KyFarmStart program popular in Madison Co.

By Brandon and Amanda Sears, Madison County Extension Agents

The KyFarmStart program is designed to help beginning farmers (those with less than 10 years of farming experience) master critical farm management issues, topics, and to understand the business of farming. Our group consisted of 36 beginning farmers from Madison, Garrard, Fayette, Jackson, and Meade counties. Interest among participants varied from beef cattle production, agritourism, horticulture related enterprises, beekeeping, and lavender production. Our program consisted of meeting each Wednesday from noon to 3 p.m. for 10 weeks in a row starting in mid-September. A registration fee of $100 per farm was collected and a meal was served at each meeting. Extension Agents, Specialists and Associates from the UK

Continued on Page 2

The 36 participants in the Madison County KyFarmStart program were from Madison, Garrard, Fayette, Jackson and Meade counties.
College of Agriculture, Food and Environment, as well as representatives from the Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (KCARD), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), local ag lending institutions, and Eastern Kentucky University and Berea College faculty and staff presented information on various topics.

The program was a combination of classroom training and on-farm experiences and discussion. Topics consisted of identifying local resources, enterprise selection, business plan development, legal risk, product marketing, basic soils, beef cattle and horticulture production, and farm equipment selection, use and safety. We visited Berea College Farms, EKU’s Meadowbrook Farm, and the University of Kentucky’s Horticulture Research Farm.

An email listserv was created to keep graduates up to date on upcoming meetings of interest.

Madison and surrounding counties are becoming more populated as residents of larger cities move into more rural areas and purchase a few acres. Many of these people have questions about farming basics and how to get started. As a result, the KyFarmStart program was very well received in our area. The program helped UK Extension and others to reach out and make an impact on a new set of clientele that have typically not utilized our services. Participants developed camaraderie very quickly and have made a network of contacts with each other and many local organizations that will help them be successful in the future. One participant stated that the legal risk session was most helpful for them since they realized a need to change from baking at a home kitchen to a commercial kitchen. Another appreciated that the program helped her make connections with various resources that otherwise would have taken her months or years to figure out. A couple of participants decided that farming was not for them after completing the program. Some might not consider this a successful outcome, but those people most likely saved time and money in the long run.

“Because Madison County’s Extension office is so close to campus I was fortunate to be able to attend the majority of the meetings with this group of beginning farmers,” said Sarah Lovett, KyFarmStart project coordinator. “They were an exemplary group to work with, very engaged with the presenters and one another, sharing their experience and asking very insightful questions. I believe we achieved our objectives of providing them with education, experiences and resources to make better decisions and develop successful whole farm plans.”

Shubin Saha comes home to UK

Dr. Shubin Saha, who joined the UK Department of Horticulture faculty as an Assistant Extension Professor of Vegetable Crops in September of 2013, is a native of Lexington and was a resident until 2001. He received his bachelor’s degree in Plant and Soil Sciences at UK.

After graduation, he moved to Gainesville, Florida, to begin his graduate education at the University of Florida. He was one of the first groups of students to participate in a new professional agricultural degree program known as the Doctor of Plant Medicine. This is an applied doctorate that entails interdisciplinary studies and internships in soil science, horticulture, crop nutrition, entomology, plant pathology, nematology, and most other aspects of crop production with an emphasis on vegetables and protected agriculture. As a plant medicine student he also conducted research for

Sarah Lovett, KyFarmStart project coordinator
non-chemical methyl bromide alternatives for Florida vegetables.

He was awarded the D.P.M. in 2005, at which point he decided to continue his education at the University of Florida. To maintain a broad background, he pursued a second doctorate in the Horticultural Sciences Department at UF, working with closed hydroponic systems for vegetables in greenhouses. He was awarded the Ph.D. in 2009 from UF, and immediately accepted a position with Purdue University as a vegetable specialist in the major watermelon and cantaloupe production region in southwest Indiana at the Southwest Purdue Agriculture Center. His research focus was on watermelon and cantaloupe production issues, as well as working with various vegetable crops produced in high tunnels, a newly emerging production system for the U.S.

“I hope to identify some new opportunities for Kentucky farmers as well as support existing industry,” Dr. Saha said. His research at UK will focus primarily on production aspects of field vegetable production and high tunnel vegetable production.

Soil preparation for spring crops

By Christy Morgan, NRCS

The cold weather has moved into the Commonwealth but landowners who planted their fall cover crops can be confident that their soil is protected from the rough weather conditions. Planting the fall cover crop is an essential part of healing our soil, according to John Graham, Soil Health Specialist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. “Since we measure soil health by the soil’s physical, biological and chemical properties, we need to farm in such a way that we not only stop degrading these soil properties but farm in a way that heals these soil properties,” Graham said.

Selecting the right cover crop mixture is important. NRCS has soil health experts available to answer all your questions. The diversity of the plants attracts diverse microbes, resulting in a healthy food web. When microbes are part of a healthy natural nutrient cycle, no chemicals are needed. “Landowners who catch on to the soil health method of farming with cover crops reap substantial financial rewards both in commercial fertilizer and chemical savings,” Graham said.

Soils have been damaged over the years by tillage operations as well as by the fertilizer and chemical applications used on the crops. By reducing or eliminating the use of tillage, fertilizers and chemicals, further soil degradation can be prevented. Unfortunately, these practices alone do little to heal the soil from its current state. Cover crops allow the soil to have a live root growing 365 days a year, rebuilding the physical properties of the soil.

“Plant roots are the home for microbes that rebuild soil structure,” Graham said. Cover crops keep that live root growing all year long. “If landowners truly understood what tillage does to their soil you would see a lot less tillage and a lot more no-tilling of crops.” No-till with cover crops maximizes live roots (the microbial home) and maintains substantial quantities of organic matter (microbial food). The end result is maximized soil health building with minimal existing soil health destruction.

For more information on improving your soil’s health, contact your local USDA Service Center or visit http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ky/soils/.

Sampling at Kentucky Farmers Markets webinar set for Feb. 20

The Center for Crop Diversification will host a webinar, Sampling at Kentucky Farmers Markets, on Thursday, February 20, from 2 – 3:15 p.m. Learn why sampling your food products at Kentucky farmers markets is increasingly important to your marketing plan. We’ll learn the basics of sampling safely, hear from a few producers, and talk about best practices to utilize while providing samples to your customers. To register, please contact Miranda Hileman at miranda.hileman@uky.edu or 859-218-4384. Click here for more information.
Fruit and Vegetable Conference
a success despite bad weather

By John Strang and Patsy Wilson,
University of Kentucky Extension Specialists

The 2014 Kentucky Fruit and Vegetable Conference was held in Lexington on January 6-7, during the polar vortex. This cut down on attendance somewhat from recent years, but it did not cut down on grower enthusiasm, conversations and interest in fruit and vegetable production and marketing.

The 2013 season with its cooler temperatures and consistent rainfall was a good one for most growers and marketers. Interest was particularly high during our High Tunnel Workshop, Grape and Wine Short Course, Tree Fruit Production and Organic Production sessions. Growers are already ordering plants and seeds, adjusting planting plans and planning their strategies for the upcoming growing season.

The popular Grape and Wine Short Course included an emphasis on winemaking this year.

“Despite the weather, we had an excellent turnout for the 2014 Grape and Wine Short Course,” said Patsy Wilson, UK’s Extension Viticulture Specialist. “We had an average of 65 attendees on Monday, 55 joined us for the celebration of KY wines, and about 50 participated in Tuesday’s meetings. On Monday we had some excellent talks including topics such as anthocyanin content and brettanomyces detection in wines. On Tuesday grape growers attended sessions such as choosing the right grapevine rootstock in KY, grape root borer control, and vineyard sanitation measures. We were pleased with the turnout and overall success of the meeting.”

KCARD offers grant workshops

By Myrisa Christy, Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (KCARD)

During December and January, the Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (KCARD) offered four grant workshops to farmers and agribusinesses through the Agribusiness Grant Facilitation Program (AGFP), funded by the Kentucky Agriculture Development Board. The University of Kentucky’s Cooperative Extension offices in Adair, Scott, Daviess, and Johnson counties graciously hosted the workshops to help farmers learn about how to apply for grants and what opportunities are available. Speakers from USDA-Rural Development, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Governor’s Office of Agricultural Policy, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, Kentucky State University, and UK Agricultural Economics Extension discussed various programs available to producers.

KCARD’s AGFP coordinator will assist producers in identifying and applying for grant opportunities. Over the coming months, there will be additional trainings on funding offered in different formats, such as evening classes and webinars. To learn more about current funding opportunities or sign up for funding notifications and workshop information, go to www.growkentuckyag.com. In addition, KCARD offers assistance in developing business plans, marketing plans, preparing financial statements, and other services to assist in applying for grants or to enhance your agribusiness. For more information on KCARD’s services, go to www.kcard.info.

Value-Added Producer Grants have deadline of February 24

The deadline to apply for USDA-Rural Development Value-Added Producer Grants is Feb. 24. This program is for producers who add value to an agricultural commodity in at least one of five ways. The most popular methods are change in physical state (think milk to cheese, cow to hamburger, berries to jelly); marketing it locally (premium on local product); and produced in a manner than enhances value (think organic/sustainable).

There have been a few changes from last year; the maximum amount for a working capital grant is $200,000, and the planning grant maximum is $75,000. Keep in mind that this program requires
more than 1,200 growers and agriculture specialists from the Southeastern U.S. and beyond. Next week, the Center will be part of trade shows at the Ohio Produce Growers & Marketers Association Congress in Sandusky, and the Indiana Hort Congress in Indianapolis. From there, it’s on to Nashville for the Tennessee Horticultural Expo, Dallas for a poster presentation at the Southern Region American Society of Horticultural Science annual meeting, then to Morgantown, WV, for the West Virginia Small Farms Conference in late February. The Center will be back on display in Kentucky at the Organic Association of Kentucky Conference in Berea on March 7-8. If you happen to be at any of these meetings, be sure to stop by to see us!

An additional resource for producers considering applying for a Value-Added Producer Grant is available from the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition: Farmers’ Guide to Value-Added Producer Grant Funding, 2013-2014. It is available online at http://sustainableagriculture.net/publications/

Center personnel hit the road

Miranda Hileman and Christy Cassady are taking the Center’s display and resources on the road this winter. We will be reaching out to Extension personnel and growers in surrounding states, as well as making some longer trips to spread the word about what we do. The Center was on display at the Illinois Specialty Crops, Agritourism, and Organic Conference & Trade Show in Springfield last week. This week, Miranda heads to Mobile, AL, for the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group Conference, which brings together more than 1,200 growers and agriculture specialists from the Southeastern U.S. and beyond. Next week, the Center will be part of trade shows at the Ohio Produce Growers & Marketers Association Congress in Sandusky, and the Indiana Hort Congress in Indianapolis. From there, it’s on to Nashville for the Tennessee Horticultural Expo, Dallas for a poster presentation at the Southern Region American Society of Horticultural Science annual meeting, then to Morgantown, WV, for the West Virginia Small Farms Conference in late February. The Center will be back on display in Kentucky at the Organic Association of Kentucky Conference in Berea on March 7-8. If you happen to be at any of these meetings, be sure to stop by to see us!

Subscribe!

Thanks for reading, and please contact Miranda at miranda.hileman@uky.edu if you are interested in subscribing to our online newsletter.

**KADF**

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