

SMALL FARMS RESEARCH CENTER NEWS UPDATE

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, LIFE AND NATURAL SCIENCES



USDA United States Department of Agriculture
National Institute of Food and Agriculture

NIFA United States Department of Agriculture
Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)



SMALL FARMS RESEARCH CENTER: OVERVIEW AND UPDATES

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Huntsville, Alabama. The Small Farms Research Center at Alabama A&M University (AAMU) was first conceived in 2000 with funding from USDA's Office of Advocacy and Outreach authorized under Section 2501 of the 1990 Farm Bill. The Center is devoted to issues affecting the family farm and assessing how such issues impact profitability and overall sustainability of small farm operations. AAMU's 2501 project (a.k.a. Small Farmers Outreach Training and Technical Assistance Project) received its initial funding in 1994. As project staff and faculty grew in numbers and became diverse and activities more complex and holistic in nature, the need for a Center to conduct sound and targeted research, provide quality education and effectively deliver outreach training to underserved agricultural producers and rural entrepreneurs became increasingly inevitable. Thus, the Small Farms Research Center was initiated in 2000 to conduct research and provide services throughout Alabama, with special and particular outreach emphasis on 21 underserved counties in north Alabama.

With nearly twenty years of experience working with farmers, landowners, new and beginning farmers, and agribusinesses the Small Farms Research Center continues to evolve, educate, and empower the agriculture community. Currently, the Center has extended its outreach arm focusing on a broader audience. The Center has received funding for the following projects below;

- *On-line Marketing Tool For Small and Mid-Sized Meat Goat Farmers (USDA/NIFA/AFRI)*
- *Urban Agriculture Initiative to Enhance Student Recruitment and Community Engagement (USDA/NIFA/CBGP)*
- *Enhancing and Sustaining Farming Opportunities for Veterans and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers (USDA/OAO)*
- *Mitigating Enrollment and Retention Attrition in Agribusiness and Underrepresented Populations (USDA/NIFA/HEC).*

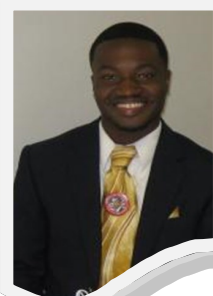
Small Farms Research Center Transition

This summer Ms. Bhargavi (Ester) Puchakayala and her family re-located to Huntsville, Texas. She has definitely contributed to the Center's success. Beginning with the many outreach efforts and assisting small farmers throughout the state Alabama. The Center appreciates her service and wishes her well with her career endeavors. We will surely miss her exquisite work ethics, personality and presence.



INTERNS 2014-2015
Mrs. Bhargavi Puchakayala
(Ester)
(Re-located to Huntsville,

Two months later following Ester's departure, Mr. JaMarkus Crowell accepted a position with USDA Farm Service Agency, as Program Technician in Sumter County. The Center had the pleasure of working with Mr. Crowell as a student, intern, program assistant and Agribusiness Management Specialist for nearly three and half years. If you interacted with him, many knew him as a personable young man, with excellent work ethics, enthusiastic attitude and personality. He was the Center's outreach coordinator working within the community and engaging farmers and landowners. We wish him well with his career endeavors and we hope to continue to interact with him through the Center's programs. Both Ester and JaMarkus played a pivotal role in the Center's development and execution of programs and services. We thank both of them for their service and a job well done. We wish them continued success.



INTERNS 2012-2015
Mr. JaMarkus Crowell,
Greensboro, Alabama



*Small Farms Research Center (AAMU)
2012 Summer Interns*

Presently, we have hired four new student assistants to execute the many programs and services available through our project. Mr. Crowell and Mrs. Puchakayala (Ester) can never be replaced, but they can definitely be remembered by the Center's constantly through our excellent service. As the year 2015 comes to close, and the year 2016 graces us with its presence, we hope we all embrace change with patience and joy welcoming our new additions to the Center.



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USDA FARM SERVICE AGENCY (FSA)

USDA Encourages Producers to Consider Risk Protection Coverage before Fall Crop Sales Deadlines

Disaster Assistance is Available for Crops that are Ineligible for Federal Insurance



Farm Service Agency today encouraged producers to examine the available U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) crop risk protection options, including federal crop insurance and Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage, before the sales deadline for fall crops.

Deadlines are quickly approaching to purchase coverage for fall-seeded crops. Producers are reminded that crops not covered by insurance may be eligible for the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program. The 2014 Farm Bill expanded NAP to include higher levels of protection. Beginning, underserved and limited resource farmers are now eligible for free catastrophic level coverage, as well as discounted premiums for additional levels of protection.

Federal crop insurance covers crop losses from natural adversities such as drought, hail and excessive moisture. NAP covers losses from natural disasters on crops for which no permanent federal crop insurance program is available, including forage and grazing crops, fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, floriculture, ornamental nursery, aquaculture, turf grass, ginseng, honey, syrup, bioenergy, and industrial crops. USDA has partnered with Michigan State University and the University of Illinois to create an online tool at www.fsa.usda.gov/nap that allows producers to determine whether their crops are eligible for federal crop insurance or NAP and to explore the best level of protection for their operation. NAP basic coverage is available at 55 percent of the average market price for crop losses that exceed 50 percent of expected production, with higher levels of coverage, up to 65 percent of their expected production at 100 percent of the average market price, including coverage for organics and crops marketed directly to consumers.

Deadlines for coverage vary by state and crop. To learn more about NAP visit www.fsa.usda.gov/nap or contact your local USDA Service Center. To find your local USDA Service Centers go to <http://offices.usda.gov> Federal crop insurance coverage is sold and delivered solely through private insurance agents. Agent lists are available at all USDA Service Centers or at USDA's online Agent Locator: <http://prodwebnlb.rma.usda.gov/apps/AgentLocator/#>. Producers can use the USDA Cost Estimator, <https://webapp.rma.usda.gov/apps/costestimator/Default.aspx>, to predict insurance premium costs.

Beginning Farmer Loans

FSA assists beginning farmers to finance agricultural enterprises. Under these designated farm loan programs, FSA can provide financing to eligible applicants through either direct or guaranteed loans. FSA defines a beginning farmer as a person who:

- Has operated a farm for not more than 10 years
- Will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm
- Agrees to participate in a loan assessment, borrower training and financial management program sponsored by FSA
- Does not own a farm in excess of 30 percent of the county's average size farm.

Additional program information, loan applications, and other materials are available at your local USDA Service Center. You may also visit www.fsa.usda.gov.



Loans for Targeted Underserved Producers

FSA has a number of loan programs available to assist applicants to begin or continue in agriculture production. Loans are available for operating type loans and/or to purchase or improve farms or ranches. While all qualified producers are eligible to apply for these loan programs, FSA has provided priority funding for members of targeted underserved applicants.

A targeted underserved applicant is one of a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic or gender prejudice because of his or her identity as members of the group without regard to his or her individual qualities. For purposes of this program, targeted underserved groups are women, African Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. FSA loans are only available to applicants who meet all the eligibility requirements and are unable to obtain the needed credit elsewhere.

Healthy Soil for Life

Soil health, also referred to as soil quality, is defined as the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. This definition speaks to the importance of managing soils so they are sustainable for future generations. To do this, we need to remember that soil contains living organisms that when provided the basic necessities of life - food, shelter, and water - perform functions required to produce food and fiber.

Only "living" things can have health, so viewing soil as a living ecosystem reflects a fundamental shift in the way we care for our nation's soils. Soil isn't an inert growing medium, but rather is teeming with billions of bacteria, fungi, and other microbes that are the foundation of an elegant symbiotic ecosystem. Soil is an ecosystem that can be managed to provide nutrients for plant growth, absorb and hold rainwater for use during dryer periods, filter and buffer potential pollutants from leaving our fields, serve as a firm foundation for agricultural activities, and provide habitat for soil microbes to flourish and diversify to keep the ecosystem running smoothly. Learn more about how **Soil Biology** plays a major role in soil health.

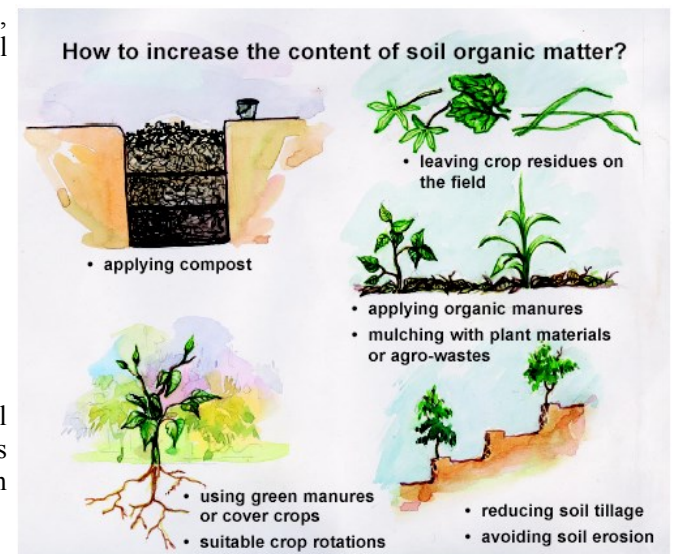


What Soil Does

Healthy soil gives us clean air and water, bountiful crops and forests, productive grazing lands, diverse wildlife, and beautiful landscapes. Soil does all this by performing five essential functions:

Regulating water - Soil helps control where rain, snowmelt, and irrigation water goes. Water and dissolved solutes flow over the land or into and through the soil.

- Sustaining plant and animal life - The diversity and productivity of living things depends on soil.
- Filtering and buffering potential pollutants - The minerals and microbes in soil are responsible for filtering, buffering, degrading, immobilizing, and detoxifying organic and inorganic materials, including industrial and municipal by-products and atmospheric deposits.
- Cycling nutrients - Carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, and many other nutrients are stored, transformed, and cycled in the soil.
- Physical stability and support - Soil structure provides a medium for plant roots. Soils also provide support for human structures and protection for archeological treasures.



Inherent and Dynamic Properties of Soil

Soil has both inherent and dynamic properties, or qualities. Inherent soil quality is a soil's natural ability to function. For example, sandy soil drains faster than clayey soil. Deep soil has more room for roots than soils with bedrock near the surface. These characteristics do not change easily.

Dynamic soil quality is how soil changes depending on how it is managed. Management choices affect the amount of soil organic matter, soil structure, soil depth, and water and nutrient holding capacity. One goal of soil health research is to learn how to manage soil in a way that improves soil function. Soils respond differently to management depending on the inherent properties of the soil and the surrounding landscape.

Understanding soil health means assessing and managing soil so that it functions optimally now and is not degraded for future use. By monitoring changes in soil health, a land manager can determine if a set of practices is sustainable. See **Soil Health Assessment** and **Soil Health Management** principles for soil health for more information. For more information on soil management, visit the NRCS Website at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/soils/health/>



Cooperating Units made possible with financial support and assistance from: USDA/OAO/Outreach Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers (OASDFR) Program, USDA/NIFA/Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program (BFRDP), USDA/NIFA/Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) and USDA/NIFA/Southern Risk Management Education Center (SRMEC).



SEASON GREETINGS

Greetings from the Small Farms Research Center (SFRC):

Seasons change to challenge the mind, body, and spirit. Change forces one to GROW.. So let's just say this year the Small Farms Research Center has definitely grown and evolved to keep up with the extraordinary changes in staff, expanding our outreach efforts, and strengthening our partnerships and building strong collaborations. If I can describe 2015 year in one sentence, it would be "CHANGE IS COMING, SO EMBRACE IT WITH A SMILE."

We have definitely embraced change with a smile by welcoming an entire new SFRC team, basically overnight. Even in this transition period, we still did not forget about you "our farmers, landowners, and agribusinesses" OUR CLIENTELE. You are our first priority, and we wanted you to know we are still here to serve, and assist you with your farming endeavors. We would like to thank each of you for supporting us throughout this year. We sincerely hope you will continue to look upon us to educate, serve and assist you with your agricultural needs.



Also, the Small Farms Research Center we would like to graciously thank Tennessee State University, Healthy Living Gardens, LLC, A+ Marketing Association/ Tri-State Rabbit Growers Association, Rosita's Farm, Metro Atlanta Urban Farm, Fort Valley State University, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, USDA (FSA, NRCS, and RD), and Alabama Farm Credit for your strong collaboration and support. Our team extend its warm thanks to each of you, including each resource speaker. You have giving us so much more besides your knowledge/expertise, experience, time and effort to our participants. And we thank you each of you for a job well done.

Many of you have repeatedly heard me say "I absolutely love my job" and "no day is the same." I truly enjoy working with each you. On behalf of the Small Farms Research Center, we wish each of you good health, prosperity, and an abundance of happiness...

Happy Holidays and Happy New Year!

E'licia (Lisa) Chaverest

Mark your Calendar!

2016 Upcoming Events and Activities

- **January 27 –30, 2016. Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SSAWG) Conference. Lexington, Texas.** The Small Farms Research Center have sponsor limited farmers, landowners, and community leaders attend the SSAWG Conference. The SFRC's scholarship includes SSAWG conference registration, hotel accommodation, transportation and one ticket entry to the Banquet Dinner of Taste of Kentucky." See attachments to learn more about details. Also, please feel free to contact us directly at (256) 372– 4970 or by email elicia.chaverest@aamu.edu.
- **February 2016. Goat Workshop, Huntsville, Alabama. (TBA)**
- **March 12-13, 2016. Small Business Workshop, Huntsville, Alabama.** More details will follow shortly.
- **SAVE THE DATE: August 17-19, 2016. Risk Management and Business Development Workshop, Mobile, Alabama.** The Small Farms Research Center in collaboration with the Alabama Cooperative Extension will host its Annual RM and Business Development Workshop. More details will follow shortly.

Editor's Corner

If you would like to submit articles related to agriculture issues, or would like to make an announcement of your event, please forward your information to:

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Editor's Note: All these articles were compiled from organization Small Farms Research Center, The Canola Team, Farm Service Agency, Natural Resource Conservation Services, and Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network

Quote of the Quarter

*Change
 is the essence of life. Be willing to surrender
 what you are for what you could become.*

UNKNOWN