



# Carolina Farm Stewardship Association STEWARDSHIP NEWS

WINTER 2014

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## Farm Profile:

### Miller Farm

by Thomas Locke,  
CFSA Outreach Coordinator

For most folks driving west on I-40, the 7-mile stretch up the mountain in Old Fort is the sign that you have reached western NC. However, if your destination is a 25-acre certified organic farm in Marble, NC, you might as well get comfortable because the trip isn't over yet. You'll find yourself at Miller Farm, run by brothers Matt, Mike and Jon, after another two hours driving through Waynesville, over the mountain in Cherokee and through the breathtaking Nantahala Gorge.

"Marble isn't what it was in the 1920s," Mike said after I asked about the town. "Back when the marble mines were still in operation the town had a lot more going on." By the time Mike, Jon and Matt moved to Marble with their father, Jim, several decades ago, the town population had dwindled and they were only a handful of kids left in the school system.

"When we moved to town, Mike and I represented 20 percent of our elementary school class," Matt said. "Growing up here was great. We had lots of room to run around and the area offered plenty to do as a child."

After Mike and Matt graduated from NC State with respective degrees in forestry and horticulture and finished



Matt Miller on the 25-acre certified organic farm he and his brothers Mike and Jon operate in Marble, NC

a job with the Cherokee Hot Shots – a group of firefighters on the road 200 days of the year to put out wildfires all over the country – the brothers decided they wanted to move back home, join forces with Jon and start a farm.

"Originally we planned to start small and have jobs in town," said Mike. Funny how things work because shortly thereafter, Michael Porterfield from New Sprout Organic Farms came to the area looking to source more produce from certified organic farms. After the brothers spoke with Michael, their decision to start small was suddenly replaced with organic certification, a significant amount of farm equipment and a lease to

beautiful farmland with two feet of rich, black topsoil just outside of town.

Fast-forward three years and the brothers have increased their acreage under cultivation from 12 acres in the first year, to 16 the second and now 25 acres with plans for further expansion. "We simply can't grow enough at this point," Matt said. "The demand for organic produce is extremely high right now."

Being 30 miles from the westernmost tip of North Carolina, where Georgia and

Tennessee meet, provides unique marketing opportunities. The brothers continue to sell produce to New Sprout in Asheville, but have also expanded their operation to Destiny Organics out of Atlanta, GA. During the growing season one of the brothers drives their climate controlled semi-truck once a week to make deliveries.

Miller Farm is proof that demand for locally grown, organic produce has never been higher. In fact, CFSA's recently published *Organic Produce Marketing Survey* identified a \$7.3 million supply gap for 13 crops that can be grown and marketed in North and South Carolina. Despite the rich farming heritage across our region, North Carolina ranks 30<sup>th</sup> in the nation and South Carolina 41<sup>st</sup> in total organic acreage. There has never been a better time for farmers to take

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## CAROLINA FARM STEWARDSHIP ASSOCIATION (CFSA)

CFSA is a membership-based organization of more than 3,200 farmers, processors, gardeners, businesses and individuals in North and South Carolina. CFSA's mission is to advocate, educate and build connections to create sustainable food systems centered on local and organic agriculture.

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## *From the Director* **GMO Debate Still Far From Over - The Search for Authenticity**

Following the maxim to 'know thy enemy,' I monitor the mainstream food industry media on a regular basis. These publications mirror their audience, and so are a testament to the faith of food company executives and consultants in the gospels of technology and convenience.

From the perspective of this audience, concerns about the health of the food we eat are an opportunity to market new technologies that will allow manufacturers to produce new processed foods, and allow us to eat those foods free of guilt. At least until the next batch of bad health news comes out.

Cloaked in the mantle of science, the food industry is supremely confident that it is marching to the beat of progress. Critiques of this paradigm are dismissed as Stone Age thinking, and government restrictions on food processing and marketing are attacked as an obstacle to free commerce (although the government subsidies of the commodity crops that propel the system are, of course, vital to ensuring an abundant food supply).

Transgenic crops are a prime example of this mentality. Food industry articles and editorials insist there is no reasonable basis for people to oppose the use of this technology because corporate-financed science says there's no molecular difference between transgenic crops and natural ones.

For consumers to make choices based on anything besides instant gratification of their immediate desires is irrational and contrary to self-interest. Why would anyone make food choices based on up- and downstream consequences if they don't experience those



*Roland McReynolds, Executive Director*

consequences on a daily basis?

And yet people do make such choices, and increasingly food marketers find they have economic incentives to respond.

It shook the Big Food world when, earlier this year, General Mills announced that its flagship breakfast cereal, Cheerios, would go GMO-free. The industry press was overcome with hand-wringing and teeth-gnashing about the impact of this decision and its implication that something is wrong with the hundreds of products containing GMOs that General Mills still sells. Especially in the aftermath of the food industry's success in defeating Washington state's GM-labeling initiative.

The loss in Washington, and in California before that, was disheartening to our movement, and yet brought further attention to the issue of transgenics in our foods. The US Dept. of Agriculture has certainly noticed this public concern, and has been hard at work over the last several years trying to figure out a way to make that anxiety go away without substantively changing its policies.

In 2011 it convened an Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Agriculture (AC21), which last year published a set of recommendations for how organic farming can 'coexist' with high tech production agriculture. As of this writing, the recommendations are open for public comment.

*continued on page 7...*

## CFSA Hosts Largest Ever Sustainable Agriculture Conference!

The 28<sup>th</sup> annual Sustainable Agriculture Conference on November 15 – 17, 2013 in Durham, NC, was the most well attended conference in CFSA history with over 1,300 participants! Make plans to join us next November in fabulous Greenville, SC! The dates are *Monday to Wednesday*, November 10 - 12, 2014.

## CFSA Helps Finance "Making Small Farms into Big Business" study

The South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA) commissioned the Making Small Farms into Big Business (MSFBB) study to look at the potential impact of expanding the state's local food infrastructure. CFSA, along with other partners, helped finance this large-scale assessment, the first of its kind in South Carolina.

Statistics show South Carolinians buy \$11 billion of food each year, with more than 90% sourced outside the state. However, the demand to buy local is growing, and implementing recommendations of MSFBB could increase SC producers' revenue to \$1.2 billion annually.

CFSA appreciates our many members and partners who took time to participate, and are privileged to have collaborated with Crossroads Resource Center in identifying key stakeholders throughout the state.

To read the full report please visit: [www.crcworks.org/scfood.pdf](http://www.crcworks.org/scfood.pdf)

## Big Victory on Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)

Thanks in part to your comments, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced that it would revise its proposed rules implementing FSMA! As initially

drafted, the rules would have negatively impacted organic growers, small and mid- sized farms, and local food businesses.

This is an important win, and a first step in bringing reason to FDA's approach to food safety in local and organic food systems. But more work is yet to come. CFSA will comment on the revised rules when they are made available this summer, and will assist others who wish to comment.

## Retail Ready Workshops

In partnership with NC State and The Support Center, CFSA is offering a series of "Retail Ready Workshops" designed to help farmers market their products for retail sale in grocery stores and co-ops.

### Event Locations and Dates:

#### Gaston County

One-Day Event March 5, 2014  
Gaston County Cooperative  
Extension: 1303 Dallas-Cherryville  
Hwy Dallas, NC 28034

**PLEASE NOTE** The Gaston County event is \$20 to attend.

#### Wake County

October 10-11, 2014  
Wake County Cooperative  
Extension: 4001-E Carya Dr.  
Raleigh, NC 27610-2914

#### Polk County

October 28-29, 2014  
Mill Spring Ag Center: 156 School Rd, Mill Spring, NC 28756

#### Eastern NC – TBD

### To Register:

Email Gary Bullen, Extension Agent NC State Agriculture Resource Economics department

[Gary\\_Bullen@ncsu.edu](mailto:Gary_Bullen@ncsu.edu)

## Take Advantage of CFSA Farm Services!

-Enrollment is currently underway for the **USDA EQIP Organic Initiative (OI)** in South Carolina. Organic producers who are interested in funding for adopting conservation

practices on their farms should contact their local NRCS office to submit an application.

EQIP-OI will also provide funding for the development of Conservation Activity Plans (CAP).

In 2014, CFSA Farm Services Coordinator, Keith Baldwin will continue writing CAP 138 -"Transition to Organic" plans in South Carolina and will be certified to write CAP 104 -"Nutrient Management" plans. He will also be available to transitional and certified producers as an EQIP consultant, assisting producers with selection of EQIP practices that are appropriate for their farms.

**-Enterprise Budgets** for organic production can be found on the CFSA website at [www.carolinafarmstewards.org/enterprise-budgets/](http://www.carolinafarmstewards.org/enterprise-budgets/)

-CFSA's **GAPS Manual for Small Diversified Farms** can be found at: [www.carolinafarmstewards.org/gaps-manual/](http://www.carolinafarmstewards.org/gaps-manual/)

# Save the Dates!

## Midlands, SC Farm Tour

April 5 & 6

## Piedmont Farm Tour

April 26 & 27

## Upstate Farm Tour

June 7 & 8

## NEW! Triad Farm Tour

June 7 & 8

For all the details & more events: [carolinafarmstewards.org/events](http://carolinafarmstewards.org/events)

# Identifying the Best Broccoli Varieties for Organic Growers

Jeanine M. Davis, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist  
Department of Horticultural Science, NC State University

As CFSA identified in the *Organic Produce Marketing Survey*, there is a large, unmet demand for organic broccoli in the Southeastern United States. Broccoli grows really well in the Carolinas, so it only makes sense that we should try to take advantage of this market opportunity.

When it comes to sourcing organic broccoli seeds, however, the selection is quite limited. Most of the well-known commercial sources for organic vegetable seeds only carry a handful of varieties. About half of those are the regular heading broccoli and the rest are sprouting, flowering, or purple broccoli. Many are hybrid varieties, so you can't save the seeds for production the next year. When we asked Western North Carolina organic broccoli growers what their most commonly grown broccoli variety was, they told us

Packman, a hybrid. Yet none of the eight well-known organic vegetable seed sources I checked even carried organic Packman seed. I could only find untreated Packman seed.

The most readily available organic heading broccoli varieties are Belstar, Fiesta, and Di Cicco. Of those only Di Cicco is open-pollinated. Many of the other organic broccoli varieties are older varieties that familiar to many of us, including Waltham, Thompson, and Green Goliath.

The problem with many of the broccoli varieties available to Southeastern farmers, is that the varieties were bred for west coast conditions.

*Broccoli growers at the Mountain Horticultural Crops and Research Station in Mills River, NC*

*photo courtesy of Jeanine Davis*

They were not bred for the hot, humid, high rainfall conditions that we often experience. As a result, many Southeastern growers only grow broccoli as a fall crop, when conditions are cooler and often drier.

Market and farmer surveys revealed the need to find, or breed, varieties best suited to organic production under Southeastern U.S. conditions, and consistently produce high-quality heads in the spring, summer, and fall. The market demands firm, smooth, highly-domed heads, with small bead-size, dark green color and long stems. In addition, farmers are looking for disease resistance, heat tolerance, uniformity in maturity, good flavor, and in some cases, high side-shoot production. They are willing to pay a premium for varieties with resistance to flea beetles and harlequin bugs.

We have two projects underway addressing many of these issues at the Mountain Research Station in Waynesville, NC. The first study is part of a USDA-SCRI funded conventional study done in cooperation with seven land-grant universities, the USDA, four private seed companies, and several large buyers and farms. The objective is to develop and screen broccoli varieties for East Coast conditions. We are looking at dozens of varieties and breeding lines in a conventional production system. The second study is an Organic Farming



*Organic broccoli varieties on white plastic with hay in the rows for weed control*  
*photo courtesy of Jeanine Davis*

*continued on next page...*

Research Foundation funded study to identify broccoli varieties for organic farmers in Western North Carolina. It is located on the certified organic unit on the research station.

Over the last three years, the large conventional study has demonstrated that we can grow beautiful, high-quality broccoli from spring through fall in western North Carolina. The best varieties are very uniform, highly domed, dark green, and high in nutrients. The production system we use includes white-on-black plastic mulch on raised beds with drip-irrigation. Although I am not a strong proponent of plastic mulch, the white color keeps the soil temperatures down in the middle of the summer and the raised beds covered in plastic kept our plants from flooding during the wettest season on record.

The organic study is a participatory project in which local organic farmers selected the varieties and were involved in the evaluation of the field plots. Blind taste tests were conducted with all the varieties. We grew the broccoli on white-on-black plastic and drip-irrigation, included row covers in the spring for protection against flea beetles and harlequin bugs, and established farmscaping. The first year the farmscaping only bordered the field, but last year we planted dill, cilantro, alyssum, calendula, and sunflowers right in the field plots with the broccoli. Once the row covers were removed, we used Pyganic and Dipel for insect control and Regalia for control of Alternaria.

Both years the fields were subjected to more water than was desirable. In 2012, we planted in a new area in our organic unit that we later discovered did not drain as well as it should have. In 2013, we planted in an area we were very familiar with and had never had water problems with before, but excessive rains still caused problems. The raised beds with plastic saved the studies both years. If we had been growing on bare ground, we would have lost

both trials to root rot and weeds.

Even though we grew the same varieties each year, there were big differences in how the varieties compared. The best variety overall both years, agreed on by growers and researchers, was Bay Meadows. Growers also really liked Packman, Premium Crop, and a selection made through a participatory breeding project led by Oregon State University that we call the OSU East Coast population. The researchers preferred Fiesta, Belstar, Batavia, and Gypsy. All of these are hybrids except for the OSU East Coast population.

The difference between the ratings by the growers and the researchers is that the researchers were rating with the wholesale market in mind and the farmers were rating with direct consumer sales in mind. There is a big difference between the two. The wholesale market wants a smaller, smoother head with small bead size. The direct consumer market doesn't care much about head or bead size,

but good color, firmness, and flavor are important.

In the blind taste tests, Belstar, Batavia, Bay Meadows, and the OSU West Coast population (different from the East Coast population) were rated the highest.

The take home lessons so far are that we can grow beautiful broccoli from spring through fall in western North Carolina. The participatory process revealed differences between what researchers were selecting for and what the immediate organic farmer population was interested in. The next step, for which we have already submitted a grant proposal, is to take these trials to the farms and see how the varieties respond to different growing conditions and cultural practices. In 2014, we are also cooperating with CFSA on some participatory vegetable variety trials in Eastern North Carolina.

> For more information on Jeanine Davis and the mountain horticultural crops and research station please visit: [www.ces.ncsu.edu/fletcher](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/fletcher)

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## Miller Farm...(continued from cover)

advantage of the rapidly growing demand sweeping the Carolinas for locally grown, organic fruits and vegetables.

For those who think this is a get rich quick venture, don't fling any seeds into your backyard yet. Organics still represents just 4.2 percent of the total market nationwide because it is hard work, and every farm has unique advantages and disadvantages. At Miller Farm the abundant rain and great soil helps grow excellent crops, but to a weed the farm is like Miami in the winter to a retired couple from New York.

In 2013 the farm got 60 inches of rain, at times too much for the crops but never too much for the ubiquitous and persistent weeds that didn't receive much attention for the prior 60 years the land was in hay production. If your idea to get rich includes starting work at 6 a.m. and weeding until 1 p.m., then this is the job for you. As the Millers are quick to point out, however, growing a business together has been very fulfilling work.

Matt, Mike and Jon were put on a good path to business success by helping their father with his metal fabrication business as children. It was there that they learned the value of good bookkeeping and a sound business plan. When asked why they chose to become certified organic, Matt said, "We always had an organic



*There are many ways to control weeds on the farm, here Mike uses his tractor with attachments on either side to cultivate the rows*

garden growing up and it was something we wanted to continue. Really, the main perceived deterrent is all the recordkeeping which is something you should be doing anyway."

Jon continued, "If you don't know how much it costs to grow a row of beets you're not likely to be very profitable."

He then made the shape of a golf ball with one hand and a tennis ball with the other to resemble the size of beets and said, "Sometimes this is the difference between making money and going broke." He added, "If you don't keep good records you really can't know where you stand."

Because of this commitment to recordkeeping, a strong work ethic and talent at growing great produce, the brothers have been

successful in their three-year-old venture.

As a part of CFSA's Organic Carolinas Initiative, where we seek to double the size of the organic sector in the Carolinas by 2020, the Farm Services team developed enterprise budgets for the 13 crops highlighted in the *Organic Produce Marketing Survey*. Because of their reputation for excellent recordkeeping and obvious success, Miller Farm was asked to help review the budgets for several crops. The farm will also take part in broccoli variety trials this spring with Jeanine Davis from NC State's Department of Horticulture Science (learn more about her work in the Toolshed section on page 4).

As Miller Farm continues to expand, be on the lookout for their wonderful produce and help support the local, organic movement in the Carolinas. Jon, Mike and Matt have an exciting future ahead! 🌱



*Jon and Mike cultivate the rows at Miller Farm*

## Executive Director Letter...(continued from page 2)

The AC21 proposals suggest the best way for dealing with the economic harm caused by GE contamination is selling crop insurance to organic and non-GMO farmers, and identifying ways to 'foster communication,' such as conversations among neighboring farmers regarding planting dates to prevent cross-pollination. Yet, AC21 fails to address the most important question: How do we prevent contamination in the first place? It would be easy prevent contamination if companies that own, promote, and profit from GMO products were held responsible for any contamination of non-GMO farms, because you can bet insurers would require those patent owners to take precautionary measures.

Paralleling the so-called coexistence debate is USDA's proposed approval of new corn and soybean seeds genetically modified to resist the

highly toxic herbicide 2,4-D. Commercial-scale planting of these new genetically modified seeds will lead to an explosive increase in usage of this hazardous chemical, which is known to cause nerve damage and cancer. It also drifts easily onto other crops. Fruit and vegetable growers, organic and 'conventional' alike, are especially vulnerable to crop loss from their neighbors' increased use of 2,4-D, and researchers estimate a 25-fold increase in its use, up to 100 million pounds by 2019, will if these seeds are approved.

Ultimately, the facts of the GM/pesticide treadmill and our diet-related health epidemics belie the fact that the food technologists are far more reliant on faith than science.

Their reductionist paradigm and relentless search for magic bullets that will solve our problems without addressing those problems' root causes, ever leads to dead ends. Yet their faith persists. Holistic, systems-based solutions offer the only hope for real salvation from our pressing environmental, social and health crises.

Despite the battles our movement continually fights, we can take solace in, and draw strength from the fact that science is actually on our side, and it looks a lot like local and organic food and farming.

Sincerely,



## Grow Well NC Website To Be Launched Soon!

Longtime CFSA friend and advocate Jen Snider is combining her love of farming and farm-based wellness coaching to create a down-to-earth wellness website, Grow Well. Jen says:

One goal of Grow Well is to help farmers educate customers at the stand. We know a lot of you get the same questions again and again...what foods are in season? How do you store them? How do you cook them? What health benefits do they provide? Send 'em to Grow Well, where we'll answer those questions and offer more inspiration for their next trip to your stand.

The site will be up in a few months. We're turning to our farmer friends to help us build momentum. We invite you to receive updates we're sending to close friends as part of a pre-launch group. To get our emails, just add your email address here:

<http://growwellnc.com/>



Morgan Siem, Jen Snider, Michelle Lotker visiting the high tunnels at Two Chicks Farm



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