

Sustainable Agriculture

Looking forward for this generation
and the next...

at **UGA**

December 2008

Welcome to the first issue of the UGA-College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) Sustainable Agriculture Newsletter. We are creating this newsletter to keep you informed about sustainable agriculture activities here at UGA and across the state.

This year has been eventful. We have obtained stakeholder input on the critical needs for sustainable agriculture in the state from a variety of sources. The Southern SARE supported Sustainable Agriculture Summit, held with Fort Valley State University (FVSU) in June, obtained input from a broad cross-section of Georgia's agricultural community. We also participated in focus groups of organic growers and conducted a survey of small fruit and vegetable growers. Several themes have emerged from these efforts. These include the need for more "place-based" research, better access to information specific to Georgia, a need for more infrastructure for local meats and foods, better education for young people particularly those wanting to go into farming, and more information and help with marketing/economic issues.

We are addressing these needs in various ways. We have launched the Sustainable Agriculture website (www.SustainAgGa.org) to provide reliable information from agricultural research conducted in Georgia from both UGA and FVSU, as well as links to other good resources in the Southeast. We have obtained a grant and are developing an Organic Production Team of county agents, specialists, researchers, and farmer advisors. The Team will bring together expertise from UGA, FVSU, and USDA-ARS to provide a technical resource for farmers producing small fruits and vegetables organically.

We have applied for grant funds to develop optimal winter vegetable rotations and test varieties within those rotations. We are also developing new trainings for county agents and farmers for the coming year.

In all these efforts our partnerships are critical for success. We will highlight some of these efforts in this and future issues. With the current economic challenges, we have more opportunities than ever for sustainable agriculture to help us keep farming viable.

*Julia Gaskin
Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator, UGA-CAES*

Sustainable Agriculture website

The UGA CAES Sustainable Agriculture website (www.SustainAgGa.org) was officially launched in June 2008. We plan to develop the site into what one Sustainable Agriculture Summit participant called a "one stop shopping site" for Extension and research results related to sustainable agriculture in Georgia. Here you can find general information, Extension bulletins, and publications from university researchers. You can also access basic principles of sustainable agriculture such as soil quality, conservation tillage, cover crops, crop rotation, IPM, organic production, management intensive grazing, local food and more. The events list is kept up to date with educational opportunities within the state of Georgia and in neighboring states. The newest posts to the website are placed in a Quick Links box on the home page. Check the CAES sustainable ag website frequently for new information.



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Highlights of the SARE Farm Tour

One of the best ways to learn is to go to the farm and see what farmers are actually doing. On 17 September 2008, 38 county agents from UGA and FVSU as well as several local farmers toured farms in southeast Georgia to look at different approaches to sustainable agriculture. Our first stop was a New Zealand style grazing dairy in Jefferson County. Mr. Jim Crawford, County Extension Coordinator from Jefferson County, introduced us to the New Zealand grazing dairy at the farm managed by John Niezen. We were given a pasture walk and tour of the milking facilities. Tour participants were able to see how this producer is meeting the challenges of maintaining year round pasture as well as the reward to the bottom line in the form of lower input costs.



John Niezen discusses pasture management for SARE Farm Tour participants.

Our second stop was an agritourism highlight as we toured the Savannah River Preserve during the noon hour. Nicky and Kay Powell, owners of this hunting preserve, told of their long term plan to make a living from their land while at the same time, protecting the land from environmental degradation and development. We also heard from FVSU agent Stefan Price and the Coastal Georgia Small Farmers Cooperative who successfully market vegetables to their local schools.

Our afternoon stop was at a certified organic farm. Walker Farms produces vegetables, Vidalia onions, peanuts, soybeans and rye. Relinda Walker discussed her systems approach to organic production as she

gave us a tour of the processing/packing facilities and vegetable fields. In addition, Gerald Larson, FVSU Extension, discussed his research on organic small fruit production.

The tour gave participants an opportunity to look at a variety of approaches to sustainable agriculture and see some of the common themes, such as protecting and rebuilding soil to maintain a productive system.



Relinda Walker explains the evolution of her management system for organic vegetables and grain

Sustainable Vegetable Faculty

In June 2009, Dr. George Boyhan will move to Athens to begin his new appointment in commercial organic and sustainable vegetable production. Dr. Boyhan is well known for his work with organic Vidalia onions. He will be leading the new Organic Production Team and has already submitted a Southern SARE proposal on developing optimal rotations for winter vegetable production. He will be a great resource as we develop new information on sustainable vegetable production in Georgia.

Current Quick Links at

www.SustainAgGa.org

- ✓ Organic certification cost share
- ✓ Legumes for nitrogen fertilizer
- ✓ 2009 Georgia local food guide
- ✓ Free web listing of Georgia made-Georgia grown products.



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