

Title:

Mississippi Model State Program Final Report for Calendar Year 2009

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Project Coordinator:1862 Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator:

Dr. Mark Crenshaw
Mississippi State University Extension Service
Box 9815
MS State, MS 39762
Phone: 662-325-1689
Fax: 662-325-8873
markc@ext.msstate.edu

1890 Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator:

Dr. Franklin Chukwuma
Alcorn State University Extension Program
1000 ASU Drive, E & R Complex # 479
Alcorn State, MS 39096-7500
Phone: 601-877-2312
Fax: 601-877-6694
franklin@asuextension.com

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January 2009 to December 2009

SARE funding amount:

\$10,000

II. Abstract

The joint Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Model State Program continues work to strengthen the concept of sustainable agriculture practices through a variety of planned programs. Both 1862/1890 institutions cooperating with other agencies and organizations, NGO's, and farmers conducted educational activities as a part of the state plan of work. Sustainable agricultural practices has been incorporated in both ACEP/MSU-ES ongoing educational programs such as annual small farmers conference, field days, producer meetings, workshops, and demonstrations of management practices and conservation. During the fiscal year 2008-2009, programming focused on maintaining existing programs and expanding new sustainable agriculture concepts to reach additional focal groups.

III. Annual Report

2. Briefly describe how your training efforts have addressed objectives in your state strategic plan for sustainable agriculture.

The state sustainable agriculture committee meets to help plan and implement programs on sustainable agriculture for the 1862/1890's institutions Extension programs (Mississippi State University and Alcorn State University), plus Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Mississippi Department of Agriculture (MDAC), MS Farm Bureau, and commodity groups. Committee members from the different organizations utilize regular communication with their administrators and staffs to implement an understanding of sustainable agriculture concepts. Training has provided our extension agents and specialists with information and knowledge so they can answer and know what resources are available to assist clientele. Committee members are committed to promote sustainable agriculture practices to agriculture leaders throughout the state and willing to facilitate training opportunities.

3. Bullet statements of training outcomes.

- **Food as a Business Program, August 11, 2009** - As the economy continues to present challenges, the Food as a Business program helped new food business owners to learn how to battle the stiff odds and have a better chance to succeed. This workshop was designed for everyone who has dreamed of owning and operating their own food processing business. The participants experienced firsthand what is required for basic start-up in a food manufacturing or wholesale distribution business. The Mississippi State University Extension Service, Department of Food Science, Nutrition and Health Promotion developed and implemented the program with satellite locations throughout the state (Cleveland, Hattiesburg, Raymond, Verona and Mississippi State University) to facilitate training participation. Topics that were covered included business plans, legal issues, marketing, internet sales, food processing and labeling regulations, funding sources, and product costing and pricing. Speakers also addressed how to work with retailers and the "Make Mine Mississippi" program. Two people who own food processing businesses told of their experiences in starting a food processing business. An impact study will be conducted in April 2010 (9 months post conference). However, from the evaluation, the conference participants' overall opinion of the conference was scored 4.5 on a 5-point scale with 5 being Excellent. Subject matter factsheets and notebooks/handouts were rated 4.5 and 4.8 respectively, by the participants. Twenty-five people attended the conference, including one Extension County Director. Two

Extension Area agents moderated at the two distance sites. Eleven speakers gave presentations on the topics mentioned above.

- Alcorn State University Extension Program coordinated travel opportunity for farmers and extension educators to attend the SSWAG Conference in Chattanooga, TN in 2009. The participants received training on sustainable production and marketing practices that will enhance the income opportunities for limited-resource farmers.
- Alcorn State University Extension Program conducted four workshops for limited-resource farmers on rotational grazing and pasture poultry practices in 2009.
- Two sustainable vegetable production field days were conducted by Alcorn State University Extension Program for limited-resource farmers. Topics on nutrient requirements for sustainable production of horticulture crops were discussed at the field days.
- Pasture Pork Production for Profit & Health was the topic for a field day hosted at the Alcorn State University, Swine Development Center in June for local farmers interested in developing a pork enterprise. The Extension Swine Specialist at Mississippi State University discussed topics including market opportunities, type of production, equipment, management, herd health, nutrition, genetics, records, regulations, and certification programs. This program was offered to area farmers, University personnel, extension agents and representatives from other organizations as information sharing and the development of a pasture pork production program offered by Alcorn State University.
- SARE funding opportunities was provided through the State Coordinator meeting with various groups, individuals or by means of mass communication throughout the year resulting in an increase interest of development of grant proposals. In addition, assistance was provided in proposal development for other funding sources for agricultural projects.
- Several contacts have been made by the State Coordinators and committee members directly with farm families to promote and develop sustainable farming practices. Direct contact by farm visits help assist farmers in adopting sustainable practices. Also working with various NGO's and State or Federal Agencies is important to providing a unified sustainable program.

4. Briefly describe expectations for future sustainable agriculture training events.

The State Committee continues to review our program direction and seek input of additional members prior to development of new programs. The committee will seek to enhance public awareness of sustainable agriculture practices, collaboration among agencies, NGO's and land-grant universities. In-service education and training will be conducted within the state to involve more agents and staff not only from Extension but other agencies working with the Extension Service at both Universities. Involvement of new committee members on the State committee will provide the opportunity to reach other audiences. Future areas of training emphasis will focus on utilizing the two representatives from Mississippi that received training

through the Energy Training for Agriculture Professionals this past October to conduct energy related training and energy programs throughout the state in 2010. Another focus area is the use of high tunnels by Mississippi farmers. Training programs regarding the use of high tunnel technology along with planned research project at Mississippi State University are planned for the up-coming year. Farmers and livestock producers continue to seek methods to improve their way of life and this provides educational opportunities for extension agents to deliver sustainable agriculture programs. Another focus area will continue to expand training to educators through the *Food as a Business* program. Farmers and livestock producers must consider the business aspects of an enterprise in order to sustain their production.

State Coordinators will work with University extension educators and researchers, State or Federal Agencies, NGO's and Farmers to explain the SARE program and encourage better participation in the grants offered through SARE. Results of funded projects will be made available to increase awareness of the value of the sustainable agriculture program and the role agriculture plays in a state like Mississippi.