New Crops Web site gets a face-lift

The New Crop Opportunities Center Web site (http://www.uky.edu/ag/newcrops) has undergone a face-lift. The home page is now more streamlined, with new links added on the left side of the page to help users navigate the site more easily. Links that had only been accessible by scrolling down the home page are now listed in the main navigation area down the left side of all the main pages. Links to price reports and PowerPoint presentations are now included on the left side of the page.

2006 Research Report available

The 2006 New Crop Opportunities Research Report is now available on the Web. This report includes results of horticultural and specialty grain crops research funded by the New Crop Opportunities Center since 2003. You can access the report at http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/pr/pr533/pr533.pdf.

Organic profile series

The first in a series of profiles on organic production is available on the Crop Profiles page (http://www.uky.edu/ag/newcrops/intro.html). The Organic Certification Process profile offers detailed information on what is required for growers to obtain organic certification under USDA National Organic Program regulations. Additional topics you can expect in future profiles include “What is organic production - is it right for your farm?,” “Transitioning to organic crop production,” as well as a list of crops that are considered easy, moderate, or difficult to grow organically in Kentucky.

New Crop, Marketing Profiles added

Asian Vegetables, along with Hot Peppers and Specialty Sweet Peppers, have been added to the list of fact sheets on the New Crop Opportunities Center Crop Profiles Web page. In addition, 32 of our older profiles have been revised in 2006, with more revisions on the way.

Another profile, Using the Internet to Market New Crops, is now available on our Marketing page at http://www.uky.edu/ag/newcrops/marketing.html.

Another round of funding

The New Crop Opportunities Center has received a seventh round of funding through a Special Grant from the USDA. Thirteen research projects have begun as a result of this funding. They are: Developing Optimized Organic Production Systems for Leafy Greens in Kentucky; Optimizing Market Quality of Edamame; Optimizing Pot-In-Pot Nursery Production for Kentucky Growers; Plasticulture Strawberry Production; Development of Organic Blueberry Production and Value-Added Products;
Evaluating the Role of Generalist Predators in Reducing Damage and Disease Transmission by Slugs in Strawberry Crops; Gluten Strength of Soft Red Winter Wheat Lines; Nitrogen Fertility and Performance of Hulless Barley; Breeding Soybean for Edamame and Organic Black Soybean Production; Evaluation of New High-Value Grain Crops for Kentucky Farming; Developing an Accurate Protocol for Evaluating Corn Hybrids for Ethanol Production; A Whole Farm Management Profit and Risk Model; and Nitrogen: A New Crop for Kentucky Corn Producers.

Research ideas?

The New Crop Opportunities Center wants suggestions from Extension agents and growers regarding the types of new crops research that are needed in Kentucky. These suggestions will be passed along to researchers in the College of Agriculture, who in turn will be encouraged to submit grant proposals to the Center for possible funding in 2007. If you or growers in your county see a need for a specific type of research related to new crops, please contact Christy Cassady at (859) 257-1477, newcrops@uky.edu, or complete our online form at http://www.uky.edu/Ag/NewCrops/feedbackform.htm.

Top 10 presentation available

A PowerPoint Presentation on the Top Ten Fruit and Vegetable Crops for Kentucky, put together by Dr. Terry Jones, Department of Horticulture, and Matt Ernst, a former Extension Associate in the Department of Agricultural Economics, is now available on the New Crop Opportunities Center Web site. You can access the presentation at http://www.uky.edu/Ag/NewCrops/presentations.html.

Price reports

Weekly price reports from produce auctions and a selection of farmers’ markets around the state are available at http://www.uky.edu/ag/newcrops/price.html. We are currently reporting prices from as many as 11 farmers’ markets and all four produce auctions (Bath County, Buffalo Trace, Fairview, and Lincoln County).

Southern SAWG Conference in Louisville

The Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group Conference will return to Louisville on January 25-28, 2007. The conference, which was moved to Louisville from New Orleans in 2006 in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, features short courses, educational sessions, field trips, exhibits, and a trade show. It will be held at the Galt House.

The conference program will be announced in October.

The 2006 conference featured sessions on selling cut flowers, organic heirloom tomato production and marketing, grants for producers, meat goat production and marketing, and solar and biodiesel on the farm, among many others. To stay up to date on plans for the 2007 conference, sign up for Southern SAWG’s monthly newsletter at http://www.ssawg.org/newsletter.html.

Kentucky Restaurant Survey

By Tim Woods, Matt Ernst, and Jeffrey Herrington, UK Department of Agricultural Economics

(This is an excerpt from the 2006 Kentucky Restaurant Produce Buyer Survey. The complete survey is available at http://www.uky.edu/ag/newcrops/restaurantsurvey.pdf)

Selling Produce to the Foodservice Sector

The foodservice sector includes restaurants and other institutions providing prepared meals away from home. This market channel has been growing for food consumption in the U.S. in general and for fresh produce in particular. A recent study estimated that 50% of consumer produce sales are through foodservice establishments. Local restaurants provide a ripe market niche for Kentucky farmers selling fresh vegetables and fruit. Though sales to restaurants typically account for less than 15% of a grower’s total sales, prices paid by restaurants are normally stronger than wholesale and auction prices.

The Restaurant Rewards Program

The Kentucky Department of Agriculture and the Partners for Family Farms initiated a program
designed to encourage restaurants to expand their purchases and promotion of locally sourced food products. The program sought to expand on initiatives first begun by the Kentucky State Parks program. The Restaurant Rewards program provided funds to participating restaurants to promote products they were purchasing locally, reimbursing a share of the promotion costs proportional to the amount of product purchased. Part of the intended outcome was to see restaurants and local producers come together more to pursue mutually beneficial marketing opportunities and to build new long term business relationships.

One of the difficulties with developing such a program is coordinating the supply and demand. There were 27 restaurants that participated in the program in 2005. Many of the restaurants and state parks expressed frustration in not being able to secure the necessary supply. Farmers were reluctant to pursue these markets because of the uncertainties of what products were being demanded, a lack of awareness of the interest in local produce, and an underdeveloped distribution network.

One of the objectives of surveying Kentucky restaurant buyers was to provide better information on products and services demanded from local farmers. The survey also explored awareness of the Restaurant Rewards program among restaurateurs. Restaurants that already work to some extent with local producers can take advantage of the program and perhaps expand their promotion and merchandising. Other restaurants that have patrons expressing high interest in local products will have more incentive through this program to seek out sources of local produce that they can promote.

Producers can use this information to help develop a production and marketing plan and consider implementing business practices that will effectively serve their restaurant clients.

Restaurant Demand for Local Produce

A single-mailing survey was sent to 280 restaurants and state resort parks in Kentucky, including the northern Kentucky/Downtown Cincinnati area. Restaurants were selected from the Kentucky AAA restaurant directory. Usable responses were returned by 64 restaurants, a 23% response rate. The survey explored restaurant interest in specific vegetables, fruits, and herbs and sought to identify the barriers restaurants perceive purchasing Kentucky-grown produce.

Restaurant Demographics

Restaurants were asked to classify themselves in one of four categories: American casual, American white tablecloth, Ethnic, and other.

Most of the restaurants (39, 62%) fell in the American casual category. There were 12 responses (18%) from white tablecloth American restaurants and five responses (8%) from ethnic restaurants. Eight (13%) of the restaurants responded to the “other” category.

Demand for Locally Grown Produce

The survey instrument asked respondents to rank crops as being “interested” or “very interested” in purchasing. Interest in fresh vegetables is particularly high. Regular tomatoes, bell peppers, and greens of all kinds were at the top of the list and are widely used among most restaurants. Other items that may be less widely demanded may still have significant promotion opportunities among the restaurants that demand them – either as a season item or as part of a mix of items that can be promoted together.

Upcoming Events

September 28 - All Commodity Field Day, Robinson Station, Highway 15, 3 miles south of Jackson, Ky., 9:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. For more information, go to http://www.ca.uky.edu/robinsonstation.

November 1-3 - Kentucky Women in Agriculture Conference, Clarion Hotel and Conference Center, Louisville. For more information, go to http://www.kywomensag.com/.

January 8-9, 2007 - Kentucky Fruit and Vegetable Conference and Trade Show, Holiday Inn North, Lexington. Contact John Strang (859) 257-5685, or jstrang@uky.edu.