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[Organic Growers School](#)



Supporting Sustainable Agriculture
in the Southern Appalachians through
Educational Programs and Outreach



...e-news

OGS is Hiring!

As we launch a new collaborative project providing training resources for farmers, the Organic Growers School is seeking a new team member. We are a 501c3 non profit organization based in and around Asheville, NC, with service to surrounding regions. This offer is for a contract position, and we are looking for qualified applicants to work with partners in creating effective, comprehensive farmer training. Please read the full job description below and submit materials to jobs@organicgrowersschool.org no later than:

Application Deadline: December 8th, 2010

The Organic Growers School invites applicants for a **Farmer Programs Coordinator** who will report to the organization's Director. Specific responsibilities include

1. Conduct fundraising and development for the Organic Growers School farmer programming, specifically farmer-driven initiatives: CRAFT-WNC and NC Apprentice Link.
2. Provide project leadership on a three-year USDA grant that will expand CRAFT to eastern Tennessee, and conduct feasibility for a satellite program in upstate South Carolina.
3. Conduct marketing and outreach for farmer programming, meeting project goals for program growth from 2011-2013. This purpose of this position is to actively expand CRAFT in the region.
4. Work closely with partners to integrate OGS farmer programming into a comprehensive, full-path, regional suite of training opportunities for WNC growers.
5. Work closely with participating farmers to ensure project completion and success
6. Develop educational materials for farmers on behalf of the Organic Growers School

We are particularly eager to find organized, hard-working candidates who possess the following skills/experience

1. Enthusiastic self-starter with an eye for problem solving and good follow-through
2. strong written and oral communication skills, including public speaking
3. knowledge pertaining to organic and/or sustainable agriculture businesses
4. knowledge pertaining to existing regional agriculture education
5. fundraising and event experience
6. ability to work both independently and in teams

Work will be contracted, from home, part time (15 hours increasing to 20 hours as project expands), and compensated at an hourly rate beginning at \$15. Funding for this position exists for 3 years beginning in 2011, and comes from a USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program Grant. There exists the potential for longer term employment after the initial three years of funding.

Interested candidates should submit a letter of interest, resume, and 3 references to jobs@organicgrowersschool.org. **We will not accept phone calls regarding this position.**

The Organic Growers School is a 501c3 non profit organization that does not discriminate with respect to race, sexual orientation, religion, or other personal factors.

**18TH ANNUAL SPRING
CONFERENCE**

News Bits



It's almost time! Our incredible team is putting the final touches on the 2011 Spring Conference, scheduled for **March 5 & 6, 2011** at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. We're aiming to release the schedule and **open registration on December 17th**, so you can get your tickets as soon as possible. (***Just think: it's the ultimate stocking stuffer for the favorite gardener in your family!***). New tracks this year are Fruit Production, All About Poultry, and Primitive Skills! Another exciting addition to this year's event is our first annual benefit concert and celebration scheduled for the evening of March 5th at the Orange Peel in downtown Asheville, NC, where we will combine creative education, entertainment for all ages, and live music from the Firecracker Jazz Band. Don't miss it!

Our Spring Conference is visited annually by participants from over 17 states and Canada, making it the largest sustainable living conference in the southeastern US. The event offers learning and networking opportunities for growers of all skill levels, and features presentations on cooking, preservation, and minimum impact living to emphasize the big picture behind the fight for sustainable food. Loyal, repeat participants have described the event as "the peeling off of winter" and "the only place where you can learn skills from starting your first garden to sheep shearing; from saving seeds to bread baking." In a matter of weeks we are excited to roll out the 2011 curriculum, so you can start planning your next Spring Conference experience.

For more information about this event, or to sponsor, [visit our website](#). To download sponsor materials now, [click here](#).

For a list of current sponsors and exhibitors, [click here](#).

Note: **Online Registration** by January 17th not only saves paper but saves you \$\$\$\$. We'll send out a special e-news announcement the minute we open online sign-up. Stay tuned!

CRAFT 2011: Enroll Now!

News Bits are reader-submitted events, news, and opinion. Submit your bit to the [enews_crew](#).

Natural Capital Investment Fund Supports Agricultural Enterprises

The Natural Capital Investment Fund (NCIF) has recently provided loans to a number of agricultural and value-added enterprises in North Carolina. NCIF has capital available for loans to growers and producers who are diversifying into natural or organic production or pursuing value-added enterprises involving produce, fruit, grains or protein.

[Recipients of Tobacco Communities Reinvestment Fund Producer or Community Grants or CNEF grants are encouraged to apply](#) if they need additional funding for their diversification efforts. (These grant programs are administered by RAFI-USA and WNC AgOptions and by the Resourceful Communities Program of the Conservation Fund.) NCIF's lending is financed in part by the NC Tobacco Trust Fund Commission.

NCIF's **Grain Bin Program** (see below), pairing small loans with cost share grants for limited resource farmers, has also been refunded by the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund.

To learn if a NCIF loan is a fit for your enterprise, please contact Rick Larson, NC Program Director at 919-967-2223, ext. 113 or rlarson@conservationfund.org.

Visit NCIF's website www.ncifund.org to learn more.

Transition Asheville Food Panel

MOST OF US TAKE ACCESS TO FOOD FOR GRANTED BUT THE TRUTH IS

ACCESS TO FOOD IS NEITHER AS SECURE AS IT NEEDS TO BE NOR AS EQUAL AS IT SHOULD BE

- The cost of food production & distribution rises as availability of cheap energy declines
- Increasing population density decreases land available for agriculture
- The impact of climate change has already caused unpredictable market fluctuations
- The recession, job loss, underemployment, and family health challenges mean 53% of households facing hunger must choose between paying for food and paying for utilities or heating fuel, higher than the NC average of 49% and the US total figure at 42%

Despite a vibrant local food movement and the economic boost that expanding local buying will bring, only a small percentage of the food consumed in WNC comes from local sources.

Become Informed and Add Your Thoughts on This Important Issue

Transition Asheville Food Panel and Discussion

Tuesday, December 7th, 7:00 PM

First Congregational United Church of Christ



The Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT) in WNC has opened enrollment for 2011. Join as a farmer, aspiring farmer, intern, or friend and receive access to monthly farm tours taught by established farmers, educational resources, intern and farm mentor matching services, farm advertising, and more! In an exciting development, the OGS has partnered with the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project as well as Mountain BizWorks on a three-year USDA funded project to integrate CRAFT into a comprehensive, full-path training program for farmers. This partnership will make the business and marketing expertise of our partners available to CRAFT farmers and their apprentices, and help aspiring growers more realistically assess their farming goals. Through this project, we will also work to expand CRAFT into neighboring counties in Tennessee. In addition, we have received funding to generate farmer-developed educational materials, making our annual CRAFT handbook unique to the program and to growers in our region.

[For more information, or to join, visit CRAFT online.](#)

20 Oak St. Asheville, NC

For more information call:

Dylan Ryals-Hamilton

828-989-9030 or email: livingvision@yahoo.com

Organizations/individuals involved include: Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, Thatchmore Farm, Chuck Marsh – Permaculture Teacher and local nurseryman, Warren Wilson College and others.

To deepen the work around this important issue, a follow-up Open Space for brainstorming and action planning will take place Saturday, December 11, 10am – 1pm at the same location.

Please join us for both!

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Farmer's Corner: Ask Tom



Dear Tom –

I recall several on-line conversations last winter about protecting coldframes for winter weather. What steps do you suggest? Thanks.

-- Sarah from Asheville

Dear Sarah –

This is a good time of year to be finishing up coldframe preparations but our preparations start with the yearly seed order. If we go to all the trouble to build a coldframe, we try to be sure that it is overflowing with good food through the winter. A great source for what to grow in your winter coldframe is Eliot Coleman's [Winter Harvest Handbook](#) (Chelsea Green 2009). For which varieties to plant, I often use Johnny's Selected Seeds snowflake icon. Early on we tried planting all the greens with a snowflake to see what worked for us. That experiment led to our winter salad mix with Claytonia as a leading component. www.johnnyseeds.com/p-6078-claytonia.aspx

Timing of the winter crop is important too. As the days become shorter, cooler, and grayer, plants have less energy for growth. Coleman offers a goal of growing plants to a mature size before days are less than 10 hours long. For Asheville that short day period is roughly from Thanksgiving to mid-January. It also makes sense to plan for the crops that will follow your fall-planted crops so that your transplants are ready as the winter crops are harvested. With the major investment in the coldframe structure, we hate to see it ever empty.

Steve Moore at the NCSU Center for Environmental Farming Systems gives a great talk on the benefits of double layers of protection for coldframe productivity. Most folks use row cover over hoops inside the coldframe for this second layer but Steve prefers used greenhouse plastic as the second inner layer. A word of caution - row cover breathes and but plastic does not so be sure and pull the plastic off on sunny days if you go that route. He hosted an August webinar on season extension at: <http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/newsevents/events/2010/sosa2010/sosa2010calendar.html> which may be in the CEFS archives if you want more detail on his research.

Hoops are important to support inner row cover. On cold nights the fabric freezes and will scorch the crop wherever it touches. We use the largest high tensile wire we can get at Southern States. Often the roll of wire is just the right diameter so we cut through the roll in one place and the hoops are ready. We use a hoop about every 5 feet and offset the hoops in adjoining beds. Inside the coldframe wind is rarely a problem but we usually put weights on one side to make handling the fabric easier. The October [Growing for Market](#) has a clever system for managing fabric using cables instead of hoops if you are feeling innovative. <http://www.growingformarket.com/articles/Covering-Hoophouse-Crops>. Another alternative is fiberglass rods that bend over the bed. I believe Reems Creek nursery has them.

Be sure and winterize your irrigation system before temperatures get into the 20s. Hoses will thaw out eventually but it can be several frustrating weeks. PVC pipes usually rupture when the water in them freezes. Putting a drain at the low point of your system and allowing air to enter at the high point will usually work if your supply line has no dips. A frost-proof hose bib and supply lines below 2 feet will simplify winter irrigation.

Finally getting back to your comment about protecting the frame from snow load, here are a few tips from our experience last winter and conversations with other growers:

- A gothic shaped coldframe sheds snow better than quonset shaped houses
- Four-foot hoop spacing is stronger than six feet or more.
- Avoid drilling into hoops – use clamp-style brackets instead – to avoid weakening the frame
- Be sure your house is anchored to the ground to avoid liftoff in high wind
- Brace your end walls outward to avoid snow load pulling both ends toward the center.
- Have portable heaters ready to melt a layer of snow under the snowpack for easier removal
- Use center posts sized 4X4 or greater to provide added snow load resistance.
- Place a rigid pad under posts to avoid the snow load driving them into moist soil
- Have extra brooms and a list of phone numbers handy just in case.
- Be cautious if the snow gets ahead of you. Coldframes can collapse suddenly when their snow load is exceeded.



To avoid ending on that not very cheerful note, NOAA predicts a warmer than average winter with average precipitation.

http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/predictions/long_range/lead03/off03_temp.gif

Happy growing!

-- Tom

Farmers: Got a Question for Tom? Email it to enews@organicgrowersschool.org

Ask Tom Articles © 2010 Tom Elmore & the Organic Growers School

NC APPRENTICE LINK

Some farmers have already starting hiring for next year. Are you looking for help? Are you seeking farm work in our region? **NC APPRENTICE LINK** is the region's only online farm-to-apprentice matching database. It is completely free and easy to use. Just visit the website, take about 10 minutes to fill out an application, and our office will work to find you a worker or a job placement, depending on your needs. What do you have to lose? Check out NC Apprentice Link and extend your search, while eliminating the arduous screening process. We'll do the work for you! [Start your search now.](#)

Gardener's Corner: Ask Ruth

Dear Ruth,

My garden was just OK last year. I harvested some vegetables, but not that many. Some of my plants weren't growing very much, and my friend thought they needed fertilizer. I want to do better next year. Do you have any suggestions?

Fred



Arden, NC

Dear Fred,

Here's the deal. I hope you won't feel discouraged, because every year that you garden, you learn a little bit more about something. Your garden *will* reflect what you learned the previous season and therefore should show steady improvement annually. Even veteran farmers are always learning new tricks and trying out ideas for the first time.

The summer was very dry for most of us, and vegetables require about one inch of water per week. If you were not watering your garden, at least occasionally, that may have been your main problem. Plants that don't receive adequate water are operating in survival mode, not in maximum production mode. Next year consider investing in some sort of watering devices...soaker hoses, drip irrigation system (excellent for water conservation), sprinkler, or watering can. Water deeply once or twice a week (unless you have tiny baby seedlings), rather than shallowly every day.

If you did water religiously this year, then you may have had some sort of fertility problem. When preparing a bed for planting, I incorporate compost into the soil, plus I like to add some of my worm-casting to each planting hole. If my garden plants start to look "lame" as the season progresses; I usually side-dress or foliar-feed them with some sort of organic fertilizer. Granular-type organic fertilizers should be gently scratched into the soil. This keeps the nutrients from washing away in the rain and directs them to your plant roots. I also use a Seaweed/Hydrolyzed Fish Blend for foliar-feeding, and sometimes as a drench. To foliar-feed your garden plants, mix the product with water as directed by the instructions, and then use a spray bottle (small scale), pump sprayer (bigger) or a backpack sprayer (bigger yet) to apply the fertilizer. Coat the leaves well on both sides if possible. The plant will absorb the nutrients through their leaves. The same product can be mixed up and poured on the root zone of the plant as a drench.

Besides water, your plants require an adequate supply of oxygen (air) to prosper. A crumbly soil indicates that there are spaces in the soil structure that hold air and water. If your soil is compacted clay, your plants cannot breathe well, and organic matter must be added to the soil to lighten it. If a hard crust has formed on the soil surface, cultivating the soil (hoeing) will loosen that crust and allow the plants to have access to more oxygen. In my experience, plants show noticeable improvements after you hoe around them...because you have made the soil more receptive to the air and water that is so essential for plant growth.

I suggest that you do a soil test this fall. The test results will indicate what additions should be made to your soil. And guess what? Currently, soil testing is a free service in the state of North Carolina.

Soil Testing –Step by Step:

You will need the correct box for sending in your samples. These free boxes and sample information forms can be obtained at your County Cooperative Extension Service. In Asheville, the Master Gardeners (a Cooperative Extension program) usually have a table at Asheville City Market where they give out soil test boxes, and other great information. Reems Creek Nursery, in Weaverville, usually has them too. To find the location of your county's North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service click here: <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/index.php?page=countycenters>. Boxes can also be gotten at the NCDA&CS Agronomic Services Division in Raleigh, NC.

Take soil samples from your garden area. Zig-zag around and across your garden, taking 15 to 20 samples that are about 6-8 inches deep. Take the core samples when the soil is dry enough that it can easily be mixed. You can use an ordinary shovel or trowel, but *do NOT use tools that are galvanized, brass, or bronze*. They can contaminate the sample with zinc or copper. The form recommends using iron or stainless steel tools to collect the samples.

Mix all the veggie garden samples together in a clean plastic bucket (do not use a galvanized bucket). The bucket should be free of fertilizer, lime, and other contaminants. Crush any clods, and mix the soil up well, as if you were making biscuits. If you are taking samples from a number of areas in your yard (such as lawn and blueberry patch), segregate the samples from each area because grass and blueberries have very different pH requirements. Mix all your lawn samples in one clean bucket, and all your blueberry patch samples in a different clean bucket. To ensure that the soil test results will be accurate (1) identify/label each separate bucket so they don't get mixed up, (2) label the



sample boxes and be sure that the box contents match the bucket contents as labeled, and (3) correctly fill out the Soil Sample Information Form so that the soil test results are meaningful for each particular area you are addressing.

Label the soil sample box using permanent ink. Fill in your name, address, and sample ID (you make this up). ID each area you sampled with a name no more than 5 letters...for instance VEGIE for your vegetable garden, GRASS for your lawn, and BLBER for your blueberries.

Put the well-mixed sample into the brown soil sample box. You *must* use the designated sample boxes. Veggie garden, blueberry patch, lawn, and flowerbed, etc. should all be sampled separately and boxed separately. Fill the box about 2/3's full or to the "Fill Line" on the box. *Do NOT seal the soil sample box with tape. Do NOT send soil samples in a plastic bag.* Fold the box flaps according to instructions.

Fill out the Sample Information Form. Obtain this form at your NC Cooperative Extension Office, or download it at this URL: <http://www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/forms.htm>. Use permanent ink or a #2 pencil to fill out the form. It is self explanatory, with an example on the back of the form. You will need to list each individual sample box and its sample ID name (such as BLBER for blueberries). Specify a crop code (the codes are on the back of the form). Gardeners should use the codes under "Home Lawn & Garden". The home vegetable garden crop code is 024, etc. In the case of blueberries, use the Farmer crop code (075 or 076) because their pH and fertilizer requirements are quite different than some other berries. For each sample box, specify how much lime was applied in the last 12 months, and the month and year it was applied.

Fold the Sample Information Form and insert it between the flaps in the top of the soil sample box. Do NOT put the Soil Information Form *inside* the soil sample box.

The samples must be mailed to Raleigh (this is your only expense) or they can be hand-delivered to the NCDA & CS Agronomic Division in Raleigh. *DO NOT take them to your local Cooperative Extension Office...*there may be some exceptions to this, but Buncombe County Cooperative Extension definitely does not take them. It is important to pack the soil sample boxes in a sturdy box (like corrugated cardboard) for shipping, and to use packing materials like newspaper (not packing peanuts) to keep the sample boxes from moving around and spilling in transit.

Shipping Address:

If you are shipping via the US Postal Service mail to:
1040 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1040

If you are using a private carrier (such as UPS, FedEx, etc.) mail to:
4300 Reedy Creek Road
Raleigh, NC 27607-6465

Your Soil Test results will be available online at: www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/ under "Find Your Report" in the left-hand column navigation bar. It usually takes about one week. In late fall through early spring, it may take the Agronomic Division several weeks to process the samples and post your results since many farmers send in their samples during this time. You can include an email address on the Sample Information Form and the results will be emailed to you. If you not have a computer, you can go online at the library or an extension office to obtain your results. **The Agronomic Division no longer mails Soil Test results.** In rare cases ... say you are 90 years old, have never had electricity, and live in a far-flung corner of Madison County...you can request that the results are mailed to you.



I asked Dr. Jeana Meyers, with the NCDA & CS Agronomic Division, why she thought soil tests were important for organic growers. She responded by saying, **"one of the main reasons organic growers should use soil testing is to make sure they have enough phosphorus in their soils because P sources are either slow or expensive for organic farmers, so they have to plan in advance. The other important reason is that organic growers often bring in large amounts of compost – animal, mushroom, food composts – and some of these can have extremely high levels of nutrients or heavy metals such as zinc. For example, zinc is fed to animals**

and then builds up in their compost and because it's a metal it stays in the soil. Low levels of zinc are necessary for healthy plant growth, but high levels can be toxic to plants, especially at low pH. An organic farmer needs to know what is in the materials he or she is applying. Compost samples can be sent to the Plant Waste Media and Solution Lab and analyzed for \$5."

Here are a few helpful links:

View a Soil Testing instructional powerpoint at: <http://www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/instruct.htm>

Fertilizing with Organic Nutrients: <http://www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/uyrst.htm> > Soil Fertility Notes > Soil Fertility Note 12

Frequently Asked Questions about Soil Testing and Fertilizer:

<http://www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/stfaqs.htm#q7>

Thanks for writing, Fred. Your soil test results should provide insight into why this year's harvest may have been meager. It's possible that something as simple as a pH adjustment could make a huge difference. I hope next year's garden is kickin'!

All my best,
Ruth

Gardeners: Got a Question for Ruth? Email it to enews@organicgrowersschool.org

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