



COMMON GROUND

Autumn 2002

News from the Southern Region SARE Program

Autumn 2002

Sustenance Farm: Portrait of Diversity

At Sustenance Farm near Bear Creek, *On The Road To Sustainable Agriculture* participants will see examples of just about every crop that can be grown in North Carolina. Organic vegetables, herbs, flowers, shiitake mushrooms, and fruit trees share 37 rolling acres. Sheep and goats produce meat, milk and fiber. Ducks, tilapia and aquatic plants make use of 16 ponds.

Harvey Harman, farmer and mastermind behind all that diversity, used a SARE producer grant to make the ponds an integral part of the entire system. He recycled runoff from animal pens through a series of filter beds of aquatic plants to capture nutrients and cleanse the water. Some plants become nutritious fodder for the ducks, tilapia, chickens, goats and sheep. Others such as corkscrew willow, pussy willow and horsetail are harvested and sold as ornamentals.

"The SARE producer grant helped me make use of something I already had—the ponds—to grow additional crops," says Harman.

During the tour, Harman will emphasize the interrelationship of all the enterprises and how they complement each other.

On The Road tour: *Talking turkey and calling hogs*

Anything can happen to an old farm put out to pasture, especially when it's located on a highway connecting two fast-growing cities. Sixty acres between Greensboro and Chapel Hill lucked out when Gerry Cohn and his wife Jessica LaMontagne bought it in 1996.

Instead of razing the old buildings and developing the property, they established Matzah Rising Farm. For three years they camped in the renovated corn crib until they finished updating the century-old farmhouse up on the hill. Today all the buildings, including a smokehouse, a tenant cottage and the lofty gambrel barn have been renovated for new purposes.

Now the land supports turkeys, geese, ducks, goats and an assortment of fruit, including blueberry bushes. The meat is sold as pasture-raised, free-range and antibiotic-free. This year about 100 dressed turkeys from Matzah Rising Farm, along with dozens of pies and cheesecakes, will be sold to grace holiday tables.

"We wanted to take an existing farm and adapt sustainable enterprises to fit the buildings, fences, water supply and other infrastructure," explains Cohn.

Besides his personal goal of raising good food for his family and to sell, Cohn also has a professional interest in learning first-hand about the problems of protecting agricultural land from development. As the Southeast Regional Director for the American Farmland Trust, Cohn uses Matzah Rising Farm as a living teaching tool.

On October 25th, 50 participants from *On The Road To Sustainable Agriculture* will stop at the farm. The visitors will see first-hand the challenges that were met and others that are still, well, challenging. They will even have an opportunity to offer suggestions to Cohn based on their own experiences. They will also get a look at some SARE-sponsored research. Cohn is one of eight turkey producers in the nation cooperating on a SARE project headed up by the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy to compare production qualities of the commercial Broad Breasted White with the heirloom Bourbon Red breed.

After the walking tour, guests will gather in the refurbished loft of the barn to sample four kinds of goat cheese made at Matzah Rising and listen to a short presentation about tools that are available for

people who want to preserve farmland in their own communities. Cohn and AFT training coordinator Kevin Schmidt will brief the group on American Farmland Trust's SARE PDP trainings. Four previous events provided USDA field personnel, other natural resource educators, farm and forestry leaders and local government planners with the training to assist their communities with farm and forest land protection questions. Four new projects



Gerry Cohn

Continued on page 2



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The Southern Region SARE Program is administered by the University of Georgia and Fort Valley State University. The Southern Region includes Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Puerto Rico and the U.S.V.I.

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Comments welcomed by
Gwen Roland, editor
Ph: (770) 412-4786
Fax: (770) 412-4789
groland@gaes.griffin.peachnet.edu

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Hogs and Turkeys *Continued from page 1*

are planned on conservation-based estate planning, leadership development and niche beef marketing.

Timing it right for hogs

The door for alternative hog systems has opened and Chuck Talbott of NCA&T has a herd of grunting debutantes ready to rush through it and strut their stuff. For three years Talbott has conducted a SARE research project (LS99-106) to identify alternative rearing environments for small scale producers. He is rotating experimental pastured herds with crops to find out how their manure compares to conventional fertilizers for production and environmental impact. Other test sites include gestating sows in forest plots to evaluate how stocking rates affect timber stands. The overall goal of the research is to help small scale/part time farmers find new markets and higher profit margins by raising swine in ways that may enhance the flavor of pork (diet, genetics and management systems) as well as the environment where they are raised.

Each year of the project has brought more farmers and policy makers to Talbott's door, anxious for results that take time to produce.

"All animal confinement industries are currently confronted with government and public concerns over animal welfare, antibiotic resistance and potential environmental degradation from excess waste nutrients," says Talbott. "Then last November we received funds from the Golden LEAF Foundation to assist tobacco farmers in developing alternative crops. The goal for that project is to have 130 active and former tobacco producers marketing hogs by 2004. The timing was just right for the work we've been doing with the SARE grant. Small scale producers have an opportunity to get back in the game now, and they are coming to our meetings in numbers I wouldn't have believed when we started this research."

Talbott plans a Small Scale Hog Producer field day to coincide with *On The Road to Sustainable Agriculture*. The results of the SARE research will be presented as visitors tour the integrated systems, examine hoop structures and get a close up view of upscale hog genetics. Farmer training sessions associated with the project will also be showcased. Topics tentatively scheduled include artificial insemination, alternative marketing options and adding value (smoking and curing) to pork.



A sow is barely visible in the shady wood lot behind Charles Talbott. Photo by Rosanne Minarovic

On The Road To Sustainable Agriculture Registration

Registration Fee \$140.00

Registration Deadline: October 1

Registration Methods:

- Complete this form, and mail it along with your registration fee to:
 - Registration Coordinator
 - NC State University
 - Office of Professional Development
 - Box 7401
 - Raleigh, NC 27695-7401
- Call: (919) 515-2261
- Fax: (919) 515-7614
- On-line: www.ContinuingEducation.ncsu.edu and click on Conferences, Event Code ANSA03

Registration Form Event Code ANSA03

Name _____

Organization _____

Street or P.O. Box _____

City, State,
Zip _____

Phone _____

Fax _____

Email _____

Method of Payment (Payment must accompany registration)
Payor: Company/Institution Individual

Please check below:

Check enclosed (payable to North Carolina State University)

Purchase Order # _____
(P.O. must be attached)

Credit Card: VISA Mastercard American Express

Corporate Card yes no

Card # _____

Expiration date _____ Amount _____

Signature _____

Print name on card _____

Hotel Presentations

- Farmer Panel Discussion
- Keynote Speakers
- Reception and Displays

Farm Tours

- All day Thursday and Friday

Meals

- Full Breakfast—Thursday and Friday
- Lunch—Thursday and Friday
- Dinner—Wednesday and Thursday

Lodging

Sheraton Imperial Hotel and Convention Center
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709
800 325-3535
<http://www.sheratonrtp.com>

Reserved lodging is available at the reduced rate of \$99 + tax per night, for single or double occupancy. To receive the group rate, identify yourself with the Southern Region SARE program and make the reservation before September 30, 2002.

Getting There

Sheraton Imperial Hotel and Convention Center is located at 4700 Emperor Blvd in Research Triangle Park, about 4.76 miles for the RDU International Airport. The Sheraton Imperial provides free shuttle service to and from the airport for guests.

If you are driving: From I-40 take Page Road Exit (Exit #282). Turn right on Page Road. Turn left on Emperor Blvd.

Questions? Contact Rosanne Minarovic at (919) 515-3252

Producer project highlight

Nothing sheepish about this faire

No detail was overlooked at the Scott County Hair Sheep Faire, including the final *e* in Faire. The quaint spelling evoked a village green dotted with gypsy trading tents and purveyors of gustatory delights. Had it been called a field day to learn more about raising hair sheep, few people would have attended, predicted Martha Mewbourne who organized the event as SARE producer project FS02-154.

Her bold approach worked. The event drew more than 150 people to the grounds of the Homeplace Museum in southwestern Virginia for a day of playful education. Music, sheep dog demonstrations and the fragrance of grilled lamb created a festival atmosphere among the restored log cabins. Sheep pens dotted the meadow. Striped party tents provided colorful shade for workshops on selecting, maintaining and marketing hair sheep.

The fair aimed to stimulate production of hair sheep in Scott County, where the median income is approximately \$16,000. Traditionally dependent on tobacco and beef cattle, the Appalachian county faces a bleak agricultural future. Several years ago a few local farmers began raising hair sheep as an alternative crop and found them well suited to the area.

The Mewbournes, who direct market black Angus, bought a few hair sheep in 1998 to improve the pastures. It wasn't long before beef customers began requesting lamb, and the Mewbournes obliged them. After comparing the profit margins, they decreased the beef herd and increased the sheep flock.

Mewbourne figures it this way. A beef cow and calf require an acre of pasture and 18-24 months to bring the calf to slaughtering age, when it will bring about \$1100 at direct market prices. Five ewes can graze one acre for 18-24 months and produce 20 lambs, which will direct market for \$3300.

"We'll always keep a small beef operation, but our economic focus has been redirected to the sheep," says Martha. "The two species improve the pasture for each other and break up the parasite cycles, but the inputs are much lower for the sheep."

She also finds them easier to handle than cattle so they can be raised by young and old, men and women. Since they don't lounge in water as cattle often do, they don't pollute streams and destroy streambanks. Well suited to rocky terrain, hair sheep can graze where mechanical harvesters or cattle cannot go. They distribute a pelleted, high-nitrogen manure that improves



Chef Bill Smith serves up lean, grilled lamb in kabobs, burgers and egg rolls. Photo by John Mayne.

pastures quickly. Best of all, shearing is not required, an attribute that sets hair sheep apart from their wooly kin.

Those virtues have made an impression on local farmers; there are now more than 600 ewes in Scott County. Mewbourne and the other producers have formed a hair sheep cooperative to help build local flocks and explore marketing opportunities.

"We must produce a sufficient number of sheep to make it attractive for buyers to come to us," says Mewbourne. "Right now most of our lambs go to Pennsylvania for finishing. I'd like to see more producers direct marketing to keep more money in our community."

Producer project highlight

Winging it: Life and death in a pecan grove

Frank Bibin's pecan grove in south Georgia is full of life-and-death drama. "I've seen wasps fly up to caterpillars much larger than themselves, sting them and then carry them off piece by piece," he says.

The wasps themselves are fair game for brown thrashers and mockingbirds flitting among the trees. Then there's the 4000 bats which flow out of their roosts in dark waves each dusk to snap up moths. The bats in turn must beware of owls. Bibin, as much a naturalist as a farmer, enjoys watching a particular owl turn upside down as he flies under the roost to catch bats as they come out.

It wasn't always this lively. When the Bibins moved in nine years ago, the

orchard was silent.

"There are no insects in most commercial pecan groves," he explains. "We lived indoors that first year because of all the pesticide spraying. By the third year, we were operating pesticide free."

He now relies on beneficial insects and bats for pest control. Polistes wasps (commonly known as paper wasps) eat soft-bodied insects like caterpillars and grasshoppers. In 1999, Bibin started a three-year producer project (FS99-86) to find out if permanent colonies of the wasps could be established and if those colonies would reduce insect damage. The answer to both questions turned out to be yes.

Investing a little more than \$500 in grant funds, he built 150 wasp houses from PVC pipe-end caps and placed them on stakes throughout the grove. Wasp occupancy in the houses increased slightly each year of the project reaching a peak of 55-60% occupancy in 2001. As the wasp population increased, pest damage decreased.

After the project closed, Bibin invested in 75 more wasp houses to suspend from pecan trees in the 2002 season. They quickly filled to 55-60% occupancy and seemed to suffer less bird predation than the wasps nests mounted on stakes. Bibin is so encouraged he plans to build one wasp house for each pecan tree in the orchard.

Which SARE grant program for you?

Southern SARE administers six separate grant programs, each with its own priorities and audiences. 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. If you prefer a mailed copy of any of the calls for proposals, contact Paige Patton at (770) 412-4787 or ppatton@griffin.peachnet.edu

Research and Education Projects generally are conducted by interdisciplinary, multi-institutional, and often, multi-state research teams coordinated by a principal investigator from a university, a non-governmental organization or governmental agency. These projects include farmers as participants.

2002

June Call for 2003 preproposals released

August 30 2003 Preproposals due

November Invitation for full proposals

2003

January 17 Full proposals due

March Full proposals reviewed

April Administrative Council announces grant awards

Professional Development Program Projects train agricultural information providers in sustainable agriculture techniques and concepts.

2002

June Call for 2003 preproposals released

August 30 2003 Preproposals due

2003

January 17 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.

2002

September 15 Call for 2003 proposals released

2003

January 24 Proposals due

March 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.

2002

September 15 Call for 2003 proposals released

2003

January 24 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.

2002

May Call for 2003 proposal released

2003

January 8 Proposals due

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.

2002

September Call for proposals released

November Proposals due

2003

Spring Awards announced

Barefoot Farm's battle of the mulch

For two years Jackie Frazier's Barefoot Farm resembled giant red and black streamers unfurled along South Carolina's coastline. His producer grant (FS98-070) evaluated the impact of plastic mulch color on strawberry production and pests. Red and black plastic mulch covered alternate rows throughout the test plots.

Strawberries were tested for two seasons, and they definitely performed better on the black plastic. Black-mulched berries ripened earlier, which made them more in demand at the market. They were also sweeter, had less weed pressure and were easier to see during harvest than berries grown on the red plastic.

As spring temperatures rose later in the season, berries on the red mulch grew bigger than berries on black, and they continued to bear after the black-mulched plants ceased production. However the difference in size and the extended harvest didn't offset the jump start of the earlier ripening black-mulched berries.

Frazier, who had casually experimented with colored mulches prior to the project, switched to using only black after the project.

"Not only is it less expensive up front," says Frazier, "But it increases my profit margin by suppressing weeds and producing earlier berries."

Producer project highlight



Jackie Frazier amid strawberry test rows at Barefoot Farm. Photo by John Mayne.

Reminder: Producer AC nominations due October 1

Producers may nominate self or someone else. Criteria include:

- Experience in sustainable agriculture
- Demonstrated ability and willingness to help address sustainable agriculture needs and methods
- Ability to work effectively as team member dealing with contemporary issues facing agriculture

Written nomination should include:

- A statement of the nominee's ability to work collaboratively to address sustainable agriculture needs
- A description of the person's interest in and contributions to sustainable agriculture
- Confirmation of the nominee's consent to be nominated
- Demographic information (sex, type of farm, commodity interest, and contact information).

Mail the nomination to:

Jeff Jordan
Southern SARE
The University of Georgia
1109 Experiment Street
203 Stuckey Building
Griffin, GA 30223

The University of Georgia
Campus at Griffin
Southern Region SARE
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Griffin, GA 30223-1797

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