Best Practices in Marcellus Shale Education

March 19, 2013

Notes on Breakout Session 2: What are the special needs of extension educators?

Opened with question of how we define special needs. What are the things beyond the obvious that we need but moved quickly to what educators have done in different places around the issue.

Presentations and sessions on the issue of natural gas and hydraulic fracturing has quadrupled normal program attendance.

In Broome County CCE responded to calls from farmers and landowners and programming centered on helping to get them organized into coalitions and groups. Programs included subjects like Estate Planning, DEC regs, etc. The CCE Natural Gas Team presented its Roadshow twice to large public forums. CCE helped the groups get speakers on a number of topics. Fielded lots of calls. Feel that they “got beat up” a bit by the public and were seen as working primarily with farmland owners.

In Tompkins very early on the subject/information was mostly about leasing and what to look for/how to protect yourself. While information given was unbiased there were at times awkward conversations because others in office were not neutral.

A few educators felt the need to watch what they say or do because of the way a perceived stance might affect CCE’s reputation and funding. There was some discussion of how to do education while being careful about funding. Few reported direct or indirect criticism of their actual work. There was also a distinction made between criticism from constituents versus someone with political power or influence. On educator in home energy conservation went into the job with an anti-hydraulic fracturing reputation. Because of the importance of the home energy piece in the overall subject of Energy Literacy, he feels the need to lay low in the hydraulic fracturing debate, but personally does not feel comfortable having to do that.

Penn St. has gotten some criticism and has come to be perceived as pro-hydraulic fracturing. However, the initial criticism of Extension was tempered because county commissioners had asked them to become involved along with other agencies. From campus, an early report from a current and former faculty member was not peer reviewed and had some problems including a biased title. It became known as the “Penn St. Report” and came across as pro-industry. Presently on campus they are looking for planning the education of county officials and have faculty engaged in that process. Extension has been criticized for “Advocacy” services when helping landowners with leases, etc. CCE needs to remember that Penn St. Ext is in a different place because drilling is occurring. Battles over whether to drill or not are long over. Big topics and questions/education on them came in waves: the leasing wave; the testing water wave; the pad construction wave; the pipeline wave; etc. Penn St. had formed the Marcellus Education Team of faculty and county educators as a way for faculty and educators to engage with each other. Series of webinars to support county educators. Don’t see many similarities between PA and NY from the Governor on down in terms of approach to the issue.

Binghamton HS- Primarily one teacher involved in education on the subject. Not in state standards but teacher has written it into district curriculum. Teacher takes care to make sure people do not know where he stands on the issue and he feels no pressure that he should lean one way or the other. He has helped with discussions in English classes when topic is debated. Support from new principal for the topic to be studied and discussed.

Is not seen as a controversial topic at the school, but even with an inner-city population students have been affected or seen effects. One student’s father found a job in PA driving a water tanker for one of the gas companies while another with an out of state hunting license has seen a decrease in deer in the area he hunts once gas wells were drilled. This has allowed for experiencing different parts of the issue.

How is the Extension system and/or campus set up to support educational needs?

At Penn St. a recent administrative change has allowed for better coordination across teams and expertise areas. People understand that the subject is a big deal. There is support and interest to get funding from more diverse sources.

It was felt that in the CCE system expertise is spread thin and Association educators on the subject are not solely doing natural gas education. Circuit riders are needed on subjects like well water quality but need way to fund them across county lines.

Three years ago there was much interest and support from campus and large crowds for presentations. But as NYS gov’t has dragged things out, interest has visibly lessened, including from faculty. Energy Literacy is something that has come to the forefront across the Project Work Teams (PWTs) that are engaged with various aspects of energy and climate change.

Due primarily to two faculty members with national reputations, Cornell has gained a reputation as being anti-hydraulic fracturing although not all faculty support this view.

Returned to question of the special interests and needs of CCE educators:

* Need support of people above, both in Associations and on campus.
* Need more information on some topics. More campus support in these areas, at least where we can find the information.
* Support group for educators doing the work.
* Campus to convince government that more resources are needed and that Energy is a critical issue where education is needed.
* Need to broaden Energy education.
* Need to integrate across Higher Education Institutions. Cornell not only college/university in the state and doesn’t have all of the answers.
* Need best practices for educating public across topics as well as Energy sources.

What can we change?

 Educators feel isolated by counties.

 If develop webinars DOE has some very good resources and webinars. DaNel Hogan (danel.hogan@ee.doe.gov) can help with possible speakers for webinars.

Rod Howe said he would use the Marcellus Shale educators’ listserv to help determine educator needs and next steps.