

WORKSHOP DATA SUMMARY

Climate Ready Midwest | Central State University Extension | Feb 15, 2024

Executive Summary

This report presents the interview questions, key findings, and detailed explanations of key findings of the stakeholder engagement meeting that took place with Central State University Extension and producer-partners on February 15, 2024.

The purpose of this document is to seek stakeholder's validation of the findings and adjust or make recommendations in areas perceived to misrepresent the views and perspectives captured during the engagement.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Extension professionals advocate for integrating climate-informed agriculture practices into their programs by connecting them to weather events rather than focusing solely on climate change.
2. Extension professionals and producers emphasized the importance of presenting climate-informed agriculture in simple language, accompanied by a historical perspective.
3. Extension professionals and producers advocate for the integration of hands-on training into climate-informed agriculture to effectively address various aspects of climate change.
4. Producers and extension professionals believe there should be an extension professional to help them identify resources and climate-related information and grant applications for climate change adaptation practices.
5. Developing resources tailored for novice farmers interested in alternative climate-informed agriculture practices that offer tangible economic advantages.
6. Extension professionals and producers alike believe there is a knowledge gap regarding climate-informed programs specifically tailored to urban spaces, which require different farming techniques.

These findings will be central in developing a theory of change as a road of map to address the challenges facing Extension climate change programming.

Detailed Summary

Theme 1

Extension professionals advocate for integrating climate-informed agriculture practices into their programs by connecting them to weather events rather than focusing solely on climate change.

Detailed description

During our engagement with extension professionals, more than half indicated that they are integrating climate smart agriculture practices into their programming. The purpose of this integration is to reduce farmers' crop vulnerability to frost and crop loss. One respondent noted, "grow in high tunnels," and "plant or replant too late - to deal with late season freezes" as best ways to deal with frost and disease. Others mentioned integrating climate-related information by sharing knowledge on composting, soil health, cover crops, and intercropping, and exploring other alternatives. For example, one participant stated, "Teach about composting - limit waste, improve capacity for C seq., reduce GHGs - even in raised beds/crop integration with covers."

However, despite indicating that they are integrating some climate-informed agriculture into their programming, they expressed limited skills and knowledge in articulating issues related to climate-informed agriculture.

Additional Illustrative Quotes

- Agroforestry programs are really popular (log-based mushroom, sustainable forestry management)
- Teach about composting - limit waste, improve capacity for C sequestration, reduce GHGs - even in raised beds/crop integration with covers.
- Alternative farming. High tunnels' grants high tunnels. Only access. Not much else. Scaled scheme on sizing in urban areas.

Theme 2

Extension professionals and producers emphasized the importance of presenting climate-informed agriculture in simple language, accompanied by a historical perspective.

Detailed description

A greater number of extension professionals and producers emphasized that information on climate-informed agriculture tends to be scientifically inclined, making it challenging for ordinary producers or extension personnel who are not trained in climate studies to understand. One respondent emphasized the importance of using terminology that resonates with producers, stating, "Need to use the terminology... terminology will matter to producers as long as they're on the same page..."

universal understanding." This highlights the necessity of using language that farmers can easily comprehend.

Another perspective shared by a producer is the importance of offering a historical perspective on climate change to effectively communicate with farming communities. By illustrating how weather patterns and climate-related issues have evolved over time, farmers can better grasp the significance of current climate challenges. This historical context allows them to compare past weather conditions with current events, aiding in their understanding of climate change impacts.

Furthermore, respondents emphasized the need for localization of language and information regarding climate issues. Even with improved language concerning climate, additional steps are necessary to contextualize climate-related issues to local areas, ensuring that the information is relevant and meaningful to the community. Suggestions included presenting information in the form of infographics or comparing pictures to facilitate understanding. Therefore, providing climate-informed agriculture resources in various formats is essential to meet the diverse needs of clientele.

Illustrative Quotes

- Communicating beyond our own extension. Making the language less formal and easier.
- Historical compromise of glaciers and to look at the changes in over a year.
- Need to speak the same language or interpret around climate change.
- language needs to resonate with farmers and this generation.

Theme 3

Extension professionals and producers advocate for the integration of hands-on training into climate-informed agriculture to effectively address various aspects of climate change.

Detailed description

Extension professionals and producers expressed a preference for practical, hands-on learning experiences over theoretical information. One respondent highlighted the importance of "hands-on in-field working on things," while another emphasized the value of "formal programming - but in-field... practices." These statements underscore preference for pragmatic programs where participants learn by actively engaging in practical activities rather than being passive recipients of information.

Additionally, respondents suggested that extension training on climate-informed agriculture should incorporate visits to demonstration sites or farms that have implemented relevant practices. By learning from the experiences of others and seeing firsthand what has worked well and what has not, farmers can make more informed decisions regarding mitigation and adaptation actions. This highlights the importance of establishing strong collaboration and partnerships between Cooperative Extension and Climate Hub to develop resources that offer experiential learning opportunities and support adult learning principles.

Illustrative Quotes

- Demonstrations sites - really impactful when good signage, learn at own pace.
- More demonstrations sites - self guided - camera set up to watch progression of practice in action.
- And the use of demonstrations sites, how can we make this feasible utilizing time and make time.

Theme 4

Producers and extension professionals believe there should be an extension professional to help small farms identify resources, climate-related information, and support grant applications for climate change adaptation practices.

Detailed description

During the engagement meeting, numerous producers expressed a keen interest in climate-related agriculture information. Moreover, they highlighted the lack of resources or incentives to support climate change adaptation practices. Many farmers expressed uncertainty about where to find available resources and incentives offered by government agencies or non-governmental organizations. One producer mentioned the need for grants specifically tailored to small-scale farmers, as many existing grants tend to target larger-scale operators. Others suggested that extension services should organize training sessions focused on proposal development related to climate change, such as "Grant writing workshops." These workshops would equip farmers with the necessary skills and knowledge to develop proposals and identify potential funding sources. Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of quarterly workshops to stay updated on the latest information and developments in climate change.

Illustrative Quotes (grants)

- Having a dedicated person that helps with USDA or grants or creating a sense of community.
- Collaborative infrastructure in order to help partners working with grants and utilize the community supports.
- Provide information related to grant incentives to smallholder farmers, and commodity partnership grants information for farms impacted.
- Rainwater catching - where to apply for grants for smaller spaces. Food bank/community centers.

Illustrative Quotes (need for information & resources)

- Provide information and resources on climate smart agriculture, factsheets (applicable locally).
- Orchard farmers - The need for information regarding planting periods and how to deal with frost and freezes

- Information on what farmers can change to reduce carbon footprint and to understand practices and footprint
- Need for information on water management to reduce water bills, storm water management.
- Need information on cover cropping, regenerative practices, winter season growing – hoop houses. Information on land use and changes for beginning aspiring farmers.

Theme 5

Developing resources tailored for novice farmers interested in alternative climate-informed agriculture practices that offer tangible economic advantages.

Detailed description

Workshop participants emphasized the importance of targeting beginning farmers in climate-informed agriculture outreach. They highlighted that beginning farmers, not transitioning from established practices, may be more receptive to adopting new practices. Additionally, stakeholders stressed the need to emphasize the financial, social, and environmental benefits of climate-informed practices and present this information without talking about climate change. One producer suggested framing these practices as diversifying crops with financial benefits rather than solely focusing on climate change, framed more as: “diversity of crops, financial, not a climate change thing,” and “delay planting due to extreme weather events.” This underscores the importance of developing resources that address the broader benefits of climate-informed agriculture and aligning them with experiential and adult learning theories.

Illustrative Quotes

- Scale down from larger farms/specialty crops. Practices teach to connect to climate.
- Identifying what CS techniques work - available for large commodity groups - needs to be made available to urban farms, small farms, organic.”
- Business-time management needs. Happening that time of year. Respond to weather. Not lose paying job.... Listening session - guide from people have info to newer folks. Never want to apply for a loan. Informal conversations. Solve a bunch of problems.

Theme 6

Extension professionals and producers alike believe there is a knowledge gap regarding climate-informed programs specifically tailored to urban spaces, which require different farming techniques.

Detailed description

There was significant discussion during the engagement sessions regarding urban agriculture, particularly climate-informed practices. Many stakeholders expressed concerns about the lack of

financial resources and literature addressing climate mitigations and adaptations specifically tailored to urban spaces. One stakeholder stated, "Programming around urban small farming context," while another observed, "Focus is in urban/suburban spaces - practices are different on this scale (stormwater management, renewable energy) - needs more classes on these topics."

These concerns underscore the need for Cooperative Extension and USDA-Midwest Climate Hub to prioritize urban farming and incorporate urban contexts into climate-informed agriculture strategies, as previous efforts have primarily targeted large-scale operations with minimal focus on small and medium operations.

Illustrative Quotes

- Programming around urban small farming context
- Urban/suburban farmers
- Urban site remediation
- Access to climate programs - not as available for urban areas.
- need more attention in urban areas and different farming techniques.
- Urban to communities connection
- Scaled scheme on sizing in urban areas.
- Focus is in urban/suburban spaces - practices are different on this scale (stormwater management, renewable energy) - needs more classes on these topics.
- needs to be made available to urban farms, small farms, organic, etc.
- Natural Resource management area happens in the urban space, how do we connect with landscapers in urban and gather under trees instead of the inside.
- Water management - urban setting - pay for water. Reducing water usage. Reduce water bill.
- Need for urban farms. Energy audit? Could share with producers.
- NE-OH. Urban growers. Market gardening. Small fruits. Hydroponic starting

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