

**STRATEGIES FOR PESTICIDE
APPLICATION STEWARDSHIP**
Robert McCarty
Bureau of Plant Industry
**Mississippi Department of Agriculture
And Commerce**
Mississippi State, MS

Abstract

A task force of representatives from state government, educational agencies, agricultural groups and private companies implemented a stewardship education program in Mississippi in 1995 that focused on cotton pesticide application. The pilot program is being proposed by several groups as a model for nationwide stewardship of agricultural chemicals.

What is stewardship?

The dictionary defines a steward as a person who acts as a guardian. Applying this definition to the agricultural sector, the people who make wise choices that allow them to take practical actions to insure best performance during the crop production year are stewards of the land. By making wise choice, taking practical actions and insuring best performance, our farmers, applicators and consultants practice good stewardship.

Key words to remember in defining stewardship: wise choices, practical actions, best performance.

Why is stewardship important?

Misused crop protection products can be harmful to people, animals and the environment. They can also affect the availability of pesticides needed to produce a crop. Farmers, applicators, dealers, distributors and agricultural consultants are being watched by the public and many environmental interest groups for any type of misuse of chemical products.

Key words to remember in defining the importance of stewardship: protect the public, protect the environment, keep pesticides available.

How does stewardship relate to you?

There are social concerns that must be dealt with. Misapplied products generate public alarm. Carelessness generates bad press. Environmental damage is difficult, if not impossible, to repair.

There are political concerns that must be dealt with. Carelessness may jeopardize the product's availability. Carelessness may jeopardize the right to use a product. Carelessness may increase regulation by federal and state government.

There are economic concerns that must be dealt with. Money is wasted if the treatment goes outside the target zone. Pesticide misuse can result in stiff fines and/or jail terms for violators. Increasing numbers of regulations to follow can cause production costs to go up.

As we see, stewardship is relevant to the farm community and it is our insurance to continue to stay in the business of farming. How does an effective stewardship program come together. There are five basic components, which have been utilized by the pilot stewardship program begun for cotton producers in Mississippi in 1995:

- Identification
- Organization
- Promotion
- Implementation
- Evaluation

Component 1 -- Identification

Identify a purpose for the program. In Mississippi, we wanted to create an awareness among growers, applicators, dealers, distributors and consultants to practice voluntary stewardship when applying cotton pesticides.

Identify a target audience. Our target audience included growers, applicators, dealers, distributors and consultants.

Identify goals to accomplish. Our goals were to promote a safe environment in Mississippi, improve farm profitability and maintain a cordial relationship with special interest groups and the general public.

Secure funding via the public and/or private sector. We worked with several government agencies, agricultural organizations and private chemical companies to obtain funding for this program.

Establish a way to administrate the program. We organized a task force and secured participation from representatives of government, private industry, educational institutions and agricultural organizations. Participants are:

- Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce.
- Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service.
- Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality.
- Mississippi State University.
- Delta Council.
- Mississippi Agricultural Chemicals Council.
- Mississippi Agricultural Consultants Association.
- Mississippi Agricultural Aviation Association.
- Mississippi Farm Bureau.
- Ciba Crop Protection.

Component 2 -- Organization

Identify the issues that should be represented. We asked Will McCarty, extension cotton specialist at Mississippi State University, to produce an outline of the production season for cotton in Mississippi. The outline was used to identify the issues we wanted to present.

Establish a timeframe for presentation of the issues. We used the outline to establish a timeframe for the issues, the order of presentation and the time of presentation.

Assign responsibilities. We used the outline to identify specialists and experts associated with a particular issue, farm practice or production problem who would function as the authority for that issue or an aspect of the stewardship program.

Gather feedback. The task force met monthly during this period to discuss responsibilities and the practicalities of implementing the program.

Component 3 -- Promotion

Identify the message. The task force agreed that the message should be voluntary stewardship.

Create a visual identity. The task force worked with a local professional artist to create a visually-appealing logo that incorporated stewardship and conveyed the idea of a clean-and-safe environment. Graphics used with those particular phrases included representations of farmland, wildlife, forests, birds and water.

Establish a communication plan. The communication plan had two target audiences: the participants or internal audience, and the public or external audience. Each audience was discussed by the task force in terms of topics, format, timetable and distribution.

Internal Communication Plan

The task force determined that stewardship issues would be presented in the form of a two-page monthly newsletter that followed the cotton production season from April through October. Production schedules for the writing, editing, proofing and distribution of the newsletter were agreed upon by the task force. Great Lines Inc. of Memphis, Tenn., produced and printed the newsletter.

The Extension Service agreed to distribute copies to producers through the county agricultural agents. The Bureau of Plant Industry agreed to distribute copies to chemical dealers and distributors, chemical applicators and agricultural consultants. Mississippi Farm Bureau also distributed copies to its local offices in cotton-producing counties.

The task force decided to use regulatory officials, growers, consultants, dealers, applicators and educational specialists in a training video. With primary assistance from Ciba Crop Protection, the video was shot exclusively in Mississippi and featured the participants discussing the importance of practicing stewardship as it related to their individual professions. A script was completed by late May 1995 and shooting began in early June 1995. Editing and post-production was completed in late October 1995. After review by the task force, some minor adjustments were made and the video was completed and ready for distribution by late November 1995.

External Communication Plan

The general subject matter areas for the PSAs were: water quality, food safety, integrated pest management, pesticide rinsing and disposal, pesticide storage and pesticide labeling. The spots are geared to promote the message that farmers are good stewards and homeowners can be good stewards, too, by following similar practices. The task force is in the process of selecting individual farmers for each of six PSA spots. The Office of Agricultural Communications at Mississippi State University is producing the PSAs.

Component 4 -- Implementation

- Review the plan.
- Make adjustments.
- Meet the schedule.

The task force met regularly (monthly) during this period to review the communication plan and wrap-up other decisions concerning production, timetables and distribution. Some revisions were made in the content and production of the newsletter to keep the newsletter current and timely. The task force approved the revisions. All deadlines for the newsletter and the training video were met. It is anticipated that the deadlines for the public service announcements will be met as production is on-schedule.

Component 5 -- Evaluation

- Review activities of the program.
- Discuss feedback.
- Review funding.
- Make revisions.
- Establish new plan for next year.

The task force met via conference call telephone hook-up in November 1995. Members discussed the possibility of expanding the program to other cotton-producing states through support from the National Cotton Council. The task force agreed to put together an instructional outline to help other states implement a stewardship program. It also reviewed the proposed deadline schedule for the 1996 version of the newsletters and the public service announcements.