June 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

June 9, 2007. 2nd Annual Onslow County Farmers Market Grand Opening. Come to the Onslow County Farmers Market to see the NCDA ‘Big Cart’, meet the 2007 NC Watermelon Queen, and participate in a number of activities for kids and adults alike. Call Larry Kent, Onslow County Farmers Market Manager at (910) 340-0009 for more information.

June 14, 2007. Food Safety/GAPs Training for Vegetable Producers. Mountain Research Station, Fletcher, NC. Contact Bill Jester at the Cunningham Research Station at (252) 526-4445 for more information.

June 23, 2007. 4th Annual NC Blueberry Festival. Burgaw, NC. Contact Wayne Batten, Pender County Cooperative Extension Center at (910) 259-1235, for more information.

June 27, 2007. Cooperative Extension SE Region 4-H District Activity Day. Jones County High School. Volunteers are needed to help organize and move 400+ kids 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.

DATE CHANGE!!!

August 14, 2007. SE Region Strawberry Pre-Plant Meeting. Location for this meeting has not yet been finalized. This will be finalized by July 1. Call Mark Seitz in Jones County at (252) 448-9621, or Howard Wallace in Columbus County at (910) 640-6605 for more information.

**Business Planning & Management**

“Confidence is contagious and so is a lack of confidence, and a customer will recognize both.”

*Vince Lombardi*

I have shared a lot of ideas about marketing and saw this quote from Vince Lombardi in a book titled *The Quotable Coach* by Thom Loverro, which says a lot about marketing and customer service.

Coach Lombardi’s quote struck a chord with me, and I thought it says a lot about how you and your employees should be thinking about customer service.

We all get caught up in the day-to-day activity of keeping the business, office or programs, on track. We all know how maddening customer demands can be in the middle of our daily routines, especially when their demands require immediate attention.

So how do you handle these unreasonable customers?

**“What is a Customer?”**

A Customer is:

- not someone we are doing a favor by serving… they are doing us a favor by giving us the opportunity to do so…
- not someone to argue or match wits with. Nobody ever won an argument with a customer…
- a person who brings us his wants. It is our job to handle them profitably to them and to ourselves.”


**Community Supported Agriculture**

Are you looking for a new marketing twist on your farm? Are you interested in getting some of your operating expenses covered at the start of the crop year, without having to borrow money from the bank? Are you familiar with futures contracts? If so, then community supported agriculture might be the marketing angle you’re looking for.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is one approach farmers and consumers are using to meet the growing demand for local produce. CSA’s are gaining momentum throughout the country and are being used by many families and consumers to increase the value and profitability of farming.

The idea of community supported agriculture started in the late 1980s. In 1986 there were only two known CSAs in North America, and by 2000, over 1,000 CSAs existed. This boom in CSAs has evolved in part, because of the decreasing share that farmers receive for the products they grow or raise.

I mentioned in an earlier article, that on average farmers receive $0.19 of every dollar US consumers spend on food. Selling directly to consumers allows farmers to capture $0.80 - $0.90 of every dollar spent. CSA’s not only help farmers capture more of the money consumers spend on food by creating a direct contract between the consumer and the farmer, but they also help farmers mitigate the risks that are an inherent part of farming.

The positive side of this shift in income is that you, not the processors or brokers, receive the
money and you get to decide how and where to spend it. The drawback to some farmers might be the additional management requirements that go along with a CSA. Instead of allowing the processors, brokers or retailers deal with the packaging, storage, marketing and transportation of the crop, this burden falls on you.

What is community supported agriculture? CSAs…

- provide a critical link in the community that helps consumers understand how farming works
- helps consumers learn what it takes to produce a crop and the impact adverse weather has on the crop
- give consumers an avenue to discuss with farmers how the crop is grown
- enable consumers to express their demand for locally grown or organic produce
- allows consumers the chance to ask that a favorite fruit or vegetable be grown or that a specific variety be grown.

How do CSAs work? A CSA requires the involvement of one or more farmers and a group of consumers who are trying to support local farmers and agriculture and keep farmland in production. Consumers buy a membership or a share of a CSA and the farmer agrees to provide produce (vegetables, fruit, meat, flowers, fiber, etc.) to the consumer. The cost of a share is based on the farmer’s cost to produce the crop plus a predetermined profit margin that allows for a living wage for the products grown.

For example, if the cost of production on a 3 acre block of land is $22,000 and the grower wants to generate are reasonable profit (or living wage) of 10% for this work, then the living wage for this CSA is $2,200. Divided equally a CSA with 100 members require each member to pay $220 to the farmer for a season’s worth of produce. In good years CSA members share the abundance with each week’s pickup/delivery. In a lean year, CSA members share in the losses incurred due to weather, disease or insect problems and receive a smaller amount of produce with their order.

All of these factors facilitate communication between farmers and their neighbors so that a greater level of understanding exists. Building this bridge between farmers, neighbors and consumers helps farmers deliver a better product and helps consumers know that the produce they receive is grown locally in a safe, healthy manner.

**Crop Production**

**Powdery Mildew Rampant on Athena Cantaloupe in Northern Florida and Southern Georgia**

From: Gerald J. Holmes, Extension Plant Pathologist, NC State University.

*Over this past week (5/27 – 6/2), I have received news that powdery mildew is present at very high levels on cantaloupe cv. [cultivar] Athena in northern Florida and southern Georgia. While powdery mildew on cucurbits is not unusual, seeing it this early and this severe on cantaloupe is cause for concern. Without doubt, the dry weather has provided ideal conditions for spread of the pathogen. Unlike most foliar diseases, powdery mildew thrives in dry conditions.*

Growers in North Carolina should take note of this and be prepared for powdery mildew this season. Fortunately, a new fungicide called Quintec (by Dow AgroSciences) received its label for use on melons and watermelon earlier this year. We have evaluated Quintec for control of powdery mildew on squash for several years and it has performed extremely well. It performs similarly on cantaloupe.

Quintec cannot be applied more than four times per season and no more than two times consecutively. It should be rotated with another effective fungicide with a different mode of action. There are two choices here, a strobilurin (Flint, Quadris or Pristine) or a DMI* fungicide (Nova or Procure). All of these rotation partners have been losing efficacy
over the past several years and there are reports of control failures using Pristine this year in Georgia. Given this information, Nova or Procure may be preferred.


Growers should scout cucurbits (especially cantaloupe and watermelon) for powdery mildew and begin applications immediately if symptoms are present. Look for white powdery spots on leaves that are in shaded areas of the canopy. If the disease is found nearby but not on your farm, you should begin treatments immediately and reapply on a 7-day interval.

* DMI = demethylation inhibitor

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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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