



NAICC NEWS

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



By
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NAICC
2009 President

INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR AG CONSULTANTS AS TSP's

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Technical Service Provider (TSP) program has presented opportunities for some and many frustrations for others. My experience in North Carolina and Virginia tells me that programs funded by the NRCS through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) vary dramatically from state to state. Compounding the confusion is the fact that within a state, programs are often administered differently from county to county. Consultants who work with the TSP/EQIP programs in other parts of the country have echoed these sentiments. Sometimes the confusion involved is enough to make a person throw up their hands and walk away from the entire TSP/EQIP situation.

I settled on this topic to address why I think it is important for us as Agricultural Consultants to stay informed, trained and certified as TSP's. Since about 2003 NRCS has provided funding in North Carolina,

through EQIP, to encourage farmers to develop both nutrient management plans and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) plans. Most of the EQIP/TSP work in NC, to date, has been to develop and implement IPM plans.

NRCS is currently implementing the 2008 Farm Bill and working on a new program called Conservation Activity Plan (CAP). IPM is one of 12 components within the CAP program. The IPM Institute has formed a working group consisting of NAICC members, NRCS employees and other stakeholders. Currently we are focusing on developing training modules and acceptable pricing levels for this new work. NAICC has been fortunate to have several people seated on the committees. **Allison Jones** is on the training committee. **Charlie Mellinger** and I are on the committee to develop cost share rates. The greatest benefit to this program is that the cost share money is not competitive like normal EQIP programs.

This program is available to all states, but each State Conservationist can choose not to use it. We have been encouraged to ask our members to contact their state NRCS offices, expressing interest in this program. More information can be found on the working group's website, <http://www.ipminstitute.org/IPMCAPs/home.htm>. Also, we have invited a representative from the IPM Institute and an NRCS representative to be on the program in Orlando to explain the program in detail.

This program alone is not reason enough to become or to remain TSP certified. I am looking at many things taking place in the arena for agricultural regulation. We know about the recent Federal Court ruling on

pesticide applications, but we do not yet know how that will be implemented. We read about CAP and Trade legislation, carbon credits and carbon sequestration. How will all these programs/regulations be put into place?

I believe that many of these will ultimately come back to NRCS to be implemented through their various conservation programs. If and when this happens, and NRCS will need consultants who are TSP certified to help get these programs out to their growers.

Most consultants are thinking, this guy is nuts. I don't want anything to do with government paperwork/red tape. I agree. There are many aspects of my work that I enjoy and find more rewarding than my work with the EQIP planning. BUT...if my knowledge of an NRCS program can help one of my growers be proactive in meeting these new requirements, then I want to be prepared to lead him/her through the process. I know my growers, how they work, their farms and soils, etc. I can do a much better job of planning for them than an outsider brought in just to complete a plan. Because I know the grower and communicate well with him, the plan will be workable and he will actually follow it. The grower will gain, NRCS goals will be accomplished, and the environment will benefit.

The bottom line is this. Lots of these programs are here. More will be coming. **Do you want to help your growers with them OR do you want a stranger doing this for your growers?**

NAICC's involvement in the implementation of this new CAP program hopefully, will lead to TSP training being available at annual meetings. Stay tuned.

Dr. Earle Raun – NAICC Pioneer and First President – Will Long Be Remembered

After a long battle with cancer, founding NAICC member **Dr. Earle Raun** passed away last month. The organization's inaugural president was not only a dedicated NAICC member; he was an innovator, a leader, a dedicated member of his family and community, a friend and mentor.

As Allison Jones, NAICC Executive Vice President, stated:

Words can't describe Earle Raun, but to me he was a leader and a compassionate and thoughtful friend. As busy as he was in life, he always had time for an encouraging word for those in need.

Earle Raun was one of NAICC's most trusted and loyal members. In true form, Earle fought his illness just like he fought for NAICC and his clients. Earle was a wise man and a pioneer in the crop consulting profession.

Dr. Raun served as the first NAICC President and was the only one to serve two

terms. He received the Service to NAICC award and also was rewarded with honorary membership in NAICC. He was key to NAICC's government relations program and represented the Alliance at many EPA and USDA meetings. Earle also was a key player in the development of NAICC's educational foundation.

Earle Raun was the backbone of NAICC, a friend to all and will truly be missed.

Orvin Bontrager had this to say about Earle:

I was impressed with Earle staying in the crop consulting profession well past the time when many would have retired. If one is enjoying what they are doing, then staying at that vocation, as Earle did, is an excellent role model.

Earle's ability to maintain a high integrity professional relationship with academia, industry, clients, and other crop consultants is something we all can strive to achieve.

And as co-founding father of NAICC, Grady Coburn paid tribute to Earle:

I realized in 1978 when Earle became NAICC's first president that he was the type of individual who could and would lay the foundation for the direction of our organization. I know no other person who believed in NAICC and its importance to U.S. Agriculture more than Earle Raun.

Hopefully, his legacy will live on through the Earle Raun Endowment Fund established at the University of Nebraska for their new Doctor of Plant Health Curriculum. I know I'll never forget him.

Many others, no doubt, echo these sentiments and are invited to share their cards and letters of condolence with Georgia Raun, 3036 Prairie Road, Lincoln, NE 68506.

And to further one of the efforts Earle helped establish, an endowed fellowship for the DPH program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has been established in Earle's name.

FEAE collaborated with the University of

Nebraska Foundation to set up the fund, which pays tribute to Earle's contribution to NAICC and to the establishment of the DPH program at the university. Fellowships from the endowed fund will support DPH students at UNL.

Contributions may be made to the Earle Raun Doctor of Plant Health Endowed Fellowship Fund #10864 at the University of Nebraska Foundation (1010 Lincoln Mall, Suite 300, Lincoln, NE 68508). For more information on this fund, please contact Ann Bruntz, Development Officer for UNLIANR at 402-458-1176.

Memorials can also be made in Earle's name to the National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants for Agricultural Education Foundation, 349 East Nolley Drive, Collierville, TN 38017.

Please take a moment to remember Earle, his efforts and his leadership; we owe it to him to continue a legacy of leadership and commitment to American agriculture.

ipmPIPE - Are We Taking It For Granted?

By Blaine Viator, Ph.D.

When Asian soybean rust was discovered late in 2004, there was a great sense of urgency to develop an advanced tracking mechanism to aid producers, consultants, industry and extension specialists in early detection of this very explosive disease in soybeans. In one of the most organized, rapid and efficient coordinated efforts that at least this consultant has ever seen, the ipmPIPE system was developed. Some not working in soybeans or other subsequently added crops to the ipmPIPE may not fully be aware of the significance and importance of this innovative concept.

ipmPIPE is an acronym for "Integrated Pest Management Pest Information Platform for Extension and education." The key word is IPM. I think back to my earliest college pest management classes and remember one fundamental of IPM that is a core value in our consulting profession:

"Management implies a process by which information is collected and used to make good management decisions to reduce pest populations in a planned, coordinated way. IPM requires a more tolerant data collection management approach than traditional blanket-application pesticide based programs."

One can simply pull up the public ipmPIPE website and see how this system fits the textbook definition of IPM, and does so in a very innovative way. A coordinated framework of State Extension Specialists, Extension Agents and private individuals participate in an elaborate scouting and web-based reporting effort to help give early warning of the pest status.

It is important to realize that the ipmPIPE is more than just predictive modeling based on weather patterns. This is actual "ground-truthing" – something we all learned is of utmost importance in this age of precision agriculture.

For a disease (or any other pest for that matter) that migrates from south to north, north to south, east to west, etc., this is a valuable tool for those producing crops in potentially susceptible areas.

From discussing the ipmPIPE concept with many consultants in our membership, a majority told me that traditionally they relied on an "ad hoc" network, calling agronomists and consultants further to the south or north of them to warn of a pending pest problem heading their way. But many said they do not always think to pick up the phone or do not know anyone in an area that may be potentially harboring the pest.

Word of mouth is one thing; seeing the positive detections on a geographic map along with written commentary on the disease status in any given area is like a picture saying a thousand words.

The ipmPIPE began with Asian soybean rust, but new components have been added since its original implementation. Soybean aphid on soybean, cucurbit downy mildew, legume crop diseases and pecan nut case bearer on pecan are now also part of the ipmPIPE.

Potential components could be implemented in the future for tracking rust diseases in wheat (in preparation for the devastating strain of stem rust Ug99) and

southern corn rust, among other devastating pests that tend to migrate geographically.

One of my greatest concerns from discussions with soybean consultants further north is a potential sense of complacency. We were all told initially that soybean rust would wipe out our soybean crop, and much fear and panic arose. But human nature always makes us fear something we do not yet fully understand. In south Louisiana, we have dealt with soybean rust each and every year in our clients' crops, and have come to respect the explosiveness of this disease. Yes, to this date it has not devastated our crop in the Deep South, but we are also much more vigilant in disease prevention since ASR appeared.

Without the ipmPIPE, we may not have been so fortunate and likely would have suffered severe losses without warnings and intensive early detection. Many feel that Asian soybean rust will be a one-in-ten-year disease for the primary soybean growing areas of the country. That will most likely prove to be true. But what will happen on that one year when ASR explodes? Do we really want to be caught "with our pants down?"

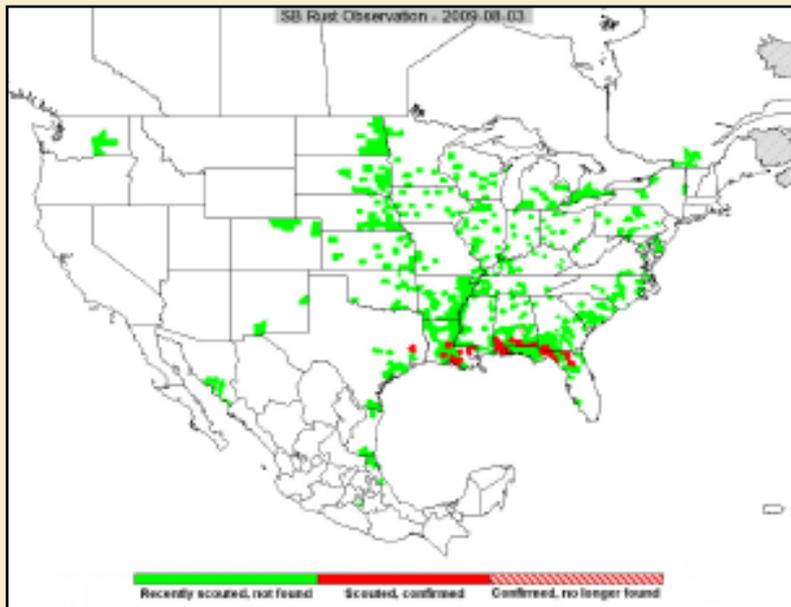
Looking beyond soybean rust, one can see the value of this system for national security and food safety. Tracking potentially devastating plant pests that could wipe out our food supply, identification of bioterrorism organisms and even using tracking human diseases such as swine flu are all potential uses of this program.

Unfortunately, the funding for ipmPIPE is beginning to dry up and its future is

threatened. There is no funding committed beyond this growing season. It will take us, the stakeholders, to make contact with those in our government in charge of project funding and budgets to reinforce the importance of this program to our growers and the non-farming general population.

We cannot let this project wither on the vine, only to witness soybean rust or some other plant pest wipe us out, and then realize that we should not have taken this tracking and reporting system for granted.

You can visit the soybean rust ipmPIPE site at <http://sbr.ipmpipe.org/cgi-bin/sbr/public.cgi> and the general ipmPIPE site at <http://www.ipmpipe.org/>.



Employee Retention through Employee Ownership

By Ron O'Hanlon, President, Crop Quest, Inc.

Statistics show that Generation Y employees will stay at a job for an average of 18 months to four years...

This is causing company managers to be more creative and proactive to ensure retention of their best, most productive employees.

One of the most successful tools for increasing retention is employee engagement: helping employees to know they are making a difference within their jobs while having a voice in the company. Employee ownership is an option that has proved successful in fostering employee engagement.

This was the thought 18 years ago when Crop Quest, Inc., was formed. Founders of Crop Quest wanted to create a unique, service-based, customer-oriented crop consulting company that also had the best interest of all employees in mind. Employee-ownership seemed to be the answer.

Ron O'Hanlon, Crop Quest president, stated "ESOP (Employee Stock Ownership Plan) was one of the ways to allow ownership by all employees, which was 67 at that time."

An ESOP is an employee benefit plan, similar in some ways to a profit-sharing plan. In an ESOP, a company sets up a trust

fund into which it contributes new shares of its own stock or cash to buy existing shares. Company contributions to the trust are tax-deductible with certain limits, and shares in the trust are allocated to individual employee accounts. There are over 10,000 ESOPs in the U.S., covering 10 million employees.

"One of the reasons (in addition to employee-ownership) Crop Quest chose to establish themselves as an ESOP is due to the tremendous tax benefits since ESOPs do not pay federal tax. It also allows for ease of ownership succession when employees do leave. And it provides a tremendous retirement benefit since the ESOP actually owns the Crop Quest corporation," explained O'Hanlon.

Employee-ownership has been shown to deliver greater customer service since employees are the owners of the business. "It's not like working for someone else; you are working for yourself," O'Hanlon said. It is similar to owning and operating your own personal business but with a network of support and expertise to help you serve your customers the best way possible.

Being an employee-owned company also helps set the business apart – in customers'

eyes – from other companies in the industry. Research indicates that ESOP implementation results in more information sharing and increased communication and involvement in decision-making for employee-owners.

John Hecht, Crop Quest Special Division Manager, sees ESOPs as an unbeatable motivator. "The ESOP tends to keep employees motivated and working hard since they are the owners of the company, and their profitability is directly related to their efforts," stated Hecht.

With the current economic challenges facing our country, Crop Quest employee-owners have realized the real benefit of being an ESOP. Working with a company that offers incredible benefits, a flexible working schedule and the opportunity to improve professionally and personally is an asset not to be taken for granted. Crop Quest values its people – both employees and customers. That is why employee ownership is a perfect match for employee engagement and retention of top talent.

For more information on Crop Quest and how the ESOP works for them, email Ron O'Hanlon at rohanlon@cropquest.com.

GLP – Good Laboratory Practices or Good Lord!!! Perfection?

By Denise Wright, GLP Coordinator/PFI, Pest Management Enterprises, Inc.

I believe the majority of our NAICC member contract researchers (CRs) conduct GLP residue trials and I believe most do a great job of keeping up with the regulations that we must adhere to for compliance with 40 CFR, Part 160.

So...with that in mind, why do most of us (or at least a lot of us) dread a sponsor or third party facility inspection/records audit and/or EPA inspection? I would like to think the primary reason is that usually these inspections/audits occur during our

busiest time of the year (May-August) when we need to be doing what we do best (field research and documentation). However, we need to realize that these inspections/audits are usually conducted this time of the season so that the inspector or auditor can see

how we really operate (even under pressure!).

I have come to view these visits as continuing education opportunities. If you'll look at them in this light, they will become more tolerable. The inspector or auditor understands how busy we are in the fields and invites the opportunity to follow us around observing our day-to-day tasks or he or she may take the opportunity to sit quietly and review our records while we take care of business at hand (I would venture to say that with the extreme heat we've been having here in Louisiana, said auditor would opt to stay in the AC rather than follow us around in the field).

Auditors, whether they be from a sponsor company, independent or EPA, can lend ideas and/or suggestions on how to make the GLP compliance part of our business run more efficiently since they visit and see a lot of different research facilities.

At PMEI, we document these GLP inspections/audits as training in our personnel files. If you think about it, that's exactly what they are. I have learned something from each and every inspection/audit I've ever been through. Whether or not you implement these ideas/suggestions into your Standard Operating Procedures and/or GLP trial conduct, they are still being offered to you because the inspector/auditor has observed them elsewhere and found them to work well for other CRs.

So...in summary, CRs are not expected to be perfect, but only to adhere to the GLPs to the best of their ability. If EPA or sponsors expected perfection, there would be no need for deviations. We're all human (I think...) and are expected to forget, neglect, err, etc. from time to time, but we are responsible for documenting our forgetfulness, neglect, error, etc. However, I have found the best way for me to keep track of

all that needs to happen within a trial to avoid deviations and/or failure to comply with GLP, is to refresh my memory from time to time by reading the GLP Standards (remember to document as training in your personnel file), and protocol/amendments (with highlighted key points), and also to keep a schedule of some type with those protocol key points (i.e., chemical restrictions, application timings, sample types and sampling intervals) close at hand for daily review.

I know that most of what I have mentioned above is "old hand" to most of our CRs, but it is my hope that those of you just starting up and/or those who have new research employees can benefit from some of this. Here's wishing each and every one of you a successful 2009 research season. See you in sunny Orlando in January! Don't forget your Mickey Mouse ears!!!

NEW MEMBER PROFILE

NAICC is proud to introduce **Kathryn Hackett-Fields** to our organization! Kathryn is an Assistant Coordinator with the IR-4 Project in Princeton, NJ. She has an A.A. in Biblical Study and credits all other education to on the job experiences via professional associations. Kathryn has been with IR-4 for 13 years, prior to which she worked as a QA in contract laboratory animal facilities for 20+ years. Her future plans are to start a small business offering QA services to the

agricultural community.

Kathryn and her organization work with minor use crops and ornamentals. IR-4 or the Inter-Regional Project 4 is a 45 year old USDA endeavor that works in cooperation with the land-grant university system, agro-chemical producers and American growers. IR-4 performs MOR projects and submits reports to EPA.

Hitting the ground running, Kathryn is already active on the Research Education Committee where she leads the planning

efforts for the QA track at the 2010 Annual Meeting in Orlando. She is also facilitating basic GLP training at the meeting. She credits the attitude of NAICC members and the decreasing focus on QA meetings for field work as one of the main reasons she joined NAICC.

NAICC is proud to welcome Kathryn and looks forward to sharing many more new member profiles in 2009!

DID YOU KNOW?

In conjunction with the spring board meeting in Washington, D.C., the NAICC Executive Board as well as non-board members met with more than twenty five Congressmen, Senators, and representatives of organizations with interests in agriculture such as the EPA, CropLife America, American Soybean Association, et al to promote NAICC and the interests of its members.



Crop and Research Consulting – Never a Dull Moment

Predators of the Southwest, a tarantula on the prowl.

Photo courtesy of John Hecht



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