

2005-2006 Special Projects

Kissel: Video Education and Marketing for Soil Testing as a Best Management Practice in the Southern Region

Adoption of soil testing is low among farmers and homeowners in many states. Many homeowners routinely apply fertilizer (sometimes in excessive amounts) to their lawn and garden without a soil test. As a result of excess fertilization, soil nutrient levels increase rapidly. Excess nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizer can move off land and contaminate lakes and streams. This project will create two videos, a short 5-minute trailer and a second longer 15-minute training video covering the environmental benefits of nutrient management and the critical role of fertility testing in recommending environmentally responsible application rates of fertilizer and lime. The video will also cover proper steps for collecting a soil sample, interpreting/understanding soil test results, and marketing soil labs (public and private). The intended audiences are shoppers at lawn and garden centers, homeowners, forestland owners, those establishing wildlife food-plots, as well as traditional farmers. A host will present generic information; although to better capture the trust of the viewer, sections requiring unique state information will be produced separately and inserted into the generic template.

The video will inform the viewer of the great value of soil testing for amending soils properly, which in turn will increase the number of samples submitted to labs. Scientifically, increased soil testing by non-agricultural audiences will improve University databases on the nutrient status of urban soils. From this information a need may be found for special soil test calibrations. More data would also improve our understanding of the buildup or depletion of certain nutrients (phosphorus is one example), which could be compared between urban and agricultural soils.

Smith & Babbit: Water Quality Issues at the Rural-Urban Fringe. Multi-State Workshop for Master Gardeners, Extension Faculty, Landscape Professionals, Landowners, and Community Leaders

The workshop is designed especially for individuals working with water quality issues associated with landscapes and gardens at the rural-urban fringe. This emerging issue is the result of rural to urban land use change, resulting from population growth, economic development, and community sprawl. It is increasingly important in rural communities across the South; these communities typically do not have trained professional staff to deal with the issue.

Participants will learn about water quality best management practices (BMPs) that they can integrate into their work through presentations, demonstrations, and field activities. The program will be a multi-state workshop targeting master gardeners, Extension faculty, landscape professionals, rural landowners, public property managers, and community leaders.

Smith & Clark: Conservation Easement Education

In response to local interest, Tennessee has developed a conservation easement fact sheet. It includes links to Tennessee enabling legislation, state greenbelt regulations, and relevant tax regulations. We propose to:

1. Produce a "generic" conservation easement fact sheet by removing the Tennessee specific information from the existing fact sheet and rewriting as needed. The fact sheet would be a web-based regional publication.
2. Seek out internet-based sources of state legislation and regulations for the 13 states in the southern region. Links to these resources and other relevant state-specific information identified in the search, such as lists of organizations able to accept easements, will be added to the regional site.

3. Create a regional PowerPoint presentation on conservation easements that will also be posted on the site for downloading and use throughout the region.

These resources will contribute to landowner education programs in the region. Benefits expected include more informed land use decisions along the rural-urban interface, contributing to water quality protection and improvement.

Vendrell: Southern Region Down-Well Camera Team

With a down-well camera, Georgia's wellhead protection program goes beyond traditional aboveground inspections opening a new realm of information explaining water quality problems due to well construction. Additionally, this video footage serves as powerful visual information inspiring the development of new education materials taking well owners to an understanding that in the past have been too complex to describe in words and diagrams to a lay person, visually conveying complex hydro-geological processes. An education video and new Farm*A*Syst self-assessment tool is available to educate well owners in Georgia. The down-well camera has been so popular among County Agents in Georgia that soon there will be a camera available to them in each of the four Districts. Also, South Carolina health officials use a down-well camera as part of their well inspection program.

Scientifically, this approach replaces conjecture with visual facts and recognizes regional problems that Extension should be addressing. Environmentally, groundwater can be protected; eliminating direct avenues for contaminants to enter groundwater, by identification of improperly constructed or maintained wells. Economically, prevention of groundwater contamination is essential because once contaminated, cleanup is most often economically impractical if not impossible.

Risse & Pagan: Master Watershed Stewardship Program—A Regional Project to Build the Capacity of Extension

The goal is to develop a regional Master Watershed Stewardship Program that provides states with tools and framework to build the capacity of Extension by incorporating agent training and a public outreach and education course on critical watershed issues. As Extension, local agents are being called on and required to address local watershed concerns, such as TMDLs and stormwater, within their communities. By establishing a regional Master Watershed Stewardship Program, agents have opportunities for expanding their knowledge and a method to share and address concerns with their clientele.

The Master Watershed Stewardship Program is modeled after Extension's master program concept, such as Master Gardener. First, the Program educates agents on watershed issues and methods to address concerns on a local level. Then, it invites citizens to participate in several workshops that cover watershed concepts in modules. To apply their knowledge, Master Watershed Stewards volunteer 40-hours of service in a community watershed project.