

Extension Highlights

Columbus County Center

April 2014

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From the Director

Greetings from North Carolina Cooperative Extension. We continue to bring the best research and resources from NC State and NC A&T State Universities to every county and the Cherokee Reservation. We strive to: strengthen the economy through profitable, sustainable and safe food, forest, and green industry systems; protect the environment and natural resources; and empower youth and families to lead healthier lives and become community leaders. We provide informal community-based learning opportunities and technical assistance to people, businesses, and governments. Our research-based solutions can improve the way you live, work, and play. In the year 2013 Extension addressed many issues facing our county and our programs continue to have a positive impact. We remain committed to working in areas true to Extension's mission, that are important to our customers. Unfortunately, still the greatest challenge we continue to face is a climate of economic uncertainty. Even though things appear economically to be on a positive note, we are still in many ways economically depressed. In this time of economic disparity Extension with your help in 2014 will continue to be a "beacon of light" in the area of meeting citizen needs. We continue to solicit your input, support, and feedback, as we strive to improve our programming efforts and make a difference in the lives of Columbus County citizens. The Columbus County Extension team has worked extremely hard on meeting the needs of citizens. Our dynamic staff is keenly aware of the task that continues before us as it relates to providing high quality researched based information to our clientele. This is information that changes lives and empowers individuals to become better citizens and to improve their quality of life. As we learn from the past and prepare for the future; I am sure that Cooperative Extension will continue to be successful in Columbus County. We are delighted to share with you a few of our accomplishments from the 2013 year. Please accept our thanks for your time, interest, and support throughout the year. As always we thank you for your continued support.

Dalton Dockery



County Extension Director

Who Knew Farmers Would Be Farming With

WWW



With the demand for local foods on the rise, agencies and organizations that are involved with local foods are constantly on the lookout for additional funding to help expand and develop new markets. For the second year in a row, The Columbus County Center of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service was successfully awarded a \$40,000 specialty crops block grant from the North Carolina Department of Agriculture to help aid one such local foods organization known as Down East Connect. Founded in 2010 in the Columbus County Cooperative Extension offices, Down East Connect helps local farmers sell specialty crops and other locally sourced foods to the Wilmington, NC area by providing them with a website based farmers market. To date, the Columbus County Extension Office has been awarded almost \$135,000 in grants and funding to support the Down East Connect program. Since its inception in 2010 Down East Connect has helped to earn Columbus County farmers close to \$120,000 and with the funds from the specialty crops block grant, three jobs associated with local foods will continue to be funded. Plans are in place to continue searching and applying for potential grant sources in order to continue funding the growth of the local foods movement in Columbus County.

What You Don't Know CAN Hurt You!

Foodborne illness costs the United States \$152 billion dollars each year in lost productivity, hospitalizations, long-term disability, and even death. Food Borne illness is nearly 100% preventable if safe food handling practices are applied from the time food is received until it is served. If an outbreak occurs, the National Restaurant Association estimates that it could cost an establishment \$75,000. North Carolina

Cooperative Extension in Columbus County provided the ServSafe course to 27 participants from various food service establishments. As a result of the course, 21 participants passed the exam with an average passing score of 88.18 and will be given 2 points credit toward their health inspection for having food safety training. Starting January 1, 2014, if establishments do not have certified managers on all shifts, two points will be deducted from inspection scores. The estimated cost savings for preventing one food borne illness in the 27 food establishments is \$2,025,000. By passing the exam participants exhibit knowledge of what it takes to provide safe food to the customers they serve. All the evaluations stated, that they would use the information and best practices learned, to train others in the establishment. The ServSafe Food Safety course will continue to be provided in Columbus County.



Since Columbus County has been constantly ranked as the unhealthiest county in North Carolina for several years, county officials and agencies are always looking for opportunities to improve the overall health of the population through prevention and invention programs. North Carolina A&T State University provided the county one such opportunity with the "Kids in the Kitchen" curriculum. They also provided an intern to conduct the program. Four sites from around the county were recruited and approximately 100 youth participated in a six-week nutrition education class. The youth were provided with hands-on nutrition and physical activity classes. NC A&T is still analyzing the data. Some of the results are as follows: 33% of children use food safety handling practices and 67% improved their abilities to choose foods according to Federal Dietary Recommendations. There are plans to continue the program next year and compare and analyze the two year program data.



For \$\$\$ Savings

Farmers are continually looking for production practices that will reduce costs and or maximize profits. The use of Best Management Practices and environmental issues also play into this decision. Cooperative Extension has encouraged farmers to use no-till as a production practice on at least part of the crop acres. Field days and demonstrations have taught the benefits of no-till practices. Numerous consultations and visits have been made, which included discussion of no-till practices. This year, approximately 40% of the corn acreage was grown using no-till. This is the largest amount of no-till corn by far. With approximately 36,000 acres of corn, the amount of no-till corn is approximately 15,000 acres. With soybean planting ongoing now, the percentage on no-till soybeans should be similar. With approximately 60,000 acres of soybeans the amount of no-till soybeans will be approximately 24,000 acres. This is a sizeable amount of land farmed no-till compared to 2012 or previous years. The amount of no-till land represents a sizeable saving in the equipment, fuel, and labor expense of preparing 36,000 acres for planting a crop. There are also the environmental benefits of reduced soil erosion, compaction, and increase of organic matter and improvements in soil structure from no-till practices. The amount of crop land using no-till has steadily increased; this year the amount of no-tilled crop land has increased to 40%.

We ARE In This Together Alternative Marketing Increases

An area cattle producer was looking for alternative marketing opportunities for his cattle and became interested in direct marketing. He approached the livestock agent for information and regulations. She shared information about trends in direct marketing of meat: such as grass fed, local, organic and Animal Welfare Approved labeling. The livestock agent and family have worked together for the last four years in various capacities; including attending the 2012 Carolina Meat Conference, a two-day event that promotes and addresses the needs of local meat producers, with his wife. Since 2009, he has converted all his cattle to grass fed, received

his Meat Handler's License and the farm is Animal Welfare Approved. The farmer and his wife tried several venues to sell their products. In each, they were able to sell but not at the volume they needed for sustainability and profitability. So, the farmer looked for an alternative place and way to sell his products. During August 2013, they partnered with a baker and opened "The Butcher and Baker" a specialty grocery shop. The store provides a market that is sustainable and profitable. They have doubled their sales of beef from 2,100 pounds a month to 4,200 pounds and this number actually increases monthly. They are continuing to look for ways to improve the store and generate more sales.

MY World

YOUR World



OUR WORLD!

Environmental contamination is always a major threat in Columbus County. Because of this Cooperative Extension continues to work with Soil Conservation in their Annual "Envirothon" Days. The two day educational workshops focus on bringing awareness to youth on how to protect the environment through simple practices. 300 youth learned about the environment and the benefits of protecting our resources. They learned about soils and the leaching process. This gave them a better understanding of what can happen if contaminants reach our ground water. Youth and teachers through direct observation and participant feedback, have gained an awareness of the environment and why we need to protect it. It is estimated that if each youth will pick up one piece of paper or stop littering to prevent ground water contamination over their life time it will save the county over \$1,700.



Something Is Fishy



Since the Master Tobacco Settlement, many farmers have chosen to transition away from tobacco production into other crops. This has left many different tobacco production implements and equipment sitting idle, particularly tobacco greenhouses. One Columbus County farmer was looking for a way to make use of his empty tobacco greenhouse and, after some research, became interested in the process of growing plants and fish together in a greenhouse through a symbiotic process known as aquaponics. Not knowing much about aquaponics, the farmer reached out to the local horticulture agent for assistance. The agent provided the farmer with contacts and information regarding growing fish in confinement as well as information and guidance on growing hydroponic vegetables. After some trial and error, the farmer finally settled on a two-tier aquaponics system that circulates water from his fish tank across a 20 foot hydroponic grow bed made of river rocks. The farmer is now able to successfully grow salad greens as well as tilapia in his greenhouse for sale. During his initial grow trial; the farmer was able to sell approximately \$2,000 worth of greens grown aquaponically. Plans are currently in place to add additional tanks and hydroponic grow tables to increase his vegetable and fish production.

slowly decreasing. This program has provided farmers a way to reduce the damage to their crops while at the same time increasing farm profitability as an alternative income source. The program has done extremely well and several hunts have been organized. This program will continue into the 2014 year.

Statistical Information January – December 2013	
Total # of Contacts	38,135
# Face to Face	21,365
# Non Face to Face	16,770
# Newsletters	22
# People Newsletters distributed to	440
# Web Visits	47
# News Articles	17
# Radio Programs	6
# TV Cable Shows	21
# Credit Courses Taught	4
# Participants in Credit Courses Taught	265
# Participant hours in Credit Courses	39
# Non-Credit Courses Taught	158
# Participants in Non-Credit Courses	5,563
# Participant hours in non-credit courses	706
# Volunteers	576
# Volunteer hours	9,280
In Kind Contribution Amount	212,640.20
Cash/Sponsorships Amount	1,805
Grants	40,000
Total Contributions	254,445.20

Safety 1st

Columbus County has a huge deer population and each year thousands of acres are damaged because of deer feeding on commercial agricultural crops. The NC

Cooperative Extension, Columbus County Tourism, Wildlife Action and a group of concerned farmers partnered to develop a cooperative hunting initiative called the "Farmers Managed Deer Hunt Program". Over 15 farmers are currently participating in the program and 1,100 acres are actively used in the fee for the hunting program. The deer population is being managed and the population numbers are

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