Poultry Production Workshop

We are right in the middle of a huge local food movement here in western North Carolina with people concerned about where their food comes from and who are willing to pay premium prices for the satisfaction of knowing. One product that has become very popular, as well as one of the easier commodities to produce, is locally-raised eggs and chicken. Two Agricultural Extension Agents from Buncombe County have developed a one-day workshop to help those interested in learning about small-scale poultry production.

The Poultry Production Workshop will take place on Monday, May 10, 8:30 am-4:00 pm, at the Mountain Horticultural Crops Research and Extension Center, 455 Research Drive, Mills River. The cost for the full-day workshop is $25 per person and includes lunch and resource materials. Participants must preregister and pay in advance.

The workshop will be packed with experts from across the country, including Jim Adkins from the International Center for Poultry and Extension Research Specialists from NC State University. See: http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu/files/library/11/PoultryProduction-1.pdf

Topics to be addressed include:

- Introduction to Raising Poultry on a Small Farm
- Understanding Commercial, Standard Breed (heritage), and Dual Purpose Breeds of Poultry
- Brooding your Baby Chicks
- Biosecurity and Small Flock Health
- Poultry Housing and Necessities
- Marketing, Processing and Integrating With Other On-Farm Enterprises

The Poultry Production Workshop is FIRST-COME/FIRST-SERVED. If you are thinking of incorporating poultry into your farm operation or looking to expand and improve your poultry business, then this workshop is for you. Come spend the day with us and learn all you need to know.
Plan Your Grazing Season

The spring of the year always provides abundant grass for our livestock. It is not really all that difficult to grow grass this time of year. More times than not we have pastures that get ahead of us and start to go to seed before we are able to turn our animals into them to graze. We normally run a bush hog through these pastures during the summer months to clip the mature seed heads off so the cattle can graze the higher quality leaf down below. This is more work on you and is costly from a fuel, time, and equipment maintenance standpoint.

If we want to manage our pastures effectively, rotational grazing is a huge management tool that we should have in our toolbox. This practice can be, and should be, applied to those pastures that tend to get ahead of you. We normally wait until our grass gets about 6-8 inches tall before we turn our animals out in the spring. We seem to be worried that we won’t have enough grass if we turn out too early. In order to keep our pastures from getting too mature, it is a good practice to turn out a week or two earlier than normal and move the animals through your pastures in a quick rotation. Your animals will basically clip the tops off of your pastures. This is the portion that produces the seed heads that we normally have to clip off later in the grazing season. This will ensure that the animals aren’t grazing one section down too far, as well as keeping the grass from becoming too mature in all sections. The forage will be higher quality due to a stimulation of more vegetative growth, and you will find that your pastures will last just as long or even longer than they did with our traditional methods.

Once you “train” your animals to move from pasture to pasture, which won’t take long, you will be very surprised at how eager they are to move when you open the gate. They will know they are heading to better grass and may knock you down as you open the gate. The following graph illustrates the vegetative state that we should try to keep our grass in order to receive the highest quality nutrition from our forages. We can do this by avoiding over grazing and under grazing through rotational grazing.

Once again, I have to mention the benefit of summer annuals to a grazing system. We all know that in the heat of the summer our fescue pastures are not actively growing. This is due to the fact that fescue is a cool season grass and it goes dormant in the hottest part of the summer. I realize that all producers don’t have the land available to plant warm season annuals, but this is a practice that needs be looked at a little closer by everyone. Most of the warm season annuals that I will mention have pretty decent drought tolerance and will respond to even small amounts of rainfall.

Sorghum/sudangrass, pearl millet, crabgrass varieties and teff grass are all options for producers in western North Carolina. Any of these grasses can be grazed or made into hay. I personally feel they would have the most benefit in a grazing system. Each of these grasses should be planted in mid-May and allowed to become established prior to grazing. Once you turn the animals into the established stand, graze down to about 6 inches and remove the animals from the field. This process can be repeated as many as 3-4 times throughout the summer, depending on rainfall. This can be a huge benefit to your fescue pastures that really need a rest during those summer months. Teff is most suited for hay due to a shallow root structure which could easily be pulled up by grazing animals. When grazing sorghum/sudangrass, be careful during drought conditions as this crop can accumulate nitrates which can be toxic to livestock. Additionally, this crop can accumulate prussic acid in the fall after a killing frost which can also be toxic to your animals.

The ideal setting for planting summer annuals is a fenced cropland setting. The reason this is ideal is due to the fact that you can dedicate this “pasture” solely to a summer annual/winter annual rotation. You will use it for grazing in the summer and graze it down in the ground around September when it is time to plant your winter annuals for grazing. I will note that if your summer annual gets ahead of you for some reason, you may also make hay or haylage out of this crop. After your
Plan Your Grazing Season (continued)

winter annual becomes established, you then have repeated grazing throughout the winter months. In this setting, neither the summer or winter annual is competing at any time with your fescue pastures because it is solely dedicated to these two annual crops. You may also drill these summer annuals into existing fescue pastures, but you will need to graze them really close about the time fescue starts coming back out in the fall. Once you have grazed it close, remove the animals, apply 50 lbs N/acre and allow the fescue to get ahead of the summer annual that is starting to decline in regrowth.

The following illustration can show you the benefit of adding a summer annual into your grazing system. This will fill the gap in the summer months and allow your fescue to rest and recover. The best way to plant these annuals is with a no-till drill. Buncombe Soil & Water Conservation has a drill to rent to producers. There are also other locations that rent no-till drills. If you have any questions about your livestock operation, feel free to call Jeff Bradley at 828-255-5522.

Producing High-Quality Hay

Hay is an integral part of most beef production systems in the southeast. Producers can either produce their own hay or purchase it from a hay producer. It is vital for livestock producers to understand the processes of growing, harvesting and storing hay if they are producing their own hay or purchasing their hay. These processes influence the nutritive value of the hay which can alter livestock performance. By understanding the changes that can take place during hay production the nutritional program can be altered to maintain livestock performance.

Prior to the hay season and before each harvest all hay equipment should be thoroughly examined and serviced. All equipment should be greased, gear oil levels should be checked and filled, wheel bearings should be serviced, and tires should be checked and inflated. Mower sections and blades need to be sharpened or replaced prior to the start of the haying season and should be checked before each mowing. Failure to ensure that the haying equipment is in good working condition can delay harvest. We all know that a spring shower can pop up at any time and this broken equipment can affect whether or not you get your hay up in good shape. This delay in harvest results in an inestimable amount of damaged hay on a yearly basis.

Hay should be harvested at the point when quantity and quality are both optimized. Factors such as weather, equipment failures, off-farm employment and other obligations can lead to delaying the harvest of hay. Forage quality typically decreases with increasing maturity. As forages mature, the leaf-to-stem ratio decreases. Higher proportions of stem result in higher concentrations of fiber and lower concentrations of crude protein and digestible dry matter. The management of forage crops is not just limited to producing a single high-quality crop. Most forages that are utilized for hay need time for adequate regrowth to maintain the stand. Cool-season grasses such as tall fescue and orchardgrass should

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Producing High-Quality Hay (continued)

be harvested at the boot or early heading stages of growth for the first cutting and then at 45-60 day intervals thereafter. These harvest times should provide the best compromise between nutritive value and yield whenever possible.

**Cutting Height.** The height at which forages can be cut is dictated by where they store their growth reserves. For instance alfalfa stores its growth reserves underground and can be mowed very close to the ground. Bermudagrass and white clover both store growth reserves in stolons or “runners” that lay on the soil surface and are unaffected by cutting height. In contrast, cool-season grasses such as orchardgrass  and tall fescue need a stubble height of 2 to 3 inches as they store their growth reserves in the stem base. When these forages are mowed too close to the ground the stand may be weakened.

Most summer annual forages require a higher (6-8 inches) mowing height for adequate regrowth. Another reason for increasing the cutting height in these forages is the accumulation of nitrates. Concentrations of nitrates typically are greatest in the lower portions of the stem, by increasing the cutting height this portion of the forage remains as stubble. Maintaining a cutting height of at least 8 inches will encourage regrowth and decrease the risk of nitrate poisoning.

**Hay Storage.** Storage of hay at the edge of the hay field on the ground leads to greater deterioration of the hay. Approximately 50 percent of the storage losses can be attributed to the soil/hay interface when hay is stored outside and on the ground. Dry hay acts like a wick drawing moisture out of the soil and into the hay bale. Air movement may not be as great around the bottom of the bale as it is around the top. This can be affected by the shape, and density of the bale and the storage site. Improper storage can lead to moist conditions within the bottom of the bale that promote microbial activity.

Numerous methods have been used to elevate hay stored in the open. These include using telephone poles, pallets, railroad ties and pipe to raise the hay off of the ground. These bases should allow for some air movement under the bales and also prevent the hay from sitting in standing water. The storage site for hay stored outside should be in a sunny, breezy, well-drained area. This location should be near the top of a slope if possible and have a southern exposure. Rows should be oriented so they run up and down the slope, as rows running across the slope will trap runoff after a rainfall event. Bales should be butted up against each other within a row while adjacent rows should not touch, with a gap of at least three feet between rows.

**Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) Sign-up Now Available**

Flooding during the fall of 2009 caused severe damage in Henderson and Transylvania Counties. Farms suffering severe damage may be eligible for assistance under the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Office if the damage:

- Will be so costly to rehabilitate that Federal assistance is needed to return the land to productive agricultural use.
- Is unusual and is not the type that would recur frequently in the same area.
- Affects the productive capacity of the farmland.
- Will impair or endanger the land.
- Restoration is a minimum of $1,000.

A producer qualifying for ECP assistance may receive cost-share levels not to exceed 75 percent of the eligible cost of restoration measures. No producer is eligible for more than $200,000 cost sharing per natural disaster occurrence.

The following types of measures may be eligible:

- Removing debris from farmland.
- Grading, shaping, or releveling severely damaged farmland.
- Restoring permanent fences.
- Restoring conservation structures and other similar installations.

Producers who have suffered a loss from this natural disaster may contact the local FSA County Office at (828) 693-1406 ext. 2 and request assistance. **Sign-up will end on June 11, 2010.**
Organic Festival Needs Vendors

In a joint effort between the Seventh Avenue Historic District in Hendersonville and the Henderson County Center of NC Cooperative Extension, the 1st Annual Seventh Avenue Organic Festival will be held in downtown Hendersonville this fall.

In conjunction with the NC Apple Festival, the Organic Festival will be held on September 3rd - 5th, which is Labor Day weekend. This is a huge weekend that is host to 200,000 visitors. The location of the Organic Festival will be in the street around the Historic Seventh Avenue Depot, which normally is host to around 10,000 visitors during the Apple Festival. Organizers are seeking organic produce vendors and all-natural meat, poultry, dairy, and fiber vendors. This would be a wonderful opportunity to let a large audience know what your farm has to offer.

If you are interested in becoming a produce vendor, please contact Sue Colucci at 828-697-4891 or sue_colucci@ncsu.edu. If you are interested in being an animal products vendor, contact Jeff Bradley at 828-545-2185 or jeff_bradley@ncsu.edu. For additional information, you may contact Sue, Jeff and also Tara Ledbetter at 828-674-3067 or taraledbetter@att.net.

May 1st Deadline Draws Near for 2010 NC Value-Added Cost Share Applications Through NC MarketReady!

The third cycle of funding offered by the NC Value-Added Cost Share (NCVACS) program is now open. The NCVACS program provides financial support, through matching funds, to producers who are applying for the USDA Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG), a nationally competitive program. NCVACS is funded by the NC Tobacco Trust Fund Commission and administered by NC MarketReady, a program of Cooperative Extension located at the N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis. The current funding cycle is designed to offset the cost (by approximately 50 percent) of hiring a qualified grant writer and feasibility professional. Matching funds, contingent on receipt of the federal grant, are also available through this grant cycle. The guidelines, application and supporting documents are available online at www.ncmarketready.org under the navigation tab “Value-Added Cost Share”. Applications for the current cycle must be received by May 1, 2010.

A value-added agricultural product is a raw, agricultural commodity that has been changed in some manner so that it no longer can be returned to its original state. This change results in increased market value, allowing the producer to receive a higher price for these value-added products compared to the original commodity. Chopped lettuce, fruit jams and stone-ground corn meal are a few examples. “The NCVACS guidelines also include non-standard production methods (such as organic), physical product segregation (gluten-free grains separate from gluten-based grains), generating farm-based renewable energy and some locally produced food products,” said NCVACS program coordinator, Brittany Whitmire.

Nine value-added producers in North Carolina received a financial boost as recipients of the first NCVACS cycle, awarded in late 2009, and currently in progress. “The nine recipients represent a diverse array of value-added enterprises and are geographically scattered throughout the state,” said Whitmire. The award recipients fell into three categories of cost share funding for grant writing and feasibility assessment.

For more information about NCVACS, visit www.ncmarketready.org (choose Value-Added Cost Share on the left menu bar). NC MarketReady will be featuring an in-depth profile of each award recipient in the coming months. Read more about them at www.ncmarketready.org.

NC MarketReady, formerly known as the Program for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture, is a program of NC Cooperative Extension, which is an educational outreach of NC State University and NC A&T State University. NC MarketReady’s multidisciplinary team builds partnerships and educational resources to help North Carolina agriculture be more profitable. NC MarketReady is a partner of the Plants for Human Health Institute at the NC Research Campus in Kannapolis. Learn more at www.ncmarketready.org or www.ces.ncsu.edu.

The Local Foods Action Plan Listserv is a statewide listserv to facilitate a local food economy moderated by the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS). The listserv is open to the public and members are encouraged to post on any topic dealing with the cultivation of local food, farms and communities by emailing local-foods-action-plan@lists.ncsu.edu. Posters are responsible for the content they submit. To receive the digest version or for questions about the listserv, please e-mail Amber_Polk@ncsu.edu. Please visit our website at www.cefs.ncsu.edu.
**Buncombe County Cattle Producer Meeting Scheduled**

A meeting for all Buncombe County cattle producers will be held on Thursday, May 20, 6:30 pm at the Buncombe County Extension Center, 94 Coxe Avenue, in Asheville.

Topics to be covered include:
- The benefits of a preconditioning program for your farm.
- L. T. Ward will give an update on the new regional stockyard in Canton.
- The possibility of forming a Buncombe County Cattle Marketing Alliance.
- FSA programs for your farm.

Please come enjoy an evening with your fellow beef producers.

**Coming Events**

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<td>May 10</td>
<td>Poultry Production Workshop - 8:30 am - 4:00 pm, MHCR&amp;EC, Mills River</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 20</td>
<td>Buncombe Cattle Producer Meeting, 6:30 pm, Buncombe Extension Center</td>
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<td>Sept 3-5</td>
<td>Organic Festival - Area around Historic 7th Ave Dept, Hendersonville</td>
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