Three Farms Awarded AgOptions Grants.

The Small Farms Initiative would like to congratulate the three Buncombe County farms that were awarded $5000 AgOptions grants for 2008: Flying Cloud Farm (adding value to farm products), Gaining Ground Farm (season extension of vegetables), and Southeastern Natives (nursery crops). These are all very innovative projects that we’ll be watching closely over the next year. Be on the lookout for future tours of these farms and others in the 16 WNC counties where grants were awarded.

Other farm tours to look for in the upcoming season will be tours of demonstrations partly funded by Buncombe County, where visitors will be able to view poultry, field grown/container nursery, medicinal herb, and organic vegetable production.

As the season turns to spring, farmers are full of new ideas—many of those ideas were likely sparked by attending two really great conferences in the area over the past month: ASAP’s Marketing Conference for Farmers, and the annual Organic Grower’s School. Both events had excellent turnout with a lot of new faces, an indication that farming is gaining interest in WNC.

One question that growers seem to battle with but tend to have few resources for is whether or not to become organically certified. The Small Farms Initiative is teaming up with the Organic Grower’s School to conduct a two part workshop in April to address these issues. For more information see Page 2.
Is Organic Certification Right for you and Your Farm?

Have you been considering becoming certified organic but need more information? Do you find all of those rules and regulations confusing? Or maybe you just want to find out what the market potential is for certified organic products.

Join the Buncombe County Small Farms Initiative and the Organic Grower’s School for a two part workshop series that aims to address some of the barriers that farmers encounter when trying to decide if they should become certified. In the first workshop, a panel of organic farmers and an organic inspector from the area will be on hand to address what certification means, associated costs, inspectors and what to expect from them, and pros and cons to certifying all or some of your farm. The second workshop will focus on organic marketing, or getting organic prices for organic produce, marketing options in WNC for organic products, direct sales versus wholesale (large and small), plus an overview of business and new enterprise planning resources.

Workshop 1: Organic Certification: April 17, 5:30-7:30 pm

Workshop 2: Organic Marketing: TBA, 5:30-7:30 pm

Hops Production in WNC

Anyone interested in learning more about hops production in WNC? I've had several inquiries through the extension office, and thought possibly we could arrange a gathering sometime over the next month or so for interested farmers to get together and exchange notes. I have SOME production information to get folks started, such as site selection, trellis construction, and some information on varieties. Plus in our humid, rainy part of the US we will have diseases to deal with. Farmers probably need to just try a small area testing a few different varieties at first. If you are interested in getting together to exchange hops info, call Jean at 255-5522. Depending on the number of calls I get, I’ll arrange a meeting here at the Extension office in Asheville.

Agritourism

Aided by North Carolina Cooperative Extension’s efforts, agritourism - farm-related entertainment or educational enterprises that often also promote agricultural products to generate more farm income - remains a force in our economy.

The state Tourism, Films and Sports Development Division estimates that more than 49 million visitors spent $13.3 billion in North Carolina in 2004, the most recent year for which we have statistics.

Martha Glass, manager of the Agritourism Office in the state Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services’ marketing division, says while we won't get our first statistical reading on agritourism’s contribution to our economy until October, "We do know that many agritourism farmers have reported that they are continuing to be more successful, and we don't hear of any going out of business."

The 2008 Asheville City Market Annual Meeting and Vendor Orientation is scheduled for Saturday, March 22nd, from 9-11 am. This meeting will be held at the Market site, 161 S. Charlotte Street, and should be attended by both Market members and day vendors.

All vendor applications received by March 17th will be processed with Vendor Agreements in place prior to the 22nd. Unpaid annual membership fees ($100) will be due and payable at the meeting. If you have any questions regarding a pending application, please contact Mike McCreary to confirm its status. Note: applications received after March 17th will not be processed in time for applicants to participate in the Oversight Committee election.

The agenda for the Annual Meeting will include distribution of ballots for the election of the 2008 Oversight Committee. Seven vendor representatives will be elected to the Oversight Committee including five farm vendors, one value-added/prepared foods vendor, and one art/craft vendor. Three of the elected vendor representatives will serve for one year and four will serve for two years. If you are a Market member and would be willing to have your name placed on the Oversight Committee ballot, respond to Mike McCreary no later than March 17th. The Oversight Committee election is limited to member vendors; day vendors may not vote or serve. Ballots must be completed at the Annual Meeting or mailed to the ASAP office, postmarked no later than March 28th.

Vendor Orientation will include a review of the site use plan and a preview of initial vendor space assignments. It would be helpful for vendors to bring their market vehicles if possible, to help anticipate spacing and placement. Additional Vendor information will also be provided and time allowed for questions and answers. The Market Manager will be available into the afternoon to speak with any vendors who would like to stay for extended questions and answers specific to their booth/vending.

To summarize:

Applications are due by March 17th for member participation in the 2008 Oversight Committee election.

- Annual Meeting and Vendor Orientation at the Market site on March 22nd, from 9:00 to 11:00am
- Unpaid membership fees due and payable at the Annual Meeting
- Oversight Committee ballot to be distributed at the Meeting, due postmarked no later than March 28th
- Those willing to have their name placed on the ballot must respond to this email by March 17th.
- A Vendor Orientation will follow the Annual Meeting - vendors are encouraged to bring their market vehicles

The Market Manager will be available after the Orientation to answer individual vendor questions.

Mike McCreary, Market Manager
Asheville City Market
828-348-0340
mike@asapconnections.org
Market Ideas

♦ The Riceville Tailgate Market is seeking vendors to join the market, which will open on May 17th. If you are interested, please contact Katy Estrada either via email at katyestrada@care2.com or by phone at 296-0383.

♦ Anyone that might be interested in selling vegetables/fruits/herbs to Givens Estates residents on a weekly basis, please contact Jean Harrison at 255-5522. Many of the residents do not drive, and so this would give them an opportunity to buy fresh vegetables right at their door.

♦ All area wholesale nursery and greenhouse growers are invited to "come over the mountain" to a trade show that is being held in the Tri Cities (Kingsport, Johnson City, Bristol area) on March 17th from 10 to 3. Setup is 7:30 a.m. Monday morning. Each grower will get a 10x10 feet area plus one 8 ft. table. THERE IS NO CHARGE for this program and there is even free food and refreshments. Area landscapers (potential buyers) have been invited to attend and will offer three points in pesticide re-certification if they attend the 3 educational programs held near the trade show area. Growers should bring a representative sample of what they grow and a price list or inventory listing to hand out. Any questions: call Hugh Conlon at 423-753-1680 or e-mail hconlon1@utk.edu

♦ Poppies Market in Brevard and NCA&T State University are planning a "Locavore's Lunch" and Small Farms Market for Sat. May 10. If you are interested in setting up a stall/booth at Poppies to sell your locally-grown food/products, RSVP to busybeefarm@gmail.com by Friday, April 11. Space is limited, so first come, first served! Schedule follows:

11am - 3pm - Farmers' Market in the parking lot of Poppies (No site fee or commission - Poppies just wants farmers to be there!)

12pm - Locavore Lunch available to the public - Burgers and Goat Cheese/Veggie Flatbreads

Cool sites:

♦ 2008 Vegetable Crop Handbook for the South-eastern US is available for download on the front page of http://ncspecialtycrops.org

♦ Try out a produce profitability calculator at: http://www.extension.iastate.edu/hrim/localfoods/calculator/index.cfm?fa=c.formLogin

♦ Weed Management on Organic Farms (AG-659-07W) is online at http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/PDFs/WeedMgmtJan808Accessible.pdf

♦ 2008 Renewable Energy Workshops: http://www.wind.appstate.edu/
March 22: Asheville City Market Meeting, 9-11 am, 161 S. Charlotte St. See p. 3 for more info.


March 29: Dehydration seminar, Angel’s Nest Farm, Oxford, NC, 9-12. Growers who wish to sell dehydrated fruits and vegetables as value-added products are invited to attend a dehydration seminar, conducted by Mr. Dave Stone, of Commercial Dehydrator Systems, Eugene. Limited to 40 people, pre-registration required by calling Granville County Extension at 919-603-1350.


April 12: Haywood County Spring Auction, new and used farm machinery and equipment (tractors, trucks, trailers, implements, tillers, hand tools, mowers, etc.) Gate will open at 6:00 am, Auction at 9:00 am. Haywood County Fairgrounds on Hwy 209, exit 24 or 27 off I-40. TO MAKE CONSIGNMENTS, CALL 828-456-3575 WITH INFORMATION BEFORE APRIL 1ST.


April 17: Small Business Jump-Start Day, Haynes Conference Center, A-B Tech, Enka Campus, 4-7 pm. No registration required. For more info see: http://abtech.edu/sbc/jumpstart.asp.


May 10: Locavore’s lunch and Small Farms Market, Poppie’s Market, Brevard. Sell your local food products (11-3pm)—no fees. For more info contact busybeefarm@gmail.com.

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.