Northeast IPM Center Partnership Grants Program
Project Report for Survey, Profile, Strategic plan Projects

2004 New England Pest Management Network

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A. Grant Data

Grant #: 2815-UM-USDA-2103
Type: Pest Management Tactic Survey, Crop Profile, and Pest Management Strategic Plan Projects
Project Directors:

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Cooperators:

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University of New Hampshire
Dr. Alan Eaton – Statewide IPM Coordinator

University of Rhode Island
Margaret Siligato – Pesticide Applicator Training Program Coordinator
Dr. Steven Alm – Professor of Entomology
University of Vermont –
Ann Hazelrigg – Pesticide Education and Safety Program Coordinator, Plant Diagnostic Clinic Director
Sarah Kinsley-Richards – Lab/Research Technician

State(s) involved:
Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont

Funding Year: 2004

Funding amount: $260,538

This is total funding for three subprojects: State network project; IWG Priorities; and Survey-Profile-Strategic Plan. This total also includes funds attached to the project for other activity in New England, but not directed by the New England Pest Management Network (NEPMNet). Direct NEPMNet funding was $196,278.

Of the direct NEPMNet funds, $39,316 was for survey-profile-strategic plan activities covered by this accomplishments report.

B. Summary

The New England Pest Management Network (NEPMNet) has three major goals.
1. Enhance public understanding and access to information on pest management practices in New England.
2. Increase stakeholder participation in prioritizing regional pest management needs.
3. Represent the New England perspective to federal regulatory agencies.

In 2004, NEPMNet received funding from the Northeastern IPM Center for work in three areas: a state network project; IPM working group priorities, and pest management survey, profile, and strategic plan reports. This report describes work done by the survey-profile-strategic portion of the project.

C. Objectives

Survey, Profile and Strategic Plan objectives for 2004 were:
1. Pest management tactic survey of New England strawberry growers.
2. Pest management tactic survey of New England sweet corn growers.

3. An unfunded winter squash pest management tactic survey was also completed.

For all three surveys, a survey questionnaire was created, duplicate prior notification and survey mailings conducted, responses were entered in a database, a response summary was created, and a survey results overview document was created.

4. New England highbush blueberry crop profile.

The crop profile was completed in fall 2005. However, during review for submission to the national database, a need was found for additional information on worker exposure to pesticides. This information is scheduled to be added in January 2006. When it is added, the crop profile will be submitted to the national crop profile database.

5. Pest management strategic plan for peas production in New England.
6. Pest management strategic plan for snap bean production in New England.
7. Pest management strategic plan for carrot production in New England.

The three strategic plans were completed and submitted to Pat Hastings for review prior to forwarding to the national pest management strategic plan database.

D. Approach

NEPMNet approaches pest management surveys, profiles, and strategic plans not as individual reports, but as three integral parts of a sequence. The first step in the sequence is a survey to accurately measure current practices. To do this, the survey must be conducted in a way that insures responses from a representative and unbiased sample of New England pest managers. This requires more than simply sending out a list of questions and hoping that enough people return it to get an accurate representation of the total population. We use the Dillman survey method for creating survey questions and for repeated, targeted mailings. By using the Dillman method, we increase the response rate and collect information from enough people to reliably represent practices within New England.

The second step in the sequence is to combine survey responses with Extension management guidelines and other reference materials to create a profile that describes the pest threats for the crop (or other setting), the currently available management options, and how they are used.

The third step in the sequence is a strategic plan, following USDA guidelines. To create the plan, we gather a group of experts to review the profile; to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the different pesticide and nonchemical management options; and to prioritize regulatory, research and education needs. The strategic plan

also discusses the potential for new pest threats or from regulatory changes that remove or constrain currently available management options. The strategic plan discusses possible responses to those contingencies using current methods, as well as new technologies that are in development or that are already in use in other settings.

A survey-profile-strategic plan sequence provides an accurate description of the challenges faced by New England pest managers, and of how they respond to those challenges. This information is necessary for public understanding and to provide policy makers accurate information about pest management practices in the region. Realistic and effective regulation at the local, state, and federal level requires this factual foundation. Accurate descriptions of current practices and priorities are also necessary to guide research and education programs at the state and federal level. In particular, research and Extension efforts at the state land grant universities benefit from the descriptive information and new possibilities provided by a survey-profile-strategic plan sequence.

E. Results

Status of each survey, profile and strategic plan were stated in the Objectives section. The completed survey and strategic plan documents, and the near-final draft of the highbush blueberry pest management profile, are included as email attachments.

F. Addendum

Difficulties:

1. Duplicated effort and delays in contract finalization. Some of the 2004 project activities were hampered by the extreme delay in getting signed contracts. For some states this issue is more critical than for others. University of Massachusetts cooperators in particular operate under rules that make it difficult to initiate work until the grant contract has been finalized.

The nominal project period for the 2004 New England Pest Management Network activities described below was January 1 to December 31, 2004. We received award notification in April 2004, four months into the project year. Steps to finalize contracts were begun at that time and were nearing completion in July 2004 when we were notified that all that work was wasted because the addition of other subcontracts that were not part of our team's proposal necessitated creating an entirely new contract.

This required a new round of budget revisions and approvals from five university grants offices. The contract cannot be finalized until all of them have signed, meaning that the slowest cog governs progress. In the slowest state, we finally called to

inquire about progress and found that the paperwork had sat for months buried on someone's desk while the cooperator in that state was making desperate calls to us because their salary account was running out of funds. The eventual outcome was that we did not have a complete contract for 2004 project activities until February 2005. This protracted process not only causes delay but it increase the cumulative handling time.

We took steps to simplify and expedite the process for 2005, and finalized 2005 paperwork for five of the six New England states before the end of 2005!

Should we be fortunate to be awarded funds for 2006, we have two suggestions for expediting the contracting process:

1) Notification of other awards that will be attached to our funding at the same time as we receive award notification for our proposal would be very helpful. This would eliminate the three month lag that contributed to contract delays in 2004 and 2005.

2) Even though we can't finalize the contract/amendment budgets until all attached awards are known, begin budget revisions to accommodate actual award amounts as soon as the amount is know.

3) Handle new funding as an amendment to the previous contract rather than as an entirely new contract.

4) When paperwork has been sent to each state for signature, notify the state cooperator in that state as to whom the message was sent, and encourage them to begin weekly checking of whether the paperwork has been processed. This should eliminate the "lost on someone's desk at the grant office" scenario.

2. Inefficient mailing lists. The mailing lists sent by each state to conduct the sweet corn survey included many people who are either not growing sweet corn, or not growing anything, or no longer breathing. Bloated mailing lists also caused inefficiency and additional costs for the strawberry, winter squash and previous surveys, but the problem was particularly noticeable in conducting with the sweet corn survey.

To reduce this problem for future surveys and to create an additional benefit from the survey process, we have added a new component to the survey procedure. Responses from people who whose name should not have been on the mailing list are recorded. This information is sent back to each state so that they can correct their mailing lists. In addition, a cumulative master file of survey recipients is being created to create lists of currently active producers and to minimize re-use of the same people in subsequent surveys addressing other crops.

3. Sequential delays. The highbush blueberry pest management profile was held up by waiting for finalized results from the survey. Likewise, strategic plans are contingent upon prior completion of the associated survey and profile. In the future, it may be advisable to postpone profile and strategic plan activity until there is reasonable

assurance that the preceding steps will be done in time to prevent cumulative delays.

4. Breaking new ground. Because the survey, profile, and strategic plan process is still evolving, there have been problems in getting compliance to published standards. Specific templates and checklists were created to assist and standardize document creation for each type (survey, profile, strategic plan). It is too early to evaluate the success of these templates, but recent document drafts have been more complete than those submitted before the templates were available. The use of templates has also saved much tedium of reformatting tables etc.

The forwarding of incomplete draft versions to reviewers wastes reviewer effort by having multiple reviewers correcting deficiencies that should have been completed before sending out for review. Getting thorough review by a cooperator in each state has also been problematic. More specific tracking of author and reviewer performance through a matrix of steps for each report may enhance accountability, and subsequently performance.

Some of these difficulties are inevitable growing pains from learning new skills and creating a new "system". We have already seen tremendous improvement in the efficiency and standardization of the survey process. As we gain experience, the "system" and the documents it produces are maturing and getting better.

Issues of cooperator-review response may require specifying reviewer activity as a budgetary line item instead of assigning to generic "base activities" for state liaisons. In addition, adding reviewer comment forms as part of the survey, profile and strategic plan templates may seem overly bureaucratic, but if it results in more thorough review activity and performance tracking then it will be worth it. But it is not yet clear how performance tracking can be used to stimulate performance. That would seem to require establishing rewards and consequences for excellent and poor performance, respectively.

Finally, more clearly defining and communicating expectations from reviewers may help. Pat Hastings has offered to help with training in this regard.