

Community food system meetings

Virginia Cooperative Extension would like to invite interested residents, farmers, business professionals, government officials and local leaders to attend one of three group discussions exploring the development of community-based food systems throughout Virginia's northern Piedmont area.

The events are scheduled for March 17, 19 and 20 in Leesburg, Warrenton and Sperryville, respectively. Each meeting will begin at 7 p.m. and last approximately one hour. The purpose of the meetings is to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and barriers of selling local farm products to local retail establishments and institutions. These events are free and all interested parties are encouraged to participate. Pre-registration is required.

The Leesburg event will be held at the Loudoun County Extension Office, 31-B Catoctin Circle SE, Leesburg. To register call Corey Childs at (703) 777-0373.

The Warrenton event will be held at Airlie Center, The Forge, 6809 Airlie Road, Warrenton. To register call Tim Mize at 341-7950.

The Sperryville event will be held at The Schoolhouse at the corner of Rt. 211 and Rt. 522 in Sperryville. To register call Kenner Love at 675-3619.

Local 4-H to hold talent contest

Do you want to be the next American Idol? Do you have America's best dance crew? Come out and share your talent Friday, April 4 at the 2008 4-H Share-the-Fun Talent and Contest Show.

Registration and auditions for the event, which is being presented by Culpeper County 4-H, will be from 4 to 7 p.m. Thursday, March 27 at the Culpeper Extension Office, 101 S. West St.

Those interested are invited to try out with vocal, instrumental, dance, drama and variety acts, to be performed individually or in groups of up to four people. Entrants should provide their own equipment, costumes and/or props.

A dress rehearsal will be held from 4 to 6 p.m. Thursday, April 3 at Farmington Elementary School. It will be followed by a contest beginning at 6:30 p.m.

For more information contact 727-3435 or visit ext.vt.edu/offices/culpeper.

Lawmakers mull regulating salvia

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — On Web sites touting the mind-blowing powers of Salvia divinorum, come-ons to buy the hallucinogenic herb are accompanied by warnings: "Time is running out!" and "stock up while you still can."

That's because salvia is being targeted by lawmakers concerned that the inexpensive and easy-to-obtain plant could become the next marijuana. Eight states have already placed restrictions on salvia, and 16 others, including Florida, are considering a ban or have previously.

"As soon as we make one drug illegal, kids start looking around for other drugs they can buy legally. This is just the next one," said Florida state Rep. Mary Brandenburg, who has introduced a bill to make possession of salvia a felony punishable by up to five years in prison.

Some say legislators are overreacting to a minor problem, but no one disputes that the plant impairs judgment and the ability to drive.

STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

David and Anita attended the Rappahannock Hunt's Point-to-Point meet recently at the Bleu Rock Inn near Washington, Va. The weather was cold, but they had a great time.

Greener pastures

The other week I talked about the Rappahannock Hunt's annual Point-to-Point meet at the Bleu Rock Inn in Washington, Va., and invited you all to come down and join in the fun — and, believe you me, it was great fun indeed, despite the very strong, very cold wind that blasted around the place. There were some good races, and some great tailgate parties on the course and, best of all, it didn't rain or snow. It was cold without a doubt, but sheltered behind a truck or trailer, a good drop of something warming in your cup, and you soon forgot about the cold.

In fact the weekend turned out to be one long equestrian event for us, and quite an exhausting time it proved to be. We knew about the Point-to-Point on Saturday, but the "Pairs Racing" that our Friends Donna Martin and Julie Williamson were riding in on Sunday was kind of thrown in at the last minute. They were riding as guests of the Casanova Hunt up near New Baltimore, about an hour's drive from home.

Normally, that wouldn't have been a problem for us, after all what is an hour's drive to those of us in America? Of course, the answer is nothing at all. It's equivalent really to popping down to the local store for a gallon of milk — just a shame it costs a gallon of gas to do it, and as we all know, that is not getting any cheaper! I have to say that without a doubt someone out there is making a lot of money off the back of us ordinary folk, who, let's face it, have no option but to use our cars/trucks to live our daily lives! But that is another story altogether, and I don't want to stir up a hornet's nest just yet (well, actually I do, but let's wait until the Green Card comes through first shall we?).

I was sort of digressing there, but it is a valid point because in the equine world, the cost of gas or diesel greatly affects everyone — not just those who travel



David points out that traveling on horseback is greener than driving a car, though it has fewer amenities.



DAVID AND ANITA HASBURY-SNOGLES

from show to show, or go trail riding in different parts of the country towing their trailers behind them, but also in the knock-on effects of transportation costs in general.

Truth be told, the cost of everything we buy will rise as a result of increasing fuel costs — and don't believe all the hype about "greenhouse gases" either. Governments love to tag on to fashionable "green issues" these days, as it helps divert some of the attention from their own miserably failings, and is a great excuse to raise additional revenue from "green taxes" too.

Personally, when anyone ever mentions how much pollution car drivers create and how we must change our "evil ways", I simply point out how much more pollution is generated from jet aircraft or trucks than the entire car-driving population of a city. What's worse is when we in the West are being severely berated for our selfish, inconsiderate ways, and are made to feel guilty for the very fact we

dare to breathe these days.

I am frequently puzzled to hear all this babble about global warming, when I keep hearing about record low temperatures in various parts of the country this winter; surely global warming would mean the temperatures get higher, not lower, wouldn't it?

Did you know that the years just before an ice age tend to show a few degrees increase in warmth — then the big freeze hits! Who's to say that isn't what we are experiencing nowadays, only in fast-forward format?

I'm not averse to recycling, nor do I like to see the beautiful countryside tainted with trash, and I appreciate that we don't always do what is best for the environment — just give us all a break from the preaching from time to time.

Maybe we should all start thinking seriously about reverting back to single horsepower — a very green mode of transport, if a little less controllable at times than the 160 horsepower equivalent. It may not come with heated seats, FM Stereo, power steering, electric windows or full-shock absorption, but the air conditioning is definitely thrown in, especially at speed, and you don't need to stop at a gas station every few hundred miles — just the nearest pasture!

Until next week

David Snogles can be reached at david_hasbury@yahoo.com

The times sure are changing

The Culpeper Madison Feeder Cattle Association (CMFCA) held its annual meeting at the new Brandy Station fire hall with 80 of 160 members attending. The association program and excellent meal by the ladies auxiliary made for a nice evening of fellowship and education between producers.



CARL STAFFORD

Scott Stickley, manager of Farmers Livestock Exchange at Winchester, had our attention when he described the changes in the beef industry with the sale of Smithfield packing to Brazilian company JBS SA.

This sale puts significant supply and market control in the hands of one relatively new player in the U.S. beef industry. While they already have beef processing holdings from their earlier purchase of Swift meat processing, this new development makes them a larger force in the market and likely to influence changes yet to come.

The Smithfield Beef Group sale includes cattle feeding capacity in Colorado, Packerland beef processing Wisconsin and, of course, Moyer Packing in Pennsylvania; the entire deal is said to be worth \$565 million. In a related story, JBS SA also bought National Beef Packing in Kansas City.

In his comments to the group, Jim Royston, state grader with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, pointed out additional changing conditions in the beef industry with historic highs in feed, fuel and fertilizer.

He observed the global market at work in all three areas, driven by a growing demand in developing countries for inputs of raw materials that, when combined with U.S. demand, explains much of the change we are going through today.

Continuing this theme, my own comments to the group pointed out that agriculture is changing around us. By way of illustration, I described an apple cart that had been turned upside down, spilling its contents onto the ground. Our own beef industry has been likewise turned upside down with nothing we thought to be true still remaining.

Important dates

- March 16-22: Ag Week
- March 19: CMFCA graded sale, CAE
- March 29: Piedmont Horse Expo, CAE
- April 4: BCIA Bull Sale, CAE
- April 5: X-Mas Tree Workshop, Glengary Christmas Tree Farm
- April 18-20: Beef Expo, Rockingham Fairgrounds

Now that the apples are all on the ground, you as producers have to decide which ones to pick up and start using again — if you see what I mean.

Things we knew were right for beef cattle, we are not so sure about today.

Grain, for example, has increased to the point we have to think twice about using any, whereas before we used it and saw the expense but did not feel it as sharply as we do today. The value of hay is pushing it into the same category. Can cattle really pay for \$100 per ton hay? Plant food values have jumped ahead in parallel with grain, hay and oil price increases.

Each case is different and each farmer has to decide what he or she can and cannot keep on doing. In the end, the things you do that bring in more than they cost are worth doing. I could see beef farmers justifying fencing, fertilizer and cattle, as all three are income-producing assets when put to work in the right combinations.

Carl Stafford is Culpeper County Extension Agent, Animal Science. He can be reached at ccstaffo@vt.edu.

Democrats criticize southern governors over water wars

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Democrats on Capitol Hill said Tuesday that the Republican governors of Alabama, Florida and Georgia are leaving their states unprepared for another dry summer by failing to settle differences over water rights.

At a House hearing on the region's lingering drought, Democratic lawmakers said the governors and the Bush administration should commit to talks before winter rains taper off.

Rep. Hank Johnson, D-Ga., said the continued uncertainty is generating anxiety and could prompt businesses to

move away or reconsider locating in the area.

"It is unacceptable that negotiations have broken down while the people of this region grow increasingly worried," Johnson said.

He and others also criticized the governors for declining to participate in the hearing, called by House Transportation and Infrastructure water subcommittee Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson, a Texas Democrat.

"The road to an equitable solution lies not in the courts but at the negotiating table," the chairwoman said. "But first (the states) must show up."

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