New Agricultural Enterprises for a Changing Population

**The Need:** As North Carolina’s population mix diversifies, so do North Carolinians’ food interests. As a result, our state’s food producers seek alternative produce and food animals to raise. For example, interest in meat goat production as a new business opportunity grew dramatically during the past six years due to increased goat meat demand by a growing population segment representing ethnic groups — Caribbean islanders, Hispanics and others — who prefer goat meat. At the same time, an increasing Latino and Asian population has fueled growth in an “ethnic vegetables” industry.

**Serving the Need:** N.C. State University is a leader in meat goat educational and research programs in the southeastern U.S. Simultaneously, N.C. State’s Specialty Crops Program concentrates on foods new to many North Carolinians: jicama, tomatillos, chile peppers, Oriental melons, Chinese greens and a special sweet potato – Boniato – preferred by Asian and Hispanic markets. Our Meat Goat Program worked with a range of partners to launch a marketing organization and provide training and certification courses. The NC Meat Goat Producers, Inc. markets live goats and goat meat directly to consumers and area retail stores and restaurants, eliminating middlemen and goat traders. And the Specialty Crops Program "fast tracks" new crop development statewide.

In addition:

- Educational programs target Cooperative Extension agents, commodity associations and other ag professionals to help meat goat producers select, adopt and successfully implement best management practices for goat production.
- N.C. producers sold about 230,000 meat goats in 2006, generating receipts of more than $9.7 million. The industry’s breeding stock inventory totals about 158,000 animals on more than 3,200 farms, worth more than $15.5 million.
- Goat producer county information meetings always draw between 30 to 50 attendees; N.C. Meat Goat Producers membership stands at more than 700 farm families in 65 counties and four states.
- The Specialty Crops Program develops research plots to determine best production methods and identify the best varieties, simultaneously test-marketing and developing packaging, labeling and promotional materials. The program educates growers about new crops successful in market and grower field trials. Growers who produce the crop receive growing and marketing assistance.

**Impact beyond North Carolina:** The Meat Goat Program is recognized as a center of excellence for research and extension in the Southeast and the U.S. We receive information requests from Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, Asia and Australia. A 2004 Specialty Crops Program survey of extension agents in 32 counties indicated an $888,000 estimated value for specialty vegetables targeted to ethnic groups.

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