



MARKETING MATTERS

**Kentucky
Department
of Agriculture**

**A Consumer
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Service Agency**

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Sharing the Family Farm

By Bill Holleran

Just off the AA Highway west of Grayson, Ky., one family has proved agriculture diversification can be successful with hard work and dedication. Dean and Grace Ramey raised tobacco and beef cattle and even ventured into the purebred Boer goat business before opening their greenhouse operation seven years ago in Carter County. Their daughter, Julie Bush, along with her husband, Bill, and daughter, Katie, all pitch in to keep the family farm thriving. The Rameys still raise cattle on their 360 acres, but tobacco and goats have been replaced with three greenhouses overflowing with vegetable and bedding plants, hanging baskets and mixed flower plantings in antique containers. They also have an old 1930s grocery store on site that belonged to Dean's great-aunt that was converted into a gift shop. Like many farmers in Kentucky, the Rameys were able to make the transition with help from the Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund's cost-share programs.

"We used to raise 20 acres of tobacco and had to find migrant labor to help us with our crop," Dean said. "I enjoyed raising tobacco and enjoyed stripping tobacco and the stripping room conversations over the years. We started raising vegetable and bedding plants in our tobacco greenhouse and then began adding greenhouses after the tobacco buyout. Now we're still able to farm and keep our family involved in agriculture without having to hire help from outside the family. I also get the chance to see old friends I haven't seen in years who stop by to get their plants."

Grace Ramey stocks Berea College crafts, Mitchell Tolle artwork, homemade soaps, dried flowers and pottery among many other gifts in the old grocery store turned gift shop next to the greenhouses. "Usually the gift shop is open only when the greenhouse is open," Grace said. "When the greenhouse closes down for the season, the gift shop is open on Friday and Saturday.

"The gift shop is my escape place. I really like to be there, and I only stock things that are special to me that I



Garden Gate Greenhouse and Gift Shop is located on Highway 7 just off the AA Highway in Carter County.

think will really mean something to others," said Grace. "We like to offer a wide variety of products to our customers, and we have learned so much about people. Most of our customers are very nice people who appreciate what we do."

Julie Bush had studied agriculture and always wanted a greenhouse. She is now seeing her plans

materialize. She has a unique way of arranging flower collections in antique containers and wooden boxes that she offers for sale. Julie goes to auctions and estate sales to see what she can use as containers for the arrangements she puts together. "I call it going junkin'," Julie said with a smile as she told me about the old trunks, copper and porcelain pots, old wooden boxes, and other containers she has found for her living flower arrangements. "It's unusual, and it's created a niche for us. We also do custom potting for people if they have their own special container they want us to use. We hope they come back year after year with these unique containers to fill with our flowers," Julie said.

Bill works full-time in the houses. In addition to the greenhouse plants he takes care of, he also raises around 4,000 mums for fall sales. "The work is not hard, but it's time-consuming. We constantly monitor and adjust the temperature and moisture. We trim the plants and deadhead old blooms to keep the plants in the best condition. We put a lot of time into our plants, and we want our houses to be clean when our customers arrive," said Bill. This commitment to quality helps Garden Gate sell out usually by the middle of June each year.

Attention to detail, customer service, and a commitment to family is a model for Kentucky farm families that want to work together and not just keep the family farm but share the family farm. For more information about Garden Gate call them at (606) 475-9960 or contact them through e-mail at GardenGate@utionline.net.

Sweet Sorghum - A Part of Kentucky History That's Still Growing

One of the crops important in early Kentucky history that is sometimes overlooked today is sweet sorghum. Kentucky remains one of the largest sorghum-producing states in the southeast. People have a renewed interest in Kentucky's food history and are realizing there is a treasure of heirloom crops and old-time methods unique to our region that are still alive and thriving.

Aaron Hoover of "Old Kentucky Home Sorghum" talked to the Kentucky Department of Agriculture at the annual Kentucky Horticulture Society and Kentucky Vegetable Growers conference in Lexington earlier this year about getting the word out about sorghum. Here's what Mr. Hoover wanted us to share with our readers about this important Kentucky crop.

Letter to the Editor By Andrew Hoover

Sorghum is made from 100 percent natural juice extracted from sorghum cane. The juice is cleansed of impurities by evaporation in open pans into a clear, amber-colored, mild-flavored syrup. The syrup retains all its natural sugars and other nutrients and is 100 percent natural.

Sorghum is one of the oldest natural sweeteners known. It was the principal sweetener used by our ancestors as America was being settled. The sorghum cooking pan traveled westward with the settlers. It thus became part of America's heritage. Besides being the energy food of the settlers, sorghum made foods more tasty and nutritious. Sorghum contains such hard-to-find nutri-

ents as calcium, iron, potassium, and phosphorous.

The settlers found many ways to use sorghum – sweetening drinks, making confections, flavoring meats – but its most popular use was in baking. It was used in place of sugar in making pies, breads, pudding, and countless cakes and cookies.

The versatility of sorghum is being rediscovered by today's conscientious homemakers. They are finding that there is hardly a food served today that sorghum will not improve. Sorghum blends with every kind of food, enhancing both taste and texture in very subtle ways. For today's chef, sorghum is a nutritious flavoring, a seasoning ingredient and a sugar substitute. It is that secret ingredient that gives any food that delicious taste and aroma that spells homemade.

There is a community of old-fashioned people living in Allen County, Kentucky, who still grow sorghum as a marketable crop. All total they grow around 150 acres of sorghum cane. The cane stalks are squeezed with horse-powered presses. The juice is then evaporated in large stainless steel evaporator pans and heated with steam from wood-fired furnaces or boilers.

The sorghum of old-timers was unusually quite dark, nearly black. With today's better equipment the sorghum is usually a golden amber color with a milder taste than that of bygone years. Most older folks still remember of sorghum being made especially in the mid- and deep South.

The community of folks in Allen County produce a lot of sorghum in a season and are looking for more markets for their products.



Traditional methods of processing sorghum include using horses or mules. Photo courtesy of Morris Bitzer.

It seems the younger generation has lost the art and value of sorghum. It would be nice to see a comeback in sorghum usage. Its food value far exceeds corn syrup and other sweets. It compares to honey somewhat. We are trying to establish more and new markets or store chains to carry this product. Dealers are welcome. For more information write to Old Kentucky Home Sorghums, 1273 Hoover Lane, Scottsville, Kentucky 42164. Old Kentucky Home Sorghum is a state- and federally-inspected facility. For more information about sorghum production visit the National Sweet Sorghum Producers and Processors Association Web site at <http://www.ca.uky.edu/nssp/production.html> or contact Kentucky's

resident sorghum researcher, Morris Bitzer with the University of Kentucky, by day at (859) 806-3358.

KDA Offers New USDA Carcass Grading Service

Bobby LeCompt completed six weeks of training with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to become the Kentucky Department of Agriculture's first USDA certified beef quality grader.

"I'm proud to say we've worked out a contractual agreement with USDA allowing KDA to offer this service in Kentucky, and currently we have the only USDA grader in the state," Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner Richie Farmer said. "Kentucky beef producers and meat processors are extremely fortunate to have a man with Bobby's skills close by. His certification, along with funding from the Agricultural Development Board allowing us to provide this service, will level the playing field for our beef producers while adding value to their products."

LeCompt was trained at a busy processing plant in Joslin, Ill., that processed 200



head of beef cattle per hour.

LeCompt travels to USDA-inspected processing plants and grades the beef hanging in their freezers based on the amount of marbling present, the age of the animal, and the overall quality of the meat. He stamps one of three grades on the carcass: "prime," the best; "choice," the intermediate grade; and "select," a leaner alternative.

Small family producers whose beef is USDA quality graded can market their beef as a grain- or grass-fed, locally raised, high-value product. That enables them to make more money and better compete with high-

volume producers. More money to family farms means stronger local economies and more tax revenues to local governments.

Until LeCompt became a USDA-certified grader, small producers in Kentucky had to pay high prices to get graders to come from other states to grade their beef.

Thanks in part to KDA's and LeCompt's efforts, Kentucky's Choice Homegrown Beef of Springfield is preparing to sell freezer beef through Remke Markets, an employee-owned grocery business with seven stores in northern Kentucky. Having LeCompt available to grade their beef will allow these farm families to compete on a much larger stage while getting a premium price for their product. They will also be able to adjust their genetics and feeding programs to ensure that they are producing beef that is USDA Choice or better.

All beef products that are offered for sale in the United States are inspected by the USDA for safety. Grading is done to measure the quality of the meat.

Good Agricultural Practices, Your Marketing Advantage

By Janet Eaton

Spinach contaminated with E. coli is recalled. A food poisoning outbreak is linked to tainted melons. Iceberg lettuce is suspected as the vehicle for an illness outbreak in Nebraska.

What does a producer do to reassure their customers that their produce is safe to eat? What steps do you take to reduce the chance for contamination on the farm?

To assist Kentucky producers and reassure Kentucky consumers, a partnership has been formed among the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, The Kentucky Department for Public Health and the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

After researching science-based programs, the partnership identified simple steps Kentucky producers can take to greatly reduce the opportunity for their produce to become contaminated.

Proper manure handling, avoiding cross-contamination from on-farm livestock and wild animals, proper sanitation during har-

vest and packing, and close monitoring of the water used in all aspects of production are some of the key components of best practices. Part of the reason consumers want to buy locally is because they perceive that local food is safer.

During the spinach scare, farmers' markets reported heavy sales volume for local spinach. Consumers trusted the Kentucky farmers that they buy from every week.

We want to keep the credibility high for our local farmers' markets and on-farm stands by avoiding any incident of food-borne illness associated with Kentucky produce.

The voluntary Kentucky Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) program offered a one-day workshop at the Kentucky Farmers' Market Summits where components of the best practices were explored.

With input from the producers who attended those workshops, the partners developed a three-hour curriculum for producers. In November 2007, extension agents will be offered a training-for-trainers class to pre-

pare to take the information back to their producers.

Consumers are asking for assurances, and the certificates that participants will earn in this educational program may be displayed to show that producers are aware of the critical control points in their production system.

Producers who complete the educational program will be offered a kit to conduct a self-assessment of their production system. This kit walks producers through the various components of a good farm plan and gives them space to write out changes they want to make and formulate a timeline.

For more information on the Kentucky GAP program, visit our Web site at www.kyagr.com, click on Programs button, then click on the GAP link or contact Janet Eaton or Mac Stone with KDA at (502) 564-4983.

Market News Information Available

Livestock, grain, produce and futures market prices are all reported daily and are available through KDA's Web site at www.kyagr.com or by calling 1-800-FARMLOT. We recently began reporting produce auction prices again this year.

KDDC "MILK" PROGRAM SET TO BEGIN

By Eunice Schlappi & Roger Thomas

Support from all industry partners has been secured for the Kentucky Dairy Development Council's "MILK"—Market Incentive Leadership for Kentucky Program.

After many months of discussion, all "letters of commitment" from the industry partners have been received. The KDDC appreciates the partnership with the industry, and we look forward to providing incentive payments to producers all across the state who achieve the quality, production and management qualifiers. This program is designed to be consistent with the goals of the KDDC - milk quality improvement, production per cow increases and better management strategies. The most important goal is adding dollars to producer paychecks. Through the "MILK" incentive payments, we have the opportunity to add \$2 of Agricultural Development Board/KDDC partner funds to dairy farm family income over the next two years. KDDC urges each producer to consider enrolling in the "MILK" program and remember: Producers qualify on a month-by-month basis.

Following are the qualifiers to be met to obtain the \$.50/cwt incentive on all milk:

- Production 10% Increase in 2007

above 2006 Base (Calculated Monthly)

- Quality SCC < 400,000 Average of all Pickups
- PIC < 20,000 Producer's Marketing Agency Requirement
- No Adulterated Milk for the Month

Management Programs Participation Required

- Production Records: DHIA (Mid-South Dairy Records)
- Financial Records: Kentucky Farm Business Management University of Kentucky or approved alternative

Incentive Premiums Earned on Monthly Basis—Paid Quarterly in Separate Check

- \$10,000 Maximum Per Farm Per Year

KDDC consultants will assist in "MILK" sign-up, management program enrollment, and monitoring "MILK" quality qualifiers. For more information or to enroll in the "MILK" Program, contact:

Maury Cox, KDDC Dairy Consultant Director—Northcentral & Northeast Kentucky
Cell—(502) 298-1864 or e-mail—maury.cox@insightbb.com

Matthew Hayes, KDDC Dairy Consultant—southeast Kentucky
Cell—(859) 516-1966 or e-mail—mhayes_kddc@windstream.net

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Roger Thomas, KDDC Executive Director
Cell—(859) 516-1129 or e-mail—Rogerthomas@insightbb.com

DHIA/Mid-South Dairy Records, contact:
Mark Witherspoon
Office—(417) 831-6931
Cell—(417) 818-0605
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Kentucky Farm Business Management (KFBM) Curtis Mahnken, Interim KFBM Dairy Specialist. Lexington Office—(859) 257-7272, ext. 259
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Bowman Named Executive Director of Sheep and Goat Office

Staff Report

Ray Bowman became the first executive director of the Kentucky Sheep and Goat Development Office April 1.

Bowman, a Franklin County, Ky. goat and sheep producer, is a retired communications professional with over 30 years of experience in state and federal government.

"I am excited and considerably humbled to be chosen for this position," said Bowman. "This is an opportunity to work with the Kentucky Sheep and Wool Producers Association (KSWPA) and the Kentucky Goat Producers Association (KGPA) to build this new office from the ground up. That's a tremendous responsibility, and I'm honored the associations feel I am up to the task."

Richard Vansickle, chairman of the search committee and president of the KSWPA, said: "Ray is well-known in the agriculture community and has already proved to be a valuable contributor to the sheep and goat industries through his work as past president of the KGPA, committee member for the American

sheep industry and regional coordinator for the American Meat Goat Association. As our new executive director, he will bring a wide range of talents to a pivotal role."

The new development office is an independent, producer-oriented entity and will be under the oversight of the KSWPA and the KGPA boards of directors. It is funded partially through a grant from the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board.

Bowman is not only a producer but a strong advocate for Kentucky's growing sheep and goat industries. He has served as a National Goat Committee member, regional representative for the American Meat Goat Association, small ruminant delegate for USDA, and as a member of Kentucky Farm Bureau's goat and sheep advisory committee. Bowman's experience working as a state public information officer under seven administrations has made him an effective communicator. He is currently the editor of "Kentucky's Goat News" as well as contributing journalist to "The Farmer's Pride" and "Journal Cabra y Oveja," a



sheep and goat Journal in Brazil.

Bowman is a graduate of Murray State University and is married with three adult daughters. He is also a traditional fiddler, singer and string band musician.

Contact Bowman at (502) 330-4268 or through e-mail at kysheep@fewpb.net.

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