



**NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
WEEKLY UPDATE
Week Ending 8/1/08**

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
7/27/2008	Buncombe County	Re-Opening of Swannanoa 4-H Center
7/28/2008	Henderson County	Tour Mountain Horticulture Crops Research and Extension Center
7/28/2008	Jackson County	Tour Betty's Creek Property
7/30/2008	Buncombe County	Operation Purple Camp

4. Items for Information

- Bladen County youth are 10% above the state average relating to childhood overweight and obesity. NC Cooperative Extension 4-H and FCS programs collaborated with county partners to write an *Eat Smart Move More* grant for \$14,000 to support the *Mission Possible: Get Fit For Life!* Day Camp. This week-long experience for youth ages 5 to 12 that are at risk of developing Type II Diabetes taught youth how to prepare healthy snacks, read food nutrition labels and become more active. As a result, according to post surveys, 97% (33) youth aspire to be physically active at least 60 minutes everyday, 100% (34) participants aspire to eat fruits and vegetables every day, and 74% (25) understand that watching TV and playing video games are not good physical activities. With these positive results, we intend to secure grant funding to offer this camp again in 2009.
- The economics of the tobacco business have changed dramatically in the last few years. Profitability is slim and grower numbers are eroding. A focus of the Forsyth/Stokes crops program of NC Cooperative Extension has been to determine ways in which growers can improve profitability. That focus has been established in test plots, winter meetings, newsletters, etc. For the 2008 season, 5 surveyed growers representing 617 acres changed their fertilization habits on their flue cured tobacco crop. By utilizing different fertilizer materials based on soil sample results, these growers have saved an average of \$182.33 per acre. On the 617 acres of tobacco represented, these 5 growers saved \$112,497.61 on their fertilizer bill.
- Senior citizens and disability Medicare Beneficiaries in Brunswick County have been provided greater peace of mind by joining the Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Program. Since the time of enactment on November 15, 2005 until June 2008, 379 beneficiaries have saved \$110,885.97 for a 30-day supply of prescription drugs. Before the Medicare Part D Program, the full cost of a 30-day supply over this period of time would have cost \$142,726.91. After beneficiaries joined a Medicare Part D Plan those same drugs cost \$31,841.03 (cost savings \$110,885.97). Extension will continue to help beneficiaries understand the cost benefit of Medicare Part D.

- The increasing cost of energy has families and community leaders developing strategies to conserve energy without sacrificing comfort. Through collaborative efforts of the County of Ashe, Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative and NC Cooperative Extension, Ashe County Center Family and Consumer Sciences, over 400 families have requested and received information on energy conservation and 25 energy kits with energy-saving devices have been distributed and used. Over \$8,000 has been saved as a result of the Ashe County Energy Committee's implementation and promotion of energy saving practices in county buildings.
- With rising fuel prices, the use of alternative fuels, and the demand for biofuels causing the increase in commodity crop prices, residents and agricultural producers are wondering how all of this may affect their lives. Realizing the needs of the public and the agricultural community, a program was sponsored by NC Cooperative Extension, Currituck County Center, and presented by NC State's Specialist in Biological and Agricultural Engineering. Participants learned about the use of alternative fuels and how biofuels will impact North Carolina. As a result of this program, two of those in attendance are interested in producing biofuels. One, the owner of a landscaping company, has attended training at *Piedmont Biofuels*, and plans to make biodiesel to use in his own equipment in the near future. Once he gets this venture started, he would like to promote that the county adopt an ordinance for biofuels production, much like the one recently adopted for the use of wind energy.
- The northwest area of North Carolina has historically shown the highest radon levels in the state. Radon gas, the second leading cause of lung cancer, can reach unsafe levels in homes. Testing for radon is the only way to know if levels exceed the safety standard. In collaboration with the Division of Radiation Protection, NC Cooperative Extension, Ashe County Center Family and Consumer Sciences made 76 radon test kits available for Ashe County families free of charge. As a result, 20% of the results showed elevated levels of radon gas. Over half of these families requested additional information on how to reduce radon levels in their homes.
- Commercial strawberry production is dependent on the "Annual Hill" production system. Soil fumigant is applied at least 3 weeks prior to planting strawberries. Methyl Bromide, the current fumigant of choice, will no longer be available in the fall of 2008. To produce high quality strawberries, new or alternative fumigants are needed. Alternative fumigants can maintain strawberry profitability of approximately \$8,000 per acre. New fumigant trials were installed in Surry County in August of 2007. A *Strawberry Fumigant Field Day* was held on April 10, 2008 in Surry County and was attended by strawberry growers from 7 counties representing over 150 acres of strawberry production. Traditional yields of strawberries can produce over 18,000 pounds of strawberries. The loss of an effective soil fumigant can reduce yields up to 50%. Information received at this meeting has the potential to keep growers in business, to maintain strawberry production yields, and to insure profitability. Growers interviewed after the meeting indicated they will use alternative fumigants for this year's August-September fumigation. Use of alternative fumigants will be evaluated after strawberries are planted in late September.

5. Routine Items – None this week.