

OBJECTIVE A-4 – FIELD CROPS

Field Crop growers will implement recommended and potential production practices and systems, investigate innovative agricultural opportunities, develop business and human resource plans, and explore marketing options to ensure continued farm productivity and profits and quality of life.

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Production of agricultural crops is economically, socially, and environmentally important to all citizens of Robeson County. Robeson county farmers produce more than \$90 million of traditional field crops each year. This objective addresses the educational needs of all full-time farmers, part-time farmers, limited resource farmers, agribusinesses, and non-farm citizens in the areas of production practices, marketing, new technologies, governmental regulations, and consumer awareness.

SITUATION STATEMENT

According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, there are 1,004 farms in Robeson County. Although the average farm size is 284 acres, small and part-time farmers operate many of these farms. Tobacco and horticultural crops are frequently the primary means of generating income on all farms, including limited resource farm and small family farms. Agricultural diversity has been key in maintaining a viable agricultural economy in Robeson County. Tobacco continues to be the most viable crop in the county. With the decline in tobacco quota and rumors of a tobacco buyout, it is more important than ever for growers to make informed decisions. It is important that those that wish to remain in tobacco production be able to do so, but it is also important that farmers seeking additional sources of income from their farm operation be provided the assistance they need to gain accurate, unbiased information so they can make sound business decisions. With the future of tobacco uncertain, farm families must find alternatives to compensate for the loss of tobacco income if they are to maintain the farms and family units. These growers must seek to maximize returns and/or seek alternative crops providing relatively high per-acre returns.

Cotton acreage has remained steady despite economic downturn on the world market. With increases in conservation tillage and transgenic crops, growers are able to produce more with fewer inputs. Production problems still exist despite technological advances. Determining the need for deep tillage, new scouting techniques in Bt cotton, insect and weed resistance, and new weed problems will continue to be upcoming challenges.

IPM is an important tool for all crops. Knowing beneficial insects, using pesticides wisely, and utilizing the proper cultural practices can greatly minimize pesticide use. Many growers are unaware of these practices and how they can be used on their farm.

Global market conditions continue to impact tobacco, cotton, corn, soybean, and wheat producers. U.S. farmers rely more heavily on export markets than ever before. International trade agreements have severely impacted the agricultural and textile industry in Robeson County. As producers plan for the future, it is imperative that they understand their vulnerability and the global factors that affect their personal farm situation.

Production practices continue to change for field crop producers in Robeson County. Each season, new products are available for use and usually come with confusion and misguided advice from company representatives. Each season, new problems also arise which have to be addressed. Extension specialists and agents are on

the front line assessing these problems and determining solutions quickly so growers can make informed, economically important decisions.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Robeson County field crop producers
- Young farmers
- Part-time farmers
- Minority farmers
- Limited resource farmers
- Robeson County agribusinesses
- Grain elevator owners and operators
- Local and regional agrisuppliers
- Vocational Agriculture teachers
- General public
- Civic clubs
- Consumers

TEACHING POINTS

- Potential new agricultural opportunities
- Cultural and IPM practices
- Pest identification and control methods
- Pest management recommendations
- Business management recommendations
- Marketing options and opportunities
- Assessing technological advances
- Assessing direct contracting arrangements

PROGRAM DELIVERY STRATEGIES

- Grower meetings
- Individual contact
- Newsletters
- News releases
- On-farm demonstrations
- Field days
- Tours
- Short courses
- E-mail
- Internet and Homepages
- Guest speaker for groups
- Radio programs
- Television news reports

EVALUATION STRATEGIES

- Documentation of farm profits remaining viable
- Tobacco growers remain profitable through contracts or auction system
- Peanut growers remain profitable due to proper use of contracts
- Documentation of the adoption of new practices
- Direct observation of changes, improvements, and increased production
- Surveys

Feedback from Field Crops Specialized Advisory Committee
Feedback from producers
Feedback from local and regional agrisuppliers
Feedback from local agribusinessmen
Documentation of adoption of new technology
Documentation of utilization of options as a marketing strategy

PROGRAMMING RESOURCES

NCSU specialists
NCCES bulletins
NCDA Regional Agronomist
North Carolina Agricultural Chemical Manual
Commodity production books
Power Point presentations
Internet and Intranet
Other county or area crops agents
Agricultural chemical representatives
Tobacco company agronomists
Local farmers
Volunteer cooperators