Organic Vegetable Production Meeting
Justin Ballew, Area Horticulture Agent

Organic foods have exploded in popularity in recent years bringing consumer demand to an all-time high. Organic growers can earn a premium for high quality produce that is grown to certified organic specifications. Getting certified and following the required criteria for production can be the largest hurdle for beginning and seasoned growers alike.

On August 15, 2016, an Organic Vegetable Production Meeting was held in Marion at the Marion County Extension Office. A number of new as well as experienced growers attended and were presented important information on field production as well as information on the Clemson Certified Organic program. Growers learned pest management strategies like flaming for weeds, creating habitat for natural insect enemies, and growing resistant varieties to avoid disease. Growers also learned how to search the Organic Material Review Institute website to determine which pesticides were approved for organic production. The program was concluded with a presentation on the process of becoming Certified Organic. Pesticide recertification credits were offered to growers with private and commercial applicator licenses to ensure proper and continuous training on using pesticides for vegetable production. It appears there will continue to be a large demand for organic produce in the future; therefore, Clemson Extension will continue to educate South Carolina growers to assist them in maximizing their production and earnings.
For the past three years the South Carolina cattle industry has seen record prices. The spring of 2015 cattle producers began to experience a downturn in cattle prices that has led to losing 50 percent value in feeder calves in the last six months. With the decrease in cattle prices producers have been searching for ways to improve management and efficiency of their operation. The workshop titled Beef Cattle Improved Management Practices was developed to educate both beginning and veteran farmers and ranchers with in-depth beef cattle production information.

The Livestock and Forages team planned, coordinated, and implemented a one day Beef Cattle Workshop. The workshop was held at the Garden Alley Restaurant in Mullins, SC. A total of 22 cattlemen attended from Marion and Surrounding Counties. The workshop contained topics that included cattle outlook, Economics of Castration, Bull Selection, preparing for calving season, EPD utilization, and weed control. Through the workshop producers learn methods to increase operational efficiency and improve profitability.

The Clemson University Agricultural Service Laboratory provides services for the citizens of South Carolina. The Agricultural Service Laboratory processed 49,480 soil samples, 2,067 plant tissue, 713 feed and forage, and 1,604 waste samples in 2015.

The Home & Garden Information Center (HGIC) provides research-based information on landscaping, gardening, plant health, household pests, food safety & preservation, nutrition, physical activity, & health.

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After a drought-ridden summer, our area was already considered a disaster in terms of the production of certain crops. Many growers estimated at least a 40% yield loss on all crops from the drought alone. Then came the rain that wouldn’t stop. Storms from Hurricane Joaquin dumped nearly 20 inches in just a couple of days, and the rains after just added to the problems we already had. The excessive rainfall finished off the crops that weren’t totally devastated from the drought. All soybeans, cotton and peanuts that had reached maturity were sprouting in the field, and with more rain came more damage and reduction in quality. Many growers were left not knowing if they’d be financially stable enough to farm another year.

Not much could be done to ease the struggle of the South Carolina farmer at this point; however the county agent was able to assist farmers by helping them navigate through their questions about harvesting and harvest aids, disaster relief, crop insurance, etc. The agent helped to tell the story of the growers with pictures and videos, news interviews, and conducting a flood affected farmer meeting where local, state and federal representatives were in attendance. The agent conducted a ‘Financing the Farm’ meeting where growers were able to evaluate their current risks, and get updated information about crop budgets and market situation and outlook. Being available to the farmers to provide support and important information has really strengthened the extension-farmer relationship in the area. Because of the work done by area agents, state legislators and others took notice and in turn proposed the State Farm Aid Bill. Two meetings were held by the agent to explain the SC Farm Aid Bill application process where over 165 growers were in attendance. After the meetings, the agent met with over 70 growers one on one to help them through the application process. By doing this, the agent along with other ag lenders helped the area growers to receive over $3.2 million in grant money (20% of >40% loss). This money has been key in helping growers continue farming and helping the #1 industry in SC stay afloat.
Tobacco Production Meeting Meets Needs of Area Growers
William Hardee, Area Agronomy Agent

Horry and Marion Counties are home to approximately half of the state’s tobacco production. With this kind of grower presence, it is important that they have the opportunity to learn about new products, research information, production practices and new crop insurance rules and regulations. Since the retirement of two of our tobacco specialist, it has become difficult to get the expertise in agronomy within the state to support the needs of the growers. The Agent(s) knew that tobacco was too important to too many people in the area to let the state tobacco meeting go by the wayside. In the absence of the specialists who normally plan the meeting, the agents decided to step up and make it happen. Six different in-state and out-of-state speakers were scheduled, the sponsors were secured and the meal and meeting location were booked. 91 growers and tobacco industry representatives were in attendance at the meeting in December. 94% Agreed or strongly agreed that they had gained new knowledge from the tobacco meeting. 100% said that they would use the information from the meeting in their operation. 87% of growers said that they learned new ways to either cut costs or increase production. 100% said the meeting met their needs as a grower. 97% indicated that they would recommend the program to others. The continuation of this meeting has shown tobacco farmers that they are still supported by the agents and Clemson Extension.

Recertification Training for Structural Pest Control Companies
Ben Powell, Forestry & Natural Resource Agent

Controlling pests in businesses and homes is a massive industry with thousands of licensed applicators across the state. To maintain their licenses these applicators must receive training covering the biology and control techniques for the full array of pests that they are asked to control, and recent changes in state regulations require them to earn twice as many credits as previously required. To address this need for licensed applicators across the Pee Dee, Ben Powell, the area natural resources agent and pesticide training coordinator for Georgetown County, coordinated training in Conway, SC in February of 2016. This day-long training invited specialists from campus and representatives from the Department of Pesticide Regulation to cover topics such as “preparing for your inspection,” “controlling ants,” “controlling bed bugs,” and “identifying and handling cases of delusional parasitosis (a psychological disorder where clients believe they are infested with parasites when none are actually present).” Seventy-six applicators attended from all over the Pee Dee and remarked how much they appreciated having training locally so that they did not have to travel. They appreciated the content and indicated that they picked up new information that will help them control household pests more effectively.
Sprayer Calibration Classes Held in Georgetown, SC

Ben Powell, Forestry & Natural Resource Agent

Calibrating pesticide sprayer equipment is essential to the safe, effective and efficient use of pesticides. Failing to calibrate and maintain sprayer equipment correctly could result in damage to crops, ineffective pest control, damage to the environment or beneficial non-target species, expensive miscalculations, or even legal action if the pesticide is applied over the maximum label rate. To help pesticide applicators in the lower Pee Dee region, the area natural resources agent, Ben Powell, partnered with the coastal commercial horticulture agent, Zack Snipes, to deliver two sprayer calibration workshops in 2016. These classes qualified as continuing training for licensed applicators to earn recertification credits required to maintain their licenses. The first class was attended by 35 growers and private applicators from the lower Pee Dee. A second class was scheduled for DNR technicians, municipal staff and a few growers that were not able to attend the first class. Twenty-seven attendees came from all over the coastal and Pee Dee regions of the state for the second class.

4-H Healthy Lifestyle Cooking Camp

Sharon Grice, 4-H Development Agent

Marion County 4-H’ers participated in a week long “4-H Healthy Lifestyle Cooking Camp” this summer. The cooking camp was geared towards youth aged 9 to 14 years old. The objective of the camp was to expose children to a wide variety of healthy foods; teach cooking skills; learn how to interpret nutrition information on labels; and learn safe food handling.

Three young men, Quentin Murrell, Jordy Smith and Christian James attended a weekend Healthy Lifestyle Summit to learn cooking skills in order to teach the Healthy Lifestyle Camp in Marion County. The Marion County summer cooking sessions included learning how to cut a chicken and how to plan nutritious meals for the family. During the camp youth learn how to prepare chicken stir fry, brown rice, apple cheese quesadilla, Manicotti with homemade crepes, Cajun catfish with corn relish, grits, Eggplant Parmesan and Spinach Macaroni and Cheese.

The team that taught this workshop consist of Marge Condrasky, RDN, Professor in Food Nutrition and Packaging Science Department at Clemson University; Chef Anne Quinn Corr of Pennsylvania; Chef Chad Carter of Charleston, SC; and Clemson University Student, Shannon Monnier. 4-H’ers that assisted with this workshop were: Brandon Murrell, Paula Lewis, Annie Johnson, Lacy Johnson and Malyaka Johnson.
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