Eastern Iowa Agriculture & Natural Resources News

Spring 2014

Agriculture specialists, in partnership with Iowa State University and counties in the Southeast Iowa area, build partnerships and provide research-based learning opportunities to improve the quality of life in Iowa.

SOLAR ENERGY FOR SE IOWA

Because of rapid price declines for solar photovoltaic (PV) panels, utility company rebates, and federal and state tax credits, numerous solar PV units are being installed across southeast Iowa. To help homeowners, farmers, and businesses make informed decisions on whether solar PV is right for them, two solar energy workshops were held in southeast Iowa. Working with the Washington Economic Development Group, a workshop was held in Washington in October of 2013, reaching over 70 participants. In March of 2014, a second workshop in Columbus Junction reached approximately 35 participants. These workshops included information on solar energy basics, financing options, working with utility companies on inter-connections, and experiences from farmers currently using solar PV cells.

Following the Washington meeting, several of the participants have installed solar PV units on their property. A survey of program participants at the Columbus Junction workshop showed all of the participants found the information useful and many will be using this information as they move forward in making decisions on the use of solar PV technology.

By providing current and unbiased information on the productivity of solar PV units and the economics of their use, ISU Extension has helped homeowners, farmers and businesses in southeast Iowa make more informed economic decisions.

DAIRY PARLORS

Nationally, Iowa ranks 12th in total pounds of milk produced, representing 2.25 percent of the 192.8 billion pounds in total U.S. milk production. (Source: NASS) Iowa has 209,000 milk cows in production on over 1,700 farms, producing 4.34 billion pounds of milk. Iowa has eleven milk bottling plants processing fluid milk, ten processing dry milk products, eleven processing cheese and seven processing ice cream. While dairy is a large and valuable industry in Iowa, it is also one with great risk to the dairyman, due to the lack of availability of qualified employees, which was partially responsible for the loss of 155 licensed dairy herds between 2012 and 2013. The Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Dairy Team recognized a high need and interest to better understand various milking system options to reduce labor risk for the future of their dairy operations.

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DAIRY PARLORS continued

The ISU Extension and Outreach Dairy Team held several educational programs on Automatic Milking Systems and Low Cost Parlors and followed up with forty-five individual on-farm visits. Ninety-three per cent of producers agreed this program had an impact on their understanding of the economics and profitability of their dairy farm through education and consulting related to milking facilities, housing facilities, and other concerns. Seven producers responded with data estimating increased returns of $346,840, or nearly $50,000 per farm per year as a result of participating in this program. In addition to helping farmers stay in the dairy industry and improve profits, the program also had a positive impact on farmers' quality of life, as indicated by the following quotes:

“IT was re-model our parlor or quit milking.”

“ISU Extension and Outreach not only helped us design our parlor, but listened to our thoughts and used them.”

“ISU Extension and Outreach helped develop a plan that would work well for our existing tie stall barn for a robotic milking system addition.”

“The robotic milking system has vastly improved our quality of life.”

FRUIT TREE GRAFTING WORKSHOPS

Locally grown food is in high demand across Iowa and the nation. However, according to a Leopold Center study locally grown Iowa apples make up only 15% of the apples consumed in the state. For other tree grown fruit, statistics are not readily available but would be much lower than apple.

Local nurseries and mail order garden catalogues generally have a limited selection of fruit cultivars, resulting in many older and/or heirloom cultivars no longer being available. Some people have an older fruit tree in their yard in which they take great pride and they want to preserve these trees into the future. However, many of these older trees are in decline.

Because of lack of cultivar availability and the decline of older trees, a series of fruit tree grafting workshops were implemented. Each participant learns how to graft fruit trees by lecture, demonstration, and hands on example with apple. At the end of each class all of the participants leave class with two self-grafted apple trees, with some of those being with scion wood from their own trees. Additional rootstocks are provided for those that want to do additional grafting. In recent years, there have been 25 such workshops in different locations around Iowa involving over 700 participants. The spring workshops for 2014 are scheduled for March 25 in Oskaloosa, March 29 in Iowa City, and April 3 in Perry.

Participants learned a new skill of fruit tree grafting, with several going on to graft many other fruit trees. In total, the class is responsible for over 10,000 grafted fruit trees, and several unique cultivars of apple have been propagated for future generations to enjoy. In addition, two students began teaching grafting classes themselves.

LOUISA COUNTY FARMER’S SHARE BREAKFAST

Local agriculture provides 2,277 jobs which represent almost half of the Louisa County’s workforce. As of 2009, farms covered 70% of the surface land in Louisa County, some of which is dedicated to local foods. By purchasing locally, 80-90% of every food dollar stays in the local economy and helps preserve farmland and the livelihood of farmers.

To bring agriculture awareness to the forefront and to allow community members to meet and interact with local farmers and, ultimately, take home more information about food sources, the Farmer’s Share Breakfast was co-sponsored by the Louisa County Farm Bureau and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach on March 1, 2014. Participants were able to purchase breakfast for $0.64, which represents the share the farmer would receive out of a four dollar breakfast. The typical share a farmer would receive out of every dollar spent in the marketplace is $0.16. The after-breakfast program included Paul Gieselman, Louisa County native, discussing his foreign trade mission to China, and Chad Hart, ISU Extension Grain Marketing Specialist, presenting on what is driving the grain markets and what farmers’ expectations should be.

The Farmer’s Share Breakfast achieved the goal of forging a partnership between farmers and consumers that promotes local foods, with these partners also being more aware of agriculture in a global marketplace.