Cooperative Extension Venture Capital Fund Proposal

I. Title of Proposed Project

Turf Site Visit Diagnostics Project

II. PI Name(s) and Contact Information (PI, or at least one Co-PI, must be an Extension employee)

PI - Carl Wilson, Denver County Cooperative Extension 720-913-5273
CoPI – Carol O’Meara, Boulder County Cooperative Extension 303-678-6377
Key team members: Tony Koski, Dept of Horticulture & L.A.; Mary Small, Jefferson County; Ned Tisserat, Dept of BioAg Science & Pest Mgmt

III. Will this be a state-wide project, or have multi-county emphasis? If multi-county, list all counties that will be participants.

Multi-county. The project will pilot in four counties during season one and expand to be offered in four additional counties over the period of season two to season three.

For pilot: Jefferson County, Denver County, Boulder County, Pueblo County

For implementation 2007 or 2008: Larimer County, Adams County, Broomfield County, El Paso County.

IV. Indicate which Core Competency Area(s) this work falls under, or if it addresses the Front Door mission of the University.

☐ Strong Families, Healthy Homes
☐ Nutrition, Health and Food Safety
☐ 4-H and Youth Development
☐ Community Resource Development
☐ Competitive & Sustainable Agricultural Systems
☐ Front Door Mission
☐ Natural Resources and the Environment

V. Cooperative Extension Work Team Affiliation

List Work Team(s), if any, with which this project will be affiliated.

This project is affiliated with the Diagnostics and Pest Management work team of Environmental Horticulture.

VI. Situation Statement

What is the problem, and why is it important to do this work?

Lawn problems are the number one concern brought to Cooperative Extension offices in the Front Range and are also important in Grand Junction and some mountain counties such as Eagle County. A large proportion of landscape irrigation water is directed to lawns making them an easy target for criticisms of landscape water waste. Improper irrigation often leads to disease
and brown spots, which tends to invoke over-watering behaviors causing more water waste. Diagnosing lawn problems and correcting irrigation practices can favorably impact municipal water conservation programs as well as landscape quality and customer landscape satisfaction.

Based on anecdotal evidence of customer comments in a pilot effort started by a few offices, there is a demand by consumers for unbiased lawn diagnosis performed by Cooperative Extension. Currently, lawn care professionals offer free diagnosis, but often clients question whether companies may be using site calls to sell products or their lawn care services. Development of a professional, unbiased, fee-for-service lawn diagnosis program to offer homeowners could prove to be a specialized market niche for Extension personnel.

Diagnosis of turf samples is often accomplished by looking at small lawn samples brought in to Extension horticulture staff and volunteers. Lawn diagnosis is better done and more accurate when the total situation including irrigation coverage is examined during a site visit.

Site calls to diagnose turf problems require an investment of staff time including training in specialized knowledge and development of skills such as grass identification, irrigation assessment and disease diagnosis. Because diagnosis is skill based, ongoing training to build, enhance and sustain staff skills is essential. Extending training to volunteers can multiply service capacity within participating counties. Creation of standardized service call forms will allow delivery of professional, streamlined, diagnosis and customer response. Organizational site visit fees must be coordinated to avoid offices undercutting each other, particularly among Front Range counties. Additionally, marketing support of the service is needed to grow the program.

VII. Project Description

Describe the project, including how it will address the needs described in the Situation Statement.

In winter 2005, agents at state Horticulture meeting voted to form a committee to explore the possibility of developing a turf diagnostic program designed to train staff and volunteers. Initial planning centered on two aspects: staff needs/training, and supporting site call forms development. Committee work began in spring 2006 with development of a site visit form and a survey of staff to assess training needs. In May 2006, horticulture staff received initial turf training conducted by Tony Koski on campus. A site call form developed for this training included plant info as well as legal customer signoffs to enter property and hold harmless recommendations made. This draft form is being used on a pilot basis in a few counties. Written evaluation of the training reveals agent interest in a further training scheduled for July 12 with Ned Tisserat along with various degrees of confidence in offering site calls. This exploratory work by the committee, the pilot training and initial site calls has provided a sound basis for designing a Turf Site Visit Diagnostics Program.

The project is designed to provide both knowledge and opportunities for skill development to staff in a supportive team environment. Professional forms and marketing materials are planned to provide a consistent look and brand identifier. Participating counties will provide this service to clients for a fee, with the goal of expanding this service to other interested counties. Additional training and mentoring of other counties by agents piloting the service will foster skill development and build confidence in being a paid “CSUCE consultant” offering this service. The program can be expanded beyond staff to include training and development of volunteers to multiply the number of field calls per week. The Tri-River area is already using volunteers to conduct site visits on a fee basis in several counties.
What is new, innovative or entrepreneurial about the proposed project?

With population growth and interest in high value turf, site calls for turf diagnostics is an emerging area for Extension to address as a fee for service activity in the Front Range and elsewhere in the state. Professional private consultants are few and a market niche is there for us as a natural outgrowth of our clinic and campus turfgrass education programs.

The project acknowledges the time needed for skill and confidence building of staff and includes a mentoring program to make this happen.

The project provides campus-county team support in developing a professional CSUCE “consulting service” that can be marketed regionally or statewide as a Cooperative Extension activity.

What deliverables (services, events, curricula, or other products) will be generated by this project?

- Turf site visits – fee-based diagnostic service for community
- Marketing materials for diagnostic services, including local services, regional services, and campus services. Materials to include postcards, brochures and newspaper advertisements.
- Web page for marketing turf site visit program that refers requests to appropriate county.
- Turf site visit and customer reply forms with legal statements approved by campus that can be used as a model for future forms that may be developed to expand diagnostic service to the whole landscape, or by agriculture agents and others in making field calls.
- Turf diagnostic training education
- Mentoring program for staff
- Site visit fees to sustain program long-term

VIII. Anticipated Impacts/Outcomes of this Work

List or describe those SHORT-TERM (learning), MID-TERM (action) and LONG-TERM (change in conditions) impacts/outcomes that you expect with this project.

Short term: County staff training in turf diagnostics; standardization of forms, piloting of site visits and forms, and coordination of fee schedules among counties

Mid-term: County staff implements turf site visits with mentoring by pilot county staff to expand program to additional counties; promote consumer awareness of service; partnership development with sod companies for referrals; partnership with the Colorado Association of Lawn Care Professionals (CALCP) turf industry group.

Long term: Volunteer staff training in turf diagnostics; expansion of site visits within participating counties by staff and volunteers; marketing creates increased consumer awareness and use of service.

IX. Partnerships

List/describe partnerships that will be developed or enhanced as a result of your project. These partnerships might include other Federal, state-, or county-funded agencies, foundations, businesses, and CSU departments/faculty that have not historically worked with Cooperative Extension.

- Inter county and county-state staff team building
- Sod farms
- CALCP
- Staff - Master Gardener volunteer relationships
### X. Action Plan, including a Time Line for the Project

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<tr>
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<th>Sep – Feb Yr.1</th>
<th>Mar – Aug Yr.1</th>
<th>Sep – Feb Yr.2</th>
<th>Mar – Aug Yr.2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff development</strong></td>
<td>Fall training day &amp; evaluation</td>
<td>Staff training May &amp; July plus evaluation</td>
<td>Fall training day &amp; evaluation</td>
<td>Staff training May &amp; July &amp; evaluation</td>
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<td>Agent skills assessment</td>
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<td>Agent skills assessment</td>
<td>Volunteer training and mentoring by staff &amp; evaluation</td>
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<td>R.M. Turfgrass Assoc. (RMTA)</td>
<td>RMTA Turfgrass Conference - Dec. - staff encouraged to attend on their own</td>
<td>RMTA Turfgrass Conference - Dec. - participating county staff attends Volunteers for program identified</td>
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<td><strong>Marketing development &amp; implementation</strong></td>
<td>Web page planning and development</td>
<td>Launch web page for marketing</td>
<td>Forms review and printing</td>
<td>Local print media advertisements and articles on service</td>
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<td>Development of brochure of services for use at garden shows, offices and other venues</td>
<td>Local print media advertisements and articles on service</td>
<td>Marketing review and print brochures</td>
<td>Brochure distribution</td>
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<td>Forms development and review</td>
<td>Brochure distribution</td>
<td>Revise and print direct mail postcard</td>
<td>Mail direct mail postcard</td>
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<td>Develop and print direct mail postcard</td>
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<td><strong>Service delivery</strong></td>
<td>4 pilot counties conduct site visits Reporting on first 6 months</td>
<td>Expansion of site visits to eight counties Mentoring of new county staff Reporting on year one</td>
<td>Late fall site visits Reporting on first 6 months of year two</td>
<td>Expansion of site visit services via volunteers Reporting on year two and summary of two year project results</td>
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### XI. Evaluation Plan to Document Outcomes/Impacts

Written training evaluation to determine staff knowledge gained and comfort level over time will be used to measure success of staff training, as well as help set target areas for upcoming trainings.

Before and after skill assessment of staff will be accomplished using lab and field exercises during each training session for checking immediate skills gained, plus a end-of-season skills assessment in the fall to measure long-term skills gained from previous classes.
In order to measure the economic success of the project, the number of site visits made and fees generated by participating counties will be counted. Goals for increasing participation and/or fees generated will be set yearly by the group, and mid-season assessment of success in achieving the goals will be reviewed.

Marketing success will be measured by phone, face to face and actively submitted web inquiries received about our service, based upon customer response to question of ‘how did you hear of our service’.

XII. **Sustainability Statement**

*How will the project continue to operate after this start-up funding period concludes?*

Participating counties will utilize funds from site visits to cover training costs including materials fees, travel and lodging.

Establishment of a marketing fund with contributions from each participating county for upkeep of webpage; printing of marketing brochures, and printing of paid advertisements in newspapers.

Forms will be locally reproduced by participating counties

*Beyond being self-supporting as grant funding concludes, how will this project generate additional revenue for CSU and/or Cooperative Extension?*

Potential for fee-generated revenue: Should staff be able to conduct two to three visits per week at $75 per hour, resulting in a minimum of $600 - $900 per month that can be generated over the growing season, which extends from April through September, totaling $3600 - $5400 per county.

For season one in Front Range: 4 pilot counties = $14,400 – $21,600.

For season two, expansion to seven counties with demographics to support hourly fee: $25,200 – $37,800 annually.

When volunteers are trained to expand the program, a potential for doubling services to six field calls per week is anticipated, for a seasonal total of $10,800 per county. Larger counties with greater demand may generate higher amounts.

Season three with expansion of service via volunteers over seven counties = $75,600 annually.

*Describe how and where revenue generated by this project will be used?*

A share to be used by counties for continuing staff training, forms printing, diagnostic equipment and supplies.

A share to be contributed by counties to general multi-county program marketing.

A share to be used to pay for mileage in mentoring other county staff and training volunteers in further program expansion.

Counties may chose to apply additional funds to user fees submitted to campus.

Local control over funds generated to be maintained by each county.

XIII. **Funding Request and Budget Narrative (separate page)**

*Total request (limit of two years) not to exceed $15,000; expenditures not to exceed $7500/year.*

List time and effort for any salary dollars; briefly explain how and when dollars for travel, supplies, and equipment will be expended.
Year 1 Budget

Personnel costs
   Website Design Consultant  50 hrs @ $50.00/hr $2500

Travel
   Mileage for trainees  600 miles @ .44.5 per mile $267
   Lodging/meals for 2 staff x 3 training days @ $120 $720

Operating Costs: Advertising and Marketing
   Brochure printing – four color, twofold, glossy 1000 per year $670
   Direct mail of postcards in select ZIP codes $168
   .06 each 14 ZIP codes
   Post card 4”x6” printing 2800 $285
   Forms printing carbonless paper 2000 $181
   Newspaper ads 4x month in 2 Denver metro papers $2400
   2 by 3 ad includes design @ $600 per time
   Internet domain name purchase $80
   Supplies – books, shovels, etc. $200

Total Year I Project Costs $7471

Year II Budget

Travel
   Mileage for trainees  600 miles @ .44.5 per mile $267
   Lodging/meals for 2 staff x 3 training days @ $120 $720

Operating Costs: Advertising and Marketing
   RMTA Turfgrass Conference registration 12 staff x $175 $2100
   Brochure printing – four color, twofold, glossy 1000 per year $670
   Direct mail of postcards in select ZIP codes $218
   .06 each 14 ZIP codes
   Post card 4”x6” printing 2800 $285
   Newspaper ads 4x month in 2 Denver metro papers $2600
   2 by 3 ad includes design @ $600 per time
   Forms printing carbonless paper 2,000 $181
   Internet domain name annual fee $30
   Supplies – books, shovels, etc. $400

Total Year II Project Costs $7471

Two Year Project Costs: $14,942
Budget Justification:

**Personnel Costs**
The turf site visit diagnostics project requests funds to support a website design consultant to work with the team on design of a marketing site that can allow people to submit site visit requests via the web. The website consultant will have expertise in web design, programming and maintenance.  **Total costs for year one: $2500.**

**Travel**
The turf site visit diagnostics project requests a total of **$1974** in travel costs for two years. Lodging and mileage is budgeted for trainees from distant counties to attend three training sessions yearly for updates and skills development. Year I: 600 miles @ $267, lodging and meals for 2 staff for 3 training days x $120 per person $720. Year II: 600 miles @ $267, lodging and meals for 2 staff for 3 training days x $120 per person $720. **Total costs for two years: $1974.**

**Direct Operating**
The turf site visit diagnostics project requests a total of **$10,468** in operating costs for two years.

Print media purchases will be used to place four weekly advertisements in the Denver Post and Rocky Mountain News Grow and Dig gardening sections. Year I: Newspaper advertising: $2,400. Year II: $2,600 to allow for advertising rate increases. **Total costs over two years $5,000.**

Direct mail advertising will be sent to 200 addresses in two ZIP codes of participating counties in both years. The direct mail pieces will be 4x6 inch postcards, with postage costs at $.06 each. Postcard printing 2800 pieces $285. Postage for mailing 2800 pieces at $.06 each $168 first year and $218 second year to allow for postage increases. **Total costs for 2 years: $956.**

A brochure of services will be developed and printed to market the diagnostic services available by counties, regional plant labs, and the CSU plant pathology campus lab. The brochure will be printed in four color ink on glossy paper. Twofold. One thousand brochures will be printed each year. Year I: printing $670. Year II: printing $670. **Total costs over two years: $1340.**

An internet domain name along the lines of “csulawncheck.org” will be purchased for marketing purposes at cost of $80 and renewed for $30. **Total cost for 2 years $110.**

Site visit forms will be printed for use by county staff when making calls to sites. Forms will give a consistent, professional look to all participating offices. Two thousand copies per year will be printed. Year I: printing $181. Year II: printing $181. **Total costs over two years: $362.**

Twelve staff registrations will be paid to the Rocky Mountain Turfgrass Association Annual Turfgrass Conference in Denver in year II. At $175 apiece, cost for 12 staff is **$2100.**

Supplies including books and other training materials plus shovels for site visit investigation are requested. Year I $200 and year II when additional staff and volunteers come on board, $400. **Two year total $600.**