April 2009

The Monthly “Beet”
Commercial Horticulture Newsletter for Southeast North Carolina

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

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UPCOMING WORKSHOPS, MEETINGS, TOURS

April 1, 2009. Sustainable Community Gardens – Planning Meeting. 9 AM. Craven Co. Health Department, New Bern, NC. Call Holly Blake at the Craven Co. Health Department at 252-636-4902 x2075

BAG LUNCH MEETINGS:
Good Agricultural Practices Food Safety Training. 12 PM – 1 PM.


This training is designed for all fruit and vegetable producers. Participants will receive the latest on basic food safety guidelines, the food safety audit process, the food safety certification process and how to use this as a marketing tool for your produce business. There will also be a brief overview of pending federal legislation on this topic. Call Mark Seitz at the Jones County Extension office for more information at (252) 448-9621.

April 23, 2009. Developing Local Food Networks in Southeast NC. Onslow County Extension Center. 10 AM – 3 PM. This program is for all fruit and vegetable producers, restaurant owners, cafeteria managers, food brokers and buyers and anyone interested in expanding the production and use of local foods in Onslow, Pender, Carteret, Craven, Jones, Duplin and Lenoir County.

Planned Speakers…

Mr. Larry Otto, retired vice president of L&M Companies in Raleigh, NC will be the keynote speaker. Mr. Otto is the past president of the NC United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association and is currently a member of the board of directors of the Produce Marketing Association Retail Division. Mr. Otto brings a unique perspective on the local food movement and what you can do to be more involved in the production and sale of local food.

Dr. Ben Chapman, NCSU Food Safety Department. Dr. Chapman brings a wealth of knowledge about food safety from farm to fork to this program.

Mr. Nick Augustini, NCDA&CS Marketing Division. Mr. Augustini’s years of experience in industry and in the NCDA&CS Marketing Division will bring another perspective on how local foods work.

Mr. Ward Sylvester, Piggly Wiggly Stores, Inc. Mr. Sylvester will bring a local retailer’s perspective on how grocery stores are using local food.

Mr. Michael Dunn, Commissary Director, Camp LeJeune. Mr. Dunn will add the federal government’s perspective on purchasing local food.

May 15, 2009. 2009 Kinston Farmers Market Grand Opening. Downtown Kinston on Heritage Street. Come join us for fresh produce, a hot dog and hospitality. 8 AM – 1:30 PM.

June 13, 2009. 2009 Onslow County Farmers Market Grand Opening. Many activities planned and produce vendor space is limited for this day. Call Larry Kent, market coordinator at (910) 455-5873 for more information.

Call Mark Seitz at the Jones County Extension office at (252) 448-9621 or Larry Kent at the Onslow County Extension office at (910) 455-5873 to register for this program.

BUSINESS PLANNING

How do I keep my fertilizer cost under control? Where do I buy it?

CROP PRODUCTION:

Sweet Potato – ‘Hattersas’ variety

The NC Sweet Potato Commission issued a press release last week regarding a newly released sweet potato variety called Hatteras. This variety was developed by the NC State University plant breeding program for limited commercial production in 2008. Unfortunately an internal decay problem is now showing up in all storage facilities at levels between 5% and 50%. This level of infection and problem is not acceptable for marketing purposes and has greater long term implications for the NC Sweet Potato industry in general.
If you were planning to grow Hatteras in 2009 the NC Sweet Potato Commission and NC State University plant breeders ask you to please reconsider this decision to give researchers time to understand the problem, to determine if a solution can be made and how to correct the problem.

If you have questions about this please call your local Extension office or contact Sue Johnson-Langdon at the NC Sweet Potato Commission at: 919-894-1067 for more information.

Food Safety: A Growing Challenge for NC Fruit and Vegetable Producers

Food safety is an on-going concern for consumers, producers and politicians are listening. The recent salmonella outbreak in peanuts, combined with other food-borne illness outbreaks in 2006, 2007 and 2008 have led the US Congress and Senate to introduce legislation to tighten the food safety guidelines for fresh produce. Two bills: The FDA Food Safety Modernization Act of 2009 (Senate Bill 510) and Safe Food Enforcement, Assessment, Standards and Targeting (FEAST) Act of 2009 (HR 1332) hope to give FDA more tools and funding to trace, recall and enforce new food safety guidelines for the food industry and the produce industry.

In response to this I will be offering four, 1 hour lunchtime programs at the Jones, Craven, Onslow and Lenoir County Extension offices to share with you what these bills are targeting and to review basic food safety guidelines called Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) that may become mandatory with the passage of this legislation. The point of this training is to help you start to develop a food safety plan for your farm based on what is currently recommended for on-farm food safety handling.

This is a subject that is NOT going away and no matter how big or small your operation is so you need to be informed about what is coming at you.

Please put one of the dates [See Calendar Section] for the training in the county Extension office closest to you on your calendar and I will do my best to answer questions on the topics of food safety and good agriculture practices.

As food safety concerns grow and in an effort to help you build a good food safety program for your farm I would like to schedule a mock ‘third-party food safety audit’ of your farm this spring – during harvest. My audit is by no means official or mandated and has any regulatory implications. The objective of this is to walk through your operation with you using USDA’s third-party audit score sheets to identify what you are doing well and what needs improvement in regard to food safety.

In addition I also plan to host four, 2 hour in-depth food safety training programs for you to help you become more aware of GAP guidelines. I know April and May are incredibly busy months to attend meetings but it is important that you attend one or all of the sessions to give you ideas on:

- What is involved in a third party food safety audit?
- What steps are mandatory or not mandatory?
- How can you reduce your customer’s food safety risk?
- Review the Good Agriculture Practices manual and understand steps you can take to begin to minimize the threat to your farm that a food borne illness can be tracked back to you.

The program materials for this training are in final development and once they are available from the NCSU Value-Added Center I will set dates and make further announcements. In lieu of this training, let me know if you are interested in participating in a ‘mock’ food safety audit and I will come do one at your farm. I have the materials for this and can get you started with your food safety plan.
Fruit IPM

For those of you in strawberry business, or who are just getting started, or for those of you who are not and are considering growing strawberries, there are a number of tasks coming at you very quickly this month as the crop matures and temperatures rise. I hope this article provides you with a few reminders, links to resources or new tips about how to manage fruit crops.

Strawberries:

By now you should have been actively inspecting your crop for botrytis fruit rot (gray mold). With the cool, wet, cloudy weather we have had both diseases have the potential to become a serious problem in the coming weeks if not monitored and kept in check. Botrytis loves temperatures between 41°F and 77°F – something of which we have had a lot of in recent weeks. As your buds begin to form fruit, stay vigilant and keep this fungal disease in check. Sanitation (removing infected buds and fruit) can be effective if small outbreaks are noticed early but for larger growers/acres, a rotational mix of fungicides is in order. Complete control measures can be found in the Southeastern Region Pest Plasticulture Production Guide online at: http://www.smallfruits.org/SmallFruitsRegGuide/G uides/2005culturalguidepart1bs1.pdf. If you need a print copy of this guide let me know.

Fungicides labeled for use to control Botrytis include: Captan, Switch, Elevate, CaptEvate – a Captan/Elevate mix, Rovral, Pristine, Scala, Topsin-M and Thiram. The rates are available in the 2009 NC Ag Chem Manual or through your Cooperative Extension office.

The key points to keep in mind as you develop and implement your spring spray program are:

1. Abound, Pristine, Cabrio all have the same family of chemistry and are equally effective against anthracnose. These chemicals (strobilurins) should not be used more than two times in a row to avoid the buildup of resistance crops.

2. Pristine has an additional component that gives good broad spectrum control.

3. Captan, Thiram and Switch are also broad-spectrum fungicides that can be effective against botrytis.

4. Elevate cannot be used more than 2 times in a row. It is very good against botrytis but nothing else. Limiting or rotating its use will help you avoid building up a disease-resistant strain of the fungi.

5. Bloom sprays the most important sprays you make. You have already invested considerable amounts of money in planting and frost protecting and you cannot afford to lose the crop now.

I have included a copy of Table 7-16 from the NC 2009 Ag Chemicals Manual, pg. 347 with a table of the efficacy of many of the fungicides available for use in strawberries. I hope this provides you with a quick reference guide you can carry in your pickup as you travel too and from the farmers market. For this reason under leaf (bottom side) coverage is very important for spider mite control.

Two-spotted Spider mites:

Spider mites are very difficult insects to see because of their size and because they ‘hang out’ on the bottom side of the strawberry leaves. Their populations can grow, relatively undetected in cool weather and expand rapidly in warm, moist conditions. Their feeding habits can seriously starve the plant for energy. Predatory mites can be an effective method of control but insecticide sprays will do serious damage to predatory mites as well as two-spotted spider mites.

Detection is relatively easy with a 30X hand lens – especially for us ‘old guys with bad eyesight’ – is a necessity for inspecting the leaves for two-spotted spider mite ova and adults. Miticides with ovicide and miticide capabilities are necessary for good control of this insect.

Cultural control is another effective way to limit the population growth of this insect. As I mentioned earlier predatory mites can control populations provided they are present in large enough quantities.
Again a hand lens and good entomology knowledge are important to have if you plan to use this control practice.

Broadleaf weed control is also important as two-spotted spider mites live and breed on alternative host plants which are just about any broadleaf week plant. Keeping broadleaf weeds in check in row middles can help minimize the populations of this insect.

One additional management factor to keep in mind… Reentry Interval (REI) and Pre-Harvest Interval (PHI). If you have scouted your crop for disease and insect problems and find an application of fungicide or herbicide is required, pay attention to the REI and PHI information on your pesticide labels. These numbers are in place to protect you, your work crew(s) and your customers. Monitoring them properly and documenting your sprays and worker safety training programs are critical components of a good agricultural practices (GAP) program.

The following article is an excerpt from an electronic newsletter published by Dr. Joe Neal, NCSU Horticulture Science Turf Grass Weed Specialist…

“What Was The Marketing Department Thinking???

I [Dr. Neal] was just looking through a catalogue from one of the major suppliers to our industries and was surprised by what I found in the herbicide section – “Image” herbicide -- but not exactly the Image herbicide we know.

So, what surprised me enough to make this a topic for my weekly word on weeds? There were three “Image” herbicides, each with a different active ingredient but the same Trade Name. One contained MSMA, a postemergence herbicide for crabgrass and nutsedge control in warm season and cool-season turf. The second “Image” contained atrazine, a preemergence herbicide for broadleaf weed control in warm season turf but not cool-season turf. The third “Image” is the one we are familiar with containing imazaquin.

So, what does that have to do with weed control in ornamentals you might wonder (since I don’t recommend the use of any of these in landscape beds anyway). This underscores the need for you, the user, to read the label.

Here is another example. Have you used the herbicide Vantage for over the top applications in ornamentals for crabgrass control in the past? If so, you will be surprised to learn that Vantage is now another name for glyphosate – NOT sethoxydim. The new name for sethoxydim in ornamentals is “Segment”. But, there is still Vantage = sethoxydim in warehouses and on the shelves. [Confused?]

Why does this sort of thing happen? Fortunately this is name changing is not common in the ornamentals market, but it does happen. Marketing departments often like to capitalize on brand name recognition, sometimes (in my opinion) casting common sense to the wind. So, before you buy, read the label and list of ingredients. Make sure you are purchasing the active ingredient you actually want.

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So what does this have to do with fruit and vegetable crops?? Everything!! The bottom line for all crop producers is…

Make sure you know what you are buying and read the labels before you apply the product.
If you have questions about any of the information, 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.