

SARE National Continuing Education Program in Sustainable Agriculture for Cooperative Extension and other Ag Professionals

Conference Call: Friday, September 2, 2005

Participants: David Chaney, Kim Kroll, Valerie Berton, Vern Grubinger, Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, Andy McGuire, Deborah Young, Julie Sexton, Brian McCann.

Agenda

1. Design team member participation, sub-contract extensions
2. Curriculum Framework
3. Online course. Go over feedback from the NACAA session and other comments based on your own review. Develop list of changes/revisions required for finalizing online course. Discuss timeline for implementing changes.
http://dodea.ext.msstate.edu/national_sare/module1.htm
4. Final multiple-choice test for online course. Plan for developing that test.
5. Discuss plan for field testing course. Would like to get 5-10 county agents from each region to field test the course. Can design team members help recruit those individuals? Also need to develop evaluation tool that field testers fill out as they take the course. Who can work on that? Target date for beginning field testing (based on timeline for implementing revisions above.)

Contract Extension

All design team members, except Vern, have funds remaining in their sub-contracts. Sub-contracts will be extended through December 31. Augmentation of sub-contract budgets, particularly for Brian and Julie, if necessary, can come from project main account.

Curriculum Framework

The final framework is on the project Web site. Note in particular that there is a link to the detailed learning outcomes at the end of each Major Topic.

Design team confirmed that framework IS completed and ready for distribution to SARE regional and state PDP coordinators. <http://www.sare.org/pdpcurriculum/Framework/>

Online Course Module 1 Feedback and Discussion

First discussed general concerns/questions about online education and value of using Web-based technologies for delivering this continued ed. program. We ARE committed to this approach given criteria of reaching a large audience over a wide geographic area (nationwide), and convenience of students participating at their own pace and time schedule. Acknowledged that we can't deliver a program of any great depth with this approach, but that was not the intention to begin with. The online course modules address the BREADTH of subject matter, highlighting key points and concepts. Depth must be provided through other channels such as on-site

workshops and courses delivered at regional and state level and through other books and references. One of the major advantages of the online course will be the LINKS embedded in the course that point to additional information and resources for further exploration and detail. The online course format and Web technologies, allow us to get some measure of feedback on participation and progress on reaching goals and objectives. This would be difficult to measure/assess if we just produced a publication. Finally, by producing an online course, we are integrating with the current trend within Extension toward information delivery and education via the Web. Julie confirmed that this was a major focus of the Southern Region Leadership conference. Also note eXtension effort.

📌 Given the constraints of the online course format, we should acknowledge up front the limitations in providing depth of content and detailed information. Make clear in course intro that the online course provides a broad overview, covering the range of topics and issues in S.A. Also make clear that the primary audience really is NEW HIRES within extension and other USDA agencies. It's also a way of helping people find out how what they already do, or are planning in their work, fits in with the sustainable agriculture rubric.

Marketing is key—how we pitch the course and to whom. Targeting ANR directors as front line for new hires will be key.

Specific Comments / Suggestions for Course Revisions

1. Frame/window size. This is pre-set by CECP system so there are some limitations here. In general would like to avoid scrolling, but it may be necessary on a few pages in order to get text to flow. CHECK SCROLLING OF POP-UP WINDOWS—very slow and awkward.
2. In order to increase the amount of space for text and photos, do NOT repeat the course title header on every page. DO keep the left hand Nav bar, but streamline it??? Not all those links are needed on every screen of the course.
3. Need to come up with a NEW COURSE TITLE. Current one is too long and there is a potential problem with S.A. In Action sounding like “inaction” !! -- negative connotations.
4. Go through course and check each photo for quality and relevance.
5. Write caption/description for each photo to show relevance to page content. These could be pop-up boxes when rolling over or clicking the photo.
6. Consider use of call-out quotes from text, instead of photos.
7. Be more explicit in instructions for interactive pieces. Come up with a symbol that indicates interactive elements throughout the course.
8. Need to be able to print the page. Currently when you click ‘print’ you get a gray shaded box and no content.
9. Videos. When you click on the video links, have a dialog box that comes up which gives users options according to their connection speed.
10. Develop user-friendly page numbering code, e.g., 1-1, or Unit 1- page 1
11. Science and sustainable ag section. Mention journals addressing sustainable agriculture. Indicate that more information on science-based aspect of sustainable agriculture will be covered in future modules. Locate original course text which mentioned society journals and workshops addressing S.A.

Other items highlighted from NACAA summary—Key issues to be addressed in Module 1 revision.

- Need better course navigation system. Expandable outline. Should be clearer to show where you are in relation to whole course. Use notation “page xx of xx”
- When you click the Next button/arrow, it would be nice to get some indication of activity while the next page loads.
- Science and sustainable ag section is very weak (only 2 screens) and not applicable to CE field staff.
- Glossary will be good addition: had differing opinions about whether or not to hyperlink words in the course direct to pop-up glossary.
- Drag-Drop overlapping circles activity needs work: some indicators can go in more than one circle, let students drag the item to whatever circle they want, when an answer is correct it just disappears—it should reappear somewhere on the page, re-design in some way to help show how goals and priorities come into play. Current content for this activity seems kind of pointless.
- Would be great if, when a student comes to a stopping point, the system bookmarks where they are and they have the options of printing what they’ve covered to so far. That print out they could then post at their desk to remind them to re-visit the course and also where they left off. Ideally for re-visiting students, they should also get a link when they log-on that says “take me to where I left off” or something along those lines.
- Biased against large scale / corporate agriculture; sets up agribusiness vs. family farms, when in actuality many large scale agri-business operations are family operations.
- History section leads us down path that leads you to believe we’re not talking to large-scale farmers. Urban development and sprawl are also a major factor in loss of farms.
- On some of the interactive pieces (e.g. year that s.a. was first in print), if you get the correct answer, then you miss out on the feedback for incorrect answers. Instruct people to check out significance of other dates.
- Videos are problematic given that many offices are still on slow, low-bandwidth lines: Have videos downloadable as separate file?, graphics and video on CD?, offer text/transcript of video?, offer audio only? Not all agents have sound at their desks. One individual in Florida doesn’t even have PCs in her office: she works at a terminal.
- Length of course: 20-30 minutes per unit seems appropriate. That would total 1 hour for this first module.
- Take out “type in your own text” activities—fake interaction.

👉 Kim, Val, and Dave will meet by phone to review all course pages, content and comments from NACAA review and finalize list of revisions. Dave will work with Julie and Brian on implementing those by 10/15.

Module 1 Final Test

👉 Kim will contact Mickie Swisher to see if she is interested in working with us on writing the questions for the final multiple-choice test. Design team will get the chance to review the questions and answers before posting to the Web.

Field Testing Online Course

👉 Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, Vern Grubinger, and Dave and Andy will be thinking about recruiting 5-10 county agents from each of their regions to participate in the official field testing of the course. Kim—who to contact in Southern Region about recruitment from that region??

Julie has an evaluation tool that she has used for other courses that may also be applicable for our needs. She and Dave will discuss adapting this to our needs.

Summarized by David Chaney