Extension’s FACT program goes to college

Emanuel Jones, 73, stopped being afraid to try new things some years ago. So when Sampson County Farm Management Agent James Hartsfield lobbied him to sign up for a computer literacy class, Jones says he wasn’t the least bit reluctant to enroll.

“Things like that used to kind of, I don’t know, limit me,” Jones says of his previous approach to new things. “I don’t know if I was scared or ashamed, but I got shed of that. I figure if somebody else can learn it, I can too.

“I might mess something up, but I’m going to try.”

Jones is one of 16 people who have completed two semesters of computer training as part of a partnership between Sampson Community College and the Farmers Adopting Computer Training (FACT) program offered through the Cooperative Extension Program at A&T.

Jones is joined in his class by people such as Allie Bullock, 83; the father-daughter duo of George Fryar and Velma Maddox; Linda Strickland and her mother-in-law Rosie Strickland; and one of the state’s most innovative small-scale farmers, Wade Cole, who raises hogs for upscale pork.

Heretofore, the three-year-old FACT program has offered specialized, labor-intense training utilizing coordinator Marcie Joyner to work one-on-one with farmers in their homes on computers loaned to them by FACT. The goal of FACT is to help farmers become savvy enough to use electronic record-keeping programs and the Internet to better manage and market their farms.

This broader approach to classroom instruction came to the fore after the director of SCC’s Small Business Center, Gabriel Gurley, approached local extension officials about ways the college could work with farmers. Hartsfield put them in touch with Joyner and Dr. Daniel Lyons, an assistant administrator for Extension, and a partnership was forged that unites the Small Business Center’s goals of preparing people for the workforce, with the FACT program’s goal of strengthening farmers’ farm-management abilities through computer literacy.

Billie Crawford Eure, Dean of Continuing Education at SCC, says the nontraditional students that come through her division tend to be more eager audiences than their younger counterparts and that the FACT students exemplify that mature attitude.

“They know what they need and what will work for them,” Eure says during a recent visit to the FACT classroom. “As a result they are just enthusiastic about what they’re learning. They are just hungry for the knowledge.”

The classes are taught at SCC two nights a week, for five weeks, by an SCC-paid instructor.

Now in its second semester, the partnership is so successful that FACT administrators are exploring similar arrangements with five other community colleges: Forsyth, Roanoke-Chowan, Halifax, Mount Olive, and James Sprunt. Joyner, however, continues to offer individual computer training to farmers in 12 North Carolina counties; with people in 11 other counties on a waiting list.

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Dr. T’s Moment

As our citizens and communities face change, there is a cry for higher education to assist with training, research and outreach.

One criticism the academic community faces is that it’s too slow in responding. Sometimes our methodical deliberations take too long.

We can not abandon our careful and scientific analysis of situations, but we must have a sense of urgency. Quality and urgency can coexist.

Responsiveness is especially critical for a land-grant university such as A&T. A land grant, according to a Washington State University Cooperative Extension definition, has an obligation to make “classrooms and degrees accessible to the working class, assure that its scope of scholarship considers no subject beneath its purview and provide access to new knowledge to those who aren’t, and don’t want to be in our classrooms.”

As agriculture changes, we are working to make sure that the students who leave our classrooms are ready for the new challenges.

We are evaluating our curriculum to make sure this is true.

We have developed and are refining our scope of work so that our researchers are addressing those issues and concerns that are real for our citizens.

And our Cooperative Extension staff is getting the answers to the people in a manner they can understand and apply.

We will also make sure we have clear objectives and that we are sharing information with those who need it.

This is our challenge. We look to you to tell us if we are meeting your needs.

— Dr. Alton Thompson
Dean, SAES

inside

- Dr. Smith Goes to Washington
- March 21–27 is Small Farm Week 2004
SAES preparing students for real world in more ways than one

Academic credits for Peace Corps service now SAES option

The SAES has just made it easier for graduate students to think — and act — globally. Master’s students in the Department of Agribusiness, Applied Economics and Agriscience Education can now earn credits toward a graduate degree for two-year stints in the Peace Corps.

Students must be accepted by both the Graduate School and the Peace Corps. They are then required to complete most of their course work at A&T, before pursuing Peace Corps service overseas. Upon returning to the United States, they will then be awarded the final four credits for their degree.

The hope is that students will apply what they’ve learned in the classroom to real-life situations, said John Paul Owens, the campus coordinator for the program. Owens served in the Peace Corps from 1971 to 1975 in the African nation of Burkina Faso.

“One of the things we used to hear is, ‘People are dying for knowledge,’” meaning that there might be information about agriculture, health or business that could literally save lives of people in underdeveloped countries,” he said. “You never know what the impact will be,” he added, noting that two of his former students are now medical doctors. Peace Corps volunteers don’t work alone, Owens said. They become part of a network of development agents, usually working for a government ministry.

The Peace Corps also pays volunteers a stipend for living expenses, provides language tutoring, and keeps volunteers up to date on health and safety needs. The rest is often up to the volunteer, who can grow by learning to be creative and resourceful at finding solutions to basic problems. Peace Corps applications can be downloaded from www.peacecorps.gov and Graduate School applications are available at www.ncat.edu/graduate.

Small Farms: It’s a growing business

In North Carolina, 94 percent of all farm land consists of small farms — each of which grosses less than $250,000 annually, and is tended by one of the state’s 41,000 small-scale farmers.

With this in mind, the Cooperative Extension Program at A&T will observe the 18th Annual Small Farms Week, March 21 through 27. With the theme, “It’s a Growing Business: Small Farming in North Carolina,” the celebration seeks to recognize the contributions and accomplishments of small farmers in North Carolina, and to highlight the Extension programs that benefit small farmers.

Although the annual programs have been organized through A&T administrators encourage statewide participation by Extension programs that represent both A&T and N.C. State University. To that end, Dr. M. Ray McKinnie, associate dean and extension administrator at A&T, and his N.C. State counterpart, Dr. John Ort, have offered $1,000 innovative grants to each of the state’s seven extension districts to help produce programs supporting Small Farms Week.

“It’s not an A&T thing only,” McKinnie says of the observance, “and in the past we’ve operated under that position, but we’re not sure everyone understood that.

“So with people wanting to participate, but being faced with tight budgets that we’ve had in Extension, we are providing this assistance to put some of those ideas for innovative programs out in the field.”

In keeping with the theme of Small Farms Week, the agricultural business of farming will be reflected in much of the programming during this year’s observances. Workshops on computer literacy, marketing, and financial literacy will be conducted during the morning session of Small Farms Appreciation Day, March 24, at A&T.

A highlight honoring the Small Farmers of the Year is also scheduled on campus for later that day. A late afternoon session, that this year makes use of the A&T University Farm, will feature Dr. Keith Baldwin demonstrating such farm techniques as drip irrigation and the use of black plastic.

The first scheduled Small Farms Week activity is slated for March 22 in Robeson County, the home county for the 2003 Small-Farmer-of-the-Year recipients, Ellery Locklear and his sister Amy Locklear-Cummings.

To put into context why Extension celebrates the Locklears and their counterparts, McKinnie makes the link between the grocery store and the farm.

“Americans have an expectation to go to the grocery store every week to find an abundance of high-quality food at economical prices,” McKinnie says. “But we sometimes forget the individuals who sweat and toil in the fields to make that happen for us.”

“There is a face behind agriculture. There are many faces, whether we are talking large scale or small scale, and they are the reason we enjoy these perks. It’s our responsibility to bring attention to those small farmers who sweat and toil every year to put food on our table and help keep our local economies going.

For more information on Small Farms Week activities, contact the Cooperative Extension Program at 336.334.7956.
on the move

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

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• Small Farms Week is March 21 – 27, and the Annual Small Farmer Recognition Luncheon on the A&T campus is Wednesday, March 24

• SAES Career Expo 2004 is Thursday, March 4. It’s preceded that same day by the SAES Industry/Agency Roundtable Business Breakfast.

• The School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences Student Awards Banquet is set for Friday, April 16.

Students in Dr. Marihelen Glass’s floral design class held a mock wedding in November to showcase their skills. Students prepared bouquets, boutonnieres, table and altar arrangements, and other extras for the occasion. Students Demaris Mial (right) and Corey Brown volunteered to serve as bride and groom, and Dr. Glass got some double-duty out of her academic regalia in her role as justice of the peace.