

ATTRAnews

Quarterly Newsletter of Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas
A program of the National Center for Appropriate Technology

Volume 8, Number 2



106th Congress hikes funding for 13 sustainable ag programs

ATTRA was among a lucky 13 sustainable agriculture projects to receive Congressional budget increases in FY2001.

The funding increases for one mandatory and 12 discretionary sustainable agriculture programs

were part of a \$65 billion USDA budget approved for FY2001 by Congress in October.

ATTRA's budget was increased from its FY2000 level of \$1.5 million to \$2 million next year.

"We're very grateful to our supporters in Congress, our funder, the USDA Rural Business - Cooperative Service, farmers across America and our partners in other sustainable agriculture organizations who worked for our funding increase," ATTRA Project Manager Teresa Maurer said. "The increase will be used to meet growing demands for ATTRA services and to expand our role of providing the latest and most comprehensive sustainable agriculture information to U.S. farmers."

The 13 discretionary sustainable ag programs were given a total of \$74 million in FY2001 funding.

Other significant budget increases for discretionary sustainable agriculture programs were \$53.3 million over FY2000 appropriations for NRCS conservation operations; \$5 million over FY2000 for the Farmers Market Nutrition Program; \$4.5 million over FY2000 for rural business opportunity grants (Rural Business - Cooperative Service); \$6.7 million over FY2000 for NRCS resource conservation and development; and \$1.3 million over

Discretionary programs

Programs	FY00	FY01 USDA	House	Senate	FY01 Final
ATTRA	1.5	2.0	2.0	1.5	2.0
a-h/fd sec	n/a	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
cons ops	660.8	747.0	676.8	714.1	714.1
DFO	178.0	128.0	128.0	128.0	128.0
DOL	935.0	700.0	700.0	500.0	525.0
FMNP	15.0	20.0	15.0	20.0	20.0
FSMIP	1.2	1.5	1.5	1.2	1.4
gfo	1002.0	1000.0	1000.0	431.0	870.0
gol-s	919.0	478.0	478.0	200.0	369.9
gol-u	2121.0	2000.0	2000.0	1697.0	1077.8
IFS	0.5	0.5	0.0	0.8	0.8
nri	119.3	150.0	96.9	119.2	106.0
OFPA	1.4	2.1	1.6	1.6	1.6
org trans	n/a	1.0	1.0	0.0	0.5
RBEG	37.7	40.7	50.7	40.7	40.7
rbog	3.5	8.0	10.0	8.0	8.0
rc&d	35.3	36.0	41.0	36.3	42.0
RCDG	4.0	6.0	4.5	4.5	4.5
SA-PDP	3.3	4.5	3.3	4.0	3.8
SARE	8.0	10.5	9.0	9.5	9.3
SDA	3.0	10.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
SFMA	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Smfm init	0.0	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
SMG	3.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0

NB: Charts and explanatory information were provided by Ferd Hoefner of the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group. Programs in capital letters are priority programs for grassroots action. Programs in lower case are other programs of note. Numbers above represent millions of dollars.

ATTRA - Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas
a-h/fd sec - Anti Hunger & Food Security Grants (CSREES)
cons ops - Conservation Operations (Technical Assistance) (NRCS)
DFO - Direct Farm Ownership Loans (FSA)
DOL - Direct Farm Operating Loans (FSA)
FMNP - Farmers Market Nutrition Program (part of WIC program)
FSMIP - Federal-State Market Improvement Program (AMS)
gfo - Guaranteed Farm Ownership Loans (FSA)
gol-s - Guaranteed Farm Operating Loans - Subsidized (FSA)
gol-u - Guaranteed Farm Operating Loans - Unsubsidized (FSA)
IFS - Integrated Farming Systems partnerships (ARS)
nri - National Research Initiative (CSREES)

OFPA - Organic Foods Production Act (AMS)
org trans - Organic Transition Program (CSREES)
RBEG - Rural Business Enterprise Grants (RBES)
rbog - Rural Business Opportunity Grants (RBES)
rc&d - Resource Conservation & Development (NRCS)
RCDG - Rural Cooperative Development Grants (RCBS)
SARE - Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (CSREES)
SDA - Outreach & Technical Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers
sfma - small farm marketing funds (AMS)
smfm init - Small Farm Research Initiative (CSREES)
SMG - State Mediation Grants (FSA)

FY2000 for Sustainable Agriculture Research and Development (SARE - USDA).

The Organic Transition Program of CSREES received first-time funding of \$500,000. The Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) of AMS received a \$200,000 budget increase over FY2000 levels.

Charts on this page and on page 4 show FY2001 funding paths for all 32 discretionary and mandatory sustainable ag programs.



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Monday - Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
at 1-800-346-9140

or visit our website at: www.attra.ncat.org

New ATTRA entree, *Dairy Farm Sustainability Checksheet*: *Farmers can assess operations using whole farm approach*

America's dairy farmers and educators are invited to offer comments on ATTRA's new *Dairy Farm Sustainability Checksheet* which will debut this fall. Reviewers can obtain a preview copy by dialing ATTRA's toll-free number, 800-346-9140.

ATTRA technical specialists Ann Wells and Ron Morrow led the effort to develop the *Dairy Checksheet* at the request of the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) which received very favorable reviews on the *Beef Farm Sustainability Checksheet*. Also spearheaded by Wells and Morrow, the *Beef Checksheet* was developed beginning in 1997 in cooperation with beef producers, CES and NRCS.

22 pages of insightful questions

Like its predecessor, the *Dairy Checksheet* is not meant to rate a farmer's management practices but rather to help assess strengths and weaknesses in their operations using the concept of a "whole farm approach." At their own pace, farmers can work their way through the 22 pages of questions dealing with the areas of farm goals, livestock and forage management, available resources, management inventory, individual pasture assessment, soil and watershed assessment, and marketing. It will become apparent

as *Checksheet* entries are pondered how decisions made in one area of a farm impact the results in other areas. The *Dairy Checksheet* is intended for use by cattle, goat and sheep dairies from large to small in scope.

"High inputs along with low prices, lack of labor and environmental constraints are making dairying unprofitable and unattractive as a way of life," Wells says. "In Arkansas alone, where ATTRA offices are located, there has been a 42% drop in the number of dairy farms the last 10 years and a 31% drop in the last five years. Many farmers want to stay in business, and educators are looking for ways to help them. But many educators are not trained in the dairy business and are struggling to figure out themselves what to tell farmers."

✓ News briefs

ATTRA extends hours

ATTRA is now open for business on Friday afternoons. 800-line service was curtailed at 12:30 p.m. Fridays about two years ago due to burgeoning caseloads and staff assignments in developing new sustainable agriculture informational materials.

People may now call ATTRA's toll-free number for sustainable agriculture information Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (Central Time). Many of ATTRA's publications are also available 24 hours a day on the Internet at www.attra.org.

Current Topics debut

Thirty new publications called *Current Topics* on a host of sustainable agriculture issues are now available from ATTRA. The publications cover such diverse topics as *Organic Asparagus Production*, *Downy Mildew Control in Cucurbits* and *Raising Dairy Heifers on Pasture*. People may obtain a complete listing of all *Current Topics* by requesting a new *ATTRA Materials List*.

Morrow adds: "Even educators nationwide with a dairy background have difficulty getting farmers to think about what they can change. Extension and the NRCS suggested that a dairy farm sustainability checksheet, patterned after our *Beef Checksheet*, would place all the issues a farmer needs to consider in a form that would allow them to assess what aspect requires the most attention."

Like the *Beef Checksheet*, the *Dairy Checksheet* was funded by the USDA Southern Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Professional Development Program (SARE/PDP) program. It is the product of two years of intensive efforts by a team of dairy farmers, specialists from ATTRA, the Cooperative Extension Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the University of Missouri Southwest Research Center.

Compiling the questionnaire required the team to visit Southern dairy farms where they recorded farmer comments and feedback. The *Checksheet* was also presented during a workshop and then evaluated by the dairy unit of the University of Tennessee Middle Experiment Station. On Aug. 7, it was presented for preview by Wells and Morrow at the National Association of County Agricultural Agents Annual Meeting in Jackson, MS.

Assessing pro's & con's

Farmers and educators using the *Checksheet* are first presented questions about farm resources and management. They are asked to think about grazing practices, nutrient management systems and the top five pro's and con's of their operation. Two sections thereafter deal with the impact of their farming practices on the quality of their life and how they plan and set goals for the farm.

The *Checksheet* poses such questions as: "What do you measure in terms of milk production parameters? Does your enterprise income support your quality of life goals? What do you want your farm to look like in 5, 10 or 20 years?"

Next, farmers are asked to assess ways they keep accurate farm records; how they prioritize expenditures for inputs; and ways they might save money through different or better management and planning.

In the following seven pages, the *Checksheet* focuses on matters concerning herd health and reproductive management; breeding, genetics and animal selection; nutrition

(See *Dairy Checksheet* page 4)

The Dairy Checksheet team

The team of individuals who compiled the *Dairy Farm Sustainability Checksheet* are:

Arkansas dairy farmers John Adams, Donna Doel, Don Meyer and Bobby Umberson; ATTRA staff members Alice Beetz, Betty Blomberg, Ron Morrow and Ann Wells; University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service dairy specialists Wayne Coblentz, David Daniel, Wayne Kellogg and Jodie Pennington; Natural Resource Conservation Service district conservationist Travis James; and University of Tennessee Middle Experiment Station superintendent Dennis Onks.

'No fishing' signs indicate a big problem

NCAT's 'Montana Rivers Project' using sustainable irrigation practices

"No fishing" signs had been posted along the Jefferson River in southwest Montana last summer when a group of ATTRA staff members paid a visit to co-workers at the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT). Water and oxygen levels in the river had fallen so low due to a prolonged drought and heavy irrigation use that state wildlife officers feared fish populations would be stressed beyond limits by trout fishermen.

Chronic summer problem

"This is becoming a yearly occurrence. You can imagine what it does to our tourist industry which is one of our top money makers," NCAT staff member Mike Morris said as he led a tour of area ranches. Morris heads the Montana Rivers Project, which is attempting to improve sprinkler irrigation efficiency in the Jefferson River Valley.

From offices at Fayetteville, AR, and Butte, MT, NCAT operates ATTRA and a host of other sustainable ag projects.

During the day our group visited several ranches where Morris and fellow staff members have installed soil moisture auditing systems that provide scientifically-based irrigation recom-

mendations. The scenic Jefferson River Valley is a gridwork of irrigation canals, large fenced pastures and hayfields lying between the Highland and Tobacco Root Mountains along the Continental Divide. Cattle and sheep ranchers there make heavy use of surface water to irrigate pastures and grow alfalfa for winter forage.

Water use is a very controversial topic in this arid place. Back in 1994 when the upper Jefferson River nearly went dry, ranchers were accused of being the main culprits. Though the river supports many other water users, the ranchers did have to concede that their irrigation schedules often depended on guesswork. Fields were often watered when they didn't need additional moisture.

ATTRA positions open

The National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) is conducting a national search for sustainable agriculture technical specialists and a technical services manager to work in its ATTRA project. Applicants can obtain detailed information about the positions and instructions for application on the Internet at www.ncat.org, or by contacting Marlene Breese at PO Box 3657, Fayetteville, AR 72702, 4th Floor Hotz Hall, 1175 West Cleveland Street, Fayetteville, AR 72701, phone 501-442-9824, fax 501-442-9842, email marleneb@ncat.org.

Linda Coffey joins staff

New ATTRA technical specialist Linda Coffey has joined our forage and livestock services team. Linda grew up on a farm at Westphalia, MO, where her family raised hogs, cattle, sheep and horses. She earned a masters degree in animal science at the University of Missouri. She and her husband, Ken, who is employed at the University of Arkansas Animal Science Department, live on a farm with their four children at Prairie Grove, AR. They enjoy gardening, making quilts, church activities, sports, 4-H, band, Girl Scouts and "many visits to the local library."



Irrigation water (left) is applied to alfalfa in the Jefferson River Valley. Extension Agent Lisa Schmidt (right) checks a soil moisture monitoring unit on her farm there.

"An important part of the Montana Rivers Project is to develop partnerships among ranchers who use sprinkler irrigation," Morris says.

Word is spreading through the Valley about the success of the fledgling program. During the 1998 growing season, participating ranchers experienced a 15% savings on their energy pumping costs. They reduced their water consumption by an average of 8%, despite exceptionally hot, dry conditions in which a 7% increase would have been expected. Weather-adjusted energy savings in 1999 were about 12%.

Participation in the in the Montana Rivers Project is voluntary and free. The project is funded by grants and donations from multiple sources that include foundations and state and national wildlife agencies.

Moisture monitoring systems

NCAT installs remote weather stations in or near the fields of participating irrigators. These stations monitor air temperature, precipitation, relative humidity, solar radiation, wind speed, crop type, crop stage and soil type.

Electronic soil moisture monitoring systems are installed in pastures and hayfields on each participating ranch. Holes are drilled into the soil at one, two and three foot depths. Into these holes are inserted cube-sized cylinders of gypsum which conducts electricity based on the level of wetness in the soil. Electrodes in the holes transit moisture information to a small datalogger mounted nearby on a pole. Soil moisture is displayed graphically, making moisture levels and trends obvious and taking the guesswork out of watering. Ranchers can apply the correct amount of irrigation water to crops for optimum yields based on more accurate readings.

Although the Jefferson River was in trouble when ATTRA staff visited this past June, the story of the 2000 drought had a happier-than-expected ending. Flows generally stayed above the critical range through the remainder of the summer and even increased steadily through most of August. Through a combination of shared sacrifice, conservation measures, and improved communication, Jefferson valley irrigators avoided disaster and met minimum flow targets almost continuously throughout the summer months.

"We hope to expand the Montana Rivers Project to other ranching areas in the state," Morris says. "I invite anyone interested in establishing such a project to contact me."

Interested parties can learn more about the Montana Rivers Project at the NCAT website: www.ncat.org/mtrivers. Contact information for Mike Morris is: NCAT, PO Box 3838, Butte, MT 59702, (406)494-4572, (800)275-6228 (Ask NCAT), mikem@ncat.org.



Project leader Mike Morris



Mandatory Programs

Programs	FY00	FY01 USDA	House	Senate	FY01 Final
CFO/CSP	0.0	600.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
CFSA	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
EQIP	174.0	325.0	174.0	174.0	pending
FPP	0.3	65.0	0.0	0.0	pending
FRA	60.0	60.0	0.0	60.0	30.0***
IFAFS	120.0	120.0	0.0	120.0	120.0+
whip	0.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	12.0*
WRP	157.0	286.0	44.0	161.0	161.0**

CFO/CSP -- Conservation Farm Option (FSA/NRCS)/
2001=Cons Security Payments

CFSA -- Community Food Security Act (CSREES)

EQIP -- Environmental Quality Incentives program (NRCS)

FPP -- Farmland Protection Program (NRCS)

FRA -- Fund for Rural America (RD/CSREES/Secretary)

IFAFS -- Initiative for Future Agriculture
& Food Systems (CSREES)

whip -- Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (NRCS)

WRP -- Wetlands Reserve Program (NRCS)

* The \$12 million appropriation for WHIP is an approximation. The final bill directs USDA to spend a portion of the \$40 million for conservation assistance from the crop insurance bill for WHIP. The remaining portion of those funds will likely be spent for EQIP.

** Unlike all previous years, neither bill places an acreage limitation on WRP enrollments for FY01 -- in large part because after FY00 there will only be about 39,000 acres remaining in the farm bill authorized acreage cap for WRP. Without an increase in that authorized level, funding for WRP in FY01 will fall to \$44 million. However, the Senate bill added 100,000 acres to the 39,000 acres and treated the 100,000 acres as emergency spending. The final bill includes the Senate provision.

*** The Fund for Rural America is allowed to spend half of FY2000's \$60 million in FY01 and half in FY02.

+ IFAFS is permitted to spend all \$120 million of FY00 money in FY01. A special legislative provision added to the bill stipulates that grants may only be made to landgrant colleges and universities.

Dairy Checksheet

(Continued from page 2)

management; and pasture grazing and confinement feeding. Mathematics come into play as the *Checksheet* asks farmers to record percentage figures for levels in their feedstuffs of crude protein, and degradable intake and bypass protein.

Even the most experienced farmers may never have thought about some of the *Checksheet* questions in this section: "How much time do milking animals spend

chewing their cud? If feeding silage or TMR, are the lengths of plant materials long enough?" The *Checksheet* then queries farmers on grazing practices, quality of forage and ways livestock are fed and watered during confinement.

In its final sections, the *Dairy Checksheet* turns to matters of concern in livestock housing, nutrient management, alternative dairy farming, seasonal dairying, organic dairies and marketing. There are also forms for assessing individual pastures, soils and the watershed.

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**New or revised
ATTRA Materials**
Call 1-800-346-9140
and ask for:

- ✓ **Drought Resistant Soils**
- ✓ **Farmscaping to Enhance Biological Controls**
- ✓ **Overview of Organic Crop Production**
- ✓ **Resource List of Organic Certifiers**

ATTRAnews

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ATTRAnews, a quarterly publication of Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas, is mailed free of charge to ATTRA friends and users. ATTRA disseminates information about sustainable agriculture to U.S. farmers, agribusiness, Extension agents and other interested people. ATTRA is funded through the Rural Business-Cooperative Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture and is administered by the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), a nonprofit organization that since 1976 has worked to champion sustainable technologies and community based approaches that protect natural resources and assist people, especially the economically disadvantaged, in becoming self reliant.

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