

Final Report to the Western IPM Center Grants Program

Grant Data

Project Number: K009607-PI

Title: Continuation of the Small Fruits Work Group for Oregon and Washington

Type: IWG

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Funding Years: 2004, 2005, 2006

Total funding Amount: \$20,444

Original Team Members

(Canadian membership was not supported by this grant. Their names are included for a more accurate representation of the dynamics of this working group. The British Columbia small fruit industry is an integral part of the overall northwest industry. This sharing of resources is helpful on both sides of the border)

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Additional members of the weekly newsletter information group.

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Overview

The blueberry, raspberry, blackberry and strawberry (referred to collectively as small fruit) industries in Oregon and Washington share many common pest management concerns and practices. This small fruit industry is also unique in the US and the world due to (1) the concentration and magnitude of these crops and (2) its overall emphasis on processed rather than fresh fruits. Many growers and fruit processors make their living with a combination of these crops rather than just one. Researchers also tend to work within this cropping group.

Six small fruit commissions, representing the growers, plus Washington State University, Oregon State University and, the USDA's Northwest Center for Small Fruit Research centered in Corvallis, Oregon, are all involved in prioritizing, funding and doing pest management research in small fruits. Unfortunately, communication and coordination of IPM research across the two states and four crops has not been optimal.

The Small Fruit Working Group includes a balance of industry, growers, and public researchers. It was formed to enhance the ability of these related crops and research institutions to make the most of our combined resources through the development of new communication tools, access to collaboration opportunities on projects and better coordination of research priorities.

Peerbolt Crop Management is a private company that has served the northwest small fruit industry with IPM scouting and consulting services, electronic web resources and field research since the early 1990s. Its communication network throughout the small fruit industry in the two states and interaction within the various commissions and public institutions offers a solid position for coordination of the working group.

Objectives

Objectives for 2004/2005:

1. Create a PNW Small Fruits Work Group.
By the end of the first year, seven members had joined the work group. They were joined by nine more in 2005.
2. Identify and make recommendations concerning IPM needs and resources.
Discussion centered on IPM replacement strategies for chemicals that would expire soon, and the status of pathology personnel in the wake of Pete Bristow's retirement. Also discussed were caneberry and blueberry Pest Management Plan critical needs.
3. Identify and prioritize IPM research projects.
We created a matrix of priorities and discussed the need for a unified method for setting priorities among the various funding agencies.
4. Develop, coordinate and disseminate a funding database.
During 2004 the database was created and posted on the www.nwipm.info web site. During 2005 work group members seemed interested in using it, but toward the end of the year, interest had declined. The project may have been too all encompassing and therefore cumbersome. It was also difficult to maintain in a timely fashion.
5. Elicit and coordinate research proposals.

During the spring of 2005, the work group discussed the need for educating growers on scouting. The consensus of the group was to prepare a pre-proposal for a 3-year SARE Research and Education grant to produce a Scouting Toolbox. Ten work group members signed on as cooperators to the proposal.

6. Manage and communicate research progress.

This objective has been most difficult to resolve. Many research project progress reports are not widely distributed and few are available electronically. The group was enthusiastic about having a database of available information, but work on that project as moved forward slowly.

7. Develop a PNW Small Fruits Work Group section within a new Small Fruits IPM website.

A password protected area was developed for the www.nwipm.info web site was on-line by mid 2004. Within it we placed the funding database, information about researchers, and information about research priorities.

Objectives for 2006:

1. Continue to serve as the communication center for the Small Fruits Working Group.

Using the network of contacts built up through the efforts of the Small Fruit Working Group, the industry sponsored weekly email IPM newsletter, Small Fruit Update, has become a primary tool for industry pest management communication. The industry sponsored IPM website, www.nwipm.info, has also become a prime source of pest management information.

2. Continue to identify IPM research needs and resources.

Weekly in-season email communication has solidified the connections between the various growing regions and various crops. IPM needs and resources are a continuous topic of conversation.

3. Continue to update and add to the current insect/disease searchable databases, and the research database on the nwipm.info web site

The insect/disease searchable database is continually updated and used regularly by the industry. The research database did not find an audience and the time and resources maintaining it took grew disproportionately to its use. We hope to revive it at a later time.

4. Develop a coordinated method for setting research priorities.

Although there has been some discussion of the need to set priorities in a more coordinated fashion, to date most funding agencies have not made a priority of this objective. Nevertheless, there is more awareness throughout the industry of the need to coordinate the way priorities are being set. The priority setting process at the Northwest Center for Small Fruits Research has definitely benefited from the better lines of communication. It is possible that the Center might become the primary source of research priority coordination. We feel that the groundwork has been set for continued improved coordination.

5. Elicit and coordinate research priorities

As stated above, this has not happened in as formal a manner as we had initially conceived. However, the ongoing group communications has definitely impacted the research priority setting of the various commissions and the Northwest Center for Small Fruit Research. What were relatively separate entities are now much more aware of what the others are planning and funding.

What has evolved over the three years of this project

This has been an unpredictable but highly successful project. The Working Group has been an essential component in the establishment of an industry and area wide communication system for receiving and disseminating integrated pest management information. Some of the original goals and ideas did not work out as planned. However, other areas developed beyond our expectations and have found a means of ongoing industry support and participation. The blending of public and private individuals to share IPM information has worked very well.

The components that worked are:

1. The **insect/disease searchable database** on the www.nwipm website. This continues to be used extensively and now has industry sponsorship to support its maintenance.
2. The Small Fruit Update newsletter that, while not a direct part of this grant, has **provided a link** between the weekly input from members and dissemination of that information to growers, industry and researchers.
3. The **wide distribution and timeliness of the IPM information** has apparently created a reinforcement system that encourages the email contact list members to reply and share information.
4. **Collaborative projects:** The working group was directly responsible for organizing and recruiting participants in the a successful WSARE Research and Education grant proposal entitled *Encouraging Sustainability in Small Fruits by Educating Producers on Scouting and Decision-making Parameters* This three-year project will involve SFWG members in workshops and in producing a Scouting Toolbox document for small fruits. This project was modeled on the Pest Management Strategic Plan process.

Component that needed adjustment:

- The **listserv of Small Fruit Working Group members**. The original Internet listserv format proved limiting in a number of ways. Understanding of how a listserv works was an obstacle for some members of the group, in particular growers not used to computer protocols. Initial signing up, adding and removing members also was difficult since these steps require the affected members to respond to what some felt were spam-like computer requests.
- Given those problems, the Internet listserv evolved into a more informal email program list (no longer referred to as a Small Fruit Working Group, although it performs a similar function) to which a request is sent out weekly to 20-25 contact/members requesting IPM information regarding regional crops or other industry information. It has proven easier for members to join/leave and also allows some to share information with specific members rather than with the entire group.

Components that didn't work (or have not yet jelled):

1. **The face to face meetings** of a majority of the members proved difficult to maintain due to competition for their time from other meetings as well as the distance needed to travel for some members regardless of location.
2. **The searchable database of grant opportunities**, including a small fruit researchers database and contact list, and listings of the various commodity and crop priority lists. These

components were developed and posted but were used minimally, while needing a significant amount of updating and maintenance time. The structure remains on the web site and we are hopeful that it can be revived at a later date. In addition, we started work on a database of completed small fruit research projects to enable the industry to search by keyword, researcher, and/or funding agency. This database would help to minimize duplication of effort and allow a larger distribution of the research results. However, such a database would take major funding. It is not something a private business can develop on its own.

Conclusions

The lines of communication between our publicly funded small fruit researchers and extension agents and the industries they serve have been greatly enhanced by this project. Electronic communication is quickly evolving as older forms, such as mailed out newsletters and meeting notices, decrease. Although not entirely in the form originally conceived, the Small Fruit Working Group has resulted in strengthening ongoing, self-supporting links between the various small fruit regions and crops.

Some of the obstacles still to be surmounted include a better sharing of grant and commodity specific priority information as well as some type of database of all the small fruit research presently going on in the region. Virtually all of the various commodity groups' funded research is reported only in a hard copy format that is distributed to the commission members. This results in much of this work not being available to the wider audience that could benefit from it.

We are confident that the foundation, which the funding of this Small Fruit Working Group grant has helped establish, will support a sustainable IPM communications system serving all of us working within the small fruit industries in the northwest, including growers, researchers, extension agents, consultants, processing personnel and our support industries.