

Best Education Practices (BEPs) for Water Outreach Professionals
Defining BEPs, Refining New Resources and Recommending Future Actions

POSTER PRESENTATION

Presenter(s): Thomas Green, AGFLEX

Title: Financial Safety Net For Corn Farmers: An Emerging Educational Tool To Increase Adoption Of Nutrient BMPs

Abstract: Surveys and case studies over the past 30 years have demonstrated that economic risk is a major barrier to farmer adoption of Best Management Practices (BMPs). For example, farmers are often reluctant to lower nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium applications to university recommendations. If the farmer or advisor miscalculates the rate, or unusual weather causes the BMP to fail, yields and profits may decline. Since fertilizer costs are inexpensive relative to the potential loss, farmers "self-insure" by applying higher than recommended rates. The project partners have tested a BMP "net returns" fertilizer rate recommendation guaranty which provides a cash payment to participating corn farmers if the recommendation results in lower yields. The participant (or a sponsor) purchases a specially designed service agreement, applies university-recommended BMP rates, and applies additional fertilizer to a check strip. If a yield loss occurs on the BMP-fertilized acres vs. the check strip, and the value of the yield lost outstrips the fertilizer cost savings, the guaranty provides a payment to compensate for the loss. Between 2001 and 2003, more than 30 corn farmers in five states have participated in research and development, with average fertilizer rate reductions of 24%. Up to 400 additional farmers are being recruited for the 2004 growing season. Watershed managers are quickly recognizing these systems are highly cost effective in terms of setting up field-scale demonstrations and are now purchasing or cost-sharing the agreements for farmers.

Target Audience(s): Agency partners; environmental conservation nongovernmental organizations; SWCDs; ag commodity groups/farmers

Educational Purpose: Education

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