Extension and the Climate Change Challenge: Providing Climate Services to Citizens and Communities

The Climate Change Challenge

Natural phenomena such as solar radiation, volcanic activity and ocean circulation influence our climate and contribute to its variability. Evidence suggests that climate is now also changing as a result of human activities, such as the emission of greenhouse gases and changing land uses. The fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2007) concluded that the global average mean temperature and the frequency of hot extremes, heat waves, and heavy precipitation will very likely increase in response to increased concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The IPCC report also concluded that the globally averaged net effect of human activities since 1750 has been one of warming.

Society will have to make decisions in the coming years about how to adapt to a changing climate. Climate variability and climate change create risks to all sectors of the economy. Climate is already a prime factor in 9 out of 10 disasters, many of which cost billions of dollars and thousands of lives. Effective preparation for the possible effects of climate change requires the engagement of resource managers, planners, public works officials, local managers, community development specialists, businesses, residents, and property owners. The challenge is to provide these diverse stakeholders with trusted, useful, science-based information so that they in turn can make informed decisions.

About the Southeast Climate Consortium

The Southeast Climate Consortium (SECC) is one of eight Regional Integrated Science Assessment (RISA) Centers sponsored by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Research and extension faculty from the Consortium’s 7 member universities have developed climate variability and forecast information and systems for delivering climatic risk management outlooks and advice to agricultural producers and water resources managers. Over the past 10 years, the SECC has become recognized as a world-class leader in adaptive research that addresses stakeholders’ climate information needs and effectively integrates trusted stakeholder advisors in the delivery and use of that information. The SECC’s success is due in part to a strong partnership with Extension in each state and the involvement of clientele from the beginning of the development process.
Climate Change Extension Activities

- Develop climate action plans for cities and counties in the Southeast
- Conduct community-wide greenhouse gas inventories of counties and municipalities
- Develop methodologies to incorporate climate information and forecasts into Water Management Districts and their decision-making processes for water withdrawals and allocations
- Operate web-based climate information and decision support systems (http://www.agroclimate.org) to reduce agricultural production and natural resource management risks related to climate variability and change
- Determine carbon footprint of agricultural and food systems
- Forecast forest fire risks
- Address public health issues related to climate variability and change
- Provide climate education professional development opportunities for county extension faculty
- Provide climate educational programs and curricula for 4-H and youth
- Design energy-efficient, low-impact communities

Contacts:

Joan Dusky  
Associate Dean for Extension, Agricultural Programs  
University of Florida – IFAS  
jadu@ufl.edu

Michael Spranger  
Associate Dean for Extension, Environmental and Natural Resources Programs  
University of Florida – IFAS  
spranger@ufl.edu

Clyde Fraisse  
Climate Extension Specialist  
University of Florida – IFAS  
cfraisse@ufl.edu

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