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SARE PROJECT ENE96-18

FINAL REPORT

September 27, 1999

SECTION I

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Report Type: FINAL Including 1997-1999.

Title: *Development of Dairy Farm Discussion Groups in Vermont and New Hampshire*

Project Coordinator: Louise H. Calderwood, UVM Extension (4/97 –4/98)

Dr. J. Woodrow Pankey (Current Project Coordinator-4/98-9/99)

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Collaborators: John Porter and Jean Conklin, Univ. NH Ext.; Colleen Helenek, Rick LeVitre, Glenn Rogers, Bill Snow, and Willie Gibson, UVM Ext.

SARE Grant Amount: \$22,300.00 **Matching NF \$:** 400.00 **Matching Fed \$:** \$20,000.00

Duration: 4/97 through 9/30/99

Project Number: ENE96-18

Reporting Period: 4/97 – 9/99

Statement of Expenditures: Please see attached Statement of Expenditures from Jane K.

O'Neal, Business Office, Dept. Animal Sciences, UVM. (656-0136)

SARE Funds granted to date through this project and the amounts of matching funds they are providing: None

Helping you put knowledge to work.

Sites which are part of this project, indicate whether they are on experiment station, or private farm, and provide their state and zip code location.

Project ENE96-18 involved development of *Dairy Farmer Discussion Groups* in Vermont and New Hampshire. Please see attached mailing lists of some of the current, on-going Discussion Groups. Monthly meetings are held on member dairy farms. On occasions, joint meetings are held with two or more groups; these joint meetings were held at the university campus or other suitable location. On occasions, the meetings included an "expert" speaker and these programs were broadcast via "Interactive Television" to multiple sites around Vermont, including sites at regional Extension offices. In June 1999, a 2-day forage management short course was presented and approximately 70 dairy farms were represented. The majority of participants were from the Discussion groups but this was open to any interested producers.

II. FARMER INVOLVEMENT

Farmer Major Role: A total of eight (8) Dairy Farmer Discussion Groups were initiated during this project. Approximately 130 to 150 dairy farms actively participate in these groups.

Generate Ideas: In my opinion, all 130 to 150 dairy farmers *generate ideas* for this project. These group meetings are open and candid exchanges of ideas, concepts and practices.

III. PROJECT CATEGORY (a): Integrated Farm/Ranch system (Dairy Farming)

IV. PROJECT CATEGORY (b): Dairy

V. PRACTICES: Agroecosystem analysis; whole farm planning

V. COMMODITY: Animals: Dairy

VI. INFORMATION PRODUCTS

Monthly newsletters are routinely sent to members of each discussion group to provide” minutes” of the previous meeting and to announce upcoming events for the group. These are provided by the Extension facilitator of each discussion group. Three lay articles were published in *HOARD'S DAIRYMAN*.

SECTION II

1. SUMMARY: SARE Project ENE96-18 had the primary goals to develop dairy farmer discussion groups in Vermont and New Hampshire. This has been accomplished. Results of this effort have far exceeded the initial expectations of the planners. The New Zealand dairy discussion group method was learned by the original four collaborators. These individuals conducted training sessions for interested persons in Extension positions in both states. From these beginnings, the discussion group model has gained wide acceptance and acclaim as an efficient and effective conduit of information and knowledge to dairy producers. In Vermont, at least eight dairy farmer discussion groups are currently active. These include approximately 130 to 150 dairy farms and represent on the order of more than 50,000 dairy animals. The format and content of monthly meetings range from open discussions between group members on production practices or the latest facility designs to member selected topics presented by “outside” speakers. The subjects discussed included stress management, personnel management, lameness, calf raising, nutrition, teat skin evaluations, bunk management, extended calving intervals, personality evaluations with employer and employees, mastitis control, farm safety, waste management and large farm permit requirements. The discussion group model will continue to be successful because the group determines the subject matter. Ownership of the

group is shared by all participants. The primary responsibility of the facilitator is to secure information on specific topics and to obtain resources to support group activities.

- 2. OBJECTIVES:** 1. Train two Sustainable Agriculture Agents, one from UVM and one from UNH in the Farm Management Group method of dairy farmer education; 2. Train one Vermont and one New Hampshire farmer in the Farm Management Group method of dairy farmer education; 3. Develop five Farm Management Groups in Vermont and New Hampshire; 4. Provide facilitators three Farm Management Group meetings in five locations on the topics of a) on farm communication skills, b) increasing community support of agriculture, c) whole farm planning.

Specific Project Results Accomplishments:

Objective: Train two Sustainable Agriculture Agents, one from UVM and one from UNH in the Farm Management Group method of dairy farmer education. Jean Conklin, UNH Regional Specialist, Dairy and Louise Calderwood, UVM Regional Specialist, Dairy spent 30 days in New Zealand observing at total of 11 Livestock Advisory Consulting Officers (CO's) conduct 18 dairy farmer discussion groups (DG's). The CO's represented experience from 1 to over 15 years in leading DG's. They employed a variety of techniques in facilitating groups and encouraging farmer interaction. New Zealand farmers attending DG's were interviewed regarding the benefits derived from DG's; the most important function of DG's; what constituted a successful DG; and why they felt farmers did or did not attend on a regular basis.

Additional meetings occurred with management level employees of Livestock Improvement Corp. Advisory members to explore job expectations, professional improvement needs and administrative requirements of CO's.

In February 1997, 30 farmers, Extension personnel and agri-business representatives participated in a training session on DG's. Presenter's included Jean, Louise, David and Vern. The day was an enormous success and led to widespread understanding of the DG method.

A Farm Data Sheet developed by Jean Conklin has been well received by DG's. The sheet has been widely distributed and is extremely useful in keeping groups focused and on track.

An article on DG's written by Louise Calderwood appeared in the April 17, 1997 edition of *HOARD'S DAIRYMAN*. Mention was made of the article on Dairy-L and resulted in over 40 requests for reprints from across the US as well as Canada, Brazil and New Zealand. Surveys were mailed with the reprints and returned surveys indicated the information received would be put to use immediately in farmer education programs.

Louise Calderwood and Jean Conklin presented a poster on DG's at the 1997 meeting of the National Association of County Agriculture Agents and Louise Calderwood submitted an abstract to the Northeastern Regional Meeting of the American Dairy Science Association in the summer of 1998. Rick LeVitre made the presentation at ADSA.

During the spring of 1998 five presentations were made to over 100 farmers outlining the value of DG's. As a result a DG was started in the White River Junction area and attendance increased at the Newport area DG. Louise visited two established DG's to demonstrate the New Zealand style of group facilitation.

Objective: Train one Vermont and one New Hampshire farmer in the Farm Management Group method of dairy farmer education. Vernon Hurd, Newport Center, VT and David Keith, Haverhill, NH were the two dairy farmers who participated in initiation of the discussion group project. They accompanied the Extension Agents on the New Zealand trip and also observed the

CO's, providing a farmers perspective. David and Keith also interviewed their New Zealand counterparts to increase their understanding of DG facilitation. Additionally, they played integral parts in developing and presenting the February 3, 1997 training in DG's. Vernon Hurd currently serves as a farmer convener of the Newport area DG and has been very helpful in providing feedback on facilitation techniques.

Objective: Develop five Farm Management Groups in Vermont and New Hampshire. This portion of the object has exceeded original expectations! At least eight dairy farmer DGs are currently functioning. Colleen Helenek, UVM Ext., facilitates two DGs; one is in the Newport - St. Albans area and includes mostly "large farms". Glenn Rogers, UVM Ext., assists with facilitation of this group. Colleen is also a facilitator for one of the first established (Calderwood) DGs in the Craftsbury area. Willie Gibson facilitates a "family farm" type group in the Connecticut River Valley. Bill Snow, UVM Ext., facilitates a DG in central Vermont around Randolph. Rick LeVitre, UVM Ext. manages two groups in southern Vermont around Brattleboro and Bennington and assists Woody Pankey, UVM Ext., with two groups in Addison County. The Addison county DGs are primarily larger herds (150-750) and one group is composed of the employees of these larger dairy operations.

Objective: Provide facilitators three Farm Management Group meetings in five locations on the topics of a) on farm communication skills, b) increasing community support of agriculture, c) whole farm. Outside speakers were used to lead discussions in the spring of 1997 on farm family communications. Presentations were also made on the DG technique and how it could benefit them. Karen Schneider, UVM Ext., conducted meetings with different DGs on "stress management". This has been a high priority issue for many groups. Phil Benedict and other VT Dept. of Agriculture personnel have met with different DGs to discuss farming/non-farming

neighbor relations and requirements for “large farms permits”. In June 1999 approximately 70 dairy farms were represented at two, 2-day short courses on forage management & cow comfort. The majority of participants were from the discussion groups in Addison and Franklin counties. Extension personnel from Cornell conducted the courses and it was a tremendously successful event with the producers.

3. SPECIFIC PROJECT RESULTS: This project has resulted in establishment of eight dairy farm discussion groups in Vermont. These groups are an efficient and effective method to bring new knowledge to producers and to enhance active learning from one another.

4. POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF THE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: This project has far exceeded the expectations of the project coordinator as far as potential impact. Knowledge has been disseminated via the Internet, professional conferences, popular press and hands on demonstrations. Eight new, active DG’s have been formed as a result of information gained in New Zealand. Individuals Involved: Workshops-30; Conferences-130; Internet Demonstrations-43.

Potential Benefits or Impacts: The DG model has great potential as a delivery mechanism for agricultural extension programs. The “one-on-one” model has out lived its practicality! Interactions between Extension and producers can continue to be maximized through the DG model while realizing the efficiency of multiple participants at each farm meeting. These groups also serve as exceptionally effective and practical “advisory boards” and proactive support groups for Extension. The impact realized as a result of this project in only 3 years far exceeds all expectations.

Feedback from Farmers: Without exception, the comments from participants have been positive. With the participants basically setting the agenda and the topics for discussion, it would be difficult to criticize! This is *THEIR* program!

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS & AREAS NEEDING ADDITIONAL

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS: We would recommend that the discussion group model be given serious consideration for adoption in other areas of Extension. Programs where “clients” are active planners, organizers, participants and critics have a high success rate. Ownership is shared throughout the group, satisfaction is guaranteed.

5. **PUBLICITY FOR THE ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS:** Besides the publicity outlined in A.1 above, newspaper articles in the *Newport Daily Express* on December 6, 1996 and the *Chronicle* on February 5, 1997 explained benefits of the DG method and relayed information gained during the trip to New Zealand. Presentations about DG’s were made by Jean and Louise in March 1997 at three of VT/NH Dairy & Crop Seminars. Jean also presented information learned in New Zealand at eight other sessions over a 4-month period in the spring on 1997, while Louise made additional three presentations. Three articles have been published in *HOARD’S DAIRYMAN* on development of dairy farm discussion groups in Vermont. (See attached)

The October 18, 1997 pasture conference in Bradford VT focused on DG’s. Jean presented material learned in New Zealand and facilitated an afternoon group so participants could experience the educational method.

6. LIST OF PUBLICATIONS:

Calderwood, L.H., R.A. LeVitre, and J.W. Pankey. 1998. Use of New Zealand style discussion groups in Vermont. North East American Dairy Science Assoc. Abstract/Poster.

Calderwood, L.H. 1997. How discussion groups work in New Zealand. *HOARD'S DAIRYMAN*. April 25. Pp. 335.

Pankey, J.W. and R.A. LeVitre. 1998. All they want is one good idea. *HOARD'S DAIRYMAN*. May 10. pp.369.

Pankey, J.W. and R.A. LeVitre. 1998. You can learn a lot from your employees. *HOARD'S DAIRYMAN*. September 10. pp. 617.