

Florida's County Chemical Education Groups

By

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Another giant step in the field of chemical education is underway right here in Florida today. Some of you are already a part of it.

We want the participation of all of you, and every key organization necessary to the success of this cooperative undertaking.

First, some background information to set the scene.

You know that Florida's favorable environment is attractive not only to people, but to pests that cause economic and public health problems. *Safe* use of chemicals has made possible our vital role in the Nation's food supply, and healthful indoor and outdoor living. There is, at present, no other practical replacement for chemical pesticides.

We are faced with the need for *continuous educational efforts in the proper use, disposal, handling and storage of pesticides*. This is a need related to agriculture and to every home in the State.

Florida's agricultural chemical safety educational program is second to none. Through our Experiment Station system, inspection by the State Department of Agriculture and FDA, it is on a sound research and regulatory base. Much of what has been done (residue research, mobile pesticide labs, Information Center, pesticide schools, etc.) has been relayed to other states by national groups as a model of what they might adapt or undertake.

Our most recent step is a very significant one, which should be known to all concerned. It is building local educational programs, around local people. It is founded on creating better understanding of chemicals through education, rather than an alarmist approach.

About every county in the State now has what is known as a County Chemical Education Group. This is a coordinated effort initiated last Fall by the Florida Agricultural Extension Service, the Florida State Board of Health, Florida State Department of Agriculture, Vocational Agricultural Education, and Industries' Florida Agricultural Research Institute. Many other interested organizations and individuals are involved in each county. No other state has made such an advancement in the chemicals area.

Here are some slides, covering our rationale, objectives, DARE projections, and some continuing questions these groups face.

The real strength lies in others who are cooperating or are a part of these groups. Some examples are: producers, garden clubs, industry chemists, research and diagnostic workers, salesmen, druggists, veterinarians, medical doctors, nurses, Extension advisory committees, Farm Bureau, aerial applicators, lawn sprayers, nurserymen, home pest control operators, caretakers, mass media, community leaders, school lunch workers, Chamber of Commerce, civic clubs, county commissioners, women's clubs, city administrators, agency employees, and many others.

The objectives of these efforts include:

. . . improving identification of problems and developing effective solutions.

. . . stimulating educational efforts on a local basis around local people.

. . . accelerating procurement and use of educational aids, programs, personnel, and activities.

. . . increasing awareness and understanding on the part of the public, organizations, interests, etc.

. . . directing emphasis to specific audiences or situations including positive side of chemicals and precautions.

The County Chemical Education Group is an excellent resource in terms of trained people, teaching aids, and literature in conducting educational programs.

As an example, a recently developed item from the University of Florida Extension Chemical Information Center can be very useful in conducting a chemical safety program. It has recently become known nationally from a write-up in NAC News and Pesticide Review. This is known as "Training Guide—Safety Kit for Agricultural Chemicals" and is in the hands of all vocational agricultural teachers. It is also in each county Extension office, and that of the County Health Director. It is even gone international. In addition to inquiries about it from other states, we have recently answered requests from British Columbia, Portugal, Australia, and Philippine Islands.

The main objective of this training guide is to give agricultural teachers and others a useful tool for working with students and adults in this vital area. The information contained in this guide is equally useful with urban and agriculturally oriented audiences.

What do these groups do? One in Collier County recently climaxed a Pesticide Safety Contest with a Fish Fry at which winners were honored by the community. Early one Tuesday morning, an Extension vegetable specialist met with members of the Putnam County group and some tractor drivers for a session on proper use. That night our Extension Entomologist met with a group of salesmen in the Indian River area at the request of a county group. The next day the Dade County group met to review a new film with possible use to their program.

Here are some other examples of county group efforts:

. . . Demonstration to be put on at 4 or 5 locations throughout the county aimed at the operators of spray equipment

. . . planning to use an English and Spanish speaking team. A more sophisticated program will be for owners, managers, and other key personnel.

. . . Check situation regarding various outlets such as grocery stores, drug stores, and variety stores . . . put up posters and distribute publications through these retail markets.

. . . Assign Group members task of developing ways to reach civic clubs, women's clubs, schools, Vo-Ag classes, 4-H, and Scouts.

. . . Ask banks to distribute handouts and publications through Bank Statement mail; handouts and envelope stuffers mailed in monthly statements to customers via industry.

. . . Agent secure extra copies of "Chemically Speaking" for key members of County Chemical Education Group; assemble a good library of references for the Group.

. . . Arrange time on local TV program widely viewed in area where civic panel interviews guest experts; chemicals

exhibit at fair. (We have even seen "I Love Lucy," on prime Thursday, 7:30 P.M. time, held off the air for a special on pesticides via one county group's efforts.)

. . . Members of the Group make presentation at series of Junior High pesticide educational periods.

. . . Home demonstration agents and 4-H Clubs to bear down on home storage, medicine cabinet, etc., clean-up, lock-up, and label-up program.

. . . "Using Pesticides Safely" color slides (and handouts) from agent to Vo-Ag member for use with students and civic clubs, then to be turned over to another instructor until all have used.

. . . Representatives of Group to meet with management and offer information and assistance on how they could instruct their customers on safe use.

. . . Hold county-wide information meetings of officials, community leaders, Group members, and others interested—including discussion by expert on identified problem; develop one-day seminar.

. . . Proclaim a county Pesticide Safety Week, show films at all schools, distribute "Dennis the Menace" to students, show films to civic clubs, use envelope stuffers, Garden Clubs and Women's Clubs, distribute material and have Safety Program, use full page ad in newspaper.

. . . Locate central storage sites in agricultural areas for highly toxic pesticides, arrange periodic pickup for proper disposal.

. . . Utilize home calls of nurses, sanitarians, etc. to include proper use and storage of pesticides in information and comments.

. . . Organize group for specific functions: screening-, information-, public relations-, safety-, school program - sub groups.

. . . Use community approach to form local groups around towns, type of agriculture, etc. supplement and cooperate with county groups.

The message of proper use, disposal, handling and storage of pesticides is one needed throughout every community and home in Florida. The educational challenge is tremendous; all available help and interest is encouraged.

We sincerely hope your membership will identify itself to these groups at the county level, and offer active support to them. Our efforts in Florida must be the best. We have a good record. We're making progress. We want you to know about it. We want you to join with us in a continuous cooperative educational program.

Any county agent, home economics agent, Vo-Ag teacher, Florida Department of Agriculture inspector, or county health director can help you get acquainted with other members of a local group . . . let them know of your interest . . . join with them, and let's all help to keep Florida out front with sound programs in the chemicals area.

I personally appreciate the opportunity of discussing this at your Fifth Annual Meeting, and look forward to working with you in the future.