

Title:	Cultivating Sustainable and Organic Beginning Farmers and Ranchers in Georgia		
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Program Code: BFRDP

Program Name: Beginning Farmer and Rancher

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{NO DATA ENTERED}

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{NO DATA ENTERED}
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Non-Technical Summary

In the last five years, demand for local, organic, and sustainably-produced food has skyrocketed, outpacing supply even in these challenging economic times. U.S. sales of organic food and beverages have grown from \$1 billion in 1990 to \$24.8 billion in 2009. In 2009 (arguably one of the worst economic years of US history), organic sales grew 5.1 percent and sales of organic fruits grew an unprecedented 11.4 percent over 2008 (Organic Trade Association, 2010). Georgia ranks 4th in the nation for fruits and vegetables harvested and has the potential to be an important state to build the nation's organic supply. The state is one of the top five producers of 11 field crops: peanuts, rye, onions, cucumbers, snap beans, cantaloupe, sweet potato, bell peppers, watermelons, cabbage, and squash (USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2007). Yet, Georgia's organic industry is nascent, and the state ranks 30th in organic production. Forty-five percent of organic farms nationally have income less than \$20,000, yet in Georgia that number is 60 percent. Conversely, 30 percent of organic farms nationally have farm sales at or greater than \$100,000, but in Georgia it is just 18 percent (USDA Economic Research Service, 2008). Experienced practitioners, those that are out in the field and pastures making a living in agriculture, have some of the best tools, tips, and information to share with beginning farmers and ranchers. This project would leverage these experienced farmers and ranchers to pass on their skills to those that are beginning. This will be accomplished through a combination of direct service in the form of mentoring, field days, conferences and workshops, and the development of multimedia resources such as case studies, podcasts, videos, and articles to meet the various needs and learning styles of beginning farmers and ranchers. Over the three year period, the project team will provide 300 total hours annually of hands-on farmer to farmer mentoring for 20 beginning farmers and ranchers where 100% of mentees receive hands-on and peer support to improve production, management and/or marketing decisions; Engage at least 150 beginning farmers and ranchers annually through field days where 75% of participants will learn something at each field day applicable to their farm or ranch; Provide support to at least 250 producers annually between on-site visits, phone calls, e-mails and Georgia Organics online discussion board; Host 250 beginning farmers and ranchers at the Georgia Organics annual conference where 75% of the sessions and workshops receive an overall evaluation of 80%; Create and distribute 1,200 printed farm case studies through exhibits, presentations and county extension offices; Distribute 500 printed Layman's Guide to Direct Marketing Regulations; 2,000 people view case studies and Layman's Guide to Regulations through Georgia Organics and UGA websites; 2,000 view/download podcasts and videos online during the grant period; Distribute 600 CDs of podcasts from conference educational sessions Reach 1,000 producers and agricultural professionals annually through written educational peer articles.

Accomplishments

Major goals of the project

Georgia Organics and its key partners - the University of Georgia (UGA) and Fort Valley State University (FVSU) aim to cultivate that next generation of sustainable and organic farmers and ranchers. The project purpose is to provide concrete, innovative, and impactful education and resources around critical areas: production and management strategies; business operations; decision assessment; and marketing support. Through the development and oversight of a strategic advisory team that will cross fertilizer personnel, expertise, ideas and outreach, the overarching goal of this project is to place more beginning organic farmers and ranchers on the ground in Georgia with the knowledge and partnership to seed the next generation of sustainable producers. This long-term goal will be achieved through the following mechanisms: 1. Provide a multi-layered offering of direct technical assistance to beginning farmers and ranchers in Georgia specific to sustainable and organic farming enterprises; and 2. Develop an educational multimedia resource bank for beginning farmers and ranchers operating or pursuing sustainable and organic farming enterprises in Georgia and the southeast. Objective 1: Provide a multi-layered offering of direct technical assistance to beginning farmers and ranchers in Georgia specific to sustainable and organic farming enterprises Outcomes (Annually for 3-Year Project Period) o Provide 300 total hours annually of hands-on farmer to farmer mentoring for 20 beginning farmers and ranchers o 100 percent of mentees receive hands-on and peer support to improve production, management and/or marketing decisions Engage at least 150 beginning farmers and ranchers annually through field days o 75 percent of participants will learn something at each field day applicable to their farm or ranch Provide support to at least 250 producers annually between on-site visits, phone calls, e-mails and Georgia Organics online discussion board Host 250 beginning farmers and ranchers at the Georgia Organics annual conference o 75 percent of the sessions and workshops receive an overall evaluation of 4 or higher on a scale of 1 to 5 where "5" is the best Objective 2: Develop an educational multimedia resource bank for beginning farmers and ranchers operating or pursuing sustainable and organic farming enterprises in Georgia and the southeast Outcomes (Total for 3-Year Period) o Distribute 1,200 printed case studies through exhibits, presentations and county extension offices (4 case studies/300 each) o Distribute 500 printed Layman's Guide to Regulations o 2,000 people view case studies and Layman's Guide to Regulations through Georgia Organics and UGA websites during the grant period o 2,000 view/download podcasts and videos online during the grant period Distribute 600 CDs of podcasts from conference educational sessions (200/year) o Reach 1,000 producers and agricultural professionals annually through written educational peer articles

What was accomplished under these goals?

This project sponsored Georgia Organics' annual conference from 2012 through 2014 by funding general conference production, presenter honorariums and conference scholarships. The conference was held in Columbus, Atlanta and Jekyll Island, respectively, and averaged 1000 attendees. With 1300 in attendance, the 2013 conference in Atlanta was the largest in the organization's history. Over three years Georgia Organics offered 48 educational sessions for farmers, including topics on silvopasture, pastured poultry, tropical niche crops, cover crops for brassica production, organic corn production, crop planning for coastal seasons, aquaponics, direct marketing, social media marketing, Southern SARE producer grants, value-added product opportunities, organic insect control, organic vegetable disease management, weed control, medicinal herbs as niche crop, mushroom cultivation, grass-fed cattle pasture management and genetics, small ruminants, negotiating land leases, marketing to restaurants and distributors, farm record-keeping, successful CSA strategies, postharvest handling and packaging, food safety, small-scale intensive farming, organic pecan and peach production, determining nitrogen availability, mob grazing, and developing a successful meat CSA. Half-day workshops included topics on organic certification, crop planning, enterprise budgets, managing root-knot nematodes through grafted resistant rootstocks, women in agriculture, establishing economical and productive raised beds, food hubs, fruit tree and berry cultivation, and permaculture. Additionally, Georgia Organics offered a total of 24 farm tours of exemplary area farms producing everything from commercial worm products to ginger. Rating for overall conference quality and information averaged 4.65 out of five over the three years.

During the course of the reporting period, Georgia Organics coordinated and participated in 18 field days. These field days provided direct educational opportunities to farmers by giving them access to commercial and research farms. Sites included a ranch with on-farm red meat and poultry processing, two of the most profitable certified organic specialty crop operations in Georgia, a certified organic soybean and corn farm, a small ruminant farm, a Certified Naturally Grown mixed vegetable farm in suburban Atlanta, a mixed vegetable farm in the Georgia mountains, a certified organic blueberry, a certified organic peanut farm, and the UGA certified organic research farm in northeast Georgia. Total attendance for all events was 825. This number does not include participation in the annual Sunbelt Ag Expo field day, which attracts 500 attendees, or counts attendance by multiple local high school classes at the organic soybean and corn farm.

Georgia Organics also coordinated or supported numerous half- and full-day workshops. These included a small farm tax and labor workshop, a small-scale intensive production workshop (in partnership with the National Center for Appropriate Technology), a pruning and grafting workshop, a veteran and underserved producer workshop, a pecan production workshop, a small organic farm production workshop, two cool season vegetable production workshops, a conference on capacity building for local food systems, an introduction to business planning for socially disadvantaged producers in southwest Georgia, a workshop on shiitake mushroom production, a workshop on organic grain production targeting Extension

personnel, a farm business workshop in partnership with the University of Georgia and the Small Business Development Center, and a workshop on high tunnel production and NRCS programs on a certified organic farm in middle Georgia, in which Georgia Organics provided travel assistance to almost forty socially disadvantaged producers from metro Atlanta through its mentoring program. These workshops had a total attendance of 526.

Georgia Organics conducted 19 presentations across Georgia intended to foster new and beginning sustainable farmers. These presentations focused on organic certification and the revenue/expense models for small specialty crop producers and were held at conferences, workshops and events, where Georgia Organics also participated as a substantial planning collaborator. Cumulative attendance was approximately 1,152, and events were located across the state, including White, Rabun, Randolph, Peach, Butts, Peach, Coffee, Chatham, Gwinnett, Houston, Fulton, Terrell, Harris, and Oconee counties.

In terms of outreach, Georgia Organics exhibited at no fewer than 28 farmer-focused events, distributing information on sustainable markets, production practices and marketing certifications. Even after reducing the outsized attendance numbers of the Southeast Regional Fruit and Vegetable Conference and the Sunbelt Ag Expo (3000 and 100,000, respectively), attendance for these events is very conservatively estimated at 20,531. Some of these activities included Fort Valley State University Taste of Ag Field Day, the Southern Sustainable Working Group Conference, the South Georgia Growing Local Conference, the National Women in Agriculture Symposium, the Georgia Multicultural Sustainable Livestock Symposium, and the FFA state conference. In 2012 and 2013, Georgia Organics assembled a host of vendors of sustainable farm inputs, organic buyers and university researchers in order to share opportunities in the expanding organic market with agricultural communities in the traditional row crop areas of south Georgia.

Georgia Organics also coordinated or participated in nine high-impact meetings, which covered Farm to School purchasing from local farms, regional farmer feedback, auxin-resistant crops, Latino outreach, and impending state and Federal regulations affecting small, sustainable farmers, among other things. Total attendance for these meetings was 355.

Through its mentoring program, Georgia Organics provided direct learning experiences from practiced farmer mentors and assistance to 42 farmers throughout Georgia. It also supported more than fifty farmers, most of whom are socially disadvantaged, to travel to immersive on-farm educational experiences in the form of workshops, field days, farm tours and regional conferences. Additionally, Georgia Organics initiated relationships with Latino community members by convening a working group and farmer veterans in order to continue outreach to these emerging constituencies after the conclusion of the grant.

Forty-seven short technical videos were completed with 20,080 combined plays (www.vimeo.com/channels/gofieldtrip). Video topics included urban farming, beneficial insects, economical washing stations, harvesting flowers, propagating tomatoes, negotiating a land lease agreement, managing dairy goats on pasture, planting mounds/hugelkultur, growing organic peanuts, growing in coastal soils, growing ginger, brooder house watering systems, converting a high tunnel to a chicken coop, pruning young fruit trees, hand tool maintenance and winter storage, loading hogs for processing, farmers market presentation, soil blocking, on-farm chicken processing, introduction to biodynamics, mobile hog structures, growing sweet potato slips, microgreen production, packing CSA boxes, packing shed design, biologically-intensive pecan production, seeding beans, gourmet mushroom cultivation, Florida weave trellising, shiitake mushroom production, no-turn row composting, fall direct seeding in hoop house, pasture-integrated chicken house design, cultivation, lambing, rotational intensive grazing, portable watering systems, summer hoop house production, cover crops, seed starting in the greenhouse, fruit tree planting, transplanting onions, winter high tunnels, sweet potato harvest, humane treatment of cattle, and winter high tunnel crops. Additionally, 43 podcasts of conference educational sessions directed toward farmers were completed. There have been 4,706 total views to date.

What opportunities for training and professional development has the project provided?

Donn Cooper, the project PD in replacement of Jonathan Tescher, presented on emerging food trends and agricultural issues to Extension agents on August 4, 2014. Attendance was 45. He also presented on the status of organic production in Georgia to researchers from the Georgia Food Policy Council on March 13, 2014.

On March 3, 2014, he spoke at a SARE-sponsored workshop to UGA Extension agents about organic grain production. Attendance was 20 and included field demonstration of no-till seeding into a rye cover crop.

On August 14-14, 2013, he attended the Southeast Beginning Farmer Workshop: Developing Farm Incubator, Internship, and Apprenticeship Programs, which was funded by a separate USDA NIFA BFRDP grant and hosted by Clemson University.

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

Results and information have been disseminated in person through exhibiting activities. Some of these activities included the Sunbelt Ag Expo, the Southeast Regional Fruit and Vegetable Conference, the Southern Sustainable Working Group Conference, the South Georgia Growing Local Conference, the National Women in Agriculture Symposium, the Georgia

Multicultural Sustainable Agriculture Conference, the Southeast Sustainable Livestock Symposium, the FFA Career and Trade Show, the Sustainable Agriculture Conference for Beginning Farmers, the Georgia Multicultural Sustainable Agricultural Conference, the Georgia Small Farm Conference, the Team Agriculture Georgia workshops, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives Small Farm Conference, the Conservation Production Systems Conference, the Fort Valley State University Farm Home and Ministers' Conference, and the Fort Valley State University Taste of Ag Field Day. Total attendance for these events was well over 300,000. Georgia Organics conservatively estimates that it reached approximately 25,000 through exhibits at external outreach events during the course of the grant.

Georgia Organics' key method of dissemination is its website (www.georgiaorganics.org), specifically that portion dedicated to farmers (<http://georgiaorganics.org/for-farmers/for-farmers-2>). Although its redesign to make information more relevant and accessible is almost complete, the section for farmers received 53,715 pageviews and 40,054 unique pageviews in 2014. By comparison, the same pages received 50,814 total pageviews and 36,805 unique pageviews in 2013, and 41,214 total pageviews and 26,742 unique pageviews in 2012. Since 2011, total visitors to the Georgia Organics website has grown from 87,002 to 127,082 to 143,861 to 150,206. Our blog, "The Daily Dirt," featured producer-written articles, as well as other information generally aimed at the producer community and has received 20,379 pageviews since its initiation in 2014. Additionally, Georgia Organics increasingly relies on social media to disseminate information to new and beginning farmers in Georgia. Since the start of the grant, total likes for Georgia Organics' Facebook page has grown from 7,869 to 21,013.

Georgia Organics publishes a quarterly newsletter, "The Dirt," that is distributed annually to nearly 16,000 households through direct mailing, retail outlets, and individual Community Supported Agriculture programs. The Fall 2014 issue focused primarily on activities on behalf of farmers funded by the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, including the publication of one of the four commissioned case studies.

Georgia Organics also publishes a month e-newsletter, "Grower News," for farmers intended to provide information on educational programs, technical advice, events, and professional opportunities. To date there are 2254 subscribers. This is a dip in subscribers from 2013 (2328) owing to a change in email service providers. The positive trend in subscribers from 2011 to 2014, however, is clear: 1,668, 2,088, 2,328, 2,254.

What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals?

{Nothing to report}

Participants

Actual FTE's for this Reporting Period

Role	Non-Students or faculty	Students within Staffing Roles			Computed Total by Role
		Undergraduate	Graduate	Post-Doctorate	
Scientist	0.4	0	0	0	0.4
Professional	1.2	0	0	0	1.2
Technical	0	0	0	0	0
Administrative	0.2	0	0	0	0.2
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Computed Total	1.8	0	0	0	1.8

Student Count by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Target Audience

The target audience consisted of new and beginning sustainable and organic farmers and ranchers in Georgia. In addition, our efforts reached socially and economically disadvantaged communities regionally in Georgia and in Atlanta.

Products

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2014	YES

Citation

Cooper, D. 2013-2014. Grower News. Monthly. Provides the latest information on technical and educational assistance, funding opportunities, farming employment positions, and events to community of growers, interested growers and agricultural professionals. Via email.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2013	YES

Citation

Cooper, D. 2012-2013. Grower News. Monthly. Provides the latest information on technical and educational assistance, funding opportunities, farming employment positions, and events to community of growers, interested growers and agricultural professionals. Via email.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2012	YES

Citation

Tescher, J. 2011-2012. Grower News. Monthly. Provides the latest information on technical and educational assistance, funding opportunities, farming employment positions, and events to community of growers, interested growers and agricultural professionals. Via email.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2014	YES

Citation

Wall, M. 2013-2014. The Dirt. Quarterly. Provides organic farming and consumer information to members and interested parties. Via email, mail, farmer distribution, and retail outlets in Atlanta.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2013	YES

Citation

Wall, M. 2012-2013. The Dirt. Quarterly. Provides organic farming and consumer information to members and interested parties. Via email, mail, farmer distribution, and retail outlets in Atlanta.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2012	YES

Citation

Wall, M. 2011-2012. The Dirt. Quarterly. Provides organic farming and consumer information to members and interested parties. Via email, mail, farmer distribution, and retail outlets in Atlanta.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Other	2014	YES

Citation

Cooper, Donn. "Current Food Trends and Emerging Agricultural Constituencies." Northwest District Cooperative Extension Training. University of Georgia, Griffin, Georgia. 4 August 2014. Presentation.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Other	2014	YES

Citation

Cooper, Donn. "Overview of Organic Market in Georgia." Organic Fruit and Vegetable Weed Control Workshop. Fort Valley State University, Fort Valley, Georgia. 23 July 2014. Presentation.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Other	2014	YES

Citation

Cooper, Donn. "Organic Production Overview." Team Agriculture Georgia: Georgia Multicultural Sustainable Agricultural Conference. Georgia National Fair, Perry, Georgia. 29 May 2014. Conference presentation.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Other	2014	YES

Citation

Cooper, Donn. "Small Farm Business Planning." UGA Small Business Development Center Farm Business Workshop. Oconee County Extension office, Watkinsville, Georgia. 24 February 2014. Presentation.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Other	2013	YES

Citation

Cooper, Donn. "Small Vegetable Farm Economics." Agricultural Outreach and Initiative Workshop. Cuthbert, Georgia. 17 December 2014. Presentation.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Other	2013	YES

Citation

Cooper, Donn. "Overview of Organic Certification." Auburn Commercial Horticulture Training. Opelika, AL. 24 September 2013. Presentation.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2011	YES

Citation

Fazio, R. 2011. "Producing Wheat and Whole Wheat Flour for the Local Market." <https://georgiaorganics.org/forfarmers/producing-wheat-and-whole-wheat-flour-for-the-local-market/>.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2012	YES

Citation

Chandler, J. 2012. "Sustainable Sheep Production in the Southeast." <https://georgiaorganics.org/for-farmers/sustainable-sheep-production>.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2012	YES

Citation

Jones, B. 2012. "Learning about Lease Agreements." <https://georgiaorganics.org/for-farmers/learning-about-lease-agreements/>.

Other Products**Product Type**

Audio or Video

Description

Forty-seven short technical videos on sustainable production were completed. There have been 20,080 total views to date. (Videos completed during the final year had 4112 total views, not 411 as reported in the 2013-2014 progress report).

Product Type

Audio or Video

Description

Forty-three podcasts of conference educational sessions directed toward farmers were completed. There have been 4,706 total views to date.

Product Type

Data and Research Material

Description

Four brief case studies of sustainable and organic farmers and ranchers in Georgia were produced by the University of Georgia and Fort Valley State University researchers, who also acted as co-PD's.

Changes/Problems

In retrospect, the grant proposal and budget created a difficult management situation by only providing for one full-time equivalent position inside Georgia Organics to oversee an almost exhausting multitude of annual activities and personal relationships: namely, mentors, mentees, field day hosts, workshop presenters, conference presenters, conference scholarship recipients, advisory team members, videographers, podcast recorders, writers, website developers, graphic artists, university researchers—to say nothing of the many outreach efforts. Furthermore, during the first year of the grant, Jonathan Tescher—Georgia Organics' farmer services coordinator who also served as a co-PD and led the execution of the grant—left the organization. Donn Cooper was hired to replace him and joined Georgia Organics on August 6, 2012, just over one week prior to the conclusion of the grant's first year.

As a result of the enormity of the work and the transition in personnel, it was practically incumbent upon Georgia Organics to partner with as many organizations as possible to deliver educational opportunities on organic and sustainable production across Georgia, which has four distinct geographic zones, complicated social relations, and the largest land area east of the Mississippi River. Consequently, in addition to hosting its own activities, Georgia Organics worked with outstanding agricultural organizations inside the state to develop, participate in, and coordinate workshops and field days in order to maximize reach and work efficiently. Over the final two years of the grant, outreach and educational activities were held in conjunction with Georgia Organics' Farm to School program, Team Agriculture Georgia, Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education, South Georgia Growing Local, West Georgia Farmers Cooperative, Northeast Georgia Locally Grown, Georgia Mountains Farmers Network, Athens Land Trust, UGA Sustainable and Organic Production Team, Coastal Organic Growers, Florida Organic Growers, Certified Naturally Grown, Global Growers, National Women in Agriculture, the UGA Small Business Development Center, and Fort Valley State University.

Other challenges were primarily external. In particular, this grant was operated during a difficult budget period for state and Federal collaborators. For one, UGA and other state employees were recovering from severe cost cutting measures during the recession. Offices were often understaffed, and communication and coordination could prove to be difficult. The same can be said of Federal employees. Only, a government shutdown in late 2013 and the final passage of the Farm Bill in early 2014—followed by rapid rollout of programs—exacerbated those effects. While these circumstances did not stop or alter execution of the grant, they affected efficiency and planning to some degree.

In addition, the lack of an organic certification cost share program in Georgia in 2013 certainly froze certification progress in Georgia. As of mid-2014, Georgia Organics could only identify 75 certified organic farms in the state by cross-referencing databases from the state Department of Agriculture and USDA ERS. Comparing those numbers to previous years was problematic due to the chronic unreliability of lists of certified organic producers. The National Organic Program's real-time

directory of active certified farms, as mandated by the Farm Bill, will provide a more stable basis for gauging progress. For the record, Georgia currently boasts the largest number of farmer enrolled in the Certified Naturally Grown program, an alternative certification to organic.

Lastly, Georgia Organics' website has changed its host, undergone a complete redesign, and implemented a new forum since late 2012. While most of the work has been completed, many of these changes have yet to go live, which has also meant that individual resource pages and multimedia resources have yet to be populated or uploaded. These items, such as articles and technical videos, will have increased views and show more robust quantitative metrics as they find more visibility in the final version of the website.