

The WAS*IS workshop organized by the Societal Impacts Program (SIP) will provide an unparalleled opportunity for me to further my interests in integrating social science research with topics pertaining to meteorology. I am an environmental anthropologist with a focus in the applied aspects of political ecology, with a particular focus on sustainable agriculture and water resource management. In the course of my doctoral research among indigenous Andean communities of Bolivia, I have become highly aware of how local understandings of weather and climate inform the processes whereby water is managed and how a viable water management system must integrate these perceptions and knowledge. This awareness has led me to my current research on the role of weather and climate information in risk management and adaptive decisions among underserved farmers of the southeastern U.S.

Presently, I am a post-doctoral research associate with the Southeast Climate Consortium (SECC) at the University of Georgia. The SECC is a Regional Integrated Science and Assessment program, funded by NOAA and USDA, to develop and disseminate climate-based information and decision support tools for agriculture and natural resource management in the Southeast U.S. The SECC relies largely on the Cooperative Agricultural Extension Services as its primary outreach mechanism. This has meant that the SECC information has largely targeted large-scale, conventional farmers, who are the traditional clientele of extension. Other groups, such as minority and organic farmers, have not equally benefited from the SECC products because the small-scale, part-time, diversified nature of their operations makes them less likely to be reached by extension. As part of the SECC assessment team, I have worked to redress this imbalance and make the SECC programmatic agenda more responsive to underserved users..

To gain credibility and legitimacy among these groups, we have developed strong partnerships with their representative organizations. For example, I am currently conducting research in collaboration with Georgia Organics, a non-profit organization of over 1000 members. The study combines qualitative and quantitative methods, including online surveys and open-ended interviews, to explore the ways in which these farmers utilize, share, and interpret weather and climate information and how this information informs their climate risk management strategies. Organic farmers are well suited to utilize the information created by the SECC as they are generally younger, more educated, computer-literate, and familiar with internet use than conventional farmers., In addition, many of them are new to farming, so they are highly motivated to learn new ways of making their farm operation more viable. The information gained during this research will help the SECC to better address the information needs these farmers.

While at the SECC, I have contributed to the development of a research project among minority farmers in Georgia in partnership with Fort Valley State University (FVSU) is a Historically Black university and with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, a civil right organization with a 41 year history of working in African American communities in the southern U.S. This project aims to develop a weather and climate information system to foster drought preparedness among minority farmers in the southeastern U.S. This is specifically important since minority farmers often do not have access to irrigation and farm on relatively marginal lands. This project aims to support The National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) by customizing and disseminating drought preparedness information and tools to minority farmers in ways that are fit with their information processing habits. A research proposal was submitted to the NOAA Climate Program Office's Sectoral Application Research Program in November 2008 and is pending approval. .

The workshop will make a significant contribution to my professional knowledge and skills by connecting me with practitioners, researchers, and stakeholders who work in applied climate science. At the same time, my experience of research among indigenous Andean communities and with underserved farmers in the American South will greatly contribute to discussions at the workshop and to the initiatives and networks that will result from it.