

Northeast SARE Professional Development Program 2006 Annual Report

1. West Virginia
2. West Virginia University
3. May 1, 2005 thru April 30, 2006
4. WV SARE Implementation Plan
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6. West Virginia has 20,000 small farms; the WVU Extension Service programs to their special needs. Our staff is small. WE have concentrated lately on bolstering the strength of the county based faculty. This has forced our campus based staff to cover many disciplines in a, sometimes, broader scope. But it has also allowed many of the program initiatives to hybridize. These hybridized programs have created a non-traditional approach a “traditional” commodity. Our livestock specialist has worked to promote marketing groups who manage, produce, and market toward a specific market. And the buyers are included in the process as partners. Our farm management work has concentrated on management decisions that drive farm family sustainability. That cross over approach has led to a hybrid of, for example, crop insurance, cost per unit of production, and organic transition. And a new look for ways to consider management changes that speak to total enterprise mix as farm profitability as opposed to individual management commodity. We program with our other USDA brethren on many projects. In fact, we are now working with a group of NRCS and Extension member of the West Virginia Grassland Council to consider a PDP grant through SARE.
This initiative concentrates on sustainable livestock production through improved grassland management. Now, of course, this looks very smart as our energy costs are skyrocketing. We are also working in a multi-agency environment to enhance the water quality. The West Virginia University PDP program has concentrated in the concept of cooperative-like activity as it relates to production and marketing. We know that the small farm families of the future that will need equipment will learn how to share the resource as a way of controlling costs. We also know that these families will have to “learn to cooperate”. The same principle is true for farmers markets. These groups will learn how to work together or perish. This leads us to the emphasis of the SARE PDP for the last three years-Market Gardens.
Our professional staff has not legitimized the relevance of the market gardening movement. They don’t understand it and they were not trained in it. The county staff who have agriculture degrees had to decide early in their education to choose between livestock or crops or soils, etc. The farm woodlot was ignored too. So, if we don’t have a more broad based education it becomes the mission of the PDP coordinator to “round out” the county based and campus based faculty about all the issues that affect longevity

and profitability on the farm. Sustaining our resources and exploiting our strengths and opportunity is a new look for them. The PDP Training has attempted to make the field professionals feel comfortable talking to their clients about adding value and selling directly. The effort has encouraged our professionals to consider the market garden as a growth industry and one with great potential. All we have done in the last three years is address this enterprise option and try to support the professionals who are serving it because they feel it is legitimate. We have divided our efforts into production and marketing-namely the farmers' market. Our farmers' markets are just beginning to recognize that they have potential and they want more training and direction. We are preparing our professionals to respond. Through our web site <http://www.wvu.edu/~agexten/sustanag/index.htm> we try to keep our professionals aware of the grant opportunities available to them and their farmers. It also gives an opportunity to work with our market gardeners. It legitimizes them too.

7. This past year we conducted two field trips to two farmers markets with 32 marketers attending. We toured the Charleston and Wheeling. Those attending are always pleased to see how other groups make decisions. We also conducted a workshop on market management and learned that this subject needs more attention. We integrated our Dell Axim training into the market garden community as one of our pilot groups is developing software and writing training materials specific to market garden decision making. We visited every one of our farmers' markets to learn from their growers and the professionals who serve them. Last we conducted a three-day workshop for the professionals and growers associated with market gardeners.
8. We didn't produce any materials this year. (Although, last we year we developed the Farmer Grower Grant publication and then learned that the NE SARE did, too)
9. We conducted and actually still are conducting a farmers' market certification program. It appears that we exceeded our Performance Target by two as 14 agents passed out certification program. They will receive their certificates at summers end. This is an attempt to help our professionals feel they gained an advantage or at least a familiarity with the market garden, community supported agriculture, and farmers' market industry. We are still working on this project but feel we they are growing; two agents made presentations at this year's conference. There is still work to do; that is the point of this year's proposal but we are satisfied with where we have taken them. Our goal is to have our professionals approach and lead their farmers to a place where market gardens are recognized as important and that that industry responds to basic marketing principals.
10. We conducted a three day market garden conference. One day was devoted to high tunnels as Mark Davis from the USDA Research Center at Beltsville and his area experts provided the training. We registered 64 professionals, lenders, and farmers and admitted more with no registration. The next day was devoted to marketing and farmers' market management. The last day we covered production of flowers to high tunnel strawberries. Our audience contained 20 professionals, but as stated earlier 14 have completed our farmers' market certification program are or just about to. This is significant as we are very close to organizing a West Virginia Farmers' Market Organization. This is

significant as our professionals and the bureaucrats will have a conduit to inject information and our farmers will have a voice and a face to deal with our politicians and other publics.

We sent 12 professionals to PASA and 5 to Future Harvest. This is important as we are trying to spread the word that scholarships are available for agents to learn new things that they feel their budget might not carry. We find that it takes more than the mention of a scholarship as we find ourselves providing encouragement and transportation to get them to these conferences but if everyone was interested and anxious to attend then we would not have that subject identified as needing our help.

Our goals have not changed much during the length of this grant except we are speeding up the promotion of high tunnels as we see this as so important for our farmers reaching more customers. One agent who is completing the farmers' market certification has scheduled regular monthly meeting of her group so that the group receives training as well as market management. This model is what we are looking for. This spring, our horticulture team planned 4 regional meetings that were designed as mini conferences like we conducted in Morgantown. This effort reached 200 farmers totaling our farmer contacts at over 300 trained. Our measurement of goals from our professionals is the total of farmers attending the local meetings and the subject matter presented at the meetings. This system is beginning to work.