Center funded, name changed

By Christy Cassady, Center Coordinator

The Center for Crop Diversification, formerly known as the Crop Diversification & Biofuel Research & Education Center (CDBREC) was recently granted one year of funding by the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board. Thanks to that funding, the Center will be able to continue its Extension functions of developing fact sheets and tools to help farmers who are trying to diversify their operations. The Center will not have enough funding to continue to conduct research projects as it did in the past, but it will expand the resources it offers to include videos, podcasts, and webinars on crop diversification topics, as well as expanded price reports. Videos, podcasts and webinars will include crop production and marketing topics. Price reports will be expanded to include farm-to-school, retail, and restaurant prices, in addition to the produce auction and farmers market prices that have been offered for years.

Because the Center will no longer be conducting research involving bioenergy, its name is changing to Center for Crop Diversification. All the fact sheets, decision tools, budgets, and price reports that have been available in the past will still be available, as will results of our research projects, which date back to 2000. Our new URL is http://www.uky.edu/Ag/CCD/, but your old bookmarks will still take you directly to our website. Look for the Center’s new videos, podcasts, webinars and price reports in the coming months.
A New Face, and Facebook

Please welcome Senior Extension Associate Miranda Hileman to the Center for Crop Diversification. Miranda, who works in the Department of Agricultural Economics, will be helping with the development of the Center’s webinars, videos, and podcasts, as well as writing and updating crop and marketing profiles, and compiling price reports. She has already been compiling farmers market price reports for the Center’s website.

Thanks to Miranda, the Center for Crop Diversification is now on Facebook. Be sure to check out our new page, and Like us on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/CenterforCropDiversification.

Developing Blueberry Products for Local Markets

By Miranda Hileman, Senior Extension Associate

Researchers at the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment have been working with the Kentucky Blueberry Growers Association (KBGA) to explore demand for frozen blueberries and other value-added blueberry food products, as well as develop and evaluate frozen blueberries and processed blueberry products.

The KBGA formed in 2002 as a group of Kentucky blueberry producers interested in working together to develop markets and promote the blueberry industry in Kentucky. It is also a full service specialty blueberry nursery offering a variety of plants and products for blueberry growing to the general public. With more than 200 members, the KBGA is able to support itself through educational resources, marketing expertise, shared experiences, and its new distribution capabilities. Its motto of “Cooperation Not Competition” has helped the association grow significantly over the past year — 56 new members joined in 2012. The KBGA’s new warehouse is located in Metcalfe County and boasts a walk-in freezer and cooler, two ice cream hardening cabinets for flash freezing, and a sorting machine. Later this year, a berry washer and berry dryer will be added. Washing and drying the berries before freezing will allow members to add value to their frozen blueberries because they will be ready to use when opened.
Currently assisting with the project, the Food Systems Innovation Center (FSIC) is assessing several freezing techniques for blueberries to determine shelf-life, continued quality, and a nutritional evaluation of the berries over time. Food scientists at the FSIC developed several recipes for ready-to-bake products that utilize frozen blueberries. These products are intended to be sold to elementary, middle and high school cafeterias across the Commonwealth. Products that are being evaluated include a cookie, a layered bar, a muffin, a smoothie, and a parfait. Sensory analyses of these value-added foods are planned for the future.

The 2013 blueberry crop was very successful! Twenty-eight of the KBGA members sold to the association this year, and by late August all the Kentucky blueberries were sold and distributed. The KBGA is looking forward to next season, and members hope to be able to process many more pounds of blueberries for sale to schools.

For more information about the KBGA, visit www.blueberrygrowers.com, and for information on how to grow blueberries in Kentucky check out our Highbush Blueberries crop profile located at: http://www.uky.edu/Ag/CCD/introsheets/blueberryintro.pdf. Learn more about Farm-to-School Marketing at http://www.uky.edu/Ag/CCD/marketing/farmtoschool.pdf. The Food Systems Innovation Center helps growers of all sizes; learn more at http://www.uky.edu/fsic.

### Apply for AgGenius Awards

The Kentucky AgGenius Awards program is a cooperative program among the University of Kentucky, Kentucky State University, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, the Kentucky Farmers Market Association, Inc., Central Kentucky Ag Credit, and Kentucky Fruit, Vegetable, Vineyard, Winery, and Organic Associations. The program offers prizes for Kentucky Farmers Markets of the year in three categories, based on market size; for mechanization and production innovations used on the farm by growers selling at farmers markets, on-farm markets, or through CSAs; and to licensed Kentucky wineries for the labeling and packaging of wine. For more information on the program including how to enter, go to http://www.uky.edu/Ag/CCD/2013AgGeniusAwardsProgram.pdf.

### Markets Extending Season

According to Kentucky Department of Agriculture farmers market specialist Sharon Spencer, 146 markets registered with KDA in 2013. Annual gross sales at the markets was around $11.5 million for 2012 if not higher, as not all markets report their sales. Spencer said she expects sales to be around $12 million for 2013, although official numbers won’t be available until early 2014.

Spencer said some consumers in Kentucky will be able to access their markets for a longer period of time than in the past.

“Numerous markets are realizing that to be successful, they need to extend their market season through the winter months,” Spencer said. “Several will continue to operate until the end of the year.”
Farmers market statistics of note:

- Jefferson County has 23 farmers markets.
- Four new Jefferson County markets opened this year, with three more in planning for 2014.
- 101 out of 120 counties in Kentucky have farmers markets.
- Kentucky had 13 new markets in 2013.
- Three new counties have markets: Letcher, Marshall and Todd.
- New markets opened in Adair, Boone (2), Garrard, Jefferson (4), Marion, and Pulaski counties.

“Numerous markets are realizing that to be successful, they need to extend their market season through the winter months. Several will continue to operate until the end of the year.”

Sharon Spencer, KDA

Spencer said that the KDA Farmers Market Manual will be updated for 2014-2015. She also pointed out that all sampling certificates expire on 12/31/2013.

According to the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, there has been a 3.6 percent increase in the number of farmers markets nationwide since last year. To see the increase in farmers markets in the U.S. since 1994, visit the AMS website.

Farm-to-School Cost Template

A tool from Oklahoma State University helps growers who are marketing fruits and vegetables through a state-supported Farm-to-School program compare the costs of various transportation/distribution methods, as well as determine their returns for each unit of produce marketed through the program. The tool, which was developed by Dr. Rodney B. Holcomb and former Graduate Research Assistant Anh Vo of the Robert M. Kerr Food & Agricultural Products Center in Oklahoma State’s Department of Agricultural Economics, also allows growers to examine how sensitive their distribution method is to changes in a number of cost factors and/or a change in market price for their produce.

You can access the template via the Center for Crop Diversification’s budget page at http://www.uky.edu/Ag/CCD/budgets.html.

Growers are asked to provide the appropriate information in the template’s green cells. It will then generate the per-unit costs for transporting produce a stated distance.

Transplant Decision Tool

A new tool produced by the Iowa Organic Farming Association, which was funded by a grant from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, can help farmers make decisions through every step of the transplant producing process. Producing transplants in a controlled environment then planting them in the field allows a farmer to decrease risk and extend the growing season. This online tool offers information regarding options, challenges and costs for every step of this process. To see the tool, go to http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/cool_tools/transplant-production-decision-tool.
New Crop, Marketing Profiles

If you haven’t already checked out our most recent additions to the Center’s Crop and Marketing Profiles pages, take a look at Producer Grants (Crop Profiles) and Regional Food Hubs (Marketing Profiles).

The Producer Grants profile (http://www.uky.edu/Ag/CCD/introsheets/producergrants.pdf) gives growers a list of funding sources that they might be able to tap, along with contact information. The profile gives several tips to potential applicants, such as how to choose which grant or grants to apply for, and how to find an advisor. There are also links to other sources of information.

The Regional Food Hubs profile (http://www.uky.edu/Ag/CCD/marketing/foodhubs.pdf) summarizes the impetus behind food hubs and identifies resources and opportunities for Kentucky farmers interested in exploring the concept. The profile also points farmers to expanded food hubs resources available through the websites of the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service and the Wallace Center of Winrock International.

KSU Small Scale Farm Grants

Kentucky farmers who sell at least $1,000 of produce to the public, but don’t sell more than $250,000, and corporations and cooperatives that serve Kentucky farms are eligible to apply for grants through the Kentucky State University Center for Sustainability of Farms and Families Small Scale Farm Grant Program. Aquatic farmers, certified organic farmers, farmers becoming certified organic, or small scale farmers who want to improve their marketability by adding value to their products are encouraged to apply. Annual funding limits are $5,000 per farmer and $15,000 for organizations. Previously approved projects include a water line to the hoop house, a root cellar, and trailers for keeping meat cool. For more information, visit http://www.kysu.edu/land-Grant/CSFF/ssfarmgrantprogram.htm.

Southern SAWG on the move

The Southern SAWG Practical Tools & Solutions for Sustaining Family Farms Conference will be held January 15-18, 2014, at the Mobile Convention Center in Mobile, AL.

The conference includes intensive short courses, mini courses, and field trips in addition to the main conference program. Topics on the program include Planning Vegetable and Flower Production for Weekly Markets; Direct Marketing Mistakes and How to Correct Them; The Art and Science of Controlling Pesky Weeds of the South; High Tunnel Cropping and Management for Profitability; Accessing Land for Farming: Non-traditional Arrangements; What Do Chefs Want: Increase Your Success at Marketing to Restaurants; and many, many more. Short course topics are Start-Up Organic Vegetable Production and Marketing; High Tunnel Production and Marketing; Managing Your Farm as a Business; and Farm to School 101: Building a Strong Foundation.

For more information on the program and how to register, go to http://ssawg.org/january-2014-conference/.

Subscribe!

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