

OPEN FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE
SUNDAY FEBRUARY 5, 2006
Columbia, SC
Mr. Friendly's Cafe

70 Registered Attendees: Approximately 50% farmers, 25% Ag Professionals (NRCS, Clemson University, SC State University), 5% primary education, 20% other (including Community Development Specialists from Clemson Sandhill Research & Education Center)

Lunch prepared by Chef Scott of Mr. Friendly's using locally-grown ingredients donated or provided by Wil-Moore Farms, Sumter Cooperative, Anson Mills, Tony Kleese and Tiffany's Bakery.

INTRODUCTION

Tony Kleese, Executive Director, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association
(www.carolinafarmstewards.org)

- Overview of CFSA activities, local food guide

Geoff Zehnder, Clemson Sustainable Agriculture Program (zehnder@clemson.edu)

- Overview of SARE funding programs for research and training

Emile DeFelice, SC Director, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association
(emile@carolinafarmstewards.org)

- Overview of South Carolina CFSA activities to promote local farms and foods

Hugh Weathers, SC Commissioner of Agriculture (hweathe@scda.sc.gov)

- Presented some statistics on production and consumption of agriculture products in SC that demonstrate a growing need/demand for local products.

DISCUSSION: TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL NEEDS FOR EXTENSION AGENTS, FARMERS AND OTHER AGRICULTURE PROFESSIONALS

General Comments

- General lack of understanding of low input, sustainable agriculture practices. There is a need to expose agents to viable, low input farming operations; demonstrate the profitability of sustainable/organic operations, marketing opportunities.
- Agents need information on the cost-effectiveness of sustainable/organic operations; enterprise budgets, value-added pricing opportunities, success stories
- Much discussion about providing training in on-farm research. For credibility, agents must have reliable, research-based information upon which to make recommendations. Certified organic research facilities are available on Clemson campus, at the Coastal Research Center (Charleston), and at the Edisto Research Center (Blackville)
- To compete for grant funds, there is a need for grant writers (volunteers). Grant-writing workshops would be valuable
- There is a critical need to develop a "skills and expertise" list (farmers and ag professionals in SC available to provide assistance)
- The sustainable/organic community would benefit from collaboration with other conventional agriculture organizations in the state

Recommendations for Training Programs

- On-farm poultry processing
- Grass fed beef production
- Agent tours of profitable farms
- Provide tasting opportunities in combination with training programs; information on nutritional benefits of locally grown and marketed products

Training and Educational Needs (continued)

- There is a need to incorporate topics on sustainability and organic production into Master Gardener programs. The state MG Conference will be held in late March, 2006.
- Training in methods to reduce pesticide inputs

Other Needs

- Tie-in with other state organizations
 - SC Food Policy Council (Emile)
 - SC CROP (Emile)
 - Palmetto Agribusiness Council (Joe James)
 - Farm Bureau
 - Univ. of South Carolina people with expertise in sustainability
- Need for Extension agriculture policy specialist
- Need for Rural Development Specialist (experts in community and rural development are located at the Clemson Sandhill Research and Education Center and on Clemson campus).
- Need for a transition team to assist growers with transition to organic

DISCUSSION: INCREASING THE SUPPLY OF LOCALLY-GROWN AND ORGANIC FOODS IN SOUTH CAROLINA: ASSISTING NEW AND EXISTING FARMING ENTERPRISES

Farm Enterprise Help/Needs

- We must quantify the market for local/organic products (use statistics as incentives)
- Develop an inventory of organic land and keep current
- Enterprise budgets for crops and livestock
- Slaughtering/processing facilities are needed
- Workshops on farm business start-up procedures, development of business plans, would be helpful
- Develop "how to" manual of techniques for small scale farming (e.g. weed control)
- Develop an SC brand and monitor standards
- Identify geographic cluster areas to facilitate infrastructure development (connecting farms to markets, etc)
- Youth outreach programs to create a new generation of farmers
- Develop an organic grain pilot project to stimulate organic grain production (several farmers volunteered land; funding is needed)
- Make contacts with and educate the lending community; create micro-enterprise loan program
- Lobby state and national representatives to enhance programs that help smaller producers (e.g., farm bill)
- Develop "tool kit" for land protection (see resources below)

Potential Resources

- Look at farm incubator programs in other states (e.g., Intervale); also Land Link programs
- SC land preservation programs
- American Farmland Trust (SC office)
- USDA Small Farm/Rural Development Programs

Meeting adjourned at 4:30 PM. Advisory Committee to meet on Feb. 6 to review discussion points and develop plan for 2006 programs.