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**

**October 10, 2006.** Fall AgriCultural Tourism Tour – Wayne County. Tour cost is $20. Contact Kim Davis at (919) 731-1520 or Lin Nichols at (910) 296-2143 to register or for more information.

**October 16, 2006.** High Tunnel Greenhouse Production Workshop. 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM. CEFS, Goldsboro, NC. Call CEFS at (919) 513-0954 for more information.

**October 17, 2006.** Regional Farmers Market Planning Meeting. Onslow County Cooperative Extension office. Jacksonville, NC. 11 AM – 12:30 PM. Lunch included. Contact Mark Seitz to register and for more information.

**November 9-11, 2006.** Southeast Strawberry Expo. Sea Trail Resort & Conference Center, Sunset Beach, NC (between Wilmington & Myrtle Beach). Contact ncstrawberry@mindspring.com to receive more info or go to www.ncstrawberry.org to register.

**November 10-12, 2006.** 21st Annual Tomato Disease Workshop. Mountain Horticultural Research & Extension Center. Fletcher, NC. Registration deadline October 23, 2006. Fee $50, $60 at the door. Contact Dr. Kelly Ivors at Kelly_Ivors@ncsu.edu for more information.

**December 13-14, 2006.** SE Vegetable Growers Conference, Myrtle Beach, SC. Details coming soon.

**December 2006.** Certified Crop Advisor Training, Onslow County Extension Center. Details coming soon.

**March 2, 2007.** Northern Piedmont Specialty Crops School, Person County Cooperative Extension Center. Call Carl Cantaluppi at (336) 599-1195 for more information.
Pollocksville Rotary and Jones County Cooperative Extension Team Up

The Jones County Cooperative Extension office has been invited by the Pollocksville Rotary Club to develop and deliver a variety of educational programs focused on wild life and outdoor education as part of the 14th Annual Pollocksville Rotary Big Game Hunt on October 27-28, 2006, in Pollocksville, NC.

This program is a new addition to the Rotary-sponsored Big Game Hunt and one that Cooperative Extension hopes will be beneficial to hunters and spectators alike. Speakers will cover a range of topics including hunter safety, food plot management, camouflage clothing and food safety. These education sessions will take place on the main stage at the Rotary Park on Island Creek Road in Pollocksville, between 10 AM and 3 PM, both Friday and Saturday.

The Big Game Hunt is a fund-raising activity for the Pollocksville Rotary club to support programs in Jones County, the US and the world as part of Rotary International’s mission.

Jones County Cooperative Extension is participating as part of its on-going mission to deliver research-based knowledge to the citizens of Jones County. For a detailed list of the scheduled education programs, go to the Jones County Cooperative Extension website at http://jones.ces.ncsu.edu and click on News.

FACT in Jones County

The FACT program (Farmers Adopting Computer Training) is a personal computer training program for small farmers across Jones and Lenoir Counties in conjunction with NC A & T State University, NC State University, NC Cooperative Extension and Lenoir Community College.

In an effort to help farmers across Jones County keep up with today’s computerized world, NC A & T, NCSU, Jones County Cooperative Extension and Lenoir Community College Jones County Campus, are working together to bring this program, developed by NC A & T, to small farmers in the area.

FACT was developed by NC A & T State University to train small farmers with limited resources to better understand and use computer technology to improve their access to larger markets through the Internet and to improve their ability to communicate with the rest of the world.

FACT students will receive basic computer keyboard training, training in Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel spreadsheet training and Internet training.

Classes will begin as soon as a minimum of six people register. Classes will be held at the LCC Jones County campus. You can get more details about this program from me or Franky Howard at the Jones County Extension office. Call now if you are interested in registering for this training.
National Extension Tourism Conference

In early September, I attended an agricultural tourism conference in Burlington, Vermont, and picked up a few ideas for those of you interested in starting a roadside market or who are already running roadside markets. The next segment in this newsletter, “Signs for Farms, Roadside Markets and Agritourism” is one of the somewhat obvious ideas I picked up. The key idea I came home with is one that is not all that new. Farmers across Vermont and throughout the US, in conjunction with their local Chambers of Commerce, their local and state tourism offices and various associations, have discovered that packaging your business with other like businesses can greatly increase your customer traffic and potential sales.

Vermont farmers, because of small farm sizes; a short growing season; high demand for land; high cost of living; close proximity to New York and Boston and high property taxes, (sound familiar?) have been forced to generate revenue from sources other than conventional crop or livestock production. Many have been done so through agriculture tourism: on-farm bed and breakfasts, hands-on farm ventures and by working together to advertise their ventures with other on-farm “agri-tainment” enterprises.

In North Carolina there are a number of ways to do the very same things, and today Internet presence is a must for anyone interested in such a venture. There are at least two websites: www.homegrownhandmade.com (for agriculture tourism businesses) and www.localharvest.org (for produce businesses) that will allow you to be “on the Web” and at no cost. While I do recommend you develop your own website and farm logo, linking to these and other websites are a low cost way to expand your presence across the Internet.

Local Harvest (www.localharvest.org) is a website designed to help fruit and vegetable growers be more visible to the marketplace. Localharvest.org started in California and today has farm, roadside market and farmers market venues listed in all 50 states. Consumers looking for locally grown produce can simply key in their zip code, and a list of farms in the area will be displayed. You can also sort out farms in your area that grow a specific product.

There are numerous websites available for you to tap into at minimal or no cost. The key message in all this is that no matter what you grow, what market or customer you are selling to, you need to be on the Internet. There is a saying in the business world today (not sure where it came from) that says, “If you aren’t on the Internet, you just aren’t [in business]!” So look around for any and all places that you can get your name and contact information listed, in order to keep growing your business.

Signs for Farms, Roadside Markets & Agritourism

Signs can be one of your best tools for advertising your farm, roadside market or agritourism venture. They work for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; 365 days a year without complaining, without charging you labor and benefits, without calling in sick and without asking questions.
Signs can be as simple and inexpensive as a hand-written cardboard sign saying, “Lemonade $0.50 per glass”, or as extensive as the computerized billboard with rotating ads and video broadcast capabilities now in use west of New Bern on Hwy 70.

For most roadside markets and farmers markets a well made, multicolor sign will cost between $250 - $1,000 depending on the detail, size and colors you want. Most signs should last five to seven years provided the next Hurricane Katrina does not take it away. To put this expense into budget terms a $500 sign that lasts five years will cost you $0.27 per day.

How important is a good sign? A recent survey done in Ohio at farmers markets indicated that 75 percent of the customers who visited farmers markets or roadside markets learned about the farmers market or roadside market from a sign on the road. With that kind of response a $500 sign would be money well spent.

**Crop Production**

**GAPs Certification**

By now the news about E. coli bacteria in spinach has no doubt reached you. The consumer reaction to this E. coli outbreak and the media coverage of the resulting illnesses will have an impact on vegetable production, especially leafy green vegetables, but it is too early to say what that impact will be in terms of monetary loss and increased regulation.

While spinach is not widely grown in eastern NC, collards and cabbage are. Just like spinach, collards and cabbage grow close to the soil and are susceptible to contamination from E. coli and other soil borne pathogens. These pathogens are difficult to wash off in leafy green vegetables and in the case of E. coli, washing does not eliminate the pathogen.

As a producer of these crops, there are a number of programs offered by NC Cooperative Extension and NC State University that address this problem. These programs can help protect you and your farm business from the risk and liability of microbial contamination coming from your farm.

**GAP Certification.** GAP (good agricultural practice) certification is a program offered by the NCSU Food Science Department and NC Cooperative Extension that trains farmers in good agriculture production practices. This training is a combination of classes teaching you good handling practices along with the record keeping requirements that are necessary to minimize your liability risk.

By completing this course GAPs training will:

“Review various production practices that you are using with fruits and vegetables.

Assess your current management strengths and weaknesses related to minimizing microbial risks.

Develop a comprehensive record keeping strategy that documents all farm actions that reduce microbial risks

Identify changes in farm management and production practices that can reduce the risk of microbial contamination

Develop action plans to improve the food safety of produce grown or packed on your farm.”

I have not heard any mention of mandatory GAPs training since this latest E. coli outbreak occurred but this case may lead some to question how well we (the farming community) are managing our businesses. The

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1 Good Agriculture Practices. Cornell University. Pg. 2.
more regulators and policy makers ask questions like this the more likely it is that some form of mandatory GAPs regulation will follow.

A second training program opportunity is titled, *Starting a New Food Business*. This curriculum focuses more on processed foods but for those of you growing fruit and vegetables and doing your own canning, or even for those who are only in the production business, the information in this class will help you better understand how food borne illnesses start and what must be done at the farm and processing level to minimize the potential of an outbreak from occurring.

If you are interested in receiving GAPs or *Starting a New Food Business* training, contact me and we will work to get these programs scheduled this winter.

**Alternative Crop Production:**

**Freshwater Prawn**

I suspect many of you are deeply engrossed with fall harvest and planting to start planning for next year. However, there are always opportunities to take a coffee break and start thinking about crops you might consider in 2007. I have been sharing with you business planning and fruit and vegetable crop production information for nearly three years now. As a change of pace I wanted to share with you some information about a new ‘alternative’ crop option that I have been assisting with this fall - prawn.

Mike Frinsko, area aquaculture agent based in Jones County, in cooperation with Dr. Lou D’Abramo at Mississippi State University, has helped developed a network of seven growers across eastern and central North Carolina. This group of farmers started raising prawn as another way to generate additional revenue on their farms. So far… it appears to be working!

Prawn (freshwater shrimp) are native to the tropical Indo-Pacific region of the world. Research on the production of this creature started at the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station 16 years ago. MS State University has a lot of information on the biology of prawn that I won’t go into. Like all crops, we have this information in the Extension office in Jones County if you are interested in it. You can also find information on this crop at the Jones County Extension website at: [http://jones.ces.ncsu.edu/index.php?page=specialtycrops](http://jones.ces.ncsu.edu/index.php?page=specialtycrops). Also, Mike Frinsko and NC Cooperative Extension have a significant amount of cost of production and pond design information available for you to see before ‘diving into the pond’.

As with any crop, before you consider making the investment you should A) have a business plan, B) have a marketing plan and C) do as much homework in advance as you can to understand what you are investing in. There is risk in ‘planting’ this crop but as with all ventures, the higher the risk, the higher the potential reward or the greater the fall.
I realize this is a very vague description of prawn production, but I wanted to let you know it is an option that you might consider this winter. I also wanted to share this with you because as fruit and vegetable growers, you understand the perishable nature of the produce industry and in that respect will have a good head start on other farmers who might be venturing into the ‘perishable’ food business for the first time.

Muscadine Grape Production Opportunity

I just finished speaking with Connie Fisk, Extension Associate and Muscadine grape specialist with NCSU in Duplin County. Connie indicated Dole Foods in Kannapolis, NC, is interested in speaking to growers who are interested in producing fresh market muscadine grape varieties. Dole has specific fresh market varieties they are looking for, so if you are interested in such a venture, please contact Peter Gilmore at (704) 273-1195 for more information.

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.

Sincerely,

Mark Seitz
Extension Area Specialized Agent
Agriculture– Commercial Horticulture