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CREAMERY PROJECT FUNDED

Word has just been received from SARE that a project which includes VABF and several members has been given nearly full funding for approximately 2-1/2 years beginning in mid-1997.

Project Coordinator Vicki Dunaway authored the Hometown Creamery Revival, which brings together five dairy farm families - three with cows and two with goats - who will build on-farm processing facilities and work together to market their dairy products locally. The process will be documented in the form of several publications which will be distributed by AFTRA and others. As part of the project, the Food Science Department of Virginia Tech will develop a dairy processing short course which will be presented to twenty participants, probably during Winter 1998. The farm families will also be aided by the Manufacturing Technology Center and the New River Valley Small Business Development Center, as well as NCSU's Regional Center for Sustainable Dairy Farming and a number of consultants, including Leonard Bergey of Bergey's Dairy. Seven Springs Farm will also cooperate through their CSA.

VABF's role as a group will be to administer the grant funds and provide some support in the form of publishing and promoting results. On an individual basis, VABF is well represented, as many of the participants are members.

The farmer cooperators include Rick, Helen, Katy and Jim Feete of Crooked Furrow Farm in Galax (around 30 Jersey cows); Harry and Gail Groot of

SunriseValley Farm in Hiwassee (30 dairy goats); Sharon and Terry Lawson of Mountain Hobby Farm in Willis (seven dairy goats, to be expanded); Dixie and Mimi Stout Leonard and family of Galax (around 40-50 Holsteins and a few Jerseys), and David, Tina, Tabitha and Brandy Puckett of D. Puckett Farms near Hillsville (seven Jersey cows). Over the 2-1/2 year period, all of the farm families expect to build or remodel facilities on their respective farms and begin production. Several have already been working with the state dairy inspector to develop their processing rooms, and the Lawsons produced and sold goat cheese from their inspected cheese room last year.

The project coordinator will be involved in investigating market potential, arranging meetings and educational sessions, and providing documentation and publicity. The project will be evaluated at each year's end by several external evaluators, including Dr. Frank Gwazdauskas and others of Virginia Tech Dairy Science and Rob Wagg, who has worked for nearly 20 years in the natural foods industry.

We are pleased to be able to proceed with this exciting project and look forward to an enjoyable and rewarding learning experience. For more information, contact Vicki Dunaway, PO. Box 186, Willis, VA 24380.

Richmond Chapter Farm Tours

Cindy Conner will host a farm day for the Richmond Chapter of the VABF on June 22. You can join us 2:00 p.m. at Natural Organics, located at the Ashland Berry Farm or at 3:00 p.m. at Sunfield Farm. The Conners have invited us to share a pot luck supper under their spreading oaks, and to stay on and play some music. So bring the family, a song and your instruments, a dish to share and table service for each person in your group.

To get to Natural Organics at the Ashland Berry Farm: Drive up Route 1 from Richmond, cross Route 54, go about 4 miles and turn left on Old Ridge Road and it's 4 miles on the left.

And to the Conners' farm: Sunfield Farm is at 12398 Ashcake Road, also known as Route 33. Coming from 64, take the Rockville exit, turn left on 623, Ashland Road, then right on Ashcake Road, drive 3 1/2 miles and you'll see their two-story green-roofed house on the left, near the road under some large oaks. Coming from Richmond, go up Route 1, turn left on Ashcake and it's 3 1/2 miles on the right.

Don't forget the BPP farm tour schedule. See page 8 for details.

**FEDERAL FUNDS
SOUGHT FOR SUSTAIN-
ABLE AGRICULTURE
TRAINING ACTIVITIES**

As part of Virginia's strategic plan for sustainable agriculture training (a prerequisite for VA Cooperative Extension (VCE) and the state to receive USDA funds for training implementation), the Virginia Agriculture Sustainability Leadership Council (VASLC) was formed and has held four meetings between December 1996 and June 1997. The Council's charge, according to documents submitted in 1996 to the USDA Southern Region Professional Development Program Consortium created to oversee implementation of this USDA program, is to "evaluate objectives, set priorities, and provide input into the formation and constitution of the sustainable agriculture training team(s). VASLC will review objectives and strategies of the VCE plan for sustainable agriculture and take leadership for guiding the implementation and evaluation of this plan." VABF Board members, Archer H. Christian and Barbara Bitters Hall, serve on the Council.

According to USDA program guidelines, each state can apply for strategic plan support funds in the amount of \$10,000 each year. At the June 4 meeting, the following projects were determined by the Council to be appropriate and a proposal was submitted to the Consortium for funding these.

1) Assist in funding the VA State University Crop Field Day/Black Farmer Conference on sustainability (\$1,000).

2) Assist in funding area-based Virginia Sustainable Agriculture Conferences (the new multi-conference plan for the former 2+ day VSAC, held most recently in Nov. '96 at Camp Blue Ridge in Nelson County) (\$500).

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next page)*

The Greening of Virginia Tech/Extension?

by Vicki Dunaway

As part of the Hometown Creamery Revival project, I attended the second Mid-Atlantic Dairy Grazing Field Day at the Ingleside Resort and Conference Center in the Shenandoah Valley July 16-17. My purpose was to evaluate the Field Day for its usefulness to farmers in our project and to those who might join our group at a later date. The sponsors filled the whole inner cover page of the *Proceedings*, and included Virginia Cooperative Extension, Augusta Farm Bureau, Southern States, the Virginia State Dairyman's Association, and a host of other of the "usual" farm businesses and organizations. But from the content of the gathering and the list of wild-eyed, UNconventional farmers who made presentations, one might have thought it was the Sustainable Ag Conference! Well, okay. They're not quite *there* yet, but progress is definitely being made. To be sure, any time a farmer has to change practices, there is money to be made, and there were plenty of display tables reflecting that. The new tools, though, weren't high-ticket combines and silos, but rather seemed to be things that were within reach of most farmers — electric fencing, water tubs and piping systems, seeds for forages. The BGH/BST folks had a display, but no one at the booth, and it didn't seem to get too many visitors (hooray!).

The field day centered around rotational grazing and its benefits. On Wednesday afternoon we visited Sunny Slope Dairy, home of Mr. James Wenger and family, who have converted to rotational grazing. That afternoon we were blessed with clouds overhead during the 2-1/2 hour pasture walk with the promise of possible rain in a very dry season. Mr. Wenger, I overheard, has tended to ignore much of what the salesmen and the conventional experts tell him, and has gone into rotational grazing, with the help of a forward-looking local Extension agent, Jerry Swisher, Jr. — and found it quite profitable. His fields were also apparently much better off during the longstanding drought than were those of his neighbors. His methods still include chemicals — the spaces between his clover plants probably reflect his admitted use of Roundup — but he has dramatically decreased his use of fertilizer and other costly inputs by letting his cows do the fertilization and Nature's regenerative processes work through intensive grazing management. Interestingly, Mr. Wenger has even given up AI (artificial insemination) so that he can breed for cows that are more efficient users of forages, more fertile and good calving traits. A pervasive theme throughout this conference was: *it is more important and satisfying to have a good profit margin from the entire operation than it is to maximize production by costly manipulations*

of many different components (breeding only for high production, hormonal forcing, "perfect" feed balance, etc.).

After dinner came an amazing panel discussion with five farmers who had made the transition to rotational grazing. They ranged on a continuum of just over the border of conventional to really out-there. In fact, Bill and Crawford Patterson, probably the most conservative of the bunch, had spoken at a recent VSA Conference. Way down on the other end of the continuum was Lynn Johnson from Tennessee, who brought himself out of a million dollars in debt to a profitable operation of 300 dairy cows by just saying no to the salesmen. He's ready to retire and his presentation and answers to questions were quite, uh, frank. James Wenger joined Dennis Leamon from North Carolina and Billy Wayson from Gordonsville, VA to round out the panel. The most telling testimonial to rotational grazing came when, asked whether they would go back to the conventional way of dairying, the answer was a unanimous "No" and the reason was a resounding "QUALITY OF LIFE."

On Thursday the professors got their turn, offering up the meat and potatoes of a rotational grazing system in four major topics which were each presented in three sessions. This format allowed everyone to attend all of the sessions they found of most interest. (VSAC take note.) I was particularly interested in a presentation by Dr. Edward Rayburn at WVU, who has done work with "wild" (i.e., weed) species, determining their forage values. This seems to be a thing that dairy farmers miss out on — all that free food (and medicine?) gets killed off with herbicides so that the "desirable" species can grow in a near monoculture. [Dr. Rayburn later sent me a copy of a publication detailing his findings, but I've not had time to review it yet — will in a later issue.] There were also sessions on forage management/ physiology of grass and legume growth, reproduction and body condition, and infrastructure required for rotational grazing, as well as a final seminar on fencing.

An excellent Proceedings was published pre-conference and a few (15-20) are still available. Send check or money order for \$7.00, payable to VCE — Augusta County to: Jerry Swisher, Extension Agent, Augusta Extension Office, P O Box 590, Verona, VA 24482. Phone # is (540) 245-5750; e-mail is ex201@vt.edu (attn: Jerry Swisher in subject line).

CHEESE AND CHICKENS: A Summary of a Summery Field Day**August 9, 1997 Willis, VA**

Everyone knows it's impossible to get farmers and gardeners out for a field day in the middle of summer. But somehow around 20 people made it to the summer field day in Willis to learn about making goat cheese and chicken tractors.

At 9 a.m., folks gathered at the home of Sharon and Terry Lawson for a demonstration of goat cheese making from milk to press. The Lawsons have established a state-supervised processing room at their new home in Willis. While the law currently does not require state inspection for processing of goat and sheep's milk, Sharon found that, when trying to sell her cheese to restaurants and other wholesale outlets, it was necessary that she have liability insurance. The only way she could obtain such insurance was to be supervised by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. So, working with the inspector for this area, the Lawsons converted part of an old dairy barn for processing in such a manner that the State issued a Certificate of Supervision. After starting the cheddar cheese by adding starter to the pasteurized goat milk, Sharon answered numerous questions about the facility and requirements. She said their costs were moderate to convert the barn, but it was certainly helpful to have such a building already on the premises and in reasonably good condition. Basic requirements include non-permeable covering on the walls (they used epoxy paint on the cinder block walls and floor), concrete floor with a drain, stainless steel sinks, a cooler, covered light fixtures, drying racks, etc. *[Since the workshop, the Lawsons have also received grade A standing for their milking parlor and permission to process cow cheese as well. The Lawsons are one of five farm families participating in The Hometown Creamery Revival Project funded by SARE.]*

After a 30-minute waiting period, rennet was added, which causes the milk to form a firm curd. Sharon warmed the milk to 90° and allowed the pot to sit in hot water (to better maintain the temperature) for an hour and 15 minutes. During that waiting period, we had an extensive question-and-answer period about cheese and some networking time. Following that waiting period, the curds were cut and a tedious process of raising the temperature approximately 2° every 5 minutes was undertaken, until the curds reached a temperature of 98°. Another waiting period ensued, and we feasted on a

huge pot luck lunch, which included samples of Sharon's dessert and feta cheeses, as well as another family's goat cheese, courtesy of Ed Gralla and Randy Schwartz. After lunch the curds were drained and put into a press, final questions were answered and the demonstration completed. Sharon put together a nice handout with instructions for the cheese and resource addresses. To receive a copy send \$1 (to cover printing and mailing costs) to: Sharon Lawson, Mountain Hobby Cheeses, Route 2, Box, 207-L, Willis, VA 24380.

Most of the cheese workshop participants and a few other people then went to Chestnut Creek Farm in Willis to see the chicken tractors for laying hens built by Charley Dunaway. Four different "tractor" models, covering an evolution of design, were on display, all full of hens in their own different stages. Charley and Vicki Dunaway were on hand to "talk chicken" and answered many questions about their model, which differs from those of Joel Salatin and Andy Lee. The Dunaways are convinced that layers need more room than do broilers and so added a corral to each chicken tractor; the chicken tractor box itself (4' x 10') is somewhat like Andy Lee's design, but is only used for shelter, nests, food and water and roosting. The hens spend most of their time in the attached corral, which is an additional 200 square feet of space. This allows more hens to be put into one tractor, allows the hens to stay in the same place (thus doing more "tractoring") for a longer period, and gives them room to run and stretch their wings. The tractors are moved approximately once a week, more often if the ground cover is sparse, and the hens' diet is supplemented by kitchen trimmings and bugs and weeds from the garden. (A Japanese beetle trap with a hole cut in the bottom of the bag gives the chickens a source of entertainment and protein. - Thanks to Joel Salatin for that idea.) Vicki has her own feed mix made which contains kelp and dried grains and sunflower seeds, but does not contain additives. *[Note - she is looking for a farmer somewhat nearby who might be able to supply organic grains.]* Because she has to have at least half a ton mixed at a time, she has found several other farmers raising layers to share the feed with. The Dunaways have over 100 hens now and sell their eggs through the Seven Springs CSA, to individuals and to a local restaurant. A handout on chicken tractoring with layers is available from Vicki if you will send a SASE (legal) - see page 2 for address. The Dunaways' chicken tractors are also mentioned in Andy Lee's new book on chicken tractors.

VASCL (continued)

conference for 6 conferences = \$3,000).

3) Assist in funding the 1998 VCE/commodity group sponsored Brandon Plantation Field Day in Southwest Virginia. Brandon Plantation has been in production for over 200 years. (\$1,000)

4) Conduct a statewide assessment of sustainable agriculture practices in use by farmers to determine the extent of sustainable agriculture and IPM practices currently in use (\$1,100)

5) Create area-focused table-top displays to be used at various programs and activities to provide information on sustainable agriculture to help farmers assess their own practices (\$1,000).

6) Fund travel and registration for extension agents and members of the VASLC to attend the annual Southern Region Consortium Training Workshop (scheduled to overlap the SSAWG annual conference) (\$1,500).

7) Fund travel and registration for three VCE faculty members to attend the Sustainable Beef Management Workshop in Tenn. Oct 9-11, 1997, sponsored by NCAT-ATTRA and the Southern Region Consortium, in order to develop a more comprehensive program for Virginia (\$1,400)

The proposal also lists matching funds from VCE in the amount of \$10,388. The next meeting of the VASLC is to be scheduled for sometime in September or October. Please contact Archer or Barbara for more information and if you would like to serve on this body.

--Archer Christian