

News

North Carolina Research Campus, Kannapolis

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N.C. State University Introduces New Online Tools for Growing Local Farmers' Businesses

North Carolina farmers have a new resource to help them start or expand an agricultural business

KANNAPOLIS, N.C. – A new resource from [N.C. State University](http://www.ncsu.edu) is designed to help farmers be more successful. The “Business Development Files,” for small- to mid-size farmers, are distributed through Cooperative Extension Centers statewide. They offer step-by-step advice for those interested in building or expanding an agricultural business. The new information consists of seven files, or steps, each providing guidance on various aspects of developing an agricultural business, from estimating market potential to calculating costs. Farmers should [contact an N.C. Cooperative Extension agent](#) in their county to review these files.

The Business Development Files

1. Evaluating a New Business Idea
2. Estimating Income and Cost: Calculating a Price
3. Researching Your Market: Identifying Your Customers
4. Researching Your Market: Evaluating the Competition
5. Estimating Market Potential: Is There a Market?
6. Legal, Regulatory and Insurance: Checklist for North Carolina
7. Product, Price, Place and Promotion

Gary Bullen, an Extension associate in the N.C. State Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics and the Program for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture, spearheaded the effort to create the Business Development Files after realizing a gap in the flow of information between business experts and farmers.

“There are a lot of materials telling farmers what they should do to be successful, but they don’t explain how to do it,” says Bullen. “These files will walk farmers step-by-step through the business development process and evaluate issues before farmers invest their time and money.”

Cooperative Extension agents will work with farmers to complete worksheets for each of the seven files, thus evaluating the feasibility of a business endeavor in advance.

Growing an Agricultural Business

N.C. Cooperative Extension agents are integrating the Business Development Files into public workshops and training seminars for farmers across North Carolina. The events are presented by Extension personnel like Amy-Lynn Albertson, Extension associate horticulture agent in Davidson County, and are often localized to meet the needs of the region’s farmers.

(more)

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"As Extension agents, we have to help farmers in our regions market effectively," says Albertson. "They know how to grow it; not necessarily how best to sell it."

Albertson uses the Business Development Files in her workshops to touch on many aspects of agricultural business development, including market and competitor analysis, legal and insurance considerations, and product promotion and marketing. Individuals from five farms have completed Albertson's Business Development Files-inspired trainings, including Brenda Garner from [SandyCreek Farm](#).

SandyCreek Farm has especially benefited from the Business Development Files provided through Cooperative Extension. Having recently expanded to include new products, a greenhouse and a Web site complete with an online shopping cart, Garner cites the benefits.

"It's paying off big time," she says.

The recent grand opening of the SandyCreek Farm store brought upwards of 70 people to the property in Lexington, N.C. "I would've considered 20 to 30 people a success," Garner notes.

Subscriptions to SandyCreek's e-newsletter have more than tripled over the past year, attendance is up at the farm's workshops and demand from local restaurants for fresh produce is exceeding supply. "Right now we have waiting lists," says Garner.

"We had no idea this resource was available. If other farmers will use it, I can't imagine how they wouldn't benefit. It's a tremendous service."

"We couldn't operate without Amy-Lynn and the Extension Service."

About the N.C. State University Program for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture

Located at the N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis, the multi-disciplinary team builds partnerships and educational resources to help North Carolina agriculture be more profitable. Learn more at www.ncvalueadded.org.

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Note to Editors: For assistance in setting up an interview with Gary Bullen or other N.C. Cooperative Extension personnel, please contact Leah Chester-Davis, Coordinator of Communication and Community Outreach, N.C. State University Program for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture, N.C. Research Campus, Kannapolis, 704-250-5406 or leah_chester-davis@ncsu.edu.