Faced with declining profits and stymied in their efforts to market their goods, a group of Alabama farmers put their heads and their resources together to tackle the problems. Their result—ing caucus gave birth 10 years ago to the Browntown (Ala.) Cooperative, an enterprise comprising 40 members from small-scale farms of the region.

Browntown Cooperative members will discuss how they organized, how they operate and what they are accomplishing during an educational forum next month at A&T, presented as part of Small Farms Week activities. The session is scheduled for 10 a.m., March 28 in the A&T Alumni Center.

The session will also feature the Selma/Dallas County Farmers’ Organization which, like Browntown, is located in south-central Alabama. Both collectives are assisted in their operations by the Tuskegee University Small Farm Rural Economic Development Center. That center’s director, Miles Robinson, is also expected to attend the Small Farms Week forum.

Although his work focuses on Alabama farmers, Robinson’s farmers, Robinson ensured they knew they had financing options other than conventional bank loans. Alabama’s State Department of Agriculture as well as local agencies have provided loans to individual farmers as well as for cooperatives projects. On the horizon for the Alabama cooperatives is a $2 million processing facility, which both the Browntown and the Selma/Dallas farmers’ groups are working to build. More than $1 million of the project has already been raised by the groups.

Since organizing in 1997, the Browntown Cooperative farmers have expanded their markets, and improved their processing and farming techniques. Agricultural researchers at Tuskegee established demonstration sites on meat goats and vegetable production. The Federation of Southern Cooperatives also worked with the center, to help the cooperatives market their goods to grocery-store chains and food brokers. Browntown farmers have also gotten loans and grants to build permanent farmers markets.

Since they’ve organized, farmers in the Browntown Cooperative have increased their gross incomes by 50 percent to 60 percent, and in some cases have even doubled them, because of the improved production techniques, Robinson says. The majority of the members are also full-time farmers, making a lucrative enough living that they don’t need off-the-farm employment.

Still, members don’t sugarcoat farming. The work remains hard, the competition tough and the risks substantial.

“They should take advantage of every resource available to them,” Robinson says. “It takes a university community working with them to serve as a conduit, making certain that they are privy to resources that are available out there.”

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Monday, March 26
10 a.m. — Kickoff at the Spaulding Monroe Cultural Center in Bladenboro (805 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive)
Nelson Brownlee, Cooperative Extension Area Farm Management Agent for Bladen and Robeson counties, will be presiding.
Margaret Lewis Moore, chairwomen of the Bladen County Board of Commissioners, and Marilyn Hearst, Buchanan Foundation for Cape Fear Resource Conservation and Development Inc., will give official welcomes.

The 2006 Small Farmers of the Year Video Featuring Harold and Ann Wright of Bladen County
10:30 a.m. — Panel Discussion: Preparation = Profits for Alternative Enterprises
Moderator: Everett Davis, Robeson County Extension Director
Panelists: Harold and Ann Wright, whose Happy Land Farms includes pasture-raised hogs, and poultry, soybeans, corn, and employ-ment for all five of their adult children.
Joe Thompson, an Orange County farmer who has made the switch from tobacco farming to aquaculture.
Marc Cox, a Columbus County farmer who has made hydroponic production a source of off-season income.
Nelson and Mary James, who are producing everything from corn to hogs to brown eggs to showcase mushrooms on their Dogwood Farm in Pender County.

Noon — Luncheon on site
Kent Wooten, Bladen County Extension Director, will be presiding.
Larry Wright, Agricultural & Natural Resources Technician for Columbus County Extension, has a thought to share.
Dr. M. Ray McKinney, former state veterinarian, Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Georgia, and administrator for The Cooperative Extension Service at A&T, will introduce this year’s Luncheon speaker: Eva Clayton, former U.S. Congressional Representative for North Carolina’s 1st District.
In 1992, Clayton became the first African-American woman elected to Congress from North Carolina. When she retired from Congress at the end of her fifth term, in 2003, Clayton left behind a legacy of commitment to small-scale agriculture, rural development, and the Cooperative Extension Programs at all 190 land-grant institutions. She served on both the House Committee on Agriculture and the House Committee on Small Business. Clayton’s public service record also includes 10 years on the Warren County Board of Commissioners before going to Congress. Since leaving Congress she has worked extensively with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to combating global hunger.

Wednesday, March 28
Small Farmers Appreciation Day at N.C. A&T
8:30 to 9:30 a.m. — Registration
N.C. A&T STATE UNIVERSITY ALUMNI CENTER (202 N. Benbow Road)
9:30 a.m. — Welcome and Premiere of Solutions for North Carolina®
President: Dr. Celvia Stovall, Associate Administrator, The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T
The annual multi-media report on impacts Cooperative Extension work is making in North Carolina will be formally unveiled. The guest list includes the stars of the show — the North Carolinians who have worked for the nation’s food supply continues to be phased in. There will also be morning presentations on meat goat herd health issues and the use of artificial insemina-tion in beef cattle. Among the afternoon workshops are training for goat and sheep producers in using the inexpensive FAMACHA® method to monitor and control parasites, head lice practices for management of small ruminants and artifi-cial insemination of beef cattle.

8 a.m. to 4 p.m. — Third Annual University Farm Equipment Show & Farm Safety Workshops
A&T STATE UNIVERSITY FARM
Throughout the day farm equipment dealers will have their latest lines on display, and representatives will be on hand to explain and demonstrate features. The workshop lineup includes a program on preventing tractor roll-overs accidents, a presentation covering the safety regulations that affect farmers markets and roadside stands, and a bio-security program focusing on preventing disease transmis-sion from farms. All three programs will be offered once in the morning, then again in the afternoon.

Tuesday, March 27
8 a.m. to 4 p.m. — Goat and Cattle Field Day and Farm Safety Workshops
Field Day at NC A&T STATE UNIVERSITY FARM
The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Sciences will start the field day with a presentation on the considerable impact the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) will have on electronic tagging of all animals destined for the nation’s food supply continues to be phased in. There will also be morning presentations on meat goat herd health issues and the use of artificial insemination in beef cattle. Among the afternoon workshops are training for goat and sheep producers in using the inexpensive FAMACHA® method to monitor and control parasites, head lice practices for management of small ruminants and artificial insemination of beef cattle.

8 a.m. to 4 p.m. — Tour of Happy Land Farms
Small Farms Week Schedule of Events March 25–31
Each individual should complete a separate registration form. Check each of the events you will attend.

Day
Monday, March 26
Tuesday, March 27
Wednesday, March 28
Thursday, March 29
Friday, March 30
Saturday, March 31
Event
Video Presentation of the 2006 Gilmer L. and Clara Y. Dudley Small Farmer of the Year
Small Farms Week Kickoff and activities
Preparation = Profits for Alternative Enterprises Panel Discussion
Kickoff luncheon
Tour of Happy Land Farms
Goat and Cattle Field Day Workshops (New Animal Identification Regulations, Goat Herd Management, FAMACHA® Parasite Control and Artificial Insemination in Beef Cattle)
Farm Equipment Show & Farm Safety Workshops (Preventing tractor roll-overs, safety regulations for farmers markets and roadside stands, and bio-security)
Premiere of Solutions for North Carolina®
Educational Forum: The Browntown Cooperative and the Selma/Dallas County Farmers Organization in a Success Story for Small-Scale Ap
Small Farmer Appreciation Luncheon, Post Clayton Featured speaker
Ozone Processing for Perishable Foods
Kickoff and activities
Small Farms Week Registration Form
Name
City
State/Zip
Telephone Number
e-mail address
Affiliation (please check the appropriate boxes):
□ Small farmer
□ Cooperative Extension employee
□ Agency representative, agency name
□ Other, indicate name of group/organization
□ Individual
To register —
□ Fax this form to (336) 256-0810
□ e-mail to deborahh@ncat.edu
□ call (336) 256-0812
□ mail to: The Cooperative Extension Program N.C. A&T State University PO. Box 21926, Greensboro, N.C. 27420
□ e-mail to deborahh@ncat.edu
□ call (336) 256-0812
□ mail to: The Cooperative Extension Program N.C. A&T State University PO. Box 21926, Greensboro, N.C. 27420
The annual premiere of Solutions for North Carolina®, Cooperative Extension’s multi-media report on how programs are re-shaping peoples’ lives, will kick off Small Farmers Appreciation Day on March 28. For a sneak preview, go to www.ag.ncat.edu. For a complete listing of Small Farms Week (March 25–31) activities as well as a registration form, be sure to hang on to this special edition of on the move.