



THE ALABAMA
SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE
NETWORK

ASAN UPDATE

Fall 2014

Published Quarterly

EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES IN ALABAMA AGRICULTURE SERIES: ELDERBERRIES

This article is part 1 of a series on niche market opportunities well-suited to Alabama growers. More about the series on page 4.

By Michael LaBelle

You'd be wise to start paying attention to the elderberry (*Sambucus nigra* ssp. *canadensis*). From www.NormsFarms.com: "This emerging superfruit is packed with Vitamins A, B and C, iron, potassium, and the powerful antioxidants known as anthocyanins. The plants are a hardy perennial, and are naturally disease resistant. Surprisingly, only 10% of the elderberries consumed in the U.S. are actually grown here; the other 90% are grown in Europe." That's right: 90% of our elderberries (fruits that grow WILD in Alabama!) are imported from Europe.

I spoke with Rodger Lenhardt, the son of Norm's Farms namesake Norm Lenhardt, whose life's work has been developing the U.S. elderberry market. Check the ASAN website in the near future for full my interview with Rodger during which he answers many questions that potential elderberry farmers will have. Rodger enthusiastically shares his years of experience in growing this amazing fruit.

Just a few reasons there's a bright future in growing elderberries:

- The fruit is native to the US,



growing wild in the Southeast.

- Relatively few insects and diseases are problematic with the elderberry.
- Market supply is not meeting demand, with 90% of all elderberries consumed in the U.S. being imported.
- Potential income per acre is substantially higher than most other crops, with a potential of over \$10,000 per acre for wholesale berries.
- Elderberries present many value-added opportunities such as jams, wine, and health food ingredients, and USDA has grant funding available for value-added products.
- Elderberry plants are easily propagated. Purchase and plant 1/2 acre of plants (1000) and after 2 years you can plant an additional 9.5 acres!
- Multiple avenues of revenue from growing elderberries:
 - Wholesale berries
 - Cleaned and bagged berries
 - Value added products: jam, jelly, syrup, juice, powder

(Continued on page 4)

ROOTED IN THE LAND: BLACK CULTURAL IDENTITY

By Natilee McGruder

As an Alabamian who is a descendant of agriculture savvy slaves, determined sharecroppers and avid gardeners I feel that cultivating and respecting the land is my ancestral birthright. After slavery ended, some freed slaves took advantage of the homestead opportunity offered by the Freedman's Bureau in

(Continued on page 6)



In Sumter County, AL, Anne Williams helps her husband Charles harvest peas and other produce. Photo credit: John Ficara (Black Farmers in America)

LEARNING FROM THE MODEL OF A COSTA RICAN COFFEE CO-OP

By Mary Ignatiadis

Small farmers face many of the same problems worldwide. How do you work with your land, your resources, your employees, your neighbors, your extension agent and your banker to achieve your goals? This summer I traveled to the highlands of Costa Rica to learn how one community has come together to answer this question. *Cooperativa*

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LETTER FROM THE ASAN BOARD PRESIDENT



Is Alabama ready for prime time? Superstar rock-and-roll singer Tina Turner always put on a dynamic show with hits like "Proud Mary, (Rolling on The River)." She would

begin the song with the titillating question and declaration, "Are you ready for me? I'm ready for you." Well, Alabama food and fiber consumers are ready for sustainable agriculture and they now are asking agricultural producers in the state if they are ready for them.

Alabama has great agriculture potential with its abundant water resources, rich soils, a favorable climate, and a not too distant history of being a significant contributor to the nation's food and fiber supply. A mere 3 generations ago, most Alabamians lived in rural areas of the state. A significant portion of a family's food was grown on the family's farm, in a garden, tended to, in most cases, by the parents and their children. Children were taught how to grow food, how to harvest it and how to harvest game animals found in the forest adjoining the

farm place. Sadly, those days of yesteryear are all but gone in our great State. What happened?

The migration of people who knew how to grow food and fiber left the states of the Old South. This migration is known as The Great Migration. Millions of people who knew how to grow food crops (vegetables and fruits) began leaving the South in search of greater economic and social freedom in the early 1900. This migration of farmers was accelerated by the need for workers to man the factories turning out warships, planes, guns and munitions during World Wars I and II. Northern and western cities as well as some southern cities, Mobile, Birmingham, New Orleans and Savannah to cite a few, benefited from the influx of millions of rural farm people who were used to hard work and were adept at learning new skills.

The new city dwellers found economic opportunities in their new locales not available in their previous places of residence. Few would return to places where their ancestors toiled without pay for hundreds of years. Most sold the farms that they or their forefathers had

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bought with hard earned money for sums not approaching the true value of the land. For many, farming was associated with the peculiar institution known as slavery. In a few generations, members of the Great Migration and their descendants lost the desire to farm, produce their own food or to live in rural communities.

The Great Migration caused a severe decline in the number of low-wage farm workers in the Southern states. To compensate for the decline in the number of farm workers, medium and large farm owners turned increasingly to mechanization. The agriculture machinery giants John Deere, Ford, Massey Ferguson, Farm-All, and others turned out a myriad array of machinery that allowed one or two people to till, plant, and harvest what would require a gang of several farm workers in prior times. Added to the "new farmer's"

(Continued on page 3)

CONTRIBUTORS: FALL 2014

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this newsletter, including (but not limited to):

Michael LaBelle is co-owner of Mighty Grow Organics, based in Fruitdale.

Natilee McGruder is part of the River Region Food Policy Council and the Alabama Food Policy Council, and a regular volunteer at EAT South in Montgomery.

Mary Ignatiadis, a Huntsville native, interned with ASAN in the summer of 2013. She is now a junior at Williams College in Massachusetts.

Joan Robertson owns and operates Luddite Farms in Attalla, AL. **Shavaun Evans** and her colleagues at the **National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition** provided the FSMA update on pg. 13.

Gene Thornton is ASAN's Board President and the owner-operator of Sneaky Crow Farm in Roanoke, AL.

Alice Evans is the Executive Director of ASAN.

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BOARD PRESIDENT LETTER (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 2)

bag of tricks were a wide range of synthetic or man-made chemical products designed to enrich the soil, kill the pest insects, eliminate the weeds and preserve the produce. U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz accelerated the decline in small farms by championing corporate farming, instituting federal agricultural policies that decimated small farms and enjoining farmers to "get big or get out." Many of them got out, and many got too big for their britches, and then got put out by their bank lenders.

Recent farm census data show the number of farmers in Alabama continues to de-

cline. Most of Alabama farmers are engaged in livestock, timber, or commodities production (cotton, corn, soybeans) where a few individuals are needed to farm large tracts of land using mechanized equipment. Specialty crop (vegetables and fruits) farmers are under-represented in the South, Alabama included.

Recent federal efforts to increase support for specialty crop producers may be too little, too late. Increasingly the food and fiber Americans eat and wear is being produced and value-added to outside the United States. Research that would benefit small and medium specialty crop farmers is sorely absent. Many land-grant colleges and universities are abandoning

their sustainable and organic research activities or are devoting insufficient time, money, and efforts to produce research of much value to small and medium sized specialty crop farmers.

A glimmer of hope can be seen in the tremendous growth of consumer groups in Alabama whose members are educating themselves on all aspects of food production, harvesting, handling, and marketing. Farmers markets are sprouting up all over the state, providing opportunities for farmers and consumers to connect and re-establish all important bonds between farmers and eaters. ASAN has been in the forefront of this movement in Alabama for the past 12 years. Many local groups were inspired to join the fight for healthy farms, healthy food, and healthy

communities by the hard work of countless ASAN members and supporters.

ASAN can use your support, financial and otherwise. If you are already a member, thanks! If not, consider joining ASAN and a group in your local area devoted to "HF, HF, HC."

Thanks, and keep on growing!



Gene Thornton
President

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ELDERBERRIES (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 1)

- (no seeds)
- Sell juice to local wineries
- Sell flowers to wine and cordial producers
- Elderberry sparkle – lacto-fermented elderberry juice
- Sell cuttings, rooted cuttings and plants

Potential Challenges

Every farmer knows that things are NEVER as easy as they first appear, and growing elderberry is no exception. First, this is a relatively new crop for commercial production, so there is not a lot of readily available information for the would-be elderberry farmer. That being said, every grower I have spoken with was only too happy to share his experiences with what works and what doesn't. It's nice to learn from others' mistakes to flatten the learning curve.

As an example of this willingness to share, Rodger Lenhardt was quick to share many of the lessons he has learned over the past decade, the hard way. He plants 2000 plants per acre, as opposed to the university recommendation of 600 per acre. The reason? "In a word," he said, "weeds." The best form of weed control for elderberries is elderberries.

Another lesson concerned why NOT to use ground cloth weed fabric for weed control. With weed fabric, the new shoots are unable to pop up next to the parent plant and are forced to travel underground into the MIDDLE of the row, exactly where you do NOT want them to grow. It is better to use heavy wood chip mulch which holds in moisture and suppresses weed growth, but allows the shoots to grow by the parent plant.

As far as insects and diseases, elderberries are generally unaffected. A certain mite can over-winter in some of the buds and, during wet years, a fungus can cause leaf

About This New Series: "Opportunities in Alabama Agriculture"

Agriculture has always been an important part of Alabama's economy and, more importantly, a major part of Alabama culture.

Only two generations ago, the majority of Alabama families survived thanks to their ability to grow food from the rich soil and abundant rainfall in the state. But, as the saying goes, "the times, they are a-changin'." For Alabama farmers to prosper into the future, we need to look outside of the traditional crops that our grandparents grew.

This is the first in a series of articles aiming to highlight new opportunities that Alabama farmers can pursue. The main idea behind this series is to highlight niche markets that can be accessed with a minimum of investment in land, equipment and capital. My goal is to pique your interest so that you can further study the emerging opportunities that interest you.

Each article will be laid out in the following format: first, an introduction to the opportunity; second, why it appears to have a bright future; third, some potential pitfalls to watch out for; and, last, the market outlook moving forward.

Always remember that agriculture, apart from growing food for your own use, is a business and should be approached as such. Study, do your research, seek counsel from those who have gone before and, as much as possible, determine a market for your products BEFORE you invest.

spot. The fungus can be controlled by a copper sulfate solution. Not bad, considering the vast number of diseases and insects that most plants endure!

One pest to be aware of is Spotted Wing Drosophila (SWD). SWD has been confirmed in several north-central Alabama counties, and its geographical footprint seems to be growing. Raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, and blueberries are the most preferable host plants for SWD. Alabama growers should be alert to the presence of SWD in their area. Monitoring for this pest is an important part of management techniques. Control is not recommended unless SWD is caught in monitoring traps, fruit injury is detected, or a high-value crop needs protecting.

Assessing the Market

So what is the market potential for elderberry, now that every farmer read-

ing this article is thinking of which land to clear first? As previously stated, over 90% of all the elderberry products consumed in the U.S. are made with imported berries. The most recent data I could find was from 2008. In that year, Austria produced and sold to the US over 19,000,000 pounds of elderberries. At a conservative production capacity of 5000 pounds per acre, it would take 3,800 acres just to replace the elderberries produced in ONE European country about the size of Maine. At an average field size of 10 acres, it would take 380 farms to produce domestically the same volume that we currently import from Austria alone.

And according to Rodger Lenhardt, the average wholesale price paid for raw elderberries ranges between \$1.00-\$2.25 per pound, depending on how much cleaning/processing is done. Doesn't \$5000-\$10,000 per acre sound interesting? (NOTE: certified organic berries com-

mand a significant premium.) Like most companies offering elderberry products in the U.S., Rodger is actively seeking new growers to help him meet demand.

I would like to express special thanks to Rodger Lenhardt for his time and knowledge. I would also


(Continued on page 5)



Above: Rodger with some of his elderberry products. At right: Rooted elderberry cuttings (8 weeks). Photos courtesy of Rodger Lenhardt




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ELDERBERRIES (CONT'D)

like to thank my sister-in-law, Jessica Espinoza from Delicious Obsessions, for introducing me to Rodger. Her recent blog post about the amazing health benefits and growing popularity of elderberry fruit really caught my attention and launched me into some exciting research. I recommend you read her blog and product review here to get an idea of the health benefits and value-added opportunities:

www.deliciousobsessions.com/2014/07/small-berry-big-punch/

For Alabama farmers to prosper into the future, we need to grow with the demands of the market, looking beyond the usual crops traditionally grown here. With the U.S. market showing great interest in elderberry products, this just could be the crop you've been looking for.

In the next ASAN newsletter, I will share another emerging opportunity for Alabama farmers. If you have questions or comments on this article, please email me at mike@mightygrow.com.

"TRAIN THE TRAINER" WORKSHOPS ON ORGANIC HIGH TUNNELS PLANNED IN OCTOBER

Southern SAWG (Sustainable Agriculture Working Group), NRCS, and ASAN will be hosting three, one-day trainings on organic horticultural high tunnel production for NRCS, Extension and other agricultural professionals.

The training is designed to expand the expertise of

these agents so that they can provide effective technical assistance to new constituents – current, transitioning and aspiring organic farmers, and farmers developing high tunnel production systems. Trainings will last from about 8:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. and will be on November 10, 12 and 13 in Falkville (north), Arton (south), and Tuskegee (central), respectively.

The training in Falkville will be held in conjunction with the ASAN Regional Food & Farm Forum for North Alabama (see page 11).

For more information about the training in your area, please contact Kirk Iversen at kirk.iversen@gmail.com.



Photo courtesy Southern SAWG.

ROOTED IN THE LAND (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 1)

1866, which created the first major wave of black land ownership. However, most freed slaves did not receive free land and instead worked for many years in a hostile environment as tenant farmers, sharecroppers or in the steel and turpentine industries to save enough cash to buy their land.

By 1890 all that hard work yielded 120,738 black farms and just twenty years later that number grew to 218,972 farms. In 1910, black farmers owned 15 million acres of farmland, and in 1920 one in every seven farmers was black. However, by 1982, black farmers owned only 3.1 million acres of farmland and one in every 67 farmers was black. Now there are less than 18,000 black farmers, representing less than 1% of all farms in America.

Many people, including those in my family history, have been divorced from the land or have left it voluntarily because of discrimination in the form of falsely denied loans for farmers, predatory lending practices, racism and violent domestic terrorism, and anti-small farm federal loans and subsidies.

Less tangibly, there is also the shame and stigma descending from generations of agricultural based slavery and sharecropping: a life that often meant crushing poverty and back-breaking work from sunup to sundown which would only result in more debt. Many black farming families who survived the 20s and 30s saw it to be a sign of success, if going forward, their children never had to pick cotton or farm for survival.

That shift forward toward industrial work, the service sector, college and careers left something behind:

the land and our connection to it. Celebrated playwright August Wilson is quoted as saying:

We were a land based agrarian people from Africa. We were uprooted from Africa and we spent 200 years developing our culture as black Americans and then we left the South. We uprooted ourselves and attempted to transplant this culture to the pavements of the industrialized North. It was a transplant that didn't take. I think if we had stayed in the South we would have been a stronger people and because of the connection between the South of the 20s, 30s, and 40s has been broken, it's very difficult to understand who we are.

There is, however, a new wave of change. The sustainable farming, homesteading, slow food, permaculture and urban farming movements just to name a few have attracted many people of color from the young to the baby boomers back to the land. There is hope in going back to the old ways—growing, preparing and sharing with the community fresh and minimally processed food. We must return to the land in order to heal ourselves of the spiritual disconnect, as well as to heal ourselves physically of obesity, diabetes and other dietary related diseases.

A successful return to the land will require educating the community, particularly young people, in skills like agroecology, sustainable building and design, technology, environmental conservation, and entrepreneurship. But first, we must engage in sharing oral and written history to honor ourselves, our ancestors and our earth as we forge a new identity that is once again rooted in the land.



Young farmers from Soul Fire Farm (NY) presented at the 2011 Black Farmers Conference. Photo courtesy of Soul Fire Farm

UPDATED SMALL FARMS RESOURCE GUIDE NOW AVAILABLE

ASAN is thrilled to announce the release of an updated version of the Alabama Small Farms Resource Guide!

This guide, produced with Alabama A&M University's Small Farms Research Center, is a comprehensive directory for all you might need in



order to start (and sustain) a successful small farm in Alabama. As it says on the cover, the guide is "for small farms with big ideas."

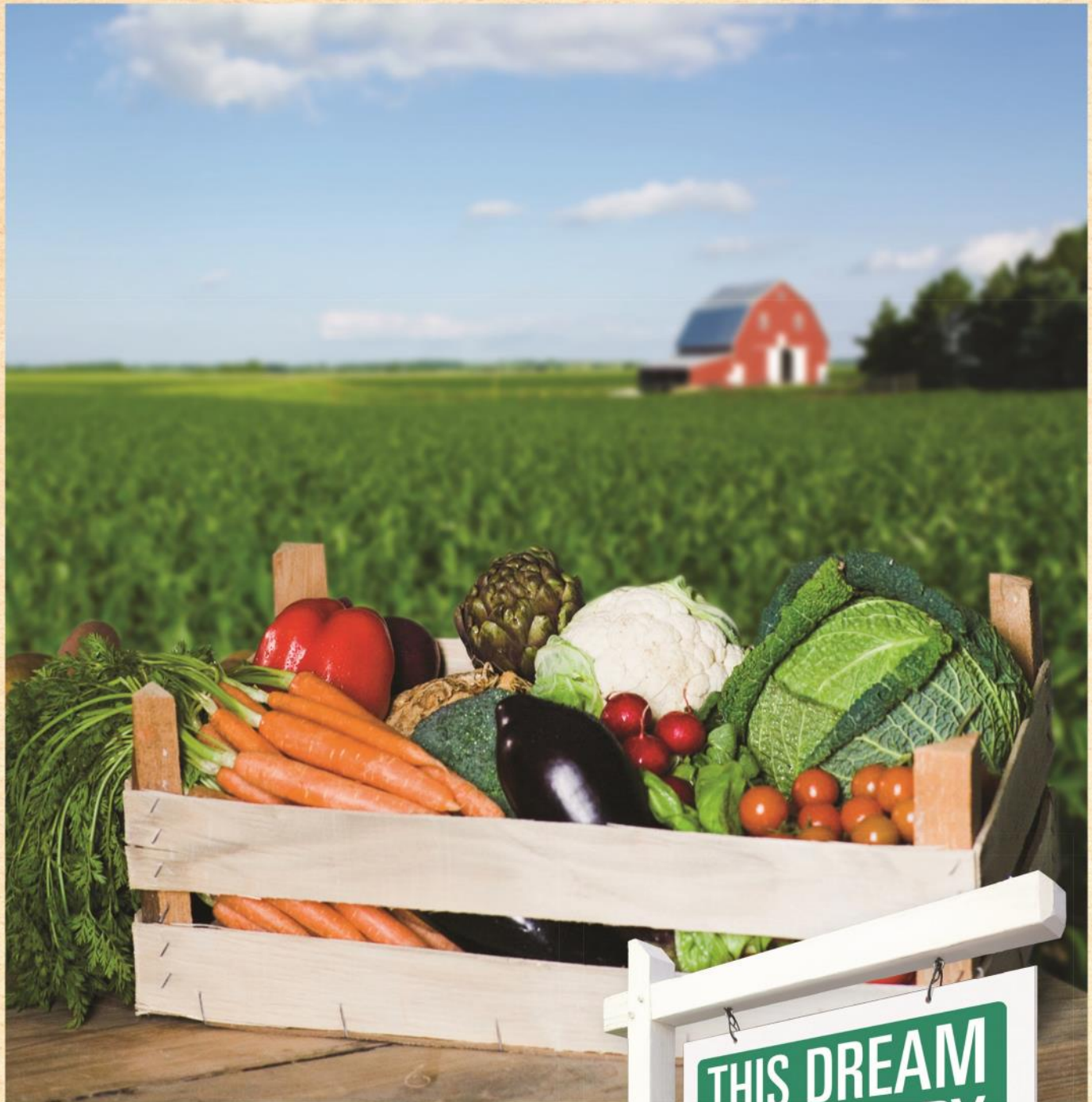
Categories of listings include: Business Planning and Assistance; Farm Equipment and Supplies; Soil Testing Services; Certifications and Standards; and much more. The guide also includes a thorough list and contact information for organizations and agencies that are of use to small farmers.

Since the 1st edition of this guide was produced in 2006, there has been huge growth in the number of educational offerings, marketing opportunities, and support organizations for direct-market and sustainable farms in Alabama. As with the 1st edition, the information contained in this updated guide was vetted by ASAN members and other farmers and ag professionals, in order to ensure that it's as accurate, comprehensive, and practical as possible. We hope that it will reduce stress and save invaluable time as farmers seek out the resources needed to launch their farms.

This project was supported in part by the USDA-NIFA's Beginning Farmer Rancher Development Program. We are *greatly* indebted to Karen Wynne, former ASAN Executive Director and owner of Rosita's Farm in Hartselle, for all her leadership, hard work, and persistence she showed in order to update the Guide.

Copies of the guide will be available at the Regional Food & Farm Forums this fall, and at select other events. An online version will also be available soon at www.asanonline.org.

We plan to run a larger second printing, which will be supported by sponsorships from advertisers. If your business or organization is interested in advertising in the guide, please contact Alice Evans at alice@asanonline.org.



First South Farm Credit, building the bridge to coordinate retail agriculture and credit opportunity. First South's mission is to provide credit and credit opportunity for young, beginning and small farmers in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. The new generation of retail agriculture is supported by farmers markets, community supported agriculture and other direct to consumer marketing options. First South Farm Credit supports the continued improvement of retail agriculture and non-traditional agriculture through the First South Young, Beginning and Small Farmer Credit Program and the First South marketing plan to identify and coordinate with the new generation of retail farming.

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THE YEAR OF THE HORSE: LEARNING TO FARM WITH DRAFT ANIMALS

By Joan Robertson

When the old tractor gave up, it took a full year and a half for me to accept it. Friends, relatives, and professional mechanics, all gave hope that THEY were the one who was going to get it going again. It seemed proper to cling to this hope.

Then it seemed proper to rent a tractor. Twice. And then it seemed proper to finally actually shop for and purchase a new tractor... Favorable growing conditions came and went, during which time, millennial farming methods were just as elusive.

People's eyes tend to glaze over at the suggestion that one might choose to make use of a large animal in preparing garden beds, as opposed to farm machinery, especially since the former tends to take a little more time, skill, and patience. Farming with horses, mules, or oxen is seen by most as nostalgic or "old-timey." That, or they say it's what they do in places where they have no other choice.

For some reason you almost never hear people use terms like "progressive," "sustainable," "mindful," "modern," or "sophisticated" when it comes to using draft power. Admittedly, draft animals have no place in most so-called modern farming situations, but in present day Vermont, draft horses are used to run fiber optic cable through terrain, impossible to access by truck.

There's an excellent publication called *The Small Farmer's Journal*, dedicated to the craft of farming with draft animals. Not long ago, it featured a story about a farmer who, while out in the field with his team, was called home on some type of emergency. While this farmer normally takes great pride in backing his team and wagon into a narrow slip in the barn, on this night, he's forced to leave them "parked" outside the house, wagon

still heavy with a load of grain. That night a storm approaches, but he is unable to attend to the horses until morning, when he finds that they have disappeared. He searches everywhere, until he finally reaches the barn, and finds that his team have backed themselves into their usual location, and the harvest was saved. Only Walt Disney could make it so that a tractor could do the same.

The inclusion of animals is a critical part of a bio-dynamic, self-supporting farm system. A three-point hitch and front-end loader are fine things as well, but as far as low impact tillage and basic garden tasks go, the jingle of harness, and the soft breath of a horse are a gift. And it is possible for the economics to work in favor of the horse. A single horse, or possibly a team, are a fine fit for an acre or two of garden, helping also with pasture maintenance and a bit of log skidding for firewood or lumber. Any petroleum powered task that can be replaced with true horse power is a step toward a more peaceful and healthy world. By baling hay for winter, with horse drawn equipment, one's farm operation could be truly solar powered.

As a grower of primarily garlic and perennial herbs, the bulk of the plowing, planting, and harvesting at my farm occurs during fall and spring, and the comparatively milder weather makes work a little lighter for a draft animal (and a farmer!). The garlic comes in handy for many animal ailments, and is part of rigorous anti-parasite maintenance for pastured sheep and lambs.

Horses and sheep make for mutually beneficial pasture mates. Not only do the horses



Fall harrowing. Never drop the lines! Photo credit: Joan Robertson

offer some amount of flock protection from predators, but they also help protect from parasites. The pole barber worm is a parasite that specifically affects sheep (though it may not be an issue with a closed mature flock).

Horses act as a vacuum

to eliminate the pole barber worm's larvae without being affected by it. Young lambs' droppings are extremely high in calcium (being almost completely milk), so they contribute natural liming and pH balancing to the soil and thereby improve the pasture quality for all grazers.

There is a multitude of resources available for anyone interested in farming with draft animals. New equipment, mainly from Amish manufacturers, is featured at the annual "Horse Progress Days," which happens every July in Illinois. "New for 2014" may seem like a strange tagline to accompany anything horse-drawn, but amazingly, you will find plows, seeders, spreaders, sprayers, mowers, and more, all built specifically for use with draft animals. There also seem to be a few folks sprinkled around the country offering their services to assist others in learning the craft of farming with horses, along with some bright-eyed young people excited to learn from them. Peinhardt Living History Farm in Cullman hosts an annual farm day in October (this year it's October 25, see calendar at back for details), often featuring draft horses at work. It seems a veritable renaissance is occurring.

"While the experts have been raising such a fuss about the 'impossibility' of farming with horses, a good many farmers scattered all over the country have quietly gone back to using them—just as thousands of Amish farmers have quietly continued to use them, with results pleasing to anybody who will look."

~ Wendell Berry, in "Going Back—or Ahead—to Horses," from his 1981 essay collection *The Gift of Good Land*



Plow repair. Photo credit: Joan Robertson

COFFEE CO-OP (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 1)

de Caficultores y Servicios Múltiples Del Dos de Tilarán, (COOPELDOS, RL) consists of approximately 300 coffee-producing families. I was entirely at home in this generous and beautiful community, which reminded me so much of farming communities in Alabama.

Some people in the United States are already familiar with the concept of consumer cooperatives: a democratically governed group pools their resources to increase their purchasing power and get the most from their money. The financial cooperative Farm Credit Systems was established in the United States in 1916 and loans 25% of all money loaned in U.S. agriculture today.

Farmers' cooperatives create financial and social stability because financial gain and social equality are not at odds in a cooperative economy. Large landowners, small landowners, women, men — after paying a small entrance fee, each member receives one vote. Rural communities increase their marketing power, increase their knowledge base, and decrease their purchasing costs for fertilizers and equipment when they unite in a cooperative.

These are especially successful when they are part of a network of other cooperatives, as is COOCAFE. The network COOCAFE has a strict code of nondiscrimination which all of its member cooperatives must follow. COOCAFE hires accountants and agricultural specialists to coordinate coffee production throughout the region and maximize farmers' efficiency.

COOPELDOS was founded in 1972 by Don Charia, a farmer who realized that the community could sell its coffee at much better prices if it could process the berries independently of middle-men and create a much more marketable product. Today, the marketing director finds three-year production contracts for the cooperative. Advance payments from those contracts carry the

coffee farmers between harvests. The economic growth that has come to Tilarán since its founding is proof that effective cooperatives can overcome the challenges of modern agriculture.

A rich, slightly pungent smell reaches my nose even before I see the building where dried coffee is sorted, roasted and packaged into the final product. Across the gravel road is the large maze of funnels, conveyor belts, and silos where coffee berries from member farms are washed, dried, and stored.

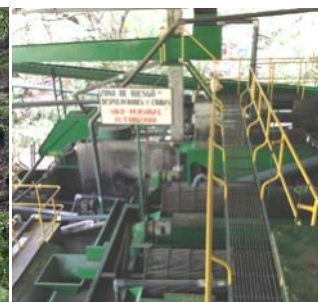
Ruben, the processing manager, has been working for the coop for 11 years and proudly explains how everything works. From late October through early February, the coop's two trucks pick up harvested berries from five regional collection centers and deliver them here. The plant employees supervise the washing, drying, dehusking, storage, and eventually the roasting and packaging of the beans.

At the coop office up the road, farmers stop in throughout the day to check the status of their accounts, share local news, and enjoy a fresh cup of coffee with their friends. Everyone is greeted by a nickname and a handshake.

A high-quality cup of coffee comes from berries that have been



Clockwise from top: Costa Rican coffee field. Equipment used to wash coffee beans immediately after harvest. Author (middle) with her Costa Rican host family. Photo credits: Mary Ignatiadis



roasted to exactly the same intensity - not underdone, but not burnt either. This is achieved by sorting out berries that are either too small or too large. Thanks to one of COOCAFE's educational programs, one of the co-op's employees is a certified taster.

The first two weeks of June in the cantón (county) of Tilarán are filled with the sweet smell of coffee flowers and creamy hydrangea blooms. I toured the cantón on a four-wheeler with Edgar, the agricultural engineer who has returned to his home town after studying at the national university. "It's all coffee and cattle here," he explains. The fields themselves are hidden on the lush mountain slopes beneath a canopy of banana trees, *locote* (a type of fruit) trees, and cane.

The co-op has played a key role in maintaining the region's soil health. These wind and water breaks prevent erosion and provide the perfect environment for the shade-loving coffee plants (*cafetales*). An acre can hold up to two thousand plants. Downhill, special lagoons constructed and managed by the co-op collect the run-off before it reaches the valley's stream. The algae in the lagoons eat the excess nutrients in the water before it can contaminate the community's water supply. Edgar is teaching his neighbors how to apply fertilizer properly, so that they waste less fertilizer and create less pollution. The cooperative also makes its own, natural fertilizer from composted coffee husks and sells it back to its farmers at wholesale prices.

(Continued on page 11)

What is a cooperative?

There are many types of cooperatives: consumer co-ops, grower/producer co-ops, housing co-ops, lending co-ops (ex. credit unions), worker-owned co-ops, and many more.

Co-ops are jointly owned and democratically controlled, uniting people with a common economic, social and/or cultural interest in order to build greater collective power and collective resiliency.

ASAN REGIONAL FOOD & FARM FORUMS ARE BACK!

Join us again for the ASAN Regional Food & Farm Forums! If you missed last year, the Regional Forums are a series of networking and knowledge-sharing events held around the state in the fall. Think of these events as part workshop, part tour, part mixer, part collective brainstorm. They are informal and accessible to folks of all levels of skills and experience. Their purpose is to spark collaboration that will lead to a stronger, smarter, and more resilient food system in Alabama.

Each Forum is anchored around several sessions of roundtable discussions, covering all aspects of sustainable farming

and local food. There are outdoor and hands-on activities – be they farm tours, mini-workshops, or field demos – and as always, there will be good company and delicious food as well!

This year there will be FOUR Forums instead of three, in hopes that more folks in more parts of the state can access this great experience. Save the date(s)!

WEST: Tues, Oct 14 – Linden

EAST: Tues, Oct 28 – Auburn

NORTH: Mon, Nov 10 – Falkville

SOUTH: Thurs, Dec 4 – Gulf Shores

(TENTATIVE)

The Forum in Linden (Marengo Co.) will be held at a converted armory which now serves as a regional food hub for aggregating, washing, processing, packing, and distributing produce grown by the Deep South Food Alliance.

The Auburn event is co-hosted by the student-led Auburn Real Food Challenge, a

chapter of a national group focused on redirecting university food dollars towards local and sustainable sources. The Auburn Forum will also feature a tour of Randle Farms.

The Forum in Falkville (Morgan Co.) will be at Tune Farm, where young farmers are collaborating on an incubator project that will nurture successful new farm operations. The location of the Gulf Coast Forum is still TBD.

There is lots more info to follow, which will be circulated via ASAN e-updates and on the ASAN Facebook page. If you cannot access either of these but want to be kept informed, please call 256-743-0742.

Have a topic you're burning to teach and/or learn about? Interested in having your farm, business, or organization sponsor/exhibit at one of the Forums? Have other ideas or questions? Contact Alice at alice@asanonline.org or 256-743-0742.

Hope to see you this fall!



Discussion at 2013 Regional Forum in Thomaston

COFFEE CO-OP (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 10)

Adolfo, the father of my host family, doesn't need the co-op's fertilizer. He has cows. He and my host mother Isabel work as a team to grow almost everything their family eats as well as coffee. Yuca (a potato-like tuber), beans, and peppers grow in neat rows on the hill. Anteater burrows dot the pasture, keeping down the ant colonies that would otherwise destroy the coffee plants. Certain trees are interplanted with the cash crop to return calcium to the soil and remove nitrogen; this creates the right type of acidity for a smooth brew. This diversity is also what allows the family to continue their lifestyle on Adolfo's great-grandfather's farm when coffee prices crash.

It feels out of place learning about coffee trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange while relaxing in hammock on the front porch of Adolfo and Isabel's farm house. But the cooperative educates its members on the forces which affect their livelihoods so that they can know how to

sustain them. He talks little, but his eyes shine when he talks about family and his land. They are at the core of his being.

Isabel shows her love for her family and her land by representing them on the cooperative's general council. She is the only female on a board of nine farmers. In Costa Rica, as in the U.S., the role of women in the traditionally male-dominated realm of agriculture is changing, thanks to no-nonsense, courageous and intelligent women such as Isabel who take on important community positions within the cooperative. Ambitious children of farming families can better afford a university education (often through scholarships provided by the co-op) and can find employment in their home community after graduating. In this way cooperatives drive upward social mobility without driving people off farms.

People here, too, experience familiar challenges related to the expense of rural health care and the rights of migrant workers. Cooperatives provide both a forum for community members to discuss their problems and the resources to address them.

Neighbors united in a cooperative increase the efficiency of their farms and their quality of life. The informational network Grassroots Economic Organizing (<http://geo.coop>) features people across the South working for democratic, just, and environmentally friendly economies. Two of the most prolific groups are Jackson Rising (<http://jacksonrising.wordpress.com>) and the Southern Grassroots Economies Project (<http://sgproject.org/about/>). GEO also co-sponsors the Eastern Conference on Workplace Democracy.

Interested in forming a worker-owned cooperative? The Southern Grassroots Economies Project sponsors an annual conference to "promote and launch sustainable cooperative economies" called CoopEcon, right here in Alabama. CoopEcon will be held October 3-5 the Federation of Southern Cooperatives' Rural Training and Research Center in Epes, AL. More information at <http://sgproject.org/coopecon>.








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FSMA: WHAT IS IT, AGAIN? WHY DOES IT MATTER? AND WHERE ARE WE NOW?

By the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) Food Safety Team

The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) is the first major overhaul of our nation's food safety practices since 1938, and it includes new regulations for produce farms and for facilities that process food for people to eat. FSMA authorizes new regulations that will affect certain farmers and certain facilities. Specifically, FSMA mandates the establishment of:

- Standards for produce production (Produce Rule), and
- Food safety measures for facilities that process food for people to eat (Preventive Controls Rule).



Washing and packing yellow squash. Photo credit: Lance Cheung, via Flickr (USDAgov account).

The rules outlined in FSMA are not yet law – FDA is in the process of developing them. Last year they released what was effectively a 'first draft'; unfortunately the rules had many issues that meant they could pose problems for sustainable and organic agri-

culture, local and regional food efforts, and natural resource conservation. In response, last year the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and thousands of organizations, experts, farmers, and eaters weighed in with comments on the draft rules aimed at fixing FSMA so that our nation can have a safe and sustainable food supply.

After receiving tens of thousands of comments (from farmers like you!), FDA announced late last year that they would re-

propose parts of the two main rules detailed above – to essentially prepare a 'second draft'.

This means our shared effort had an impact!

That second draft is likely to be released to the public in September – we'll soon need your help again to shape the rules!

It is possible that FDA has made many of the changes we asked for – like making sure safe, long-established sustainable and organic farming practices aren't prohibited – but we won't know until we see the revised rules. If they have not, we'll need to double down our efforts to fix the rules before they are finalized.

You can learn more about FSMA and sign up for FSMA updates so that you can stay involved at: <http://sustainableagriculture.net/fsma/>.

NEWS FROM YOUR NEIGHBORS

The **Northwest Alabama RC&D Council** is thrilled to have welcomed **Marianne Leigh** on board as their new Office Manager! Marianne, who is a native of the Shoals area and a graduate of Sheffield High School, started work in late August. She has a degree in Public Relations from the University of Alabama. Marianne is very excited to be joining the staff at Northwest AL RC&D.

ASAN board member **Jodie Powell**, along with her husband **Will** and their daughters, welcomed baby boy **William Edward** (Wiley) on July 9. Jodie and Will operate Sweet Home Organics in Leroy (Washington County). Congratulations to the Powells!

CLASSIFIEDS & RESOURCES

PULLETS FOR AUCTION: The Clarke County 4H Chick Chain Show and Auction is November 3 in Jackson, AL. The youth will show pullets and they will be auctioned in lots of 3. It's a great place to buy high quality birds that have been raised by our 4Hers with a great deal of care. Contact Kristin Woods for more information. 251-753-1164

INTERN OPPORTUNITY: Pecan Point Farm in Hurtsboro, AL, is seeking interns. Farm is about 30 miles from both Auburn and Columbus, GA, includes a 90 acre pecan orchard, a Jersey micro-dairy, creamery, grass-fed beef herd, free-range poultry (chickens and ducks) operation for egg production, a certified commercial kitchen for value-added products, honeybees, and a 30 acre lake managed for agricultural recreation. Expect hard work and beautiful scenery. Interns should be able to work well with others (the humans) as well as with the animals. You can see our (incomplete) web-site <http://pecanpointfarm.com> to get an idea of our farming philosophy. Minimum length is negotiable. On farm housing may be included, depending on individual intern's circumstances. Call George at 706-835-5985 or Becky at 334-667-6902.

These sections appear in every newsletter and feature updates both personal and professional, on ASAN members and friends: anything from a new farm, to a new baby.

They make existing resources known to others, and help spread the word for those looking to connect. Connecting people in this, the barest-bones of ways, we hope to provide a jumping-off point for folks to connect on their own in deeper ways.

Have something you want us to publish? Get in touch at alice@asanonline.org or (256) 743-0742.

ALGAE FERTILIZER AVAILABLE FOR FARM TRIALS: Auburn startup LGF Enterprises harvests the algae in catfish ponds and processes it into a granular, organic, vegetarian fertilizer, called Little Green Friends (TM), a complete, full spectrum nutrient source for most plants. Eventual goal is to establish several farmers cooperatives for harvesting, processing, and sale. We believe that the 70,000 pond acres in the southeast are capable of producing more than 100 million dry pounds annually. Currently have limited-quantity samples available for evaluation – if you're interested in being part of evaluating these samples contact Ron Putt at 334-221-6660 or ronputt@att.net.

(Continued on page 14)

UPCOMING EVENTS

MORE DETAILS AT WWW.ASANONLINE.ORG/EVENTS, AND WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/ASANONLINE

September 15 – Huntsville

Food Hatch

12-2pm at Straight to Ale Taproom. Informal open meeting for food entrepreneurs, part of RocketHatch. More at www.rockethatch.org.

September 16 – Jasper

Beavers, BMPS and Forest Products

Free forestry workshop from 8:30am-4pm at Beville State Community College. Topics include beaver control, herbal/medicinal uses of forest products, timber market analysis, and more. Registration required, call Katherine at 205-387-1879, ext 1.

September 17 – Wetumpka

Seed Saving Workshop

Hosted by ACES, cost \$10. 9am-12pm. For more info call 334-567-6301.

September 20 – Phenix City

Silent Tears of Hunger Fundraising Lunch and Silent Auction

12-2pm. \$25/person goes to support BeYond Expectations Community Outreach's "Neighbor to Neighbor" food programs. More info at 334-855-0383.

CLASSIFIEDS (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 13)

PROPERTY FOR SALE, HUNTSVILLE: Lee and Shannon McBride have moved to Cullman County and are selling their house in South Huntsville. The ½ acre lot (8905 Hogan Dr., 35802) has new fruit trees and berry bushes in the front yard and cultivated plots in the back inside a privacy fence. House is 2374 sq. ft., 4BR, 2.75BA. Two out-buildings and extra carport. Perfect space for a great urban minifarm. McBrides would love to see it go to someone who will enjoy the "edible landscape." House will be listed at <http://royclaytor.crye-leike.com/>. Contact shannonkmcbride@gmail.com with addl questions.

PROPERTY FOR SALE, NW Alabama: "A lovingly maintained organic farm with barn, honeybees, pond, 32 acres of timber, and 1/2 acre fenced garden that's been composted since the 1940s into fertile black soil." Owner would "love to find a buyer who appreciates the productivity and potential of the place." More details at: www.owners.com/al/vernon/17620-county-road-49/mwj7098, or contact Dwight Grandia at dgrandia@gmail.com.

September 20-21 – Birmingham

Community Garden Bike Tour

9am-1pm, cost \$20. 10-mile ride through several community gardens, starts and ends at Railroad Park. More on Facebook, "Community Garden Coalition for Birmingham."

September 23 – Dothan

Honeybee Program for Youth

Fun, interactive, 3-stage program for elementary students. Features bee biology session with waggle dance demo, open hive demo with real bees in a safe environment, and honey extraction and tasting. Home school groups welcome. Contact Landmark Park at 334-794-3452 for more info.

September 23 – Tuscaloosa

Connect to Your Coast

5-8pm, student networking event and membership drive for the Alabama Coastal Foundation. \$25 general admission at the Tin Top Restaurant and Oyster Bar. More info at www.joinacf.org.

September 25 – Florence

Citizens Rally to Stop Tar Sands Mining in Alabama

5-9 pm in Wilson Park. Live music and a few speakers; information booths. More at www.facebook.com/AlabamaOilSands and <http://saveourshoals.com>.

September 26-27 – Clanton

Alabama Beekeepers Assn. Annual Meeting

Features classes for beekeepers of all levels, and vendors selling beekeeping equipment. More at www.alabamabeekeepers.com.

September 27 – Eufaula

Peer-to-Peer High Tunnel Training

Series of free workshops held at S&B Farms, intended to help farmers develop the potential of their tunnel houses / high tunnels. Topics include season extension, irrigation, pest and weed control, budgeting, transplant production, harvesting, and more. Call 334-687-2532 for more info.

September 27 – Moundville

Moundville 75th Anniversary Sym-

posium Series

5-7pm, free. Panel discussion between tribal historic preservation officers on the topic "Ancient Perspectives & Modern People". More info at <http://moundville.ua.edu>.

September 28 – Fredonia

Hoochee Poosa Locavores Slow Food Meeting/Dinner

Regular gathering of East Alabama Slow Foods chapter, open to all. At the Fredonia Community House. More at sf.hoocheepoosalocavores@gmail.com.

October 3-5 – Epes

CoopEcon

Gathering for those interested in launching and building worker-owned co-ops. More info and registration at <http://sgproject.org/coopecon>.

October 4-5 — Royal

Blount County Solar Homes Tour

Tour of 4 solar-equipped homes within 10-minute radius. Free tours run on the hour between 9am-4pm Sat and 1-4pm Sun. Registration is required. More info at solartouralabama@gmail.com.

October 6 – Mobile

Lunch & Learn: Veggie Gardening 101

12-1pm, free, bring your own lunch. Hosted by Mobile Master Gardeners the first Monday of each month. Beverages are provided. Presentation by James Miles. More at www.aces.edu/counties/Mobile/mg/documents/Trifold2014.pdf.

October 8 – Huntsville

Tennessee Valley Community Garden Association Monthly Potluck

6:30pm. Informal and open to all, held at Extension office. Oct theme is winter garden planning. More on Facebook, "Tennessee Valley Community Garden Association."

October 14 – Linden

ASAN Regional Food & Farm Forum (West Alabama)

See page 11.

(Continued on page 15)

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Not sure if you need to renew? Check your address label to see when your membership expires.

Please mail checks made out to ASAN to:
 PO Box 2127, Montgomery, AL 36102.

UPCOMING EVENTS (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 14)

October 18 – Elkmont

Southern ReInvention

Hosted by Belle Chevre, event "celebrating the South's traditions and making them new." More at <http://southernreinvention.com>.

October 18 – Eufaula

Peer-to-Peer High Tunnel Training

See Sept 27 entry for more info.

October 19 – SW Mississippi

MSAN Farm Tours

Free and open to the public, lunch available for \$5/person. Tour includes 4 farms. More at www.mssagnet.net/programs/workshops-events/

October 25 – Cullman

Peinhardt Living History Farm Day

9am-4pm, \$7 for adults. Featuring exhibits and demos of old-time woodworking and sawmilling, sorghum syrup making, blacksmithing and shoeing horses, a grist mill, and more. More at www.peinhardtfarm.com/farmday.htm.

October 25 – Birmingham

Chefs vs Surgeons Pumpkin Carving Contest

10am at Pepper Place Saturday Market, sponsored by Brookwood Hospital. Pepper Place is open Saturdays 7am-12pm through December 13. More at www.pepperplacemarket.com.

October 28 – Auburn

ASAN Regional Food & Farm Forum (East Alabama)

See page 11.

November 3 – Jackson

4H Chick Chain Show and Auction

Clarke County 4Hers will show pullets they've raised, then will auction them in lots of 3. Contact Kristin Woods at 251-753-1164 for more info.

November 3 – Mobile

Lunch and Learn: Growing Citrus in the Home Garden

See Oct 6. Nov presentation by Mary Derrick.

November 6

Cheers to the Coosa

Farm to Table dinner at Stone's Throw Bar and Grill, to benefit the Coosa Riverkeeper. More at <http://coosariver.org/events/cheers/>.

November 7-8 – Jackson, MS

Till Tomorrow: Mississippi Food Summit and Agricultural Revival

This year's MS Food Summit includes a film and music festival, plus workshops, panels, and speakers on all aspects of food and farming. More at www.mssagnet.net/programs/ms-food-summit/.

November 9-11 – Chapel Hill, NC

Women Working in the Meat Business Intensive Seminar

Workshop for women livestock farmers, butchers, and other niche meat professionals. More at <http://ncchoices.ces.ncsu.edu/women-working-in-the-meat-business-2014/>

November 10 – Falkville

Organic High Tunnel Train the Trainer Workshop

First in a 3-session series hosted by Southern SAWG, NRCS, and ASAN. See page 5.

November 10 – Falkville

ASAN Regional Food & Farm Forum (North Alabama)

See page 11.

Nov 10-12 – Louisville, KY

Slow Money National Gathering

Featuring food entrepreneurs and leaders in agriculture, investing, and philanthropy. Featured speakers include Vandana Shiva, Joel Salatin, Eliot Coleman, and many others. More at <https://slowmoney.org/national-gathering/2014/home>

Nov 10-12 – Greenville, SC

CFSA 29th Annual Sustainable Agriculture Conference

(Continued on page 16)

ASAN

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UPCOMING EVENTS (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 15)

Annual conference hosted by the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association.

More at

www.carolingfarmstewards.org/sac/.

November 12 – Huntsville

TVCGA Monthly Potluck

See Oct 8. November will feature a recipe swap, just in time for Thanksgiving.

November 12 – Ariton

Organic High Tunnel Train the Trainer Workshop

See page 5.

November 13 – Tuskegee

Organic High Tunnel Train the Trainer Workshop

See page 5.

November 13-15 – Dallas, TX

Facing Race: A National Conference

Conference hosted by Race Forward

focusing on the “practice” of racial justice work. More at <https://facingrace.raceforward.org/>

November 14-15 – Montgomery
FOCAL 42nd Annual Conference

Hosted by the Federation of Child Care Centers of AL (FOCAL). More at www.focalfocal.org.

November 15 – Eufaula

Peer-to-Peer High Tunnel Training

See Sept 27 entry.

Nov 29, Dec 6 & 13 – Birmingham
Pepper Place Holiday Market

7am-noon. Featuring Alabama-grown Christmas trees, decorations, and hand-made gifts from local artisans; Alabama produce and locally-made desserts and treats! More at

www.pepperplacemarket.com.

December 1 – Mobile

Lunch and Learn: Backyard Chickens

See Oct 6. Dec presentation by Ed Williamson.

December 3 – Huntsville

TVCGA Monthly Potluck

See Oct 8. December will feature a screening of Eating Alabama.

December 4 – location TBD

ASAN Regional Food & Farm Forum (Gulf Coast)

See page 11.

December 20 – Eufaula

Peer-to-Peer High Tunnel Training

See Sept 27.

January 14-17, 2015 — Mobile

Southern SAWG Conference: Practical Tools & Solutions for Sustaining Family Farms

More at www.sawg.org.