



**NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION**  
**WEEKLY UPDATE**  
**Week Ending 7/25/08**

1. Items for Approval – None this week.
2. Items for Discussion – None this week.
3. Summary of County Visits by Dr. Jon Ort

DATE	COUNTY VISITED	PURPOSE
7/20/08 – 7/25/08	San Juan, Puerto Rico	Joint COPs Meeting

4. Items for Information

- Onslow County is a military community and its citizens arrive from all parts of the country. Quality of life is an important issue to both county and military leaders. Onslow County Master Gardeners are involved in a long-term project to develop a four acre educational garden named "Discovery Gardens" as a means to educate the public on successful horticultural practices and involve both the young and seniors in gardening activities. Key to development of this project is fundraising. On May 22, local master gardeners conducted a successful fundraiser dinner working with Outback Steak House that netted \$2,850 for Discovery Gardens. They have also successfully lobbied county commissioners to allocate \$50,000 in the 2008-2009 capital outlay budget for the gardens.
- Even as economic and development pressures constrain many farms in the region, the New River Headwaters Alternative Agriculture Program of the NC Cooperative Extension Program at NCA&TSU works with growers of various crops to address identified needs and secure resources for growth and continuing farm viability. During 2008, the program achieved a broad range of successes that enhanced opportunities for small farms throughout the region. Examples include working with the New River Organic Growers (NROG) cooperative to secure more than \$30,000 in new grants for shared-use equipment and enhanced marketing. Cooperative Extension also helped steward the funds secured by earlier grants to NROG, facilitating the process of selecting an efficient and appropriate truck to purchase. Additionally, the program continued the popular shiitake mushroom spawn distribution program of NCA&T, and assisted a Watauga beekeeper in obtaining an Ag Options grant to improve production efficiency.

- More than 130 million households were eligible to receive Stimulus Payment checks this year based on 2007 income. People who do not normally file tax returns (i.e. retirees, disabled veterans, railroad retirees, etc.) may not have been aware of their eligibility or how to file if eligible. The NC State Employees' Credit Union's participation in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA) offered (and will continue to offer until October 15), "free filing" to those individuals and families not accustomed to filing returns. NC Cooperative Extension in Alleghany County partnered to promote this program through a variety of media efforts (radio program and newspaper article), verbal announcements at a number of public meetings, and one-on-one telephone inquiries. Through this collaborative and networking effort, it is estimated that, 120 people in the community have saved approximately \$18,000 in tax preparation fees and refund loans to date.
- Landscape professionals don't like to take the time to attend pesticide trainings that are just a review of old material. Our Extension Agent in Pitt County held a winter landscape meeting featuring 10 topics every landscaper should know to keep them on the cutting edge of information they can use to provide solutions for their clients. Topics included soil testing and preparation, proper planting, mulch management, plant identification, landscape design, water management, weed management, insect management, and disease management. 109 Landscape professionals participated in the training and each received 1 hour of pesticide credits. Surveys indicated they valued this no-fee training opportunity at \$5,920 and indicated it would save or make them \$148,000 over the next year.
- Improper food handling in food and restaurant establishments account for a high percentage of the reported 76 million cases of foodborne illnesses each year in the United States. NC Cooperative Extension, Cleveland County Center, in collaboration with the Cleveland County Health Department, provided a 16-hour food safety certification course in May. Twenty-four restaurant managers and foodservice employees completed the food safety training with 18 establishments represented. Ninety percent passed the certification examination. The National Restaurant Association (NRA) estimates the average cost of a foodborne illness outbreak to an establishment to be about \$75,000. If 18 establishments prevented one foodborne illness outbreak, food safety education provided an estimated cost savings of \$1,350,000. Through course evaluations, participants reported increased knowledge and skills that will be implemented in their establishments. Food safety certification courses will be offered three times per year in Cleveland County due to the positive impact in preventing foodborne illness.
- According to statistics in Hoke County, the drop-out rate increased slightly from 4.74% in 2004-2005 to 5.04% in the 2006 school year. To address this need, the North Carolina Cooperative Extension 4-H Life Skills program in collaboration with the Hoke County Schools conducts an intervention program in the schools. This program addresses the character needs of the students whose goal is to help reduce the risk of dropping out of school. According to school officials, this school year had one of the largest graduating classes in history. A total of 340 youth graduated from high school; 33 of the youth who participated in the Life Skills program during their elementary and middle school years, graduated from high school.

- Currituck County has become reliant on a tourism-based economy. Destination and cultural tourism are ranked high according to a study by tourism consultants. A priority for tourists includes historic attractions. Currituck County is the oldest county in the state with few historic attractions preserved. In an effort to capitalize on funding and complete the requirements for the Board of Commissioners to become certified in historic preservation, NC Cooperative Extension conducted a comprehensive study of historic structures; 400 data files on historic structures were submitted and approved by the State Office of Archives and History. After jury of applications for a National Register Nomination, 15 structures have been approved for the study list and are eligible to seek certification. This will add to the attractions for historic significance and enhance preservation of structures. GPS mapping and records were established as the State's first ever digital records.

5. Routine Items – None this week.