

PRODUCERS SAY... New Products, Market Development Are Vital



By Bob Ratliff

Each year for more than 50 years, representatives of agricultural producer groups in 27 northeast Mississippi counties have met to talk about their needs and to tell those needs to Mississippi State University research scientists and Extension professionals.

In the early 1950s, meetings were held under the oak trees at the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station in Holly Springs. More recently, the site of the gathering has been the North Mississippi Research and Extension Center in Verona.

At the 2007 North Mississippi Producer Advisory Council meeting, the need for research with value-added products and for market development programs were among the most talked about items.

Representatives of 11 producer groups attended the meeting. Each group met to discuss their specific needs among themselves and with representatives of MAFES and the MSU Extension Service. Following those meetings, a representative of each commodity group presented a report to the entire council.

• **Beef Cattle**

The need to form alliances to market feeder calves was one of the topics discussed in the beef group meeting, reported Noxubee County beef producer Jacob Megehee. The producers also want more research and information on forage systems for brood cows and on carrying feeder cattle to higher weights.

• **Ornamentals**

The ornamental plant growers group requested that MSU scientists focus on research to help stabilize and develop small ornamental business in local communities, said group chair Linda Camp of Itawamba County. The ornamental group also requested that the university provide general information for maintenance of water gardens, including natural algae control.

• **Cotton**

Cotton is a major row crop in the northeast section of the state, and growers would like more research on conventional cotton varieties for hill production, said group chair Clay West of Calhoun County. The cotton producers also asked for more research on strip tillage and herbicide-resistant weeds.

• **Dairy Cattle**

Forage research and work with record-keeping systems were among the requests of the dairy producer group. Producer chair Jeremy Graham of Pontotoc County also said the group would like to see more educational programs on how to deal with hairy heel wart outbreaks in dairy herds.

• **Equine**

Horse shows, rodeos and other equine events have a significant economic impact in Mississippi, and Beverly Jones of Oktibbeha County reported that the equine group discussed ways to bring horse organizations together to further strengthen this industry in the state.

The group also noted the need for better communication of research results to horse owners and other segments of the horse industry.

• **Forestry**

Continued university work with alternative markets for timber resources was among the requests of the forestry group. The group's chair, Butch Steele of Itawamba County, said the discussion also included the need for adequate state funding for agencies providing necessary services to Mississippi's forest landowners.

• **Fruits and Vegetables**

The fruits and vegetables group discussed the need for updated publications on peaches, pears, apples and nectarines. Group chair Bill Coggins of Itawamba County said producers would like the university to conduct pumpkin variety trials, as well as provide pest management information and a marketing contact list.

• **Soybeans**

A request to fill the vacant Extension soybean agronomist position was a priority for the soybean producer group. Chair Ben Harlow of Monroe County said the producers also discussed the need for more stored grain information and for information on shattering ratings for soybean varieties.

• **Sweet Potatoes**

The sweet potato producers discussed the need for continued university research with insects that attack their crop, according to group chair Stephen Bailey of Calhoun County. The producers also noted the need for more work with variety development and identification of viruses in sweet potato plants.

• **Turf**

Turf producers, according to group chair David Rainey of Alcorn County, need research and information on the economic impact of their business. The growers cited the need to educate the public on how to better manage turf in lawns.

• **Swine**

The swine producer group discussed the need to get meat packing businesses back to Mississippi. Chair Byron Wilson of Chickasaw County said the group also supports the construction of a new swine center on the MSU campus.

"The experiment station and the MSU Extension Service report back to the producer groups on their requests," said MAFES Associate Director Reuben Moore. "In most cases we are able to meet their needs through an existing or new research project or an Extension educational program."