



Joe DiPietro

## Growing Organic

As you may know, the Institute, in cooperation with the **Tennessee Department of Agriculture**, has launched a statewide organic agriculture initiative. The intent of this initiative is to involve more Tennessee farmers in organic production in order to increase farm income and keep the family farm in the family. Organic production has the potential to increase profits by reducing the use of off-farm inputs and providing consumers with locally grown, high-quality organic products in a rapidly growing market where the demand is greater than the supply.

This spring, we will offer workshops on organic production in Jackson, Nashville, and Knoxville. On **Friday, May 15, an Organic Crops Field Tour** will take place at the **Organic Crops Unit** that is part of the **East Tennessee Research and Education Center**. Multifaceted outreach and research is underway, and we expect that a teaching component focusing on organic production systems will be added in the future to the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources' coursework.

The organic initiative, we believe, has something to offer all Tennessee growers regardless of their production system. According to Extension commercial vegetable specialist **Annette Wszelaki**, the principles behind the research can help growers across the state reduce their input costs through practices such as minimum tillage, for instance, which reduces the number of passes through the field and, hence, fuel and labor costs, and cover cropping that can reduce fertilizer and pesticide inputs. She adds that our research with high tunnels can help any grower capture more dollars by extending their harvest by weeks or months, either earlier or later in the season, and providing a high quality product with a longer storage life.

In these ways the **Institute's new Organic and Sustainable Crop Production Initiative** is truly a value-added enterprise. You can read more about the initiative and the May 15 field tour at <http://organics.tennessee.edu/>.

All the best,

## Extension acts to 'triage' Tennesseans in financial crisis

Throughout the state, **UT Extension agents are helping consumers and farmers deal with job loss, reduced income, and other financial setbacks and threats associated with the tightening economy.**

Family economics specialists **Dena Wise** and **Ann Berry** of **Extension Family and Consumer Sciences** have developed curriculum titled, "Tough times, tough choices: You're not alone in a financial crisis." The resource sheet identifies agencies and organizations that can assist individuals in working with creditors and finding services to help with day-to-day living, and may help individuals avoid fraudulent schemes and those seeking to take advantage of the financially ailing.

"I see us as a triage agency in this instance, responding to the circumstances that people find themselves in and acting to try to ensure their situations don't get worse," says Wise. "Agents can take the curriculum and expand it with resources specific to their communities."

Through in-service and computer-based training, Wise and Berry have disseminated other resources to agents and expect to continue to do so in the future.

"There's a need," Berry says. "The economy is leading to so many rapid changes in public policy, in financial regulations, in tax incentives, and even in credit overdraft protection at banks. All of this points to the importance of heightened outreach and education by Extension."

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*A yellow-throated warbler is just one songbird you might glimpse when the **UT Arboretum Society** sponsors a bird walk at the **UT Forest Resources Research and Education Center** in Oak Ridge on **Saturday, May 9**. **TWRA Officer Jim Evans**, B.S. FWF, '75, will serve as guide. The Arboretum and **FRREC** are located on State Route 62 (901 S. Illinois Ave.) Because the walk starts promptly at 7 a.m., participants are asked to arrive by 6:45 a.m. Bring your binoculars and join in the fun.*



Tom Hunter

## What's news

- » An article co-authored by Institute researchers was the editor's pick in the February issue of *Plant Disease*, a journal of the American Phytopathological Society. The article investigated temporal development and susceptibility of bigleaf hydrangeas to powdery mildew and found that a resistant cultivar responded quicker to infection than a susceptible cultivar did. Authors were **Entomology and Plant Pathology** Postdoctoral Researcher **Yonghao Li**, Professors **Mark Windham** and **Robert Trigiano**, Sandra Reed, USDA/ARS Floral & Nursery Plants Research Unit, McMinnville, Tenn., and James Spiers and Timothy Rinehart, USDA/ARS Thad Cochran Horticultural Research Laboratory, Poplarville, Miss.
- » Shelby County officials are hoping to plant a seed in the lives of more than 40 inmates. It's a new rehabilitation effort called **Sow to Grow. UT and TSU Extension agents and volunteers**, including **Cortney Holloway**, **Chris Cooper**, **Mike Dennison**, and **Master Urban Forester volunteers**, are training inmates in vegetable, fruit and nut production, ornamental and turfgrass management, and urban forestry. The hope is that the project will prepare the young men to either be productive employees or be able to start their own small business in the rapidly growing green industry in the Memphis area. Shelby County Government is providing the tools, transportation, and labor, and they are seeking sponsorship to help cover those costs.
- » Students in the **College of Veterinary Medicine** will present their **annual open house from 9 a.m to 5 p.m., Saturday, April 18**. This free event is an excellent opportunity for animal lovers of all ages to gain insight into the teaching hospital's operations.

## Extension helps Guard prepare for Afghan ag mission



*George Smith*

*by George F. Smith  
Interim Assistant Dean, UT Extension*

A specialized Tennessee National Guard team recently started a yearlong deployment in war-torn Afghanistan. They plan to have a big impact—but with farming, not firepower.

The team is part of the **Guard's Afghan Agribusiness Initiative**, started last year to capitalize on the farming knowledge many Guard soldiers have from their civilian jobs. As U.S. forces work to rid the country of terrorists and rebuild Afghan security forces, the initiative focuses on get-

ting their agricultural industry back on track after years of war and occupation that started with the Soviet invasion in 1979.

Tennessee is one of only a few states chosen to participate in the program, according to **Col. Jim Moore**, B.S. Agricultural Education, '80, the team commander. They are working in Paktya Province on the Pakistan border. Late last summer Colonel Moore contacted **Extension** for help in preparing his team for this assignment. They planned to work on several enterprises including sheep and goat production, cultivation of wheat, potatoes, apples, and apricots, and starting bee colonies.

Their time was limited. We decided to focus on how to be successful in agricultural development in another culture rather than on specific production techniques for any of these farm enterprises.

Drawing on their experiences working in Africa and Latin America, **Forbes Walker**, associate professor of **Environmental Soil Science**, and **Michael Wilcox**, assistant professor in **Agricultural Economics**, helped me put together a one-day workshop on how to work with farmers in another country to improve agricultural productivity.

"We also involved the international community at UT and in the Knoxville area to help the team learn about Afghan culture," says Walker. "To be successful, you must first understand their way of life and develop rapport with the people," adds Wilcox. "Once they gain the confidence of the farmer, the respect of the farmer, they can then begin to successfully transfer their knowledge and technology," he concludes.

The one-day program was divided almost evenly between development topics, such as methods of doing rapid agricultural assessments, and Afghan culture topics ranging from land ownership patterns and irrigation water control to the role of religion. "We were even able to enjoy an Afghan lunch prepared by an Afghani family living in the area," Walker adds.

Fruit tree and vineyard pruning and management were specific production areas the team requested. **Dave Lockwood**, professor in **Plant Sciences**, provided a separate one-day, hands-on fruit tree and vineyard workshop for interested team members.

So far, the Afghan people seem genuinely interested and willing to accept the help. "We all look forward to hearing about their experiences when they get back home," says Wilcox. 🌱

*You can explore a Web site developed to aid the National Guard troops with their agricultural work in Afghanistan: <http://trend.ag.utk.edu/afghanistan.html>.*

## 2009 Institute field days offer variety of educational opportunities

**Raising healthy hardwoods. Producing quality beef. Growing fresh fruits and vegetables in your own backyard.** These are just a few of the topics Tennesseans can learn about at the **2009 University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture Field Days.**

Each field day season provides producers and consumers with the latest information in agriculture and gardening. Between May and October, nine field days plus a number of special events will take place at **UT AgResearch and Education Centers** across the state. At each event, UT experts will bring their latest scientific findings to the field. Visitors can see new demonstrations, examine research trial results and speak with university specialists to get up-to-date recommendations on topics like beef production, forestry, turfgrass management, fruit and vegetable production at home and crop production on the farm. In addition, many field days feature a trade show of vendors who exhibit the latest technologies or artisans who exhibit their creations for the garden and home.

The 2009 field day season kicks off with two new events. **Organic vegetable production will be featured at a new education event in Knoxville at the East Tennessee Research and Education on May 15, and Tennessee Healthy Hardwoods premieres May 30 at the Forest Resources Research and Education Center at Oak Ridge.**

Two previously scheduled events, the Dairy Field Day on June 2 in Lewisburg and the Making Forages Work Field Day on July 23 in Spring Hill, have been cancelled for 2009.

The UT AgResearch Field Days were originally created to be hands-on educational tools for the state's farmers, who continue to fully utilize the events. Adding to the success are field days that cater to a different sector of agriculture, the homeowner. The events focus on home gardening and landscaping. Last year almost 20,000 Tennesseans took advantage of the educational opportunities offered by the UT experts.

The Institute will also host a number of special events in 2009, including **Blooms Days**, held at the UT Gardens in Knoxville, June 27-28, the **Pumpkin Field Day** in Jackson on October 9, the **Heritage Festival** at Ames Plantation on October 10, and the **Fall Folklore Jamboree** at Milan on October 17. The fall events celebrate the unique cultural legacy of early West Tennessee settlers.

All field days and special events are open to the public, and most are free. A complete listing of times and locations is available at the Institute Web site, <http://agriculture.tennessee.edu/news/FieldDays/index.htm>. ☞

### The complete schedule is as follows:

**May 15**, Organic Vegetable Production, East Tennessee REC, Knoxville

**May 30**, Tennessee Healthy Hardwoods, Forest Resources REC, Oak Ridge

**June 11**, Beef & Forage, East Tennessee REC, Blount County

**June 16**, Fruits of the Backyard, Middle Tennessee REC, Spring Hill

**June 25**, Tobacco, Beef & More, Highland Rim REC, Springfield

**July 9**, Summer Celebration, West Tennessee REC, Jackson

**July 16**, Tobacco & Forage Production, Greeneville REC

**August 4**, Steak and Potatoes, Plateau REC, Crossville

**September 3**, Turfgrass, East Tennessee REC, Knoxville

### What's news, continued

- » Supporters of Tennessee's agriculture, forestry, and renewable energy sectors recently celebrated the formation of the **Tennessee 25x'25 State Alliance**. This new coalition is working to meet the goal of having 25 percent of the nation's energy production derived from renewable resources by 2025. **The alliance named Tim Rials, director of research and development in the Office of Bioenergy Programs, co-chair of the state-level organization**, which is part of a larger national initiative. Rials says that Tennessee's mix of regional resources and transportation routes makes the state uniquely positioned to expand its contribution towards the national endeavor's goal.
- » **Weekly Crop Comments are now available as a podcast.** The comments are by **Chuck Danehower**, Extension area specialist in farm management, who has taken over the responsibility from **Agricultural Economics Head Delton Gerloff**. A complete list of available podcasts produced in Agricultural Economics and links to subscribe can be found at the department's "Photos, Videos and Podcasts" Web page under the Podcast tab at <http://economics.ag.utk.edu/media.html>.
- » **The Web site devoted to Tennessee's major field crops has a new design and some added features** that researchers say will help the state's producers better manage their 2009 crops. The updated version of **UTCrops.com** is being unveiled just in time for spring planting season.

- » **The UT Arboretum Society Spring Plant Sale** will take place at the UT Arboretum, 901 S. Illinois Ave. in Oak Ridge from **9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday, April 25**. The featured plant will be the Japanese maple. A members' only portion of the sale will occur from 5-7 p.m., Friday, April 24, 2009. ☞

*Extension acts, continued*

Some Family and Consumer Sciences agents such as **Beth Bell in Dyer County** are establishing or working with county-based coalitions of financial officers from banks and community volunteers. These groups coordinate services and some mentor people in need.

Led by Agent **June Puett**, the **Hamilton County Extension office** conducted a “**Save Green, Go Green**” event at Hamilton Place mall in response to the current economic crisis. Approximately 2,000 people participated in hands-on activities, interacted with representatives from 20 community agencies and businesses, and learned about saving money and the environment. Through media exposure, more than two million youth and adults were reached with positive financial and environmental messages as the county celebrated Tennessee Saves Week leading up to the event.

Agricultural agents are also heavily involved. In **Claiborne and Union counties**, Extension Agent and County Director **Mike Heiskell** is incorporating risk management and budgeting information into the production meetings he leads. “About six weeks ago, we covered it in a vegetable production meeting, and next week, I’ve got a meeting on beef marketing that has a risk management portion.” He also plans to cover the topic in forage production, which is so integral to cattle production,

but he has clients who say they can’t even afford to fertilize their pastures this year.

“I’m going to provide them with information on fertilization by soil test results and show them it can save them money or make them money.”

“Tennessee farm families are experiencing significant financial stress,” says **Agricultural Economics Professor Clark Garland**. “Farmers are being negatively affected by rapid declines in many farm product prices, increasing and widely fluctuating farm input prices as well as conditions in the general economy.”

Garland said **Extension’s MANAGE program** can be of particular assistance. MANAGE is designed to help farm families carefully evaluate their individual financial situation and assist them in improving their quality of life. Ten area farm management specialists across the state use computer financial planning software to plan individually with farm families.

Although MANAGE will not remove uncertainty of the future, it can provide farm families with a clear understanding of their current financial situation and help them evaluate their alternatives for the future. Seven Extension agents across the state serve as contacts for farm families in dealing with stress. For assistance, farm families may contact their local UT Extension office or call the toll-free MANAGE Information Line at 1 (800) 345-0561.

UT Extension Central Region Program Leader **Jim Stewart** sees diversification and efforts to add value as two other keys to survive in this economy.

“Our agents and the **Center for Profitable Agriculture** are focusing on how producers can bring more of a dollar spent on agricultural goods back to the farm. How do we make the farmer’s chunk of that dollar bigger? The answer is adding value. We’re working with a lot of our farmers on several aspects of value-added farming, from direct marketing, to processing their own products, to using more of their byproducts.”

And just like diversifying a portfolio when investing in the stock market, Stewart says, diversification in farming is always a good idea. “Diversifying the farm is the real key to staying in business. We’re working with farmers to not have all their eggs in one basket. The more they’re diversified, the less risk they carry, so we’re really emphasizing that.”

“I’m hearing from our personnel across the state that they are all highly engaged in helping citizens deal with the financial realities that we find ourselves in,” says **UT Extension Dean Tim Cross**. “In times like these, the value of Extension in helping improve the lives of citizens is very apparent.” 🌱

*UTIA News* is published monthly by the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture  
Send comments and suggestions to Margot Emery, [memery@tennessee.edu](mailto:memery@tennessee.edu)  
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**TENNESSEE** **UT**  
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101 Morgan Hall  
Knoxville, TN 37996-4505