Farmers Fine-Tune With Integrated Crop Management Program

The Situation
In the 1990 farm bill, the Integrated Crop Management (ICM) Program was funded. This program, administered through ASCS (now Consolidated Farm Services), provided cost share funds for farmers to decrease pesticide and fertilizer use in order to decrease the impacts of those products on water quality. Kootenai County, Idaho was designated as a pilot county for the implementation of the program. Farmers could volunteer to enter the program. Cooperative Extension was designated as the agency to evaluate farm plans before they were approved by ASCS, and to sign off on practices performed to reduce pesticide and fertilizer use before ASCS would pay the cost share. Farmers had no guidelines for developing their initial plans.

Our Response
* In 1992, Kootenai County Extension developed an ICM evaluation form that farmers used for each field they wanted to place in the ICM program. The information requested on the form included cropping history, pesticide and fertilizer application history, soil type(s) in the field, past insect and disease problems, identity and location of problem weeds, cultivation, planting and harvesting practices, areas of erosion, indication of grassy waterways, crops to be planted, etc. The farmers also were asked to run soil tests.
* Kootenai County Extension compiled a reference which contained the evaluation forms and bulletins which pertained to northern Idaho crops, and distributed them to participating farmers.
* Kootenai County Extension and ASCS agreed that a valid expense for cost sharing was training which would help farmers better manage their farms to decrease impact on water quality by erosion or pesticide/fertilizer residue.
* Extension reviewed the initial farm plans for each participating farmer and the ASCS evaluation sheets at the end of the season.
* ASCS made the final decision on whether or not the farmer complied with the requirements of the ICM program.

Achievements
* Ten farmers participated in the program over 3 seasons. They indicate that the ICM program helped them focus on costs of production by field, and helped them identify fields that were "not making money."
• Pesticide applications (herbicides) were reduced by one-third.

• Because of research done by University of Idaho weed scientist Don Thill, we became concerned that reduction of herbicides (as required by the ICM program) in the short run would result in higher weed populations and an increase in herbicides in the long run. We shared this with our national congressional staffs.

The Future
The continuation of the ICM program will be decided in the current Farm Bill debate.

For More Information
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