

2008 PROGRAM WORK TEAM ANNUAL REPORT FORM
(Please complete items 1, 2, 3 and 4 below)

1. Full name of your Program Work Team (PWT):

Environmental Health Risks in Agricultural Communities

2. Names, affiliations and e-mail addresses of the PWT Co-Chairs: (With an asterisk [*], please indicate the co-chair responsible for finalizing this report.)

*	Lois Levitan	Dept Communication (Ithaca)	lcl3@cornell.edu
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3. As a separate attachment, please provide a list of names, affiliations and email addresses only of **active** members of the PWT. We realize the organizational structure of the PWTs varies widely. We are interested in obtaining contact information about individuals in the core decision-making or planning group of the PWT, not in an exhaustive list of all participants in general meetings or activities.

4. Please identify your PWT's activities, accomplishments, and, most importantly, outcomes and impacts over the past year.

In your successful PWT petition, your team committed to:

- Fully engage your member stakeholders, especially externals.
- Address specific statewide program needs.
- Conduct or plan to conduct programs/activities to address those needs.
- Seek and document productive outcomes through evaluation efforts.
- Integrate applied research and extension activities.
- Foster multidisciplinary approaches.
- Explore external sources of support for PWT efforts and programs.

PWT co-chairs should do their best to convey their team's progress and accomplishments. Co-chairs are encouraged to choose and include any information that they believe best reflects the productive results of their team's activities and that they wish to share with other PWTs, Program Councils, administration, and the public in general. It is particularly important to include specific programming outcomes and impacts in your report. Please consider and report any changes in audience behavior, skills, or conditions, and what differences occurred in individuals, groups, families, businesses, or communities due to your team's work.

Via the main PWT website (<http://hosts.cce.cornell.edu/admin/pwt/>), you can find your PWT's petition and its previously submitted annual reports to use as reference.

Please use the next page-and-a-half to report on your PWT's progress and activities in FY 2007-08.

The completed report can be emailed as a WORD attachment to me:

John Whitcomb (jgw2@cornell.edu) by Tuesday December 23, 2008. Please give the WORD attachment a filename that includes the surname of the lead PWT co-chair (example: *Smith-PWTReport07-08.doc*).

This PWT is a vehicle for coalescing statewide activities and interests relating to the recycling and life-cycle stewardship of agricultural (“ag”) plastics. Ag plastics include mulch films that suppress weeds, other types of film that cover and wrap forage; bag feed, seed, soil and other inputs; and cover greenhouses,. Also rigid plastics used as nursery pots and trays, containers for pesticides and dairy medicines, and tubing for irrigation and maple sap. The array of product types and the quantities used have been growing exponentially for several decades.

Recycling of used ag plastic is a concrete and pragmatic means to implement energy conservation and sustainability while supporting production agriculture and stimulating regional economic development.

Why are these disparate objectives under the auspices of the Environmental Health Risks PWT?

It is because recycling offers an alternative to the open burning of agricultural plastics on NYS farms, a common practice that releases harmful emissions of dioxins, heavy metals and particulates. Emissions from uncontrolled fires on farms create a particular risk because they deposit in agricultural communities and on food and animal feed, thereby re-entering the food chain and creating a risk for all consumers.

Recycling is also an alternative to the common practices of plowing waste plastic into the soil, leaving it in the fields or stashing it in some out-of-the-way corner of the farm. Unmanaged waste plastics can tangle in machinery, clog water channels, be a choking hazard for livestock and wildlife, create breeding habitat for mosquito and rodent disease vectors, and decrease market values.

In addition, recycling conserves much of the energy and resource value invested in making ag plastic products. These energy and resources are otherwise dissipated by burning and dumping, whether these practices take place on–farm or in municipal landfills and incinerators.

Despite its many advantages over other means of disposal, very little ag plastic is recycled. The Cornell-based Recycling Ag Plastics Project (RAPP) has been working for several years to stimulate recycling by developing both infrastructure and markets for the waste plastics used in all sectors of agriculture.

Since the PWT report filed last year, RAPP received a two-year grant from the NY Farm Viability Institute to implement ag plastics recycling programs in three areas of NYS and to provide outreach materials and training statewide. Members of the PWT were instrumental in developing the proposal for this project during Summer 2007, and a broader group has been instrumental in carrying out the project since its inception in January 2008.

RAPP staff are also working with the Northeast Waste Management Officials Association (NEWMOA) to provide workshops, training materials and technical advise to ten groups in rural NY and Northern New England; several PWT members have been instrumental in providing venues for the NYS workshops.

RAPP is anticipating funding from NYS DEC to expand our geographic reach and purchase suitable plastic baling equipment to compact waste plastic for transport from farm to market; a technical subcommittee of the PWT assisted RAPP staff in evaluating compaction equipment re: safety and operational features.

PWT members are providing feedback on draft curricular and training materials developed by RAPP staff, *e.g.*, guidelines for Best Management Practices (BMP) in handling ag plastics so that they are suitable for recycling, and safety and operation guidelines for the plastic baler. Dissemination of these materials and promotion of the recycling concept are key to this Program, and PWT members have been instrumental in setting up and staffing demonstration and plastic collection events (more than 40 of which were held in 2008) and in writing and placing stories in the agricultural and mass media. RAPP efforts were chronicled in at least 25 media stories in 2008.

The PWT is an important thread connecting all parts of the NYS program. PWT members include members of the Advisory Committees that RAPP has established in each of the project areas, as well as statewide advisors from agribusinesses (*e.g.*, suppliers of ag plastics products and plastic baling equipment), agricultural organizations (RAPP works closely with the NY Farm Bureau and several commodity groups), and plastics manufacturers who are currently or potentially interested in using ag plastic wastes as feedstock. The Advisory Committees are comprised of farmers and personnel from agricultural, environmental, economic development and solid waste/ recycling agencies, organizations and businesses. These include Extension and SWCD staff from at least 15 counties.

PWT special needs funding was used to support travel of PWT members to meetings of their regional Advisory Committees and to statewide venues for RAPP, such as Empire Farm Days. These funds also provided food for several meetings over meals, meals that lubricated silo-breaking communication among RAPP's diverse stakeholders. For example, one such gathering included two NYS plastic manufacturers with interest in processing waste ag plastics into new products; the developer of the BigFoot plastic baler, which is the piece of equipment best suited to moving plastic from the farm to these recyclers; RAPP staff and partners from several Extension Associations and SWCD; a CCE-funded student summer intern; and several graduate students in Communication conducting research with farmers and Extension educators to understand attitudes and behaviors that influence the use and disposal of agricultural plastics.