



Making strides in Virginia

What do hiking boots have in common with state sustainable agriculture coordinators (SSAC)? There must be a good fit in order to make strides, according to Lori Marsh, SSAC for Virginia.

Marsh should know because she has completed a very successful first year of training activities, and she was hiking the Appalachian trail from May to September while most of the training was taking place.

"That's the beauty of it," she says, "I set it up, and the local agents took responsibility for the events in their districts."

She credits the hard work of Virginia's sustainable ag steering committee for six successful in-service trainings and two farm tours this fiscal year. A total of 265 ag professionals received training in soil quality issues, organic certification options for farmers, farm transition planning and farmland preservation tools.

Looking back at her first year, Marsh marvels at the way personalities and positions dovetailed for smooth planning and delivery of training activities.

First there was the support she received from her department head when she was asked to serve as a state coordinator. He granted the 15 percent time commitment that Marsh figured she needed in order to do the job right.

Then the associate director of extension showed support with a letter to district administrators mandating that sustainable ag training would take place, and that each district would work with a member of the state sustainable ag steering committee to make sure training goals fit within the SARE funding guidelines.

Marsh and co-coordinator Andy Hankins of Virginia State University had set up the sustainable ag steering committee with representatives from extension, FSA and NRCS, along with some research faculty members and producers. They prepared a strategic plan for sustainable ag training in Virginia, outlining what ag professionals needed to learn. Each member of the committee was ready to work with their assigned district when the time came, but the actual event planning was done by local agents.

"The number one factor for the success of the PDP in-service training in Virginia was allowing the extension agents to plan their own programs," says Andy Hankins. "We made suggestions that influenced their choices, but they owned these programs. They were responsible for implementation. I don't think the agents would have participated nearly as well if the programs had been planned for them."

A good fit between the co-coordinators is also crucial to the success of their program, according to Marsh, an associate professor in biological systems with a background in energy management.

"I view myself as an administrator, not a specialist in sustainable agricul-



Lori Marsh who hiked 2,170 miles from Georgia to Main over 150 named mountains in 127 days, knows the importance of a good fit, whether it be in hiking boots or working relationships.

ture," she says. "Andy, with 15 years as an extension specialist in alternative agriculture, supplies that part for our state. He loves to do the trainings and is well connected to the appropriate people to invite, but he wouldn't want to do the paperwork."

Hankins conducted one of the most

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Common Ground is published by the Southern Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program. SARE funds projects that develop environmentally sound, economically viable and socially acceptable agricultural methods. SARE is funded by USDA and EPA.

The Southern Region SARE Program is administered by the University of Georgia and Fort Valley State University. The Southern Region includes Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Puerto Rico and the U.S.V.I.

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Printed on recycled paper

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Making strides

successful trainings in Virginia by combining two districts and their budgets into one event with \$5000 to spend. Those combined funds allowed him to bring nationally known soil microbiologist and crop consultant Elaine Ingham from Oregon.

"She advises large vegetable and fruit growers on restoring productivity to their land after years of methyl-bromide and black plastic," he says. "Her presentation helped a lot of agents really understand the biological foundation of farming for the first time. After hearing Elaine you can't think of soil as just the brown stuff that holds up plants."

Hankins thinks Ingham's presentation was well worth the honorarium and travel expenses.

"Qualified resource people charge \$300 to \$500 a day. Those fees, plus their travel and accommodations are part of the reality of conducting training activities," he explains.

Combining districts and choosing topics that will attract a homogenous audience are bonafide ways this veteran of extension training gets more bang for the buck. However he encourages other state coordinators and extension personnel to look beyond the state funds and take advantage of the competitive PDP grants.

"It's great that each state receives that \$10,000 annual allotment," he says, "But so much more can be accomplished with \$50,000 or \$100,000 from the competitive grant pool. It's just a matter of finding the time to put together a good proposal."

He intends to take his own advice and go after some of the big money next year.

"I know that the people who serve on the steering committee are among the busiest in the state," he says, "but I think we can get it done."

Whether grant writing or planning training events, Marsh and Hankins will rely on the same teamwork that made their first year together so successful.

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Tracking soil health through Georgia

A regional PDP soil management workshop held two years ago in North Carolina will be impacting Georgia soils for years to come. The extra milage is courtesy of funding from the Georgia State Sustainable Ag Coordinator's office.

The participants learned to use a portable, tool-box-sized NRCS Soil Quality Test Kit at the workshop. Each state group received a kit to bring home and put to work. Georgia's kit is being used, along with another kit belonging to NRCS State Agronomist Jimmy Dean, to start a database of Georgia soil quality under different types of management.

"After the workshop, some of us formed the Georgia Soil Management Team, which looks for opportunities to educate other people about soil management," says Julia Gaskin, with the Agricultural Pollution Prevention Program in UGA's Biological and Ag Engineering Department. "Using information from the soil tests, we can show how soil organic matter, bulk density, infiltration and water stable aggregates are affected by management techniques."

A favorite place for taking samples is Coffee County where conservation tillage has been practiced on some farms for many years. These farms offer soil data that contrasts with companion samples taken from neighboring fields under conventional practices. Besides looking at tillage differences, the group also takes pairs of samples from organic farms and neighboring soil, as sort of a before-and-after soil scenerio.

Funding from the Georgia SSAC office pays for additional laboratory tests from the sampled fields—tests that are beyond the scope of the portable test kit.

"These are the routine tests that farmers would usually get, plus a test for organic matter," Gaskin explains.

To help others contribute to the database, the team is writing a standard operating procedure to be used with the



During the 2000 PDP Annual Workshop, Julia Gaskin presented data about how different tillage practices impact soil quality.

soil test kit manual.

"Samples can be tested and added to the database much faster as more people are trained to use the kit," she notes. "We have presented the idea to several high school audiences, and it would make a great project for a 4-H group. If we can get 100 data points, when it's over, we will have a good picture of Georgia soils under different management systems."

For more information about the kits and database call Julia at (706) 542-1401.

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Annual Workshop

Due to popular demand, the Sixth Annual PDP Workshop will center on one topic—organics.

“The topic was chosen in response to what the leadership committee was hearing from extension agents,” says John O’ Sullivan. “Agents were complaining that they didn’t feel equipped to answer the questions farmers are asking about organic production and marketing. We see organic production as one of the arrows in the quiver of sustainable agriculture, and agents should be able to respond intelligently to farmers’ questions.”

The two-day workshop will provide ag professionals with the who, what and where of organic research, markets and standards.

An update of organic research on private farms and experiment stations will be presented by keynote speaker Mark Lipson of the Organic Farming and Research Foundation. This includes research addressing market trends and consumer interests as well as production techniques.

Organic certification and standards also will be addressed, along with other issues of public policy and legal considerations.

Breakout sessions, always one of the most dynamic parts of the workshop, will vary from organic marketing success stories to composting recipes to legal issues. Livestock, vegetables, fiber and business planning will all have places among the 11 sessions.

An afternoon joint meeting on the 19th with SSAWG will have two thrusts. One session will explore common ground between organic and conventional principles. The other will highlight holistic approaches to be considered before deciding to produce a new crop or to introduce a value-added product into a system.

After the workshop closes, the SSAWG trade show will continue January 20-21, also at the Chattanooga Choo Choo Holiday Inn.



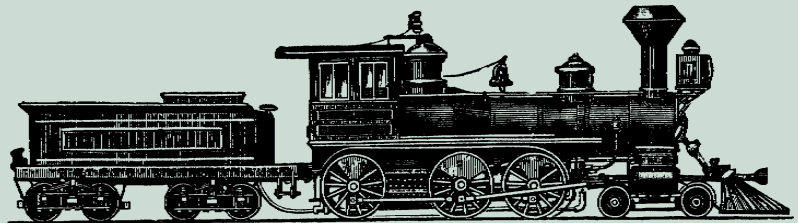
All Aboard

6th Annual Southern Region PDP Workshop

Chattanooga Choo Choo Holiday Inn

Chattanooga, Tennessee

January 18-19, 2001



Workshop registration fee: \$65

Lodging is available at the Chattanooga Choo Choo Holiday Inn and Days Inn Rivergate for \$52 per night.

For registration information contact:

Rosanne Minarovic at (919) 515-3252

or check the Southern SARE web site: www.gaes.peachnet.edu/sare

PDP registrants will receive \$25 discount on 10th Annual Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SAWG) Annual Conference and Trade Show, January 19-21, also being held at the Chattanooga Choo Choo Holiday Inn.

From SAN

Reap New Profits: Marketing Strategies for Farmers and Ranchers—This 20-page bulletin offers snapshots of marketing alternatives such as farms stands, agritourism, value-added products, restaurant sales and CSAs. Free. Order from Paige Patton at (770) 412-4058 or ppatton@gaes.griffin.peachnet.edu.

A companion CD-ROM Power Point Presentation has just been released. Using the latest graphics, more than 60 eye-popping photos by Jerry Dewitt and a lively script by Val Berton, the program is suitable for farmers, ag consultants, students or consumers. Free copies available from SAN at (301) 504-6422 or san@nal.usda.gov

The Small Dairy Resource Book—Vicki Dunaway compiled and designed this 56-page guide for those who want to do commercial farmstead dairy processing, make dairy products for their family or just take better care of the family cow. The book is a product of SSARE's Hometown Creamery Revival project with resource entries collected from farmers, librarians, trade magazines, processors, scholars and the World Wide Web. \$8 plus \$3.95 shipping. Send check or

purchase order to: SARE, Hills Building, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405-0082.

Building Soils for Better Crops, 2nd edition—Fred Magdoff and Harold van Es have updated their popular soil management guide. While the first one focused exclusively on the building and maintaining of organic matter, this broader view includes chapters on managing physical properties, nutrients and evaluating soil health. Farmer profiles bring to life key practices described by the authors. 230 pages, \$19.95 plus \$3.95 shipping. Send check or purchase order to: SARE, Hills Building, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405-0082.

A Whole Farm Approach to Managing Pests—The newest information bulletin from SAN uses real farm profiles to demonstrate how cover crops, smother crops, beneficial insects, trap crops, innovative tillage techniques, crop rotations and more work together to help farmers reduce chemical inputs and increase profits. 20 pages. Free. Order from Paige Patton at (770) 412-4058 or ppatton@gaes.griffin.peachnet.edu.

How to Conduct Research on Your Farm or Ranch—This 12-page bulletin guides you through the steps



of developing a sound, easy-to-conduct research project for SARE or other granting agencies. It describes the most practical designs for crop or livestock research, stresses the importance of cooperators and provides real farm illustrations of some outstanding producer projects. Even if you don't plan to apply for grant funds, this bulletin will boost your reading comprehension of published research. Free. Order from Paige Patton at (770) 412-4058 or ppatton@gaes.griffin.peachnet.edu.

WWW.griffin.peachnet.edu/sare

- Current calls for proposals and descriptions of all four grant programs
- All past issues of Common Ground
- Contact information for regional and national SARE staff
- PDP workshop information
- Upcoming sustainable ag events
- Links to other sustainable ag sites
- Publications from SSARE research
- Summaries of all current and completed research projects

NEW !!!

- 12 Aprils Dairying—A manual of Tom Trantham's grazing dairy system complete with photos of his herd, paddocks, fencing, lanes and new irrigation system.

Which SARE grant program for you?

Southern SARE administers four separate grant programs, each with its own priorities and audiences. The process begins with the release of calls for proposals for each of the programs. If you are on the Common Ground mailing list you will receive an issue prior to the release of each call for proposals. The SSARE web site www.griffin.peachnet.edu/sare is the quickest way to receive the calls for proposals as soon as they are released.

Research and Education Projects generally are conducted by interdisciplinary, multi-institutional, and often, multi-state research teams coordinated by a principal investigator from a non-governmental organization, university or governmental agency. These projects include farmers as participants. For more information call Jeff Jordan at (770) 412-4788.

2000

June 1 Call for preproposals released

August 31 Preproposals due

November 1 Full proposals invited.

2001

January 19 Full proposals due

March Full proposals reviewed

April Administrative Council announces all grant awards

Producer Grant Projects are developed, coordinated and conducted by producers or producer organizations. These projects are generally located in one state, often on one farm. There is a \$10,000 limit for funding proposals submitted by an individual producer and a \$15,000 limit on proposals submitted by producer organizations. For more information about Producer Grants call John C. Mayne at (770) 229-3350.

2000

September 1 Call for proposals released

2001

January 26 Proposals due

March Proposals reviewed

April Administrative Council announces all grant awards

Graduate Student Awards are intended for full-time graduate students (masters or Ph.D.) enrolled at accredited colleges and universities in the Southern Region. Up to \$10,000 will be awarded to each successful applicant for up to three years of project activities. The funds are paid directly to the university for use on the graduate student's project. For more information call John C. Mayne at (770) 229-3350.

2000

May 15 Call for proposal released

December 8 Proposals due

2001

March Proposals reviewed

April Administrative Council announces all grant awards

Professional Development Program Projects train agricultural information providers in sustainable agriculture techniques and concepts. The Southern Region Training Consortium consists of North Carolina State University, North Carolina A&T University and ATTRA. For more information contact Roger Crickenberger at (919) 515-3252.

2000

June 1 Call for preproposals released

August 31 Preproposals due

November 1 Full proposals invited

2001

February 2 Full proposals due

March Full proposals reviewed

April Administrative Council announces all grant awards

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