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WNC Winter Vegetable Conference
February 18 & 19, 2009

The Winter Vegetable Conference will be held in Asheville at the Crown Plaza Resort on February 18 & 19, 2009. This annual event is sponsored by the Tomato Growers Association of NC, but this doesn’t mean that all talks will be about tomatoes. There is something on the agenda for all vegetable growers in WNC!

This year’s topics are timely and will be presented by specialists from NC State as well as NCDA&CS and include:

- Pumpkin and Squash Production in WNC
- Sweet Corn Production
- Methyl Bromide Alternatives—including a panel of growers, chemical reps and specialists that will discuss research and experience on their farms
- Drip Application of Pesticides for Insect Control
- Fertilizer Costs and Sources
- Cucurbit Diseases in WNC
- Tomato Breeding Updates
- Understanding and Prevention of Food borne Illness Outbreaks
- County Level Extension Programs—including a panel of local agricultural Extension agents
- Spider Mite Thresholds on Vegetable Crops
- Pesticide Spills and Cleanup
- Local Food Opportunities
- Adding Value to Your Farm Product Through Packaging
- Weed Management in Vegetables
- Strategies for Combating Bacteria and Other Emerging Diseases of Tomatoes
- And more!

As always there will be a trade show featuring vendors of all things dealing with vegetable production. Pesticide Credits will be offered for many of the half-hour sessions. Continuing education credits for Certified Crop Advisors will also be offered.

Registration information will be on its way soon so watch your mail box. If you don’t receive registration information and would like to, please contact me. My contact information is located on the left.

Persons with disabilities and persons with limited English proficiency may request accommodations to participate in activities mentioned in this newsletter. Please contact Sue Colucci at 828-697-4891 during business hours at least 3 days prior to the event to discuss accommodations.
Weaknesses in food safety policy, organization and communications were all displayed during this summer’s outbreak of Salmonella Saintpaul, according to a report released this week by the Produce Safety Project (PSP), an initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts at Georgetown University. The report, “Breakdown: Lessons to Be Learned from the 2008 Salmonella Saintpaul Outbreak,” represents an in-depth review of the public record of last summer’s Salmonella Saintpaul outbreak that caused illnesses in more than 1,400 people across the country.

Highlights and recommendations from the report, which notes that tomato growers sustained unnecessary economic harm, include:

- The need for organizational reforms throughout the public health system for a more coordinated outbreak response. The report raises questions about how timely and effectively data was shared between public health agencies and if it contributed to a delayed identification of jalapeño and serrano peppers as a vehicle for *Salmonella* Saintpaul.

- The need for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to use its existing statutory authorities to establish mandatory and enforceable safety standards for fresh produce. While FDA officials said the outbreak showed the need for these standards, they said Congress needs to pass legislation to grant it explicit authority to do so. However, the report notes that FDA has already used existing authorities to put in place preventive safety standards for seafood in 1995 and for juice in 2001.

- The need to have established and unified risk communication plans in place before an outbreak. The report documents “dueling” public health messages from various agencies announcing the outbreak, and questions why the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention changed its presentation of data numerous times in the middle of the outbreak.

“Many of these problems have been identified for years by expert body after expert body,” said Jim O’Hara, director of PSP. “If we pass up this opportunity to learn from this most recent outbreak, we will keep repeating the same costly mistakes – for public health and industry alike.” For the report and comprehensive timeline, PSP reviewed all of the public statements and Web site postings of the CDC and FDA; the transcripts of the FDA/CDC media calls; press releases and website postings by state public health departments and industry trade associations; and media coverage from around the country. In addition, PSP staff attended and monitored the oversight hearings held by Congressional committees.

“The Obama administration should make the establishment of mandatory, enforceable safety standards for fresh produce a food safety priority and take steps to fix our broken outbreak response system,” O’Hara said. “Both actions will go a long way toward safeguarding public health and protecting farmers.”

David Eddy, Nov 20, 13:26

This article is reprinted from the *American Vegetable Grower Newsletter* with permission.

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**Drip Irrigation On-line Tool**

There is a new on-line tool that can be used to help you decide if drip irrigation is right for you. The Drip/Micro Payback Wizard from Toro Co. was designed to help growers recognize the cost savings and determine payback period for converting to a drip or micro irrigation system. Growers submit information including state, crop, number of acres, current irrigation type and water cost per acre foot, and the Payback Wizard does the rest. The on-line tool will also estimate additional acreage that could be farmed with the water saved. Check it out!

Web Address: [http://www.dripmicrowizard.com/](http://www.dripmicrowizard.com/)
ATTENTION: Research Stations at Risk!

On January 14, 2009 the Public Strategic Planning Meeting for Research Stations will be held at the Mountain Research Station in Waynesville, NC.

As instructed by the Legislature, North Carolina State University, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services are currently working together to develop a comprehensive strategic plan for managing our research stations. Our primary objectives are to enhance efficiency, improve effectiveness and modernize our facilities for agricultural research. We welcome your input in the strategic planning process.

Please mark this date on your calendar and plan to attend this extremely important meeting. Additional information may be found at the following web site: http://www.ncagr.com/research/strategicplan.htm. Working together, we can help insure that agriculture continues to have a strong future in North Carolina.

This is a very important opportunity to let your concerns for the health of our research and research stations be heard. We all value the great information that comes out of NC State, and we need to maintain that research here in the mountains. Please come and voice your opinions and hopes for the research stations. Your voice will be heard and is extremely valuable!

Spanish-English Pesticide Safety Training

For those farmers whose pesticide license expires in 2009, there is a V credit (Pesticide Safety training for Private Applicators) opportunity on January 22 at the Mountain Horticultural Crops Research and Extension Center, Mills River, from 3:00-5:00 p.m. This opportunity will be offered in both English and Spanish as we plan to have an interpreter there with the Simultaneous Interpreting system.

Please announce this training to all your employees. Call the Buncombe Extension Center at 828-255-5522 to preregister, so we know how many interpreting headphones to bring.

Also, farmers who do not have a license are welcome to attend as well!

Final Reminder for WNC AgOptions Grants

This is just a reminder that the WNC AgOptions grant proposals are to be postmarked by January 23, 2009.

This program was designed to help sustain family farms, especially those who produce or had previously produced tobacco.

This year there are 3 amounts that may be awarded: $3,000, $6,000 and $9,000. The $9,000 award was added this year to attract larger, commercial producers who have projects that have a budget of $45,000 or more.

If you are a producer that is planning to make some changes or updates for next year, this program is for you.

Arrange a time to meet with me or your local agent to talk about the grant application and what you can do to receive one of these awards.

Did you know that you can get this newsletter via email? If you are interested, please contact us either by phone at 828-255-5522 or email at deanna_jordan@ncsu.edu.
Future of Fumigants

The EPA is reviewing soil fumigants (chloropicrin, metam sodium/potassium, dazomet and methyl bromide) for re-registration, and a number of mitigations have been proposed. The use of soil fumigants is very important to some vegetable growers in WNC, and the proposed changes will change the way these products are used or whether or not vegetable growers will even be able to use soil fumigants in a practical and cost-effective manner.

Proposed changes include the following measures:

- Buffer zones
- Posting requirements
- Agricultural worker protection
- Good agricultural practices
- Application method, practices and rate restrictions
- Restricted use pesticide classification
- Community outreach and education programs, etc.

So far, five U.S. senators signed a letter to Stephen Johnson, EPA’s administrator, regarding Re-registration Eligibility Decisions (REDs) for the fumigants. The letter, which was signed by Sen. Lincoln (D-AR), Sen. Chambliss (R-GA), Sen. Isakson (R-GA), Sen. Craig (R-ID), and Sen. Crapo (R-ID), explained that these senators listened to concerns from different sectors of their agricultural constituents. The three most common issues of concern included buffer zone distances and overlap, monitoring and notification requirements, and Fumigant Management Plans. The buffer zones presented in the REDs will take a significant amount of highly productive land out of production and likely put some growers and nursery operators out of business.

This is a very important issue and threatens vegetable production as we know it. Public comments on implementation of the risk mitigation measures were due to EPA on October 30, 2008; however, they are still accepting comments at this time. EPA has indicated that, based on the comments it receives, it may modify the rule or some of the mitigation measures it has published. Word is that they have received very few comments, thus far. So if this issue is something that you feel strongly about, please send the EPA your comments soon.

Organic Cost Share Program

The NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services has released information on the organic certification cost share program:

"This program is designed to assist the organic grower with the cost of becoming certified under the National Organic Program. For a farm to be eligible for this program, it must be located within the state of North Carolina and must be certified by a business or organization that is accredited by the USDA to certify organic operations. The NCDA&CS will pay 75% of the cost of certification up to a maximum of $750 to the certifying agency for any certification occurring between October 1, 2008 and September 30, 2009. Funding for this program comes from a USDA grant to the NCDA&CS.

The assistance is available on a first come/first serve basis until the funds are depleted."

For more information, contact Kevin Hardison at NCDA&CS at Kevin.Hardison@ncmail.net.
Farm to Fork—Building a Local, Sustainable Food Economy

Last year, “Locavore” was the Word of the Year in the Oxford American Dictionary.

On November 12 there was a packed room of growers, agriculture professionals, and estaurateurs, among others, at the NC Arboretum in Asheville to discuss what is needed to have a sustainable, local food economy. This was a part of a series of meetings held throughout North Carolina to identify the needs and obstacles for making a sustainable, local food economy happen. The results and action plan will be presented at a statewide summit on March 2 and 3. Visit the Center For Environmental Farming Systems site www.cefs.ncsu.edu/commmfoodsyst-summit.htm or cefsfarmtofork.com for more information.

In WNC we have many enthusiastic organizations and individuals dedicated to form a sustainable and local food economy in the region. These organizations may help you market your products, find granting opportunities and attract consumers to your farm. Some of these stellar organizations and/or websites that are working on this local food movement include the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) that produces the local food guide (www.asapconnections.org); Buy Haywood, an organization dedicated to promoting produce from Haywood County, NC (buyhaywood.com); the Organic Growers School that not only puts on the Organic Growers School Conference every year, but also conducts workshops throughout the year (www.organicgrowersschool.org) and Local Harvest, a national website designed to help consumers find fresh, local and organic food (www.localharvest.org). There are many more organizations dedicated to supporting local farmers and local food as well.

If you have any input on what would make ours a local sustainable food economy, or if you are working to do this, I encourage you to attend the summit. This is a place where we can all work together, and we need the input and opinions from all involved in local food economies which includes commercial producers like you!

**I know you are all wondering... The 2008 Word of the Year in the Oxford American Dictionary is “hypermiling”. Hypermiling is doing something to make your vehicle more fuel efficient, like keeping your tires properly inflated. Maybe more appropriately, Merriam Webster’s pick for the word of 2008 is “Bailout”.

Upcoming Events and Deadlines

January 8-10, 2009 — Southeast Regional Fruit and Vegetable Conference, Savannah, GA. Visit www.gfvga.org/ for more info.


Jan. 23, 2009 — Proposals for WNC AgOptions must be postmarked by this date. See page 3.

Feb. 2, 2009 — Deadline to file for NAP for most vegetable crops.


March 21 and 22, 2009 — Organic Growers School Spring Conference. For more information, please contact event coordinator, Meredith Leigh McKissick at meredith@organicgrowersschool.org or (828) 450-7996.
Commentary: Giving Thanks This Holiday Season

This year, amidst the wonderful and lavish (no kidding we had 8 different types of pie) Thanksgiving dinner at my family’s home in Rhode Island, an awkward silence occurred as we sat down to begin our meal. Silence may not be awkward for every family, but in my Italian, outspoken, wine-imbibing clan, silence is an awkward guest.

This silence occurred as it usually does when my Nana isn’t present and the family must decide who will say “Grace”. It is strange how such a dynamic and opinionated group of people clams-up when it comes to expressing thanks and appreciation. My dad offered to say something; and, knowing that it was going to be the old “Rub-a-dub-dub, thanks for the grub”, I had to intervene. To be honest, we have so much to be thankful for that I could not let this moment go to waste. I, as most know, am certainly not shy; but I could feel a little quiver in my voice as I started to speak. All ears were on me, and all bellies were grumbling, so there was a lot of pressure here.

I started off my expression of thanks for my family and friends including those who couldn’t be with us and those who have passed on. And then went on to talk about the amazing food, a feast of traditional turkey and stuffing to eggplant parmigiano that could feed a small country (hold the Rhode Island jokes, please).

While speaking of the spread, in the back of my mind I couldn’t forget about how thankful I was for my job and to work with such a great group of farmers. I had to express my thanks to those who produced this food. I thanked each of the farmers who grew the squash, broccoli and eggplant and even gave thanks to the turkey producer who is most likely in NC (NC ranks 2nd nationally in turkey production). I thought about each one of the farmers in WNC who not only keeps food in their families’ mouths, but in mine as well.

As I finished up my “Thanks,” I encouraged my family to think about how our work and lives impact others like all of the hardworking farmers that keep us fed and clothed everyday. It is my pleasure to work with such an innovative, resourceful, caring bunch of people. You are my job, and I strive to help you in every way possible. So this is my and my family’s public expression of gratitude to you and your family. THANK YOU!