

Climate Extension Program: Challenges and Opportunities

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The Southeast Climate Consortium (SECC) was formed as a research and extension partnership of six universities in Florida, Georgia, and Alabama in an effort to apply climate forecasts in the development of decision support tools for agriculture and natural resource management in the southeastern U.S. An important component of the SECC is the climate extension program which aims to disseminate climate-based information and develop decision support tools based on input and guidance from various stakeholders. The challenges facing the climate extension program are to disseminate climate information to a level that can be understood by various stakeholders, and to present the impact of climate forecasts on the different aspects of agricultural production, including marketing and risk management. The key to effective dissemination of climate-based information to growers is the partnership of the SECC and the Cooperative Extension Service of Land-Grant Universities. Extension agents and specialists play an important role in transferring information technology and new knowledge to farmers and stakeholders, and in helping elicit local knowledge and farmer needs and relaying it back to the SECC. Climate extension specialists are working with county agents and commodity specialists to emphasize the importance of climate forecasts in farm decisions and risk management. Climate and agricultural outlooks are developed in close collaboration with research and extension faculty. The agricultural outlooks provide a unique platform on which information on potential impacts of climate on agriculture can be disseminated, on a regular basis, to a broad group of audiences. The climate extension program provides opportunities to increase the awareness and interest in climate forecasts among stakeholders, and to identify new applications of information.

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