Sustaining North Carolina Agriculture

**The Need:** To stay competitive in a global agricultural market, small farmers are turning to high-value products such as sustainably raised crops, meats and dairy products. The market for organic foods is one of the nation’s fastest growing, with demand for organic products up 20 percent each of the last 10 years. The production practices used for these products are considered “sustainable” because they are economically viable, ensuring that resources – including land – will be available for long-term use.

**Serving the Need:** Growers who are new to sustainable and organic production need help understanding best practices. In order to meet this growing need, the Center for Environment Farming Systems began programming in 1996 to conduct research, education and outreach programs in a variety of sustainable agricultural practices. CEFS, based at the Cherry Research Farm in Goldsboro, is a partnership among N.C. State University, N.C. A&T State University and the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

CEFS focuses on the production of pasture-based dairy products, grass-fed beef, hoop-house pork and organic produce as well as a long-term agricultural systems research unit. In addition, the center offers the following opportunities:

- Summer internships at the Small Farm Unit for graduate and undergraduate students to work and learn.
- Apprenticeships for producers who want to learn sustainable practices first hand.
- A variety of grower workshops on sustainable practices.
- Marketing opportunities, such as Community-Supported Agricultural partnerships with corporations that connect urban consumers with local sustainable producers.
- The N.C. Choices program, which links consumers with producers of sustainably raised pork.
- Information on producing and marketing organic grains.
- A Web-based organic production guide for growers.
- Public education and outreach efforts, including CEFS’s fall Harvest Festival and public lectures by notables such as Carlo Petrini of Slow Food International and Fred Kirschenmann of the Leopold Center.

**Impact beyond North Carolina:** In 2006, CEFS celebrated 10 years of programming with “Seasons of Sustainable Agriculture.” The celebration kicked off with keynote speaker Kirschenmann and the opening of the center’s new sustainable swine unit. In 2006, CEFS sponsored 13 workshops, which drew more than 450 attendees, including 40 Cooperative Extension agents from 24 counties. The workshops included two aimed at consumers: one on Home Gardening and Nutrition and one about Community-Supported Agriculture. The Sixth Mid-Atlantic Dairy Grazing Conference, held in October, drew 130 participants. And the center’s first-ever Fall Festival, a family fun and educational event, drew more than 700 participants. CEFS had nearly 3,000 visitors in 2006.

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