



# Western Center

## FOR RISK MANAGEMENT EDUCATION



NEWSLETTER FOR WESTERN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATORS FEBRUARY 2007

### Transitioning to Organic Farming Systems in Montana: Managing the Risk

#### **IMPACT:**

*Farmers are able to assess the risks and benefits of transitioning to sustainable agriculture by completing an organic risk analysis*

Farm tours with experienced "Farmer Trainers" put a human face on a curriculum specifically designed to help producers evaluate the risks and benefits of sustainable farming practices. All workshop participants completed both a draft organic risk assessment analysis and a draft organic transition risk assessment analysis, with over 50% of these participants taking specific actions towards organic crop production. The remaining participants determined that transitioning to organic was not a good risk strategy for them as a result of this project.

According to project coordinators, "The farm tours, where a farmer can see the results of different practices that need to be either avoided when he gets home, or incorporated into his system plan, was a key success." As one participant put it, "The farm tours put it all together for me." Expertise from more traditional agricultural organizations was also key to helping farmers recognize the risks associated with each practice.

Collaboration with other Montana agricultural organizations helped to influence participation from younger farmers and multi-generation farm 'teams'. Educators say they were surprised by the number of young producers less than 45 years old. As a result, they will look to design trainings using younger farmer trainers so participants are working with their peers as they improve risk management strategies.

Program educators say they were also surprised to find out that they had never met 80% of their workshop participants, even though they have been doing sustainable agriculture educational programs for 15 years. This was an indication that training press releases, radio PSA's and outreach through other Montana agricultural organizations and institutions was an effective way to reach producers.

**ORGANIZATION:** Alternative Energy Resources Organization  
**PROJECT DIRECTOR:** Jonda L. Crosby  
**FUNDING AWARDED:** 2004



This month's featured project used press releases, radio PSA's and outreach through other agricultural organizations that attracted a new and unexpected audience; over 80% of workshop participants were first time attendees.

#### **FULL PROPOSAL REMINDERS**

*If you were invited to submit a full proposal, a careful review of the following will increase your chances for success:*

- The submission deadline is 5 pm, March 1, 2007
- Re-read the RFA; it is the binding document for application instructions.
- Review the six selection criteria.
- Make sure you have a letter of commitment from each team member or collaborator that lists the role each will play in the project.

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