North Central Cluster Meeting representing Forsyth, Guilford, Rockingham, and Stokes Counties 
Friday, October 30th, 2009  9:30 a.m./11:00 a.m. 
Host: Brenda Sutton, CED, Rockingham County

I am adding the following note which was not a part of our cluster meeting, but I felt that it was timely to get this to you before the holidays. 

**NOTE:** To promote any activity or event free of charge in the Triad Area, go to [www.gotriadsscene.com](http://www.gotriadsscene.com) and hit the blue ‘Submit Listing’ button on the top right and then hit ‘Submit Events’ and follow the prompts. You can put as many events as you like and it is FREE. With the holidays coming up, this is the perfect time for you to try it. Also, at a previous SAC meeting we were asked that the local advisory council visit as many organizations and clubs as possible to do a brief overview of Cooperative Extension and what it does for every single citizen in every single county. We need your help in getting the word out about Cooperative Extension’s very diverse programs on a more local level. The program does not need to be long. Clubs such as Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, etc. are always looking for programs and most importantly, those that affect their area.

Now, the Cluster Meeting Notes as best I could transcribe….

All counties were represented by their CED as well as an advisory council member from each county. Steva Allgood, SAC member, welcomed all present after which everyone was asked to give their name and county affiliation.

Brenda Sutton, CED of Rockingham County started off by stating that work is progressing on the ‘Horse Park’ with an estimated $15 million in direct economic impact. The Memorandum of Agreement with NC A&T is being signed. There is interest in grant funding for a community garden with a possible food distribution process involving surrounding counties.

Mark Tucker, CED of Forsyth County, stated that they are highlighting local growers on their website and are working on local food processing and retail operations highlighting farm/city activities and agricultural heritage. Their 4-H 100th Year Birthday Bash at the Dixie Classic Fair made front page news in their local paper.

Michael Hylton, CED of Stokes County informed those present that they are pushing a local foods movement and land preservation. They are hoping to bring broad ban service to the county within the next year – Food Hills Connect with Rockingham County. The hope is to promote foods on the internet that are available for purchase each season. There is strength in partners regarding grant funding for the development of small farmers and businesses. Currently, there are two groups growing the purple sweet potato, and they are working on getting a Foothills Sweet Potato Alliance. The purple sweet potato is now in the Fresh
Markets and Whole Foods. In order to expand into more food stores, there is the need to have more growers, more people involved and more product available.

Brenda Morris, CED of Guilford County stated that her office will help Stokes County in doing a TV segment on the purple sweet potato when the time is right and there is enough product on the market to answer the demand. Dr. Wickliff is really involved with the Farm Land Protection Plan and is working on getting community surveys to get this moving forward more rapidly. Guilford County held a 4-H Birthday Celebration. NC A&T received a grant for Parenting Education. Currently, there are 17 community gardens within the county and the interest keeps on growing. A community Garden conference is being tentatively planned for the Fall of 2010.

Jim Cowden, District Director, updated those present on the vacancies within Cooperative Extension which, in some part, is due to retirements. Since there is a freeze on hiring for the most part, these positions will be filled one or two at a time. Great News! Michael Hylton will be the permanent CED of Stokes County. Congratulations, Michael! Under Ag and Natural Resources, Dr. Edwin Jones will be receiving some staff help. 5 teams are now being set up that will work under the management of Dr. Jones. 1) Local Foods, 2) Natural Resources and Environment, 3) Water Quality, 4) Agriculture Security and Disaster Management, and 5) Ag Crops and Science. There is the need for formula funding vs competitive funding. The federal budget had an increase of 3% in 11 of the 13 line items. There is a need for more formula funds (Smith Lever) than competitive funds (grants) in the federal budget. On the state side, they are looking at what affect the 10% cut will have across the board. Mr. Cowden updated those present on the SAC meeting that was held in October by stating the Dr. Ray McKinney reported on the national level regarding the Farm Bill of 2008 and the National Institute for Food and Agriculture. Key words were Science and Technology. There are 5 initiatives on the national level that follow closely with those that Dr. Jones will manage on the state level. 1) Global Foods, 2) Climate Changes, 3) Sustainable Energy, 4) Childhood Obesity, and 5) Food Safety. Mention was made that NC A&T is having a Farm Field Day on Nov. 3rd. The North Central District Meeting will be on December 10th at the Ag Center in Hillsborough, Orange County.

Steva advised those present to get with the TDA or CVB in order to promote your programs and events and possibly to get a section on Agritourism in each county’s Visitor Guide. Also if you have a farm or winery, there are brochures that promote this throughout the state and a farm listing is free. i.e. Discover North Carolina Wines and Discover North Carolina Farms. She also read an excerpt from a newsletter that her office receives regarding the need for farmers to diversify offerings to attract tourists and visitors such as a corn mazes or pick-your-own farms. Also, regarding STEM (Science Technology, Engineering and Math), nationwide, we are losing foreign skilled engineers and technicians to their homelands because of the increasing job opportunities. The flash card that she received regarding SEAL (Strengthening Extension Advisory Leaders) at the SAC meeting could not be pulled up so she is going to go to the web and see if she can learn more about the program from that angle. Website is http://als.ces.ncsu.edu. All counties will receive this power point presentation. A Back Home Visit is being planned
for either February or May 2010 in Rockingham County to visit the site of the Horse Park and other venues.

During the overall sharing session, Perry Graves with NC A&T gave an update that the perception of Cooperative Extension is for people only on the farms, and there is a need to get the 4-H leaders involved. In the overall sharing session with advisory council also speaking, it was mentioned the need to get away from the past mindset that there is no prestige in farming. We need to educate people and build the value of farmers. Children learn from the home. A new trend is to educate children about food as in Smart Start by buying healthy and wholesome foods. Childcare Providers need to take a lead in this. Cooperative Extension needs to go to the people and a possible way would be to get involved and ask to speak at your local Chamber of Commerce Meetings. Brenda Sutton in Rockingham County has had great success with this. Joan Wright of Davidson County was a welcomed visitor to view how we held our cluster meetings.

The informal sharing session was fun with some really great ideas being tossed around. Several counties found ways that they could work together in promoting ideas, events, or just brainstorming. The meeting was very successful from the standpoint of those present. It was great to have Jim with us. He is very knowledgeable with a wonderful sense of humor (thank goodness)!

Tons of thanks go to Brenda and Rockingham County Extension Office for the wonderful refreshments and the outstanding hospitality.

End of Report by Steva Allgood