

New crop management program offered for blueberry growers

Blueberry producers will be offered a program new to Piscataquis County in 2006. Integrated Crop Management (ICM) could help growers reduce the need for pesticide applications, identify weed and pest species, and determine fertility needs of each field.

ICM was developed by the Maine Cooperative Extension and has been successful in other parts of the state, most notably in Washington and Hancock counties. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District (PCSWCD) plan to bring ICM to Piscataquis blueberry producers this year if there is interest among growers.

Services would include:

- Weekly written scout reports listing weeds, insects and diseases found in fields.
- Place fly traps and monitor for blueberry fruit fly.
- Contact land owner and manager by phone when pest infestations are noted.
- Take soil and leaf tissue samples to determine fertilizer needs.
- Provide detailed maps of weed species and locations.

Scouting services provided by the PCSWCD would be paid with an incentive payment through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). In addition to pest management, the EQIP program may be able to provide assistance with other aspects of the blueberry operation such as brush management, obstruction removal and mulching.

For more information about EQIP or to sign up for the pilot ICM program, please call 564-2321.