

# on the move

*Preparing. Finding. Implementing solutions.*

North Carolina A&T State University  
School of Agriculture and  
Environmental Sciences  
Newsletter

April 2006 • Vol. V, No. 2

## Dudley Award lands happily at Happy Land Farms

**Harold Wright** could have dug ditches for a living and Ann Wright would have been down in the trenches with him if that's what it took.

As it turned out though, the Bladen County couple made a career of farming and has done so well they have won recognition as the 2006 Gilmer L. and Clara Y. Dudley Small Farmers of the Year in North Carolina. Their aptly named Happy Land Farms is a thriving 600-acre spread comprising 500 pasture-raised hogs, pasture-raised chickens and turkeys, and 500 acres of soybeans and corn. The Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T, which issues the Small Farmer of the Year Award, supports the Wrights in many of their farm endeavors, including their first-time venture this year in planting strawberries on black plastic and drip irrigation. The Wrights also own a fleet of flat-bed trucks and operate a day care center.

All five of their adult

children work in the family businesses, which are operated from the family home. Daughters Candice and Brenda Wright and Edrissa Wright Williams help their mother with management of Happy Land Farms, work in the family Big Bird Day Care, or work as dispatchers in the trucking business. Sons Russell and Michael Wright help farm and drive the trucks.

Even though Ann Wright administers the businesses with a precision and organization that could withstand a military inspection, the family's manner is anything but rigid. Entering their home and business, is to encounter immaculate comfort, ease, hospitality and — just as soon as Harold Wright walks through the door — lots of humor.

"I've always wanted a family business," Harold Wright says. "It makes you proud. It also takes some of the responsibility off of me. When we decide to go somewhere, we don't have to

worry about whether things are being done."

On a day when both sons are away trucking and Harold Wright can't leave the farm, in a seamless shift of duty, daughter Brenda Wright takes over — easing behind the wheel of a pickup to drive eight hogs to a slaughterhouse in Kingstree, S.C.

"They're all like that," says Bladen-

Robeson Farm Management Agent Nelson Brownlee, who nominated the Wrights for the award. "Each one of them can fill in for the other."

The family unity is a legacy fulfilled for Harold Wright, whose father and grandfather farmed on the same land his sons now tend. Although many of his peers left Bladen County for big cities, Wright remained and at 17 was farming full time.

"I saw the opportunity right here in North Carolina to make a living, so that's where I stayed," says Wright, 55.

When they met in 1970, Ann Wright was a teacher's assistant who had no intention of marrying a farmer, but says: "I fell in love with the person so it didn't matter what he was doing. He could have been digging a ditch."

Today, Harold and Ann Wright are ambassadors for family farms and regularly travel — most recently to Washington — to lobby for agricultural funding. They are just as passionate about farming, though, back in their Bladenboro enclave. Whether it's Harold Wright lamenting how the United States imports produce treated with pesticides that are banned on American farms; or whether Ann Wright explains that she once gave away meat rather than sell it, because the meat-packing company (which she no longer uses) didn't meet the "vacuum sealed" guarantee they advertised — the Wrights are strict about standards and their reputation.

## Dr. T's Moment

**Generally I use** this space to announce SAES highlights, upcoming activities or my thoughts on how I approach my work. I've shied away from out and out boasting and tried to do more sharing or announcing.

Not this time. I'm going to boast.

For the second year in a row, two of our SAES researchers are being recognized by the University for the groundbreaking work they are doing in solving North Carolina's problems.

Dr. Omon Isikhuemhen has been tapped as the University's young investigator of the year and Dr. Abolghasem Shahbazi is tied as one of two of the University's senior investigators.

Dr. Omon, as he's most often called, is working to jump-start a biotechnology industry based on exotic mushrooms. This includes helping many of our farmers replace income lost from tobacco production.

Dr. Shahbazi is working on numerous projects designed to help farmers and agribusiness convert waste into value added products. At a time when America is looking for ways to reduce its dependence on oil, Shahbazi is investigating ways of converting farm waste into usable fuel.

Both are hard working and deserving of this honor. Last year, Dr. Ipek Goktepe was the young investigator and Dr. G.B. Reddy was tied as the senior investigator.

I'm not only proud of the work done by Drs. Omon, Shahbazi, Goktepe and Reddy but of the entire SAES faculty, staff and students.

I've always been proud of them and boasted that they are the best A&T has to offer. Now, the University agrees with me.

SAES remains on the move.

— Dr. Alton Thompson  
Dean, SAES

*Editor's Note:* Dr. Thompson didn't mention it, but the University has named him the Administrator of the Year.

**Ann Wright helps her husband Harold inspect their strawberry plants on black plastic.**



## USAID grants SAES researcher \$1.2 million



**Many farmers in Southeast Asia** who are living on less than a dollar a day could improve their living standards, under a new grant being administered by a researcher in the Agricultural Research Program (ARP).

Dr. Manuel Reyes is the recipient of a \$1.2 million grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for a vegetable-agroforestry project in Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam. Reyes, a biological engineer, is leading an international team of researchers from universities in the United States, Southeast Asia, and Australia who will introduce sustainable vegetable production to small-scale farmers in the three countries. Other participants are from the World Agroforestry Center headquartered in Kenya, the World Vegetable Center based in Taiwan, and Mars Incorporated, a United States candy and food company. The project will continue through September 2009.

Many of the farmers who stand to benefit are desperately poor, and are farming on small hillside patches that are susceptible to erosion, Reyes said. The team will present a menu of sustainable options to farmers, including agroforestry — which is the practice of encouraging tree varieties that prevent soil degradation while also producing products for home consumption or sale. Other technologies farmers can select from include conservation tillage (including no-till or minimal till); drip irrigation; and the

reintroduction of native vegetable varieties. The development of markets will also be a critical component of the project, Reyes said.

The intent is to help farmers become more self-sufficient and also give them alternatives to the “chemical treadmill” that accompanies many commercial vegetable varieties, he said. Although markets exist for the commercial varieties, they also tend to be dependent on chemical inputs, which cause harm to health and ecosystems.

However, it remains to be seen if markets can be developed for such products, or if sustainable techniques will be accepted, Reyes said.

A critical first step will be building rapport with farmers and agencies in the host countries, with the goal of finding out what new techniques are likely to be adopted, Reyes said. The project will take a grassroots, versus top down approach, he added.

“It is a relationship of equals. The scientists are no better than the farmers, and

*Dr. Manuel Reyes made visits to Thailand (A & B), the Philippines (C) and other countries in Southeast Asia to investigate the potential for assistance from SAES research.*

the farmers are no better than the scientists. Therefore, we will not dictate. We will ask, and we will listen. We hope that because of this open atmosphere, the strengths of farmers, scientists, and other stakeholders will be harnessed for the benefit and empowerment of rural communities,” Reyes said.

The project will also encourage women villagers to take control of key decisions in the development project.

“That’s because a lot of the farming tasks are carried out by women, they tend to know best what will work and what won’t, and we will need their input,” Reyes said.

Reyes’ research specialty is soil and water conservation, and when he began to design the project more than a year ago, he originally considered it from that perspective. However, he quickly learned that a broader approach was called for. For instance,

he discovered that the project wouldn’t get far in addressing environmental issues unless it also addressed underlying cultural, gender, economic and social aspects of the problem. As a result, he recruited several social scientists to the project team, who will be critical to its success, he said.

“You can’t approach a problem of this magnitude from one perspective,” he said. “The social, economic and environmental issues are all interconnected.”



## Small Farms Week Quotes

*“Many of the values that I hold dear, I know came about by my working on that small farm with my father, my brother, my uncles and cousins.”*

**Jim Deal**, Chairman of the Watauga County Board of Commissioners, at the Small Farms Week Kickoff in Boone

*“How do you take advantage of a changing market? You have to figure out how to take advantage of the market that you have ... that takes a very innovative approach and a different skill set than you have with traditional farming.”*

**Blake Brown**, N.C. State University associate professor of agriculture and resource economics, at the Small Farms Week Kickoff

*“Every week during the season on our farm, I have people asking if I can help them find some land. The potential out there to increase small farming in North Carolina is just tremendous. People want to do it.”*

**Kirby Maram**, 2005 Small Farmer of the Year, at the Small Farms Week Kickoff

*“We feel so strongly about our commitment to small farmers that we use as one of our themes, ‘ensuring the viability of small-scale agriculture.’ Since the beginning days of the University this has been our work. Over 100 years later, things have not changed. We are committed to helping this state’s small farmers.”*

**Donald McDowell**, Associate Dean for Academic Programs, School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at A&T, Small Farmers Appreciation Day Luncheon

*“There’s a statistic that I’m not proud of, and that is that last year North Carolina led the nation in the disappearance of small farms — over 2,000; that’s appalling. ... We want to make a real stab at land preservation, not focusing on the land, but on the farm family.”*

**Steve Troxler**, N.C. Commissioner of Agriculture, Small Farmers Appreciation Day Luncheon



An SAES research scientist, **Dr. Ipek Goktepe**, has received notification that her application for patenting a new process for packing mushrooms and some special equipment used in it has passed through provisional status, and a full patent application is now on file with the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

**Dr. Alton Thompson**, dean of the SAES, has been named to the Policy Board of Directors for the National Association of State Universities and Land-grant Colleges (NASULGC) Board on Agriculture Assembly. The Board on Agriculture Assembly is the primary voice for the concerns of agriculture in NASULGC, an association of 205 public research universities, land-grant institutions, and state university systems.

**Dr. M. Ray McKinnie**, administrator and associate dean for The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T, has been named to one of the three primary working groups for the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP). ECOP is the major voice for the 57 state and territorial Cooperative Extension systems, working with both USDA’s Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service and the National Association of State Universities and Land-grant Colleges. McKinnie will serve as the 1890 representative to ECOP’s Personnel and Organizational Development Committee (PODC).

Edrissa Wright Williams (left), and Candice Wright treat Cooperative Extension Agent Nelson Brownlee to a place at the table with their father Harold Wright, right. When The Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T named the Wrights the 2006 Small Farmers of the Year, it was a win for the entire family. Harold and Ann Wrights three daughters help manage the farm, and work in the family’s Big Bird Day Care and as dispatchers in the trucking business, D&H Contracting. Sons Russell and Michael Wright help on the farm and drive the D&H trucks.

# on the *move*

North Carolina A&T State University School of  
Agriculture and Environmental Sciences Newsletter  
*Produced by the Agricultural Communications and  
Technology Unit*

Dr. James C. Renick, *Chancellor*  
Dr. Alton Thompson, *Dean, School of  
Agriculture and Environmental Sciences*  
Dr. M. Ray McKinnie, *Associate Dean,  
Administrator, The Cooperative Extension Program*  
Dr. Carolyn Turner, *Associate Dean,  
Agricultural Research Station*  
Dr. Donald McDowell, *Associate Dean,  
Academic Programs*

North Carolina A&T State University  
is a land-grant doctoral/research intensive  
institution and AA/EEO employer.

Send change of address and correspondence to:

**on the *move* Newsletter Editor**  
**Agricultural Research Program**  
**CH Moore Agricultural Research Station**  
**Greensboro, NC 27411**

7,000 copies of this public document  
were printed on recycled paper at  
a cost of \$879.14 or \$0.13 per copy.



Distributed in furtherance of the acts of Congress of  
May 8 and June 30, 1914. Employment and program  
opportunities are open to all people regardless of  
race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability.  
North Carolina A&T State University, North Carolina  
State University, US Department of Agriculture and  
local governments cooperating.

Nonprofit Org.

US Postage Paid

Permit No. 202

Greensboro, NC

## on the *move*/flip side



*Dr. Allen Cannedy, a veterinarian and professor at N.C. State University,  
prepares to demonstrate proper injection techniques for goats during the  
2006 Small Farms Week Goat and Cattle Field Day at the University Farm.*

### Mark Your Calendar

- SAES Student Awards Banquet:  
April 28
- Research Apprentice Program (RAP):  
June 18–30 and  
July 9–21

[www.ag.ncat.edu](http://www.ag.ncat.edu)