Buncombe County Small Farms Initiative Updates

The Small Farms Initiative is now in full swing having had 3 informational meetings in Buncombe County. The best attended meeting was this past Sunday at Britain Cove Presbyterian Church on Dula Springs Rd. in Weaverville, with 42 in attendance. Thanks go to the coordinators of this event for gathering the community together and really making something happen! It looks as though we’ll be planning some small fruit production and marketing trainings for this group—10 farmers expressed interest in growing blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, strawberries or grapes. The other popular potential enterprises for this group include production and marketing of organic vegetables, cut flowers, medicinal herbs, mushrooms, poultry, and goats. Four farms signed up to participate in the Edible and Medicinal mushroom project (see p. 3). And 3 farms are interested in pursuing production of value-added products at Blue Ridge Food Ventures.

We will continue to visit communities in the county—let us hear from you if a group of farmers is interested in learning about the small farms initiative, and the possibility of having workshops, trainings, or farm field days/demonstrations in your area. Black Mountain? Swannanoa? Spring Mountain? Cane Creek? Fairview? Leicester? Call Jean at 255-5522 to schedule a meeting for morning, afternoon, or evening.

Another important event for small farmers in November was the Asheville City Market Informational Meeting for producers/vendors of produce, meat, eggs, prepared foods, and arts/crafts. Mike McCreary (Market Manager) and Peter Marks of Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project led the meeting, addressing the questions and concerns of potential vendors. A proposed timeline was presented for completing the rules and regulations for the market, with a membership meeting and election scheduled for March 6, 2008.

The market will open on April 19 at 8:00 a.m. and will run until the Saturday before Christmas. Market hours are 8-1. The proposed annual membership fee is $100 and members will pay an additional weekly fee ranging from $20-$30 depending on the product being sold. Day vendor spaces will be allotted as available for $35/day. Vendors must be the producer of items sold or a listed representative.

If you have any questions or would like a vendor application, contact Mike McCreary at mike@asapconnections.org or 236-1282.
**AgOptions Grants for Farmers: Deadline January 25, 2008**

The WNC AgOptions program is once again offering minigrants to farmers for assistance with crop diversification or agritourism ventures. The program focuses on developing economically sustainable ag enterprises in the 15 westernmost mountain counties of WNC, including the Cherokee Reservation.

Sixteen $2500 grants and twenty-two $5000 grants will be distributed to grantees with high quality projects that increase diversification of farm operations and expand agricultural enterprises.

All grant recipients will be required to attend an “Agribusiness Management and Planning” workshop within their geographic region during the late winter of 2008. The recipients of the larger grants ($5000) must complete and submit a “Formal Farm Business Management Plan.” Training will be provided by NC A&T, NCSU, and Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP).

Who should apply? Farmers who would like to supplement their agricultural income through agricultural tourism ventures and/or a diversified mix of agricultural commodity production.

What can grant funds be spent on? Suitable expenses are those associated with the production and marketing of diversified farm enterprises and agritourism endeavors; examples include, but are not limited to: seeds, fertilizer, plants, amendments, animals, trainings, advertisements, packaging, fences, signage, facilities, supplies, tools, and specialized equipment.

Applications will be available in December, 2007 and the deadline for submission is January 25, 2008. To get an application, contact your county agent. (Buncombe: Jean Harrison, 255-5522 or jean_harrison@ncsu.edu).

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**Workshop for the Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) Program and the Section 9006 Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Program**

NC Cooperative Extension Service and USDA-Rural Development are holding a free workshop on Dec. 10 at the Burke County Extension Office in Morganton from 1-4:30 pm for those that are interested in the Value-Added Producer Grant and Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Improvements Programs. This past year, five recipients from North Carolina received almost $1,000,000 in grant awards for value-added enterprises. The grant awards ranged from $19,500 to $300,000. North Carolina also received 23 Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Awards including approximately $500,000 in grants and over $10.2 million in loan guarantees.

If you are interested in grant opportunities for value-added enterprises or loan/grant programs for renewable energy and energy efficiency improvements, you will want to attend this workshop. The workshop will also include tips on preparing a grant application. While the notice soliciting applications is not out yet, prospective applicants should be planning now! This will allow those interested to obtain assistance in completing or reviewing your application and possibly avoid mistakes caused by last minute preparation of the application.

The Edible and Medicinal Mushroom Project at NC A&T State University is once again offering free shiitake mushroom spawn to growers who follow the requirements below:

1. You must live in North Carolina.
2. You must attend an inoculation workshop. The WNC workshop will be held at Ray-Cort Rec. Park in Burnsville on January 23.
3. You must cut and inoculate a minimum of 200 logs in the first year.
4. You must purchase your own tools and materials for inoculation including drill bit, inoculation plunger, and cheese wax and can be purchased at one of the following: fieldforest.net, mushroompeople.com, fungiperfecti.com. Plan on spending between $100 and $150.
5. Sign a consent form in which you agree to: provide information about your production; provide sales records which are used solely for program assessment; share acquired knowledge with other farmers who might be interested in learning from you.
6. At least once a year, you will be required to complete a survey.

Oak logs are recommended for this project. Cut your logs from live trees only when the leaves are down; inoculate within 3 weeks of cutting.

Requests for spawn orders should be made through your county agent by December 30, 2007 for delivery during the Jan-March 2008 inoculation period. For more info about the project, contact your county extension agent.

2008 Western North Carolina Shiitake Mushroom Workshop

Join NC Cooperative Extension for the 2008 WNC Shiitake Mushroom workshop on Wednesday, January 23, 2008 from 1-3 pm at Ray-Cort Rec. Park in Burnsville. This will be a demonstration workshop for anyone who would like to learn how to inoculate logs with shiitake mushroom spawn. All attendees are asked to bring 2 oak logs, fresh cut within 2-3 weeks of the workshop. The oak logs should be 4-8 inches in diameter and 4 ft. long. Each person will inoculate their own logs to take home. DO NOT BRING MORE THAN TWO LOGS TO THE WORKSHOP. IF YOU BRING MORE, WE WILL ASK YOU TO EITHER DONATE THEM TO THOSE ATTENDEES THAT HAVE COME WITHOUT LOGS, OR LEAVE THEM IN YOUR VEHICLE. To register for the workshop, call Jean Harrison at 255-5522 or jean_harrison@ncsu.edu. Ray-Cort Park is located at 315 Mitchell Branch Rd., off of N. Main Street in Burnsville. Bundle up, we'll be outdoors!
Marketing Tool: Appalachian Grown

Do you grow food or agricultural products on a family farm in western North Carolina or the Southern Appalachian Mountains? If so, you are eligible to be certified by the Appalachian Grown program offered by the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project. What this means is that once you are certified, your product can be labeled with the Appalachian Grown logo, either as a sticker on cases of wholesale produce, or in poster form for use in tailgate markets or groceries. When consumers see this logo, they will immediately know that the product they are buying was grown or raised by a local farmer. They will know that the product is fresher, better tasting and nutritious, and that they are supporting a local food system that supports the local economy, helping to preserve farmland, preserving the farm heritage of Appalachia, and protecting our mountain landscapes. To learn more about this program, go to http://asapconnections.org/AG/AppalachianGrown.html or call Peter at 236-1282.

Marketing Tool: The New Farm Locator

Check out this site where you can list your farm for free and consumers can do a search based on state/county to find you. Farms that raise produce, dairy/eggs, meat, value-added products, and herbs or seeds, or that offer services or agritourism opportunities are included.

The New Farm Locator has recently added businesses like restaurants, retail stores, institutional buyers and other food businesses interested in purchasing products from local farmers, so the site has the potential for matching farms with buyers.

Farmers need to get listed on this site, and buyers need to be made aware that this matchmaking resource is available to them. Currently there are only four Buncombe County farms taking advantage of this free marketing tool, and no businesses have been listed yet—but just a few phone calls can change that! Spread the word to business owners and farmers and let the matchmaking begin!

Here's the site: http://www.newfarm.org/farmlocator/?type=cons&tab=consumer_seeking_farmer#consumer
The Buncombe County Chapter of the NC Beekeepers Assoc. is accepting reservations for the Beginning Beekeepers’ School which is scheduled for Feb. 2, 3, 9 and 10 at the Folk Art Center. Register online at wncbees.org or call the Buncombe County Extension office at 255-5522.


Jan 11-13, 2008: SE Regional Fruit & Vegetable Conference, Savannah International Trade and Convention Center, Savannah, GA. 877-994-3842 or www.gfvga.org, for more info.


Jan 23: WNC Shiitake Inoculation Workshop, Ray-Cort Park, 315 Mitchell Branch Rd., Burnsville. 1-3 pm. Call Jean Harrison at 255-5522 to register (see p. 3 for workshop description).


Feb. 12-14, 2008: Acidified Foods Processing and Packaging, Better Process Control School. Haynes Conference Center at A-B Tech Enka Campus. Call Lisa Gordon, Department of Food Science at 919-515-2956 or lisa_gordon@ncsu.edu


March 6, 2008: Asheville City Market membership meeting, elections. Call Mike at 236-1282.


Buncombe County Small Farms Initiative

More and more farmers have been sharing with our agents that they desire to continue to farm, but are desperately looking for ways to increase the income from their farming operation to preserve the farm. With the support of our Buncombe County Commissioners and County Management, Cooperative Extension is initiating a program to aggressively work to help farmers diversify their operations, add value to their products or market products differently in order to increase the income from their operations.

Individuals with disabilities who would like to participate in any program mentioned in this newsletter, but who need special assistance to do so, should call the Extension Center at 828-255-5522 at least five days prior to the event.