Small Farm News

Buncombe County Small Farms Initiative Updates

The New Year is well underway and our office has been abuzz with people calling and dropping by with questions about their AgOptions grant proposals. The grants were reviewed this week, and letters will be going out the first week of February to announce the outcome to each applicant.

Numerous educational opportunities are planned over the next few months to stimulate your interest in new enterprises and/or new ways to market. **WNC Winter Vegetable Conference** will be held on Feb. 20-21 (Wed.-Thurs) at the Crowne Plaza Resort in Asheville (formerly Sunspree). Next, be sure to check out the **ASAP Marketing Conference** on Saturday, Feb. 23 at Warren Wilson College—details on page 5. Buncombe County Extension has developed a farm diversification track for this conference that has sessions on heirloom tomatoes, medicinal herbs, marketing nursery crops, pastured poultry, alternative Christmas tree options—and for folks getting started in berry production, you won’t want to miss Walter Harrill’s session on the finances of berry management. We have included a registration form in this newsletter to make things easier for you—also, ask me if you are interested in getting a scholarship for this conference, there are still plenty available. Don’t let the cost of the conference keep you from going—it is WELL worth the money and they feed you a delicious, locally grown lunch too!

On Saturday, March 8, attend the **Organic Grower’s School** see p. 3.

As for updates for the Small Farms Initiative, we have been fortunate to have received additional financial support this month. One is a grant from the **NC Specialty Crops Program** that will help us with financing the educational programs that you have requested. Funds will be used for paying speakers’ stipends, travel, and for library resources. If there are specific speakers you would like for us to invite, or books/resources that you think would be useful for us to have, please let me know.

The other was additional funding from Buncombe County to: (1) enable us to conduct a feasibility study for production of local milk, and (2) to conduct four demonstrations in Buncombe County on enterprises with potential profitability.

And lastly, we are making plans to start up the Small Farms Initiative website! The website will take a while to establish, but will provide WNC farmers with resources and information that is relevant to our region. We need recommendations for a new name for the initiative—something catchy, but that demonstrates the regional nature of the mountains. Send your suggestions to me (Jean) at Jean_Harrison@ncsu.edu or call 255-5522.

NC State and NC A&T State Universities commit themselves to positive action to secure equal opportunity regardless of race, color, creed, national origin, religion, sex, age, or disability. In addition, the two universities welcomes all persons without regard to sexual orientation. North Carolina State University, North Carolina A&T State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments cooperating.
Farm Outreach Project at Blue Ridge Food Ventures

Blue Ridge Food Ventures, the kitchen incubator located in Enka, is pleased to inform you about its new effort to help local farmers turn their excess produce into jars of tomato sauce, pints of apple butter or other products. The project goal is to help farmers develop value-added products to sell alongside their fresh local produce, which would in return supply the community with locally-produced foods well beyond the typical growing season here in the mountains.

The team consists of Project Manager, Laura Dominkovic; Product Developer, Jill Frazer; and Packaging and Marketing Specialist, Meredith Lovejoy. They are working together with the Small Farms Initiative of Buncombe County Cooperative Extension and ASAP.

The project objectives include:

- Identify small farmers who are interested in producing value-added products.
- Develop new shelf-stable products that are made from locally-available ingredients.
- Improve understanding of farmers’ goals, needs and constraints in order to learn about ways in which the facility could better assist WNC farmers in adding value and marketing their value-added products for defined markets, including local schools and institutions.
- Identify farmers’ needs for training classes and provide the necessary education.
- Identify what new equipment BRFV needs to purchase in order to meet the identified needs for production and packaging.
- Develop cost-effective packaging and labeling for the new products.

To find out more about Blue Ridge Food Ventures, go to: [www.blueridgefoodventures.org](http://www.blueridgefoodventures.org).

If you are a farmer and interested in exploring adding value to your produce, please contact Laura Dominkovic at (828) 665-9464 or katarinald@gmail.com.

For more information on the Buncombe County Small Farms Initiative, contact Jean Harrison at (828) 255-5522.

Value-Added Producer Grant Deadline March 31, 2008

The much-anticipated "Announcement of Value-Added Producer Grant Application Deadlines" was published in the Federal Register this morning. The following website will be updated soon and you are encouraged to utilize the templates, guides, and checklists, available there:


This year, applications must be submitted to the North Carolina Rural Development State Office, 4405 Bland Rd., Suite 260, Raleigh, NC, 27609 by the deadline published in the notice, March 31, 2008.

If you are not already working on your proposal, we cannot overemphasize how important it is to get started immediately to ensure that you will have sufficient time to complete and review your application.

Please read the announcement very carefully and strictly adhere to the application deadline and submission requirements. Bruce Pleasant, (919) 873-2031, will be glad to review any applications for eligibility and completeness prior to the deadline but please leave sufficient time to make any changes necessary to ensure your application will be considered.
Thanks to a new rule, a “grass fed” label on packages of beef, along with “USDA Process Verified,” means that the meat came from animals that actually ate grass and had access to pastures during the growing season. We checked whether it’s worth paying for the beef, sold at some supermarkets, natural-food stores, and online.

The claim. Beef from cattle raised on grass is better for you than beef from corn and grain-fed animals, says the American Grassfed Association, a trade group, and raising cattle on grass is better for the environment.

CR’s take. This beef could have benefits. The limited research completed to date suggests that steak and hamburger from grass-fed cattle may contain less total fat per serving, according to a review by the nonprofit Union of Concerned Scientists. Grass-fed steaks can also have higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids, which can lower heart disease risk. Grass-fed ground beef usually has more conjugated linoleic acid, which might improve the immune system and help fight cancer, atherosclerosis, and type 2 diabetes, lab and animal studies show. And raising cattle on well-managed pastures can lessen erosion and boost soil fertility, the scientists’ group found.

Independent Small Animal Producers Educational Workshop
March 29, 2008 in Marion

Interested in learning about processing poultry (chickens, turkeys, guineas) or rabbits? Come to the Small Animal Producers Educational Workshop at McDowell Community College on March 29. The workshop will include sessions on Market Opportunities, Best Management Practices for poultry and rabbits, Insurance Issues, Meat Handler’s Licenses, An Overview of the Regulatory Environment, and a review of the planned processing plant in Marion. Our invited speaker at lunch, Dr. James McNitt, Southern University and A&M College, will discuss “The future of independent meat production and the role of service providers”. For more information about this workshop see the McDowell County Center or contact Smithson Mills at Smithson@smithsonmills.com.

Cool Sites:
Small Organic Farms & Local Markets
How to Assess Organic Compliance: A Tool for Market Growers, Market Managers, Produce Buyers, Extension Agents, and Others
see: http://www.kerrcenter.com/

Cooking Demonstrations: Providing the perfect ingredients to season your farmers’ market http://www.kansasruralcenter.org/publications/ChefDemo.pdf
WESTERN NC HEIRLOOM APPLES AVAILABLE FOR SALE, SPRING 2008

The **Avery County Cooperative Extension Office** will be offering several heirloom apple varieties for sale this spring. All apple trees will be semi-dwarf, will reach 10-15 feet in height and need to be planted 15-20 feet apart. The apple trees are one year old grafts and will be approximately 4-6 feet tall. They are all grafted on MM111 Rootstock.

**MM111 qualities include:**
- Quite disease resistant (not immune)
- Can withstand wet spells (but can still be drowned)
- Can withstand moderate drought conditions
- Produces a tree about 15 feet tall (manageable for most purposes)
- Will usually produce fruit in 3-6 years (2-3 years sooner than standard rootstock)

The following varieties are available:

**Early:**
- **Early Harvest** (Yellow June, Yellow Harvest and Yellow Juneating)
- **Yellow Transparent** (Early Transparent, Russian Transparent)
- **Striped June** (Bevan’s Favorite, Bivins and Early Bevan)

**Golden Sweet** (Golden Sweet, Early Golden Sweet And Summer Sweet)

**Mid-Summer and Early Fall Apples:**
- **Summer Banana**
- **Wolf River**
- **Gala** (not heirloom)
- **Rusty Coat** (Golden Russet, Sweet Rusty Coat)
- **Grimes Golden** (Grimes Golden Pippin and Bellflower)
- **Virginia Beauty**

**Late Fall and Winter Keepers:**
- **Old Fashioned Winesap** (Holland’s Red Winter, Blacktwig and Winter Winesap)
- **Mammoth Blacktwig** (Blacktwig, Paragon and Arkansas)
- **Limbertwigs**
- **Royal Limbertwig** (Carolina Baldwin)

If you’d like more information on these heirloom apple varieties or would like to find out how to order them, contact the Avery County Cooperative Extension Center at 828-733-8270.
Attend the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project’s 5th annual day-long Marketing Opportunities for Farmers Conference on **Saturday, February 23** at Warren Wilson College. This conference is a day well spent for experienced and new farmers as it provides opportunities to learn about local markets and to network with other farmers, buyers, and ag professionals. This year, Buncombe County Cooperative Extension will be offering an educational track within the conference, “Increase your Profits through Farm Diversification”. Sessions within this track will include marketing information for the following enterprises:

- Alternative Christmas Tree Options
- Marketing Your Nursery Crops
- Eeny, Meeny, Miney, Money…. The Finances of Berry Management
- Is the Past Part of Your Future? It Can be with Organic Heirloom Tomatoes!

Other sessions at the conference will include Farm Business Planning, Community Supported Agriculture, Tailgate Markets, Farm to School, Wholesaling to Local Markets and Supermarkets, Season Extension, and Marketing Safe Food. For more information about the sessions offered and for a registration form, see [http://asapconnections.org/marketingconference.htm](http://asapconnections.org/marketingconference.htm)

Conference cost: $30 per person or $40 per two farm partners. The price includes a continental breakfast and lunch of locally-grown food.

Scholarships available (call ASAP at 828/236-1282 or Jean at 255-5522).

Workshops Being Planned for Farmers Considering Transitioning to Organic Production

The Small Farms Initiative is teaming up with the Organic Grower’s School to provide growers with two educational workshops geared towards answering the most common questions growers have about transitioning to organic production. The first workshop will be focused on organic certification, covering topics such as the definition of organic agriculture, costs of certification, pros and cons to certifying some of all of your farm, what to expect from an organic inspector, and more. The second session will deal with marketing your organic products—getting organic prices for organic produce, marketing options in WNC (direct and wholesale sales) and business and new enterprise planning resources. As soon as we identify the dates for these workshops, we will let you know!

In the meantime, be sure and attend the Organic Grower’s School on March 8—you are certain to find numerous courses to spark your interest. See page 3 for more information, or [www.organicgrowersschool.org](http://www.organicgrowersschool.org) for details on the sessions and workshops.
Many of you plan to set out blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries this year. Did you know that the most critical year in fruit production is the year prior to planting? Important steps need to be addressed, such as selection of planting site, nutrient amendments based on soil testing, elimination of noxious weeds, and facilitation of good air drainage.

When selecting a site for your planting, choose a site that allows for cold air to drain out (continues to slope below the planting). Don’t plant in a “frost pocket”. Remove any barriers to good air flow out of the planting, such as hedgerows, fencerows, etc. and make a break in the planting row every 300-400 feet. Eliminate wet areas in fields by ditching or tile drainage.

Site selection should also include consideration of aspect. Selecting a field with a north or northeast aspect can cause a delay in bloom, which is advantageous during those times when we have a premature warm-up in the spring. Planting on a site with a south or southeast aspect can cause plants to bloom earlier. South-facing plantings have greater potential for winter injury and frost damage. East facing plantings allow for early drying of plants in the day, reducing disease pressure.

By now you should have submitted soil samples from the areas where you are considering planting. During this time of year, the soil testing lab is getting very busy and there is a slower turnaround for results. Important soil characteristics that deserve immediate attention include phosphorus and soil acidity, as these both are best adjusted before the plants are in the ground. The desirable pH range for blueberries is 4.8-5.2 (optimum 5.0), raspberries 5.5-7.0 (optimum 6.5), and blackberries 4.5-7.5 (optimum 6.2). For blueberries especially, it is important that you pay attention to pH, as having too high a pH can negatively affect production for the life of the plants. It is much easier to lower the pH before you set out your blueberry plants.

For noxious weed control, it is also easier to eliminate those weeds before you plant. There are few herbicides labeled for young plantings. Organic approaches to weed control include cultivation, mulching (includes organic materials, plastic, or fabric), mowing, flame cultivation, and OMNRI approved organic “burn down” materials.

If you haven’t yet submitted a soil sample, come by the Extension office and pick up some boxes, a form, and instructions. This is one way to assure your plants will get off to a good, healthy start and will produce an optimal harvest. Please call our office if you have further questions. We are planning some small fruit trainings this year, but the points listed above need to be dealt with pronto!

Call if you have questions: 255-5522.
Feb. 5: Asheville City Market farmer/vendor info. mtg, Public Works Building, S. Charlotte St., 7-9 pm. Call Mike McCreary at 236-1282 for info.

Feb. 5: Natural Products Business: How to Successfully Sell Your Herbal Products to Retailers. 128 Haynes Conference Center at A-B Tech Enka Campus, 6-9 pm. See http://www.abtech.edu/sbc/class_schedule.asp

Feb. 12-14: 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

Feb. 16: NC Meat Goat Producers Meeting, Catawba County Extension Office, Newton 1 pm. For more information, call 336-573-4155.

Feb 19: WNC Livestock Producers Meeting, Mountain Horticultural Crops Research and Extension Center, 7-8:30 pm.


Feb. 21-22: Regional Landscape Maintenance Workshop, Mtn. Hort. Crops Research Station, 8:30-4pm. See http://henderson.ces.ncsu.edu/content/LandscapeMaintenanceWorkshop or call Amanda Stone at 255-5522.


Feb. 25: Sheep & Goat Meeting, Forsyth Ag Building, Winston-Salem. 7-8:30 pm. Contact Amy at 336-593-8179.


Feb. 28-March 1: Georgia Organics Conference, NW GA Trade and Convention Center, Dalton, GA. www.georgiaorganics.org/conference

March 8: Organic Grower’s School. www.organicgrowersschool.org or call Jean at 255-5522 for a registration form.


May 1: Swine Husbandry for Outdoor Production Systems, Rowan County Extension office, Salisbury, 9-4.
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.

Jean Harrison
Extension Agent
Agriculture-Small Farms

http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu