Buncombe County Small Farm Initiative Updates

The Small Farm Initiative conducted two programs in April for farmers who are considering organic certification for their farms. At the first meeting, Robert Wilson, organic inspector in the WNC region, teamed up with Tom Elmore, and Aubrey Raper, two certified organic farmers, to discuss rules and recordkeeping associated with organic certification, and to address farmers’ questions about the process. The second meeting focused on marketing of organic products, with experts Kate Slattery of ASAP, Rob Everett of Greenlife Grocery, and Tom Elmore, of Thatchmore Farms, leading discussion.

An interesting fact that came out of this discussion (from a research study generated by ASAP) about local food production in general, was that in our region of WNC, 2.6 billion dollars is spent on food, but less than 1% is locally grown. 49% of the food purchased in our region (meat, dairy and produce) COULD be grown locally. This should be encouraging news to anyone considering growing and marketing food items in our area, organically or conventionally.

Rob Everett of Greenlife grocery listed some of the items that he has interest in purchasing from local farmers. See more detail about this discussion on page 4 in “Market Ideas”.

A lot of folks were unable to make the meetings and have called to see if there is information available on the subject.

The following website is recommended for those with outstanding questions on organic certification:
http://chatham.ces.ncsu.edu/growingsmallfarms/ogcertguide.html

Hope you’ve registered for the Small Fruit Conference

On Friday, May 9, farmers will spend the day learning about small fruit production at the Small Fruit Conference for Small-Scale Mountain Farmers, at the Mountain Horticultural Crops Research Station in Fletcher. The deadline for registration is Friday, May 2, in order to be served lunch catered by Laurey’s.

This conference will focus on production for mountain farmers that farm on smaller acreages. The day starts with a tour of the strawberry variety trial at the research station. Next, Allen Straw will discuss how to get started growing blueberries, strawberries and brambles, including how to select the site, prepare the soil, select varieties, and source plants. After lunch, Phillip Sanders will present his research on high tunnel production of strawberries, and Frank Louws will cover management strategies for strawberry diseases. To wrap up the day, Bill Cline will present information for mountain farmers on blueberry production.

Questions about the conference? Call Jean Harrison at 255-5522, or Jeremy Delisle at 688-4811. Hope to see you there!
Major New Funding Announced for Organic Research and Education Grants

OFRF has issued its Request for Proposals for organic research and education projects for Fall 2008 grants. Proposals for awards of up to $15,000 per year ($20,000 for fruit projects) are due to OFRF on or before **July 15, 2008**. Multi-year funding will be considered for fruit projects. Fruit proposals are subject to the same application and review process as OFRF’s general grants program, but will be underwritten by the new partnership funds. The full Request for Proposals and application information is available online at [http://ofrf.org/grants/apply.html](http://ofrf.org/grants/apply.html) or by contacting Jane Sooby at the OFRF office (831-426-6606, jane@ofrf.org).

OFRF offers funds for research on any topic that will improve organic production systems, and for education and outreach projects to share organic farming information with current organic producers and to farmers and ranchers considering transitioning their operations to organic.

OFRF particularly encourages farmers, ranchers, researchers, and Extension personnel to apply for funding. Farmers and ranchers often find that working with professional researchers can make it easier to design and carry out a research project, and OFRF encourages applications from such partnerships.

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Want locally produced milk?

Buncombe County residents are asking for sources of locally produced milk and milk products, while remaining dairymen in the county are struggling to stay in business.

To determine whether there is adequate demand for locally produced milk to merit local packaging options, the Buncombe County Board of County Commissioners and NC Cooperative Extension have developed an online survey, “Demand for Locally Produced Milk”.


Questions? Contact Mike Ford at 255-5522.

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**Foothills Family Farms On-Farm Workshop Series: Pastured Broiler Production for Small Acreage Vegetable Farms at Crooked Creek Farms in Old Fort, 2 - 6:00 PM. FREE.**

Two on-farm workshops will be held covering a host of topics related to pasture based production of meat birds on a 4 acre vegetable farm. The May workshop will include topics such as receiving and brooding mail order chicks, construction and management of Salatin style pens, pros and cons of Cornish birds, feed and water systems, enterprise budgets, integration into vegetable rotations, and an introduction to the Mobile Processing Unit which will soon be made available to producers in the region. On this date there will be 3 day old birds and 5 week old birds on the farm. The October workshop will include detailed financial information on the season’s production, marketing, and Best Practices for On-Farm Processing with the Mobile Processing Unit, including a demonstration. Date TBA. **Sponsored by USDA (SARE) & ISAMPA**

To register: call Casey McKissick at (828) 216-2966 email to
Seeing Red

For many gardeners, growing better, bigger tomatoes means applying more fertilizer. Unfortunately, adding fertilizer means a greater chance that water-soluble nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus will wash out of the soil and into creeks and rivers. Now, a greener way to grow bragging-right tomatoes is to see red. Research at Clemson University has found that red plastic mulch had a definite positive result on the number of fruit produced. Further tests by the USDA also discovered that red mulch helped plants produce tomatoes that were an average of 46 percent more in weight than plants not using the mulch.


Increase in GAP Certification Assistance Payments

The N.C. Dept. of Agriculture & Consumer Services has increased the amount they will pay in the 2008 GAP Certification Assistance Program from $400 up to $600. This program will pay for up to $600 of the cost of a grower’s third party GAP audit. Growers must apply to participate in this program before they have the audit. Any grower interested in applying, including all growers approved to participate in 2008, may get an application form from Jean Harrison at Buncombe County Extension, 255-5522 or Jean_Harrison@ncsu.edu.

Cool Sites

A new NATIONAL plant data base:
http://www.onlineplantguide.com

Over 8,000 images online at present and approximately 2800 plant species are represented with extensive cultural information on each. All FREE to any person registering on the site.

Check out the new "Going Native: Urban Landscaping for Wildlife with Native Plants" website www.ncsu.edu/goingnative. The website contains multi-layers of information, an interactive native plant database, recommendations for ID and management of select invasive plants, and a 10-minute video. It has sections on "Why go Native", "How to go Native", "Create your own Native Landscape", "Where to get native plants" and more.

Woody Plant Seed Manual now online at: http://www.nsl.fs.fed.us/nsl_wpsm.html

Organic production info at: http://www.organicaginfo.org

High Tunnel Raspberries and Blackberries http://www.fruit.cornell.edu/Berries/bramblepdf/hightunelsrasp.pdf

Beat the Drought!! Rain Barrel Sale by Extension Master Gardeners of Buncombe County


80 gallon barrel measures 37 inches high and 28 inches wide. Made of 20% recycled high density polypropylene. Heavy concave lid channels water flow into the barrel. The screen entry blocks leaves, debris and insects. Dark green color discourages algae growth. Two overflow ports to move water away from your home.

Cost: $110.00 each. Make check payable to Master Gardener Project Fund and mail or deliver to NCCE at 94 Coxe Avenue, Asheville NC 28801 BEFORE May 9, 2008.

OR Make your Own Rain Barrel!!!! Kits are now available for $20.00 at the Buncombe County Extension office. The kit includes a brass spigot, a plastic overflow valve, PVC locking fittings, and O-rings. It also contains the flexible inlet spout that connects your downspout for the rain barrel. For more information, call 255-5522.
Market Ideas

**Whole Foods: South Region Local Food and Artisan Summit.** May 22, Expo Building, NC State Fairgrounds. A Free Seminar for NC Farmers and Food Companies. **Education Sessions:** open to all attendees on quality standards, marketing, prepared foods. **Tabletop Show:** open only to vendors who meet Whole Foods Quality Standards found at: [www.wholefoodsmarket.com/products/](http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/products/)
For more details, contact Jean Harrison at 255-5522.

Do you have over-grown trees and shrubs in your nursery? Country Blossoms is willing to pay for cut branches of various trees and shrubs. Any fields that are overgrown, ready to be bulldozed, cleared or in need of serious whacking...they are interested. Call: **Suzanne @ Country Blossoms** 252-244-5990. These large branches are sold by the bundle to the Northeast....this is not "pruning"....cut the trees/shrubs to the ground or whatever is possible. They will come here if there is anything they can use in season...that is, magnolia, dogwood, cherry, boxwood, river birch etc. depending on the season and their needs. Also flowering quince, overgrown forsythia, pussy willow, redtwig dogwoods etc. Large dramatic decorative branches are the key.

**Rob Everett from Greenlife** shared with the Organic Marketing class last week that he would be interested in purchasing some of the following items from local farms:

- Fall greens—he NEVER has enough!
- Fresh grapes
- Mushrooms
- Onions, shallots
- Brussel sprouts
- Organic Iceberg lettuce
- Celery

Rob also indicated that root crops, including turnips, parsnips, and beets, would be a good crop for farmers to grow, store, and bring to **Greenlife** to sell in the winter.

Of particular interest to customers at **Greenlife** are washed, packaged, locally grown farm products. Rob mentioned the following packaged items that he would be interested in buying from farmers: water cress, French beans, basil, Bibb lettuce, sprouts, and Yukon potatoes. Keep in mind that the Blue Ridge Food Ventures facility in Asheville is a certified kitchen where farmers can come to process their value-added products like this. Check out the classes being offered at AB Tech Main Campus, May 12-13 for food entrepreneurs.

**2008 Wool Pool Information**
from Charles Young, NCCES

**WNC Wool Pool dates and locations:**

- **July 2** — Asheville, PM
  Buncombe Agent, Jeff Bradley
  255-5522
- **July 3** — Sparta, 8-11 AM
  Ashe Agent, Charles Young
  336-846-5850

Wool is sold on a grade and yield basis, so the way you package your wool will determine what price you can receive. If you bag everything together, the price will be that of the lowest grade. If you can separate the different types and keep out the foreign material, you can get what the wool is worth. It is really up to you.

I would also remind you of the USDA price support program for wool, in the form of loans and LDPs. Our local FSA office will be at the site, so all the paperwork can be handled that day. Most producers will opt for an LDP payment, and current rate is \$0.15/lb. on ungraded wool. Details of the program and rates can be found at: [http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA)

**Market Ideas**

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

May 12-13  Recipe to Market and Selling Skills for Food Entrepreneurs, AB Tech Main Campus, Asheville. First day covers product development, safe food production, labeling, packaging, marketing, food regulations, and more. Second day covers product rollout, pricing, making sales calls, trade show operation. $30 one/$50 both. Speakers from Cornell Extension and Vermond Food Venture Center. Email Mary Lou Surgi to register.

http://www.baext.nct.edu/workshops/worms08/index.htm

May 19-20  NCSU Worm Farming Conference in Raleigh.

May 21  ASAP Workshop: Minding Your Own Business - Old Fort, NC. 9 am—12 noon. Workshop for farmers covering farm business planning, local marketing, food safety. Call to register 236-1282.

May 21  Pastured Broiler Production for Small Acreage Vegetable Farms, Crooked Creek Farms, Old Fort, 2-6 pm. Free program. To register call Casey McKissick at (828) 216-2966 or send an email to info@foothillsfamilyfarms.org

May 27  Protected Production (in high tunnels) of Fresh Cut Flowers—Field Meetings, Abingdon, VA. 6:30-8:00 pm. Contact Carol Streetman, (804) 524-5960, VA Cooperative Extension or email Jean_Harrison@ncsu.edu for program agenda and directions.

June 10  Canning and Preserving Made Easy, Buncombe County Extension Center, 5:30–9:00 p.m. Cost $5. To register contact Cathy Hohenstein at 255-5522.

June 17  Canning and Preserving Made Easy, Madison County Extension Center, 1–5 pm. Cost: $5. To register call Sue Estridge at 649-2411.


June 26  Bread Wheat Workshop. Mtn. Research Station, Waynesville, 4-7 pm. How production for the bread flour market differs from conventional market and what varieties of hard wheat do well in NC. Processors of bread flour and organic wheat will answer questions about market conditions and requirements. Weed and fertility management in organic wheat. Visit the CEFS website for more details and registration information.

July 8  Hands on workshop: Canning Tomatoes. Buncombe County Cooperative Extension Center, 1-4 pm. Cost: $5 To register for this workshop please contact Cathy Hohenstein at 255-5522.

July 10  Hands-on workshop: Canning Pickles and Relishes, Madison County Cooperative Extension Center, 1-4 pm. Cost: $5. To register for this workshop call Sue Estridge at 649-2411.

July 17  Southeast Regional Farm to School Gathering, Isaac Dickson Elementary, Asheville.

July 25-27  Wild Herb Weekend, Valle Crucis. For more info see http://ncherbassociation.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.

JH/ds