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Conclusions and Recommendations from the Central and Eastern European Workshop on Drought Mitigation

The importance of prevention and planning in drought mitigation was the impetus for the Central and Eastern European Workshop on Drought Mitigation, held April 12–15, 2000, in Budapest-Felsőgöd, Hungary. The workshop was organized and sponsored by several Hungarian agencies: the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development; Ministry for Environment; Ministry of Transport, Communication and Water Management; Research and Development Division of the Ministry of Education; and Hungarian Meteorological Service. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), European Commission Joint Research Centre (EC JRC–ISPRA), European Regional Working Group of the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ERWG ICID), and the International Drought Information Center and National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, USA, also provided support.

Seven country reports on the status of national drought mitigation strategies in central and eastern European (CEE) countries and twenty-one scientific and technical papers were presented and discussed. U.S. scientists discussed drought mitigation practices used in the United States that might also be followed in Europe. Although some steps have been taken in several CEE countries toward the establishment of national drought mitigation strategies, participants noted that further efforts are necessary. Their recommendations are republished below.

“1. Participants of the Workshop—after discussing the papers and propositions presented—agreed . . . that an effective drought mitigation should be based on a comprehensive view of drought, because drought is not simply a deficiency of precipitation, but a more complex phenomenon which influences the whole society.

2. Recognizing the significant economic, social and environmental impacts of drought in the CEE countries, as well as in other drought-prone European regions, the participants of the Workshop recommend that each country develop national strategies and national action programmes to mitigate drought, and establish international cooperation for solving related common problems as follows:

2.1. Encourage and help non-member countries to join the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, recognize the important role of UNCCD in combating desertification and land degradation, and support each other in drought mitigation.

2.2 Establish a common methodology for drought preparedness and mitigation programs and policies including forecasting, early warning system, risk assessment, characterization of drought severity through common indicators and maps, etc., using the SPI index for international comparison. Any other indexes are appropriate at national level. To facilitate the establishment of this common methodology, the Workshop participants recommend the creation of a regional network of scientists, policy makers, and other experts.

2.3 Request authorities, scientific institutions and . . . organizations involved in combating land degradation to link their activities with efforts . . . to monitor and mitigate drought effects in order to promote sustainable development and nature conservation in drought-prone regions.

3. Taking into account the importance of US practice and experience in drought mitigation and

planning, the Workshop participants recommend the continued involvement of the US National Drought Mitigation Center in future European cooperation/collaboration, and the participation of US experts in the proposed regional drought mitigation projects.

4. Drought mitigation experts and institutions from any other countries are invited to participate.
5. Italy, on behalf of the Northern Mediterranean Annex of UNCCD, expressed the intention to foster collaboration between the Mediterranean and CEE

regions. Participants of the Workshop accept this proposal and express their gratitude for that, and welcome coming opportunities for collaboration under the provision of Annex 5 to the UNCCD.

6. The participants of the Workshop ask the Hungarian authorities responsible for drought management to create an international interim task force with the participation of the representatives of countries concerned, and coordinate the next steps to realize the above mentioned proposals, and to find out and identify relevant international bodies for the necessary participation and financial support.”

Talking Imperative for Grieving Farmers, Others

Editor’s Note: The following news release was provided by the IANR News Service, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln on June 8, 2000.

Farmers who are losing their livelihoods to the drought shouldn’t be surprised to feel depressed or angry, and neither should people around them. After all, these farmers are suffering a very real loss and they are grieving.

Farmers who lose a crop in many ways will react as have people who have lost loved ones, said John DeFrain, family and community development specialist at the University of Nebraska here. That is, they go into shock, denial and anger, and not necessarily in that order.

The loss of a crop means a loss of time, expenses, identity and, in some cases, a family tradition, DeFrain said. The worst nine-month drought in the state’s history meant spring crops were planted in soils six to eight inches short of moisture. While there was sufficient moisture to get most of those crops up, without additional moisture by mid-June, dryland crops likely will burn up. Eastern and central and

southwest Nebraska are affected the most, with the southeast being hardest hit. The drought is expected to continue for the rest of the year.

“These are troubling human issues,” DeFrain said. “What can you say that makes any sense?”

People who try to console others who have suffered a loss must be careful with their words, the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources specialist said. While joking may make some people laugh, others may not be in the mood for humor. The key, DeFrain said, is to listen to people carefully, to see where they’re at. That means not only listening to what they say, but sensing what they’re reluctant to open up about.

“Find the courage to sit down and listen,” DeFrain said. Don’t make judgments and don’t try to fix the problem, because you can’t. Honor and respect the grieving by letting them know you want to hear their story, he advised.

At the same time, he said, the person grieving needs to find ways to open up to other people. That’s difficult, he said, because farmers tend to be strong

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