GEORGIA'S CONSERVATION TILLAGE EDUCATIONAL TASK FORCE: IMPROVING COUNTY EXTENSION AGENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF CONSERVATION TILLAGE SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

Farmer interest in conservation tillage has increased with rising fuel prices, the new Conservation Security Program, decreasing commodity prices and desire for improved resource stewardship. Research has shown that farmer's see maximum benefit to conservation tillage if it is part of a cropping system that includes cover crops and crop rotation. The conservation tillage system best suited for a particular operation will vary with the crop, the site, the soils, and other factors. Many county extension agents in Georgia indicated they needed further training to meet the informational needs of their farmers. Consequently, the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences created a multi-disciplinary conservation tillage educational task force to develop a training program. The College recognized the need for input from other agencies that had extensive experience in conservation and management of natural resources. The task force includes UGA-CAES faculty, USDA-NRCS personnel, USDA-ARS research scientists, and non-governmental representatives. A survey of the county agents was conducted to determine specific training needs and attitudes towards conservation tillage. The survey indicated most county agents had a positive attitude towards conservation tillage systems, but their knowledge was weak on the differences between conservation tillage systems and conventional systems in terms of inputs, equipment, changes in soil quality and fertility, effects on yields and quality of different commodities, and specifics on how to implement conservation tillage practices. The survey also indicated that more information on the economics of conservation tillage systems was needed. Agents preferred a combination of classroom and field training. The results of the survey are being used to develop specific training modules with the purpose of improving the knowledge level of county agents on conservation tillage systems.