

Plow Sharing

January-February 2006

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A bi-monthly newsletter promoting awareness, understanding, and practice of sustainable agriculture



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I hope you find this newsletter helpful and informative. If you have ideas or suggestions for future issues, call or stop by the office. I always welcome your feedback!

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2005 Highlights and Looking Ahead

I want to thank everyone who responded to my annual plea for feedback on the website and newsletter. I received over 200 responses! Your input is very valuable to me as I assess past programs and plan new ones. I thought it might be useful and hopefully interesting to you to review some highlights of 2005 so we can see where we have been and where we are going.

2005 Highlights:

- Eight **Enhancing Sustainability workshops** were conducted for a total of 485 participants; there's been 38 Enhancing Sustainability Workshops for a total of 2,250 participants since I started the series in August 2001 – that's an average of almost 60 participants at each of 38 workshops over the past 4 years; 2005 topics included beekeeping, pastured poultry, sheep shearing, blueberry pruning, organic pest management, cut flower production, organic pasture management, and season extension
- 4 issues of **Plow Sharing newsletter** delivered to 1,400 subscribers.
- The **Growing Small Farms website** grew to 300 pages and had 100,000 visits (4.6 million hits) in 2005; the number of visits to the website has increased an average of 97% every year for the past three years, including a 140% increase in 2005.
- I gave dozens of presentations on various topics related to organics and small farms to groups throughout the state. I consulted individual farmers through email, farm visits, phone calls, and office visits.

February marks my fifth year as a county agent in Chatham County and almost seven years with North Carolina Cooperative Extension. I absolutely love what I do and feel very fortunate to be in a job that continues to challenge and reward me.

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Advisory Committee

Some of you may not be aware that Extension agents use advisory committees comprised of stakeholders to ensure that our programs are relevant and responsive. We meet 2-3 times a year and always end up having the best time! I want to thank my committee members for helping me to create a strong program:

- Donna Carle, Green Dreams Farm
- Cathy Jones, Perry-winkle Farm
- Robin Kohanowich, CCCC Sustainable Farming Program
- Judy Lessler, Harland’s Creek Farm
- John O’Sullivan, NC A&T State University
- Henry Outz, Roundtop Farm
- Fleming Pfann, Celebrity Dairy

Challenges

I think maybe it is helpful to remind people that my salary is paid for 100% by Chatham County. Some of the feedback I received on my newsletter and website included “why can’t you do workshops in my county?” or “how come you don’t feature farms in my county?” - well it’s because I work for Chatham County! The good news is people from outside Chatham can benefit from the newsletter, website, and workshops.

My biggest challenge continues to be my (in)ability to keep up with all the individual email questions I receive. I get so many emails from people from all over who have seen my website or have questions about organics. I don’t have to tell you that there are not enough educators out there who specialize in organic production. I am constantly stressed because I am behind in emails. I think people don’t always understand the life of a busy county agent. We do not sit in our office every day waiting for the phone to ring or working on the computer. Many weeks I am barely in the office due to meetings, farm visits, presentations, etc. That’s why you’ll often find me emailing at night or on weekends.

New Email Policy

I talked with my advisory committee about this and this is what they came up with. I will continue to do the best I can to answer everyone’s email, but I need to give priority to Chatham farmers. So if you are a Chatham farmer and you email me with a question, please put “Chatham farmer” in the subject line and I will set up a filter that funnels those messages to a special folder. Those will get priority and I will get to other emails as time permits. All I ask is for everyone to please be patient and understand that I am doing the best I can. I don’t mind helping others from outside

the county but I don’t want my Chatham clients to suffer because of it.

Plans for 2006

We have some very exciting things happening this year in Chatham County. Two big ones are the opening of Chatham Marketplace (see article on page 10) and the new poultry growers’ cooperative Growers’ Choice (see page 11).

Right now demand for locally grown organic produce exceeds supply. Chatham Marketplace is committed to buying from local producers. Currently the majority of Chatham’s small farmers direct market through CSAs and farmers’ markets and sales to chefs. We need to cultivate more farmers to supply Chatham Marketplace with year-round products. That will be a big focus area for me this year. We will all be on a learning curve as the store opens and demand slowly grows. I will offer more programs on season extension, starting with a February 28 workshop.



Henry Outz at the Carrboro Farmers’ Market.

Demand for locally-grown, antibiotic-free, pastured poultry also exceeds supply. Grocery stores want it. Chefs want it. Farmers can’t bring enough to farmers’ markets. I am committed to helping Growers’ Choice increase the supply of local poultry. We’ll have two pastured poultry conferences later in the year.

I will continue to expand the website. I will be creating 8-10 new farm profiles for the web. I have spent the past couple of years taking photos at these farms and now need to assemble all the pieces and tell the story. I am hoping to purchase a digital video camera some time this year to develop farm highlights. These farm profiles help increase awareness and appreciation of local farms.

Last year I worked with several reporters and writers to increase coverage of local farms, and the payoff was several articles/stories in the News & Observer, the Independent, and NPR. This year we have already had a national publication, the Christian Science Monitor, feature

a Chatham farmer. I hope to see this increased exposure continue to shine a spotlight on the exciting things happening around here!

These are just a few things I plan on doing this year. You'll hear more later!

**February 28, 2006:
Year-round Vegetable Production
with High Tunnels**

Pittsboro, NC

The Chatham County Center of North Carolina Cooperative Extension will offer a workshop entitled **Year-round Vegetable Production with High Tunnels** as part of its Enhancing Sustainability Series on Tuesday, February 28, from 6:00-9:00 p.m. in the Agriculture Building auditorium in Pittsboro, NC. Steve Moore, NC A&T State University Research and Extension Specialist at the Center for Environmental Farming Systems, will talk about his 30 years of experience farming and 15+ years growing in high tunnels in Pennsylvania. Steve came to North Carolina in November 2005 and will be involved with research and outreach with season extension, winter production of vegetables, and much more. Come to the workshop to learn where Steve has been and where he is going. He very much wants to communicate with farmers so he can prioritize his research agenda. Steve's work has been featured on Rodale's New Farm[®] website at www.newfarm.org - just do a keyword search for Steve Moore.



The main focus of the presentation and discussion will focus on operation in a year-round systems approach, including general planting schedules and maximizing production. Other topics include design, layout, nitrate uptake in low-light greenhouse production and pest problems and controls. The program will allow for plenty of time for an open Question and Answer session.

See Steve Moore's article below to learn more about his remarkable background.

Participants will receive a resource notebook. The cost of the workshop is \$10 to cover materials. **The deadline for registration is February 24.** To register, please send a check payable to Cooperative Extension to Debbie Roos at PO Box 279 Pittsboro, NC 27312.

Contact Debbie Roos at debbie_roos@ncsu.edu or 919-542-8202 for more information. **Participants are encouraged to bring a sandwich for dinner.** Drinks and light refreshments will be provided.

**New Extension Associate
Brings 30 Years of Farming Experience
and High Tunnel Expertise**

By Steve Moore

Debbie Roos asked me to write a little article about ourselves and what we have done. After three decades of farming in Pennsylvania, my wife Carol, our daughter Sarah (12 years old), and I left home and family to come to North Carolina. The path to North Carolina has been interesting and seemingly deliberate. A couple of years ago we sold our family farm to a son and his family. I have really enjoyed teaching and research over the years and wanted to make that a larger portion of my daily work. Our work in Pennsylvania had taken a different direction than we had hoped and a change seemed in order.



Searching the Internet for opportunities, I came upon my current position as a Research and Extension Associate for NC A&T State University based at the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) in Goldsboro, NC. It seemed to offer everything I wanted. In the end, I was drawn to North Carolina, not only by the work but also by the commitment to and the state of sustainable agriculture here. The deciding factor that convinced us to leave PA was the dedication of the faculty, staff and administration at NC A&T State University (later I would realize the dedication of NC State University as well). Someone told me during the interviewing process "we aren't here just for retirement." There is a state and institutional dedication to farmers and sound agriculture. Having been a farmer, I know the dynamic tension that can exist between extension and farmers. It is fortunate to be in a place where a new paradigm exists.

That explains why I came. But probably more important to the farming community is what kinds of farming I have done and what experiences I have had. I hope this jump starts my usefulness to many of you and provides a catalyst for that first handshake. Carol and I started out on a shoestring: no land, little direct knowledge and our closest generational ties to the land were two generations ago. We launched into general farming on a part-time basis starting with draft horses and an old John Deere B for power. The "B" was sold and horse power dominated for two decades. Slowly Biointensive agriculture began to dominate and a final transition to Biointensive was made after 26 years of horse power.



D. Roos

That process had been an interesting one. Over the years we had sought to get bigger (an attempt to make more money), with up to six horses including our own stallion. That meant renting more land and lots more headaches (and no more net monetary gain). At least for us, the take-home message was "small is beautiful" and the important issue is the net return not the gross. About the same time we were trying to expand our small two-cow dairy. We were selling butter, Carol's cheeses and other dairy products. We began building a herd and could have written a book on bizarre and costly cow situations. We backed down to our family cow and pursued vegetable production. We built several large heated greenhouses and grew tomatoes year-round.

We were the collaborator with Penn State University (PSU) in (3) three year grants to utilize beneficial insects in greenhouse production. I found this topic and research in general to be personally quite satisfying. We marketed those tomatoes and our other vegetables in the Washington, DC area (about one and a half hours away). Our concerns about fossil fuel use and sustainability resurfaced especially after some huge green-

house heating bills! At this point, we began to experiment with unheated greenhouses/high tunnels. Around this time I taught a few draft horse workshops. I really enjoyed teaching and decided to take a position at a local liberal arts college as the Director of the Center for Sustainable Living. We started a 130 member CSA to help support the Center and to model and teach sustainable agriculture. I was fortunate to get a large grant to promote CSAs. Part of the grant was material development and several years later we started the Robyn Van En Center for CSA Resources to permanently house that work and much more. If you are interested in CSAs check it out on the web (www.csacenter.org) or contact me in person.

My utilization of high tunnels began to draw attention from PSU and other farmers. I was fortunate to get a couple of grants to research high tunnel production and do a lot of intensive micro-climate monitoring. The use of a computer driven data logger accelerated my understanding and expanded high tunnel usefulness. I have tons of boring data! But, as a result of that data I have been able to realize year-round fresh food production (and income). We have been able to grow in a climate that is often in the single digits at night and a few times a year dips to zero to five below - our coldest recorded temperature was 17° below. We found a grow tunnel inside a high tunnel and insulating pathways and perimeters of the tunnels to make a huge difference. In addition to winter production, we also utilized the tunnels to extend seasonal production of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, basil etc. in the spring and fall and to take advantage of the tunnels in the summer to control diseases (water/rain-related diseases) and pest insects using biocontrols, mostly beneficial insects on those same warm-season crops.



D. Roos

We were using Biointensive agriculture in the fields and it was a natural fit for intensive production needs in the tunnels. Presentations led to research and more research led to wider geographic audiences. I eventually had the opportunity to present three lectures/workshops in Russia. What a great experience, to see a new culture and meet farmers, university faculty and extension in another country.

Simultaneous to the high tunnel interests was my interest in Biointensive agriculture. In the early 90s I spent some of our very hard-earned farm money and traveled to California to a three day Biointensive workshop. I was over-

whelmed by the work done by Ecology Action and John Jeavons. This system offered the rudiments of a definable sustainable system (or as close as may be possible). Ecology Action had worked for twenty plus years to close the loop on fertility and address diet considerations all within the context of world food needs and resource availability. This group and work touched my heart and I decided to apply myself to Biointensive agriculture as well.

As you can see this idea of a sustainable food system has been an important thread for us. We have drifted occasionally from our original idea to minimize fossil fuel use, but eventually something brings us back. Energy conversion in crops is one way of measuring energy usage. It is simply the amount of energy used (human, embodied and direct) compared to the calorie gain from the crops production.

We had an intuition that Biointensive had a good conversion ratio and in 2003 we did the research on our onion crop (8 varieties totaling 30,000 onions) and found that we could produce, on the varietal average, over 36 calories for each calorie invested (human, compost, embodied energy of tools and equipment and direct energy for irrigation). This was quite encouraging as the US average for mechanized production of onions was 0.9 calories of onions produced for every calorie of energy used in production.

I know these sorts of interests may be a little quirky (Carol would probably use the word obsessive) but I think the reality is that at some point in time we will need to quantify what we do in our food systems to know if systems are truly sustainable. My current position with A&T allows me the good fortune to magnify the research and sharing to a level impossible on our own farm. I so believe in the family farm! And, I have a strong desire for my grandchildren (7 currently) and their children to live in a civilization that has learned to sustain itself. I look forward to meeting you and working together on the challenges and opportunities ahead.

New NC Organic Grain Production Guide

The North Carolina Organic Grain Production Guide (AG-660) is now available through NCSU Agricultural Communication Services. This guide provides extensive information on production of organic corn, small grains, and soybeans, organic weed management, fertility, organic certification, marketing, and organic crop budgets. Order from the distribution center of the Agriculture Communication Services

through Jeanne Marie Wallace, telephone 919-513-3152 or email jeannemarie_wallace@ncsu.edu.

Kidding Season at Celebrity Dairy!

I was out at Celebrity Dairy's annual Open Barn February 11 and I had lots of company – they had over 600 folks visit over the weekend!

Saturday was cold and rainy but we lucked out and got to see a goat giving birth. Of course I had my trusty camera with me and captured the kidding and



voila...we have the first **Farm Photos of the Week** for 2006! You can see the pics on the Growing Small Farms website at <http://chatham.ces.ncsu.edu/growingsmallfarms/farmphoto.html>

Annual Southern SAWG Conference Breaks Attendance Record!

The annual Southern SAWG (Sustainable Agriculture Working Group) Conference is one of my favorites. I attended my first one about 10 years ago while in graduate school at the University of Florida and haven't missed one since. Each year it is like a little reunion where I get to see old friends I met at previous conferences – a farmer from Tennessee, an Extension agent from the Virgin Islands, a university specialist from Virginia, etc. – we all come together for several days to celebrate farming and learn how to be more sustainable.

The conference location rotates around the south. We have had memorable experiences in many great places including Jekyll Island, GA; Memphis, TN; Chattanooga, TN; Mobile, AL; Gainesville, FL; and New Orleans, LA. This year for the 15th annual conference we met in Louisville, KY January 19-22 where a record-breaking crowd

of 920 attendees chose from among 50 sessions on direct marketing strategies, community food systems and sustainable livestock, vegetable and flower production.

In addition to the workshops, four intensive short courses focused on cut flowers, organic vegetable production, pastured turkeys, and management intensive grazing of beef.

Five exciting field trips featured pastured poultry, meat goats, high tunnel production, sustainable agriculture research, and community food systems.

One of the highlights of the conference was a reading by Wendell Berry, Kentucky farmer and national literary figure. He was featured during the Saturday banquet of locally grown food. Lots of folks got some one-on-one time with Mr. Berry as he patiently signed his books for a long line of devotees.



Author Wendell Berry signs his books for conference regular Marty Mesh of Florida Organic Growers.

We always have a sizable North Carolina contingent attend the Southern SAWG conference. Each year I promote this conference through emails and my newsletter. Every year I hear from people who wish they could have attended but couldn't. A few of you have requested some kind of report from Southern SAWG so this year I decided to give it a try!

I recruited some farmers and educators to serve as "reporters" during the conference, asking them to share some of the things they learned or experienced during the conference. Thanks to the folks below you can experience at least a little of the conference vicariously. If you did not attend this year you should definitely consider it for next year. Go ahead and block out the third weekend in January 2007!

As for me, well I've already shared a little of what SAWG means to me. I presented a session on Beneficial Insects and Biological Control to a very attentive group. We even started off the session with a song about bugs – sung by a conference attendee I had just met who travels with her guitar. She had the whole room singing!

One of the primary benefits of attending this conference is the amazing sense of common purpose and inspiration I always leave with. It is so energizing to be around so many dedicated people striving to improve our world.



Alex Hitt gave two different talks to standing room only crowds rapt with attention.

I also want to report that North Carolina farmers and educators are always in demand to speak at Southern SAWG and several gave wonderful presentations at this year's conference: Alex Hitt, Ken Dawson, Molly Hamilton, Gary Bullen, Emily Jackson, Scott Marlow, and Michael Sligh. And Laura Lauffer did a fantastic job coordinating the educational programs.

Okay, now let's hear what our reporters had to say...

Reporters

- Farmer **Cathy Jones** operates Perry-winkle Farm in northern Chatham County.
- **Robin Kohanowich** is the Coordinator of Central Carolina Community College's Sustainable Farming Program in Pittsboro.
- **Scott Marlow** is the Director of the Farm Preservation Program at RAFI-USA in Pittsboro.
- **Molly Hamilton** is an Extension Assistant with North Carolina State University's Organic Grain Project.
- Farmer **Ken Dawson** operates Maple Spring Gardens in Cedar Grove, NC.
- **Shiloh Avery** is the new Produce Manager at Chatham Marketplace in Pittsboro.

Farm Bill Policy

Reporter: Robin Kohanowich

I chose to attend two sessions on Farm Bill policy at the 2006 SSAWG conference in Louisville. I was glad for the opportunity to learn more about how the Farm Bill is constructed and what its impact is/will be on farmers in the SSAWG community.

The two sessions I attended were titled "Maintaining Diversity in the 2007 Farm Bill" and "Putting More Organic in the 2007 Farm Bill". Both were about the Farm Bill but they could not have been more dissimilar. The Diversity session was led by an African-American beekeeper and farmer from South Carolina, a Native American female lawyer from Arkansas and a third generation Texas-born Hispanic farmer. The essential reality that was presented is that the title "maintaining" diversity is misleading and that regardless of policy change and good people at various levels of policy implementation, in general the local level of implementation still includes discriminatory practices.

Several participants shared their own personal experiences, and the encouragement to be persistent in asking for what is your due as a farmer was repeated often. I came away enlightened about a community of farmers I have little access to, leading the sheltered life of a Chatham County small farm groupie. I also came away motivated to try to do a better job learning about and advocating for farm policy fairness.

In "Putting More Organic in the Farm Bill" one of the things that I learned was that the timing for a new Bill to be created is not set in stone. At this time there seems to be some debate over the benefit of completing a Farm Bill under the current legislation or waiting until 2008 under perhaps a different political climate. RAFI and the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture have a draft outline of the items they would like to see included in the next Farm Bill with regard to organic agriculture. These items include: re-authorization for cost share money for certification, research money for classical plant and animal breeding, more USDA research money for organic, etc. You can see this outline on the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture's website at www.sustainableagriculture.net/Organic_FB_Process.php.

Overall, the conference was excellent, motivating and Saturday evening - what a treat! To hear Wendell Berry and eat delicious, Kentucky-grown food with good friends - thanks to all who made it happen!

Saturday Banquet and Wendell Berry

Reporter: Scott Marlow

I have to say that a highlight of the weekend for me was the banquet on Saturday night. To see 900 people in a room, all of whom share our belief in sustainable agriculture, was overwhelming. When I started attending the SSAWG conference, we had 300 people and felt ourselves fortunate. It was a wonderfully diverse crowd, representing the breadth of southern agriculture, and to see all of us together in one room was amazing. It was also wonderful to get to see Wendell Berry read one of his stories. It is not every day that you get to speak with someone whose writing had a major effect on your life. I was fortunate enough to be fairly close to him and to be able to watch his reaction as 900 people cheered and applauded him, and [conference coordinator] Jean Mills acknowledged how revered he is in that community, and I believe that he was deeply moved by it.

Organic Chicken Production

Reporter: Molly Hamilton

I was impressed with the diversity of the conference attendees. I am happy to see minorities represented so well at this event and commend SSAWG on their outreach to groups that are so often under-represented and left out. I attended the session on Maintaining Farm Community Diversity, which was inspiring and motivating. It is important that farmer, as well as farm, diversity is maintained in order that we have sustainable communities.

I found the organic chicken workshop [led by ATTRA's Holly Born] very informative. There has been a huge growth in organic poultry (broilers, layers, turkeys) in the past few years—**1000% growth** in organic poultry from 1997 to 2003, with 33% annual growth expected until at least 2008. **North Carolina is ranked number 3** in organic poultry production in the United States. This is a big opportunity for current and potential organic grain producers—the demand is here and growing!

Cut Flower Short Course

Reporter: Cathy Jones

To maximize my SSAWG conference experience I took the Cut Flowers short course the day before the actual conference began. Vickie Stambach (Bear Creek Farm in Oklahoma) and Mark Cain (Dripping Springs Garden in Arkansas) were the very able instructors. Although I have always been a good record keeper, I was inspired to take it to the next level. Journals in the greenhouse, journals for each market, copies of sales reports, as well as daily calendars with jobs/tasks clearly noted will greatly aid all of us working here.

Vickie Stamback said whenever she feels discouraged, frustrated, overwhelmed by the tasks at hand, she said that she remembers a comment that her dad told her: "Remember, you volunteered for this!" and that gets her back to being focused.

Transplant Production

Reporter: Cathy Jones

During the actual conference I took an excellent workshop on Transplant Production taught by Jay Martin, former owner of Silver Seed Greenhouses. His emphasis on proper watering and hardening off procedures should prove to be extremely beneficial to our own production. He believes that hardening off begins in the greenhouse by withholding water and letting the plants wilt down. This will toughen up the stems. He also believes that plants should be moved to a cold frame prior to planting in the field. His formula for determining how long to keep the plants in the cold frame is to leave them for as long a time that it took to germinate. Therefore, if it took tomato seeds 5 days to germinate, you would harden them off in a cold frame for at least 5 days before planting them in the field. He also recommended that you spray your plants prior to transplanting with a concoction of 1 oz. of kelp and 1 oz. of insecticidal soap mixed into 1 gal of H₂O.

Jay Martin talked about the importance of watering in the greenhouse: "He (she) who holds the hose, grows the rose". Translated to mean - it's all about how well you manage watering in the greenhouse. He recommended that only **one** person do the watering so it is done consistently and correctly.



Cathy Jones (right) catches up with her friend Ellen Polishuk, a Virginia farmer, at the Saturday banquet.

The thing that I always come away with is the concept of how lucky we are here in North Carolina. What we often forget is that a lot of our farming friends from around the south are farming almost in "a vacuum". I hear time and time again from other farmers that the SSAWG conference is their one-time-a-year opportunity to get with like-minded farmers and exchange ideas and information and ask questions. We need to celebrate the community that we are fortunate to be a part of and to also be thankful for all the resources (institutional, NGO, educational) that are here in NC.

Conference as Inspiration

Reporter: Ken Dawson

For me, the conference is always more about inspiration than information. While I do come home with new tips for production, I really go to connect with the larger alternative agriculture community, in all its rainbow of diversity. We farmers toil away in our own relatively isolated day-to-day lives, growing our crops, paying our bills, raising our kids. We are all, by our work and our lives, making our own contribution to changing the course of things. Conference is a chance to realize we are not alone in this, but part of something much bigger, that grows broader and more influential every year.

I am especially encouraged by the serious, bright, young people I meet who are pursuing a path in agriculture. Highlights of the conference this year were 3 conversations with representatives of a new generation of farmers - one with an 18 year old woman from Arkansas who has worked in a strong urban community garden project since she was 5, and will be moving to NC in the summer to attend Warren Wilson College.



Ken Dawson, right, chats with a young farmer.

A second was with a bright and solid young man from Alabama, a recent graduate of Auburn who studied horticulture and who is back on his family's farm. He has started his own garden and CSA and has a waiting list of 200. And finally, with an adorable little 5 year old from Texas came up to me and said, "Hi Ken Dawson. We have your movie." Seems her family has copies of all 5 of the Sustainable Farming Systems in the South videos [a

series of SAWG videos, including one featuring Ken's farm], and when the kids want to watch TV that is what they get to see - how to grow organic vegetables, and cut flowers, and raise pastured turkeys. Meeting these young folks gives me good reason to be encouraged about the future, and a reminder that our work has rewards beyond the cash in the box on market day.

Health Benefits of Fresh Produce

Reporter: Shiloh Avery



As far as conferences go, I usually expect to attend one or two interesting and useful sessions. With all the networking and one-on-one conversations, I usually end up learning a lot anyway. Plus, it's inspiring to get together with so many people with a common purpose and passion. But this year, the Southern SAWG conference was phenomenal. Nearly all of the sessions I attended were interesting and useful! One of the most interesting sessions I attended addressed something that most organic farmers are curious about: the health benefits of farm products.

The first question we all want to address is usually "is organic produce healthier?" It would be nice to have some peer-reviewed studies proving this, but there isn't such a simple answer. There are very few credible studies directly comparing organic and conventional produce and there are so many variables to consider. Results can be skewed by things such as variation in location, soil, climate and season, farmer skill and vigilance, and postharvest handling. Surprisingly, the risks from long-term exposure to chemicals are unknown! There are many food components such as phytochemicals and flavanoids that may be important but are not well understood nor easily measured.

Organic produce may have higher levels of these. Organic produce may have some other nutritional bene-

fits that are not well proven such as higher vitamin C levels in leafy green veggies, higher quality but smaller amounts of protein in cereal grains and legumes, and higher levels of some minerals such as iron, magnesium, and phosphorus.

The second question we need to address is "is organic produce safer?" Again, there aren't any conclusive studies proving a causative link between ingestion of pesticide residues and health risks such as cancer. What is proven is that organic produce contains 1/3 the levels of pesticide residues of conventionally grown produce and 1/2 the levels of pesticide residues of IPM grown produce. Increasing your intake of organic produce definitely decreases your intake of organophosphates. But again, there is no proven link between ingestion of organophosphates and health impacts. Organic produce also has lower nitrate levels. This is particularly interesting to parents of small children who are extremely susceptible to nitrates that compete for oxygen in the body. Too many nitrates can cause blue baby syndrome in babies. Nitrates can also be converted to carcinogenic nitrosamines after ingestion, but there is no evidence of increased cancer risk associated with nitrates. The most promising study today of the relative safety of organic produce involves children. There was a study of the urine pesticide levels of children before, during and after switching to an organic diet. After only five days on an organic diet, the pesticide levels in their urine dropped dramatically! This study, and any other relevant studies, will be cited on the SSAWG website within the next month (www.ssawg.org).



On the question of safety, there are some theoretical concerns about organic produce. Some natural plant toxins that have been identified as harmful to humans are theoretically higher in organic produce because of the higher sugar content and lack of fungicides. However, the slower rate of growth and thicker protective cell walls

probably counteracts this effect. The other potential risks of organic produce such as harmful microbials can be controlled by postharvest conditions, sanitation and heat (especially when concerning composting practices).

With no conclusive studies at our disposal, how do we market the common sense health benefits of our farm products? Well, organic or not, there are proven health benefits to eating a diet high in fruits and vegetables including reduced cancer risk, weight control, lower blood pressure, and protection against cataracts. We can take this mainstream message and build on it. Permissible health claims and suggested wording will be posted on the SSAWG website within the next month. Most of the American public knows very little about nutrition and are hungry (pardon the pun) for information. We, as farmers, should educate ourselves and be able and ready to provide as much information as possible, because the fact is, our products are healthy, organic or not.

The USDA website provides us with tools to help us in this endeavor. It provides nutritional analysis of most whole foods, as well as a recipe analyzer. Providing recipes to customers with nutritional content is a great way to help that understand how to prepare your farm products healthfully. Providing all this information to your customers also helps them understand the care you've put into producing their food. The website www.5aday.com can also provide you with ideas for how to promote the health benefits of your produce. Don't forget how important it is that your produce was picked ripe and has not traveled thousands of miles to get to your customer. Food miles definitely affect the nutrient quality and content.

As farmers, we need to advocate for more research on the health impacts of organic versus conventionally grown produce so that in the future we can draw on more credible studies to promote our products. But in the meantime, we already know the health benefits of eating more fruits and vegetables and we already know that the average American diet does not include enough of these. We can use our available resources to educate ourselves and our customers on a healthy diet.

Chatham Marketplace Update

By Laura Lauffer

Chatham Marketplace is a community owned co-operative grocery store located in the historic Chatham Mills building in Pittsboro. Construction is rolling

along, staff is being hired and we are actively seeking local producers to fill our shelves with Chatham County and local products. We are also seeking additional members to serve on the Producer Relations Committee.

The aim of the Chatham Marketplace Producer Relations Committee is to serve the broad farming community by developing a dynamic purchasing policy for locally purchased produce, plants, and animal products sold at the co-op. The policy is approved by the CM Board and staff will follow the policy when making local purchases. To achieve the requirements of the CM purchasing policy the Producer Relations Committee will establish guidelines and protocols for local farm visits. Members of the committee visit farms to discuss the CM purchasing policy and learn about products and volume available. All purchasing decisions are made by CM staff.

The committee meets every other month in Pittsboro. In harmony with the policies of the Chatham Marketplace co-op and in order to prevent conflicts of interest, committee members will sign and support our Disclosure and Confidentiality Statement. Committee members should have knowledge of animal husbandry or basic agricultural practices and must be owners of the co-op. If you are interested in serving on this committee please contact Laura at LauraLauffer@nc.rr.com.

Members of the CM Producer Relations Committee have been visiting local farms to gather information about products and quantities available. One of the best things about our co-op is the proximity to local growers, cheese makers, and herbalists. The committee has visited numerous farms; if you have filled out our producer information sheet you are on our list. The producer information sheet is located on the Chatham Marketplace web site at www.chathammarketplace.coop. Click on the Become a Supplier section to fill out both the general information form and the more specific form for fruit/vegetables, meat/dairy or eggs.



Construction of the front entrance to Chatham Marketplace.



We are very happy to announce that we have hired a produce manager that many of you know - Shiloh Avery (left). Shiloh comes to us from Weaver Street Market, serves as an instructor at the Sustainable Farming Program at Central Carolina

Community College and is a farmer herself! Shiloh will be working with local growers to provide our owners and customers with fresh locally grown produce.

The store will be open soon! Unfortunately due to construction schedules (photo at right) we cannot pin down an exact opening date but suffice it to say we will see you all in our gorgeous new store this spring. We look forward to working closely with Chatham county farmers as we open our doors and into the future!!

Laura Lauffer is a member of the Chatham Marketplace Board of Directors and also chairs the Producer Relations Committee.

**March 27, 2006:
Producer Meeting for Chatham Marketplace**

Pittsboro, NC

The Chatham County Center of North Carolina Cooperative Extension will host a Producer Meeting to discuss **Producing for Chatham Marketplace** on Monday, March 27, from 6:00-9:00 p.m. in the Agriculture Building auditorium in Pittsboro, NC. Chatham Marketplace is Chatham County's locally owned co-op grocery store scheduled to open in spring 2006. The purpose of this meeting is to introduce Shiloh Avery, Chatham Marketplace's new produce manager, and to discuss types of produce, quality, volume, packaging, communication, handling, etc. We will also introduce Jeff Barney, the new Kitchen/Deli Manager at CM. Jeff is also interested in purchasing as much as possible from local producers. If you are a producer living in or near Chatham County and hope to supply Chatham Marketplace, you won't want to miss this meeting!

The meeting will begin at 6:00 pm with a **potluck**, so bring your favorite dish to share. Drinks will be pro-

vided. Please RSVP to me at debbie_roos@ncsu.edu or 919-542-8202 if you plan on attending just so we will know how many to expect.

**Growers' Choice:
Chatham County's New Cooperative
for Small Poultry Producers**

By Alex Hitt

The ONLY poultry processing plant in North Carolina open to independent small farmers, in fact there isn't one in Virginia, South Carolina, Tennessee, or Georgia either! Imagine yourself as a small poultry producer dependent on this one plant and you found out it was going to close and was up for sale, what would you do? Panic - I now have 100 pet turkeys? Decide you were getting out of the poultry business which was becoming an important part of your diversified farm? Buy it and keep it running? But it takes more money and time than you have as one farmer. Get some other farmers together and buy it! That is what has happened with Growers' Choice.



Cutting up freshly processed chicken at Growers' Choice.

When Rose Hill Farms outside of Pittsboro decided to close their doors last fall, panic ran through the many small flock producers - especially the turkey growers just getting ready for Thanksgiving. Several of us got together and began to investigate the possibility of buying the property and operating the USDA-inspected plant. The task seemed daunting and the complexity of the details unbelievable at times. What kept us going was the belief that we had to keep this vital resource open for all of those farms who had diversified their operations into poultry and rabbits. These farmers are raising their own

birds and direct marketing them to customers at farmers' markets, CSAs, and restaurants. Those same birds are providing important fertilizer to the farmers' fields, and eating insects and weeds. Sure the law says that a farm can process up to 1,000 birds a year on the farm for direct sales to individuals and restaurants but who really wants to do that many? Who can really do it efficiently? Cut up birds, parts, packaging?

From the beginning we wanted the business to be owned and operated by farmers who could have a say in how it would be run. A cooperative seemed natural so that is how Growers' Choice was incorporated so that the growers would have the choice in their own business! Initially Joe Moize (The Shady Grove Farm), Alex Hitt (Peregrine Farm) and Weaver Street Market in Carrboro were doing the investigating. Joe handling the financial and legal aspects; Alex working to get the various farmers and interested groups together; Weaver Street Market wanting to buy all of their poultry from local farms. We had to move fast because if a USDA plant shuts down it is close to impossible to re-open it. We hired a couple to manage the plant's day-to-day operations, giving the others time to pull the rest together. It has not been easy and there have been lots of bumps on the road!



Alex Hitt visits with his pastured turkeys.

Four months in and the signs are promising. We now have ten co-op members, people who firmly believe in making this plant available. Farmers, businesses, and consumers who have put in \$50,000 of their own money. We continue to build enthusiastic relationships with important allies (Rural Advancement Foundation International, NCDA, Extension both at NC A&T and NC State University, the Agricultural Advancement Consortium and more.). We made it

through the hectic Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons and are now processing an average of 3,000 birds a week, including 900 a week for Weaver Street Market. Even with what seems like having to repair every piece of equipment in the plant (\$12,000 worth of major repairs) we are at break-even as far as the business is concerned. Amazing!

What do we do next? We need more members, especially those who raise small flocks. We need to continue to raise more money so we can complete the buyout of the property. We need small farmers to put birds on the ground, especially those who want to direct market their own product. We need a few larger growers who want to grow low density, antibiotic-free birds on an all-vegetable diet for Growers' Choice to sell wholesale. We have a growing wholesale market that wants local poultry from us, mostly chicken but also turkeys, ducks, geese, and more. We need farmers and businesses to continue to support the plant! If you are interested in growing for Growers' Choice contact Steven Moize at greenthumb@theshadygrovefarm.com. If you are interested in general information about the plant or to schedule processing call Scott and Renee Henderson at the plant at 919-742-6584.

How can you become a member? Only producers actually engaged in the production of agricultural products handled by this Cooperative can be voting members. To become a member you have to have to buy one \$100 share of Common stock. To become a voting member and be eligible for patronage dividends based on the amount of business you do with the cooperative, you must buy five \$100 shares of Common stock (\$500 total). As with all cooperatives there is only one vote for each member no matter how much money you invest. This is how you have a choice in Growers' Choice.

If you want to further support the business you can invest more money by purchasing \$1,000 shares of Preferred stock. Most of the current shareholders have invested \$5,000. You do not have to be a producer to invest in this way. Preferred shares are eligible to receive regular dividends based on how many shares you own. If you are interested in becoming a member and investing contact Alex Hitt at abhitt@minndspring.com or 336-376-6320.

Where are we going? The reality is we need to build a new plant because the current one is in bad shape and it is increasingly difficult to keep the USDA happy. We intend to build it right across the driveway from the existing facility at a reasonable cost. We are currently working with NCDA to design it for us. We are exploring reopening the hatchery so when you bring birds in for processing you can take chicks back home! We are exploring

reasonably priced, quality feed sources to help reduce feed costs for producers. We are beginning to talk to more restaurants and stores so we can expand the wholesale market for poultry and rabbits. The plant is approved (but is has never been done) to do custom cut-up and packaging of red meats. It is also permitted to do value-added meat products including smoking bacon, making sausages and more. While we are not set up to do this now, many producers see it as an important area to expand into to make their farm businesses even more diversified and to use all the parts of the animal.

The panic has passed and the realities of running a complicated cooperative have set in now. We hope you will grow more birds, diversify your farms more, become members and be active in the running of your cooperative!

Alex and Betsy Hitt have operated Peregrine Farm near Graham for 25 years, growing vegetables, cut flowers, blueberries, and pastured heritage-breed turkeys. Look for them at the Carrboro Farmers' Market when it opens in March!

Note: The Chatham County Center of North Carolina Cooperative Extension will be conducting **two Pastured Poultry Conferences in 2006**. The September conference will focus on pasture management and Growers' Choice and the December conference will focus on pastured poultry production. Stay tuned for dates and more details.

Planting & Harvesting Guide: Printable Version Now Available on GSF Website



I told you all about this new tool that Doug Jones and I created in the last issue of Plow Sharing. The very

extensive guide shows planting and harvesting dates for about 35 crops and is on the GSF website at <http://chatham.ces.ncsu.edu/growingsmallfarms>—you'll find it under the Production section.

I just wanted you to know I created a printable (pdf) version that can be downloaded from the above site. I hope you find this useful.

Get your Farm on the Web for Free!

Ever wish you had a farm website but don't have the skills to do it yourself or the cash to shell out for a professional web designer? Well you'll be happy to learn that there are several opportunities to get your farm on the web for free, and no special skills are required! But it doesn't do any good to establish a web presence unless people know how to find it, so the best news is that the organizations described below all have media campaigns to draw attention to your website. So take some time now to sit in front of the computer and get your farm up there to benefit from this free exposure. It's a great way to connect with both current and potential customers!

LocalHarvest: www.localharvest.org

LocalHarvest.org, an electronic directory of family farmers selling directly to consumers, is currently getting over 5,000 visits a day!!! These are consumers are looking for farm products.

LocalHarvest.org is offering a free listing in their electronic directory for direct marketing family farmers and for farmers' markets. You can get your own individual listing that tells consumers about your farm or farmers' market, where you are, what you have to sell, how they can purchase your farm products and you can even show a picture of your farm or farmers' market if you want! For free!

Consumers can search the LocalHarvest.org directory by state, city, zip code, farm type, or farm product to learn where to buy farm products grown near them.

Go to www.LocalHarvest.org to sign up now. Be sure to check out listings already in the directory too!

Currently LocalHarvest.org, the largest directory of farms and farmers' markets, has WAY too few listing for farms and farmers' markets in the South.

Is your farm or farmers' market in the LocalHarvest.org directory? Are all the farmers you know in this directory? Well, put your farm and market on the map!

Approximately 15 Chatham county farms are currently listed on this website.

Farm Locator®: www.newfarm.org

The Farm Locator® is part of Rodale Institute's The New Farm® website at www.newfarm.org (click on Farm Locator in right column). The Farm Locator offers you the opportunity to create a unique farm profile online. With one simple form, you build a personalized webpage -- an online portrait of your farm and farm offerings.

It will put you on the map for families, chefs, food brokers, other farmers, farm market operators -- anyone who wants to be your customer. Share the page with current and prospective customers. Put your name "out there" for others searching for products in your region. Your farm will be searchable by state, county, product, type of marketing, and more. The site links consumers as well as restaurants, retailers, institutions, etc. to farmers.

You have these online information fields to paint a word portrait of your farm:

- History, size, distinguishing traits of your farm
- How you market (direct sales, wholesale, restaurants, CSA, etc.)
- What you grow/produce
- Sustainable and organic farm practices (cover crops, crop rotation, grazing, other)
- Farming system style (conventional, organic, sustainable)
- Your points of sale (how people can find your products)

Better yet, you can easily update your Farm Locator® entry as information changes.

The Farm Locator® gives you a chance to get your farm "on the map". Creating a unique Farm Locator profile puts you on the web for free.

Only 7 Chatham County farms are currently listed on this website (actually 8 but one is a duplicate).

NC Farm Fresh: www.ncfarmfresh.com

The NCDA&CS www.NCFarmFresh.com website was created in 2003. You can search by county, region, or the entire state for farmers' markets, on-farm stands, pick-your-own farms, CSAs, nurseries, and more. Visit the website to submit your farm information on-line or contact Shirley Nicholson at 919-715-0155 or email ncfarmfresh@ncmail.net.

17 Chatham County farms are currently listed on this website.

**March 11, 2006
Organic Growers' School**

Flat Rock, NC

The 13th Annual Organic Growers' School will be held March 11, 2006 at Blue Ridge Community College in Flat Rock NC.

The Organic Growers' School is a day of workshops for beginning farmers to advanced commercial growers. Now in its 13th year, the Organic Growers' School seeks to share practical, region appropriate information at an affordable price. With nearly 1,000 participants from 10 different states, this is the largest conference of its type in the region. Come to network with others, and enjoy over 70 exciting classes and hands-on workshops, a seed exchange, and a trade show with informational and educational booths.

Important details about this year's school:

- Choose from over 60 classes! More workshops than ever before!
- New tracks this year: Sustainable Energy Options and Farmers: the Next Generation.

To request a mailed registration form and/or to be added to our mailing list, email your contact information to info@organicgrowersschool.org. You can view the complete program and get all the details and even register online at <http://organicgrowersschool.org>.

For registration and attendance inquiries, contact Karen Vizzina at Karen@organicgrowersschool.org 828-369-2375.

**Iowa County Mandates Purchasing
Local Organic Food**

A few weeks ago, Woodbury County, Iowa became the first county to adopt a local food purchasing policy mandating the purchase of locally grown, organic food for county departments. This policy supports their Organics Conversion Policy, adopted last June, which offers up to \$50,000 annually in property tax rebates for those who convert from conventional to organic farming practices.

Learn more on the Food and Society website:

<http://ola.wkkf.org/fasupdate/2006/january/feature.html>

2006 Calendar of Events

updated weekly on the web:

www.ces.ncsu.edu/chatham/ag/SustAg/calendar.html

February 25, 2006: Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) **Marketing Opportunities for Farmers Conference** at Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, NC. Training sessions cover all aspects of marketing farm products, from selling at tailgate markets to agritourism to supplying grocery stores, and much more. Many sessions are farmer-led. A delicious local food lunch is provided. Visit the conference website at www.asapconnections.org/marketingconference.htm for more details.

February 28, 2006: A workshop on **Year-round Vegetable Production with High Tunnels** will be offered by the Chatham County Center of North Carolina Cooperative Extension as part of its Enhancing Sustainability Series from 6:00-9:00 p.m. in the Agriculture Building auditorium in Pittsboro, NC. For more information, contact Debbie Roos at 919-542-8202.

March 3, 2006: The **Northern Piedmont Specialty Crops School** in Roxboro, NC. Sponsored by North Carolina Cooperative Extension. Topics include direct marketing, seedless table grapes, blueberry production, and season extension. For a pre-registration form, which includes a map and a list of local motels in the area, please contact Carl Cantaluppi at 919-603-1350.

March 8, 2006: Mushroom Inoculation Workshop from 2:00-6:30 pm in Lansing, NC. Sponsored by North Carolina A&T State University. For more information, go to <http://chatham.ces.ncsu.edu/growingsmallfarms/mushroomworkshops.html>.

March 11, 2006: 13th Annual **Organic Growers' School** at Blue Ridge Community College in Flat Rock, NC. For more information, visit the conference website at www.organicgrowersschool.org.

March 14, 2006: Homestead Milk Production Shortcourse sponsored by NC Cooperative Extension in Burlington, NC. Topics include Overview of Milk Production, Cow vs. Goat Milk, Animal Nutrition, Animal Health, Milking, Milking Equipment and Sanitation. Classes will be on March 14, March 21, March 28, with a field practicum on April 1 at Nu Horizons Farm in Pittsboro. All classes are from 7:00-9:00 pm except for the field day which will be from 9:00-11:30 am. For more information, contact Marti Day at 336-375-5876.

March 18, 2006: Mushroom Inoculation Workshop from 9:30 am-4:00 pm in Denver, NC. Sponsored by North Carolina A&T State University. This workshop will be repeated in various locations throughout the state in the spring of 2006. For more information, go to <http://chatham.ces.ncsu.edu/growingsmallfarms/mushroomworkshops.html>.

March 20, 2006: Mushroom Inoculation Workshop from 9:00 am-2:00 pm in Maple Hill, NC. Sponsored by North Carolina A&T State University. This workshop will be repeated in various locations throughout the state in the spring of 2006. For more information, go to <http://chatham.ces.ncsu.edu/growingsmallfarms/mushroomworkshops.html>.

April 8, 2006: Chatham Beekeepers' Field Day in Pittsboro, NC. For more information, contact Jim Williams at 919-362-1794.

April 22-23, 2006: Annual Piedmont Farm Tour sponsored by Carolina Farm Stewardship Association and Weaver Street Market. For more information, contact CFSA at 919-542-2402.

May 9, 2006: Center for Environmental Farming Systems **Swine Unit Dedication and Kick-off to the "Season of Sustainable Agriculture" Celebration** of CEFS in Goldsboro, NC. More details coming soon.

June 24-25, 2006: Annual Mountain Farm Tour sponsored by Carolina Farm Stewardship Association. For more information, contact CFSA at 919-542-2402.

July 17, 2006: Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers (ASCFG) Southeastern Regional Meeting in Clayton, NC. The meeting theme will be "Specialty Cut Flowers from Sunrise to Sunset" and will include a lecture and growers' tour. More details to come. Contact Leah Cook at 919-452-8987 for more information.

July 22-23, 2006: Annual High Country Farm Tour sponsored by Carolina Farm Stewardship Association. For more information, contact CFSA at 919-542-2402.

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awareness, understanding,
and practice of sustainable agriculture*