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, 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. Wake County Office Park, Commons Building 4001 Carya Drive, Raleigh, NC. Call (919) 250-1000 for more information.


January 13-14, 2009. NC Blueberry Council, Inc. 43rd Annual Open House. Sampson Agri-Expo Center, Clinton, NC. Registration 8:30 AM. Meeting 9 AM. Contact Julie Woodcock at (910) 471-3193 or by email at: jjwoodcock@bellsouth.net 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.

February 24, 2009. Regional Farmers Market Meeting. Rocky Mount Farmers Market, Rocky Mount, NC. Contact Mark Seitz for more information.

Business Planning

This will be the best year I’ve ever had on my farm!

“Recession is when a neighbor looses his job. Depression is when you lose yours.”
- Ronald Reagan

Even if you’re on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.
- Will Rogers

Planning for 2009

I’ve been in the shoes of the depressed neighbor – having lost my job in October 2001 after 12 years of employment in the vegetable canning industry. Difficult, devastating, maddening, frustrating, unnerving… there probably are not enough adjectives to describe how I felt the day I was laid off. The good news is, that event brought me to North Carolina Cooperative Extension.

We are all facing tough economic times, and yet no matter how bad the situation may appear there is always a bright side. The demand for local food is still high and that creates opportunities for everyone in the produce industry.

To weather this storm, you need to do some marketing homework. Here are a few tips that I want to share with you that may help you do that.

So what can you do?

1. Develop, revise and implement a business and marketing plan. Business marketing plans force you to set goals, to be creative and to find new ways to work on the problems and challenges that your business faces. Sit down with your employees, your spouse, your business partner(s) and brainstorm for 10 minutes. Think of every problem, success and missed opportunity your business had in 2008. List every one of them. At the end go through the list and rank them. See what information or ideas pop out. Decide what you did well, what needs work and if something needs to go.

2. Create a marketing map for your farm. Grab a county, eastern NC, NC or US map. Put a pin on your home town and draw circles 1, 5, 10, 50, 100 or more miles out. Use the US Census Bureau website: http://www.census.gov/popest/ to estimate the number of households inside each circle. Getting this number shows your sales potential. This will give you a sense of how many potential customers you have in your back yard and how much they might spend.

3. Develop a plan to contact these potential customers by mail, email, phone and website to tell them what you are doing in 2009. Create a logo for your farm/business and drop off a card at their door with your farm logo and web address. This information can help you keep existing customers happy and bring in new customers.

4. Use the marketing map to define your target market and develop a customer profile for each region or community you are serving. Decide how many of these customers you want to contact within each circle, focusing on those closest to home, and go meet them or send them information about your farm. Ask questions and find out what they want and what they value. Use this information to understand who you are selling to, what they want and which of their interests you are currently meeting.

5. Sort the data you collect by geographic location, demographics, personality, or any other breakdown you feel is important. Find out what each of these groups need and decide whether you have products or if you can produce products that meet these needs.

6. Contact people to ask if they are willing to sign a contract with you to buy produce or if they will commit to bringing 40 people each month to your petting zoo or corn maze or for hay rides. Strategies like this can help you forecast customer traffic and more accurately project income across the year.
I love Will Rogers’ quote, “… you get run over if you just sit there.” That is precisely what we cannot do going into 2009. No matter how rough, no matter how unnerving the economic prospects are for 2009, develop a marketing or business management plan keeps you focused and looking ahead rather than behind.

Asian Vegetable Marketing Survey Results

I received funds from the NC Specialty Crops program this summer to find out what type of Asian vegetable varieties might grow in eastern NC and what type consumers in the area are familiar with. The goal was to gather information and provide you with feedback from consumers on their knowledge and interest in Asian vegetable varieties.

The survey work was conducted in two ways. First, 200 - 3” X 5” stamped post cards were distributed at a local roadside market every time a consumer purchased an Asian vegetable variety. From these 200 survey cards, 58 were mailed back with responses to the questions posed.

Second, a full page consumer survey was handed out to 91 people, primarily at the Onslow County Farmers Market and the New Bern Farmers Market throughout the summer of 2008. Customers were asked to take the survey on four separate Saturday’s through the year. Consumers were asked where they live, their age, educational background and their knowledge of Asian vegetables. They were also asked for their opinions on local and organic produce, the number of times they attend a farmers market or roadside market and if recipe cards were important to them.

The results from these surveys are on the last two pages of this newsletter. I hope they offer some insight into the mindset of consumers in the region. I also hope producers will take note of these results and can them to their advantage in 2009.

Crop Production

Public Meetings – NC Agriculture Research Stations

I have two dates (December 10 & 16) 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.

Muscadine Grape Production and Pruning Workshop

The program will start at the Jones Co. Civic Center – small auditorium and will move outside (rain/shine/snow) to Warren Vineyards after lunch. Bring pruners, loppers and gloves for some hands on pruning practice.

High Tunnel Greenhouse Production Workshop

Save the date! – February 17, 2009 – Save the date!
The agenda for this program is still being finalized and the final details worked out. However, the location for the program is the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) in Goldsboro, NC. I moved this meeting to Goldsboro for two reasons. One CEFS has a number of working high tunnels that we can tour and use for teaching purposes and two because there is interest for this type of production from a wider area than Jones, Craven, Onslow & Lenoir County. I will get the program details wrapped up and have them available in the January and February newsletter.

Crop Budgets

Creating a budget for the crops you grow is a management tool frequently overlooked as a valuable resource for your farm/business. Budgets take time to develop and discipline to follow, but they help you keep expenditures in check when money is tight.

The North Carolina State University Agriculture and Resource Economics Department has numerous horticulture crop budgets, field crop and livestock production budgets available online at: http://www.agecon.ncsu.edu/extension/Ag_budgets.html

These budgets are developed by NCSU Agriculture Economists with input from research faculty, commodity groups, farmers and Extension agents. Keep in mind that there is no such thing as a ‘perfect’ budget. The goal is to produce budgets that reflect the amount of money required to plant, manage and harvest a crop based on
management practices developed by NC State University specialists and farmers all over the state.

**Soil Testing**

Now is the time to get your soil samples collected and sent in to the NCDA Soil Testing Lab. Listed below are some soil sampling guidelines from J. Kent Messick, NCDA Field Services Section Chief to follow. The full text of Mr. Messick’s brochure ‘Soil Sampling Basics’ is available online at:


- The sample should represent the area.
- Test sandy coastal plain soils every two to three years. Fine textured soils from the piedmont or mountains should be tested every three to four years.
- Test results and recommendations can vary within short distances.

**Taking Samples**

- Agricultural samples = 15 to 20 cores from each area.
- Use a clean stainless steel or steel sampling instrument. A soil probe is best, but a shovel will work.
- Place each soil core into a clean plastic bucket. Avoid using metal buckets or containers.
- Walk a random pattern over the sampling area.
- Look for changes in soil color, texture, slope and history to divide area into separate samples.
- Do not group together cores from areas that you know have received different treatments. These special areas should be sampled separately.
- Avoid field borders, ditch banks, old brush piles, burn sites, etc. If crop response has been different in an area and the area is large enough to manage separately, then sample it separately.
- The sampling depth for agricultural land where conventional tillage is practiced is 6 to 8 inches. In areas where a pasture or hay crop is to be established or a conservation tillage or no-till plan started, sample to a 6- to 8-inch depth. Where an existing sod is already established, such as pasture or hay, sampling depth is 4 inches. Where conservation or no-till is established, sampling depth is 4 inches.
- Keep sampling areas manageable units. Avoid making units too large or too small. No sample should represent an area larger than 15 to 20 acres. Extremely small areas can be difficult to treat.
- If soil is too wet to till, it is likely best to wait for dryer conditions before taking samples. Wet soils are difficult to mix thoroughly and may affect the quality of the subsample taken.
- After sampling an area, thoroughly mix the sample breaking up clumps and removing any large particles of trash. Fill the sample box to the fill line marked on the side of the box. Be sure the box is marked with the correct sample identification and the grower name.

Soil boxes and sample forms can be picked up at the Cooperative Extension office in your county. Current soil sample turn around is 5-7 days. The amount of time it takes to process samples will increase substantially in the coming months because of the volume of samples NCDA Soil Test Laboratory receives. Get your samples in now and you’ll get your results back much faster.

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.
2008 Asian Vegetable Marketing Survey
Customer Responses

Gender
Male 29.3%  Female 70.7%

Age
18-33 25.0%  34-50 30.4%  51-67 33.7%  67+ 10.9%

Education Level:
High School 8.7%  College Graduate 31.5%  Associate Degree 13.0%  Graduate Degree 18.5%  Some College 28.3%

Location
US 4%  North Carolina 4%  Jones County 13%  Onslow County 71%  Craven County 7%  Jacksonville 58%  New Bern 2%

How Often Do You Shop at a/the farmers' market?
# Times / Month - 1 - 2 66%  # Times / Month - 3 - 4 21%  # Times / Month - 5+ 13%

How likely are you to try or buy a unique fruit and vegetable product at a farmers market or roadside market?
Highly Unlikely 7%  Unlikely 4%  Might Try It One Day 60%  I buy all my ‘new’ fruit and vegetable crops at a farmers' market or roadside stand 29%

Have you ever purchased or cooked Asian vegetable varieties?
Yes 59%  No 33%  Never Heard of Them 9%

Would you be more willing to buy and try exotic fruit and vegetables if recipe cards were available?
Yes 91%  No 9%

On a scale of 1 to 10: 1= Not at all, 10 = I tell everyone about this market, how likely are you to tell a friend about this market? (Circle one)
5 15%  6 2%  7 4%  8 12%  9 8%  10 59%

From the list below, please circle the Asian vegetable varieties that you are familiar with:
Yu Choy Sum 0.7%  Pak choi / Bok choi 15.0%  Malabar spinach 0.4%  Bitter melon 3.6%  Chinese broccoli 7.3%  Chinese mustard 2.6%  Chinese celery 3.3%  Chinese / Korean radish 4.0%  Yard Long Bean 4.7%  Eda mame 9.5%  Mung bean 6.6%  Hyacinth bean 1.5%  Sword bean 0.7%  Burdock 1.1%  Chard 12.4%  Komatsuna (turnip green) 2.2%  Snow pea 23.7%  Perilla (spice) 0.7%

Local produce growers struggle to make a profit producing small volumes of specialty crops. Knowing this are you willing to pay more for local produce that is fresh picked?
Yes 95%  No 5%
If Yes, How much more?
0%- 3% 24%  4% - 6% 44%  7% - 12% 24%  >13% 7%

Organic produce growers struggle to make a profit producing small volumes of specialty crops. Knowing this are you willing to pay more for organic produce that is fresh picked to help farmers offset natural crop loss?
Yes 68%  No 32%
If Yes, How much more?
0%- 3% 16%  4% - 6% 54%  7% - 12% 18%  >13% 11%

Significant data from this survey…
• 50% of consumers have college or graduate level degrees, 50% do not
• 66% shopped at a farmers market or roadside market at least 1-2 times per month
• 60% of consumers might try a unique vegetable from a farmers market and 29% indicated they buy all their unique produce from a farmers market
• 91% of customers indicated they would be willing to try new fruit or vegetables if they were given a recipe card with their purchase
• 79% of customers indicated they tell they actively tell people about the market where they shop
Snow pea (23.7%), Bak / Pak choi (15.0%) and chard (12.4%) were the Asian vegetables most recognized by consumers.

Consumer interest in local produce (95%) was 27% higher than interest in organic produce (68%).

Consumers on average were willing to pay 7% more for local produce than for organic produce.

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### 2008 Asian Vegetable Marketing Mailed Survey Card

#### Customer Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>80.4%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>18-33</th>
<th>34-50</th>
<th>51-67</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Jones County</th>
<th>Onslow County</th>
<th>Craven County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How Often Do You Shop at a/the farmers' market?**

- # Times / Month - 1 - 2: 26%
- # Times / Month - 3 - 4: 18%
- # Times / Month - 5+: 56%

**From the list below, please circle the Asian vegetable varieties that you are familiar with:**

- Bok choi: 28%
- Chinese/Korean radish: 3%
- Chinese broccoli: 14%
- Chinese celery: 10%
- Jicama: 8%
- Komatsuna: 12%
- Malabar spinach: 13%
- Napa cabbage: 7%
- Perilla (spice): 2%
- Snow pea: 1%

**Would you buy the product again that you bought today?**

- Yes: 86%
- No: 14%

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**Significant data from this survey…**

- 74% of customers visit their local roadside market at least 3 times per month.
- Bok choi (28%), Chinese broccoli (14%) and Malabar spinach (13%) were the three most widely recognized Asian vegetables at this roadside market.
- 86% of customers indicated they would buy the product that they purchased and tried again.