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

Mark Seitz
Extension Area Specialized Agent
Agriculture – Commercial Horticulture
(252) 448-9621 or Mark_Seitz@ncsu.edu

UPCOMING WORKSHOPS, MEETINGS, TOURS

October 20, 2009. Regional Farmers Market Meeting. Duplin County Extension Center, Kenansville, NC. 9 AM – 3 PM. Call Mark Seitz at the Jones County Extension Center, (252) 448-9621 for more information.

Oct. 27-28, 2009. NC Greenhouse Vegetable Growers Association Annual Conference. Wake County Ag. Center, Raleigh, NC. For more information call (919) 334-0099, fax (919) 877-0940, mobile (919) 413-9544 or email cathyprice09@yahoo.com

November 8-10, 2009. NC Strawberry Expo. Sheraton Imperial Hotel, Raleigh, NC. For more information email the NC Strawberry Association at: info@ncstrawberry.com.

November 30-December 2, 2009. Southeast Vegetable Expo. Kingston Plantation Embassy Suites Hotel, Myrtle Beach, SC. For more information call (919) 334-0099 or email Cathy Price at: cathyprice09@yahoo.com

December 1-2, 2009. Certified Crop Advisor Training. Onslow County Cooperative Extension Center, Jacksonville, NC. 15 hours of CCA recertification credits will be available at this meeting. For more information call Curtis Fountain at the Duplin County Extension office at (910) 296-2143.
BUSINESS PLANNING

Managing Your Business

Peter Drucker, considered by many as THE father of modern management, wrote numerous books about management and how it does and does not function well. One concept he discusses in his book *The Essential Drucker* is business reports and how they are misused.

Mr. Drucker’s view on reports is “Reports and procedures should be kept to a minimum, and only when they save time and labor. They should be kept as simple as possible.”

Reports can provide you a great, simple, quick snapshot of what is happening in your business, but the key to using them effectively is to keep them simple. Do not make them so cumbersome that they distract you from what is important – getting the work done that you need to be doing. Worse yet, do everything you can to keep from bogging down your employees in a minefield of reports that become a distraction and keep them from doing their jobs.

In the heat of planting or harvest, this can be easy to say and tough to do, but it can be done.

Production Budgets & Break Even Analysis

Summer is winding down in eastern NC, and with it comes the end of the main part of the fruit and vegetable production season. It is true sweet potatoes are still in the field – close to harvest and the planting window for fall crops like collards is right around the corner. However, with all that work going on, it is also time to start planning for spring 2010.

For established now is the time to tally up the harvest and sales data from your 2009 spring/summer crops. Doing so on a crop-by-crop basis will help you decide if it is worth your time and energy to produce something. If you made or lost money, what was the reason? Weather? Marketing? Excess or limited volume? Too much competition? Production costs?

In today’s business environment, determining what you made money on and what you lost money on is more than just scratching a few numbers on an envelope in the truck. It requires sitting down and really thinking about what you spent to produce the crop and what aspect of producing that crop cost you the most money.

As producers of food, whether you like it or not, you must live and survive in a low-cost, high volume world where most consumers believe food should be inexpensive, top quality and available 24/7/365. This requires you to find the holes in your business and plug the leaks. Going through the budget process can help you identify the holes.

While the budget process is valuable, it falls one step shy of telling you the complete picture. The budget helps itemize what you spend your money on and how much you spend it, but it doesn’t answer the most common question I receive each year from farmers, “What should I charge this year for my product?”

That question has no single answer because it depends on two key factors: 1) what it cost you to produce the crop, and 2) what consumers are willing to pay for the crop. The answer is driven by how much is produced and how much
it costs you to produce the product, all the while taking into account the amount you sell and how much profit you build into your budget.

Budget sheets for many of the common fruit and vegetable crops grown in NC are available online at: http://www.ag-econ.ncsu.edu/budgets. Taking a minute to create or review your budget may mean the difference between a profit and a loss in 2010.

**FOOD SAFETY:**

**Legislation:**

The US House of Representatives passed their version of the latest greatest food safety law coming to a farm near you. The US Senate will begin debate on the topic when they return from their summer recess. Now is the time to keep in touch with your Congressional representatives to make sure they understand what is important to you regarding on-farm food safety rules and regulations. Like it or not, there will be some form of food safety legislation mandating traceability, a food safety plan for your farm and more record keeping. How much and in what form is still up for debate, so you still have time to tell Congress what will work for you and for the industry.

**CROP PRODUCTION:**

**Insect Pest Control in Strawberries**

Some of you attended the 2009 Strawberry Pre-Plant meeting in Kinston, NC on August 19. Those that did attend enjoyed a great meal and received some great information on insect control in strawberries. I wanted to share a quick overview of the insect management discussion that was led by Dr. Hannah Burrack, NCSU Entomology Department, regarding the control and management of Two-spotted spider mite (TSSM) and strawberry clipper. You also received 1.0 hours of pesticide recertification credit, which by the way is ‘in the book’.

- **TSSM Conventional Control**
  - Check plants on arrival to see if TSSM populations are present and if treatment is necessary.
  - Economic Threshold: 5 TSSM (mature, egg laying adults)/leaflet – consider an application of miticide if threshold is exceeded.
  - Scout weekly in mid-February – 10 leaflets from 10 plants in 10 places in the field. If an average of 5 or more TSSM per leaflet are present apply Acramite or Kanemite.
  - Spring treatment should supply 3-4 weeks of control.
  - IF populations begin to increase, an application of a larvicide/ovicide (Zeal, Savy or Oberon) should provide an additional 3-4 weeks of population control.

- **TSSM Organic Control**
  - Check plants on arrival to see if TSSM populations are present and if treatment is necessary.
  - Economic Threshold: 5 TSSM (mature, egg laying adults)/leaflet.
  - When mites being to appear in numbers equaling or exceeding threshold levels, release predatory mites.
  - Avoid use of pyrethroids (Danitol and Brigade) until the end of the season AND only apply if TSSM populations have exceeded the threshold of 10/leaflet.

Regardless of the method you plan to use, check the cost of the material, the mode of action and the rate to achieve the most effective control of TSSM possible.
Strawberry Clipper

- Strawberry clippers are a small, brown colored beetle that causes most of its damage when the adults are laying eggs.
- Strawberry clipper populations are worse when strawberries are planted in fields adjacent to or surrounded by trees.
- The adults ‘clip’ off blooms, thereby reducing yield. Some varieties compensate for the bloom loss by throwing out more blooms later.
- Treatment timing is tricky. Strawberry clipper are present during bloom. Bloom sprays are tricky and risky. Insecticide applications during bloom are tricky and risky.
- If treatment is necessary, apply Brigade or Sevin XLR.
- Apply at night/dusk to reduce exposure to honey bees and other pollinators.
- No organic options available at this time.

Poultry Litter as a Nitrogen Source

Poultry litter is a great source of N. It contains 30 lbs of N per ton so an application of 2.0 tons per acre would meet the 60 lbs N per acre recommendation in the fall. The poultry litter will also provide a good source of organic matter. If you feel you need more organic matter, a second 2.0 ton per acre application of turkey litter will supply this but wait until next fall to make a second application. Too much N applied in the fall keeps the plants in a highly vigorous state and increases the potential for frost/freeze injury to your plants in the winter.

The other concern with fresh poultry litter is bacterial contamination. Salmonella is the most common organism found in poultry litter and food safety guidelines need to be followed in this case. Untreated manure has to be applied to the field at least 120 days before harvest. Non-composted poultry manure applied now (August & September) would also keep you in compliance with the current food safety guidelines. Therefore, applications made today will be in the field almost 240 days before strawberries are ready to pick so you should be in good shape.

The only caveat to this is if you plan to push your crop with row covers in the fall for harvest in December. In this case be sure your harvest dates go beyond the 120 days after the application of raw manure in the field.

For more information about the fertility question contact your Extension office. For more food safety information visit the NC Value-Added Agriculture website at: http://ncvalueadded.org/

Late September – My Schedule:

If everything goes as planned I will be out of the office in late September enjoying the arrival of my first child. [We know it’s a girl – name to be determined!] Our due date is September 24. The arrival date is yet to be determined.

I will be checking email and voice messages as I have time, while I am on leave (probably for one week). Feel free to email your questions to me as they arise. My replies may come in the wee hours of the morning, but I’ll do my best to keep up while I am out. Wish me luck. 😊

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.