

**Pursuing a SARE Partnership Grant for
The Association of Warm Season Grass Producers**

Ad Hoc Committee Meeting

DEP North Central Regional Office

Williamsport

August 26, 2016

Attendees:

- Michael Palko
- George Kauffman
- Will Brandau
- Leonard Reggie
- Michelle Ferguson (DEP Host)
- Sarah Wurzbacher (call-in)

The Committee met to discuss the feasibility and process of submitting a competitive grant proposal for a project that funds a beneficial and sustainable agriculture process for Pennsylvania farmers to grow and market warm season grasses.

We will pursue a SARE Partnership Grant.

Through this project we seek to develop a market for warm season grasses...answering the following:

- Who are the buyers / sellers?
- Where and what are the equipment needed to grow, gather, store this potential fuel?
- Who sells boilers / stoves?

The process will identify, consolidate, and share the following:

- Costs to establish warm season grass (i.e., switchgrass)
- Costs to harvest
- Costs to bail
- Cost to transport / store – in bins, super sacks, plastic 40# bags
- Cost to burn -- using a boiler /stove
- Cost to dispose of the ash and/or find beneficial on-farm uses including analysis of same
- Cost of information sharing including writing reports, video production, brochure development, workshops, website funding

Some of the deliverables to share include:

- Identify the equipment we have and does it work?
- Identify existing stands of grass with known cooperators
 - New stand establishment – we can offer expertise as part of this program?
 - New equipment types are needed for developing stands on utility rights-of-way
 - To demo for utility company maintenance, reduced costs using a Power Rake (future project?)
- Demonstrate a one month comparison of grass pellet fuel use with other conventional fuel use
- Produce/share brochures, videos, reports, website exposure, workshops (at least one)

The following questions and comments constitute the bulk of the committee's discussion supporting the grant proposal:

- We will need to answer, "What constitutes a farmer?"
- Who are the necessary cooperators throughout this project.
- Can we proceed with the project while pursuing non-profit status?
 - Who are the dozen or so cooperators?
- We'll need to contact the SARE Coordinator at Penn State.
- In practice, does it matter what conventional fuels are displaced?
- We'll need a system for fuel cost calculations.
- DEP will be identified as a cooperator rather than a project partner
- Do partners have to match funds?
- We will demonstrate equipment for the following:
 - Briquettes
 - Pellets
 - Fuel bricks
 - Biomass Boilers & stoves
 - Examples:
 - Max Ox
 - Twin Heat
 - Cord wood stoves/boilers in use now
 - Rice coal boilers
 - (What does Ernst Seed have?)
- We will develop a demonstration training facility through this project
 - With a steam engine for possible power generation (a new funded project?)
 - We will research other CHP Grants
- We will avoid failure
- We will develop/identify others partners
 - SBA's
 - USDA REAP

- Penn TAP
 - Rural Economic Development Corporations
- We know that cooperators (growers) are from across the state
- Cooperators may grow grass but may not densify or burn it.
- Some may grow it for feed or bedding.
- All of them are part of the market development for the ag community
- This is identified as contributing to market resiliency...the more the end-use options, the greater the market's resiliency.
- There are opportunities for future grass demonstrations for, say, animal-bedding trials.
- We know Univ of Delaware has demonstrated switchgrass as bedding
- Ernst Seed has applications to share
- As do members of the AWSG Producers
- Grass pellets have been demonstrated as horse bedding
- There is strong market potential with minimal processing costs for individual producers
- What is the true cost of chopping switchgrass at the field?
 - One step harvesting with a flail chopper for a farm use of nearby end-user.
- We will need to conduct BTU analysis at a million btu/unit basis.
 - As well as other ash analysis for pH and Carbon content
 - What are the costs for these analyses?
- We will need letters of support from:
 - DEP
 - PSU Extension
 - SBA
 - Penn TAP
 - PASA
 - PA Dept. of AG
 - Penn State NEWBio
 - Others?
- All information to be shared and archived to the Producer's website