

Growing skills for the future

Squeezed between the Mississippi River levee and the sprawling Louisiana State University campus is a food desert called Old South Baton Rouge. Expensive convenience stores and cheap fast food are the dining options for this inner city community. Most residents don't own cars so it's difficult to travel outside their neighborhood to supermarkets that offer more choices, fresh produce and better prices. Even if transportation was not an issue, farmers markets around Baton Rouge don't accept EBT cards or food stamps

Many of the children are raised by single moms or live with extended family. Mental illness and addiction compound the obstacles to education and a livable income. It's no wonder that obesity, diabetes and despair are common among teens of Old South Baton Rouge. Enter a diverse group of organizations and people with a fresh approach to rescuing this community through its youth.

SARE's state sustainable agriculture coordinator Carl Motsenbocker coordinates the Summer Experience, an entrepreneurship training camp that not only teaches leadership skills and builds self esteem, it also provides healthy lunches of fresh food along with nutritional education. Each student has the opportunity to earn \$500 during

the camp, a powerful incentive in a community where there are few prospects of summer employment.

The farm-to-table project revolves around growing, harvesting and selling fresh vegetables in their community as well as marketing their own hot sauce called Old South Baton Rouge Hot Stuff. Nutrition, horticulture, leadership, teamwork and basic business skills are taught every day. For most of the students,

"I've learned that you can work with people you don't like and actually get something done without a fight."

A Summer Experience student

the eight-week program affords them their first taste of success—their first chance to see a project through from start to finish. It's a summer job with the power to change lives.

A complicated chain of events must take place throughout the year in order for the eight-week camp to happen. People and financial support come from various departments at LSU, the local Islamic complex, the governor's office and local charities. Someone has to coordinate all of it. For example, extension specialist Jimmy Boudreaux starts a one-acre market garden at the Burden Research Station in early spring so there will be crops to tend when the camp starts in June. Participating farmers allow students to glean their fields. During the 8-week camp students must be transported from their homes to farms, markets and the LSU campus. In October, after the



In August 2005, YaSin and Elaine Muhaimin escaped Katrina with only the possessions that would fit in their car. YaSin had been an educator in the New Orleans public school system for almost 30 years. This professional couple started a new career raising pastured poultry and organic vegetables north of Baton Rouge.

Despite the culture shock of a rural life style and the learning curve of a whole new set of skills, by 2006 they were selling their first vegetables from the farm. In 2007 their organic vegetables and pastured chickens found eager customers at the Red Stick Farmers Market.

The Muhaimins credit their farm's jump start to the combined efforts of the SARE State Coordinators, the Louisiana State Department of Agriculture and people like James McNitt of Southern University who provided technical assistance from his SARE pastured poultry project.

The best part of the Muhaimin's early success is that they have already started giving back, opening their farm for students of the Summer Experience and volunteering at the American Muslim Mission--two more blows against poverty.

Continued on page 2

Common Ground is published by the Southern Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE). SARE funds projects that develop environmentally sound, economically viable and socially acceptable agricultural methods. SARE is funded by USDA.

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. Virgin Islands.

Communications Committee

Lora Lee Schroeder, chair
EPA
Georgia

Andy Clark
SARE Outreach
Washington D.C.

Tim Cross
Cooperative Extension
Tennessee

Laura Freeman
Producer
Kentucky

Randy Raper
Agricultural Research Service
Alabama

Juan Carlos Rodriguez
Florida Organic Growers

Tom Trantham
Producer
South Carolina

Relinda Walker
Producer
Georgia

Editor, Gwen Roland
Southern SARE Communications
groland@southernsare.org
(770) 412-4786

Download or print any project report from the project data base at www.sare.org

For a mailed copy of any project report contact Southern SARE at:
Phone: (770) 412-4787
sueblum@uga.edu

Growing skills *Continued from page 1*

students have gone back to school, someone has to ferment the peppers for next year's camp.

For the past two years all those details have been in the capable hands of horticulture graduate student Emily Neustrom, program assistant to SARE's Louisiana State Sustainable Agriculture Coordinators. Neustrom, once torn between a career in horticulture or social work, has learned from the camp experience that she doesn't have to choose.

"Through working with this program, I've realized that the youth in our communities need resources, support and guidance if they are to succeed. I see sustainable agriculture playing a huge role in the success and healthy future of America's youth. The Old South Baton Rouge community has whole-heartedly supported the success and hard-work of its youth. Seeing the kids selling vegetables, flowers, and hot sauce on the corner brightens the neighborhood with smiles, hope and a sense of freshness, literally!"

She's witnessed the transforming power of horticultural therapy and plans to use the experience for her master's thesis.

"The Summer Experience Program is a true reflection of a community-based effort to engage and support the youth of inner-city Baton Rouge. The combinations of hands-on horticulture, cooking, and marketing assist youth in developing skills to build a successful, healthy life and community. Students develop relationships with university, community and local business professionals in the Baton Rouge area that they might not otherwise have."



Learning to dream and grow in South Texas

Dreams can be unrealistic when you live eight miles north of the Mexican border, says extension agent Barbara Storz.

“When you are really, really, really poor your dreams are from a novella—of a prince on a white horse coming to save you. There are no realistic dreams of things you could actually accomplish,” she says.

Dreams of fresh local food, for example. The farms around McAllen, Texas, produce the biggest variety of fruits and vegetables in the state, but until two years ago, local residents didn’t have access to fresh produce. It was all trucked away by the big packing houses.

Then Storz organized a group of low-income families, mostly women, into the Grow’n Growers of San Juan, Texas. Now they raise about 50 varieties of crops including bok choy, collards, eggplant, tomatoes, spinach, colored Swiss chard, grapefruit, limes, oranges, herbs, broccoli, cauliflower, Chinese and Indian vegetables.

White collar workers who used to speed by their community on the way to and from McAllen, now brake for their monthly market days. Some customers drive 70 miles from Brownsville for the fresh organic food. One woman has bought a residential lot next to her home and started a CSA. A man has turned the property behind his tire shop into another CSA. A woman sells pastured eggs from her farm. All of the families involved are enjoying an improved diet as well as an upwardly mobile sense of self.

It all started when Storz helped design a park behind a community center and Head Start facility. The county commissioner, Hector Palacios, asked if there was anything he could do in return. She requested help in starting a farmers market and community development project. She needed land for a demonstration garden and a room for presentations. He arranged for a bit more than an acre to be set aside for that use. A few weeks later Storz was asked for a materials list so construction could start. This was in 2007.

She immediately called Heifer International and told them about the gift from the county commissioners. Heifer responded with technical assistance, donated seeds and travel expenses to other enterprises to see successful farming and marketing. Twenty seven families came to the first meeting, and 17 stayed through the first-year program to learn raised-bed vegetable gardening. The city of McAllen donated compost. Heifer provided a grant to pay for lumber, weed cloth and tools. Additionally Heifer and the SARE state sustainable ag coordinator’s office partnered to sponsor a pastured poultry workshop in Spanish, with help from the Texas Health Department and ATTRA.

In February 2008, the Grow’n Growers launched their farmer’s market. Customers responded to the fresh, local organic produce, and the Grow’n Growers program was declared a success. A community had learned to dream.

As the 2009 classes started, 15 of the first-year families returned to join the newcomers. This season’s advancements include installing drip irrigation with the help of Master



The Grow’n Growers of San Juan, Texas, sell their organic produce to eager customers just north of the Mexican border. The women credit the program with helping them fight depression as well as poverty.

Gardeners. There are tomato cages and row covers for everyone in the group. Along with crop production, this year classes include finance management, nutrition, cooking and marketing. English classes are offered twice a week. In the future they hope to hold the market two or three times a month.

Come summer, 36 low-income children will attend a one-week camp in the certified wildlife area and butterfly garden with classes taught by Grow’n Growers members and Master Gardener volunteers. The day camp includes a nutritious lunch. It’s essential to reach the children because attitudes are formed so early, says Storz.

“These people bring their fears of government from Mexico,” she adds. “During our first season one woman asked another if I was really going to let them keep the money they made at the market. This was after I had been teaching them classes twice a week. Now she is the first person to stand up and brag when Heifer sends someone to look over the project.”

As for the future, Storz sees a need for more funds and people to help.

“A new park is opening about 10 miles away,” she says. “Commissioner Palacios wants to put in an outdoor classroom and demonstration garden in an even lower income neighborhood. It’s difficult to imagine a neighborhood lower on the income scale than this one, but I am sure I will find a real determination to succeed on the part of the people, once we give them the tools to make a few real dreams come true.”

Upscale coffee energizes downturn market

Coffee has been a staple crop in Puerto Rico since it was introduced there in 1755. Growers have borne the ups and downs of politics, changing tastes and weather ever since. During the Green Revolution of the 1960s, experts urged them to switch from traditional methods of growing coffee plants in the shade of native trees to mono-cropped sun-grown coffee. The change resulted in erosion, soil depredation, polluted streams and the disappearance of birds. In the 1990s, when cheap coffee from Viet Nam began flooding the markets, Puerto Rican growers began looking to the expanding gourmet market, which depended on shade-loving cultivars.

Southern SARE state coordinators and SARE grants helped with the transition. In 2003 producer Luis Miguel Rico was awarded a producer grant (FS03-172) to create a model acre of sustainably grown coffee at his farm Hacienda Verde. Rico, who is also the director of the non-profit organization REVIBE (Reverence to Life and Beauty) conducts research about ecological farming and forestry in the tropics.

With technical assistance from SARE state sustainable ag coordinator Luis Mejia, Rico planted leguminous native trees for shade. For fertilizer he relied on cow manure plus a leguminous ground cover, *mani pantanal*. The fledgling coffee plants and their native shade trees performed well together, but the ground cover, transplanted from nursery stock, was slow to take hold and was overcome by weeds.

Rico tackled that problem with another SARE producer project (FS05-193). This one focused on finding a better way to jump start the *mani pantanal*. This second project found out that the *mani pantanal* performed better when planted directly under the coffee plants in a bedding of coffee waste and sand. Not only did it cover the ground more quickly, but Rico estimates the savings in labor made it about three times more efficient and cost effective than using nursery plants. By involving cooperators from NRCS, the extension service, experiment station staff and even wildlife specialists Rico extended his research results quickly throughout the coffee-growing community.



Coffee grown in the shade of native plants provides a pleasant work environment.



Domingo Ruiz of the Natural Resource Conservation Service talks to visitors at Hacienda Ana Luisa where shade trees and contour planting provide wildlife habitat among the coffee plants. Agritourism provides extra income for shade-grown coffee plantations.

In 2004, researcher Eduardo Schroder of the University of Puerto Rico used a SARE Research and Education grant to evaluate the use of leguminous trees for nitrogen input as well as for shade. Seeds from 30 nitrogen-fixing native trees were evaluated for nitrogenase activity. Samples and mapping of more than 100 farms in the best coffee producing areas will help farmers and extension agents select the most useful shade tree species for each soil and altitude in the coffee-growing regions of Puerto Rico. For more information see the web page: <http://academic.uprm.edu/eschroder>.

In 2005, Steven Welker used a SARE On-Farm Research Grant to see if coffee seedlings could be grown in re-usable forestry tubes, a less expensive and more eco-friendly choice than the plastic bags used throughout the industry. The tubed seedlings were an all round success. They showed adequate above-ground development and root systems superior to plants grown in bags containing 6 to 7 pounds of top soil. Plants established faster in the tubes, and since they are soil-less, they don't depend on topsoil mining. A soil mix based on waste rice hulls was developed for use in the tubes. A very detailed final report can be found at www.sare.org by searching the project data base for project OS05-027.

Jose Aponte is currently using an OnFarm Research Grant to investigate the potential of precious woods for shade over coffee plants, thus giving farmers a second kind of crop to harvest. Precious woods are in demand for yachts, fine furniture and musical instruments. Some of the species have additional beneficial qualities such as attracting honey bees or providing shelter for the endangered Puerto Rican parrot. To keep up with this project, search for project OS07-033 in the project data base at www.sare.org.

Guest grazers in Kentucky

It might be called a partnership. Maybe it's a barter. Or possibly the beginning of a community supported grazing program. The exact nature of the relationship between Kevin Kidwell's goats and the former Lexington Bluegrass Army Depot might not have a name, but it has a lot of potential for both sides.

The historic Depot no longer functions as a military base but belongs to the Kentucky Department of Military Affairs, which renamed the facility Bluegrass Station and operates it as a business park for about 40 tenants. The property includes three landfills totaling 51 acres, which have been permanently closed with engineered caps.

Bluegrass Station was spending nearly \$4600 each year for mowing the landfills. With fuel and labor costs rising, that expense was expected to increase indefinitely. Ray Bowman of the Kentucky Sheep and Goat Development office was asked if goats might help keep the landfill well-groomed and erosion resistant.

Bowman punted the request to animal scientist Terry Hutchens of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service. Hutchens had conducted a grazing project (OS03-011) for Southern SARE that showed the importance of pasture rotation in controlling internal parasites. He also helped establish Kentucky's Master Sheep and Goat Grazing program.

Such research and education had convinced goat producers like Kevin Kidwell of rotational grazing's benefits, but resting pastures a month at a time limited their carrying capacity, and profit margins were too narrow to justify buying more land. Grazing someone else's land for free would rest his pastures and decrease parasites in his goats.

Hutchens put undergraduate student William Ison to work designing a grazing scheme and business plan that would bring Bluegrass Station and Kidwell's goats together for mutual savings. Hutchens and Ison figured that 255 goats can rotationally graze in 11 paddocks over the 51 acres. In

exchange for the parasite-free forage, the goats will provide weed management and pelletized manure fertilizer to improve grass covering the landfill.

An 8-foot chain-link perimeter fence was already in place, and Bluegrass Station will supply water and water tanks. Kidwell only has to supply liability insurance, mineral feeders, portable shelter and electric fencing for sub-dividing paddocks.

Kidwell, a veteran farmer, has always kept up with changing times from his early years in tobacco to mixed grains and beef cattle. More than a decade ago he converted to goats. Kidwell gives Hutchens credit for helping Kentucky farmers stay ahead of the curve.

"Anything I've ever asked Terry, if he didn't know the answer he would go research it for me," he says.

Bluegrass Station Environmental Manager Gary Logsdon agrees. "Terry was the key. Bluegrass Station didn't want to be in the goat business. We depended on him to work out the details of the plan and find a producer who knew how to do it right."

Doing it right is a top priority because of the public nature of the property, according to Hutchens.

"This kind of partnership is not suited for producers who are stretched for time or management ability," he says. "Exemplary management is essential so that the operation is visually pleasing to outside observers."

Hutchens was also instrumental through the approval process which took about 18 months due to the sensitive nature of conducting such an operation on expensive landfill caps. He had to provide expert opinion on the feasibility of grazing management. Concerns about pollution and possible damage to the landfill caps had to be addressed. Bluegrass Station's attorneys needed guidance in spelling out the

responsibilities of the landowner and the producer in a contract.

After two years of planning, Kevin Kidwell is anxious to get started on the guest grazing program. The first season, 2009, he plans to put open does on the landfill. Depending on the forage quality, he may later add pregnant does to the herd.

"I'm really looking forward to putting our theory to work," he says.

Hutchens and Logsdon are also looking ahead to the potential of controlling woody plants along the chain link fence and around a golf course on another part of the facility. Logsdon says other groups have asked to take a look once the project is underway.

That's just what Terry Hutchens wanted to hear.

"We hope that this will open the eyes of producers as well as municipalities to the potential of using these animals to control exotic and invasive plant species," he says. "This partnership can serve as a visual demonstration and educational opportunity for the city leaders in the Lexington, Louisville and Cincinnati triangle who face similar challenges with controlling vegetation in an economic and environmentally sustainable manner."



For details see: <http://www.uky.edu/Ag/AnimalSciences/goats/newsletter/april0107goatproducersnewsletterweb.pdf>

A Gathering of Entrepreneurs

Martha Pile is a dream catcher. No matter that her official title is a food and consumer science agent for University of Tennessee Extension, she lives to help other people visualize and realize their dreams. She often asks clients to bring magazine photos of their dream business. They put the photos on a dream board when they meet with her. Together they start working on a worst-case scenario budget.

"The dream and the budget are equally important," she says. "One without the other will not work."

Born into a family of entrepreneurs (her daddy was an International Harvester dealer) Martha was teaching farm families to safely freeze food at an early age. She broke gender barriers to become the first paper girl in the state.

That energy and vision helped her see opportunity in catastrophe in 1999 when the extension office in downtown Clarkesville was destroyed by a tornado. The office was moved to a recently vacated rural elementary school. Pile recognized the potential in the cafeteria kitchen still equipped with stainless steel sinks and counters. Working with the county, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture and a

host of volunteers, the extension office upgraded the cafeteria to an inspected community kitchen. Pile won a travel scholarship for 22 people to tour the Clinch Powell Community Kitchen in East Tennessee, which has received several SARE grants to help small growers add value to their crops.

Inspired by what the Clinch Powell community was doing, Martha submitted a Sustainable Community Innovation grant proposal in 2007. She named the resulting project The Gathering, because it brings entrepreneurs together for education, inspiration and marketing events.

According to Pile, building home-stead businesses is just a matter of connecting people who can help each other achieve their respective dreams. They will do the rest. This kind of approach is recession proof, she says.

"We aren't borrowing huge amounts of money. We are talking shoe string budgets and making use of free resources as much as possible. If you need a horse and buggy for two weeks, instead of buying one, you partner up with someone who needs publicity for their horse and buggy."

Based on this pattern, The Gathering is a coalition of homestead entrepreneurs from seven Tennessee counties and two neighboring Kentucky counties who are working on related ideas based on regionally grown foods. The members gather several times a year, but mainly stay in touch through Pile's newsletter, *Sustainability Makes Cents*, which alerts them to group educational opportunities and marketing events. They learn about crop production, food safety regulations, legal issues, labeling, marketing and every other aspect of bringing a



For a truly local flavor Linda Hays bakes artisan bread in a native-stone oven built by her husband Larry. See more at <http://evawoodbakery.com>



Volunteers paint banners based on local photographs. The banners are displayed at fairs, festivals and markets where coalition products are sold.

product to market. Each community in the coalition is mapping their home-stead-based businesses and producing their own brochures based on a common template. Local artists created beautiful banners for each community.

None of the project's \$10,000 budget goes to salary, testimony to Pile's ability to inspire volunteers. Instead, the funds are invested in printing brochures and other materials, educational meetings, travel for speakers, promotion of marketing events and improvements to the community kitchen.

Nearly 40 homestead entrepreneurs currently are growing their business through The Gathering. Products include artisan bread, fruit pies, herbs, teas, preserves, honey and traditional crafts as well as fresh fruit and vegetables. Some 4-H families are selling eggs for future college tuition. A downtown market, also called The Gathering, will open in Clarkesville's historic square in April.

For more information search for project CS07-056 in the Project Data Base at www.sare.org.

Which SARE grant program for you?

Southern SARE administers six grant programs, each with its own priorities and audiences. The process begins with the release of calls for proposals for each of the programs. All proposals must be submitted online. Get calls for proposals from the SSARE web site www.southernsare.org

Research and Education Projects generally are conducted by multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional research teams addressing whole systems. These projects include farmers as participants.

2009

March Call for preproposals released

June Preproposals due

August Full proposals requested

Nov. Full proposals due

2010

February Administrative Council announces grant awards

Researchers not yet ready to submit a Research and Education systems proposal can apply to one of the entry-level grants: **Research and Education Planning Grants** or **Research and Education Preliminary Grants**. See page 8 for details. CFP for these grants will be released in summer.

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

2009

March Call for preproposals released

June Preproposals due

August Full proposals requested

Nov. Full proposals due

2010

February 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.

2009

March Call for proposals released

June Proposals due

August 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.

2009

August Call for proposals released

October Proposals due

December 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.

2009

September Call for proposals released

November Proposals due

2010

February 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 one producer at all stages of the project. Funded for a maximum of \$15,000 for up to two years of activities.

2009

September Call for proposals released

November Proposals due

2010

February Administrative Council announces grant awards

Changes to Research and Education Grants Program

Southern SARE's Research and Education Grants Program introduces changes in 2009 to help applicants focus on whole systems research. (*Note: these changes will not affect the PDP, Producer, On-Farm, Graduate Student or Sustainable Community Grants programs*) Starting with the 2010 Call For Pre-Proposals to be released in March, 2009, applicants must propose research that fits one of three grant categories:

- **Production research**—Focused on actual production methods, this kind of research has made up the bulk of SARE's project portfolio in the past and has developed techniques that have become common tools for farmers.
- **Postharvest/food systems research**—These projects examine what happens past the farm gate such as in the markets, distribution systems and policy making. This category can serve as a funding path for social science researchers to also make a difference in our farm and food systems.
- **A combination of production and postharvest/food systems research**—The ultimate in systems research would connect what goes on in the ground with everything that happens after a crop is harvested, including adding value, marketing, infrastructure for processing and transportation, as well as policy making.

Research and Education grants award up to \$300,000 for up to 3 years of project activities.

For researchers who are not yet ready to submit a full systems proposal, Southern SARE will offer two entry-level funding opportunities with the release of calls for proposals later in the year for

- **Research and Education Planning Grants** to bring together interdisciplinary, multi-institutional teams to define a project scope, establish goals and objectives, perform literature reviews across disciplines and do other tasks necessary for developing a systems research preproposal. These grants will award up to \$20,000 for one year's planning activities. Pre-proposals will be not required. CFP will be released summer 2009.
- **Research and Education Preliminary Grants** to conduct necessary research that would feed into the interdisciplinary team's objectives. It is likely that such a missing link would be discovered during the literature review of a Research and Education Planning Project. These grants will award up to \$50,000 for up to 2 years of project activities. Pre-proposals will be not required. CFP will be released summer 2009.

This announcement serves to alert potential applicants of the upcoming changes and additional grant opportunities. Specific details of each grant will be in the respective calls for proposals. To find out how these changes fit into Southern SARE's overall funding strategy for the future see the document [Advancing Sustainable Agriculture](#) at www.southernsare.org.

The University of Georgia
Campus at Griffin
Southern Region SARE
1109 Experiment Street
Griffin, GA 30223-1797

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO.515
Athens, GA