



NAICC NEWS

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



By
Al Averitt
NAICC
President

On the Importance of Being Connected

As I write these words, it is 20 degrees outside and sleeting for the fourth time in 24 hours.

It has also been snowing, up to 8 inches total by now. This is not typical eastern North Carolina weather. But then there is no such critter as "typical North Carolina weather."

But all this atypical weather highlights the irony of my topic— the importance of "Being Connected." The weather has dropped me in the middle of a major disconnect from my normal work routine.

Just yesterday, I was mapping management zones with GPS technology while the crew harvested soil samples in another area of the same county. We were in the field until dark, an hour after the snow began.

We did not know it had been snowing heavily – and longer – toward home, two counties further south. A normal 50-minute drive home took three times that as the snow veterans tried to maintain a visual for rookie drivers.

Thank goodness for four-wheel drive. I hope it never snows enough to keep me house-bound for a week. I'd go stir crazy no doubt. I need to have the freedom to roam the land. Hats off to our northern brothers.

Modern Terminology

Contemporary language gives us the concept of "connecting" – or for our purposes, "disconnecting."

With all of our technological gadgetry – desktops, laptops, cell phones, etc. – it is almost impossible to truly disconnect from work in the 21st century. Maybe it's possible if the electricity were off long enough for our batteries to lose their charges.

Then we'd probably crank up a generator to charge our stuff, because the outside world would continue its busy pace without us while still affecting us in ways we couldn't know until we "reconnected."

When the "connect/disconnect" idea struck, I was traveling to work on some new farms in a county on the North Carolina/South Carolina border. Most of the farms we service are a county or two to the north of this area, so traveling south is a disconnect for me.

Do you get the same feeling when you have the opportunity to go work on a remote farm away from people, things and distractions? It seems to be a kind of disconnect – but is it?

Disconnecting to Connect

Maybe it's really about connecting to something else we need to occasionally connect with – the physical and living world around us. I believe this "connection" is the component that drew many of us to our occupations.

We tend to connect to many different things. I have considered this concept for a while, and I say we do need to be able to disconnect from certain things for a time so that we can connect in another area.

Aren't connections also about relationships and priorities?

This is where the National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants (NAICC) comes in.

Personally, I would not be the consultant I am today without my involvement with my fellow NAICC members these past 10

years. I usually don't handle crowds well or effortlessly, but I've found friends at NAICC gatherings.

These are friends and colleagues who really enjoy sharing and helping each other. They are friends who have a lot in common and do practically the same thing – with maybe a little different twist – for most of their waking hours.

As Andy Rooney said, "I've learned that the easiest way to grow as a person is to surround myself with people smarter than I am."

If you are an independent crop consultant or research consultant and did not connect with your friends at NAICC's Albuquerque meeting in January, I hope you will see the need to connect with us in Washington next year or possibly at a regional NAICC/State Consulting Association meeting in coming months. As consultants, it is our duty to our clients to know when, where and how we should connect with others to improve our services and ourselves.

I also encourage all of you to find a creative and occasional "disconnect" that helps keep things in perspective. My wife Julie recommends peaceful or inspiring music. For me, it's as simple as leaving the office and sitting in my truck watching my father's Angus calves in the snow next to the yard.

They stuck out like sore thumbs, even though it was still snowing and the only light came from the office outdoor light. Everything was visible, and suddenly all of life's little cow patties were erased by the snow.

I enjoyed the momentary disconnect. Then it was time to reconnect with the real world.

Remember this: connecting and disconnecting are the same thing. It's just connecting in different ways to the shrinking world around us.

Connections: grow 'em. NAICC is fertile ground.

An Ag Sciences Approach to High School

By Denise Wright

My husband and I recently enrolled our son in an innovative, new educational institution, the Louisiana School of Agricultural Sciences (LaSAS).

This is a Title IV Charter School that incorporates the agricultural sciences into regular high school curriculum. Students can follow a career path and pursue a college preparatory track.

The school is based on the premise that students learn more effectively when learning is connected to real-world application. We are elated our son has this opportunity.

It's our understanding that several schools similar to this one are springing up across the country. We don't know of any of us in the ag industry who wouldn't want to take advantage of having our children learn academics while at the same time having on-hands training in agricultural sciences.

The Practical Approach

This school is designed to give students a practical, yet technological approach to agricultural sciences while at the same time offering credit toward their high school diploma. Academics offered in the area of agricultural science are Plant Science (General Agricultural Science, General Horticulture, Nursery/Landscape, Floriculture, Agronomy), Animal Science (General Agricultural Science, Small Animal

Care, Animal Science, Vet Tech), and Environment (General Agricultural Science, Environmental Science, Natural Resources, Forestry).

The quality of the staff simply overwhelmed us – each and every one of the instructors bend over backwards to help the children and are cross-trained in each area of learning offered.

For instance, the English I teacher knows a great deal about horticulture, and the horticulture teacher knows his/her English very well.

A really big plus to this new school is its promotion and commitment to the Future Farmers of America (FFA) organization. The students must join the FFA to be eligible to attend the school, and are encouraged to commit to one or more projects each year, whether it be model crop production and/or livestock showing, or some other facet of agriculture.

Randy Darr, CPCC-I, of Soil-Right Consulting Services in Illinois, and a strong FFA advocate, told us of a similar agricultural sciences-based inner-city high school in Chicago, but he wasn't sure about the criteria for attending. We need more schools such as these, and they can become reality through hard work and determination as demonstrated by the founder of LaSAS, Linda Bordelon.

Environmental Incentive

Mrs. Bordelon is a grant writer and also a very staunch advocate of Louisiana agriculture. Most financial resources dedicated to making this new school a reality come from federal and state grant programs.

One of the incentives Mrs. Bordelon used in her grant proposals was the fact that attending students would be responsible for becoming Earth Team Volunteers. They would periodically donate their time and energies to helping restore coastal areas of Louisiana in cooperation with the NRCS.

Just recently, our son participated in a four-day outing in Galliano, Louisiana, below New Orleans. They donned hip boots and mosquito netting to walk the wetlands, where they gathered grass seeds to plant in greenhouses. Those grasses would, in turn, be used to restore coastal areas with high erosion.

He probably worked harder those four days than he ever had before, but he came away with a renewed appreciation of our environment along with first-hand knowledge of how he can be a good steward of the land. LaSAS has definitely been a positive move in our son's life, and our hope is that he and others of his generation will proudly carry agriculture into the future.

What a Study Director Expects From A Field Study Scientist

By Dennis Hatterman, Ph.D.

Study Directors can be pretty demanding. If this contention is true, it is for a good reason. Study Directors are responsible for assuring that all aspects of the study are in compliance with the protocol, standard operating procedures (SOPs) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines. They are responsible for providing a study that is scientifically sound and legally conducted and documented.

These responsibilities should not – and cannot – be taken lightly. The Study Director's job requires a sense of organization, attention to detail, careful planning, punctuality, good communication and the ability to see the big picture, among other things.

It also helps to be able to predict the future and to be flexible to a point. Did I say flexible? How can a Study Director be flexible and demanding? Aren't these opposites?

You could say that unless you realize that flexibility does not connote weakness. I use flexibility in the sense of responding to difficulties, unexpected phenomena or roadblocks in a pro-active way that maintains

the integrity of the study.

Flexibility is necessary because seldom do studies go exactly according to plan. There are too many variables you cannot always control, try as you might. That is why protocol deviations and amendments are necessary.

Big Expectations

So what do Study Directors expect from Field Scientists?

Over the past 11 years, I have had the opportunity to work with Field Scientists with various personalities, backgrounds and motives. It has been an interesting and rewarding experience, but it has not been without frustration.

So let's cut to the chase. What is the biggest expectation that a Study Director has of a Field Scientist?

Besides an unquenchable desire to provide the highest quality product possible and the expertise to deliver this product, the most desirable quality in a Field Study Scientist is indicated by the "nickname" given to these people in the industry. The

nickname: Field Cooperator.

And what does that term imply? It implies flexibility, that misinterpreted word again.

Now I am not implying that cooperators should open themselves to abuse – and I have been told that some Study Directors are inclined to abuse cooperators. I am simply implying that Field Scientists should keep in mind who steers the ship.

That does not mean that the Study Director is without fault or infallible, but just that he/she is in charge. This is where flexibility of the Study Director comes into play.

Valuable Input

As a Study Director, I encourage the Field Scientist to work with his experience working with many different companies and numerous projects and protocols to make suggestions he believes might improve the Study or avoid a pitfall.

Some of these suggestions are related to the Field Scientist's particular business practices or SOPs or typical agricultural practices for that region. Some of these

suggestions need to be incorporated into the Study, and the Study Director should have the flexibility to do that. However, there are two criteria that a Field Cooperator should keep in mind when approaching this issue.

First, the suggestion should ideally benefit the Study in some way. If it also benefits the cooperator in terms of convenience or less time spent on a task in the Study, then that is an added benefit.

Also, it should be a suggestion, not a demand. I often make changes that do not require a deviation and will make life easier for everyone. Most of the time these will also benefit the study.

Study Directors usually have a problem with changes that are made solely for Field Cooperator convenience, especially if they also require a deviation. What the Field Scientist must keep in mind is that the Study Director is looking at the big picture, and some things may be planned a certain way for a reason (i.e. uniformity of field trials in the Study or following the guideline or wishes of the Sponsor).

Making changes to these plans may affect some other aspect of the study in a way that the cooperator did not perceive.

Pop-Up Issues

There will always be issues in a study that were not anticipated or that just pop up during the course of the project.

A good Study Director can respond to these issues expeditiously and in a way that maintains the integrity of the study with a minimum amount of damage (i.e. devia-

tions, hurt feelings, etc.). A good cooperator will ideally anticipate or perceive these problems and relay them to the Study Director before they mushroom into a deviation – or worse yet, something that could affect study integrity.

He will provide options along with his recommendation for a course of action and will respond as directed by the Study Director. In turn, the Study Director should be reasonable and fair in his approach and should not institute unnecessary actions. However, what may again appear unnecessary to the cooperator may actually be necessary to the “big picture”.

The bottom line is that the final product – the study reflected by the raw data – should be of the highest possible quality with a minimum of mistakes, or what are perceived as mistakes. The Study Director and the Field Scientist should be dedicated to this goal.

They should work together and be flexible enough to provide this product in the most efficient way with the highest possible quality. To this end, the Study Director should attempt to alleviate Field Cooperator inconvenience, but only to the point that it does not affect study quality.

Both the Study Director and the Field Scientist should expect to suffer to a certain degree from time to time. If it were easy to produce a quality study, anyone could do it and we would both be out of a job.

Some of the most rewarding things in life are those for which you work and sweat the hardest. In a world of increasing competi-

tion and seemingly diminishing resources, this is the best way to guarantee survival.

Money Trail

Something that is important for all of us to keep in mind is where the money is coming from.

The money trail goes upstream from Field Scientist to contract research company to Sponsor to grower to consumer. Yes, the consumer is ultimately in charge of our destiny, something we do not often think about.

Most Field Scientists who have been in the business for at least a few years are very good and efficient at what they do, and they work hard to be good cooperators. We have come a long way from the late 1980s and early 1990s when everyone was learning the good laboratory practice (GLP) ropes.

There are many good, professional cooperators out there with whom I have enjoyed working. I hope that most of them will survive the recent “downturn” in the industry, because when the industry “turns up”, there needs to be qualified people around to do the work.

I believe at this time we have the most efficient, talented and professional assemblage of Field Scientists in the history of our industry. The world still revolves around personal relationships, and this will continue for some time.

A good Study Director-Cooperator relationship – as well as a good Study Director-Sponsor relationship – will always play an important part in the success of our industry.

Harold Lambert Named Cotton Consultant of the Year

COTTON FARMING magazine and Syngenta Crop Protection named long-time NAICC activist **Harold Lambert, BCE, CPCC-I, CPAg**, the 2001 Cotton Consultant of the Year.

Lambert was recognized at the recent National Cotton Council's Beltwide Cotton Conferences in Atlanta and in the January issue of *COTTON FARMING* magazine.

Lambert served as NAICC president in 1995.

COTTON FARMING has been selecting a

Cotton Consultant of the Year since 1981.

Lambert has been in the consulting business for more than 20 years. He founded Lambert Agricultural Consulting, Inc., in Innis, Louisiana, and currently serves as company president.

Lambert Consulting provides farmer/customers with general crop production advice, with emphasis on pest management, soil fertility management and precision agri-

culture technology.

The company's south-central Louisiana producers grow cotton, soybeans, corn, wheat, grain sorghum and sugarcane.

Lambert has been a member of the National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants (NAICC) since 1983. He served on the Executive Board from 1993 to 1996 and on the Legislative Advisory Task Force from 1997 to 2002.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE STATES

Kansas Association of Independent Crop Consultants Annual Meeting, February 5-6, 2002, Marriott, Wichita, KS. For more information contact Dan Filbert at (620) 348-3460 or cropmanagement@awav.net.

Mississippi Agricultural Consultants Association Annual Meeting, February 5-6, 2002, Bost Extension Building B, Mississippi State University. For more information contact Marianna Hayes at P.O. Box 38, Lexington, MS 39095, (662) 834-

9938, (662) 834-4788 (fax) or mhayes@msagconsultants.com.

Louisiana Agricultural Consultants Association Annual Meeting, February 7-8, Louisiana Convention Center (next to the Hampton Inn, Alexandria, LA). For more information visit <http://www.louisianaag-consultants.com/calender.html>.

Independent Agricultural Consultants of Colorado Annual Meeting, February 7-8, 2002, Denver, CO. The meeting will be

held at the Park Inn at Peoria and I-70. For more information contact Randy Haarberg at (970) 358-4514 or Brian Lauritsen at (719) 336-3957.

Georgia-Alabama Crop Consultants Association Annual Meeting, February 21-22, 2002, Auburn University Conference Center, Auburn, AL. For more information, visit www.georgiacropconsultants.org.

Texas Surveys Consultant Influence on IPM

By Dan Bradshaw, CPCC-I, CPAG/CSp

All of us probably have a "what-if" list of things that would change our lives, if only this "something" happened.

What if I won the power ball? What if Regis would ask me that oh-so-easy easy question that dummy in the TV hot seat missed?

But what if that question were about crop consulting and you were the one on the hot seat?

More or less, this was the situation our Texas Association of Agricultural Consultants (TAAC) found itself when asked about the extent of the contribution independent crop consultants made to the farm-level implementation of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in our state. Although we knew our contribution was significant and obvious to anyone involved in agriculture at the farm level, it wasn't so obvious at the government level.

The government wanted numbers and hard facts, information we found ourselves unable to provide.

In addition to the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), the Texas A & M Extension Service and Texas Pest Management Association also were interested in this type of information about the independent agricultural consulting community. TAAC responded to the call for information by these various agencies by applying for a grant to conduct a survey of agricultural consultants in Texas.

Although none of these Agencies cut us a million-dollar "Regis-type check", TAAC did receive significant funding from the TDA IPM program to help conduct an in-depth survey.

Big Payoff

However, with the level of decision-making activity in IPM policy at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there could easily be a big payoff with decisions impacting our profession and our clients.

We needed answers to show policy makers that independent crop consultants (ICC) were important players in the IPM implementation game and that our role in on-the-farm decision making continues to grow.

Our importance is probably even greater today in areas outside of IPM than it is with IPM alone. With current farm bill discussions about certified third-party vendors, government agencies must understand and appreciate that there is a large number of educated private practitioners currently delivering IPM, ICM and BMP services to farmers.

The independent consultant should not be left out when government sets policies or makes decisions affect production agriculture.

Clear and Concise

Our first task in developing a TAAC consultant survey was to make sure that the questions were phrased clearly and concisely.

It was important that our survey questions be credible and stand up to the scrutiny of those who would rely on the data the survey generated. Professionals experienced in designing and analyzing surveys assisted in these tasks.

We knew it was essential to develop a survey that gave crop consultants a sense of ownership in the information generated. This would encourage consultants to fill out the lengthy questionnaire. Based on the 41 percent response we received from Texas consultants, we felt our efforts were successful and respondents showed a real commitment to our profession.

The survey results were varied, as would be expected in a large state like Texas. Although cotton was the main crop on which IPM services were provided, our survey successfully documented that Texas consultants provide IPM services on virtually every crop grown in the state.

Respondents indicated that IPM services offered by the independent consultant included:

- Insect scouting – 97 percent;
- Nutrient deficiency scouting – 97 percent;
- Diseases scouting – 94 percent;
- Herbicide damage scouting – 88 percent;
- Weed scouting – 85 percent.

The survey also showed Integrated Crop Management (ICM) services were not far behind IPM scouting:

- Soil fertility recommendations – 87 percent;
- Variety recommendations – 86 percent;

- Soil sampling – 82 percent;
- Crop-planting dates/conditions – 79 percent;
- Crop rotation recommendations – 76 percent.

It was interesting to note that although grid soil sampling is rather new, approximately 11 percent of the consultants questioned were providing these services.

Pest Management Types

The survey also shed light on the types of pest management practices utilized and the way crop consultants provide those services.

Of all the practices in this section, pest scouting and economic thresholds were on top, both with 100 percent. Close behind were:

- Beneficial insects considered in recommendations – 97 percent;
- Rotation of pesticide classes – 97 percent;
- Planting dates – 94 percent;
- "Soft" pesticides – 94 percent;
- Plant growth regulation – 94 percent.

Numerous other IPM tools were listed as widely used, which indicates that respondents understand and use many sophisticated IPM practices. It also documents crop consultants as important partners in resistance management and environmentally sound pest management practices.

While IPM information was the main focus of the survey, we took the opportunity to ask questions about education, experience, membership in professional organizations, certification and an abundance of other things Regis probably would never even think to ask. These are areas about which policy makers might just like to know, and they are the ones who are more likely to affect ICC and our clients' bottom line.

It may not have quite the glamour of Regis handing over the big payoff check, but nowadays be ready to take it however you can get it.



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