

OPEN FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE
SUNDAY FEBRUARY 11, 2007
Sandhill Research and Education Center, Columbia, SC

MEETING MINUTES

48 Registered Attendees including farmers, agriculture professionals (NRCS, University Extension, state department of agriculture), university research and education specialists, community development specialists, non-government organization representatives and educators.

Lunch prepared by Chef Vinnie Livoti and Chef John Lindower, American Chefs Federation, Midlands Chapter. Local food ingredients used to prepare lunch provided by Broken Wing Farm (pork), Anson Mills (Carolina Grits), Rawl Farm (greens) and Carolina Plantation (rice).

OPENING SESSION

Welcome and Introduction, *Geoff Zehnder, Clemson Sustainable Agriculture Program*. Overview of the SARE funding mechanism, the SC Model State Program and 2006 activity highlights.

Introduction to the Sandhill REC and Plans for the Sandhill Farmers Market. *Austin Jenkins, Natural Resource Manager, Sandhill Research & Education Center*

Low Country Advisory Group Update; *Gail Rahn, President, CFSA Board of Directors*. Susan Chewing is group chair but was unable to attend. Gail gave an update including the most recent meeting in Beaufort hosted Judy Lessler who gave a presentation on starting and managing a CSA. Topics for future meetings include goat cheese production, small acreage farming, and season extension.

Midlands-Upstate Advisory Group Update; *Bill Welch, Broken Wing Farm*. Bill gave a summary of critical issues identified by the group at their September meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for April 20 from 2-4 PM at the Clemson Student Organic Farm on Clemson campus.

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association Update; *Roland McReynolds, CFSA Executive Director*. Roland gave an update on plans for South Carolina including the Upstate Farm Tour in October, and the CFSA Benefit Dinner to be hosted by Walker Miller and the Happy Berry on October 13. Roland also mentioned discussions about establishing community kitchens and a farm incubator in SC.

The New Farm Bill and Implications for Small-Scale Farms in South Carolina. *Tony Kleese, Eastern Carolina Organics and former CFSA Executive Director*

Fred Broughton with SC Dept. of Agriculture mentioned that funds have been appropriated for a state branding program and an advertising campaign for SC products.

Joe James mentioned a new loan program that may be available to small-scale farmers. Information is available at <http://www.innovativebank.com/site/soho.html>. He also mentioned that Whole Foods has earmarked \$10 million that will be available for below-prime rate loans.

Review of Critical Issues Identified in 2006

Geoff Zehnder, Clemson Sustainable Agriculture Program (please contact Geoff for a listing of critical issues).

DISCUSSION: Critical Issues to Address in 2007

The discussion focused large-scale or “macro” issues and smaller-scale or “micro” issues. Macro issues most likely cannot be addressed solely with state Sustainable Agriculture Program resources (involvement of other groups would be needed).

Macro-Scale Critical Issues

- Promote use of local foods in schools
 - Need for greater advocacy
 - Need for greater supply of locally produced foods
 - Lack of adequate school kitchens to handle and prepare local ingredients

Shawn Jadrnicek mentioned the lack of nutritious foods in schools and the lack of mass transit as barriers to community food security and more sustainable agriculture. Fred Broughton mentioned that some South Carolina transit authorities serve farmer markets in some communities.

- Community food security
 - There is a need to quantify consumption (i.e. how much food is consumed and how much is produced locally)
 - Have representatives attend Governor’s Conference on Tourism (i.e., link sustainable agriculture with related, high-profile programs)
- There is a need for a Land Link Program to source land for new farmers
- There is a need for a farm incubator program to provide beginning farmers with knowledge and resources needed to start a farming operation
- There is a need for a site(s) to demonstrate edible landscape practices

Micro-Scale Critical Issues

- Need for expanded research on sustainable/organic pest management
 - There is a need to identify specific pest problems that need research attention
 - There is a need for a person to coordinate the communication of pest problems needing attention to researchers
 - Develop a crop/livestock specific list-serve
 - Identify 4-5 specific pest problems per year
- Organize and communicate with Farmers Market managers in South Carolina
 - Make Farmer Markets more farmer-friendly (i.e. through education/workshops for managers)
- Youth Education (4-H and FFA)
 - Engage 4-H agents in our organization
 - Assist 4-H agents with curriculum development

Micro Scale Issues (continued)

Investigate development of a state organic label

- Develop solid criteria
- Tie-in with the proposed labeling program for SC products (have special “organic” labels printed for labeling of SC organic products)

- Connect with other like-minded organizations and programs; i.e.
 - South Carolina Food Policy Council (Keith Willoughby is a CFSA representative)
 - The South Carolina Value Added Program
 - County and State Extension Advisory Committees (contact your local extension office for meeting schedules).

- There is a need for additional workshops on organic certification (for farmers and ag professionals)

- There is a general lack of understanding of USDA incentive programs, i.e.
 - NRCS EQUIP, Easement programs
 - Farm Service Agency Farm Conservation Programs
 - Community Assistance Programs

- Members from our group should communicate with county and statewide Extension Advisory Committees (contact your local extension office for contact information and meeting schedules)

This concluded the discussion on Critical Issues.

A vote was taken to choose a topic for a short course to be organized in South Carolina by the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SSAWG) during 2007. The topics in order of preference are:

1. Organic Vegetable Production and Marketing (15)
2. Meat Goat Production and Marketing (9)
3. Pastured Broiler Production and Marketing (7)
4. Cut Flower Production and Marketing (6)
5. Management Intensive Grazing of Beef (3)
6. Pastured Turkey Production and Marketing (0)

Based on the vote SSAWG will conduct a short course on Organic Vegetables, and possibly also on Meat Goat Production. Information on the short course will be forthcoming.

Respectfully submitted
Geoff Zehnder
February 13, 2007

**South Carolina Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Committee Meeting
February 12, 2007, Sandhill Research and Education Center, Columbia, SC
(See Last Page for List of AC Member Attendees)**

Meeting Minutes

9:00 AM meeting begins. The discussion focused on Macro and Micro Issues identified during the Open Forum meeting, and on the Regional Advisory Groups.

Elaine Beardon suggested that we connect with other related, high-profile organizations; i.e. tourism and community development groups in order to better promote our agenda.

Dave Lamie suggested that we track progress of new, organic farmers in order to develop training to address their needs.

Elaine suggested that we track and contact people who buy land in SC and who want to farm, and invite them to participate in our programs.

Fattiyyah Mustafa suggested that we reach out to conventional farmers, some of whom may be interested in transitioning some land for certification.

A suggestion was made to involve extension agents in vocational ag and 4-H curricula.

A discussion on the potential of farmer markets as education/training venues:

- Farmer markets are a logical place to educate
- There is an opportunity at the Greenwood Market Vendors Meeting on May 7, and at the Spartanburg Market this spring
- Farmers could be surveyed on training needs. Extension agents could survey several farmers regarding training needs, offer to do training programs, recruit farmers for training events, and track benefits of training.
- Roland McReynolds suggested that we go to farmers markets to discuss the economic benefits of sustainable/organic farming, advertise training events and recruit farmers, then conduct training workshops in the fall.

A discussion on the need for farm business plan training:

- Roy Hollingsworth has conducted training in farm business planning and is willing to assist. Other people mentioned as qualified to do this training are Toby Boring (farm business management) and Carlos Carpio (both with Clemson). Dave Lamie may also have additional contacts.

Bill Welch mentioned the successful 3rd Thursday Program in Kentucky and suggested that we do a similar program in SC (i.e. farmers invited to a monthly meeting organized around a specific topic to be held at a central location (i.e. Sandhill REC).

Azeez and Fattiyah Mustafa indicated that Sumter Cooperative Farms has grown to approx. 14 farmers and 200-300 acres (certified or in transition). They are involved in a Leadership Program where they mentor beginning farmers.

Bill Welch and Azeez Mustafa attended Organic Certification workshops for farmers in SC last year. The training was unique in that it walked farmers through the farm plan application; most left the training with a completed application.

The last hour of discussion focused on training for agents and farmers and on the regional advisory groups.

Training for Agents

How can we build on the 2006 IOIA Organic Certification and Inspection Training? Ideas included:

- Organize the same training for agents who were unable to attend
- Organize advanced training for agents who attended the initial training
- Survey agents who participated in the training to find out how they are using the training and how it has benefited their careers

Specific Action Items:

- Provide training on current markets for organic products and also on the demand
 - Whole Foods has indicated an interest in assisting with training
 - Should gather some data to validate demand in SC
- Get a current list (including new hires) of all extension agents working in the area of sustainable agriculture and related areas.
- Identify agents who need training
- Survey agents to determine specific topics for future training events and best times for training
- Finish the "Go To" list of expertise

Recommended Topics for Agent Training During 2007

- Organic inputs (soil amendments, pest management, etc)
- Pest management for organic crops
- IOIA Organic Livestock Certification (would require additional funds; i.e. SARE Enhancement Grant funds)
- Market potential for organics (see above). Could include presentations from a successful farmer and Whole Foods representative

Training for Farmers

Recommended Topics for Farmer Training During 2007

- Farm business planning (Roy Hollingsworth)
- Certification training
- Tours of successful farms
 - Obtain list of all certified organic growers in SC (CFSA can provide)

Recommended Procedures for Farmer Training

It was decided that three farmer markets will be used as pilot training venues during 2007. At the initial spring vendor meetings an agent and farmer will give a brief presentation on opportunities for marketing of organic products and on what's involved with organic farming and certification. The agent will focus on "what's involved" and the farmer will give her/his experiences. Easy to understand print information will be given to farmers as well as a schedule of CFSA/Sustainable Ag Program events.

Participating farmers will provide names and contact information, and will complete a survey to identify their interest in organic farming and their training needs (Geoff and Amy will develop draft surveys for review by the teams). The agent/farmer team will maintain contact with as many farmer-vendors as possible to determine their training needs and to invite them to future training events. Specific farmer markets and participants include:

- Low Country: Beaufort Farmers Market
 - Agent: York Glover
 - Farmer: Azeez Mustafa
- Midlands/Upstate: Greenwood
 - Agent: James Hodges
 - Farmer: Louise Powell (tentative; to be confirmed)
- Upstate: Spartanburg
 - Agent: Danny Howard (tentative; to be confirmed)
 - Farmer: Fran Davis

Timeline for the above:

Agent/Farmer teams will give presentations at the initial market vendor meeting in the spring. Farmer-vendors will be “recruited” at this meeting. If possible farmer vendors will be surveyed at the market (either print or oral) to determine their interest in organic farming, and their training needs. Based on input from the farmer vendors, the teams will develop a list of training topics for the fall. Training events will be developed in cooperation with the Regional Advisory Groups and the Advisory Committee (Geoff Zehnder will be contact person for the AC). The teams should maintain monthly contact with their representative regional advisory groups.

Other Recommendations

Dave Lamie recommended that a 2-page informational brochure on sustainable/organic be developed for Community Development agents. He also indicated that a new USDA Rural Innovation Center has been established at Sandhill REC. We should establish contact with this group as they are a resource for grant writing training and other areas related to rural community development.

Advisory Committee meeting adjourned at 1:00 PM

SC Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Committee Members Attending	
Name	Area of Expertise/Interest
Alvarez, Sharon	Vegetables and herbs
Elaine Bearden	Community Development
Bett, Bob	Clemson extension
Boozer, Donna	Honey, organic farming, pastured poultry
Broughton, Fred	SC Dept. of Agric., Direct marketing
Buck, Patrice	Pastured beef, free range pork/lamb, medicinal herbs
Davis, Fran	Vegetables and pastured poultry
Glover, York	Clemson Extension
Hardee, Gene	Agronomist, NRCS
Harris, Shaheed	Sumter Cooperative Farms, organic vegetables
Hollingsworth, Roy	Clemson Extension

James, Joe	Organic farming, minority and limited resource farming, marketing, grant writing, rural economic development
Lamie, Dave	Clemson Institute for Community Development
McReynolds, Roland	CFSA Executive Director
Mustafa, Azeez and Fathiyyah	Sumter Cooperative Farms; organic vegetable farming
Nichols, Amy	Clemson, SC SARE, horse farm
Palmer-Quay, Dianne	Vegetable farming
Rahn, Gail	Aspiring farmer, attorney
Welch, Bill	Broken Wing Farm; poultry, pork, vegetable farming
Zehnder, Geoff	Clemson, SC SARE, organic farming, pest management