



Market sustains a way of life

To market, to market

If you are considering a direct marketing venture, there are plenty of resources to consult. Two good ones are offered by SAN, the publishing arm of SARE.

Reap New Profits is a 20-page bulletin that offers snapshots of all types of direct marketing. It's a good starting place to determine whether a farmers market, pick your own operation, CSA, farm stand, or even agritourism is right for your family. The web version can be viewed at: <http://www.sare.org/market99/slideshow/index.htm>

Bulletin and companion CD are free.

The New Farmer's Market is the one-volume, must-have resource for sellers, market planners and managers. It covers everything from what to grow and how to prepare for market to liability insurance and designing a market web site. 250+ pages, \$24.95 plus shipping.

To order any of the above, call the SAN distribution center at (802) 656-0484

With a jump start last year from a SSARE Producer Grant, the Fairview Farmers Market is enjoying a brisk second season. Five or six farmer members and the occasional visiting vendor supply residents of Fairview, North Carolina, with fruits, vegetables, home-baked breads, jams, jellies, pickles, herbs, soaps, meat and fresh flowers—all local and, mostly, organic.

But the market has accomplished more than just a direct link between consumers and growers. It has drawn this fast-growing suburb of Asheville back to its agricultural roots and established closer community ties.

“When we first began meeting to plan for the market, most of the people involved hardly knew each other,” recalls Annie Louise Perkinson, SSARE project coordinator. “However as everyone worked to make the market succeed, it became more than that. Not only did they have the diligence to show up every Saturday morning from mid-May to mid-November, but people



Sidney Rose Perkinson (right) is getting a head start at being a fifth generation farmer at Hickory Nut Gap Farm and the Fairview Farmers Market. Photo by Jeff Racer

Three
Calls for Proposals
Released in September
Story on page 2

started volunteering to be in charge of various things such as t-shirts, signage and advertising. In fact, the market manager stopped taking her \$20 per week stipend because everyone was sharing the responsibilities so equally.”

Perkinson credits the SSARE producer grant for the market's successful start.

“A thorough public relations plan is crucial to any new business,” she says. “The SARE funds allowed us to advertise in the local newspapers, and to create flyers, signs and t-shirts. We purchased attractive shade canopies that gave the market an identity.”

Their public relations goes beyond what can be purchased. The atmosphere of a community festival is created with spontaneous blue grass music. Some ready-to-eat items such as homemade sausage and egg biscuits put customers into a buying frame of mind. One booth was designated for children to sell produce. This not only helps establish a family atmosphere at the market, but also trains the next generation in the fine points of selling what they grow. Last year a 12-year-old girl from Kosovo brought produce from her garden as well as baked goods to help support her large family. She returned this year as a seasoned veteran and regular farmer member of the market.

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Not one, but three

Southern Region SARE releases three calls for proposals in September

Since 1994 the Producer Grant Program call for proposals has been released in September, giving growers the late fall and winter to prepare a submission. This year two new grant opportunities will debut in September.

September 15 is the release date for the **Producer Grant Program** call for proposals. Funding maximums are \$10,000 for an individual producer or \$15,000 for a producer organization to conduct on-farm research or marketing projects that promote sustainable agriculture and produce information that many farmers can use. The stories on page one and page three of this newsletter are examples of two kinds of producer projects. Summaries of current and past Producer Grant Program projects can be obtained from our web site or by contacting the office at (770) 412-4787 or ppatton@gaes.griffin.peachnet.edu. If you have specific questions about the Producer Grant Program, contact John Mayne at (770) 229-3350 or jmayne@gaes.griffin.peachnet.edu. Due date is January 25, 2002 with awards announced in April.

September 15 is also the release date for the new **On-Farm Research** call for proposals. These projects are similar to Producer Grant Program projects in scope and focus, and they will be evaluated by the Producer Grant Program reviewers. However, they are conducted by extension, NRCS or NGO personnel who currently work with farmers and ranchers. At least three farmer or rancher cooperators must be involved in the project from planning through implementation and outreach. These on-farm research and marketing projects promoting sustainable agriculture have a project funding maximum of \$15,000. Due date is January 25, 2002 with awards announced in April.

New partnership announced

September 3 is the release date for the **Sustainable Community Innovation Grants**, a pilot grants program in partnership with the Southern Rural Development Center. These projects will strengthen both agriculture and Southern communities through explicit linkages between sustainable agriculture and community development, and improve understanding of the mutual benefits of such linkages. Applicants may be farmers, ranchers, researchers, community organizations, environmentalists, ag and community development professionals, entrepreneurs, governmental and non-governmental organizations. Projects may be funded up to two years for a project maximum of \$10,000 for proposals from individuals or organizations.

Due date is November 2, 2001 with awards announced February 4, 2002.

All three calls for proposals will be posted on the SSARE website by their release dates. The web site is www.griffin.peachnet.edu/sare.

Obtain a mailed copy of any of the calls by phoning (770) 412-4787 or sending an email post to ppatton@gaes.griffin.peachnet.edu.

Cagey solutions surface in catfish farming

Of the 600,000,000 pounds of U.S. farm-raised catfish that will be harvested this year, more than 100,000,000 pounds will come from Alabama. Dickie Odom of Greene County is up to his hip boots in the action.

Odom knows about catfish—not just how to eat them—but how to raise them and help others raise them. For 14 years he has operated his own 85 pond-acres and helped family members manage an additional 300 acres of ponds. He has chaired the Alabama Catfish Producers State Committee for five years and has just been elected to the board of directors of the National Aquaculture Association. With all that experience he has seen the fledgling industry get up to speed and hit a few bumps along the way.

“The catfish industry has enjoyed 10-15 percent annual growth for about 20 years,” he says. “Now we are experiencing a little slow-down along with the rest of the economy and also due to some market competition from Viet Nam which shipped 2,000,000 pounds of catfish into the United States last month.”

Odom and other producers are fighting back with research to improve profits. He recently completed a SSARE producer grant project that examined whether more profit could be made from catfish ponds by using caged filter-feeding fish to harvest plankton.

Plankton flourishes on the nutrients produced by catfish waste in ponds. Excess plankton can lead to oxygen imbalance and cause the catfish to die. Algaecides are the conventional control for plankton, but they are expensive and may have detrimental effects on the pond ecosystem. An alternative control is to co-stock filter-feeding fish like carp or tilapia to keep the plankton in check and also provide a second fish crop from the catfish pond.

However this solution has its own problems. The filter-feeding fish may compete with catfish for the expensive food pellets, and they interfere with

catfish seining. Catfish processors may even charge a fee for separating the filter fish from the catfish.

An alternative to stocking filter feeding fish directly in catfish ponds is to put them in cages so they don't interfere with seining or compete for catfish chow. Cage culture of fish fed with high quality feed is common, but cage culture of filter-feeding fish is not common because the cages restrict their access to food. Since catfish ponds are aerated, it seemed feasible to Odom that enough plankton could be circulated through the cages to nourish filter-feeding fish.

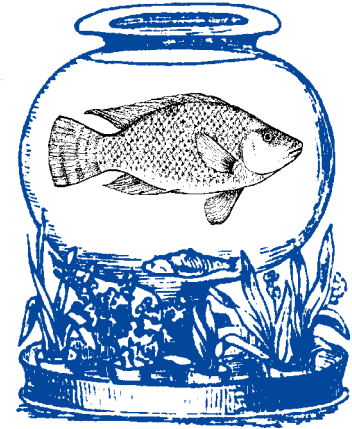
“I would like to see other researchers follow up on the economics as well as the effectiveness of plankton control, now that we know healthy tilapia can be raised in cages.”

David Teichert-Coddington

With the help of cooperators from Auburn University, Odom evaluated the performance of tilapia fingerlings who grew for 134 days in his ponds. They experimented with density stocking rates—some cages had only 170 fish, while some had 500 fish. They also experimented with distances from the aerators—some cages were 50 feet from the aerator and some were 150 feet from it. At the end of the grow-out period the tilapia were harvested and sold for 75 cents per pound.

Results indicated that higher density stocking rates did not affect the size of the individual fish and distance from the aerator didn't affect individual size or growth rate of the tilapia. While the number of tilapia in the study were not sufficient to make a measurable impact on the plankton population, they did convert a nuisance into economic value.

“Even though we didn't do the study for economic purposes, a rough



economic analysis was performed on the data just to see what the cost and income came out to be,” said David Teichert-Coddington with the Auburn Cooperative Extension Service.

The cost of the cages (\$285/cage) was depreciated over seven years. Fingerlings cost 25 cents each and were sold for 75 cents each. Using those figures, the low-density cages had a mean net income of about \$1 per cage, while the high-density cages had a mean net income for more than \$53 per cage. Net income would be less if labor was charged against the fish.

“I think raising tilapia in cages could be profitable if they were stocked a month earlier than we did for the project and if the density was increased by at least 50 percent to about 750 fish per cage,” says Teichert-Coddington. “I would like to see other researchers follow up on the economics as well as the effectiveness of plankton control now that we know healthy tilapia can be raised in cages.”

The results were encouraging enough for Dickie Odom to invest in tilapia for his ponds, but not the black ones used for the study. Fish buyers told him that consumers prefer red tilapia. Auburn University scientists have obtained an attractive strain of red tilapia from Colombia, which Odom plans to stock.

“They have plenty of eye appeal, and I plan to supplement their feed just a little bit to grow them out faster,” he says. “I also plan to build a facility for overwintering so I can sell when the market is right or I can re-stock them to grow even bigger next summer. Either

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Southern farmers featured in new book

They weren't looking for fame; they were just looking to save their farms. But they did such a good job of it, fame has found 11 Southern farm families. Their stories appear in SAN's newest release, *The New American Farmer: Profiles of Agricultural Innovation*.

There's Jackie Judice who boosted profits and won environmental awards on his sugar cane farm during the lowest sugar prices in decades.

Terry and LaRhea Pepper helped pioneer the organic cotton industry in Texas, which now produces 25% of the U.S. organic cotton crop.

Alex and Betsy Hitt are harvesting \$20,000 an acre of vegetables, fruit and flowers from their five well-tended acres in North Carolina.

Alvin and Shirley Harris have been quietly growing and selling organic produce for more than 20 years to loyal customers in west Tennessee who don't even care that it's organic. They pay premium prices just for the flavor and freshness.

Max Carter's row crops in Georgia. Luke Green's organic

peanuts in Alabama. The Sechrists' beef in Texas. Rosa Shareef's pastured poultry in Mississippi. The Chuck Smiths' poultry and wine grapes in Kentucky. Lynn Steward's citrus of Florida. Tom Trantham's milk in South Carolina.

Reading the list makes your mouth water and *that* smorgasbord is just from the Southern profiles. They are joined by 38 more stories from the other three regions.

For years John Ikerd has campaigned for SAN to collect and publish 1000 success stories from sustainable agriculture. He believes that so much real-life evidence presented in one collection has the potential to change the direction of agriculture. This first volume is about 951 stories short of his dream, but it's a good start.



Jackie Judice looks for cane borers in a jungle of sugar cane stalks. Photo by Sandy Romero

The collection is available as a 160-page book (\$10), a cd (\$5) or online at www.sare.org/newfarmer.

Send checks to
Sustainable Ag Publications
210 Hills Building
University of Vermont
Butlington, VT 05405-0082

For credit card orders, call (802) 656-0484.

Farmers Market

Continued from page 1

A fourth generation farmer, Perkinson is acutely aware of the need to cultivate customers as well as crops.

"We started off on a higher note this year because we had a customer base from last year," says Perkinson. "However we didn't take any chances with our publicity strategy. In fact this year we tried something new that worked very well, a direct mailing in conjunction with a health food store."

The farmers also wrote a seasonal recipe column which was positioned next to the market's display ad in the community paper. This helped keep people aware of the market and brought in customers.

One of the challenges is the market's location on a scenic highway where signage is restricted. The newly formed Fairview Small

Business Association plans to tackle the signage question politically.

"We're going to try to introduce legislation to allow certain types of tourist orientation signs," she continues. "If we are successful it will set a precedent for other businesses located on scenic drives."

This effort will get a boost from another goal met by the SSARE project: to increase awareness about preserving local agriculture.

"Last year when the growers saw the enthusiastic reception to their products, accompanied by better prices, they were encouraged to keep their land in crops," says Perkinson.

Coinciding with this increased interest, Hickory Nut Gap Farm offered a series of workshops on sustainable practices for consumers and home gardeners. Topics included soil building, making soil blocks, starting seeds, growing seasons, insects and chicken tractors. New

public awareness about local agriculture should help in the debate over the market's right to erect signs.

To see photos of the market visit the website created by Jeff Racer:

<http://www.balmzara.com/FairviewTailgate.html>

Cagey Solutions

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way should increase profits."

Since completing his research project Odom has joined the SSARE Administrative Council, making him the first producer member from the aquaculture industry. With so much of his life revolving around the bewhiskered delicacy, you'd think Dickie Odom is a champion catfish cook, but not so. "I eat plenty of them," he says. "But I eat at restaurants who support the industry."

Which SARE grant program for you?

Southern SARE administers six separate grant programs, each with its own priorities and audiences. The process begins with the release of calls for proposals for each of the programs. If you are on the Common Ground mailing list you will receive an issue prior to the release of each call for proposals. The SSARE web site www.griffin.peachnet.edu/sare is the quickest way to receive the calls for proposals as soon as they are released.

Research and Education Projects generally are conducted by interdisciplinary, multi-institutional, and often, multi-state research teams coordinated by a principal investigator from a non-governmental organization, university or governmental agency. These projects include farmers as participants. For more information call Jeff Jordan at (770) 412-4788.

2001

June 1 Call for preproposals released

August 31 Preproposals due

November 1 Full proposals invited.

2002

January 18 Full proposals due

March Full proposals reviewed

April Administrative Council announces grant awards

Producer Grant Projects are developed, coordinated and conducted by producers or producer organizations. These projects are generally located in one state, often on one farm. There is a \$10,000 limit for funding proposals submitted by an individual producer and a \$15,000 limit on proposals submitted by producer organizations. For more information about Producer Grants call John Mayne at (770) 229-3350.

2001

September 15 Call for proposals released

2002

January 25 Proposals due

March Proposals reviewed

April Administrative Council announces grant awards

Graduate Student Awards are intended for full-time graduate students (masters or Ph.D.) enrolled at accredited colleges and universities in the Southern Region. Up to \$10,000 will be awarded to each successful applicant for up to three years of project activities. The funds are paid directly to the university for use on the graduate student's project. For more information call John Mayne at (770) 229-3350.

2001

May 1 Call for proposal released

2002

January 9 Proposals due

April Administrative Council announces grant awards

Professional Development Program Projects train agricultural information providers in sustainable agriculture techniques and concepts. The Southern Region Training Consortium consists of North Carolina State University, North Carolina A&T University and ATTRA. For more information contact Rosanne Minarovic at (919) 515-3252.

2001

June 1 Call for preproposals released

August 31 Preproposals due

November 1 Full proposals invited

2002

February 4 Full proposals due

March Full proposals reviewed

April Administrative Council announces grant awards

On-Farm Research Projects are conducted by agricultural professionals such as extension agents, NRCS and/or NGO personnel who currently work with farmers and ranchers. Cooperators must include at least three producers at all stages of the project. Funded for a maximum of \$15,000 for up to two years of activities. Call John Mayne at (770) 229-3350.

2001

September 15 Call for proposals released

2002

January 25 Proposals due

March Proposals reviewed

April Administrative Council announces grant awards

Sustainable Community Innovation Projects link sound farm and nonfarm economic development with agricultural and natural resource management. Applicants may be farmers, ranchers, researchers, community organizations, environmentalists, ag and community development professionals, entrepreneurs, governmental and non-governmental organizations. Funded for a project maximum of \$10,000 for up to two years of activities. Call John Mayne at (770) 229-3350.

2001

September 3 Call for proposals releases

November 2 Proposals due

2002

February 4 Awards announced

Southern SARE to host national conference

On The Road To Sustainable Agriculture is the name of the national conference Southern SARE will host in and around Raleigh, North Carolina on October 23-26, 2002. Producers, researchers and extension folks will demonstrate what they are doing to improve crops, natural resources, profits and quality of life. Conference participants will walk the fields and stroll the markets with them. They'll crumble the soil, squeeze the tomatoes, taste the cheese and ask questions.

Based at the Sheraton Imperial Hotel and Convention Center in Research Triangle Park, the conference will roll through farms, markets and research stations on comfortable chartered buses. Presentations at the convention center and during the bus rides will bring a national perspective to what participants will see at the tour stops.

On The Road To Sustainable Agriculture will focus on six themes:

- Urban sprawl and sustainable agriculture
- Organic research, marketing and certification
- Direct marketing opportunities
- Production systems in transition
- Opportunities for limited-resource farmers
- Environmental issues and sustainable agriculture



If you are interested in making a presentation at the conference, proposals are being solicited until October 29, 2001 for the following:

1. Keynote speakers at the conference center
2. Topic presentations during the bus rides
3. Poster sessions to be displayed at the conference center
4. Book chapters

The call for presentations is posted on the SSARE web site at www.griffin.peachnet.edu/sare. To obtain a hard copy of the call for presentations, contact the SARE office at (770) 412-4787.

As conference details are confirmed, they will be announced in future issues of *Common Ground* and on our web site at www.griffin.peachnet.edu/sare. If you would like to receive conference information in the mail, contact the Southern SARE office at (770) 412-4787.