

## News

### North Carolina Research Campus, Kannapolis Program for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture

September 1, 2009

**Media Contacts:** Dr. Ben Chapman, Extension food safety specialist, 919-809-3205 or [benjamin\\_chapman@ncsu.edu](mailto:benjamin_chapman@ncsu.edu); Diane Ducharme, Extension horticulture and food safety associate, 704-250-5402 or [diane\\_ducharme@ncsu.edu](mailto:diane_ducharme@ncsu.edu); Dr. Chris Gunter, Extension horticulture specialist, 919-513-2807 or [chris\\_gunter@ncsu.edu](mailto:chris_gunter@ncsu.edu); Dr. Trevor Phister, Extension food science specialist, 919-513-1644 or [trevor\\_phister@ncsu.edu](mailto:trevor_phister@ncsu.edu). For assistance in arranging interviews, contact Leah Chester-Davis, coordinator of communications and community outreach, N.C. State University Program for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture, 704-250-5406 or [leah\\_chester-davis@ncsu.edu](mailto:leah_chester-davis@ncsu.edu)

### **September Is Food Safety Month: N.C. Cooperative Extension Initiative Focuses on Year-Round Fresh Produce Safety**

KANNAPOLIS, N.C. – N.C. Cooperative Extension, in cooperation with the N.C. Fresh Produce Safety Task Force, is leading an initiative to educate fruit and vegetable growers and consumers about measures that can minimize food safety risks. The organization has received more than \$250,000 in grant funding to support the statewide Extension and research effort.

N.C. Cooperative Extension has conducted train-the-trainer workshops for Extension agents who, in turn, will train producers. The training focuses on Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and what it takes to obtain GAPs certification. Industry, such as grocery stores, is increasingly demanding that growers they buy from be GAPs certified.

The fresh produce safety curriculum consists of nine training modules that cover GAPs measures such as verifying the safety of irrigation water, regular hand-washing procedures, packing facility and transportation vehicle cleanliness, maintaining the “cold chain” temperature and establishing traceability. The workshops also include modules focused on managing risks and liability as well as crisis communication.

In addition, a Web site, [www.ncfreshproducesafety.org](http://www.ncfreshproducesafety.org) has been developed as a resource for growers, consumers and Extension agents. Additional efforts include development of food safety plan templates for growers to use and adapt to their operations, presentations focusing on fresh produce safety education and active representation on the Governor’s Food Safety and Defense Task Force.

(more)

## **N.C. Cooperative Extension Initiative Focuses on Year-Round Fresh Produce Safety, p.2**

Traceability systems research is being conducted by N.C. State University faculty. The research will identify current measures and assess the industry's ability to trace fresh produce in the event of an outbreak or food safety incident triggering a recall. The research will be used to make recommendations for improvements. Researchers are also studying typical North Carolina farming and produce packing and shipping operations. Extension specialists and agents will use these studies to develop traceability templates that farmers statewide can use to implement traceability measures cost effectively on their farms. Other research includes testing irrigation water for potential contamination and looking at ways to reduce risks.

N.C. Tobacco Trust Fund Commission, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension (SARE), USDA Rural Cooperative Development, Agricultural Advancement Consortium of The N.C. Rural Center, Risk Management Agency, N.C. Tomato Growers Association and PPG Inc. provided funding for the fresh produce safety initiative.

N.C. State University faculty serve as co-chairs of the N.C. Fresh Produce Safety Task Force, which brings together fresh produce growers, educators, government officials, public policy makers, industry representatives and researchers. The task force consists of five working groups: education; research; industry and policy relationships; networking and communications; and executive management oversight. The co-chairs are Dr. Ben Chapman, Department of 4-H Youth Development and Family and Consumer Sciences; Diane Ducharme, Program for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture; Dr. Chris Gunter, Department of Horticulture Science; and Dr. Trevor Phister, Department of Food, Bioprocessing and Nutrition Sciences.

In addition to Ducharme, other Program for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture team members are members of the task force. Rod Gurganus and Leah Chester-Davis, serve as co-chairs of the education, and networking and communications working groups, respectively.

**N.C. Cooperative Extension** is an educational outreach of N.C. State University and N.C. A&T State University. It has programs in all 100 counties and the Cherokee Reservation. Learn more at [www.ces.ncsu.edu](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu). **The Program for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture**, part of the N.C. State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, is located at the N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis. The multidisciplinary team builds partnerships and educational resources to help North Carolina agriculture be more profitable. The team works closely with N.C. Cooperative Extension personnel who work with farmers across the state. Learn more at [www.ncvalueadded.org](http://www.ncvalueadded.org).

###

Writer: Leah Chester-Davis

**Note to Editor: Photographs of fresh produce safety practices in action can be downloaded at <http://ncvalueadded.org/news-media.html>**