November, 2008

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, Tours & Meetings


December 2-4, 2008. Certified Crop Advisor Training. Onslow County Extension Center. Contact Curtis Fountain at the Duplin County Extension office at (910) 296-2143 for more information.

December 10, 2008. Public Hearings for Managing North Carolina Agriculture Research Stations. 6:00 PM. Tidewater Research Station, Plymouth, NC. Call (252) 793-4118 for more information.


December 16, 2008. Public Hearings for Managing North Carolina Agriculture Research Stations. 6:00 PM. Wake County Office Park, Commons Building 4001 Carya Drive, Raleigh, NC. Call (919) 250-1000 for more information.

January 13-16, 2009. Mid-Atlantic Direct Marketing Conference. Atlantic Coastal Agricultural Conference and Trade Show. Trump Taj Mahal Casino-Hotel, Atlantic City New Jersey. Optional Farm Tour, January 16th. www.madmc.com. This is a very good conference with farm tours in an area of the country with high population, heavy doses of urban sprawl, high land...
prices and lots of customers with large amounts of disposable income.

January 21, 2009. Muscadine Grape Production & Pruning Workshop. 9 AM – 1 PM. Jones County Senior Center & Warren Vineyard, Trenton, NC. Call Mark Seitz at (252) 448-9621 to register and for more information.

February 17, 2009. High Tunnel Vegetable Production School. Save the date!! Location TBD. Call Mark Seitz at (252) 448-9621 for more information.


Business Planning

Listening as a Management Tool

Listening to people is one of the most underutilized management skills we have at our disposal. The Greek philosopher Epictetus said, “We have two ears and one mouth so we can listen twice as much.” For most of us that observation is so obvious, and yet in practice, few of do enough listening.

Listening is a skill that can help us find answers to our daily problems. Listening enables us to better understand what the real issues are. Many times in our day we encounter people and employees that for one reason or another love to complain. Behind it all there is usually a good explanation behind the complaint and in a business setting, if we take the time to ask a few questions and listen to the answers, we will discover the reason for the complaints or concerns.

Management guru Peter Drucker in his book The Effective Executive says there are two kinds of people in the world – readers and listeners. 1 Drucker says readers are people who are readers need to see information in print to give them time to mull over their options before reaching any conclusion. People who are listeners prefer their information via verbal communication. They need to have face to face communication with people before making a decision.

Bottom line is you can’t make a reader listen and you can’t make a listener read. As business owners who are handling everything from production to customer service, you need to figure out which type of person you are. If you are a listener, take time to listen to the people who work to get their feedback. If you are a reader, give your staff opportunities to write down ideas.

Finding ways to work from the side of what you do best will not only make you more productive, but it will reduce your stress levels and might even make your staff happier. Good luck.

Crop Production

Public Meetings – NC Agriculture Research Stations

I have two dates listed in the calendar section for public hearings on how the NC Agriculture Research Stations can be better managed to serve you. One is in Plymouth, the other in Raleigh. Please consider attending one of these meetings. These research stations serve you, and we need your input to help determine the kind of research that

gets done and where the research gets done. This is your chance to ask for help with crop production problems you may be having or that you think are important for this region.

High Tunnel Greenhouse Production Workshop

Save the date! – February 17, 2009 – Save the date!

I am in the process of putting together a one day high-tunnel greenhouse production and management workshop on February 17, 2009. I have not finalized the location as yet, but it will be in one of these four county Extension offices: Lenoir, Craven, Jones or Onslow. This will be an all day program as there is a lot that we can cover. I am finalizing the program now and will have it available in the December issue of this newsletter.

Winter Production & Food Safety – Boiled Peanuts

I received a few calls this fall regarding the sale of boiled peanuts at local farmers and roadside markets. This is a farm-fresh product that many in eastern North Carolina love, and one that is relatively easy to produce and sell. How you package this product dictates which regulatory agency you need to contact to sell them in a legal fashion.

I know. I know. I can hear the groaning and complaining. “One more rule or regulation I have to think about.” Like it or not, the world has changed and while we certainly have the safest food supply in the world, as producers you have to continue to be vigilant and follow the food safety rules as best you can. We have all seen the consequences to an industry when problems arise, so I hope the food safety information I am sharing with you helps keep you on track.

Boiled peanuts, while they are relatively obscure in terms of national market appeal, there are food safety problems that can arise if they are improperly processed. How they are packaged, more so than how they are processed, puts them in the same category as canned low-acid foods that carry the problem of having botulism develop in the product. No one deserves to contract botulism, and it is a bacterium that is caused by improper processing. Taking time to learn the rules and regulations on harvesting, handling and selling the products you make is worth the time, money and effort to do so, compared to the cost of a lawsuit against you for doing something wrong or that you should not be doing.

To address the question about how to handle boiled peanuts at your farmers market or roadside market, I contacted Laura Cain, NC Department of Agriculture Food & Drug Protection Division, who works with growers in this area, to get the answer.

There are two issues with boiled peanuts.

1. In boiled peanuts, there is a risk that people who are boiling peanuts, then bagging them up in plastic bags and refrigerating for resale, significantly increase the risk that their customers will contract botulism poisoning.

The reason for this is that peanuts packed in a 'modified air' environment like a plastic bag are sitting in a perfect environment for bacterial growth - particularly botulism. Laura Cain at NCDA – (919) 280-4427 - told me NCDA would handle the food safety inspection on this type of product.

2. In boiled peanuts that are going to be boiled and sold on the spot with no packaging, there is little to no risk of botulism or other 'processing' problems, like those you would have with low-acid canned food - that NCDA would regulate. As long as the peanuts were boiled and sold to consumers in paper bags or cups - fresh - then there is little or no chance
of having a closed atmosphere that would promote the growth of botulism bacteria. That said, Ms. Cain thought anyone interested in doing sales like this needs to contact their local health department to find out what concerns, rules or regulations they would have for selling boiled peanuts in this fashion.

If there is other product specific information like this that you would like to have answered, let me know, or contact Laura Cain at NCDA, and I will be happy to chase down the information you need.

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.