New Crop Opportunities Newsletter
Fall 2007

SSAWG Conference returning to Louisville next January

The Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group Practical Tools and Solutions for Sustaining Family Farms conference will return to Louisville next year.

The conference, scheduled from January 16th to 19th, will once again be held at the Galt House in downtown Louisville. More than 1,100 people attended the 2007 conference at the same site.

The 2008 conference will begin on Wednesday and conclude on Saturday evening. A variety of whole-day intensive short courses will be offered from Wednesday afternoon through noon on Thursday. Field trips and new hands-on activities will be offered on Thursday afternoon. Two full days of regular conference sessions will start Friday morning and conclude with a banquet dinner on Saturday evening.

The keynote speaker at the Taste of Kentucky dinner will be Joel Salatin of Polyface, Inc., a family owned farm in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley. Salatin will also lead two conference sessions - one on multi-species grazing and one on his marketing strategies.

Another feature of the conference will be a structured conversation on Thursday evening with writer and farmer Wendell Berry.

The full program, including conference sessions, short courses, mini-courses, and field trips will be posted on the SSAWG Web site (http://www.ssawg.org/conference-.html) the first week of October.

The 2007 conference included short courses on such topics as Management Intensive Grazing of Beef; Pastured Turkey Production and Marketing; Organic Vegetable Production and Marketing; Cut Flower Production and Marketing; Pastured Broiler Production and Marketing; Meat Goat Production and Marketing; Seed Saving for Small-scale Producers; and Business Planning for Small-scale Producers.

Please note that anyone who finds the cost of registration for the conference to be prohibitive should apply for a fee waiver. SSAWG typically grants a number of these waivers, so please encourage growers in your counties to apply if cost is a problem.

Kentucky State hosts events

Kentucky State University will host the 2007 Small Farm Biennial Field Day on Thursday, September 20th, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the KSU Research and Demonstration Farm, 1525 Mills Lane, Frankfort. Topics will include Commercial Production of Flowers, Fall Fruiting Blackberries, Sweet Sorghum, High Tunnel Fall Organic Vegetable Production, Pastured Poultry, Organic Production Equipment, Experimental Organic Pesticides, Paddlefish Production, Goats, and more.
The field day celebrates 10 years of the Third Thursday Thing monthly trainings. The event is free, and includes A Celebration of Kentucky State Agricultural Products lunch.

For more information, go to http://www.kysu.edu/land_grant/thursday.cfm, or contact Dr. Marion Simon at (502) 597-6437 or marion.simon@kysu.edu.

On November 13th through 15th, a Small Farm Conference will be held at Kentucky State and the Holiday Inn, Frankfort. For more information, call (502) 597-5905, or contact Dr. Simon.

Southern SARE invites producer and on-farm research proposals

By Sue Blum, University of Georgia

The calls have been released for the 2008 Southern Region SARE Producer Grants and 2008 Southern Region SARE On-Farm Research Grants. Proposals for both programs are due by November 15th, 2007.

Southern SARE Producer Grants are open only to farmers and/or ranchers or producer organizations. Any farmer/rancher or producer organization in the U.S. Southern Region is eligible to apply for the grants, which have maximums of $10,000 for individual producers and $15,000 for producer organizations to be used within two years.

Southern SARE On-Farm Research Grants are open to Extension, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Non-Governmental Organization personnel who work with farmers. Any Extension, NRCS or NGO personnel who work with farmers in the U.S. Southern Region are eligible to apply for a SSARE On-Farm Research Grant. Applicants must work with at least one cooperating farmer and can apply for up to $15,000 to be used within two years. The On-Farm Research proposals will be accepted only through an online submission form. It can be found at http://www.ciids.org/sare/ofrg/

While all SARE proposals must promote agricultural practices that are profitable, environmentally sound, and good for rural communities, these two grant programs have identified nine broad focus areas. Proposals are invited that address: soil health, beneficial insect habitat, alternative crops/livestock, organic agriculture, marketing, sustainable grazing systems, improving the sustainability of existing farming practices, appropriate technology, and agroforestry.

The Southern Region is composed of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Puerto Rico and the U.S.Virgin Islands.

Additional information and instructions for Producer and On-Farm Research Grants can be found in the calls for proposals, which are available at http://www.southernsare.uga.edu/callpage.htm, by sending an e-mail request to info@southernsare.org, or by calling (770) 412-4787.

Giving your SARE proposal an edge

From the Southern Region SARE Web site, http://www.southernsare.uga.edu/

Have you ever wondered what makes a winning proposal? With each call for proposals, Southern SARE includes tips for writing better proposals. However, real life examples make the best illustrations. So to help future applicants write more competitive proposals, as of 2004 instead of just listing the winning proposals SSARE began highlighting some of the qualities that made them stand out in a field of tough competition.

SARE reviewers compare all submissions to the guidelines in the calls for proposals. While all of Southern SARE’s calls for proposals share some requirements such as good organization, appropriate cooperators and effective outreach, each grant opportunity also has some unique requirements concerning the audience or project goals and activities. The more closely a proposal follows the guidelines, the better chance it has of being funded.

2007 producer projects

Ten projects were selected for funding this
year by the Southern SARE Administrative Council because they all demonstrated particular strengths that Southern SARE looks for in Producer Grant projects.

Each of the projects funded this year received a thorough technical review. Then the final review and funding decisions were made by the Southern SARE Administrative Council.

No single project is an example of the perfect project. But there were certain things that the reviewers noted that stood out in this year’s crop of funded projects. Summaries of the proposals can be found at http://www.southernsare.uga.edu/winnerfiles/07winners/2007producerwinners.htm.

The reviewers always look for proposals that are well organized like projects FS07-217 (Low Input No-Till Vegetable Production in the Shenandoah Valley, $9,988), and FS07-219 (Treating Soil Compaction Using Woven Weed Fabric, $9,886). If they can easily read the proposal and clearly see what the producer or producer organization wants to do, and how they are going to do it, the reviewers can more easily understand the goals. Reviewers also look for good project designs and goals as in project FS07-218 (Biodegradable Mulch, $3,457) and FS07-219. Another thing reviewers always look for is exactly what each cooperator will do in the project.

Projects that utilize interactions among pests and predators and so result in fewer off-farm purchases for pesticides, like project FS07-212 (Control of Corn Earworm Using Brazilian Freetailed Bats, $999), meet one of Southern SARE’s funding goals and are always looked for by reviewers.

Reviewers always look to see that the project addresses a serious problem that affects a number of growers or an industry. This was the case for FS07-216 (Season Extension for Winter CSA and Restaurant Sales, $5,829). Strong outreach is also something that is important to a successful producer grant project.

Sometimes, a different approach to an issue will meet the goals in the call for proposals; for example, innovative ways to meet an emerging market demand as in project FS07-220 (Meeting the Needs of Microbreweries with Fresh Hops Production, $9,762). Or finding better ways to utilize farm production waste like in FS07-213 (Recycling Mushroom Spent Compost, $8,027). Reviewers also look for good ways to analyze the data if a project is conducting trials.

So, the reviewers don’t simply look for projects dealing with particular crops or animals. They look for projects that best meet the goals for sustainable agriculture that are listed in the call for proposals.

2007 on-farm research projects

From garlic juice to combat goat parasites to biofuel made from sweet sorghum and airblown cotton gin waste replacing black plastic mulch, if this year’s winners have a common theme it’s that they investigate low-tech approaches to solve persistent problems.

It always helps if a proposal addresses more than one problem such as OS07-033 (Precious Indigenous Woods For Coffee Shade, $14,967), which uses very high-value indigenous trees as the perennial crop for shading coffee. The ecological value of shade-grown coffee is enhanced even more by the low-maintenance requirements of indigenous trees. The economics are beneficial for the farmer because the shade trees serve as a profitable second crop. Reviewers thought OS07-034 (Hydroseeded Mulch as an Alternative to Plastic Mulch Films, $14,000) was worth funding to find out if the seemingly simple idea of using a hydroseeder to blow drifts of cotton gin waste and other agricultural by-products across fields could replace black plastic mulch with all its labor costs and environmental concerns.

Solid planning, a broad base of researchers, a conservative budget and wilt-fighting potential for crops beyond watermelon were mentioned positively in reviews of OS07-035 (On-Farm Use of a Hybrid Vetch Cover Crop to Reduce Fusarium Wilt in Seedless Watermelon, $9,900). Effective collaboration between universities, researchers and farmers helped the turkey tasting project OS07-036 (Sensory Evaluation of Alternative Turkey Genotypes, $14,962) get noticed. A double cover
crop of brassicas and vetch proposed by project OS07-037 (Allelopathic Potential of a Biculture Cover Cropping System Utilizing Fabaceae and Brassicaceae Cover Crops, $12,840) intrigued reviewers for its potential to address hardpan and weeds in more than one cash crop.

Sometimes a proposal gains credibility because a producer brought the problem or a solution to a researcher. That’s how the idea came about for project OS07-038 (On-Farm Biofuel Production from Sweet Sorghum Juice, $14,898), which will examine the feasibility of a farm-based sorghum-biofuel production system. Sound planning to address a common and growing problem brought the herbal solutions proposed in OS0-039 (The Use of Controlled Grazing and two Herbal Treatments to Prevent Parasitism in Sheep and Goats, $14,967) to the attention of reviewers.


New grape resources available

The Price Reports page (http://www.uky.edu/Ag/NewCrops/price.html) on the New Crop Opportunities Center Web site now includes links to a number of sample documents that will be helpful to both buyers and sellers of grapes. These include sample purchase and sale contracts, a sample vineyard lease agreement, and a sample cooperative agreement.

Please note that these documents are offered as sample agreements and make no claim regarding legal authority or completeness. Contracts should always be reviewed by appropriate legal counsel for both buyer and seller.

Women in Agriculture Conference

The 2007 Kentucky Women in Agriculture Conference is scheduled for October 31 through November 2 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Lexington. Three pre-conference workshops will be held on Wednesday, October 31st. The workshops will focus on Kentucky value-added products (registration fee $25), risk-assessed business planning for small producers (registration fee $10), and home-based microprocessing (registration fee $50). Advance registration is required for all workshops, and participation is limited.

The conference will include sessions on Selling to Restaurants and Retailers, Legislative Updates, and a Farm Bill Update. Topics for Friday’s roundtable sessions include High Tunnel Production and Season Extension Techniques, Marketing Goats, MarketMaker.org, and Qualifying for Federal, State, and Local Grants.

For information on registration, please go to http://www.kywomeninag.com/page7.php

Upcoming Events

September 20 - 10th Anniversary Small Farm Field Day, Kentucky State University Farm, 1525 Mills Lane, Frankfort, KY. 40 Workshops on agriculture, home economics, and rural development. For more information, go to http://www.kysu.edu/land_grant/thursday.cfm

October 27 - Kentucky Nut Growers Association Fall Meeting, UK Research and Education Center, Princeton. Contact Joe Masabni 270-365-7541 X 247; e-mail jmasabni@uky.edu


November 13-15 - Small Farm Conference. Kentucky State University/Holiday Inn, Frankfort. Registration fee $25. For more information, call (502) 597-5905, or contact Marion Simon at marion.simon@kysu.edu

January 7-8, 2008 - Kentucky Fruit and Vegetable Conference, Embassy Suites, Lexington. Contact John Strang at 859-257-5685; e-mail: j strang@uky.edu

January 16-19, 2008 - Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group Conference, Galt House, Louisville. For more information, go to http://www.ssawg.org/conference-.html