

Northeast Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association

April 2014 Newsletter



Dr. Jeff Wilson – Regional Horticulture Specialist

Well it has been a strangely cold winter, but maybe the worst is behind us now. Here at the NMREC in Verona we have had over 2,000 chill hours, or hours below 45°F. The average for here is around 1000-1200 hours. While I don't think we should expect this every year, it does explain while many of our fruits are blooming later this year. I mention this just as a reminder that when you are selecting fruits to be sure and choose cultivars that are best suited for north MS.

I know some of you attended the Farm to School program during our conference. I sat in on this same program this past week and was encouraged by what I heard. If any of you want more information on how to go about doing this, please don't hesitate to call me.

On a different note, Torrey Mitchell at the Lee County Agri-Center is hoping to start a Farmer's Market on the days the Tupelo market is not open. If you are interested in selling there, contact him at 662-871-9273. *As always, please contact me if there is anything I can do to assist you.

SPECIALISTS COMMENTS – David Nagel, PhD

Remember it takes time for cover crops to decompose after they are turned in. Allow at least three weeks for the soil microbes to reduce the green plant to soil organic matter before planting your spring vegetables. Mowing the cover crops with a mulching mower tears them into small pieces which are metabolized quicker.

Green Beans have been in the news lately. Green bean galaxies are a new type of cosmic body concerning collapsing quasars. Here on Earth Dwarf Velour is a new bush bean with purple pods. Fans of Louisiana Purple pole bean may want to try this bush version with deeper purple colored pods that turn green when cooked. Rockport is a new green bean specifically selected to be cooked whole. Grill masters may want to use this bean for those special dishes.

Sage and Cassidy are two new varieties which produce slightly straighter beans a day or so earlier than old favorites like Provider and Contender. New varieties are seldom on seed racks in stores. You will probably have to order these seed from catalogues or on line.

Cold fronts passing through Mississippi are making it difficult to decide when to plant Spring plants. Tomatoes, peppers, and other warm season crops shouldn't be exposed to temperatures below thirty two degrees, but the calendar reminds us that June and ninety degree temperatures are less than seventy days away. Gardeners can protect their plants in the garden by covering them with buckets or planting pots. The covers should be put on before sundown and removed when temperatures are in the mid-forties. Many gardeners will place a weight on top of the bucket to keep it in place.

Some gardeners invest in spun bonded polyester or polypropylene blankets specifically made for frost protection. These specialty cloths have the advantage of not needing removal until the temperatures climb into the sixties. Other frost protection measures include hot caps, bed sheets or blankets, plastic sheets, and other covers that have to be put on and removed just like the buckets. One method uses the heat releasing properties of water. The commercial version is called Walls o'Water and is a container designed to be placed around the plant and filled with water.

UPCOMING EVENTS

***** PLEASE READ THIS:** We will have an Association Meeting on **April 17th at 10:00** at the NMREC. We will discuss this year's conference and plan for next year. We will also hold elections for new officers. We need everyone to come and participate in this event. Only members who have paid their dues for this year will be allowed to vote. If you attended the February conference then you have paid. If you did not attend the conference, you can pay the \$20 that day to update your membership. I hope all of you can set a few hours aside to help us with these two important areas. ***

MSU Better Process Control School for Acidified Foods -

The Department of Food Science, Nutrition and Health Promotion will offer a Better Process Control School (BPCS) for Acidified Foods. This course offers instruction which fulfills the FDA and USDA Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) requirements to certify supervisors of acidification and container closure evaluation operations during the canning of acidified foods. Companies which manufacture acidified foods must operate with a certified supervisor on the premises when processing as specified in 21CFR Part 114 & 108.25(f). It will be **April 15-16** at the MS Ag and Forestry Museum in Jackson, MS.

Areas of Instruction: FDA and USDA require approved BPC Schools to follow certain guidelines. To assure the safety of acidified foods, schools must cover the critical factors supervisors must know when processing acidified foods. Participants seeking certification are required to attend a BPC School and pass examinations on these topics: Microbiology of Thermally Processed Foods, Foods Container Handling, Records for Product Protection, Food Plant Sanitation, Principles of Thermal Processing & Process Room Instrumentation, Equipment and Operation.

Participants seeking certification in specific processing systems must attend that session and are required to pass the respective examination. Process systems offered for certification include: Acidified Foods. Participants seeking certification for a specific container closure system must attend that session and pass the respective examination. Closure sessions offered for certification include: Glass containers

Examination questions are prepared by the National Food Processors Association/Food Processors Institute with the approval of FDA and USDA. Each examination consists of 10-20 questions and requires a minimum score of 70% to pass. Participants are encouraged to attend all sessions regardless of their intention to take the qualifying exam. Those not seeking qualification in a specific system area are not required to take that exam.

Pre-registration is mandatory. The registration fee (\$250) includes breaks, instructional materials, tuition and certificates earned. A letter/email confirming receipt of your registration, directions to the Ag Museum and the book will be mailed to you. After Feb. 24th the fee is \$300 (until March 3rd). Please see the attached brochure for more details and how to register.

GAP/GHP Cost-Share Program Available

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce is currently offering a cost-share program to provide financial assistance to Mississippi fruit and vegetable farmers receiving Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) Certification. Eligible farmers will receive reimbursement for 75% of the certification costs up to a maximum of \$500. To receive reimbursement, farmers must submit a completed application with proper documentation of costs incurred. Only audits completed by an approved USDA certifier will be eligible for reimbursement. A list of auditor contacts is available at www.ams.usda.gov/gapgghp. Funds are available on a first-come, first-serve basis until the funds are depleted. Funding for this program is provided through the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. For more information about this program or to obtain an application, visit www.mdac.ms.gov, call Michael Lasseter at (601) 359-1120 or email michaelL@mdac.ms.gov.

NRCS Conservation Innovation Grants

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is accepting applications for competitive grants to develop and accelerate conservation approaches and technologies on private agricultural and forest lands. "Conservation Innovation Grants (CIGs) have contributed to some of the most pioneering conservation work on America's agricultural and forest lands," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "It's an excellent investment in new conservation technologies and approaches that farmers, ranchers and forest landowners can use to achieve their production and conservation goals."

About \$15 million will be made available nationwide by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). State and local governments, federally recognized Indian tribes, non-governmental and educational organizations, private businesses and individuals are eligible to apply. Pre-proposals are due March 7. Vilsack said priority will be given to applications that relate to nutrient management, energy conservation, soil health, air quality, climate change, wildlife, economics, sociology, environmental markets, food safety, historically underserved groups, or assessments of past CIG projects.

In the 10 years that NRCS has administered the program, grants have helped develop water quality trading markets, demonstrated ways to increase fertilizer water and energy efficiencies, as well as address other resource concerns. The grant program enables NRCS to work with public and private partners to accelerate technology development and adopt promising approaches to address natural resource concerns. Funded through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the grants are awarded through a competitive process. At least 50 percent of the total cost of grant projects must come from non-federal matching funds, including cash and in-kind contributions provided by the grant recipient. For more on this grant opportunity view the attached document or visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html>. To apply electronically, visit www.grants.gov.

More Info: * It's spring and commercial vegetable growers are searching for supplies and equipment for this year's planting and harvest season. Refer to this link that American Vegetable Grower Magazine compiles each year: <http://www.growingproduce.com/production/2014-product-guide-directory>

MSU-ES Contact info:

Below are the contact names and numbers that are directly related to the association and your production issues. Please start with your local county Extension agent to help find answers to your questions. They are capable of handling your request and have access to all of our resources

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