

## PRODUCERS FOCUS ON RESEARCH, EDUCATION NEEDS

By Bob Ratliff

Nowhere is Mississippi State University's role as the "People's College" more evident than in the North Mississippi Research and Extension Center Producer Advisory Council.

For more than 50 years, representatives of agricultural producer groups in 27 northeast Mississippi counties have met annually to discuss their needs and to tell those needs to MSU research scientists and Extension professionals.

The 2006 meeting brought together more than 100 members of the committee, representing 11 commodity groups. Each group met to discuss their specific needs among themselves and with MSU personnel with responsibilities in their commodity area. Following those meetings, a representative of each commodity group presented a report to the entire council.

"The council meeting is a chance for producers in this part of the state to communicate with each other and with the university personnel who work with the crops they produce," said Joe Street, head of the North Mississippi Research and Extension Center in Verona.

Research conducted by scientists with the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station and educational programs conducted by the MSU Extension Service are always major topics at the annual meeting. The producers also pick up profitable ideas from each other.

"Ideas for packaging peas and beans for sale at local farmers' markets were a hot topic in the fruits and vegetables group this year," said Shelaine Wise, county Extension director in Prentiss County.

The vegetable and fruit group report was given by Ralph Hanskiewicz of Union County, who noted that programs are needed to attract more young producers. The producers also asked for work toward an agricultural tourism association in the state and discussed the need for an additional producer group for the council.

"There is a need for a honey bee group because pollination is so important for our crops," Hanskiewicz said.

Chris Hussey of Lee County reported that the turf group discussed the need to educate the public about their industry. The turf producers also requested promotion of higher industry standards and more weed control research.

The swine report was given by Byron Wilson of Chickasaw County and included a request for a swine research facility and more research with the management and use of swine waste.

John Scott Edmondson of Calhoun County said growers need research and guidelines for organic sweet potato production. The sweet potato producers also requested additional work with "skin-set" chemicals, which help prevent damage during harvest.



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Consumer demand for landscape plants that are easy to maintain was one of the topics discussed by the ornamental producer group, according to Pete Poland of Lee County. The ornamental growers also requested regular updates on ornamental research and more information about container recycling.

Asian Soybean Rust was a major topic in the grain crops group. Ben Harlow of Monroe County reported that producers need soybean rust management information, including nozzle type and size for use in applying fungicides. The growers also requested evaluation of insecticides for use in soybeans in conjunction with fungicides.

Continued landowner education programs are a priority for the forestry group, according to Don Whitehead of Lafayette County. The forestry group also requested increased market development and alternative fuels research.

The need for a state equine specialist and for enforcement of existing laws and regulations concerning horses were discussed in the equine group, according to Beverly Jones of Oktibbeha County. The group also asked for an updated economic impact study of the horse industry in the state.

Jeremy Graham of Pontotoc County reported the dairy producers would like to see research with parasitic wasps and other alternative fly-control methods. The producers also requested additional heat stress research and research with handling and use of animal waste.

Cotton producer Keith Morton of Tippah County said his group discussed the need for plant bug monitoring and information on plant bug control in hill areas of the state. The growers also requested a feasibility study of precision agriculture practices for use with cotton.

The beef producers report was given by Jacob Megehee of Noxubee County. He noted that the producers would like to see more health and nutrition research, especially projects dealing with anaplasmosis and improving fertility in beef cattle. The beef producers also requested more help with marketing issues.

"There are a lot of opportunities out there, but we're going to have to change the way we do business," Megehee said. "We have to look and see what the ultimate judge—the consumer—wants to buy."