

Report to the SHAP Extension Committee – February 10, 2009

Title: *NRCS Programming and Pennsylvania Fruit Growers: Education and Advocacy*

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Report: NRCS continued to support the Pennsylvania fruit growers in 2008, primarily through EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentive Program) contracts. In an effort to improve the communication between NRCS, PSU Extension, and fruit growers, a training titled “Understanding IPM within EQIP” was held in the spring of 2008. The training was attended by 5 NRCS employees, 5 PSU Extension employees, and 25 fruit growers.

Again in 2008, multiple farm visits and e-mail/telephone consultations were made to assist growers in understanding the NRCS evaluation, ranking, and contracting process. Information regarding the EQIP program was distributed through PSU Extension, SHAP newsletters, as well as fruit grower meetings.

At the State Technical Committee meeting in August, the updates to the 2008 Farm Bill were discussed. EQIP funding will increase from \$1.2 million to \$1.7 by the year 2012 and will include assistance for organic production. Pest management programs within EQIP, such as IPM, will continue to run as before. AMA (Agricultural Management Assistance) and WHIP (Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program) continue to be funded, and CIG (Conservation Innovation Grant) specifically denotes funding for specialty crops. A new program titled Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) offers a new opportunity to the fruit grower as this program will financially reward producers “to address resource concerns by undertaking additional conservation activities and improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation practices.” To be eligible the grower must already care for one priority resource concern, and by the end of the contract care for one additional resource concern (such as soil, water, etc). In addition, the 2008 Farm Bill provides for adequate technical assistance within conservation programs to the specialty crop grower. An interest to increase partnership between PSU Extension and NRCS was expressed in order to better deliver program information to growers.

The priority sign-up closing date for 2009 EQIP funding was moved up to August 31, 2008. NRCS is currently ranking the 2008 round of applications; they again expect to have far more applications than available funds.