NO MORE SPRINKLERS IN THE RAIN! – INSIGHTS FROM AN INNOVATIVE RAINFALL COMMUNICATION INTERVENTION

Laura A. Warner[1]*, Colby J. Silvert*[2]*, Nick Taylor*[1]*, John M. Diaz*[1]*, and Robin Grantham*[3]

[1] University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA

[2] University of Maryland, College Park, MD USA

[3] Southwest Florida Water Management District, Brooksville, FL, USA

Among Florida residents, rainfall may be perceived as bonus irrigation rather than a primary water source, leading to irrigation waste. Thus, there is an opportunity to conserve water in residential landscapes by helping residents align their irrigation usage with their landscape's actual water needs accounting for varying precipitation. Interventions targeting water conservation have historically relied on information dissemination, but more strategic and innovative approaches are needed. A 2016 research study (Survis, 2016) demonstrated providing information about local rainfall effectively reduced residents' water consumption. The intervention described in this presentation is drawn from a newly completed "Rainfall Signage to Reduce Residential Irrigation" project intended to build on the previous research. Initiated by the Southwest Florida Water Management District, key project elements — intentionally omitting educational activities — included robust measures of water consumption in experimental and control neighborhoods through UF/IFAS' H2OSAV program, pre- and post-survey data collected using behavioral theory, and 52 weeks of remote weekly rainfall data updates supported by cellular connectivity and solar power. Key findings included no changes to self-reported conservation practices or knowledge, no apparent influence of the sign on irrigation water use, positive perceptions of adjusting irrigation based on recent local rainfall, the rainfall sign becoming a primary source of rainfall data, and concerns over limited community buy-in. There is a possibility that the sign raised awareness of the lack of precipitation during drier times and encouraged some increase or no change in irrigation. Implications for others considering similar projects include: a need to determine the duration/timing of such interventions and possibly align them only with Florida's rainy season, opportunities to integrate participatory planning and educational activities and outreach, opportunities to increase the visibility of benefits of adjusting irrigation based on precipitation, and a need to ensure community policies and irrigation decision-making are aligned with water conservation programs.

PRESENTER BIO: Dr. Warner is an associate professor and extension specialist focused on understanding the human dimension of environmental behaviors. Specifically, she examines factors that relate to adoption of water conservation practices and other environmental behaviors and translates these factors into innovative behavior change strategies.