Beekeepers Are Active in Oconee

The Oconee County Beekeepers Association recently completed a beginning beekeeper short course and approximately twenty five participants have joined the beekeepers association. That puts the membership up close to eighty. The association meets every other month and has programs on all areas of managing honeybees. There has been an increasing interest in honeybees across South Carolina since the reports came out about huge losses in our honeybee population across the United States. Oconee County has had a strong beekeeper association since the 1970’s and the group continues to have strong participation. Although honey producers don’t make a lot of money producing honey, there is a growing demand for local honey and prices have been increasing, thus making it at least a break even business. The more experienced beekeepers assist the new beekeepers in getting started, and most of the meetings have a time where questions are presented and answered by the more experienced beekeepers. Oconee producers have been entering their honey in the State Fair for the last few years and have won a lot of awards. People interested in keeping bees are encouraged to contact an association member or the extension office. You don’t need a lot of room to keep bees. It is also a great project for young people.
Peach Producers Participate in Field Day

Peach producers in Oconee and surrounding counties participated in a peach field day at Clemson University’s Musser Fruit Research Farm, Near Seneca. Growers Heard about new varieties in development, and got to taste about 40 varieties of peaches, nectarines and plums to see if they might fit in their operation.

Apple growers began planting a few peach trees about seven years ago to see if they would be a good fit with their apple operation. Clemson Peach Specialist Dr. Desmond Layne worked with the growers to find high quality varieties that would do well in our area and would fit, time wise, with apple production. As a result, All of our apple growers have integrated peaches in with their operation and people living in Oconee can find good quality peaches grown right here in our county.

Master Gardener Programs Offered Annually

Twelve Oconee county residents participated in the 2010 Master Gardener Program, held near the Clemson University Campus. The course ran about sixteen weeks, with a three hour class held each Monday. Thirty one students were instructed by various specialists, including Clemson University, SCDNR and individuals with special knowledge in a particular subject area.

The Master Gardener program is held each year and is set up to train participants in horticulture, including soils, vegetables, turf, ornamentals, fruit, diagnosing plant problems, pests, etc.

Participants agree to give 40 hours of volunteer service in horticulture back to their community as a part of being able to take the course. There is also the Master Gardeners of the Foothills Association that the participants can join once they complete their 40 hours of service. This group is made up of past graduates of the Master Gardener Program that continue to serve the local communities and the Horticultural Gardens with volunteer work.

Confined Animal Manure Managers Trainings

The Confined Animal Manure Manager (CAMM) program team consists of agents and specialists with Clemson University, the Clemson Extension Service, the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The team was assembled in 1998 to comply with State Regulation R.61-43, which states:

An operator of a new or existing swine facility, lagoon, manure storage pond, or manure utilization area shall complete a training program on the operation of swine manure management created by Clemson University.

An operator of an animal facility or manure utilization area shall attend a training program on the operation of animal manure management under the program created by Clemson University.

During 2000-2010 Oconee Clemson Extension has cooperated with the statewide team to provide this critical training for area farms. Three trainings were held to allow producers to obtain recertification credits (2-08-2010, 5-24-2010 and 5-29-2010). Trainings provided 2 hours of recertification credits to attending farmers. A total of 46 farmers were trained.
The key to profitability for most agricultural enterprises is marketing, though many producers find it to be an area of weakness. Most producers enjoy the production side of the business, but leave marketing to chance. Cattle producers too often do a great job in selection and management then give up their advantage to hands off marketing approaches. Developing a good marketing strategy can bring added profits to the farm.

In 2008, cattlemen in Oconee requested assistance to put together truckload lots of calves for sale. We held several meeting to inform producers of the efforts to begin managing calves at the various farm in the same way. In 2009, producers successfully marketed calves in truckload lots. In 2009 and 2010, we continued to promote the marketing alliance. This has resulted in three truckloads of calves being managed by nine different farmers to be combined and sold as a uniform set of feeder calves. All calves were vaccinated using the same vaccine program and managed on the farms using the same management practices. The calves were all preconditioned on the various farms as well. The calves are then sold as a single truckload lots bringing a five to eight cent premium per pound. On a 50,000 pound load that generates an additional 2500 to 4000 dollars per load. For the three loads that’s an additional 7500 to 12000 dollars for the calves.

Cull cows are also a large revenue source for cattle producers. In 2010, we also took a look at opportunities to market cull cattle through more direct methods. Typically, beef producers load culls and send them to the local auction where they are at the mercy of the buyers present that day. In May 2010, Frankie Caughman presented a program to local cattlemen on his buying strategies at FPL Foods in Augusta, Georgia. Through buyers like Frankie, producers call ahead an know what their cattle are worth that day or the next. This gives the producer the opportunity to decide whether it is the right time to market culls. Tours were arranged to FPL Foods and Brown Packing, both buyers of cull cows, to learn how to interact with these outlets for marketing culls.
Some 90 landowners interested in forestry and wildlife in Oconee and other upstate counties participated in a two day workshop at the Clemson University International Center for Automotive Research (CUICAR) in Greenville. The first session covered attracting birds to your property, including songbirds and quail. Specialists from SCDNR and a local forest landowner discussed ways landowners could modify their lands to make their property bird friendly. Judy Barnes with DNR led a discussion on quail, covering their population history in SC, habitat requirements, goals of habitat management and forest management practices for quail.

Other major forestry topics covered in the workshop included; Allocation of timber and land tax basis for forest land by Dr. Tamara Cushing, Clemson Extension Forest Specialist, Tree farming on a firefighter’s income, by Mark Jones, fireman and forest landowner in Abbeville, Economic Decisions for thinning timber, by Bruce Carroll, president of Forsight Resources; Are my pines ready to thin, by Dr. Stephen Dicke, Mississippi State Forestry Extension Specialist; and short presentations by each of the Agriculture Agencies that work with Forest Landowners. A highlight of the program was a presentation by Dr. Patrick McMillan, Naturalist and Biologist, Clemson University on the importance of private property in Conservation in the South Carolina Piedmont. A field trip was held in the afternoon, led by Dr. Dicke that gave participants a chance for some hands on training in using diameter tapes, clinometers and increment borers as well as measuring sample plots.
Helping Improve Upstate Water Quality

As population of the state continues to grow, water will become an increasingly important resource to our area. At the present many of the watersheds of the state are considered impaired for one or more pollutants. Fecal Coliform, a bacteria associated with the feces of warm blooded animals is one of the major pollutants. Fecal coliform enters our watershed through human and domestic animal sources. Failing rural septic systems allow black water to migrate to the surface. During rain events this surface effluent is washed into nearby lakes and streams. Additionally, livestock allowed direct access to streams and ponds for watering introduces animal feces and Fecal Coliform directly to our streams.

Four projects across the upstate during 2009 and 2010, conducted by County Extension Agent Morris Warner, were aimed at reducing these pollutant loads in four watersheds. The watersheds involved were Enoree River in Spartanburg and Union Counties, Tyger River in Greenville, Spartanburg and Laurens Counties, Long Cane Creek in Abbeville and Greenwood Counties, and Rabon Creek in Laurens and Greenville Counties.

Through cost share assistance provided to landowners and homeowners these four project have been instrumental in the repair of 176 failing septic system, and has encouraged over 20 producers to fence 1820 head of livestock out of upstate lakes, ponds and streams.

All totaled, the four projects provided over 1.5 million dollars to local landowners and homeowners to help protect over one hundred miles of streamline.

Failing septic system significantly contribute to the pollutant load of impaired watersheds in South Carolina.
Orchard Park Elementary School, in cooperation with community members, master gardeners, Clemson Extension Agents and school staff have begun a project to teach students the importance of agriculture by starting a gardening program on campus. It will consist of constructing raised bed gardens for vegetable gardening as well as developing and improving an existing apple orchard on the campus of the school. With the help of many volunteers the garden beds have been laid out and planted. Further refinement of the beds will take place over the next year including the installation of an irrigation system. The beds were laid out so each class would have a bed to work with. Master Gardeners, as part of their training, along with a local apple grower pruned the apple trees to help get them into production.

The goal of this gardening project is to utilize South Carolina Science and social studies standards to develop a comprehensive integrated curriculum that will provide hands-on, relevant learning opportunities for the students. The Junior Master Gardener curriculum will begin in fall 2010 with an after school 4-H program. The students have been very excited to get to grow vegetables as part of going to school. This type of activity is beginning to catch on in South Carolina as several schools have begun similar projects.
In March 2010 a new 4-H horse club was started in Oconee County. The vision for the Oconee Mountain Riders was to be a club that teaches members about being responsible horse owners and exposes them to the many facets of the horse industry. We hit the ground running with meetings, fundraisers and workshops. Our workshops consist of time for members to work on their horse record books and educational opportunities where we cover topics such as tack, horse breeds, conformation, health management, land management and much more. In addition to this we also take field trips to local farms and attend demonstrations for various riding disciplines. For example this year we toured the Clemson University Equine Center and enjoyed a roping demonstration at a nearby training facility. During the months of June and July we held horse camps that were open to horse enthusiasts of all ages. Camps included arts and crafts, educational hour, horseback riding and fun and games in the arena. We hope to provide our members with fun opportunities to learn appropriate information which will help them be knowledgeable and responsible contributors to the future of the horse world. These first few months have been great and we can only hope for continued success for our club!