

# Professional Development Training in Sustainable Agriculture in Washington

*Andy McGuire and Carol Miles (Washington: State Professional Development Program Grants)*

**Title:** Professional Development Training in Sustainable Agriculture in Washington

**Co-coordinators:**

**Eastern Washington**

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Andy McGuire, Washington co-coordinator, welcomes fellow Western SARE state coordinators to the Tri-Cities area.

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Carol Miles, Washington co-coordinator, chats with Henning Schmsdorf, a SARE grant recipient from Lopez Island.

**Context and Overview:**

The Washington State Professional Development Program (PDP) is part of the Washington State University Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources (CSANR). The PDP focus, which reflects that of the center, includes biointensive and organic agriculture (BIOAg), bioenergy, bioproducts, sustainable farming systems, community food systems, direct marketing and small farm opportunities.

Within these programs, PDP gives priority to projects that address the top three informational needs among Washington's Extension educators (2004 survey): organic agriculture, economics of alternative systems, and soil-building crop rotations.

PDP's goal is to help WSU Extension, NRCS and other agency personnel gain knowledge and skills to serve their constituents in these areas to promote the health of Washington's people, land and communities. Within our three-year plan we have specific activities that focus on new WSU Extension personnel.

The two state coordinators, Andy McGuire in Eastern Washington and Carol Miles in Western Washington, are part of the CSANR leadership team, a diverse group of WSU faculty that sets the direction, including PDP. The CSANR advisory council, individuals from various sectors of Washington's diverse agriculture, provides advice and guidance to CSANR and the PDP coordinators.

**Activities and Methods:**

In the 2007-08 reporting period, most PDP funds supported sustainable agriculture-related speakers for the WSU All-Extension conference March 6-8, in Spokane, including travel and honoraria for six speakers and one professional facilitator. The theme, Energy and Agriculture, tied together keynote speaker Paul Roberts, author of *The End of Oil*, with other speakers in the agricultural track, which covered:

- meeting regional food needs from regional production
- biofuels
- energy use in the transport of goods
- energy use in agriculture
- natural gas and nitrogen fertilizer
- food distribution and energy use
- climate change and agriculture
- labor and immigration issues in agriculture



A facilitated session followed, designed to empower extension personnel to apply what they had learned to local programming. Facilitator Peter Bloome, with the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology, guided attendees in small group discussion on potential impacts topic, concluding with a discussion of how WSU Extension could continue the process of addressing these important.

As PDP money was used to support these speakers, Andy McGuire, PDP co-coordinator, was made chairman of the planning committee for the agriculture-related track, enabling the selection of speakers who addressed sustainable agriculture solutions. Western SARE support was acknowledged through announcements, visuals and a flyer included in attendee packets.

The remaining PDP funding supported:

- Feedback sessions on the WSU sustainable agriculture educational programs
- Travel scholarships to attend the Washington Tilth conference
- Travel scholarship for the Cultivating Success coordinator to attend training

**PDP-funded Publications/Educational Materials and Products:**

Two publications were distributed to the 23 Extension personnel attending the facilitated discussion at the All Extension Conference and are available to other extension personnel:

- Primary Take-home Messages from AEC Energy and Agriculture Sessions
- Potential Programs relating to the AEC Energy and Agriculture Sessions

**Impacts and Contributions:**

*1) Acquisition of new knowledge and skills*

Over 400 people attended the AEC keynote session on *Food and Fuel: The Oil Crunch and its Implications for the Food Economy*. Most (393) were WSU Extension personnel. Several NRCS state office personnel, including the State Conservationist, also attended.

Attendees at this session and the follow-up session (attended by 120 extension personnel) learned of:

- Serious challenges facing continued reliance on expanding global petroleum production
- Potential risks associated with a decline in global oil production

These sessions increased awareness and knowledge in the PDP target audience and will continue to have impact extension programming.

The rest of the sessions provided knowledge on several related topics:

- Biofuels overview and applications
- Energy use in agriculture
- Natural gas and nitrogen fertilizer
- Food distribution and energy use, potential and challenges of solutions
- Climate change and agriculture
- Labor and immigration issues in agriculture

*2) Changes in behavior and action*

A follow-up survey conducted for the All Extension Conference found that for the Energy and Agricultural sessions:

- Over 80 respondents said they gained knowledge at the conference
- 15 had already used the information gained in their programming
- 37 were planning to use the knowledge gained in their work
- 31 were considering using the information

The focus on energy at the All Extension Conference contributed to formation of an Extension Energy Task Force to look at programming to address energy issues, including those in agriculture.

As a result of the PDP-sponsored meeting, the Pacific Northwest Vegetable Extension Group has:

1. Developed a survey for producers and industry representatives to: a) identify issues impacting vegetable production and b) identify best mechanisms for disseminating information.
2. Investigated creation of an email-based Pest Alert system
3. Begun developing workshops for disease diagnosis that could be presented through research center- or county-based programs in the three states and in conjunction with agricultural conferences such as PNVA.



**Recommendations**

By sponsoring some of the WSU All Extension Conference speakers, PDP was able to:

1. reach a majority of WSU extension educators at one location
2. influence the choice of topics and speakers

