

# Sustainable Agriculture

Looking forward for this generation  
and the next...

at **UGA**

**March 2010**

**W**ell, this was supposed to be the Winter newsletter, but winter is gone (Thank goodness).

We have been busy with meetings and workshops, so the newsletter was put on a back burner. But spring is here and with it a new growing season. We have some tips for you on marketing to chefs and some of the types of crops they need. Also many scientists both here at the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES), FVSU, and at the Agricultural Research Service have worked hard over the past year to submit grant proposals for needed work in sustainable agriculture production. We highlight two of these new grants.

This winter we were able to participate in several very successful conferences. The Conservation Production Systems Training Conference was held in Americus in February. For ten years, this conference has brought farmers, researchers, Natural Resource Conservation Service personnel, and Extension together to look at farming systems that minimize environmental impacts. The conference emphasizes farmer to farmer instruction and always has farmer speakers covering pertinent issues. One very interesting system featured this year combines row crop production with a sod rotation for grazing cattle.

The Georgia Organics Annual Conference was held in Athens also in February, with over 1,000 people in attendance. See more information on CAES' participation in this conference elsewhere in the newsletter.

We have seen remarkable growth in interest in sustainable agriculture from both within and

without UGA. We have made a lot of progress in getting existing information to those who need it, training extension agents in alternative production techniques such as organic production, and obtaining grant funding to investigate important production issues. As you all are aware, the University system and our College in particular face deep budget cuts that may impair our ability to continue the progress. We will keep you informed as the state legislators and the administration make their decisions. Thanks for your support. Keep growing!

Julia Gaskin

Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator, UGA-CAES

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## **Research Update**

### **Georgia Receives Two New SARE Grants**

Dr. George Boyhan, Horticulture Department, University of Georgia, is the principal investigator on a grant that will look at two winter vegetable crop rotations in terms of profitability and improving soil quality. The two proposed rotations are:

Rotation 1- Strawberries → Soybeans → oats/Austrian winter peas → Potatoes → Sunn hemp → Onion → southernpeas;

Rotation 2 – Brassica → Sugar snap peas → Sudax/Iron Clay Peas → Carrots → Sugar snap peas → Sunn hemp → Onion → Millet.

These rotations will be tested in both north and south Georgia to determine how they perform in different soils and climatic





conditions. The investigators will also look at how the rotation breaks pest cycles, how the cover crops supply nitrogen and suppress weeds,

and how the cover crops and crop rotation suppresses nematodes. The project will develop a budget for the whole rotation and an economic model that will demonstrate the importance of this type of systems approach. The first growing season will begin next fall, so stay tuned.

Dr. Harry Schomberg, USDA Agricultural Research Service, JPC Natural Resource Conservation Center, is the lead scientist on a grant that will investigate organic grain production. This project will use different crops such as canola and sunflower oilseeds and hard red winter wheat to extend the traditional corn, soybean, and wheat rotation. The researchers hope to provide more diversity in cash crops that can reduce the farmers' financial risk. They will be looking at organic conservation tillage to reduce weed pressures and increase soil quality, and will compare this to a cropping system that uses more intensive tillage practices. Enterprise budgets will also be developed in this project to assess economic viability of production systems. We will be keeping you abreast of developments in this research. We appreciate Southern SARE's support of this important work.

[www.SustainAgGa.org](http://www.SustainAgGa.org)

*is your source for UGA research & extension information, educational events around the state, and archived newsletters from the UGA-CAES sustainable agriculture program*

## Georgia Organics 2010 Conference Held in Athens

Athens and the University of Georgia community were excited to host the 2010 Georgia Organics Annual Conference in February. With over 1,000 conference attendees in two days of intensive workshops and farm tours, educational and networking sessions, and culminating in the Farmers' Feast and keynote address, Athens was the place to be for anyone interested in sustainable agriculture and good food.



Research tour participants learn about soil quality. Photo by Stephanie Schupska

The College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences produced a workshop on soil fertility and biology. Held at the Horticulture Research Farm, this workshop gave participants the opportunity to learn the basics of soil fertility through lecture as well as hands on activities. For the final portion of the workshop, participants were able to take some of the basics of soil fertility learned in the classroom setting outdoors to the certified organic plots of the Organic Agriculture Certificate fields. The workshop was so successful; plans are being made to offer it as a stand-alone workshop later in the year. Stay tuned for further developments.







Observing soil differences in long-term conservation tillage plots. Photo by Stephanie Schupska

In the afternoon, UGA-CAES teamed up with their next-door farm neighbors, the USDA-ARS for an agricultural research field tour. Tour participants spent the first half of their tour at J. Phil Campbell Natural Resource Conservation Center's long term watershed research plots hearing about research related to soil quality and quantity and the environmental effects of grazing systems.



Entomology was one of the highlights on the sustainable ag research tour. Photo by Stephanie Schupska

Tour-goers then trekked across the road to the UGA-CAES Horticulture Research Farm to observe high tunnels used for blueberry season extension, pumpkins for organic production, the use of fish emulsion for disease prevention and nutrients, floral farmscaping for biological control of insects, and certified organic plots used for the Organic Agriculture Certificate program. Summaries of these research projects and others will soon be posted on the Sustainable Agriculture website [www.SustainAgGA.org](http://www.SustainAgGA.org).

*Joy Schomberg and Julia Gaskin*

## **Grower's Corner** **Chefs Hungry for Local Produce**

Marketing to chefs successfully requires the farmer to utilize a variety of skills, one of the more important of which is making crop and variety selections. Chefs need high quality produce that comes from a reliable source.

Because restaurants want to provide their customers with a memorable dining experience, farmers should focus on crop varieties that provide maximum flavor rather than the highest yields.

Developing a relationship with a chef and getting them to talk about the types of produce they want to use is a good first step for success. Set up a meeting and bring seed catalogs. This may help you and the chef determine crops and varieties that you can grow successfully and the chef wants to buy. Consider growing a signature product that you can produce reliably and of high quality. When you have developed a reputation for being the main producer for that product, you can then attract attention for your other crops. Having a diversity of crops that you can supply reliably will also help.

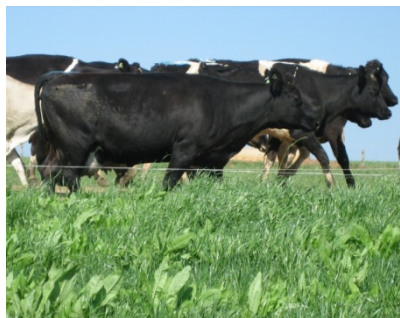


Obviously, tomatoes and squash are not going to bring a premium price at the height of their season. However, extending the season using early and late varieties may produce a sale when a particular vegetable is not usually so abundant. Furthermore, many local markets are closed during the cooler part of the year. There may be less competition in producing cool weather vegetables.

Crops that have been mentioned as needed by chefs include small fruits such as blackberries, raspberries, blueberries and strawberries, as well as lettuces, baby vegetables such as squash and leeks, heirloom tomatoes and corn. Surprisingly, many of our traditional southern crops such as field peas, purple hull peas, and lima beans are wanted by many chefs. Asparagus and other specialized crops are often sought. The key is knowing your market and you can only accomplish that through good and continuing communication.

*By Joy Schomberg, Julia Gaskin and Kent Wolfe adapted from information from Debbie Roos, NCSU Extension*

## Two Upcoming Field Days for Graziers



Due to the growing interest in grass-fed beef and grazing dairies in the state, the Extension forage program will present two

field days this spring that will provide good information for those of you who are graziers.

First, a field day on ryegrass April 10<sup>th</sup> will be held at the Joe B. Harris Pond House in Odum. Ryegrass serves an important role in providing high quality forage that can be stored for times when only low quality or no forage is available. Find out the latest information on ryegrass varieties, seeding rates, fertilization with poultry litter and commercial fertilizer, harvesting and

storage methods, and USDA programs to assist with forage production, and grazing management.

At the second field day, you can learn all you ever wanted to know about legumes in pastures. The Field Day and Pasture Walk will be held on May 13<sup>th</sup> at the Central Georgia Research and Education Center in Eatonton. Legumes can improve your forage quality and help reduce the amount of nitrogen you need to maintain good stands. This event will feature all the authors of "Southern Forages" and cover topics such as the economics of using legumes in pastures, how to manage legumes in a grazing system, and new varieties in development. This is truly an opportunity you don't want to miss.

For more information on both these events, go to [www.GeorgiaForages.com](http://www.GeorgiaForages.com) and click on Upcoming Events.

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## More Upcoming Events

**April 27 Starting a New Food Business** – This intensive day-long seminar covers the topics a new food entrepreneur needs to know, including a roundtable discussion from successful Georgia entrepreneurs. More information is available at <http://www.efsonline.uga.edu/> or by contacting the Extension Food Science Office at (706) 542-2574.

**June 17 Fort Valley State University Organic Fruit & Vegetables Workshop** – Contact Ms. Jean Willis, 478-825-6268, for further information



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## *SARE Outreach* Publishes Guide to Federal Programs

Got a great idea? Need a grant or loan to get a jumpstart? Check out *Building Sustainable Farms, Ranches and Communities*, a guide to federal programs that provide financial and technical support for sustainable agriculture. Written for anyone fostering innovative enterprises in agriculture and forestry in the United States, the guide features program resources in community development; sustainable land management; and value-added and diversified agriculture and forestry. Thus, it can help farmers, entrepreneurs, community developers, conservationists, and many other individuals,



as well as private and public organizations, both for-profit and not-for-profit. Published in 2009, *Building Sustainable Farms, Ranches and Communities* can be useful for those seeking help from federal programs to become aware of and take better advantage of the enormous array of federal programs and resources.

Available only online, download the publication for free at <http://www.sare.org/publications/ruralplaces.htm>.

*By Sean McGovern, SARE Outreach*

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