

Prospectus for an Agricultural Energy Efficiency Program Network

Organized by
American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy
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Background

In recent years, ACEEE has been active in reinvigorating interest in energy issues relating to agriculture. We supported the Senate Agriculture Committee in crafting the energy titles of the *2002* and *2008 Farm Bills*, helping to ensure that energy efficiency stipulations were included. In order to expand the dialogue about the role of energy efficiency in agriculture, ACEEE has organized two conferences exploring this subject, one in 2005 and another in 2008. The “Forum on Energy Efficiency in Agriculture,” or “Ag Forum,” has been a successful way of bringing together a diverse group of participants—in some cases, groups without prior relationships—to raise awareness, share information, form new collaborations and establish new visions regarding policy and program opportunities to increase energy efficiency on farms and ranches, and in rural communities. The conferences focused on advancing programs and policies that can help the agricultural community realize the benefits of more efficient energy use in agricultural operations and processes, as well as issues related to increasing the sustainability of the agricultural sector.

Proposal

Opportunities to improve energy efficiency in the agricultural sector abound; however, information on how best to implement practices and programs is scarce. ACEEE proposes to establish a network to facilitate dialogue between existing energy efficiency program implementers and organizations that plan to establish such programs. The network would also capture information on government policies and best program practices, along with other pertinent resources to create an ongoing resource for program implementers in the future.

The intelligence collected would aid organizations interested in agricultural and rural energy efficiency programs to implement the most up-to-date, persuasive, and effective energy efficiency strategies.

Materials will be targeted to USDA’s state-level programs, state agricultural and energy agencies, electric utilities, electric cooperatives, contractors, farmer-run cooperatives and other energy efficiency program operators.

Topic areas that the network could potentially explore include:

- Program trends
 - What works: lessons learned
 - What is most effective
 - Strategies for successful program development and funding
- Technologies and Practices
 - Promoting energy-efficient agricultural equipment
 - Relationship between sustainable farming practices and energy efficiency
 - New technology and practice opportunities
 - Role of energy efficiency in biofuels production and markets
- Policy developments
 - Currently available government programs (e.g., REAP, RD)
 - New legislation, policies, and programs that are being developed, including climate policy issues

Deliverables

ACEEE would implement this project with an emphasis on using electronic information technologies to reduce the time and travel costs of participation – particularly important for rural programs that tend to be

under resourced. The network would be designed for quick reference and the encouragement of person-to-person communication. The deliverables offered to participants could include:

- Web-based information portal
- A moderated online discussion forum
- General network webinars
- Special webinar seminars covering topics of interest
- Blog to share current insights and new materials
- Online catalog of reference materials, fact sheets, and packaged presentations that can be used by participants in their program and communications efforts
- Directory of agricultural programs and program staff at the state and national levels
- Directory of subject matter experts

Through the use of our Web site, blogs, webinars, and other materials, relevant, timely information would be disseminated. Online discussion forums could also provide a space for program managers to share their current insights, successes, and failures. The network dialogue would therefore provide the newest and most effective ideas and approaches, which other managers could then apply to their own work.

A key activity of the network would also be the planning of the program for the next *ACEEE Ag Forum*, scheduled for February 2010. The *Forum* would act as a call to action, and serve as an opportunity to convene the network.

Timetable

ACEEE is prepared to invest its own resources in the initial organization of the network. These activities would include conference calls and/or webinars establishing the scope of the network as well as initiating the planning process for the next *Forum*. We anticipate receiving comments by the third quarter of 2009, with the first online products, including the establishment of an initial directory of agricultural programs and program staff, in late 2009.

How to Participate

To become involved with the agricultural program network contact Neal Elliott (rnelliott@aceee.org) or Sarah Black (sblack@aceee.org) at ACEEE. Participation in the network does not require any commitment of funding. ACEEE is, however, seeking funders to defray the cost of the organization and operation of the network and the related *Forum*. Opportunities exist to sponsor either or both of these related activities. To find out more about these sponsorship opportunities contact Sarah or Neal.