Cross Sector Collaboration and Evaluation in Ag Plastics Recycling Programs

Melissa Kono, Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin-Extension
Background
The problem
Weekly collection efforts
Solution?
Ag Plastics Recycling in Wisconsin

- According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, 15-20 pounds of agricultural plastics are generated per cow every year.
- 1.2 million cows in Wisconsin.
- 2/3rds of farms surveyed are using bunker covers.
Cross Sector Partnership

- Revolution Plastics provides ag plastics recycling dumpsters and regular pick up service to farms at no cost to the farmer.
- The plastic is processed in the United States and recycled into products

- Through University of Wisconsin-Extension, people of Wisconsin and beyond can access university resources and engage in learning, wherever they live and work.
- Historically agricultural-based programming and services
2017 Distribution

- Marketing: Facebook ad, radio station, press releases, Ag newsletter
  Revolution Plastics mailing and wait list
- Pick up event
- County Fair educational display
- 110 dumpsters distributed
Evaluating Plastics Collection Efforts

Methodology

- A Qualtrics survey was emailed to approximately 2,000 Revolution Plastics customers and others regarding their agricultural plastics recycling practices, there were 392 responses to the survey.

- Not all survey respondents were currently using an agricultural plastics recycling dumpster provided by Revolution Plastics and were on a waiting list.

- The survey was approved by the Human Subjects Protection Administrator.

- The purpose of the survey was to examine the need for educational opportunities when it comes to agricultural plastics recycling.
What are your greatest challenges in recycling agricultural plastics?

- Keeping access clear
- Too frequent pickup
- Too infrequent pickup
- Too much volume
- Not enough volume
- Unsure of what can be recycled
- Removing debris
- Prohibited items being placed in dumpster
- Note enough time to recycle
- Getting employees to properly recycle
How have your waste management practices changed as a result of having a plastics recycling dumpster or bag available on your farm
What is your estimated annual cost savings?

- $0-500: 53%
- $501-$1,500: 19%
- $1,501-$3,000: 8%
- $3,001-$5,000: 2%
- Greater than $5,000: 2%
- No cost savings: 18%
Findings and other considerations

- Half of survey respondents said it provides an alternative to burning.
- 56% said there is less excess plastic litter on the farm.
- Respondents indicated they used more ag plastics products because they were able to recycle it.
- Farms seemed to underestimate their annual cost savings.
- Perception vs. Reality
Potential Partnerships

- Farmers
- Recyclers
- Department of Natural Resources
- DATCP
- University of Wisconsin-Extension
- Local Government
- Local Government
Take Aways

- Potential for education in the areas of farm financial management, proper recycling techniques
- Efficient communication around pick-up schedules
- Increased partnerships with government entities and private sector
Questions?

Melissa Kono, Associate Professor
University of Wisconsin-Extension
Department of Community Resource Development
Clark & Trempealeau Counties, Wisconsin
Melissa.kono@ces.uwex.edu