March 1, 2007

Commercial Horticulture:  
Future Cooperative Extension Programs, Business Planning and Crop Production Issues & Alternative Crops

This newsletter is intended for people interested in commercial fruit and vegetable production, business planning and North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service meetings throughout North Carolina. For back issues of this newsletter please go to the Jones County Extension website and click on the Commercial Horticulture, Nursery & Turf menu option on the left side of the website. The website address is:  
http://jones.ces.ncsu.edu

Upcoming Workshops, Tours & Meetings

March 1, 2007. Strawberry School and Trade Show. 8:30 AM - 3:00 PM. Tidewater Community College Advanced Technology Center, Virginia Beach, VA. Contact Calvin Schiemann at (757) 385-4769 for more information.


March 5, 2007. Report to the People – Jones County. This is a year end report by the Jones County Cooperative Extension staff to the Jones County Commissioners and citizens, to provide an overview of the work Cooperative Extension has done in 2006. Contact the Jones County Extension office for more information.

March 7, 2007. Pesticide Recertification. 6 PM-8 PM. Greene County Extension Center, Snow Hill, NC. Safety training – 2.0 hours V credits.


March 15, 2007. Pesticide Test & Exams. 6 PM, Johnston County Extension Center. Smithfield, NC. Licensing Tests & Exams for Private, Commercial, and Public Pesticide Applicators. Renewal exams for applicators with expired certifications & licenses will also be given. Pre-Registration through Cooperative Extension is required. Call 919-989-5380 or e-mail eric_spauding@ncsu.edu to obtain study manuals or for more information.


March 29, 2007. Webpage Design Workshop. 6 PM – 9 PM, Clayton, NC. Any farmer dealing with fruits, vegetables, nursery, dairy products, tobacco, field crops, wool fibers, honey, agritourism, or CSA programs will benefit from this workshop. This class is FREE!!!! Contact Amie Newsome at (919) 989-5380 for more information.

April 21, 2007. Onslow County Farmers Market Season Opening.

June 9, 2007. Onslow County Farmers Market 2007 Grand Opening. The NCDA ‘Big Cart’ – a shopping cart with a V-8 engine will be on display for everyone to see. Call Mr. Larry Kent, Onslow County Farmers Market Manager at (910) 340-009 for more information.


June 27, 2007. Southeast Cooperative Extension Region 4-H District Activity Day. Jones County High School. Volunteers are needed to help guide 400+ kids from southeast NC, from room to room as they give talks about projects they are working on. Call Erin Morgan at the Jones County Extension office (252) 448-9621, or any other area Cooperative Extension office in southeast NC for more information.

General Information

Farmers Markets

Just a reminder… the New Bern Farmers Market opens on March 24, 2007, and the Onslow County Farmers Markets opens on April 21, 2007. Hope to see some of you there. Contact the Onslow or Craven Extension offices or me at the Jones County Extension office, if you or someone you know is interested in selling fruit, vegetables, flowers or home made products at either of these markets.

Business Planning & Management

FACT in Jones County

We reached critical mass for the first FACT class!! WE have six people registered – the minimum number for the class, but there is still time to be a part of this inaugural class. The first session will be held at the Jones County Campus of Lenoir Community College in Trenton, on Thursday, March 8, at 6:30 pm. Good luck to everyone who signed up.

Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement has a lot of textbook definitions, but I would define it as the process of doing things with a focus on always getting better at what you do. No matter what definition you use, those two words by themselves – continuous improvement - should stimulate a lot of thought provoking ideas about yourself, your business or
the groups you work with without needing any additional explanation.

The real question is what are you doing on a personal or professional or organizational level to continuously improve? Do you have a plan that you are going to actively pursue to make some improvements? Are you going into the 2007 crop year doing things the same way you did in 2006?

If you made money in 2006, keeping things the same could be a good plan. But what are you going to do if produce prices fall between now and June? What contingency plans do you have to handle a labor shortage right in the middle of harvest? What continuous improvement plans have you made to cut costs, improve your product quality, or reduce your transportation or storage costs? Have you discussed this plan with your partner?, Your employees?, Your spouse?

I have written about a lot of different business management concepts in the last three years, and continuous improvement is another one that I think is important. It is something to considering as you formulate a strategy that will keep yourself and your business moving forward. How can you do this?

- **Have a passion for what you do or are planning to do.** Excitement is contagious. If you don’t have a passion for what you do, or if you have lost your enthusiasm for it, there is no way your employees will follow your lead.

- **Be willing to listen to any and all ideas that come from your employees.** You can still reserve the right to make the final decision, but the more input you allow your employees to have, the greater their level of enthusiasm and sense of ownership they will take in your operation. This includes not only your employees, but your business partners and family members that are involved as well.

- **Don’t be afraid to make mistakes.** Some of the best learning experiences we all have come when we make mistakes. Provided no one was seriously injured or killed, mistakes can be corrected and learned from. Just be sure to remember to go back and teach your staff what happened, what went wrong and what the plan is to fix the problem. Let them be involved in the formulating the plan to fix the problem, and at the end of the day you will most likely end up with a better plan than the one you had in your head.

- **Don’t stop learning.** Time management is a challenge for all of us in today’s world. We’re overloaded with paperwork and regulations and we are all inundated with requests from Cooperative Extension agents to come to educational programs, serve on advisory committees, or to serve on your Farm Bureau or farmers market boards. The requests for our time seem to go on and on and on. One of the ways I try to keep learning is by listening to books on CD while I’m in the car. There are some excellent business planning and management texts available on CD that you can listen to, 10-15 minutes at a time, and possibly pick up that one idea that can lead to a significant cost savings for your business.

I hope some of these ideas spark some new ideas with you. They do not cover every possible continuous improvement topic or idea ever conceived, but maybe they will give you one idea that you can expand on that will save you a little time and/or money and improve your bottom line.

**Crop Production**

**Strawberry Notes**

**Fertilization: Foliar Nutrient Testing**

Strawberries in 2006-2007 have endured another abnormal fall and winter and survived. We had a warmer than normal fall, and saw a lot of blossom development in December and early January, as well as a lot of rainfall. Rainfall totals at the Cunningham Research Station in Kinston, NC, between Aug 30 and Feb, 3 totaled 35.6 inches! That is nearly 65% of our normal annual rainfall in
a three month window, with 21.3” of that amount falling between September 15 and December 31.

The combination of warmer than normal temperatures and higher than normal rainfall most likely did two things. The warm weather triggered the plants to produce more vegetative growth and blooms in December and January than they would, and the excess rainfall most likely leached nutrients out of the soil profile. This means that adjustments to your fertilizer program are going to be needed as you start pushing toward harvest. This is necessary because soil testing done in mid-summer does not account for the amount of leaching that might have occurred, and soil tests do not indicate whether the plant is absorbing the nutrients that are present.

Foliar sampling is the best way to evaluate and manage the pre-harvest nutrient needs of your strawberries. Foliar samples give you a snapshot of the availability of nutrients in the plant. The analysis measures existing concentrations of nutrients required for plant growth, including major nutrients (N, P, K), secondary nutrients (Ca, Mg, S), and micronutrients (Fe, Mn, Zn, Cu, B, Mo and Cl). These elements can be limiting factors in the development, yield and quality of your strawberries.

In order to collect an accurate leaf tissue sample, a number of steps should be followed.

- Remove dead leaf tissue from the plants. This will reduce the incidence of fungal diseases that can infect the new buds and blossoms. This should be done in late February or early March, depending on when the warm weather returns in 2007.
- Collect leaf samples from the first mature trifoliate growth of the year. Avoid sampling the newest trifoliate, as these leaves will have higher levels of the mobile nutrients and lower levels of immobile nutrients that may or may not indicate the actual levels available.
- Collect 15-20 most recently mature petioles from each field or block of strawberries that you fertilize separately. A random walk should give you a good representation of the nutrient levels in the field.

This will allow you to fine tune your fertilizer program through the season.

- Petiole samples should be sent to the NCDA&CS Soil Test lab for analysis. Ship these samples wrapped in tissue, paper towels or newspaper – not plastic bags! This will allow the plants to dry naturally and avoid fungal infections that will affect nutrient values.
- Petiole and nitrate nitrogen values should reach 3000-4000 ppm by early fruit picking, and then decline gradually to 500 ppm by the end of harvest.
- Petiole samples should be taken bi-weekly to maintain adequate levels of N in the root zone in order to maximize yield and quality.
- Fertigate weekly based on petiole N levels.
- Ammonium toxicity is a possibility if fertilizers containing 50% of the nitrogen is in the ammonium form. This could lead to root injury and increase the strawberry plant’s vulnerability to disease.

Source: Review of Strawberry Nutrition and Foliar Sampling by C.R. Campbell, Chief Plant/Waste/Solution Advisory Section, Agronomic Division, NCDA&CS

If you have questions about any of the upcoming meetings, business strategies, or crop production management issues, please call me at the Jones County Extension Center at (252) 448-9621. I can also be reached by email at: Mark_Seitz@ncsu.edu.

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