Welcome to the spring issue of The Small Farms Newsbreak! The purpose of this newsletter is to provide timely updates of educational information and events of importance to Sampson and Duplin Counties' small and part-time farm families. This will be a continuing effort through the Sampson and Duplin Counties Small Farm Program, which is an outreach of the Sampson County Cooperative Extension Office, located at 55 Agriculture Place, Clinton, NC 28328.

Our professional staff is here to help you put knowledge to work by providing practical education to the citizens of Sampson and Duplin Counties. We are here to serve you. If you need assistance, please visit or call our office at 910.592.7161. Our business hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 5:00pm. I hope you enjoy this issue!

Respectfully,

James Hartsfield
Area Extension Farm Management Agent

Small Farms Week registration cutoff 16 days into March

March 16 is the registration deadline for Small Farms Week 2012, set for March 25-31. The Small Farms Week kickoff will be Monday, March 26th at the Jamesville Community Fire Department in Martin County. A $20 registration fee is required for Tuesday and Wednesday, March 27th and 28th activities. Small farmers who register in advance are exempt. The four programs in the education forum the afternoon of Tuesday, March 27th, from 12:30pm - 3:45pm at NC A&T State University Farm will cover tours of two farms that market livestock directly to local customers. The educational forum the morning of Wednesday, March 28th, from 9:00am to 10:10am will include: marketing livestock to local customers, meat cuts and pricing, value-added livestock products, marketing options for fresh poultry, food safety and other marketing tools and being a “Meat Product Entrepreneur.” Panelist discussion from 10:30am to 11:15am includes: beef, pork, poultry, and small and large animal processing. The invited speaker for the Small Farmers Appreciation Luncheon at 12:00 noon is Dr. Homer L. Wilkes, Acting Associate Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service.
2012 Small Farms Week (continued)

To register for any Small Farms Week activity, visit the School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences web page at www.ag.ncat.edu.

Small Farms Week

March 25-31, 2012

Each year, a small farm family is awarded the honor of NC Small Farmer of the Year Award. In 2011, Thomas Pierce, owner of J&J Farms in the Jamesville community of Martin County was honored. The 2012 Small Farms Week Kickoff, Agricultural Summit and Luncheon will be held at the Jamesville Community Fire Department in Jamesville, NC on Monday, March 26, 2012 from 10:00am to 11:40am. The program topics and discussion included are Martin County’s Farmer Fresh Program and Cultivating the Market for Locally Grown Food. The luncheon will begin with a video presentation of the 2011 Gilmer L. and Clara Y. Dudley Small Farmer of the Year Award. The day concludes with an on-site tour of J&J Farms.

For more information contact Cecil L. Sumner, Agricultural Technician, Martin County Cooperative Extension Center at 252.789.4370 or cecil_sumner@ncsu.edu.

SMALL FARMS WEEK PROGRAM ACTIVITY IN SAMPSON COUNTY

March 26-31, 2012 - Small Farms Educational Exhibit, Sampson County Extension Center, Clinton, NC - During the week of Small Farms Week there will be an educational display illustrating small farms programs solutions in Sampson and Duplin Counties.

For more information contact James Hartsfield, Area Farm Management Agent, at 910.592.7161 or james_hartsfield@ncsu.edu.
SELECTING ALTERNATIVE ENTERPRISES FOR YOUR FARM

Change is continuous in farming. Prices, farm programs, trade policies, technology, markets, and consumer preferences all change continuously just to name some of the causes. Some farm enterprises benefit from these changes and some are harmed, so the search for profitable alternatives is a continuous challenge. There are seven important questions that should guide the search for alternative enterprises. Answering each one of these is important to achieving success.

1. Why are you interested in alternative enterprises? Some of the issues to think about include your lifestyle and family income goals, the farm products or services of interest to you and other options that might help you achieve your goals. It also helps to examine the time and investment capital you have available.

2. What are consumers interested in buying and who will be your customers? Many farm families are not accustomed to studying their customers because they sell commodities that move into global markets. However, many of the alternatives to these traditional farm enterprises have local or specialty markets, so knowing your customers and marketing issues become very important.

3. What are you planning to sell and how will you sell it? There are four parts to the answer to this question: your product or service, how you will get the product to your customer, the way you will promote it, and how you will set your price.

4. Will your product require processing and, if so, how will you produce it? Food products have a host of technical, regulatory and production requirements for production, distribution and sale.

5. What business and legal issues apply? Depending on the type of enterprise and the scale of operation you may need to think about risk management and insurance, form of business organization, contracts, employment law compliance, business and employment taxes and intellectual property protection.

6. What resources will you need? Once your ideas have been well developed and you have a production and marketing plan you should assess just what resources you will need and where they will come from. These may include human resources (including family members and external advisors), facilities and equipment, suppliers and distributors, and financing (including your own money and borrowing needs).

7. Will it be financially feasible and worthwhile? This is most people's least favorite part of planning but just because you CAN produce and sell something doesn't mean it will be a financial success.

Realize that enterprise selection is a complicated and demanding process. It should be considered no different than evaluating any other business opportunity. The amount of time and energy spent in research should be directly related to the amount of capital at risk and the potential rewards. All of this takes a lot of work but it is well worth taking time to make sure the idea you are considering will work and to avoid problems or disappointments down the road.
Farm Tax Guides

Farmers can visit the Sampson County Cooperative Extension Center at 55 Agriculture Place, located on Highway 421 South of Clinton, or Duplin County Extension Center at 165 Agriculture Drive, Kenansville, NC to pick up a copy of the 2011 IRS Farmers Guide. There have been quite a few changes in the tax laws this year, and some of them affect farmers. Whether you do your own federal tax returns or you check behind your tax preparer to make sure they do it right, you need to be aware of how the tax law affects you. Make sure you stop by the Extension Center and pick up your free copy.

Computer Classes for Small Farmers

The Sampson and Duplin County Centers of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, North Carolina A&T State University Cooperative Program, and the Human Resources Departments and Small Business Centers at Sampson and James Sprunt Community Colleges, are offering computer courses for small and limited-resource farmers in cooperation with the Farmers Adopting Computer Training (FACT) Program. FACT trains farm families to use computers in their farm operations to become more competitive in the marketplace. These classes start with the basics of operating a computer and progress to providing fundamental instruction on using a computer to improve farm management record keeping. Registration may be waived for individuals who meet eligibility. For more information about these courses including fee-waiver eligibility or to register, please contact James Hartsfield, Area Farm Management Agent, Sampson County Cooperative Extension Center at 910.592.7161 or james_hartsfield@ncsu.edu; or Courtney Owens, Extension Associate at North Carolina A&T Cooperative Extension Program at 336.334.7734 or ctowens@ncat.edu.

Calendar of Events

April 3, 2012 – High-Tunnel Greenhouse and Plasticulture Workshop, Sampson County Extension Center – The workshop will cover the advantages of using a high-tunnel greenhouse and plasticulture. Also, techniques to extend the growing season and the latest on growing produce using plastic mulch and drip irrigation will be discussed. For more information, please contact James Hartsfield, Extension Area Farm Management Agent at the Sampson County Cooperative Extension Center at 910.592.7161 or james_hartsfield@ncsu.edu.

Mid April - Creating Your Own Farm Signage Workshop - In this exciting and fun, hands-on class, farmers will paint and draw their own personalized signs for their roadside stands and farmer’s market displays! Bring your farm logo, or create one to paint on your signs, as well! Dress in work clothes! Class size limited to 15 people. Class supply fee of $10.00 required at sign up. Look for more details.

Mid May - Web Page Design Workshop for Small Farmers, Sampson County Extension Center - Cooperative Extension Specialist, Associates and Agent will present the workshop from the North Carolina A&T Cooperative Extension Program. They will assist farmers in creating their own web page that has the potential of providing more marketing opportunities. Look for more details.

Mid June - Southeastern North Carolina Alternative Enterprise Tour - Small and part-time farmers will have the opportunity to visit a number of alternative systems such as intensive fruit and vegetable production with plasticulture, a pastured pork operation, greenhouse vegetables, and other alternative enterprises. Look for more details.