

In a release from Aimee Colf, Assistant Horticulture and Forestry Agent: The demand for locally grown food continues to grow despite a weak economy. Direct sales from farms to consumers grew 215% from 1992-2007. The average farmer in NC is 57 years old, and looking forward to retirement. Quite often people come to Cooperative Extension and say "I have some land that I want to do something with... but I don't know what. Can you tell me what I can grow and make some money?"

This is an open-ended question, because a successful agricultural venture really depends on the operator, resources (time, equipment, finances), and marketing. Any good business starts out with a good plan and lots of research. More and more families are looking at ways to supplement their incomes and put their land into something productive. It's relatively fun and easy to produce something but establishing a constant and reliable market for your product is where many new farms struggle.

Sandhills Farm School is taught by NC State University specialists and designed to help beginning farmers and farms in transition as they explore their farming options. It is a 7-month educational program that trains beginning and transitioning farmers to operate successful small-scale sustainable farms. This class targets those with serious interests in creating a farm business. It offers seven business planning seminars, which will give farmers the tools to create a viable business plan. Each business session will focus on different areas of writing a business plan including financial management and effective marketing strategies. The school also includes seven, day-long field trips at different working farms, led by innovative experienced farmers, Cooperative Extension agents, and agricultural professionals.

Participants will learn about low-cost sustainable farming methods, from fruits, vegetables, cows, pigs, poultry, goats, specialty crops and agritourism. Business classes will meet the third Thursday of the month beginning February 19 from 6-9pm at the Richmond County Extension Center at 123 Caroline St., Rockingham, NC 28379. The farm field days will be the 4th Tuesday of the month from 9am-3pm. Farm field days will take place at various locations throughout the Sandhills region. Class size is limited so register early. Registration deadline is January 30th, one person: \$250, two people: \$400, Visit SandhillsFS2015.eventbrite.com to register online. Interested individuals can learn more about Sandhills Farm School at anson.ces.ncsu.edu/events/ or contact Extension agent, Aimee Colf, at 704-694-2415.

Piedmont Farm School is also available starting January 8th at the Rowan County Cooperative Extension office at 2727 Old Concord Rd., Salisbury, NC 28147. Contact Extension Agent, Danelle Cutting, at 704-216-8970 for availability and details.

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Extension Notes Cleaning Tips for Kitchen Safety

There is a common myth that lemon juice and salt will clean and sanitize a cutting board. Well...not so. Sanitizing is the process of reducing the number of microorganisms that are on a properly cleaned surface to a safe level to reduce the risk of food-borne illness. Lemon juice and salt will not do this.

The most effective way to sanitize a cutting board as well as other kitchen surfaces is with a diluted bleach and water solution. To clean and sanitize your cutting board, first wash it with hot water and soap. Then sanitize it by using a diluted chlorine bleach solution - just 1 tablespoon unscented liquid bleach (not more) to 1 gallon of water. Let the bleach solution stand on the surface for a few minutes, then rinse and blot dry with clean paper towels.

It is important to clean and disinfect. Just because a surface looks clean, does not mean it is free of disease-causing bacteria! In fact, bacteria can spread throughout the kitchen and get on hands, cutting boards, knives, and countertops. Frequent cleaning can keep that from happening. To keep your whole kitchen clean and safe from food-borne pathogens, take these steps.

- Before preparing, serving or eating food, wash your hands with soap and warm water, scrubbing for 10-15 seconds.
- Wash fresh vegetables and fruits thoroughly.
- Clean and disinfect cutting boards and counter tops.
- After handling raw meat, fish or poultry, use paper towels to wipe up juices. Discard the paper towels, then clean and disinfect any soiled surfaces, such as cutting boards and countertops. Remember, bleach, not lemon juice.
- After handling raw meat, wash your hands as described earlier. Disinfect dishcloths and sponges used to wipe up raw meat, fish or poultry. Thoroughly wash forks, knives, plates, platters and containers.
- Frequently, launder dishcloths and sponges. Clean and disinfect sinks and often-touched kitchen surfaces, like the handles on refrigerators, dishwashers, ovens, microwaves, faucets, drawers and cupboards.
- Clean the insides of refrigerators and microwave ovens. And remember, to disinfect, use liquid household bleach or a disinfectant (antibacterial) kitchen cleaner. Read and follow label directions.
- And note that only products that display an EPA registration number on the label are approved disinfectants or sanitizers.

By Janine B. Rywak, County Extension Director

Sanitary Sewer Overflows on January 12

The Town of Wadesboro experienced two sewer overflows on January 12. Approximately 3,000 gallons of sewage flowed into Brush Creek. The location of that overflow was Olde Towne Estates. The cause of the overflow was a possible blockage and the heavy flows from the Burns Street pump station.

Approximately 2,000 gallons of sewage spilled into Lamphley Branch. The cause for the spill was heavy rain.

The Division of Water Quality in Fayetteville has been notified about the spills. For further information please contact Nick Griffin at 704-694-5171.

Sign Up at Field Dreams for Spring Season

Sign up now for spring season at Field of Dreams in Polkton through March 8. Spring sports include:

- Tee ball (ages 4-6) cost \$30 until February 22, then \$45
- Baseball (ages 7-12) cost \$55 until February 22, then \$70
- Softball (ages 7-18) cost \$55 until February 22, then \$70

A spring sign up day to be held at the Field of Dreams will take place on Saturday, February 22, from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. Or you may sign up online at www.sportsmanager.us/aaya.htm. Let's play ball!

Free Tax Assistance Available March 4 & April 1

Free income tax assistance will be available for Anson County residents sixty years of age or older of low or moderate income needing help in preparing their income tax returns through a program sponsored by AARP and Grace Senior Center. Volunteer counselors trained in cooperation with the IRS will be at Grace Senior Center on March 4 and April 1. Free assistance is designed to help taxpayers fill out forms 1040EZ, 1040A, 1040 and the North Carolina return.

Persons using the service should bring this year tax package, age and earnings statements (forms W-2) received from employers, interest statements from banks (form 1099-INT), a copy of last year tax return and any other relevant information concerning income and expenses. Electronic filing of returns will be available.

If you are interested call Grace Senior Center to register and for additional information at 704-694-6616.

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