Tennessee program highlights coming
food safety rule

By Matt Ernst, independent writer

The Tennessee Food Safety Task Force sponsors an annual conference for food producers, manufacturers and university academics involved in food safety issues. This year’s conference, held May 22 in Nashville, focused on FSMA – the Food Safety Modernization Act.

“There are regulations coming down from FSMA that are going to affect food manufacturers and also people who grow produce,” said Faith Critzer, University of Tennessee Food Safety Extension Specialist. “At the conference, we spent a lot of time with food manufacturers already learning how to incorporate a food safety culture into their operations,” she said.

Alliances have formed as clearinghouses for information on FSMA for both food manufacturers and produce farmers. Those alliances, said Critzer, are the best sources of information. “Even if you think you’ll be exempt from FSMA, you can still follow information from these two groups,” she said.

Under the FDA’s current proposal, many smaller produce growers and food manufacturing operations may be exempt from much of FSMA. But there is still some uncertainty about how the final FSMA rules will read, especially relative to smaller food manufacturers. That makes it an important topic for educators and producers to monitor.

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The alliance working with food manufacturers is the Food Safety Preventative Controls Alliance. Its website is http://www.iit.edu/ifsh/alliance/. It will help manufacturers in complying with FSMA, when the final rules are issued, through a training curriculum and other future resources.

The other alliance, the Produce Safety Alliance, will work with produce growers impacted by the produce safety rule in FSMA. The Produce Safety Alliance website is hosted at the Cornell University Department of Food Science website, http://producesafetyalliance.cornell.edu/. “If I was in a farmer’s shoes and wondering how these regs might affect me, I’d be paying attention to that alliance website,” Critzer said.

The alliance websites are also the go-to resource for Extension educators, as “both alliances have very good websites,” Critzer said, “and they are the ones receiving federal dollars to go out there and get the message out to people about who has to be compliant.”

Food safety is an issue that is on the front burner for everyone in food production. An important message about FSMA is that it will not take effect overnight. “Nothing is going to change from today until tomorrow,” said Critzer. “Manufacturers and farms are going to have a period of time to adjust, and depending on the size of the operation, we can already say that it’s going to be one year to three years, for most people,” she said.

The Tennessee Food Safety Task Force annual meeting is open to industry and educators from surrounding states. More information is available at its website, http://foodsafetytaskforce.org/

**UK plants hemp pilot project**

*By Miranda Hileman, Senior Extension Associate*

Hemp has once again been planted in Kentucky soil. Since the signing of the 2014 Agricultural Act (the farm bill), the Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA) has established an Industrial Hemp Program, which allows pilot projects in conjunction with universities across Kentucky to do research and development work with industrial hemp. Industrial hemp is a versatile plant that can be grown for its fiber and/or seed. The KDA recently acquired 13 varieties of hemp seed from Italy and University of Kentucky researchers planted it on Spindletop Research Farm on May 27, 2014. Four days later the seeds had germinated, and at six days researchers saw true leaves on many plants. One trial is being conducted for seed production, one for fiber production, and there is a separate trial for fiber production with the addition of nitrogen fertilizer. These variety trials are being conducted in the same manner that standard variety commodity trials are handled.

Agronomists David Williams of the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences at the University of Kentucky, and Richard Mundell of the Kentucky Tobacco Research and Development Center, are the principal investigators of the University of Kentucky project. They are working cooperatively with Western Kentucky University and Eastern Kentucky University to replicate the variety trials, in order to understand how the crop will grow in
different parts of the Commonwealth. The goal of this year’s project is to find one or more varieties that are well adapted to our Kentucky climate and latitude. If some varieties do well, future trials will be conducted to further understand this crop and its potential for the state of Kentucky. The researchers are looking forward to learning about this interesting crop over the growing season, and harvesting of the industrial hemp is slated to begin at some point in October.

“We are excited to work on this project because it is different, and the potential to impact Kentucky agriculture is high,” Williams said. “We are looking forward to learning and determining how we can help Kentucky farmers grow hemp in the future.”

New funding source option for farmers, food entrepreneurs

By Caroline Heine, Seed Capital Kentucky

In April 2014, Seed Capital Kentucky was invited to become a Kiva Zip Trustee by Kiva Zip fellow, David Taliaferro. As a trustee, Seed Capital’s responsibility is to endorse borrowers with whom we have a relationship for loans on the platform. Really, we are vouching for the borrower’s character and stating that we believe their project has social benefit. We are also agreeing to help get the word out about the loan by engaging our communication outlets, like our website and social media channels.

So, what is Kiva Zip? Kiva Zip is an online microlending program that uses the power of crowdfunding to raise money to support businesses that might otherwise have limited access to capital. It leverages the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular community. Kiva Zip launched as a pilot in November 2011, and entered its alpha phase in September 2012. Since then, it has distributed more than $2,952,875 in loans.

Seed Capital Kentucky has endorsed three loans since April! All of the borrowers are farmers with whom we have had a relationship for some time. The first loan was for Adam Barr of Barr Farms. Adam borrowed $8,000 to build a packing shed. His loan went live on April 24, and was fully funded in about 6 days. Ben Abell was the second loan. His $10,000 loan was fully funded in about two and a half weeks. For these two loans, there were almost 300 lenders from all across the U.S., Canada, Europe, even as far away as Malaysia and Taiwan! We endorsed our third loan last week. The borrower is Michelle Howell. She and her husband, Nathan, have a farm in Western Kentucky and are adding value-added processing capacity to their operation to create some shelf-stable foods that can be available when food is otherwise out of season. The value-added processing also gives farmers a way to make use of seconds or otherwise unsellable fruits and veggies from their fields, so they can harvest their entire crop and make use of all of it, resulting in higher income for the farmer. As of this writing, their $10,000 loan is already 41% funded, with loans from 79 lenders from across the U.S., into Europe and even one from Kuala Lumpur. It is amazing to watch the power of social media in funding these loans.

Seed Capital Kentucky has also recently been notified that we have been upgraded from a “pilot” trustee to a “first tier” trustee, which means we can now endorse up to 10 loans! Kiva Zip did this because our borrowers are farmers, and farmers have so far proved to be great borrowers on the
Kiva Zip platform. We already have several in the pipeline to go live in the next month or so. This is such a great program for farmers, and a very easy way for Seed Capital to support the regional farmers who grow food for us.

David and others are also working hard to engage more trustees in Louisville, so Louisville can become a Kiva Zip City. Louisville has the opportunity to become one of the first 15 Kiva Zip Cities in the U.S. As a city, Louisville will have its own Kiva site. By going to the Louisville site, lenders would be able to see all of the local entrepreneurs raising funds, and to connect with them through the conversations tab. Kiva would also commit four fellows to Louisville as a Kiva City to really galvanize its place as a resource in the community.

If anyone wants to inquire about Kiva Zip, they can reach David at david.taliaferro@fellows.kiva.org. Learn more about Seed Capital Kentucky and read more about the Kentucky farmers who are benefiting from this loan program on their Kiva Zip website: https://zip.kiva.org/trustees/1339.

New price reports from IL, TN

The Center for Crop Diversification has been compiling price reports for farmers markets and produce auctions around Kentucky since 2005. Price and sales information is helpful to producers who are selling through such markets as farmers markets, produce auctions, and terminal markets. These reports are used by producers across the Commonwealth and the region. They tell us that it’s helpful to see a range of prices that other producers are selling their products for across Kentucky. These reports are very useful for new producers who are starting to market their products through various channels. We rely on dedicated volunteers to provide price reports from several markets across Kentucky, then we aggregate them into a weekly report. Our price report Web pages are the most-utilized pages on the Center for Crop Diversification website, with produce auction prices first and farmers market prices second.

In 2013, faculty and Extension personnel at the University of Tennessee stated reporting prices at a selection of their farmers markets, and we were able to help them get the information out to Tennessee growers. This year, a team of Local Food Systems and Small Farms Extension Educators from the University of Illinois Extension are working together to create an Illinois farmers market price report. It is exciting to be working with people in two states who are trying to help their producers by creating their own statewide price reports. To access farmers market price reports for all three states, go to http://www.uky.edu/Ag/CCD/price.html

CCD needs your feedback!

Reminder: For those of you who received a feedback survey about the Center for Crop Diversification, please help us plan future programming and deliverables that will help you in your work. Your input on how you use the website is extremely important as we try to make a case for continued funding for the Center. Please go back to the email you received from us and click on the survey link to provide your feedback. We appreciate your thoughts!

Nathan and Michelle Howell farm in Western Kentucky. Michelle’s application for a loan to add value-added processing capacity to their operation has been endorsed.

Photo courtesy of Michelle Howell
USDA set to implement Whole-Farm Revenue Protection

USDA Press Release, May 21, 2014

In late May 2014, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced a new risk management option that will be available for fruit and vegetable growers and producers with diversified farms. The policy, called Whole-Farm Revenue Protection, will provide flexible coverage options for specialty crop, organic and diversified crop producers. The program will be implemented in several counties across the country and will expand in availability over the next several years.

Whole-Farm insurance allows farmers to insure all crops on their farm at once, rather than insuring commodity by commodity. Traditionally, many fruit and vegetable crops have not had crop insurance programs designed for them — making it less attractive for a farmer that primarily planted a commodity crop like wheat or corn to use another part of his or her land for growing fruits and vegetables or other specialty crops. This allows farmers greater flexibility to make planting decisions on their land.

“Crop insurance has been the linchpin of the farm safety net for years and continues to grow as the single most important factor in protecting producers of all sizes from the effects of unpredictable weather,” said Vilsack. “Providing farmers the option to insure their whole farm at once gives farmers more flexibility, promotes crop diversification, and helps support the production of healthy fruits and vegetables. More flexibility also empowers farmers and ranchers to make a broader range of decisions with their land, helping them succeed and strengthening our agriculture economy.”

The 2014 farm bill requires a whole-farm crop insurance policy option, and paves the way for the Risk Management Agency (RMA) to make it broadly available to specialty crop, organic, and diversified growers. The Federal Crop Insurance Corporation Board of Directors (FCIC Board) approved the Whole-Farm Revenue Protection pilot policy for RMA to offer it through the federal crop insurance program in 2015.

USDA has taken many steps to provide effective insurance coverage for diversified, organic and specialty crops. The whole-farm crop insurance policy provides flexibility to meet the needs of specialty crop growers, organic producers and those with diversified farms, and who have farm production and revenue history, including five years of historic farm tax records. This policy is also part of USDA’s commitment to small and mid-sized producers managing diversified operations.

“Providing farmers the option to insure their whole farm at once gives farmers more flexibility, promotes crop diversification, and helps support the production of healthy fruits and vegetables.”

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack

USDA has been strengthening crop insurance by providing more risk management options for farmers and ranchers. The policy offers coverage levels from 50 to 85 percent; recognizes farm diversification through qualification for the highest coverage levels along with premium rate discounts for multiple crop diversification. The Market Readiness Feature, as outlined in the farm bill, simplifies insurance coverage for producers under the Whole-Farm Revenue Protection pilot policy by allowing the costs such as washing, trimming, and packaging to be left in the insured revenue instead of having to adjust those amounts out of the insured amount.

The new Whole-Farm Revenue Protection policy combines Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) and AGR-Lite along with several improvements to target diversified farms and farms selling two to five commodities, including specialty crops to wholesale markets. The new policy is also designed to meet the risk management needs of diversified crop or livestock producers including those growing specialty crops and/or selling to local and regional markets, farm identity preserved markets, or direct markets.

As part of the pilot, Whole-Farm Revenue Protection will be available where AGR and AGR-Lite are
currently offered, and will expand to other counties as data are available for underwriting and actuarial ratemaking. RMA will release information on the policy later this summer when it becomes available. This information will be announced on the RMA website at [www.rma.usda.gov](http://www.rma.usda.gov).


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**UKREC hosts open house June 19**

The University of Kentucky Research and Education Center at Princeton will host its second annual Horticulture Open House on Thursday, June 19th, from 9 a.m. until noon (CST). The open house will feature tours of ornamentals and fruit, as well as presentations by faculty and staff on research projects. Ornamentals research includes the development of a moisture monitoring and irrigation control system, and *Aronia melanocarpa* ‘McKenzie’ (Chokeberry) in a container study using biodegradable fabric containers. Fruit presentations will feature NC-140 Regional Research Project apple and peach rootstock trials, and a blackberry cultivar trial. The ornamentals tour will feature variety trial gardens, woody plants, daylilies, perennials, and annuals, while the fruit tour will feature apple, apricot, peach, grape, and blackberry plantings. The ornamentals and orchard tours will run concurrently.

The UK Research and Education Center is located at 1205 Hopkinsville Street, Princeton. Go to [http://wkrec.ca.uky.edu/sites/wkrec.ca.uky.edu/files/Map_of_Princeton.pdf](http://wkrec.ca.uky.edu/sites/wkrec.ca.uky.edu/files/Map_of_Princeton.pdf) to see a map. For more information, contact Dr. Winston Dunwell at 270.365.7541 x 209, or wdunwell@uky.edu.

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**SARE offers local food resources**

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education has created a new topic room, *Farm to Table: Building Local and Regional Food Systems*, to help anyone interested in local food systems find the resources they need. SARE websites feature hundreds of reports, books and other resources on a variety of topics. SARE created “topic rooms” to organize its information on important topics in sustainable agriculture. The *Building Local and Regional Food Systems* topic room is a free, online collection of tools and educational resources created to provide information for farmers, ag professionals, community organizers and others who are working to reconfigure the nation’s food system so more value stays in food-producing communities. The topic room features resources grouped under the categories of Business Issues, Marketing and Markets, Distribution and Aggregation, Food Safety, Food Processing, Strong Communities, and Training Resources for Practitioners. To access this information, go to [www.sare.org/local-food](http://www.sare.org/local-food).

*Adapted from SARE press release of 5/21/2014*

**Subscribe!**

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

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*The Center for Crop Diversification is supported by a grant from the Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund.*