

Calhoun Bottoms at the top of sustainable agriculture; Clemson looking for volunteers to chart the future

Clemson's founder would beam with pride knowing the campus carved from his Fort Hill plantation now hosts a successful working model of sustainable agriculture. This model, known as the Calhoun Field Student Organic Farm, needs interested individuals to help chart the future of the land -- as Thomas Green Clemson did when he bequeathed Fort Hill and other assets to establish an agricultural college.

The Calhoun Field Student Organic Farm (SOF), located in what is often called "the bottoms" was established in 2001 as an experiential learning environment for research and demonstration of farming systems and strategies. The primary focus has been on practices that are ecologically, economically and socially sustainable and that will strengthen local food systems.

Professor Geoff Zehnder, coordinator of sustainable agriculture programs, is looking for those interested in using the Calhoun Field Student Organic Farm for research, teaching or outreach activities. He is also organizing a development team of people dedicated to the idea of sustainability.

"It is our goal that the future of the Student Organic Farm project will be determined by those most interested in the project mission," said Zehnder. "With its rapid growth, this project aims to expand partnerships with individuals and organizations in the region, but most particularly with those in our local community and within the university."

Five of the 20 total acres are currently under cultivation and are certified organic, dedicated to intensive production of high-value seasonal vegetables, culinary herbs and cut flowers. These crops are sold through the Calhoun Field Laboratory's season-subscription produce program (with weekly pick-ups), at the Pendleton Farmer's Market (on the square in Pendleton, S.C. on Thursday afternoons), and online through the Student Organic Farm's Web store. The SOF also offers research opportunities for graduate students, and hands-on experience in organic production systems and sustainable practice to graduate and undergraduate students of any discipline.

The SOF is also a resource for hands-on learning in a variety of subject areas related to agriculture and horticulture. Opportunities for experiential learning also exist in agriculture education, agri-tourism, architecture, biology, biosystems engineering, business/marketing, construction science, ecology, environmental toxicology, food science and nutrition, landscape architecture, natural resources management and waste management.

A meeting of interested individuals will be held this fall:

-- to identify current needs or challenges that could be addressed through SOF-related activities or programs; and

-- to create an Student Organic Farm Advisory Committee of dedicated individuals from a wide range of disciplines who will be involved with future planning.

If you would like to participate in this process of inquiry and planning for the Student Organic Farm program, contact:

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