

National Food Check-Out Week February 21-27, 2010

Food Check-Out Week, February 21-27, is a time when Farm Bureaus at the county, State and national level celebrate the abundance and safety of food. This year, in recognition of current economic conditions, the focus is "Stretching Your Food Dollar with Healthy, Nutritious Food."

Key messages for the program are as follows:

- Farm Bureau is helping consumers find solutions to eating healthy on a stretched budget.
- America's farmers and ranchers are committed to producing safe, abundant and healthy food.
- Through charitable donations to local Ronald McDonald Houses (and other charities) during Food Check-Out Week, we recognize the need everyone has to find solutions to feeding families healthy foods on a tight budget.

Starting in 2009, the timing of the Farm Bureau's Food Check-Out Week is not related to the date Americans have earned enough money to pay for their food for a year, which is always calculated on USDA data that is always a year behind. The third week of February was selected for Food Check-Out Week as a bridge to National Nutrition Month in March. Statistics compiled by the Agriculture Department's Economic Research Service indicate American families and individuals currently spend, on average, just 10 percent of their disposable personal income for food.

When you consider the average price increases that Americans have absorbed for vehicles, gasoline and other consumer products over the past 20 years, the cost of food really does seem like a bargain. We are blessed with a safe, abundant and affordable domestic food supply here in the United States, thanks to the farmers and ranchers who produce it. Many Americans take agriculture for granted. They don't think about where their food comes from.

Growing up on a dairy farm I learned where fruits, vegetables, milk and eggs came from because I was involved in growing, harvesting, processing and consuming them. It was not an easy life but the rewards were worth it.

I learned a lot tending vegetables and feeding calves and chickens. I remember helping pick dozens and dozens of ears of sweet corn so that we could put it up for future consumption. After picking the corn early in the morning we were itchy but we had to help husk the corn so my mother could cook it and cut it off the ear to freeze it. The fun part was eating the remains after the corn was cooked and cut off the cob. Then we had to take the cobs with the husks out to feed them to the cows. Everything on the farm was put to use.

Back then we rented a locker at the local ice house to store produce from our garden. One of my favorite things to do was to get a container of my mother's frozen applesauce out of the freezer and eat it as it thawed. We had picked the apples from our farm orchard so we could process and store them with the other produce from our garden so we would have home grown food over the winter. We knew where our food came from and how it was prepared.

A special treat was when we got to make homemade ice cream. We had a bulk tank at our farm that the milk went into from the cows so the cream was always mixed in and didn't have a chance to settle out. I remember big snow storms when we didn't have to go to school but we had to get up and help shovel so we could get the milk truck in to pick up our milk and of course I had to feed animals.

My memories of growing up on a farm are something I will always treasure and remember. I think about agriculture a lot because of my job and I am very thankful for what agriculture has given me and allowed me to experience in my life. Please stop and think about the role agriculture plays in your life and be thankful for what you have thanks to our farmers.

As in years past, the cost of food for American consumers continues to remain affordable, according to the US Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service. Americans spend just under 10 percent

of their disposable income for food, an amount that has continued to decline steadily during the past 35 years.

Despite continually escalating regulatory costs and input prices for fuel and energy, America's farmers and ranchers are still the most efficient and productive in the world. In observance of America's abundance of affordable food, the West Virginia Farm Bureau will celebrate Food Check-Out Week, February 21-27, 2010. As part of the observance, WVFB will donate food and supplies to each of the three Ronald McDonald houses located in West Virginia.

The Ronald McDonald houses, located in Huntington, Charleston and Morgantown, provide overnight housing, cooking, bathing and laundry facilities for families of sick children undergoing treatment at local hospitals. These facilities are available at low or no cost to the family members, a real boon to those struggling with the expenses of a catastrophic illness. During Food Check-Out Week, WVFB members volunteer to shop at area grocery stores, purchasing meats, non-perishable foods and paper products at local supermarkets and donating the items to each Ronald McDonald House.

Berkeley County Farm Bureau women have participated in Food Check-Out Day activities in Morgantown. For more information on this event check out the WVFB website at <http://www.wvfarm.org/>

Did you know that farmers and ranchers receive only 20 cents of every food dollar that consumers spend on food at home and away from home? According to USDA, off farm costs including marketing, processing, wholesaling, distribution and retailing account for 80 cents of every food dollar spent in the United States. For a chart showing the retail amounts paid and the price the farmer received for various agricultural commodities go to the following website:
http://nfu.org/wp-content/february_2010_farmersshare.pdf

Troy Bishopp, NY Farmer to Speak on Grazing Management March 11, 2010

Anyone interest in hearing about Grazing Management is invited to come to the March 11 dinner meeting being held at the Berkeley County Youth Fairgrounds to hear Troy Bishopp, NY Farmer present a program on Grazing Management. Christina Richmond, WVDA, will also attend this meeting to discuss CAFO's. The speaker is preceded by a meal served at 6:30 pm on Thursday, March 11, 2010 at the Berkeley County Youth Fairgrounds. There is no charge for the meal if you call and make reservations with the Berkeley County Extension Office (304) 264-1936 by noon on Wednesday, March 3 (so we can prepare properly). The speaker will follow the meal so no definite time is given. Come and have a meal with us and share with others. We look forward to seeing you there. Three Pesticide Recertification Credits will be given for attending each dinner meeting program for a total of 9 credits over the three months. Those of you needing credits to recertify here is an excellent opportunity to get credits. If you have any questions please call Mary Beth Bennett, Berkeley County Extension Agent at (304) 264-1936.

2010 West Virginia Small Farm Conference March 1 – 4, 2010

The 2010 WV Small Farm Conference is scheduled for March 1 – 4 at the Lakeview Resort and Conference Center in Morgantown, WV. This year's event features seven learning tracks: Fruit and Vegetable Production, Value-adding, Beginning Farmers, Agri-tourism, Energy, Farmers Market Management, Animal Production and Marketing. There are several special events scheduled during the week of the conference: Winter Blues Farmers Market – Monday evening, March 1st, Better Process Control School – Monday and Tuesday, March 1&2, Community Food Security Workshop and Seminar, 2010 Agritourism Media Awards, WV Specialty Crops Block Grant Poster Session. The conference tracks are designed to accommodate the diverse mix of experience, age, crop enterprise and interests of the region's small farmers. For more information and a registration form go to the following website:
<http://smallfarmcenter.ext.wvu.edu/events/conference>

The Tools of Precision Agriculture Tuesday, March 9th

Here is your opportunity to learn about several components of precision nutrient management in one afternoon that work with "Precision Nutrient Management Using a Systems Approach. Presentations by a local researcher and three manufacturers will be given. Please Call the Jefferson County Extension Office (304.728.7413, ext. 0) to make a reservation for lunch.

- 12:00 – Lunch (Courtesy of the WVU Extension Service)
- 1:00 - Variable Rate Nitrogen Application to Wheat and Corn - Dr. Josh McGrath, University of Maryland Extension Nutrient Specialist
- 1:45 - Products and Services from Hooper Incorporated – Ken Diller, Precision Ag Specialist
- 2:30 - Products and Services from John Deere – Chad Sidow, Carlyle and Anderson, Incorporated
- 3: 15 - Products and Services from GVM Incorporated – Lin Harnell
- 4:00 - Adjourn

The meeting will be held Tuesday, March 9th at the WVU Tree Fruit Research and Education Center located at 67 Apple Harvest Lane in Kearneysville, WV. The Center is located on Rt. 9 east of Martinsburg. This meeting is being held to compliment a \$360,000 cost share program through the NRCS Conservation innovation Grant Program. You can learn moiré about this local program by visiting: http://www.jefferson.ext.wvu.edu/agriculture/eastern_panhandle_conservation_innovation_grant

Gardening 101 Program

The Berkeley-Jefferson Master Gardener Association will be conducting a free gardening seminar on Saturday, March 13, 2010 from 9:00 AM until 2:30 PM at the Berkeley County Youth Fairgrounds. Participant check-in begins at 8:30 AM. The seminar, called Gardening 101, will cover the following topics: Setting up a Garden, Seed Choices, Starting Plants from Seeds, Container Gardening, Pests and Weeds, Composting & Rain Barrels. Participants are asked to bring a brown bag lunch. The Master Gardener Association will provide drinks and desserts. For more information or to register for Gardening 101, please contact the Berkeley County Extension Service office at (304) 264-1936 or go to <http://www.berkeleyextension.com>

Forum for Rural Innovation: New Approaches for Agriculture and Rural Prosperity

The sixth annual Forum for Rural Innovation will be held Friday, March 19, 2010, 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Best Western Lee-Jackson Motor Inn & Conference Center in Winchester, Virginia. The purpose of the forum is to showcase new and exciting projects and programs that enhance farm or rural business profitability. The models presented at the forum also focus on conserving farmland and natural resources, and developing new approaches to rural prosperity in upscale areas where land commands premium prices. The program features presentations from some of the most progressive and recognized farmers and researchers in the region, and will emphasize farming for high-profitability by using innovative and sound business approaches particularly suited to the Mid-Atlantic region. Forum topics and speakers will include:

“Trends and Opportunities in Specialty Crops and Cane Berries” - Dr. Reza Rafie, Horticulture Extension Specialist, Virginia State University, Petersburg, VA. Hear an overview of the potential for marketing cane berries and related specialty crops in the Mid-Atlantic region. Also, details of a high tunnel specialty crop trial to be conducted in northern Virginia in 2010.

“Internet Marketing 201 - Social Networking As A Marketing Tool” - Janet Childs, Owner and Marketing Director of BreedersWorld.com and VA Lamb, Berryville, VA. Learn how to use low cost, highly effective new tools that get your message and products in front of customers faster than websites alone. A step-by-step presentation on starting and maintaining a cost effective marketing program.

“Step-By-Step Process For Direct Marketing Meat and Processed Foods” - Barry Jones, Office of Meat & Poultry Services, VA Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Lynchburg, VA and Cindy Martel, Marketing & Development, WV Dept. of Agriculture, Charleston, WV. Thinking about selling at a farmers market or doing direct sales? This session will answer your questions on what producers need to do to comply with state regulations in order to sell meats and processed foods. Find out if the investment of time and equipment adds value to the bottom line.

“What I See As Food Innovation in the Mid-Atlantic Region” - Melissa Harris, Publisher of Flavor Magazine, Sperryville, VA. Flavor Magazine is an independent publication dedicated to local food, wine, and sustainable agriculture in the D.C. and Virginia Piedmont areas. Learn how this unique regional magazine discovers innovative farms for their articles and hear about some of their favorites.

“Innovative Ideas for Large Acreage Land Owners and Renters” - Warren Howell, Allder School Berries,

Purcellville, VA; Phillip Ramsey, Stoneleigh Farms, Warrenton, VA; and Tyler Wegmeyer, Wegmeyer Farms, Hamilton, VA. What do pumpkins, honey bees, and berries have in common? Hear how these three entrepreneurs have expanded their operations onto larger acreages, and the unique lease arrangements for non-traditional crops.

"New and Successful Innovative Projects from Across the Region" A snapshot of efforts being conducted in agriculture development and marketing by members of the group sponsoring the Forum for Rural Innovation. Kellie Boles, Jefferson County, WV; Ray Pickering, Fauquier County, VA; Melissa Nelson, Loudoun County, VA; Mary Beth Bennett, Berkeley County, WV. During the conference luncheon featuring local food products, the 2010 Innovation Awards will be presented to: Farmers Online Market.net – Catlett, VA, Phillip Ramsey, Stoneleigh Farms – Warrenton, VA, Bob Tabb, Round Oak Farm – Leetown, WV, Leon Warner, Ellerslie Farm – Berryville, VA. In addition, exhibits by agricultural suppliers, support agencies, and area businesses will be featured the entire day. Area agribusinesses are encouraged to participate with exhibits and displays. The registration fee of \$35.00 per person includes the forum program, morning refreshments, and a buffet lunch. Registration information is available online at www.LoudounFarms.org or by calling 703-777-0426. Pre-registration by March 12 is required. The Forum for Rural Innovation is a cooperative educational effort by the Offices of Agricultural Economic Development and Cooperative Extension in Clarke, Fauquier, Frederick and Loudoun Counties of Virginia; Jefferson and Berkeley Counties, West Virginia; Potomac Headwaters and Shenandoah RC&D; Virginia Cooperative Extension and WVU Extension.

Garden Tips

- Seed kohlrabi (indoors)
- Plant onion sets
- Order strawberries
- Plant broadleaf evergreens

Until next timeHappy Gardening, and Farming!

Mary Beth Bennett, Ph.D. is a WVU Extension agent and associate professor. She can be reached at 264-1936, MBBennett@mail.wvu.edu or on the web at www.berkeleyextension.com
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