

The *PEOPLE* Project: Resource Library for Extension Programs in the Tropics

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Abstract—The Portable Extension Office for Program Literature Exchange (*PEOPLE*) project aims to expand the sustainable agriculture information resources available to agriculture professionals and their clients in the islands of the Western Pacific. The project has identified, obtained, and disseminated literature, in digital format (web site and CD-ROM), through extension institutes and non-government organizations (NGO) worldwide that relate to tropical sustainable agriculture issues and practices. At the participating project sites, staff skills have been updated to include use of various types of computer equipment, software, and information resources to enable the effective implementation of “print-on-demand” program literature exchanges. Issues identified in the project’s implementation and future efforts are presented.

In the late 1990’s, in an effort to develop a resource which would enhance extension programs in the islands of Micronesia and the surrounding area, two surveys were conducted to assess the nature and needs of island extension programs. One survey was conducted among agricultural professionals on Guam, and the other survey included extension agents across the American Pacific. These assessments identified some unique needs of island extension programs in this region. These were:

- 1) each extension office is isolated, has limited staff, and has limited technical support,
- 2) internet access is expensive and often unreliable, particularly in more remote areas,
- 3) island extension professionals expressed a very strong desire to have publications relevant to agriculture, gardening, and family consumerism in the tropics,
- 4) because of their isolation and relatively small numbers, island extension agents can produce only a limited number of publications and handouts for use in client education programs. Consequently, they feel restricted in their ability to deliver extension programs due to the lack of materials,
- 5) bulk printing is neither feasible nor practical for producing publications for this region due to storage issues and the fluctuating demand for any given publication.

The principal and cooperators of the project concluded from the survey that a digital extension library bringing together all relevant publications would help agents deliver more effective extension programs. These publications would include all the publications of the American Pacific and all the publications in the mainland U.S. relevant to a tropical or subtropical environment. Publications on nutrition and food preparation, particularly those methods of preparation useful in the tropics, as well as publications relating to personal, family, farm and small business financial management would also be included.

The P.I. then determined that the first step in developing this digital library was to screen existing USDA digital publications for those that were relevant to tropical island conditions. Appropriate topics from web sites of extension offices across the U.S. mainland were selected. A survey was then disseminated to University of Guam extension agents and subsequently to all extension professionals in the American Pacific to determine the subjects of greatest interest and importance for their programs.

A digital format for these publications was deemed the best for their program so that publications could be printed on demand. A digital format provides immediate access to publications for extension agents and/or their clients and, as previously mentioned, precludes the need for bulk printing and storage. Because of the desire to print these documents as needed, the digital publications were archived in Portable Document Format, PDF. This format lends itself to more reliable, more standardized layouts for printing on different computer configurations than the current version of HTML.

Publications from the Pacific Islands and the Caribbean that addressed preferred topics were collected. Publications were also downloaded from mainland extension sites to expand the subject content. Agreements were formulated with various private or non-profit web sites to allow the inclusion of appropriate publications from their collections as well. Relevant out-of-print publications were converted into digital format, especially those developed by tropical extension programs.

Digitized publications were transferred to a CD for low-cost, easy distribution. Publications were cataloged alphabetically by subject, utilizing HTML hypertext links for cross-referencing. Files are accessed using various internet browsers. An attractive and colorful CD label was developed, along with a jewel case insert which provides instructions for use of the CD and contact information on the primary individuals involved in the project. Users needing additional assistance were invited to contact the individuals listed.

The *PEOPLE* CD includes copies of the database plus copies of Adobe Acrobat Reader. There also is a searchable index of words of the publications that can be used when running Acrobat.

The print-on-demand feature allows the user to print copies of selected publications. The most economical printer for a print-on-demand system, based on printing 1 to 100 copies of articles, is an ink jet printer. Several brands of ink jet printers were evaluated. The desired features of a printer included:

- 1) automatic double-sided printing,
- 2) ability to print up to 11" X 17" paper, which allows the printing of posters,
- 3) ability to print quality photographic images,
- 4) ability to use continuous ink supplies (CIS).

The use of continuous ink supplies reduced the major expense of print, which is ink. A CIS has ink cartridges which are attached to bottles of ink, thus significantly reducing the per-page printing cost.

Islands which are participating in this project have been provided with copies of early versions of the *PEOPLE CD*. They are in the process of digitizing their own publications, which will be included in future versions of the *PEOPLE CD*. Island extension offices have been provided, according to their needs, with color ink jet printers, scanners, digital cameras, CD burners, blank CDs, and ink supplies in order to enhance their ability to disseminate publications from the *PEOPLE CD*. Each extension site was also provided with a set of notebooks containing hard copies of every publication on the initial version of the CD. This allows individuals who are less comfortable with computers the option of reviewing printed copies of the publications on the CD. An updated version of the *PEOPLE CD* was completed in the summer of 2001, and a new version, which will encompass more topics and include hundreds more publications, will be completed by late March 2002.