

## Northeast SARE Professional Development Program Progress Report

**State:** Maryland

**Land-Grant Institution:** University of Maryland, College Park (1862)

**Report Period:** May 1, 2005 to April 30, 2006

**Title:** The Continued Viability of Rural Maryland: Implementation of the Maryland Strategic Plan for Training and Education in Sustainable Agriculture.

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### **Project Narrative:**

Agriculture in Maryland will be diversified and profitable, providing healthful products to its customers; it will be conducted by farmers who manage resources wisely, who are satisfied with their lifestyles, and have a positive influence on their communities and the environment. Although Maryland is rapidly urbanizing, agriculture remains an important industry in the State. With the decrease in numbers of farms and farm families has come a reduction in legislative influence at the county and state levels. However, county and state leaders are becoming increasingly aware that agriculture must be viable in Maryland if the open space that all citizens' value is to be maintained. Simultaneously, federal, state and local programs designed to protect the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries and water supplies for people in Maryland's cities and rural areas, have focused attention on traditional and conventional farming practices and their potential environmental impacts. The combination of urbanization and environmental pressures continues to stress the future of Maryland agriculture. The Maryland Cooperative Extension educational program in sustainable agriculture will focus on efforts that will work toward a continued viability for rural Maryland. This will be accomplished by a broad based program that promotes an agricultural industry that is economically viable and environmentally responsible. Efforts will be made to develop the framework for a statewide curriculum to support Maryland's sustainable agriculture programs. The web site for the University of Maryland, Cooperative Extension is [www.agnr.umd.edu](http://www.agnr.umd.edu).

## **Current Northeast SARE funded PDP activities:**

1. *Maryland's Sustainable Agriculture Strategic Plan:* Maryland's strategic plan was updated in 2005. The core group consisted of MD Extension faculty from College Park and UMES as well as MD producers who attended the N.E. SARE conference in 2004. In addition, three MCE county agents who graduated from an intensive organic productions training program in 2005, provided key guidance and direction. This plan provided the foundation for MCE's 5 year federal strategic plan. A short term implementation plan was developed by Extension administrators from both College Park and UMES. This short term plan's main focus was a new staffing/hiring plan for MCE.
2. *Sustainable agriculture systems in-service – Maryland:* Increasingly, MD farmers are considering sustainable agriculture practices as a way of adding value to their agricultural enterprises. In December 2005, a sustainable agriculture in-service was held for MD Cooperative Extension faculty, with approximately 50 participating. Three MCE county AGNR agents were selected to attend and intensive organic production systems training program conducted by N.E. SARE. All three agents graduated from the program and now are providing a foundation for organic production to MCE and producers in the State. Two twilight tours were conducted on a variety of topics such as cover crops, vegetable production, melon varieties and edible flowers, with an estimated 40 producers in attendance.
3. *Applied sustainable agriculture research projects:* The College of Agriculture and Natural Resources has made a commitment to more research and extension in organic agriculture. Tom Simpson and Jim Hanson received \$30,000 grant to improve organic research at the research and education centers. Three of our research & education centers received certification (3 –5 acres each). A small grants program was offered to encourage faculty to pursue applied research projects in sustainable agriculture, in collaboration with farmers, at these sites. Twelve projects were approved and developed by MCE faculty. These applied research projects are learning opportunities for these faculty and farmers.
4. *Future Harvest/CASA:* Future Harvest/CASA (Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture) developed a two-day conference on sustainable agriculture several years ago. Attendance is growing rapidly at these conferences (+200 people). This conference is well received by the sustainable ag. community. In addition to the leadership provided by Future Harvest/CASA, faculty from MCE and USDA-BARC are playing an increasing role. SARE funds have continued to be used to support this conference.
5. *Rural economic development center for sustainable agriculture:* Regional MCE faculty in cooperation with MARBIDCO, DBED and local agriculture development specialists developed a plan to implement this center. One regional extension specialist took a sabbatical to develop the fundamentals of the center and provide MCE administration with a staffing plan and strategic focus. Funding was provided for travel and plan development.

**Performance Targets:**

1. Fifteen MD Agriculture Extension Agents and five MD producers will attend the N.E. SARE professional development conference to be held in Burlington, VT in October 2004, to gather background information that will assist in revising MD's "Sustainable Agriculture Strategic Plan." Scholarships will be available in cooperation with UMES.
2. Fifteen MD Agriculture Extension Agents, five USDA-NRCS conservation professionals, four representatives from non-profit organizations and five MD producers will assist MD Coop Extension and UMES in developing a revised "MD Sustainable Agriculture Strategic Plan."
3. In cooperation with faculty from UMES, six administrators from MD Coop Extension and UMES will assist in developing an implementation plan for the revised Strategic Plan.
4. Twenty-five extension faculty and ten professionals from NRCS and the Soil Conservation Districts will attend Future Harvest/CASA conference to understand sustainable agricultural practices. Scholarships will be offered to defer the registration fee.
5. Applied organic research projects (3) will be continued at University of MD Research and Education facilities to better understand how to grow organic products, problems associated with the transition as well as develop budgets to determine profitability.
6. Four regional extension specialists at the Western MD Research & Education Center will develop the basic framework and plan to implement a "Sustainable Agriculture/Economic Development Center." A grant will be obtained to start the initial steps to develop the framework for curriculum to support MD's sustainable agriculture programs. This curriculum will be broad in scope to encompass traditional agriculture, small farms, organic farming, livestock & grazing systems as well as natural resource base enterprises.
7. A student intern will be hired to assist in the development of MD's revised strategic plan, assist in coordinating a mini-grants program for professionals and develop a plan to convert MD's Forestry Correspondence Course to a web based learning tool for professionals.
8. Thirty-five extension agents, USDA-NRCS conservationists, non-profit professionals and other professionals will attend a program on organic production to learn new cultural practices, plant materials and financial management.

## **Accomplishments:**

**Future Harvest/CASA's Farm Profitability and Stewardship Conference:** Two-day training was held for Maryland Cooperative Extension, USDA, NRCS, and MDA professionals and farmers (200 total in attendance). Sustainable agricultural practices, new marketing strategies, and sustainable agricultural training were provided. This was the seventh annual conference.

**Future Harvest/CASA's Sustainable Agriculture Field Days:** Two field days were held in Maryland showcasing sustainable agriculture practices. Primary audience is producers, extension faculty and NRCS professionals.

**Farmers/Grower grant writing workshops:** One workshop was held to assist farmers & growers develop grants packages in sustainable agriculture practices. Extension faculty from College Park and UMES assisted in the training. Two farmer/growers participated.

**Maryland Organic Crop Production Training:** 8 extension, 2 USDA, 2 MDA, 1 NRCS, and 5 non-profit professionals attended a twilight tour on organic crop production.

**Maryland Organic Cover Crop Research:** 8 extension, 1 USDA, 3 MDA, 1 NRCS, 4 non-profit professionals and 10 producers attended a twilight tour on organic cover crop research.

**Individual Intensive Organic Training:** Three Maryland Cooperative Extension county faculty attended a SARE intensive organic production training program and provided basic knowledge for MCE in organic production systems.

**MCE In-service Training:** 45 MCE faculty attended an in-service training program on sustainable agriculture.

### **Applied Research Mini-Grants to Maryland Cooperative Extension Faculty:**

- Alternative Agriculture Enterprises in St. Mary's County – Transition from Tobacco to Cut Flowers and Vegetables.
- Sustainable Vegetable Research and Demonstration Project in Southern MD
- Garrett County Rural Enterprise Conference
- Nitrogen Management in Corn Production Systems (Garrett County)
- Development of Sustainable Weed Suppression Techniques in an Organic Production System.
- Pasture Based Performance Testing for Small Ruminants
- Exploring the Effectiveness of the "Salad Table" for Continuous Production of Mesclun Micro-Greens.
- Neighborhood Gardening Volunteers in Baltimore City
- Development of a Model Farmette Rotational Grazing System for Horses.
- Mini-Melons: A Value Added Crop for the Mid-Atlantic.
- Sustainability and Low Input Strip Till & No-Till Vegetable Planting Tactics.
- Sustainable Agriculture variety selections and organic pesticide applications of eggplants.
- Demonstrating the Significance of Irrigation as Part of a Hot Climate Viticulture BMP on Coastal MD.