

Conservation Agriculture Systems Alliance

Conference Call

Wednesday, March 16, 2011

at 11 a.m. (eastern)

Participants:

Glen Shaw, Soil Conservation Council of Canada

Doyle Wiebe, Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association

Karen Scanlon, CTIC

Susan Winsor, Corn & Soybean Digest

Dick Wittman, Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association

Eliav Bitan, National Wildlife Federation

Tim Healey, Agrotain

Theo Friedrich, FAO

Sjoerd Duiker, Pennsylvania State University/PANTA

Agenda

- Report from Soil Conservation Council of Canada
- Discuss proposal

Discussion

Glen Shaw: SCCC sees WCCA as great opportunity to share information and build partnerships. Supports development of application. Board requested additional information before making final commitment to Congress. Most questions around budget and detail required. Can we get information on past WCCA budgets. Have past events run a deficit? What is liability? Is there potential to make a profit? Group advocated for main center for congress with tours in other locations, rather than moving the congress to different locations. Hoped congress would be relevant to producers and have balance between research and practical application relevant to producers and advisors.

Theo: supports strong component for farmers. Haven't been involved in financial details of previous congresses, but think \$500,000 would be safe, in addition to registration revenue. Last Congress (India) got grant of \$300,000. First congress ran deficit and host did have hard time to cover \$400,000, but only case of a problem.

Australian event run by professional conference organizer. India congress run by government staff. Kenya did not have professional organizer, but a committee of organizations.

Theo: before June OK for submitting proposal. Final decision takes place at 5th WCCA. Will inquire with Australian organizers for budget information.

Susan Winsor: are commodity groups interested?

Theo: on piggybacking to another meeting...when two meetings join, hard to distinguish between two. Must have way to separate the two.

Sjoerd: level of farmer participation in the past congresses? If we want producer group support, need to show benefit to their members.

Theo: first was short in farmers; second was higher. Africa had less than 50%, but visible farmer participation. India it was low; expect Australia to be higher. CASA organization role will have positive influence for involving farmer participants.

Sjoerd: want to introduce to PANTA; but think they will be skeptical.

Glen: registration fee may be a deterrent to farmer participation. Would have to show value for that fee.

Theo: consider Australian fee high. No rule on how that is set; up to organizers. Piggy back on No-Till Conference to attract more farmers?

Sjoerd: hook would be representation from large, successful producers in South America. Opportunity for US/Canadian producers to meet with counterparts in other countries. Opportunities to purchase land/operations in other parts of the world.

Theo: focus in NA could shift from small farmers to larger farmers. FAO money could be used to fund small farmers to attend the WCCA.

Sjoerd: consider partnering with Lessiter's National No-Till Conference (January). Farm groups already organize bus trips to that conference.

Doyle: winter meetings in Canada as well. Time not good for field trips.

Susan: heard Roberto Pierreti speak, well known speaker, would attract attendees

Dick: linking with No-Till meeting...don't want to dilute that meeting or WCCA; what would be different in focus/content? To focus on producers, have to consider soil health, but also economic viability and economic messaging better as motive for transition to CA. Key is getting farmers to understand economic benefit in long run. Attract farmers because they will benefit by learning how to gain efficiency and economic benefit. Global audience helps accelerate learning and adoption curve. Focus people on program – reputable people with long-term experience and successes – that can bring information to US / Canadian operators. Farmers won't attend to listen to researchers and scientists.

Theme: Soil Health and Wallet Wealth

Sjoerd: will summer event effect farmer attendance? PA farmers likely not attend a summer event.

Glen: first two weeks of July is window for meeting

Dick: not sure there is a good time for everyone

Theo: to attract farmers from other parts of the world, need to show something other than snowy landscape

Doyle: have web-based event instead?

Theo: consider that an add-on, rather than replacement. Face-to-face interaction is important.

Dick: not a good fit with Commodity Classic. We focus on farming practices and conservation systems, different than focus of Classic events. Makes more sense to coincide with No-Till conference. Pitch idea to change focus of conference to international focus and incorporate WCCA into his annual event.

Susan: is it a goal to get more Midwestern attendance?

Karen: location criteria include ability for international travelers to arrive; conference facilities; lodging facilities; opportunities for field trips

Glen: Toronto; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Calgary, Alberta; Saskatoon, Sask.

Doyle: Saskatoon hub of research in CA; half the farmland of Canada; central location

Time -- Winter event

Pros: farmer participation likely higher; piggy back on existing event (national no-till conference)

Cons: weather events prohibit travel; no field trip

Time – Summer event

Pros: field trip possibilities better

Cons: farmer participation lower; weather problems

Susan: will financial considerations help drive decision on time/location?

Dick: build it and they will come. Winter timing will be negative for international audience. If goal is to attract time of year that makes it attractive to those outside US/Canada.

Glen: Canadian producers visiting South America got most value from field trips.

Doyle: CA is not just no-till

What will you take away from today's conversation?

Dick: focus on target audience; desire to make event producer friendly and balanced with science/research community; strong arguments for winter vs summer; consensus to not pair with commodity conference but could pair with no-till conference

Glen: favor summer conference not piggybacked with another event; don't hear consensus on location, need more work that

Doyle: ditto Glen

Susan: look at who attends and what place is easy to get to from there; focus on content being a great draw; farmers come for field trips and would vote for that

Sjoerd: vote for integrating with no-till farmer conference;

April 5 @ 11 am eastern