N. C. Good Agricultural Practices Certification Assistance Program

The North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services has developed the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Certification Assistance Program. This program will help North Carolina growers with financial support in obtaining a third party audit to verify they are following effective food safety practices.

Food safety has become an important marketing and health issue for the produce industry. Buyers are demanding assurances from growers that their produce is safe. It will become more difficult for growers to market their fruits and vegetables if they don’t have a GAP program in place to make sure their produce is free of contamination. The goal of this program is to increase the number of N.C. farmers following Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)/Good Handling Practices (GHP) and using third party audits to verify their food safety program.

This is a cost share program designed to assist fruit and vegetable growers with the cost of a GAP/GHP audit. The NCDA & CS will pay up to $600 of the cost of having a third party audit to verify a farm’s food safety program. Funds will be paid to the auditor conducting the GAP/GHP audit to reduce the cost to the farmer by up to $600. Participating farmers will be responsible for paying the auditor for any balance due above $600. Funding for this program comes from an USDA grant to the NCDA & CS. Funds are available on a first come first served basis until the funds are depleted.

To be eligible for assistance, North Carolina fruit and vegetable growers must meet the following requirements:

- Growers must have a third party audit from an approved government agency or company that verifies Good Agricultural Practices/Good Handling Practices.
- GAP/GHP audits can be for Farm Review, Field Harvest and Field Packing Activities, Packing House Facility, Storage and Transportation, and Traceback.
- The GAP/GHP audit must be conducted in 2009.
- Submit an application form for approval to participate in this program to the NCDA&CS prior to receiving the GAP/GHP audit.

For additional information or to request an application for this program, contact Shirley Nicholson, 919-733-7887 or email Shirley.Nicholson@ncagr.gov.
Water Analysis Cost Share Program

The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) is pleased to announce the creation of the Water Analysis Cost Share program. The purpose of this program is to encourage water testing as part of a pre- and post-harvest food safety program for fruit and vegetable crops. The program will assist in paying for the cost of testing irrigation and/or packing house wash water. The NCDA&CS will reimburse growers up to $200.00 for laboratory analysis to determine the quantitative presence of generic E. coli bacteria in irrigation or wash water by a certified laboratory.

Affecting an estimated 76 million Americans annually, food safety is an important aspect of agricultural operations. Recent outbreaks of Salmonella and E.Coli have brought attention to safety programs throughout the country and increased consumer awareness of this issue.

Safe inputs, including irrigation and wash water are an important part of any food safety program. Growers and packers are encouraged to have their water tested for generic E. coli as this test can provide indication of contamination with pathogens. Results from these tests can aid in tailoring a detailed and reliable food safety program for the farm/packing facility.

Funding for this program is from a USDA specialty crop block grant and is available on a first-come, first-serve basis. If your application is approved, you will be notified and be required to submit a reimbursement form along with receipts as proof that you have paid for the tests.

A listing of certified commercial laboratories that test water samples is available from the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Division of Water Quality website: http://h2o.enr.state.nc.us/lab/CertifiedLaboratoryLists.htm or by telephone at 919.733.3908.

Growers can be reimbursed for one water test or multiple tests throughout the year. For multiple tests please have individual receipts for each test and turn in only one inclusive reimbursement form for all testing throughout the growing season.

For additional information or to request an application for this program, contact Kevin Hardison at 919-733-7887 ext 234, or email at Kevin.Hardison@ncagr.gov.

Making Your Website Work For You

During the last week in April I had the opportunity to attend a training for agents on "The Business Side of Agri-Toursim". One of the topics that was discussed was the importance of having an effective website to market and promote your business. It is becoming increasingly important that businesses, even agricultural businesses, have a web presence. Here are some tips that gained from a presentation entitled "Making Your Website Work for You" presented by Scott Cagle of Safe and Sound Solutions.

- **You need to be found!** You can have the most beautiful website out there, but if search engines can't find you no one will ever see it. Search engines (like Google or AltaVista) find text in a webpage and read it. They can't find pictures. Use key words in text often and also put key word into the URL. Ask your clients what they searched to find you on the internet.
- **Make your contact information readily available and easy to get to.** How often have you wanted to contact someone from a webpage, but not been able to find out where or how to do that? It is pretty frustrating. *Continued on next page.*
Interest in buying locally grown fruits, vegetables and meats continues to grow as consumers look to support local growers and find foods that haven’t traveled very far from the field to the table.

To tap into this growing trend, the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is ramping up its efforts to help shoppers find locally grown farm products in their area through promotions and updates of the department’s NCFarmFresh.com Web site.

The Web site is a tool where consumers can search for retail farms, roadside stands, farmers markets, community-supported agriculture operations, nurseries, retail garden centers and similar outlets in their area that sell directly to the public. Listings can be searched by the type of commodity being sold, by county or by region.

NCFarmFresh.com has been active for around five years and lists more than 1,000 farms, 119 certified roadside stands and 116 farmers markets. The site has traditionally focused on fruits and vegetables, nursery products and Christmas trees; however, farmers who sell meat and dairy products can now sign up to be listed.

“Farmers who market their products directly to consumers are encouraged to sign up now so they won’t miss this marketing opportunity,” said Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler. “As our marketing efforts draw more and more shoppers to the Web site looking for farms in their communities that sell direct, this will be a simple and easy way for farmers to promote their products and potentially increase their sales. Best of all, it is free and easy to do.”

The department will soon launch a statewide advertising campaign encouraging consumers to use the Web site to find local vendors. The campaign is being funded by special grants from the Golden Leaf Foundation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as well as cooperative funding from commodity associations.

Farmers can register their farms by logging on to NCFarmFresh.com and following the links on the home page. They may also contact NCDA&CS at (919) 733-7887 for more information or assistance. Farmers interested in joining the Goodness Grows in North Carolina program or becoming a certified roadside stand can also contact the department at the number above.

NCDA & CS Encourages Farmers to Register With NCFarmFresh.com

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Making Your Website Work For You, continued from previous page.

- **Make Your Website Look Fresh.** You can easily tell a dated picture by hairstyles and clothes, so make sure you are current. Also, this will keep a visitor coming back. A good way to do this is by having a photo contest that your customers participate in. Make sure that your site is updated with current events and current prices.

- **"3 Clicks In" Rule.** If a visitor can’t find what they are looking for in 3 clicks into your website, they will leave. Also, if you have external links in your site, make sure they open in a new window– you don’t want your visitors navigating away from your page.

- **Let Someone Who Knows Nothing About the Internet Navigate Your Site.** Not everyone is savvy when it comes to the internet. Put a list of items you would like a visitor to find and have a friend or family member who is not versed in the web navigate your site (without your help!). If they can’t find it, neither will your customers.

- **Even If You Can’t Afford A Formal Website Use Social Media.** More and more people are using Facebook, Twitter and Blogging to communicate. These tools are free and easy to use. There are also resources through the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project’s Local Food Guide and the NCDA & CS General Store.
New Website Includes Helpful Information to Vegetable Growers

There is a new website that has been developed for vegetable growers. The Growing Produce Website, www.growingproduce.com, is a comprehensive source for information applicable to vegetable growers. The following can be found on the Growing Produce website:

- **Information from *American Vegetable Grower, American/Western Fruit Grower and Florida Grower* magazines.** Includes articles, videos and pictures.

- **Searchable topic areas.** Can be used to locate info on specific insect or disease problems or a particular article from a recent issue.

- **News across markets.** The latest happenings in labor, food safety, new products, etc.

- **USDA pricing information.** A price ticker on the top of the home page will provide the most recent prices for commodities directly from the USDA.

- **Variety trends.** Latest info on releases from seed companies along with links to state, regional and national associations.

- **Industry leaders.** Allows you to learn directly from knowledgeable and award-winning producers and the decisions they are making.

- **Events.** Past, present and future events all over the USA are listed here.

- **Helpful production and crop protection tips.** Tips from experts in the industry on how to grow the highest quality produce possible.

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**Surviving (and Thriving) Through Tough Economic Times**

Buncombe County Cooperative Extension Service has put together a comprehensive website to help individuals manage through these tough economic times. The website Surviving (and Thriving) Through Tough Economic Times provides information for families, gardeners and farmers. Some references available for farmers includes the most current enterprise budgets (2002) from NCSU and other universities in surrounding states, information on establishing and using a farm financial record-keeping system, using alternatives to synthetic fertilizers and a retirement estimator for farm families.

In addition, the website gives helpful information including family budgeting, managing debt, managing stress, meeting your insurance needs, setting spending priorities and cutting energy spending at home.

Visit the new site at [http://sites.google.com/site/survivingtrouble/](http://sites.google.com/site/survivingtrouble/).

If there is information that you would like to see on this site that will help you to survive and thrive through the challenges ahead, please contact the Buncombe County Extension office at 828.255.5522.
The Environmental Protection agency (EPA) administrator signed the final rule allowing production, importation and consumption for Critical Uses of methyl bromide exempter under the US Clean Air Act during the 2009 Control Period. The Federal Register Notice announcing the final rule was signed on Friday April 25th and posted on the EPA’s Ozone Depletion website located at www.epa.gov/ozone/strathome.html.

The only difference in the final rule from the proposed rule is the slight increase in the amounts of new production and imports allowed under the rule (see Table below). This was one of the major issues raised by the user group comments in response to the proposed rule. EPA in its final rule acknowledged the impact of the shortage of 1,3-Dichloropropene (Telone®, Dow AgroSciences), the revised levels of Available Stocks based on the manufacturer and distributors survey, and the lack of adoption of alternatives at the rate previously estimated by the international community. Though there is an increase in the levels of Available Stocks, it is still likely that shortages of fumigants may occur.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1: 2009 METHYL BROMIDE CRITICAL USE: APPROVED QUANTITIES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Production/Imports</td>
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<tr>
<td>metric tonnes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proposed Allocation Rule: Clean Air Act (Nov 2008)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Allocation Rule: Clean Air Act (April 2009)</td>
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The narrative accompanying the publication identified several specific conditions and areas of concern that relate to individual areas of the country. The Limiting Critical Condition necessary to be able to certify Critical Use in North Carolina (vegetable and small fruit growers) were identified as follows:

**Cucurbits** - Moderate to severe yellow or purple nutsedge infestation. Moderate to severe soilborne disease infestation. Moderate to severe root knot nematode infestation. A need for methyl bromide for research purposes.

**Peppers** – Moderate to severe yellow or purple nutsedge infestation. Moderate to severe nematode infestation. Moderate to severe Pythium root, collar, crown rots. A need for methyl bromide for research purposes.

**Strawberry Fruit** - Moderate to severe yellow or purple nutsedge infestation. Moderate to severe nematode infestation. Moderate to severe black root or crown rot. A need for methyl bromide for research purposes.

**Tomatoes** - Moderate to severe yellow or purple nutsedge infestation. Moderate to severe nematode infestation. Moderate to severe Pythium root, collar, crown rots. A need for methyl bromide for research purposes.

**BOTTOM LINE** - If your production depends upon soil fumigation, it is strongly recommended that you make arrangements for supplies of your preferred fumigant as soon as possible. This is true not only for methyl bromide but alternatives as well. The pressure on the supply chain is going to be tremendous and it is anticipated that many, if not all, fumigant users will NOT be able to obtain exactly what they would like to utilize. It is recommended that all fumigant users begin to look at alternative solutions as this situation will only be getting more difficult as we move into future Control Periods.

To read the entire rule on the Federal Register, please visit: http://www.epa.gov/fedregstr/EPA-AIR/2009/April/Day-30/a9966.pdf
Upcoming Events

May 14 and May 28—GAPs Training—Putting Together Your Food Safety Manual. 4 pm—6 pm at the Mountain Research Station in Waynesville, NC. This is a series of trainings for farmers. Free. Call Sue Colucci at 828.697.4891 for more info or to register.

May 14, 2009—Hops Workshop, 10 am-3:30 pm. $20 charge for workshop, includes lunch on site at the Madison County Extension Office. You must register prior to Tuesday, May 12 by phone or email. Please call 828-606-3130 or e-mail Chuck@JeweloftheBlueRidge.com for more info.

May 21—Vineyard Planning and Establishment Field Day, 8:30 am-3:15 pm at DeMariano Vineyards in Dysartsville, NC. $20 registration fee includes lunch. Pre-registration is required along with the fee no later than May 15th at the McDowell Extension Office, call 828-652-7874 for more details.

June 9, 2009—Pesticide Speciality Training, 2 hour credit A B G H I K L M N O T D X, 3 pm-5 pm. At the Buncombe County Extension Office located on 94 Coxe Ave. in Asheville. Contact Amanda Stone at 828.255.5522 for more info and to register.

June 25, 2009—Pesticide Safety Training, 2 hour credit V, 9 a.m. At the Henderson County Cooperative Extension Office located at 740 Glover ST. in Hendersonville. Contact Marvin Owings at 828.697.4891 for info and to register.

June 27-28, 2009—Family Farm Tour, 1 pm-6 pm each day. Over 40 farms in 6 WNC counties are involved. Purchase a button for $20. For more info visit: www.asapconnections.org/thefamilyfarmtour.html

Please contact us if you have event additions!