After over a yearlong vacancy, we are pleased to announce that the position of Watauga County Extension Director has been filled. Jim Hamilton has accepted the position.

Hamilton is no stranger to Watauga County and Cooperative Extension as he worked previously as the Christmas Tree Agent for almost three years before taking a faculty position at Alabama A&M University in 2005. However, Hamilton says his love of the mountains brought him back to western North Carolina after just a year. Jim has been at Haywood Community College since 2006 serving as the college’s Forestry Program Coordinator and Grant Writer. He was recently awarded the 2009 Master Teacher Award for the college.

Hamilton has worn many hats and brings experience from a diverse background to his new position as County Extension Director. He received a Bachelor’s degree from the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, in Natural Resources and Anthropology and earned a Master’s degree from Auburn University and a doctorate from North Carolina State University in Forestry.

His experience in the Peace Corps in South America led him to his career in education and Extension. As a Peace Corps Volunteer and Trainer, he worked on various outreach projects such as beekeeping, small tree nursery, soil conservation methods, crop diversification, and pesticide safety. As a worker-training consultant with the Michigan Cooperative Extension, NC Cooperative Extension, and the Southern Coastal Agromedicine Center, he expanded an outreach model for Integrated Pest Management and pesticide/farm safety education for the Christmas tree industry. While at Haywood Community College, Hamilton gained proficiency in online course development and collaborated with the National Agroforestry Center to edit and develop a handbook and online training course for landowners and natural resource professionals interested in silvopasture -- a management practice combining timber with livestock production.

Hamilton says he is looking forward to being back in the Boone office and serving Watauga County as its new Extension Director. Having worked with most of the current staff, he feels welcome coming into the position. He and his wife, Silvi, have two sons, Christian and Lucas. In his spare time, you can find Hamilton enjoying the outdoors with his boys or on the racquetball court.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Jim to our office and county.
For the last couple of years, the Farm City Planning Committee has had the idea of creating a more family-oriented, on-the-farm, picnic sort of atmosphere for the Farm City Banquet. That was enacted this year with a change of venue.

The 54th annual Farm City Celebration was held on Saturday, August 15 at the Blair Farm. The event was moved to an earlier date in the year so it could be outdoors and include activities and exhibits for families in addition to the traditional awards and banquet. Exhibits included farm animals, beekeepers, Christmas tree growers and more. During the awards ceremony, individuals and groups were recognized for their involvement in agriculture and the community.

It was a successful event, which received positive feedback. The committee would like to try the new venue for a year or two more and see how it grows.

**EXTENSION NEWS CORNER**

**FARM-CITY Celebration**

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**WHAT 40 YEARS AS A COUNTRY VET WILL TEACH YOU**

by Robert McCrory, DVM

- A cull is a cull no matter what the papers say. Too many animals of all types are kept simply because they are registered.
- Make excuses for a heifer and you will have to apologize for the herd. To make progress you must subtract as well as add.
- The time to sell is when someone wants to buy. It's better to sell a good one too high than a poor one too cheap.
- A steer an inch longer is an inch heavier. A steer an inch taller is an inch taller.
- If you pick over a man's herd and select his biggest, he will be happy.
- The herdsman will tell you which animal is best if you lead him right.
- Check the performance and production history of a registered animal before you look at the animal.
- Energy is the most lacking nutrient. Don't work yourself to death paying for convenience.
- It's hard to cut hay too early.
- Too much hay is seldom a problem.
- All hay is not created equal.
- Buying hay by the bale is like buying bulls by color.
- Get pasture before you get animals.
- Reduce the herd to fit your feed supply.
- The time to fatten a cow is before she gets too poor.
- A thin cow may be a credit to her and a discredit to you.
- Enter winter with flesh on the cow and cover on the pasture. Stockpiled forage is as good as stored hay.
- Learning about the cattle business from a cow trader is like learning about poker from a gambler.
- If she has pones she should be gone.
- If it is not convenient, it won't get done.
- Filter material and rock to prevent mud are good long-term investments.
- A $6.00 bucket is better than a $10,000 Quarter Horse for rounding up cattle.
- Long feet and corns should be treated with a ride in the stock trailer.
- Cattle handling equipment is sometimes made for ease of construction and not for safety and efficient use.
- If your customer fails to make money on your cattle so will you.
- You can afford to pay for a bull what five cows cost.
- Lease a good bull or co-op with a neighbor but by all means get the best bull possible.
- A feedlot grain-tested bull will never live long enough to overcome the bad effects of the experience.
- A cheap bull is the most expensive animal on the place.
- Everyone brags on your cattle to your face.
- Aged cows may be a good way to get into some good animals.
- Your neighbor won't buy from you because it infer that your animals are better than his.
- Eternal vigilance is the price of AI.
- The ugliest cow is always the best producer - otherwise you would have sold her.
- People with thin cattle worry about fundering. People with obese animals claim they never feed them.
- Inconvenience has lost many an animal.
- The owning of one cow requires the presence of a pen and head catcher.
- The smaller heifer typically calves okay and the big old cow dies in labor.
- The eye of the master fatteneth the cattle. It's all about skill.
- The falling tree always hits the nearest fence.
- Build a bull proof fence then add a hot wire on both sides. Good fences make good neighbors. Everybody has an SOB for a neighbor. Even your neighbor!
- Sale barns are for selling, not buying.
- A good name is better to have than great riches. Riches can be regained but not a good name.
- Never deal with a person who thinks everyone else is a crook.
- The best thing about the cow business is the people you will meet. Bad cow people don't last long.
- Job grazing saves bush hogging fuel and labor and improves the pasture.
- Some people feel guilty if they are not working themselves to death in the cattle business. The smart ones let the cows do the work.

(Courtesy of The Stockman GrassFarmer, The Grazer’s Edge, October, 2009, Volume 10, #9)

For a free issue of The Stock GrassFarmer call 1-800-748-9808.
Organic Gardening 101

The next Organic Gardening 101 series will be held June 21–24, 2010, 9 A.M. until 12:30 P.M. The series is designed for beginning gardeners or those who would like to switch to organic methods. Topics include garden planning, seed starting, companion planting, how to attract beneficial bugs, pest management, soil tests and amendments, composting and vermi-composting, growing herbs, landscape planning and edible landscaping. Classes will be held at the ASU Sustainable Development Farm in Valois, N.C. Cost is $55 per day and all proceeds will be turned out to responsibly dispose of unused pharmaceuticals.

OPERATION MEDICINE CABINET A HUGE SUCCESS!

Continued On Next Page

Beginning November 1, the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services will no longer routinely mail out paper copies of agronomic reports. This policy will apply to reports for soil tests and nutrient analysis, as well as plant tissue, waste, and feed. An electronic report will be provided to the customer by the lab. All old and new labs provide electronic reports. These reports are readily available through the NCA&CS Agronomic Division website, www.ncags.gov/agnorm.htm.

“By making the switch to electronic-only reports, the NCA&CS will work within its limited budget to save significantly on postage, printing and paper costs,” said Dr. Garrett, NCA&CS chief. “Districts of the Agronomic Division. “Although environmental and fiscal benefits are driving this change, clients should also see a significant improvement in plan quality and efficiency. Online reports are available to clients faster than mailed reports and make record keeping much easier.”

Eventually, the NCA&CS would like to notify all clients via e-mail when their reports are available online. Clients who provide a valid e-mail address on their sample information form or who register an e-mail address with the Agronomic Division online, can receive electronic notification. In the interim, all other clients will receive a postcard with instructions on how to find their reports.

Clients who visit the Agronomic Division home page should select the “Find Your Report” link from the left-column navigation bar. This link takes visitors into the division’s laboratory information site, known as PALS. For most people, using the “Quick Report Search” link is the most convenient way to access reports. Basic instructions are outlined at www.ncaerg.gov/agnorm/epsearch.htm. Anyone who has difficulty using the PALS report-search feature or has questions can call (919) 733-2665 for assistance during regular weekday office hours.

Financial Opportunities for North Carolina’s Forest Landowners

by Robert Barton, Ph.D., Department Extension Leader and Associate Professor, Department of Forestry and Environmental Resources, NC State University.

This past year, North Carolina woodland owners became eligible to participate in expanded cost share programs focusing on woodland management practices that protect water quality from non-point pollutants; conserve ground & surface water resources; improve forest health and biodiversity; and reduce soil erosion from agricultural and forest lands. This opportunity for woodland owners is the result of the “Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008”, also known as the 2008 Farm bill.

Under the Farm bill two main working lands conservation programs, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), were expanded to include forestry. These programs provide cost-share assistance to landowners whose future plans or goals for their property include:

• Conserving soil and water resources
• Establishing wildlife habitat
• Sustaining your woodlands
• Implementing your forest management plan

These programs are administered by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and provide government funds to share the cost of implementing your woodland management plan. To participate in these programs, landowners will need to sign up with US Department of Agriculture NRCS, have a farm number which can be obtained from the Farm Service Agency (FSA), and have a management plan. To find the nearest office, visit the following websites:

• NRCS offices in NC: www.nc.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/directory
• FSA offices in NC: www.offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app/state=nc&agency=fsa

The management plan is a site-specific plan that is prepared by a professional reponsible for installing the proposed practices as approved by NRCS. The plan outlines the values and goals a woodland owner has for their property and how they will manage the woodlands for long-term sustainability. These values can include wildlife, recreation, aesthetics, timber, watershed protection, and others. To be eligible for NRCS cost-share programs, you will need to ensure that your current plan includes specific information on forest management, conservation practices, and an updated map that clearly indicates locations of proposed cost-share practices. Work with your forester and local NRCS office to ensure your plan has all necessary information. To get assistance with plan development, contact your local NRCS office, NC Division of Forest Resources, The Wildlife Resource Commission, or seek assistance from a professional consulting forester or industry forester.

To learn more about these programs and other opportunities related to the Farm bill, contact the following agencies: the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), both of which are conveniently located at 971 West King Street in Boone, NC.

NCA&CS Announces Online Soil Tests and Agronomic Reports

Plants to Enjoy This Winter

Winter is often considered a time of blandness in the landscape; however, there are many plant species that provide wonderful visual appeal during the winter months. Take for example the plant known as Winterberry, Ilex verticillata, which is a deciduous holly that develops bright red berries along the stems in the fall. Berries persist for many months and can provide trees and shrubs with food for hungry birds during the depths of winter. Winterberry usually grows to a height and width of eight feet and has a suckering habit that is best highlighted in mass plantings. At home in both full sun and partial shade, Winterberry does best in moist to wet soils though can tolerate a range of soil conditions. Like all hollies, at least one male plant is needed to produce fruit on female plants. During the growing season, it provides nectar for hummingbirds and is a host plant for butterfly larvae.

Red Twig Dogwood, Cornus sericea, is also an attractive shrub plant for winter gardens. Also known as Red Stem or Red Oser Dogwood, this plant species displays bare, bright red stems in the winter on juvenile branches. To maintain the intensity of the red coloration, mature plants are often pruned back to the ground in early spring and young plants are pruned every other year. Red Twig Dogwoods reach a mature height similar to that of Winterberry and are a great choice for forming masses on banks, as they also have a suckering habit.

Two Hawthorne species, Washington Hawthorne (Crataegus phaenopyrum) and Winter King Green Hawthorne (Crataegus viridis ‘Winter King’) both provide an attractive branch architecture enhanced by glossy red fruits that persist all winter long. Both species grow to a mature height of about 20 feet with a similar width. On older stems, the branches of ‘Winter King’ exfoliate and provide a medley of muted coloration. Hawthornes are also an important nectar plant for both butterflies and pollinators and are a host plant for butterfly larvae. They thrive in moist soils and can adapt to both full sun to partly shade. Cinnamom bark Dogwood (Cornus sericea), also called Mountain Pepperbush, is a great choice for a small showy shrub. Reaching a mature height of 12-20 feet tall, Cinnamom bark Dogwood gets the name from the peeling bark that reveals mottled coloration as the inner bark becomes visible. Through pruning, this species can be trained into a shrub or tree-like form. Adaptable to both sun and shade, this plant can be at home as an understory plant under larger trees or as a focal point in the open landscape. Most soils with good drainage are ideal, but drier soil conditions are tolerated. Cathrises are excellent for supporting wildlife, as they provide nectar for bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds, and the seeds are a good food source for birds.

Keep an eye out for these visually exciting plant species during the cold winter months, and consider adding one or more of these species to your landscape for next year.

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Winterberry, Ilex verticillata

In the spring this shrub provides nectar for hummingbirds and a host plant for butterflies and butterflies. They thrive in moist soils and can adapt to both full sun to partly shade. Cinnamom bark Dogwood (Cornus sericea), also called Mountain Pepperbush, is a great choice for a small showy shrub. Reaching a mature height of 12-20 feet tall, Cinnamom bark Dogwood gets the name from the peeling bark that reveals mottled coloration as the inner bark becomes visible. Through pruning, this species can be trained into a shrub or tree-like form. Adaptable to both sun and shade, this plant can be at home as an understory plant under larger trees or as a focal point in the open landscape. Most soils with good drainage are ideal, but drier soil conditions are tolerated. Cathrises are excellent for supporting wildlife, as they provide nectar for bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds, and the seeds are a good food source for birds.

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I am often asked this time of year, “How much hay do I need to feed?” Beef cows need a sufficient amount of long stem hay to stimulate rumen function and salivation. Salivation is critical to maintaining the rumen at the correct pH. A minimum of 3 pounds of hay per cow per day is needed.

Back when small, square bales were commonly fed, limiting intake was easy. Knowing the weight of the bales, it was simple to figure the cow’s needs and then feed the correct amount of hay by weight. With the large bales of hay fed today, limiting hay intake is more difficult. The first step is to know how much the bales you are feeding weigh. The guy who sold the baler told you the maximum weight the baler can manage, but this isn’t necessarily the weight of your bales. Rolls vary in weight due to forage variety, moisture, and the humidity when rolled. It is a good idea to weigh your bales when you start to feed; it is best to weigh a couple of bales and calculate an average.

The number one way to limit hay intake is to feed with a bale processor that unrolls or delivers a precise amount of feed. These machines are very expensive and are not practical except for the largest operations. Unrolling hay is the second most precise method we have to limit hay. This sounds easy enough; just unroll the amount of hay you wish to feed. This is not as easy as it sounds; let’s see at the math. In a 5 ft. diameter bale, 1/3 of the hay is in the outer 4 inches and 1/2 of the hay in the bale is in the outer 8 inches. For example, you have a 5 x 5 bale that weighs 1,000 lbs.

and you have 50 cows. You want to feed those cows 10 lbs. of hay each, so you need to feed 1/2 of the bale. On the first day, you roll out the outer 8 inches of the bale. On the second day, you roll out the rest. Wasteage is still a factor with unrolling. Cows and calves will trample and soil about 5 to 10 percent of the hay unrolled. In high winds, you may be feeding the neighbor’s cows. Losses due to waste are increased in wet or snowy conditions.

Another method is by limiting access to hay for only a few hours per day, then moving cattle to an adjacent pasture. This method is extremely effective for smaller herds. Temporary fences can be used to limit access to the hay feeding area if they are maintained with an adequate charge.

Recent research from the University of Illinois indicates that as little as three hours of access is needed with high quality hay, and six to nine hours of access is needed for medium quality hays to achieve cow performance similar to unlimited access. In this particular research, hay was the only feed offered to these grazing cows. If hay is to be stretched by feeding by-products, then feeding times may be sufficient. It is important that there are enough feeding locations so all cows can eat at the same time. Therefore, multiple hay bale feeders may be needed. However, with the price of hay, you can afford to buy a couple of new hay feeders.

One very simple method that does not save as much hay as other methods but allows most producers to achieve some reduction in hay usage is called two on one off. Cows are fed all the hay they want for two days, and then hay feeding is skipped on the third day. Cows should be fed any supplemental feed as normally fed on the skipped day. Skipping a day of hay feeding if supplements such as corn gluten meal will not compromise cow performance. Cows will have sufficient rumen fill to continue to have cud to chew and produce extra heat for fermentation on the day without hay. It takes 48 to 72 hours for the rumen to empty if cattle receive no feed. It is critical that with all of these methods, consideration is given for weather conditions. If a week of extremely cold weather is predicted, then limiting hay intake may not be the best idea. During these extreme periods, using more hay will provide additional nutrients needed by the cattle. In addition, cow body condition should be monitored throughout the winter and feeding practices adjusted to maintain a body condition score of 5 to 6.

There are several affordable feeds that can help stretch hay supplies or improve nutrition while feeding hay that may have been put up after being rained on. The first starting point is to take a forage sample. (Information from “Limiting Hay Intake by Cows”, Dr. John B. Hall, Extension Beef Specialist, VA Tech)
WINTER IS THE TIME TO PRUNE APPLE TREES, BLUEBERRIES, AND OTHER FRUITS

If you have plantings of apples, blueberries, and other types of fruits, winter can be nearly as busy as the growing season, as dormant-season pruning is essential for the long-term health of many fruit-bearing plants. Winter pruning removes dead, diseased, and damaged tissue, and channels the plant’s new growth into productive patterns. But many people find winter pruning intimidating. What is too much? What is too little? Cooperative Extension has numerous printed and online resources about winter-pruning fruit trees and shrubs available to those who want to learn on their own. But many growers find that a hands-on learning session communicates much more. In the past, fall sessions on winter pruning have been very successful in assisting growers toward better management of their own orchards. During 2010, Cooperative Extension is planning two winter pruning workshops: one for blueberries and one for apples (plus other pome fruits) and peaches (plus other stone fruits).

The Blueberry Pruning Workshop will be held at the farm of Wayland Cox, just east of Jefferson, NC (less than an hour from Boone) on Thursday, February 4, 2010. The workshop will be led by NCSU Specialist Bill Cline, with assistance from Watauga County Extension Agent Meghan Baker, Ashe County Extension Agent Della Deal, and Allegheny Extension Agent Richard Boylan. The Apple & Peach Pruning Workshop will be held at the small orchard of Jake Riddles’ just outside of West Jefferson, NC, on Tuesday, February 23, 2010. It will be led by Area Extension Agent Richard Boylan, Ashe County Extension Agent Della Deal, and Watauga County Extension Agent Meghan Baker.

These workshops will be a great way to learn first-hand the pruning techniques that will keep your own fruit plantings healthy and productive. Printed resources will be available at each workshop to take home, but most importantly, each workshop will offer the chance to try some pruning on-site, so plan to bring your pruning tools, bring your pruners.

For the exact times, dates, and locations of these workshops, contact any of the above-listed agents at either the Watauga County Extension Center (828) 264-3061 or the Ashe County Extension Center (336) 846-5850.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE:
For The Health of Small Farms and Your Family

Over the last 20 years, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has become a popular way for consumers to buy local, seasonal food directly from a farmer. Here are the basics: a farmer offers a certain number of “shares” to the public. Typically the share consists of a box of vegetables, but other farm products may be included. Interested consumers purchase a share (a “membership” or a “subscription”) and, in return, receive a box of seasonal produce each week throughout the farming season. This arrangement creates several rewards for both the farmer and the consumer.

Advantages for consumers:
- Eat ultra-fresh food, with all the flavor and vitamin benefits
- Get exposed to new vegetables and new ways of cooking
- Usually get to visit the farm at least once a season
- Find that kids typically favor food from “their” farm - even veggies they’ve never been known to eat
- Develop a relationship with the farmer who grows their food, and learn more about how food is grown

It’s a simple enough idea, but its impact has been profound. This model was very successful in our community for 2009. There are currently around eight community supported agriculture projects available to Watauga citizens. The largest CSA is a multi-farm model and was supported by a grant from the N.C. Rural Center. It provided 70 families with fresh produce for 20 weeks from more than 14 area farms. They hope to double in size in 2010. Some growers are starting CSA projects for the first time in 2010. For more information about CSA projects, contact the Extension office at 264-3061.

National Demand Up For Fresh Produce, But N.C. Consumption Falls Short

Despite the current economic conditions and rising costs, consumers are still very interested in fresh fruits. In a 2009 Fresh Trends study conducted by The Packer, a business newspaper for the produce industry, one-third of the consumers who participated said they bought more fresh produce this year than they did a year ago. Forty percent of the respondents said their produce purchasing habits remained the same last year, and one-third said they bought more whole produce than fresh-cut in the past 12 months.

In the 2008 Produce Department Annual Review conducted by Produce Marketing Association, produce sales were reported to have increased 4.6 percent during the marketing year ending July 26, 2008. Fresh fruit sales accounted for 45.5 percent of these sales, up from 44.8 percent the previous year. Berries led fruit sales, contributing 3.8 percent of the total. Apples made up 8.8 percent, bananas accounted for 5.8 percent and grapes contributed 5.6 percent. Together these fruits represented nearly 25 percent of the total produce sales.

What is driving this increase in fresh fruit sales?

HEALTH CONCERNS HELP INCREASE FRUIT CONSUMPTION

First and foremost, health concerns have driven demand for fruits as consumers look for healthier and more nutritious options for their diets. With the increased media attention on obesity and associated health problems, consumers are trying to eat healthier foods, placing an increased focus on items such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Health is expected to continue to be a growing factor in consumer buying decisions.

As reported in Healthy Eating Trends 2009, Steve Lutz, vice president for the Perkinsville Group, West Dundee, Ill., said, “Consumers seem to understand that healthy eating promotes healthy aging. So as consumers age, healthy eating increases in importance.” Fresh fruits and vegetables receive credit from consumers for being unprocessed and natural, Lutz said, and that increases their health appeal.

The demand for berries has especially been influenced by increased consumer awareness of their health benefits because of the many vitamins, minerals, fiber and antioxidants contained in the fruits. Berries are also a quick and healthy snack option, as the only preparation needed is to wash the fruit and eat it. In the United States, fresh blueberry consumption was up 65 percent in 2007, fresh raspberry consumption was up nearly 300 percent and fresh strawberry demand was up 45 percent from 2001 to 2008.

Consumers believe a food is healthy based on these factors: color, seasonality and whether the product is organic, raw and local, according to Healthy Eating Trends 2009. This study also suggests that consumers view farmers markets, health food stores and specialty stores as healthier sources for food than grocery stores and supermarkets.
Some consumers believe that it is important to buy locally grown produce or foods produced in a sustainable environment. The growing trend to eat locally has led to a rising consumer group known as “locavores,” or those consumers who focus on purchasing, preparing and consuming foods grown locally. Locavores believe that food grown locally will be fresher and therefore more nutritious than food shipped from distant locations. This trend has induced consumers to shop at farmers markets and local farm stands in increasing numbers. Direct-to-consumer sales increased 104.7 percent from 1997 to 2007, while total agricultural sales grew 47.6 percent, according to Facts on Direct-to-Consumer Food Marketing, May 2009, from the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service. In addition to recognizing the health benefits associated with buying locally grown produce, some advocates, such as Stacy Miller, executive director of the Farmers Market Coalition in Martinsburg, W.V., suggest that consumers are buying more produce from direct markets because “there’s accountability in knowing where your foods come from … some inherent, built-in credibility and traceability.”

THE DEMOGRAPHIC SHAKEDOWN

Demographics also make a major impact on fresh fruit consumption. Adults aged 45 to 54 years spend the most money on fresh fruits, as do consumers in the middle- and upper-income levels, according to Demographics of Consumer Food Spending, 2008. In addition, females typically purchase more fruits than men. Consumers of Asian backgrounds spend the most on fresh fruits, whereas Hispanic spend the second highest amount. Couples with children usually buy more than couples without kids, and consumers who are college graduates spend significantly more than those without a four-year college degree.

Consumers in households with children are more likely to buy apples, grapes and peaches than those without kids; 93 percent to 86 percent, 84 percent to 72 percent, and 63 percent to 51 percent, respectively, according to 2009 Fresh Trends. Income level is a factor in most berry purchases; however, with the likelihood of a purchase strongly increasing as household income rises. The Fresh Trends study also showed that shoppers in the highest income bracket ($100,000+ comprised the group most likely to buy blackberries, blueberries, raspberries and strawberries while those in the lower income brackets were least likely to buy. In addition, female shoppers were more likely to buy strawberries, at 74 percent, and male shoppers, at 59 percent.

Not surprisingly, older consumers are normally the most receptive to a “healthy eating” message and women place more importance on the consumption of fresh fruits than men and are more likely to adjust their eating habits accordingly, as reported in Meeting Fruit and Vegetable Targets, Datamonitor, June 2005.

N.C. TAKE CONTROL

To help families deal with the economic downturn, North Carolina Cooperative Extension has developed this website with fact sheets on how to cope with personal and financial crises. These fact sheets on saving money, talking to children about the economy, shopping for healthy foods on a tight budget, avoiding home foreclosure and other timely topics were developed by N.C. Cooperative Extension Family and Consumer Sciences specialists in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at NC State University. Check out the fact sheets at: http://www. nctakecontrol.com/

SAVE MONEY and STAY WARM THIS WINTER

Take steps now to improve energy efficiency during the home heating season. Energy dollars can pour out of homes through drafty doors, windows, and uninsulated attics, walls, floors, and basements. Most winterizing investments pay for themselves relatively quickly with lower heating bills. Weather-stripping and caulking are inexpensive and among the more attractive ways to boost efficiency and cut energy costs year round. A small investment now can pay big dividends keeping your home warm this winter.

Don’t overlook simple energy-saving steps that are low cost or no cost:

• Set your thermostat to a low as is comfortable in the winter. Turn down the thermostat when you leave for work, or when you will be away for an extended period of time. According to the Department of Energy’s EnergySavers, setting your thermostat 10 to 15 degrees lower for eight hours can save you up to ten percent on your annual heating and cooling costs.

• Wear multiple layers of clothing and warm socks and slippers inside. Dressing warmly will help you stay comfortable while your thermostat is set a little lower.

• Make sure a throw blanket is located within easy reach when relaxing.

• To reduce water-heating costs and water bills, lower the temperature of the water heater to 120 degrees F, and install low-flow water restrictors on showerheads and faucets. Repair any leaky faucets.

• Replace or clean the furnace filter according to manufacturer’s instructions. Check the filter at least once a month and replace when dirty. Dirty or clogged filters can reduce the efficiency of the system and block air circulation. If you have pets, you may need to change your filters more often.

• Use drapes, blinds, curtains, or shutters on all windows to reduce heat loss through the glass.

To maximize thermal energy from the sun, open window coverings during sunny days, and close them at night to keep heat inside.

• Use kitchen and bathroom vent fans sparingly during the winter to minimize the heated air that escapes to the outdoors.

• Make sure chairs and furniture and window coverings don’t block air flow from supply ducts and air returns. Arrange the sitting area so that sofas and chairs are away from drafty windows.

• Close the damper and the glass doors on the fireplace when not in use.

(From "Extension’s Successful Family Newsletter")

STRESS-FREE COOKING FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

The fall and winter seasons offer opportunities to entertain family and friends. A little planning and preparation can simplify your holiday dinner gatherings. Follow these tips for less stressful, more successful entertaining:

• Plan menus that won’t keep you in the kitchen the entire time. It’s no fun to be too busy to visit with guests. Avoid foods that require last-minute preparation. Slow-cooker or one-pot meals are great when you’re short on time. All the work is done well in advance, and the slow cooker keeps your meal warm until it’s time to enjoy it.

• As you plan your menu, keep in mind the likes, dislikes, and food allergies of your guests.

• Choose an appetizer that will be ready to eat when your guests arrive. Appetizers can be as simple as cheese and crackers or raw vegetables and dip. Be sure to place appetizers wherever your guests want your menu to congregate.

• Use glass or ceramic plates, cups, and glasses to make the occasion more formal and “greener” than using disposable items.

• Making the table look special does not have to be expensive. Create a center-piece by filling a vase with lemons, apples, or other fruit; putting sand or rice in a shallow bowl and carefully inserting a wide candle; or arranging sprigs of evergreen with small white candles.

• Involve guests. If guests offer to bring something, take them up on it. Suggest that they bring a salad, bread, or dessert. This will make them feel a part of the occasion and help you at the same time. You may want to ask one of the guests to help out in the kitchen or with dispenses beverages.

• Clean up later. After the meal, stack the plates in the kitchen. Refrigerate leftover food. Move to another part of the home and enjoy the company.

• Keep it SIMPLE, including the guest list, the menu, and the decorations. Keep your guest list small. Inviting too many guests can make the host feel like a large crowd. Make the meal special with one treat, such as homemade bread or an elegant dessert, and serve other dishes that are easy to prepare and that can be eaten with ease.

Preparing simple, nutritious, and delicious food for special occasions helps your family and friends practice healthy eating. (Taken from “Extension’s Successful Family Newsletter”)

YEAR-ROUND AVAILABILITY

A greater variety of fruits has also helped to increase the demand for fruit and many Americans shop at super-markets where there are many different brands of fruits to choose from. In addition, consumers are demanding a variety of produce that is available year-round, especially during off-seasons. Globalization along with improved transportation and cold chain management techniques have helped increase the number of fruit sources from Mexico and countries in the Southern Hemisphere which has enabled consumers to purchase fresh fruits all-year round.

In North Carolina, a research team that includes scientists from N.C. State University and the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is studying the use of buahs to help farmers extend the growing season for local strawberries.

Convenience continues to play a large role in fruit demand. The average time to prepare a meal has dropped from 49 to 31 minutes over the last decade, according to the 2009 North American Food & Agribusiness Outlook by Rabobank International. As household disposable income increases and free time diminishes, consumers desire more convenient products that frequently command higher prices. According to the Rabobank outlook report, convenience food purchases increased 50 percent in the past decade and fresh-cut produce sales grew almost 170 percent between 1997 and 2006, reaching an estimated $13.4 billion annually.
Margie Mansure, Registered Dietitian, and Amanda Davis, Certified Personal Trainer with a B.S. in Exercise Science, are offering “Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less” on Thursday evenings, January 21st until April 15th, 5:15-6:15 p.m. at the Agricultural Conference Center, 252 Poplar Grove Road in Boone. Cost of the entire series is $30.

“Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less” is a weight-management program that uses strategies proven to work. Each lesson informs, empowers and motivates participants to live mindfully as they make choices about eating and physical activity. The program provides opportunities for participants to track their progress and keep a journal of healthy eating and physical activity behaviors.

Each lesson includes:
- In-depth information about why the behavior is important for weight loss and weight maintenance
- Strategies for adopting the behavior
- Ways concepts can be adopted by the whole family
- Opportunity for sharing and celebrating
- Suggestions for living mindfully
- Guided discussion of strategy for the week
- Time for each participant to assess body weight in a non-public setting

There are 15 lessons that will be covered in 13 weeks in the “Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less” curriculum:
1. Introduction
2. Make Your Commitment
3. Re-Think Your Drink
4. Eat Fewer Calories
5. Move More
6. Check the Facts
7. Enjoy More Fruit and Vegetables
8. Right-Size Your Portions
9. Plan, Shop, Fix and Eat
10. Eat Out Less
11. Move Strong
12. Start Smart
13. Tame the Tube
14. Pack Smart Lunches
15. Keep Your Commitment

Each participant receives:
- “Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less” Magazine -- A full color magazine that contains the most salient points from each lesson, recipes and more.
- “Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less” Journal -- A small booklet that helps participants track their weight, food eaten and physical activity.

“Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less” teaches you how to be mindful of your physical activity and nutrition choices. Whether your goal is to maintain your weight or lose a few pounds, this class can help. Register in advance by calling 264-3061.

On Sunday, October 4th, the 4-H clover and website address were featured on the back panel of the No. 24 racecar driven by Jeff Gordon at the Kansas Speedway. This promotional opportunity generated more than 70 million media impressions and put 4-H in front of millions of NASCAR fans, 4-H alumni and new friends.

Our State 4-H leader, Marshall Stewart went to Kansas for the running of the 4-H clover at the NASCAR race. Here is his story. “It was truly a great experience that I will always remember as we had the opportunity to watch the race from the pit area and to assist National 4-H with their media efforts related to the event.

However, the most important part of this past weekend for me was to see someone that I work with everyday have a dream realized. For over ten years, Jackie Helton has worked as a 4-H agent, 4-H Foundation staff member and 4-H state staff member, to see the 4-H clover run on a car at a NASCAR race. On Sunday, we saw his dream come true.

In our business we teach youth and adults to dream and to work hard to pursue their dreams. Over these past ten years, Jackie has never given up on his dream for 4-H. As the #24 car made its way around the track, I cannot tell you how much it meant for me to be there with him to see this dream realized.

I commend Jackie for his leadership, persistence and hard work. While many others would have given up long ago, he never stopped. There is a great lesson in that for all of us. We must never forget to dream big and pursue those dreams.

Because of Jackie, the 4-H clover has now reached a larger audience in one single event than at any time in its history. Only time will tell what the impact of that will be, but rest assured that there are millions of 4-H’ers, volunteers, alumni and supporters who are feeling greater pride in 4-H because of Jackie’s efforts.

Jackie, on behalf of six million 4-H’ers...keep dreaming...we need more dreams...sometimes, they do come true.

See more at http://www.nc4h.org

Give the Gift of an Experience for Young People
4-H CAMP REGISTRATION OPENS

July 25-30.

To guarantee a spot, register by January 29. The good news is you can reserve your spot with a $200 deposit and have until June to save up for the rest of the fee, which is $290. The fee covers meals, lodging, t-shirt, transportation to and from camp. Registration will continue beyond January 29, but spaces may not be guaranteed. Contact the 4-H office at 264-3061 for more information or to register. Check the website out at http://www.nc4h.org/centers

2009 4-H National Science Experiment:

Biofuel Blast

In October, all across the nation, 4-H sponsored a science experiment to encourage interest in science and current issues. The theme this year was biofuels.

Renewable energy sources like biofuels are constantly making headlines in the news today. As our nation grapples with important environmental issues such as global warming, sustain ability and energy independence, “biofuels” -- sources of energy obtained from recently harvested plant materials -- are at the forefront of the discussion of alternative energy sources. It is vital for youth to understand and engage in the important environmental issues our global community faces together and the opportunities available for a greener tomorrow.

The experiment explores the production of the biofuel ethanol and demonstrates how organic materials can be converted to fuel to supply energy. The kids “make” their own “biofuel” and experiment with different biomass which might make biofuel. Biofuels are typically made in the US by converting the starchy corn kernels into the sugars in corn syrup and then adding yeast to break down the sugars, which releases carbon dioxide and ethanol as by-products. The ethanol is blended with gasoline and then sold at some gas stations. You might see a sign at the pump that says “E10,” which means 10 percent ethanol and 90 percent gasoline.

The experiment was done locally in after-school settings and is still available for groups that might be interested.

Youth Gardening Series

Plans are in the works for garden-related activities for youth in the spring. Is your family thinking about starting a garden but have a black thumb? Want to encourage an interest in gardening with your children? Kids’ sessions on how to start a garden will be offered. These workshops are designed to interest kids in gardening but will offer some basic information for beginning parent gardeners as well. The workshops are targeted for 5-12 year olds. We will offer some hands-on activities, some fun instruction, and support.

We will offer lots of ideas on neat things you can do at home with plants. Initial dates are:

- Saturdays, 10 a.m. - 12 noon
- March 20, April 24, May 15

- Location: March and April will start off at the Agricultural Conference Center
- Contact Watauga County 4-H at 264-3061 for more information.

Fruit Plant Sale

Available plants will include strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries and grapes. An order form will be online at the 4-H link at http://watauga.ces.ncsu.edu. Profits from this sale help provide funding for Watauga 4-H Programming.

Kids in the Garden

Bring your kids with you to the Organic Gardening 101 workshop series.

When: Monday, June 21 - Thursday, June 24
Time: 9:00 a.m. - 12 noon

Explore the garden, meet some chickens, insects, and plant lovers, and do some hands-on activities.

- Ways concepts can be adopted by the whole family
- Opportunity for sharing and celebrating
- Suggestions for living mindfully
- Guided discussion of strategy for the week
- Time for each participant to assess body weight in a non-public setting

www.4-h.org 4-H NEWS
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**OUR MISSION:** “North Carolina Cooperative Extension partners with communities to deliver education and technology that enrich the lives, land and economy of North Carolinians.”