

Regional IPM Centers' Response to the 2006 Mid-term Review

October 11, 2006

On February 14-17, 2006, USDA-CSREES conducted a mid-term review of the four Regional Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Centers in the interest of continuous improvement. A six-member external panel helped to assess the Centers, recognize accomplishments, and make recommendations. The conclusion of the review panel was that the Centers have been successful both individually and as a network and are a potential model for other USDA-CSREES regional programs. The Centers have engaged a wide spectrum of nontraditional partners and reinforced established IPM networks, thus facilitating IPM adoption across the nation. Panel members concluded that the Centers demonstrate the capacity and flexibility to advance the National IPM Roadmap and coordinate a positive response to emerging pest management issues on a regional and national scale.

The panel summarized their findings and recommendations in *Mid-Term Review of Integrated Pest Management Centers* (see <http://www.ipmcenters.org/IPMCenterReview2-06.pdf>). Center directors discussed these recommendations and summarized their responses in the following document. The panel's recommendations are set in *italics*, and the responses are set in roman.

Recommendation 1: Further develop center strategic plans.

To be in compliance with the National IPM Roadmap, strategic plans (as developed by the Northeast IPM Center) and Impact Assessment Evaluations should be developed by all Centers.

Center Response 1

The Centers agree with this recommendation and have already begun to write strategic plans that incorporate, where possible, success indicators and timelines of activities and achievements. Advisory councils or steering committees are assisting with the process.

Recommendation 2: Sponsor meetings and symposia with a regional focus.

Two examples of meetings sponsored by the Centers in 2005 were discussed during the review....Both meetings resulted in several positive outcomes:

Heightened awareness of the Centers and the importance of adopting IPM practices.

Networking opportunity for diverse participants (e.g., representatives from land grant colleges, commodity groups, advocacy groups, industry, various government agencies and programs)

An opportunity to identify regional IPM priorities.

Center Response 2

The following regional and national meetings and symposia have recently been completed or will be completed in the near future:

- National IPM Symposium, April 2006 (all Centers, with organizational leadership provided by the North Central IPM Center)
- Environmentally Friendly Lawns and Landscaping Informational Teleconference, May 2006 (sponsored by the North Central IPM Center)
- Forum to Improve Collaboration in IPM among 1890 and 1862 Land Grant University Programs, September 2006 (organizational leadership provided by the Southern IPM Center)
- Tamarisk Research Conference (the Western IPM Center), October 2006

- National Pest Management Strategic Plan for School IPM, October 2006 meeting in Las Vegas (joint project sponsored by all four Centers and CSREES)
- Residential IPM Workshop, July 2007 (Northeastern IPM Center)
- North Central Regional Symposium, Spring 2008 (based on input received from the North Central IPM Center Stakeholder Panel during their October 2006 meeting)
- National Work on Evaluation, Logic Model Training (organizational leadership provided by Carol Pilcher, North Central Region)

In addition, the North Central IPM Center has conducted training teleconferences on Evaluation and Measurement, Sudden Oak Death, Pink Hibiscus Mealybug, Corn Rootworm, and Soybean Rust.

The Southern Region IPM Center has participated in many regional meetings but has been advised by its advisory council to not sponsor large regional or national symposia. The other regions will plan additional meetings and symposia as appropriate.

Recommendation 3: Develop user-friendly, informative annual reports for mass distribution to enhance Center visibility.

Center Response 3

The Centers now have a Communications and Outreach Committee—consisting of IPM Center and CSREES representatives—that will formulate plans for collaborative Center communications, including perhaps a 2007 annual report and a marketing piece. Committee members will highlight national successes, will look to the IR-4 and SARE reports for inspiration and ideas, and will consider marketing and distribution as an integral step in creating any joint publications.

Recommendation 4. Provide feedback to Pest Management Strategic Plan participants.
One presenter suggested that centers should develop a follow-up system for following up with PMSP participants that would notify participants of the PMSP's status. This could also be used to contact interested parties if the PMSP is revised at a later date.

Center Response 4

The Pacific Northwest follows up on regulatory aspects of PMSPs with workgroups and growers, particularly on registrations. The North Central Region brings carrot growers together each year to discuss issues and revise the carrot PMSP. The North Central Region Potato Working Group updated the Potato PMSP in April, 2005. The Centers could follow up on the list of research and implementation needs cited in PMSPs, could let PMSP panels know which funded projects resulted from their work, and could advertise this information in newsletters. Additionally, Centers could add to the national PMSP guidelines a section to encourage feedback, but overall, they do not have the resources to follow up on every aspect of PMSPs.

Recommendation 5: Increase partnering with other federal agencies and programs on a variety of activities (e.g., IR-4, NRCS, Regional Plant Diagnostic Centers).

Center Response 5

Each Center partners consistently with numerous agencies and other stakeholders at various levels, and we wish to retain regional flexibility in this regard. We participate in the national IPM symposia (representing hundreds of partners) and in the Federal IPM Coordinating Committee and have devoted Center resources to the formation and success of the Interagency Working Group, including the evaluation subcommittee. IR-4 personnel are routinely invited to participate

in PMSPs held in each region. Additionally, we have begun a process of identifying certain partners, such as the NRCS and RMA, with whom to increase our level of interaction, and hope to continually add more partners. We would applaud increased CSREES efforts to partner at high levels on our behalf and believe this is a necessary step to enhance support and to move the program forward.

Recommendation 6: Consider farmer-level grants.

USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) and other programs provide grants to individual growers. The IPM centers should explore farmer-level grants.

Center Response 6

Many stakeholders, including farmers, are encouraged to apply to Center-funded grant programs. Several Centers are actively working with both farmers and the NRCS with the goal of helping farmers to receive funding for IPM-related activities and to improve the quality of pest management plans. Centers also support development of IPM guidelines for farmers, extension educators, and others to use, and we serve on SARE administrative councils, which help fund farmers. At this time the Centers do not plan to develop specific farmer-level grant programs.

Recommendation 7: Develop linkages with land-grant and other institutions on graduate research.

The IPM centers should consider partnerships with Land-Grant and other universities that would take advantage of graduate research projects. This could facilitate the centers' emphasis on results-oriented research and help centers leverage other sources of funding.

Center Response 7

Centers link to graduate students through faculty project directors, who help to ensure their support. Although internal *Center-funded* grants permit funds to be used for tuition, federal regulations prohibit funds from the Regional IPM Competitive Grants Program from being used in this manner. In addition, the brief (one- to two-year) time limits of Center sub-awards do not allow for the longevity required for most students to complete graduate research projects. Developing further linkages with land-grants for graduate research, while a laudable goal, is likely beyond the current scope of the Centers.

Recommendation 8: Encourage whole systems approaches to pest control.

Center Response 8

The Centers are in favor of whole-system approaches to pest management. Funds from the Regional IPM Grants Program and Center-funded grants programs currently support projects that contribute to whole systems, and we help determine the relevancy of PMAP (Pest Management Alternatives Program) proposals that involve whole systems. Pest Management Strategic Plans funded and organized by the Centers consider whole system planning that can justify the need for competitive grants. We will continue to look for additional ways that whole systems can be integrated into the work we do.

Recommendation 9: Consider regular updates from centers to stakeholders.

Centers should consider regular (monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly) communication with stakeholders to outline accomplishments and advise of plans for upcoming crop profiles, PMSPs, stakeholder meetings, etc.

Response 9

The Centers generally consider their communication with stakeholders to be a definitive strength. We engage stakeholders when setting priorities, send out newsletters and email updates, communicate via web newsletters, and frequently talk by phone or in person.

Recommendation 10: Centers could benefit from additional support in Washington.

The role of CSREES in leading and supporting the Centers should be defined. The details of this support should be agreed upon by CSREES management and the Center directors.... CSREES also needs to be more assertive in response and provide leadership to the Centers. The Centers should clearly communicate their needs to CSREES in Washington.

Response 10

CSREES leadership has done a good job of encouraging Centers to work together, yet allowing them to be independent and adapt to regional needs. The Centers have begun to articulate the type of CSREES support that would be most useful to us as we grow. We believe it would be valuable for USDA to better champion the Centers and position them for the future.

Overall, we could benefit from our CSREES liaisons continuing to act on our behalf in streamlining the steps and paperwork required at USDA to accomplish IPM work. For example, one area that could use improvement is in regard to communication about RIPM awards and the dates when funds will be available. Since grants are initiated by CSREES, part of the communication is beyond the control of the Centers. Centers are served by different individuals in the Office of Extramural Programs (OEP) at CSREES and have occasionally received different or contradictory information. Additionally, the timetable for processing paperwork can vary widely among Centers. Given that Centers are distinct from other programs funded in CSREES, it would seem advantageous for one individual at OEP to become expert in this area and simultaneously supply the same information to all Centers.

Recommendation 11: Centers need to continue efforts to establish positive relationships with other federal agencies. CSREES enlisting collaborative efforts of other federal partners can be helpful in this endeavor.

Response 11

We agree. The USDA, with the leadership of CSREES, could hold the vision that IPM Centers are the coordinating bodies for all IPM-related programs and could impart this vision to other agencies. It would be helpful to have continued CSREES support in networking with such partners as, for example, the Water Quality Program and HUD.

Our work with other programs (e.g., the EPA) to develop a strong national awareness of IPM has been growing steadily. We participate in the Federal IPM Coordinating Committee and regularly invite partners and potential partners to our meetings that occur three times a year.

Recommendation 12: Centers should continue to secure external funds to leverage the funds received from CSREES and to help support the additional program efforts required. External funding may come from other federal agencies, industry, commodity groups, foundations, or other regional or state entities.

Response 12

Since 2003 Centers have increased the number of external funding sources from two to six, and many of the Centers have the goal to “diversify funding” set for the coming years. We acknowledge that single sources of funding can leave the Centers vulnerable, and therefore

continue to pursue collaborations with RMA, APHIS, NRCS, and other programs and departments. One step that we would like to take with USDA-CSREES is to develop and implement a joint strategy to obtain additional support at the federal level.

Recommendation 13: The Centers should continue to encourage full participation of state IPM coordinators into Center activities.

Response 13

Centers typically have productive relationships with IPM Coordinators. These individuals serve on advisory councils, steering committees, and regional technical committees. As state resources for extension and research dwindle, the Centers are ever mindful of their role in bringing additional resources to the region which can be shared by the states and can benefit IPM programs.

Recommendation 14: Partnerships with other organizations should be expanded to create greater awareness of and benefits for the Centers.

Response 14

We agree with this recommendation and have begun to build these important relationships. Examples include participation of the United Soybean Board with the Soybean Rust Pest Information Platform for Extension and Education, the NC IPM Center NRCS Working Group, the National School IPM Pest Management Strategic plan with the IPM Institute of America, Scotts Miracle-Gro Retail IPM Workshop, and the Lawns and the Environment Initiative, as well as many partnerships on regional projects and programs.

Recommendation 15: CSREES should develop a remittance plan for other agencies that benefit from the use of crop timelines, crop profiles, and PMSPs.

Such agencies should establish a means to provide the Centers with advanced notice of their needs for new or revised documents, to help the Centers prioritize their efforts.

Response 15

We recently formed a committee—consisting of a Center representative and leadership from CSREES and the EPA—that plans to investigate a remittance plan for user agencies.

REGIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Northeastern Region Recommendations

1. In the future Northeast Community and Urban Workshop, consider including school IPM and other interest groups.

Northeastern Response: School IPM (specifically, IPM in curriculum and IPM practices in school settings) was a significant topic at the Urban and Community IPM Conference we sponsored in March 2005. Future workshops underwritten by the Northeastern IPM Center could definitely include school IPM and other interest groups, as long as stakeholders have the time and interest to provide leadership.

In conjunction with the other Centers and with CSREES, we recently funded the creation of a school PMSP, which we believe will lead the way to collaboration and conferences among those experts. Already one school PMSP meeting has been scheduled for October 2006.

2. Provide advice on developing and implementing strategic plans to other regions.

Northeastern Response: We have shared our strategic plan electronically with the Centers and have conferred with at least one Center in detail about how the strategic plan was created. We would be happy to respond to requests for additional information and advice.

3. As the region most heavily focused on urban IPM, consider adaptations to the Northeast model that are applicable to urban areas in the other regions.

Northeastern Response: Some adaptations that we plan to make, and which other regions might consider, are a) adding a representative from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to our advisory council; b) altering the RIPM and our Partnership RFAs to further reflect urban IPM issues; and c) including more urban audiences on our mailing list.

North Central Region Recommendations

1. Appoint an Advisory Committee of representatives of the stakeholders of region.

North Central Response: We have identified a Stakeholder Panel to serve as our Advisory Committee. The group will meet for the first time October 25–27, 2006, in St. Louis. They will be briefly oriented to the NC IPM Center, develop a process to identify and prioritize IPM needs for the region, develop our strategic plan (with the assistance of a facilitator), and initiate the planning process for the regional IPM symposium.

2. When the Advisory Committee is formed, consider an executive committee of the Advisory Committee to serve as the Steering Committee.

North Central Response: We agree with this recommendation and have plans to adopt it.

3. Continue efforts to draw input from all IPM coordinators of all states in the region.

North Central Response: We agree completely and continue to value the contributions of the North Central Region IPM coordinators. These coordinators serve as our State Contacts and receive frequent communications from the IPM Center. Four IPM coordinators will serve as representatives on our Stakeholder Panel. In addition, Center leadership will continue to meet annually with members of the NCERA-201 IPM Coordinating Committee.

Southern Region Recommendations

1. Continue efforts to draw on input from IPM coordinators of all states in the region.

Southern Response: We will continue these efforts.

2. Intensify the effort to develop regional priorities.

Southern Response: We have intensified this effort by calling for stakeholder suggestions and discussion this in the Advisory Council. Outside of PMSP production, however, stakeholder input continues to be less than ideal.

3. While the current program is functioning well, consider partnering with another institution in the future proposal to strengthen regionalism.

Southern Response: We have considered this. The Advisory Council and the Steering Committee were both unwilling to recommend that we implement this change. Both committees are more concerned with the risk of jeopardizing the good work we are doing than they are concerned with the potential opportunity loss of partnering with another institution.

Western Region Recommendations

1. Periodically evaluate the need for state(s) non-competitive support.

Western Response: This recommendation is puzzling, as (state) Information Networks, Workgroups and Issues in IPM projects are all funded on a competitive basis. The issue of competitive information networks is discussed on an annual basis with the Western IPM Center Steering Committee when budget allocations are made. The Western IPM Center has allowed funding to support information networks only on a yearly basis. The Steering and Advisory Committees felt that committing to supporting this process annually would provide flexibility to the Center and allow the Steering Committee to evaluate the benefits of information networks on an annual basis. This evaluation has been done annually for the past three years and will continue to be part of our annual budget allocation process. The Steering Committee recommended at our meeting in April 2006 that information networks be eligible for multiple year funding.

2. Develop a specialization that is particularly important to the Western IPM Center that can be shared with other regional centers.

Western Response: The Western IPM Center has specialized in several areas, most notably the development of Pest Management Strategic Plans, the hiring of Comment Coordinators, and Center representation on the National IPM Evaluation Committee. The Western IPM Center staff will continue to look for opportunities to share successes with other IPM Centers.

3. Explore IT options for greater participation with Pacific Island members and stakeholders.

Western Response: This is a good suggestion for dealing with the vast distances involved in the western region. Several years ago the Western IPM Center did provide digital cameras to the lead scientists on the Pacific Islands to aid in long distance evaluation of pest problems. The Western IPM Center cooperates very closely with Western SARE to share issues and expertise. Western SARE has sent staff to the islands for specialized training that includes information on funding opportunities offered by the Western IPM Center. Fairly frequent staffing changes in the Pacific preclude long-term relationships.