

Agricultural REVIEW

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Nov. 18 deadline coming up

Organic growers have until Nov. 18 to apply for 50 percent reimbursement of the cost of becoming certified or for recertification through a program offered by the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Growers who are certified or recertified between Oct. 1, 2021 and Sept. 30, 2022, can apply for assistance through the program.

Under the grant, operations can be certified and reimbursed in four separate categories: crops, livestock, wild crop and handler/processor. The maximum reimbursement per category is \$500.

Download the application at www.ncdaorganic.org, or growers can also apply through their local Farm Service Agency office. Application and required documents can be mailed, faxed or emailed to the NCDA&CS Organic Certification Cost Share Program, Attn. Heather Barnes. For questions, contact Barnes at 919-749-3337.

Pilot program to loan traps for feral swine

A new pilot program through the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services aims to give landowners in five North Carolina counties the tools they need to remove invasive pigs from their land. The 5-County Trap Loan Program, which is now available in Anson, Davie, Haywood, Montgomery and Randolph counties, provides high-tech corral traps that can be borrowed for up to one month. The pilot program is funded through the U.S. Farm Bill and is available to qualifying landholders through August 2023.

"Feral swine are one of the most destructive invasive animals in the country, representing a threat to clean water, food security, wildlife and property," said State Veterinarian Dr. Mike Martin. "Their rooting and wallowing behavior can destroy food crops, pollute waterways and devastate natural areas."

The pilot program is part of a national effort to address feral swine and the billions of dollars in damage they cause each year. Interested participants must complete an application and assessment before receiving a trap. The traps include a remote trigger system that allows an operator to monitor the trap with their smartphone in real time and close the gate when the entire group of pigs is inside. Borrowing one of the program's traps is free, but participants are responsible for baiting and monitoring the trap, as well as disposing of any pigs that are captured, although they can request assistance with disposal. By state law, feral swine may not be released alive from any trap.

"We're working with participating landowners to get these pigs tested for disease," said Martin. "There's a lot we're hoping to learn about the kinds and amount of damage they cause here in North Carolina, including the diseases they could spread to livestock."



Feral swine are highly destructive to land and crops. The five-county trap loaner program is designed to help landowners remove these pests and prevent larger populations. Photo from USDA APHIS, courtesy of NASA.

According to the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, feral swine can be found in isolated areas statewide.

First released in North Carolina by European explorers, today's feral swine are a blend of Eurasian wild boar and domestic stock - genetics that allow them to mature quickly and produce multiple litters a year. This poses

(See Pilot program, pg. 2)

Over \$1.35 million Specialty Crop Block grants awarded

Ten specialty crop projects, including seven through N.C. State University, will receive more than \$1.35 million in grants through the Specialty Block Grant Program administered by the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and funded by USDA.

"USDA's Specialty Crop Block Grant program enables continued research and outreach, which is critical to the long-term success of North Carolina's specialty crop producers," said Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler. "Projects will focus on research

involving Fraser Fir Christmas trees, blueberries, hops, ginger, tomatoes, potatoes and hemlock trees. Plus, funding is included to promote specialty crop production in Johnston County."

North Carolina's specialty crops include fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, turfgrass and sod, Christmas trees and nursery and greenhouse crops. Grant proposals were submitted by nonprofit organizations, commodity groups, government agencies and universities.

Following are 2022 Specialty Crops grant recipients and projects:

-- Johnston County Tourism Authority received \$149,315 for its JoCo Grows Specialty Crops program aimed at educating residents, visitors and consumers on the value and benefits of specialty crops grown in Johnston County.

-- North Carolina A&T State University received \$148,542 to promote ginger and its production by identifying the best cultivars.

-- N.C. Christmas Tree Association received \$102,704.50 for Expanding NC Fraser Fir Brand Awareness by expanding its social media distribution

across current platforms, using shared value strategies to extend brand awareness to consumers and to provide a counterpoint to extensive misinformation from artificial tree manufacturers.

-- N.C. State University received \$74,932 to conduct a field trial of selected hop plants for evaluating yield, brewing test beers, and releasing the selections to NC hop growers.

-- N.C. State University received \$150,000 to improve sustainable hemlock pest management and

(See Specialty Crop, pg. 4)

From the tractor



Commissioner Troxler

Commissioner's column

November is a month of reflection for many of us as we pause to acknowledge the many blessings we have and celebrate time with family.

It's also a time when I like to look back over the year and the work we have done as a department. Being able to be of service to farmers, agribusinesses and consumers is something I am

by Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler

grateful that we are able to do and it is rewarding to me personally.

It has been a busy year for the department, but we have accomplished some big tasks this year, too.

Chief among them have been distributing disaster relief funds across several sectors of agriculture, adding another phase of IMPEC grants to assist meat and seafood processors, working to protect the poultry industry from highly pathogenic avian influenza, discovering and treating for the highly invasive and destructive spotted lanternfly in the state and the elm zigzag sawfly, increasing delivery of USDA commodities to food banks and feeding facilities, and working to protect consumers from price scanner errors.

Those do not include many of our regular responsibilities involving food and drug protection, pesticide and structural pest control

oversight, agronomic testing and soil recommendations, and protection of animal agriculture.

We have also held a successful Got to Be NC Festival, the Mountain State Fair and we are in the midst of the N.C. State Fair as I write this.

I cannot say enough about the staff behind these efforts. They have been tasked with doing more to ensure we provide good service to residents of this state, especially following the pandemic.

We have been fortunate as a state to have federal monies earmarked to help increase the protein processing capacity in the state. We have moved quickly to allow meat and seafood processors be able to take advantage of this money. The increased capacity will be especially beneficial in the event of another situation like COVID. Building local resiliency is a good

thing and local production served consumers well when meat supplies were limited due to the pandemic.

Every week throughout the year, we have highlighted N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services employees as part of the We Are Agriculture social media series. Through that series, we have introduced you to employees across the department; employees that are making a difference in the lives of North Carolinians through their work. We have also been able to showcase the scope of work the department is involved in and the types of jobs that are involved with agriculture.

You will find one of these stories on Mikaela Lee, a fuel quality inspector, on page 8. With the rising costs of many products,

(See Troxler, pg. 3)