



NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION - STATEWIDE IMPACTS

Week Ending 5/15/09

- ◆ **NC Cooperative Extension in Hertford County worked with a local agribusiness, a facility design engineering firm, and the local planning personnel, to help find a source of funding for a \$6+ million "Biofuel to Energy" complex.** When completed, the facility can/will supply energy in the form of steam to the agribusiness as well as produce electricity for the national grid.
- ◆ Considering the economic crisis in North Carolina, the distribution of food from the NC Food Bank is crucial to those in need. In order for the 132 agencies under the Greenville Food Bank Branch to distribute food, they must attend a mandated food safety training session. Two free classes provided 80 people Pitt County Cooperative Extension's food safety training. As a result of this training, the Greenville Food Bank branch, covering 10 counties, served 111,000 people at risk of hunger. Of these, 10,000 are seniors and over 40,000 are children. **Because the participants attended this free food safety class, they did not have to attend a \$125 ServSafe class, thus saving the Food Bank of Central Eastern North Carolina \$10,000.**
- ◆ Fruit and vegetable crops are a high value alternative crop option for NC farmers, which help increase on-farm income. One Lenoir County livestock producer started a fruit and vegetable operation in fall 2008 for spring 2009 harvest. With the assistance of NC Cooperative Extension, Steve Putnam of *Putnam Family Farms* followed production guidelines from NC State University and NC Cooperative Extension, enabling him to produce strawberries three weeks earlier than other producers in the region. *Putnam Family Farms* also developed a marketing plan that included direct, roadside and farmers' market location sales. **These recommendations allowed the family to establish a presence at the Onslow County Farmers Market, enabling them to sell 95% of the strawberries brought to the market three weeks in a row. With an additional four to five weeks of harvest ahead, the income from the early start already exceeds the estimated production cost of \$7,000.**
- ◆ Consumer concerns about food-borne illness outbreaks and the weak US economy are driving an increase in home gardens. People with little or no space are also getting into the gardening game, evidenced by the increased demand for garden plots at the *New Bern Train Depot Community Garden*. The *Train Depot Community Garden* began as a partnership between NC Cooperative Extension and the City of New Bern in 2007 with 16 individuals and families tending 18, 100 square foot plots; 22 individuals and families tending 18 plots in 2008; and 40 individuals and families tending 32 plots in 2009. **NC Cooperative Extension provides vegetable gardening tips and educational information that enables these families to successfully produce an estimated \$400 per plot in produce each year. With 32 plots in production, this project has the potential to save New Bern families over \$12,800 for the cost of produce in 2009.**
- ◆ Financial management classes were conducted for a local church by NC Cooperative Extension's Family and Consumer Sciences Agent in Edgecombe County. A goal of one participant was refinancing his home loan to obtain a lower interest rate. He requested an estimate from an online broker, which offered a lower interest rate with high closing costs. Cooperative Extension provided information concerning the various factors to consider when refinancing, including closing costs and the importance of comparison shopping. The homeowner contacted a local bank, which offered the same low rate as the online broker as well as lower closing costs. **As a result of Extension's education, the homeowner will benefit from an interest rate reduction from 6% to 4.5% on a fixed-rate mortgage and will save over \$5,000 in closing costs.**

- ◆ Local food demand is on the rise across North Carolina. Helping producers and consumers connect is a key component of the work being done in eastern NC by NC Cooperative Extension. A \$500 grant from the Center for Environmental Farming Systems allowed the Onslow County Chamber of Commerce, the Onslow County Farmers Market Association and Cooperative Extension to host a one-day *Developing and Strengthening Local Food Networks* workshop. Thirty-nine participants from Onslow and seven neighboring counties attended. **As a result of this program, one Lenoir County grower and restaurant owner made contact with one another resulting in the sale of 800 heads of Bok choy with a farm value of \$1,600, and an undetermined retail value at the restaurant. In addition, follow up meetings between local farmers and retail grocers and local farmers and restaurant owners are being scheduled to build relationships between producers, buyers and consumers.**
- ◆ Per NC Prevention Partners (www.ncpreventionpartners.org), physical inactivity and poor nutrition costs nearly \$11.1 billion each year to NC employers. In Gaston County, NC Cooperative Extension partnered with the Health Department to provide Weigh Less, a worksite wellness program, to county employees with 27 employees completing the 12-week program (Jan – April 2009). **The program provided a cost savings of approximately \$90,153 to Gaston County.** Total group weight loss was 116 pounds, 21 (78%) participants lost weight, and 8 (30%) participants lowered their blood pressure. Participants reported that they are getting at least 30 minutes of daily physical activity (63%) and eating more fruits and vegetables (85%). Weigh Less will be offered again this fall to other county employees.
- ◆ Swine farmers have been dealing with many changes in legislation that affect their operations. NC Cooperative Extension in Lenoir and Greene Counties works with these farmers to make sure they understand how the changes affect their livelihood. **Over the past few months, Cooperative Extension has saved these farmers over \$500,000 in fines by providing information, allowing them to make quick and informed decisions about their farms.** Additionally, Extension has updated the animal waste plans for many of these farms to keep up with the changing regulations. Monitoring the performance of the farm's waste management system and its waste plan enables the farmer to use the nutrients they produce on the farm in the most effective and environmentally friendly way possible. Cooperative Extension agents stay informed of all the regulatory changes that affect swine farms because these farmers rely on Extension for advice and updates.
- ◆ The middle school audience is one that has been untouched by the Alamance County 4-H School Enrichment Program. NC Cooperative Extension and Alamance County 4-H assisted 5 middle school science teachers by offering the 4-H Embryology program. Embryology meets the 6th grade standard course of study science objectives. **By offering Embryology to middle schools, we get more for our money. With one incubator and one set of eggs, we can reach 3-4 times as many students because they change classes throughout the day in middle school.** One student reported that this program gave their class a hands-on way to learn about cell development and that she would use this knowledge in the future. One teacher reported that it was amazing to look into her classroom and see concepts clicking in place. **4-H Embryology provides middle school teachers with the tools they need to teach cell development, and provides students interesting opportunities to learn science.**