

Northeast Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association

June 2014 Newsletter



Dr. Jeff Wilson – Regional Horticulture Specialist

I hope all of you are in full production with your crops right now. I also hope the rains find your farm as we continue through the summer. In this newsletter, I have attached info on upcoming events as well as news about a few areas of the new Farm Bill that may help you. I had our Regional Health Specialist include an article on ‘sun safety’. This affects all of you, so please take time to read her article and keep yourself safe this summer in the sun. In the next issue, Casey will update us on a few of the projects he is working on. As always, contact me if I can help you in any way.

SPECIALISTS COMMENTS

Dr. Carla C. Stanford, CFLE, Regional Health Specialist

There was a radio show in the 1930s-1950s that asked "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows!" followed by an evil laugh. Today, I will use this phrase “The Shadow Knows” to remind you that being safe in the sun is important to your own health.

You may be outside, working or playing, and not have a watch or your cell phone to determine the time. When that happens, you can use “The Shadow Rule”. When your shadow is short (meaning the sun is somewhere directly above...or close), you are at greater risk for sunburn or sun poisoning. When your shadow is long, you are less likely to burn. Don’t be fooled, though, you can still be burned, even when the sun is behind the clouds. Follow these simple rules for sun safety:

1. Apply sunscreen (30 spf or higher) at least 20 minutes BEFORE you go outside and reapply when you are wet (even if it is waterproof sunscreen!). Let it be noted here that adults, especially men, according to one study, are negligent on using sunscreen...but especially REAPPLYING sunscreen.
2. Wear breathable cotton so that you will not get as hot.
3. Drink LOTS of water. (Water...not sodas or energy drinks.)
4. Seek occasional shade. It’s hard seeking shade when you are trying to get a job done, but important for your skin. (While you’re in the shade, why not drink that water?)
5. Choose “wrap around” sunglasses when you can and be sure they have a UV protection factor.
5. Choose early morning or late afternoon for less sun exposure.

Southerners LOVE the sun, but you must be careful! Too much sun exposure can lead to skin cancer and let’s face it, the sun ages you. Be careful out there, Mississippi growers, and have a great summer!

UPCOMING EVENTS

New Pilot Program Offers Coverage for Fruits/Vegetables, Organic and Diversified Farms

WASHINGTON, May 21, 2014 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced a new risk management option that will be available for fruit and vegetable growers and producers with diversified farms. The policy, called Whole-Farm Revenue Protection, will provide flexible coverage options for specialty crop, organic and diversified crop producers. The program will be implemented in counties across the country and will expand in availability over the next several years.

Whole-Farm insurance allows farmers to insure all crops on their farm at once, rather than insuring commodity by commodity. Traditionally, many fruit and vegetable crops have not had crop insurance programs designed for them—making it less attractive for a farmer that primarily planted a commodity crop like wheat or corn to use another part of his or her land for growing fruits and vegetables or other specialty crops. This allows farmers greater flexibility to make planting decisions on their land.

"Crop insurance has been the linchpin of the farm safety net for years and continues to grow as the single most important factor in protecting producers of all sizes from the effects of unpredictable weather," said Vilsack. "Providing farmers the option to insure their whole farm at once gives farmers more flexibility, promotes crop diversity, and helps support the production of healthy fruits and vegetables. More flexibility also empowers farmers and ranchers to make a broader range of decisions with their land, helping them succeed and strengthening our agriculture economy."

The 2014 Farm Bill requires a whole-farm crop insurance policy option, and paves the way for the Risk Management Agency (RMA) to make it broadly available to specialty crop, organic, and diversified growers. The Federal Crop Insurance Corporation Board of Directors (FCIC Board) approved the Whole-Farm Revenue Protection pilot policy for RMA to offer it through the federal crop insurance program in 2015.

USDA has taken many steps to provide effective insurance coverage for diversified, organic and specialty crops. The whole-farm crop insurance policy provides flexibility to meet the needs of specialty crop growers, organic producers and those with diversified farms, and who have farm production and revenue history, including five years of historic farm tax records. This policy is also part of USDA's [commitment to small and mid-sized producers](#) managing diversified operations.

USDA has been strengthening crop insurance by providing more risk management options for farmers and ranchers. The policy offers coverage levels from 50 to 85 percent; recognizes farm diversification through qualification for the highest coverage levels along with premium rate discounts for multiple crop diversification. The Market Readiness Feature, as outlined in the Farm Bill, simplifies insurance coverage for producers under the Whole-Farm Revenue Protection pilot policy by allowing the costs such as washing, trimming, and packaging to be left in the insured revenue instead of having to adjust those amounts out of the insured amount.

The new Whole-Farm Revenue Protection policy combines Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) and AGR-Lite along with several improvements to target diversified farms and farms selling two to five commodities, including specialty crops to wholesale markets. The new policy is also designed to meet the risk management needs of diversified crop or livestock producers including those growing specialty crops and/or selling to local and regional markets, farm identity preserved markets, or direct markets.

As part of the pilot, Whole-Farm Revenue Protection will be available where AGR and AGR-Lite are currently offered, and will expand to other counties as data are available for underwriting and actuarial ratemaking. RMA will release information on the policy later this summer when it becomes available. This information will be announced on the RMA website at www.rma.usda.gov.

USDA Announces \$78 Million Available for Local Food Enterprises

WASHINGTON, May 8, 2014 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that USDA is making a historic \$78 million investment in local and regional food systems, including food hubs, farmers markets, aggregation and processing facilities, distribution services, and other local food business enterprises.

"The 2014 Farm Bill has given USDA new tools, resources and authority to support the rural economy," Vilsack said. "Consumer demand for locally-produced food is strong and growing, and farmers and ranchers are positioning their businesses to meet that demand. As this sector continues to

mature, we see aggregation, processing, and distribution enterprises across the local food supply chain growing rapidly. These historic USDA investments in support of local food give farmers and ranchers more market opportunities, provide consumers with more choices, and create jobs in both rural and urban communities."

Vilsack said that \$48 million in loan guarantees for local food projects is now available through USDA's [Rural Development's Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program](#), and \$30 million is available through competitive grants via the Agricultural Marketing Service's (AMS) [Farmers Market and Local Foods Promotion Program](#).

The 2014 Farm Bill requires USDA to set aside at least five percent of Business and Industry (B&I) program loan guarantees for projects that focus on local food business enterprises. Details on how to apply for local food funding through the B&I program are available on the [Rural Development website](#). Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. The B&I program has the authority to fund local food infrastructure in urban areas as long as the project supports farm and ranch income and expands healthy food access in underserved communities.

Rural Development's B&I program provides financial backing for rural business development in partnership with private-sector lenders. It is one of several USDA programs that help finance local foods projects. In 2013, Rural Development supported more than 170 local food infrastructure projects – from food hubs, to scale-appropriate processing facilities, to cold storage and distribution networks. Entities eligible for B&I loan guarantees include cooperatives, non-profit organizations, corporations, partnerships or other legal entities, Indian tribes, public bodies or individuals.

The 2014 Farm Bill tripled funding for marketing and promotion support for local food enterprises by creating the [Farmers Market and Local Foods Promotion Program](#), administered by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). This new program makes \$30 million available annually to farmers markets, other direct producer-to-consumer venues, and other businesses in the local food supply chain. Under this program, \$15 million is now available for marketing and promotional support specifically for local food businesses, including food hubs, delivery and aggregation businesses, and processing and storage facilities along the local food supply chain, while \$15 million is for marketing support for farmers markets and other direct to consumer outlets. Since 2009, AMS, which administers this program, has funded nearly 450 projects totaling \$27 million to support direct marketing efforts for local food. [More information about how to apply is available on the AMS website](#). Applications are due June 20, 2014.

These funding opportunities are cornerstones of the USDA's commitment to support local and regional food systems. [USDA's Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative](#) coordinates the Department's policy, resources, and outreach efforts related to local and regional food systems. [The Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Compass](#) maps nearly 3,000 local and regional food projects supported by USDA and eleven other federal agencies. Secretary Vilsack has identified strengthening local food systems as one of the four pillars of USDA's commitment to rural economic development, along with production agriculture (including expanding export markets and improving research), promoting conservation and outdoor recreation opportunities, and growing the biobased economy.

Sign-Up Begins for USDA Disaster Assistance Programs Restored by Farm Bill

WASHINGTON, April 15, 2014 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that starting today, eligible farmers and ranchers can sign up for U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) disaster assistance programs restored by passage of the 2014 Farm Bill.

"We implemented these programs in record time and kept our commitment to begin sign-up today," said Agriculture Secretary Vilsack. "To ensure enrollment goes as smoothly as possible, dedicated staff in over 2,000 Farm Service Agency offices across the country are doing everything necessary to help

producers that have suffered through two and a half difficult years with no assistance because these programs were awaiting Congressional action.”

Depending on the size and type of farm or ranch operation, eligible producers can enroll in one of four programs administered by the Farm Service Agency. The Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), and the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) will provide payments to eligible producers for livestock deaths and grazing losses that have occurred since the expiration of the livestock disaster assistance programs in 2011, and including calendar years 2012, 2013, and 2014. The Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) provides emergency assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybees and farm-raised fish that have suffered losses because of disease, severe weather, blizzards and wildfires.

Enrollment also begins today for the Tree Assistance Program (TAP), which provides financial assistance to qualifying orchardists and nursery tree growers to replant or rehabilitate trees, bushes and vines damaged by natural disasters. Producers signing up for these programs are encouraged to contact their local FSA office for information on the types of records needed and to schedule an appointment. Taking these steps in advance will help producers ensure their application moves through the process as quickly as possible.

Supporting documents may include livestock birth records, purchase and transportation receipts, photos and ownership records showing the number and type of livestock lost, documents listing the gallons of water transported to livestock during drought, and more. Crop records may include purchase receipts for eligible trees, bushes, or vines, seed and fertilizer purchases, planting and production records, and documentation of labor and equipment used to plant or remove eligible trees, bushes, or vines.

Producers have three to nine months to apply depending on the program and year of the loss. Details are available from any local FSA office. For more information, producers may review the 2014 Farm Bill Fact Sheet, and the LIP, LFP, ELAP and TAP fact sheets online, or visit any local FSA office or USDA Service Center.

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/gapgph. 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](tel:6013591120) or email michaell@mdac.ms.gov.

Growing Lunch-A School Garden Grant Program

Growing Lunch is a school garden grant program administered through the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce with the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. Eligible schools can receive a grant up to \$500 to purchase supplies needed to plant a school garden. Growing Lunch seeks to enhance the Farm to School program across the state. Farm to School provides locally-grown produce to our state's schools and also seeks to educate students on agriculture. This program will act as an educational tool to enhance the knowledge of school-aged children on agriculture, healthy eating, and how food arrives on their plate three times a day. As society becomes increasingly further away from agricultural practices and the farm, it remains pertinent to educate students on the origin of their food;

MDAC has designated a website for those interested in the Farm to School Program and educational resources and materials for Farm to School Week, www.farmtoschoolweek.org.

All schools, K-12, in the State of Mississippi are eligible to apply, although this program is ideally geared towards younger school-aged children. For more information, please see the attached application or contact Susan Head at susan@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.

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

Dr. Jeff Wilson
Regional Horticulture Specialist
Northeast District 662-566-2201
jwilson@ext.msstate.edu

Dr. Scott Cagle
Chickasaw County Extension Agent
662-542-8650
scottc@ext.msstate.edu

Dr. David Nagel
Vegetable Specialist
662-325-2701
davidn@ext.msstate.edu

Dr. Blake Layton
Extension Entomologist
662-325-2085
blayton@ext.msstate.edu

Dr. Wayne Porter
Regional Horticulture Specialist
Southeast District 601-482-9674
wporter@ext.msstate.edu

Dr. Eric Stafne
Fruit Crops Specialist
601-403-8939
estafne@ext.msstate.edu

Dr. Keith Crouse
Soil Specialist
662-325-3313
keithc@ext.msstate.edu

Dr. Ken Hood
Marketing Specialist
662-325-2155
kenh@ext.msstate.edu

Dr. Rick Snyder
Greenhouse Vegetable Specialist
601-892-3731
ricks@ext.msstate.edu

Dr. Alan Henn
Extension Pathologist
662-325-2311
ahenn@ext.msstate.edu

Dr. Casey Barickman
Vegetable Research Specialist
662-566-2201
tbarickm@ext.msstate.edu

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