate students as both part of the social science research team and as co-developers with Extension staff of the outreach campaign. An evaluation of the project will establish whether changes in knowledge, attitude and behavior have occurred as a result of the Extension effort. The project will serve as a pilot that could be adapted and duplicated within or outside the region at the neighborhood, community, or watershed scale.

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