Agriculture and Economic Development

**Person Reporting: Janine Rywak     Location: Anson Date: 2013-06-24**

In response to local foods interests and requests from producers, consumers, and advisory groups, Cooperative Extension in the counties of Anson, Montgomery, Richmond, Stanly and Union in NC, along with Chesterfield County SC, have worked with twelve area growers to establish Farm Fresh Ventures Cooperative, a regional food hub serving the six counties.

This spring, Extension Agents assisted growers in establishing the cooperative as a legal entity, electing officers, adopting by-laws, and working with a cooperative paid employee. Through creative funding opportunities, Extension linked Farm Fresh Ventures with grant resources, securing $26,441 in start-up and marketing costs, allowing the sale of 123 18-week CSA subscriptions for a box of locally grown produce, and recruiting volunteers to assist with weekly aggregate site responsibilities. To date, in eight weeks of operation, Farm Fresh Ventures has brought in $20,372 in revenue and paid $13,974 back to local producers in direct sales.

***Lessons Learned:*** *It takes a lot of time, meetings, and taking two steps forward with one back to organize a project like this.  However, when the light finally appeared at the end of the tunnel, there was a lot of pride from all parties.  Our group basically had to bite the bullet and say, "We are going to do this, no more putting off for the right time and combination of players."*

*The greatest satisfaction was in getting producers from neighboring counties at the same table.* ***When they started talking, planning, coming up with recommendations, there was an energy in the room that was unlike one we had experienced.  And it was contagious.***

*There were some things that we had to do in Extension that I had rather not have, but it took that the first season to get the ball rolling.  Going into season two, Extension made it clear that we would be pulling back from certain aspects of the operation, and the producers stepped up to the plate.  They took ownership of this project.*

*We had many partners throughout the project, and it took all of them to pull this off.  It also took about $25,000 in start-up funds through grants and in-kind contributions.  We cleared enough the first year to have a stash for start-up going into season two.*

***The marketing that Cooperative Extension has received for being a catalyst of the project cannot be understated.  You can't buy the kind of visibility we have had.  And once again, Extension is credited for bringing something great to the community.***

*Farm Fresh Ventures is now selling 2014 subscriptions for Christmas presents.*

***Person Reporting:*Shenile Ford     *Location:*Greene *Date:*2013-07-24**

The Elaney Wood Heritage Farmers Market opened in May 2013 with ten market vendors participating. The season started off slow because of the weather. Vendors have increased their sales by 5%and kept their produce farms in business since becoming a market vendor. The market will start excepting EBT (SNAP) payments at the market in August 2013. The market has become a venue for people to socialize, learn how to prepare nutritious foods, learn who their county farmers are and also learn how to grow and care for a garden or produce crop. Each vendor has taken the food safety class through Greene County Extension. In the future, the market will have a commercial kitchen for vendors to use to prepare and package value added products.

*Update: 2013-11-22*
The Elaney Wood Heritage Farmers Market opened in April 2013 and closed in September 2013.There were 16 produce and craft vendors that sold at the market. Customer traffic increased this year by 5%. Sales averaged %600 monthly for some of the produce vendors. In the coming year (2014) we hope to get the EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) program started to attract more low-income families and individuals to the market.

***Person Reporting:*Charlie Tyson**      ***Date:*2013-05-14**

Nash County ranks 10th among North Carolina counties for the farm gate value of its agricultural production. However, there is increasing influence and sometimes pressure brought to bear on the agricultural community by non-farming rural residents. As a result, Nash decision makers have directed Cooperative Extension to assist the county's agricultural advisory board in the preparation of a county agriculture development plan.

Seeking public input, a survey was disseminated, generating many very useful responses. Survey respondents include 8 local agribusiness, 70 farmers and landowners and 211 non-farming residents. Their ideas and suggestions together with interviews and local agricultural statistics were incorporated into a county agriculture development plan. This plan describes the current state of Nash agriculture and lists objectives and steps for intentionally encouraging of additional growth in agriculture by public agencies, organizations and county government.

Update: This long-awaited county agriculture development plan was adopted by county commissioners in March 2013.

***Person Reporting:*Jessica Anderson     *Location:*Alamance *Date:*2013-06-27**

The Anson County Tourism Development Authority exists as an entity of County Government to disperse funds collected from an occupancy tax to promote the tourism industry in Anson County. The Authority utilizes a relationship between County Government, Chamber of Commerce, Uptown Wadesboro Inc. and the Anson Economic Development Corporation to develop and promote local tourism events.

This past year, the Anson County Livestock Agent served as chair of the Authority, including oversight of an annual budget of $35,000 and how it was distributed for advertising, marketing, and support of local events to promote tourism. As the agritourism representative on the Board, it is essential to provide an agricultural insight of the heritage of agriculture in the area and how that may promote tourism in Anson County. As a Cooperative Extension employee, the Authority also received much needed guidance in planning, networking and relationships building. This past year over $5,000 was given to promote local events and contests in the county to promote tourism.

***Person Reporting:*Kevin Johnson     *Location:*Wayne**  ***Date: 2013-04-10***

Agriculture has a need to train leaders for the future of our industry. The Karl Best Agriculture Leadership Program was developed to train future leaders. The program is a collaborative effort between the Wayne Count Cooperative Extension Service and Wayne Community College. The Program started in 2007 and has had four classes with a total of 59 individuals completing the course.

The classes had to complete numerous sessions that gave them skills to lead our industry. Fourteen new participants successfully completed the leadership program in 2013. The classes have been involved in political training sessions and have been involved in political forums. They have learned how to take agriculture issues to political leaders. The training will teach them how to have a voice in the political arena. Many of the graduates are now involved with local politics and are positioning agriculture for the future.

***Person Reporting:*Carolyn Shepherd     *Location:*Ashe *Date:*2012-06-25**

Several Ashe County citizens have been contacted by individuals going door to door wanting to purchase mineral rights. Cooperative Extension Ashe County Center was contacted by citizens wanting more information on selling their mineral rights. Environmental Law specialist from Extension came to Ashe and presented 2 workshops on Mineral Rights: What You Need to Know.

One participant who owns her home place of over 400 acres in Ashe County attended one of the workshops. She had learned some time ago that someone else owned the mineral rights to her property. She gained knowledge to help her in her negotiations with the entity that owns the mineral rights to her property. Realtors who participated in the workshops gained knowledge they plan to use in their businesses. Agencies in the county who work with taxes and planning also attended and gained knowledge they can share with citizens who have questions about mineral rights. All participants gained knowledge about mineral rights and the issues around ownership of property.

***Person Reporting:*Mike Lanier     *Location:*Orange *Date:*2012-06-29**

Agriculture has been facing many issues during the past several years, including low profitability; farmers whose average age is 57; high use of off-farm resources, particularly energy; access to land by beginning farmers; and a food supply dependent on food imported from distant places. Orange County Cooperative Extension and Economic Development partnered to address these issues through the PLANT workshop series and the Breeze Farm Incubator.

Since the PLANT program began, 230 students have participated in the 24-27 hours of annual instruction. In 2012, 44 students participated in the series consisting of 18 white males, 14 white females, 6 black males, 3 black females, 2 Asian males, and 1 Latino male. Each primary participant pays $110 to attend the series and they can enroll one partner who can attend for $55.Pre and post-tests, composed of sixty-eight questions, are given to gauge knowledge gained by students.

The overall results from the 2012 class revealed that they had increased their knowledge of the subject matter from 2.65 in the pre-test to 3.81 in the post-test, on a scale of 1-5. Since the program started, the class has generated or trained owners of at least 22 new farms (29 students). Nine other students are also involved in work related to the local food movement. The 2012 results are from 29 tests received from the pre and post test administered to that class. A copy of the test can be obtained from Orange County Cooperative Extension.

*Update*: *2012-06-29*
In the past ten years the number of farmers markets in Orange County grew from two to seven. The growth was a sign of how many new farmers were interested in selling food locally. Since 2008, though, 230 new farmers have participated in the PLANT workshop series, a twenty-four hour program that teaches beginning farmers what they need to know to start farming.

With all these new farmers a new expanded market was needed. Orange County Cooperative Extension, working with Durham County during the fall and winter of 2011-2012, organized and located a new farmers’ market in an underserved South Durham market. Promotion of the market during this period was done through a meeting of an existing organization whose members were very excited about getting a market and through newspaper articles.

When the first market day came this spring consumer interest was higher than anticipated. Most vendors sold everything they brought to market by mid-morning. Since then, the vendors have been prepared with enough supply to make it until noon. Farmers who have been selling at markets in Cary and Hillsborough have told me they sell twice the amount in Durham than in their other markets. Farmers are learning how important marketing is to their farm’s success.

*Update: 2012-12-19*

Although 2012 marked the fifth year the Breeze Farm had leased land to people who want to learn how to farm, there were a number of issues at the farm that needed improvement in order to provide a better experience for the apprentice farmers and to provide facilities that allowed them to practice what they learned in the PLANT classes they take during the winter months. In collaboration with Orange County Economic Development, funds were obtained through RAFI (Rural Advancement Foundation International) and the USDA through a Specialty Crops Grant in order to undertake these upgrades.

The upgrades included the purchase and conversion of a frozen foods shipping container into a produce cooler, building a wash stand with a three compartment stainless steel sink, replacement of a gasoline powered pump to an electric pump, installation of two small high tunnels, running underground water and electrical lines to operate the cooler, the wash stand, and irrigation for the field and the high tunnels, evaluation of vegetable crates, purchase of a large salad spinner, and fencing and leasing twenty-eight acres of pasture. These upgrades improved the experience of the apprentices and provided the facilities, and tools needed to host a workshop on food safety for the wider direct market farmer audience, and provides a place to demonstrate sustainable grazing practices. These upgrades represent the largest step forward the Breeze Farm has taken since it began.

***Person Reporting:*Spring Williams -Byrd     *Location:*Burke *Date:*2012-12-05**

Elected officials and citizens often overlook the importance that agriculture has on the Burke County economy. Cooperative Extension continues to build the bridge to help educate and spread agriculture awareness to citizens and stakeholders. The Burke County Cooperative Extension program and advisory members provided an opportunity for Burke County citizens and elected officials to participate in a farm tour visiting three different farms in the county. This Report to the People was a way to promote awareness of what Cooperative Extension does to help farmers and agriculture in the county. By involving all user groups there were numerous impacts and successes as a result of this event.

Youth had the opportunity to share their project work, enhancing their public speaking skills. Elected officials were able to network with citizens and farmers throughout the county. Farmers were able to demonstrate how Cooperative Extension assisted and improved the waste management at both poultry and equine operations. In addition, farmers shared that Cooperative Extension helped to increase their overall gross receipts by teaching best management practices throughout agriculture, resulting in an economic boost to the county. Cooperative Extension not only has assisted these farmers, but in turn helped educate the entire county. Farmers, citizens, and elected officials participating in the farm tours served as advocates to others throughout Burke County. As a follow-up the County Manager utilized Cooperative Extension to educate and provide assistance to other stakeholders regarding agriculture concerns.

***Person Reporting:*Charlie Tyson     *Location:*Nash *Date:*2012-05-29**

Nash County ranks 10th among North Carolina counties for its farm gate value of its agricultural production. While agricultural production remains strong, there is increasing influence and sometimes pressure brought to bear on the agricultural community by non-farming rural residents. As a result, Nash decision makers have directed Cooperative Extension to assist the county's agricultural advisory board in the development and presentation of a county agriculture development plan. Seeking public input, a survey was disseminated, generating many very useful responses. Survey respondents include 8 local agribusiness, 70 farmers and landowners and 211 non-farming residents. Their ideas and suggestions together with interviews and local agricultural statistics are now being used to craft a draft county agriculture development plan.