

Free Trainings For Area Vegetable Growers Offered

Free training for local vegetable growers will be offered next month in Iowa County. These training sessions will provide invaluable information for those interested in becoming a commodity grower to supply commercial vegetable processing plants as well as those interested in growing vegetables for farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), restaurants/institutions, and auctions.

On Thursday, April 15th, from 9:30-11:30 am, Craig Chase, Ph.D from Iowa State University, will speak on pricing for profits. Dr. Craig Chase is a farm and agricultural business management field specialist for Iowa State University Extension. Dr. Chase has over 27 years experience in helping producers with business planning, financial analysis and decision making, risk management, and sustainable agriculture and water quality issues. More recently he has been focused on analyzing organic and food-based alternative agricultural enterprises and regional food system development.

Following Dr. Chase on Thursday, April 15th, from 1:00-2:00 pm, Keith VanderVelde, UW Extension Agent for Marquette County, will speak on developing budgets that lead to increased profits from vegetables for the large-scale commodity grower. Keith has presented at numerous venues, including the Institutional Food Market Coalition for Dane County.

On Friday, April 16th, from 9:00 am-4:45 pm, Atina Diffley and Laura Frerichs will present a dynamic full-day of training on post-harvest handling of vegetables. This workshop includes important topics of handling, storage, packing areas, sorting and cooling produce. Atina Diffley is an experienced organic vegetable farmer who educates consumers, farmers and policy makers about organic farming and related issues. She provides consulting services to organic farmers through her business, Organic FarmingWorks and is the founder of Gardens of Eagan. Joining Ms. Diffley will be Laura Frerichs, co-owner of Loon Organics, a 40-acre certified organic vegetable farm in Hutchinson, Minnesota that provides for a 135-member CSA, several restaurants, and the Mill City Farmers Market in Minneapolis. The 2010 season will be Laura's sixth season independently farming with her husband, Adam Cullip.

On Friday, April 23rd, from 9:00am-11:30 am, Sam Beattie, Ph.D will present the importance of safe food handling on the vegetable farm. Dr. Sam Beattie is the Food Safety Extension Specialist for the State of Iowa. His faculty appointment is in the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition. In addition to outreach, he maintains an active food mycology laboratory focusing on molds and yeasts of agricultural and biotechnological significance.

Following Dr. Beattie's presentation, from 11:30 am – 12:00 pm, Tim Leege will present the specific requirements for certification in GAP (Good Agricultural Practices). Tim is the Program

Manager with Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection Inspection Service. Tim has 35 plus years of inspection and auditing experience with the State of Wisconsin. Tim also works with the USDA on food safety issues and has worked with different states on inspection and GAP audits. His line-by-line presentation of a GAP audit is invaluable for all growers interested in GAP practices as well as those seeking certification.

All trainings are free and provided by a WIRED grant (Workforce Initiative for Regional Economic Development) through the office of SWCAP in Dodgeville, WI and will be held at Sam and Maddies Restaurant, 3656 Hwy 23, Dodgeville, WI. Please reserve your seat by contacting Elizabeth Rosenthal, grant assistant, at (608) 576-1737 or elizarosenthal@yahoo.com or by contacting Rick Terrien, Iowa County Area Economic Development at (608) 341-6797. For more information and to register on-line please go to www.iowacountyedc.org.