What’s new?

Food Safety Legislation: Closer to reaching the Senate?

While the House passed the Food Safety Enhancement Act (HR 2749) before their summer recess, the Senate has postponed looking at their version of the proposed food safety bill (SS10) due to the ongoing health care reform debate.

However, now that the health care bill has passed in the House, we are one step closer to the legislators picking up the discussion of the food safety issue.

The Food Safety Enhancement Act contains several important provisions, including:

- Strengthening a commodity-specific approach to produce;
- Ensuring that FDA will work with USDA, state departments of agriculture and other agencies in implementing all produce provisions;
- Keeping a mandate for traceability across all foods;
- Exempting produce from any duplicative requirements for COOL;
- Enhancing the ability of fresh processors to develop individual HACCP programs without rigid one-size-fits-all mandates;
- Equal treatment of imported & domestic produce in food safety standards;
- Ensuring tighter control of potential FDA quarantine authority, requiring an imminent threat to take such action and coordination with USDA;
- Capping registration fees for both facilities and importers.

And while the bill going forward to the Senate has been significantly altered, some form of food safety legislation is likely to come out of this debate. Therefore, it is important that Tennessee legislators hear from Tennessee growers of all sizes. Let your senators know that you would like the legislation to address the following points:

1) Risk and size appropriate—consider smaller- and mid-sized growers through a tiered regulatory approach;
2) Science-based—regulations need to be supported by scientific data, not arbitrary standards;
3) Regional & production system differences—recognize differences among regions in the U.S. in scale and cultural practices;
4) Market recovery—develop plans for market recovery in the legislation that moves forward.

To contact Senators Corker and Alexander, visit: www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm?State=TN

Registration Now Open for the TN Horticultural Expo

The 2010 Tennessee Horticultural Expo will be held January 28-30, 2010 at the Nashville Airport Marriott. This year, the Tennessee Agritourism Cultivating Farm Revenue Conference will join the Expo activities.

The 2010 TN Hort Expo will feature educational sessions, trade show exhibits, networking opportunities and association meetings for the TFVA, TFWA, TFGA, TFMA, TVOS and agritourism operators.

The TFVA Program features sessions on food safety, alternative marketing, organic production, season extension, labor issues and production updates.

Registration is now open with early registration discounts offered if registered by Jan. 5.

Several special events offered for additional fees include the Winemaker’s Dinner, TFVA Banquet and TVOS Reception and Banquet.

Learn more about the conference and register on-line at www.tnthe.com.

SSAWG Farmer Scholarship Application DEADLINE- November 13

The SSAWG Practical Tools & Solutions for Sustaining Family Farms Conference will be held in Chattanooga, TN, January 20-23. There are scholarships available for farmers who are interested in attending. This year, the scholarship program is focusing on “mentor farmers.” A mentor farmer is defined as a farmer leader. The mentor farmer may be a leader in a farmers market, farmer cooperative, livestock association or simply be a producer who tries innovative practices and hosts field days, trainings, etc. to teach others about what they have learned. The idea is that the mentor farmer, who attends SSAWG, will take the information home and teach other producers.

For application information, visit: http://organics.tennessee.edu or contact Peg Hamlett at: phamlett@utk.edu or 731.425.4725. For more information on the 2010 SSAWG Conference, visit: www.sswag.org.
New Projects for 2010

It will be a busy year for the UT Vegetable Production and Organic & Sustainable Crop Production Programs. We have three new and exciting projects for 2010:

**UT Market Garden Program**

Farm market stands and farmers markets are becoming increasingly important avenues for growers to market their produce directly to the consumer. Direct markets offer better prices to the farmer and lower travel costs and less travel time to get their products to market. In turn, these farm stands and markets offer the consumer an opportunity to connect with the grower and often the land where their food was produced and to learn about the practices used to grow the food, as well as providing fresher, more nutrient rich foods, as the time and distance from farm to fork can be greatly reduced by buying locally.

How can we increase the number of farmers growing for (direct) market? We are developing a multi-disciplinary internship program for UT students through a market garden on the organic farm to stimulate interest in beginning farming and preserving farmland. The student interns will participate in all aspects of the farm market from business planning to production to marketing. Additionally, a 6-month ‘SproUTing Growers Workshop Series’ will be created for Tennessans who are considering becoming market growers in East TN, with guest speakers Rob Holland, from the Center for Profitable Agriculture, and Alice Rhea, Area Farm Specialist. Stay tuned for more information on the SproUTing Growers Workshops!

This project is funded through UT Extension and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

**Biodegradable Mulches for Specialty Crops Produced under Protective Covers**

High tunnels can enhance the quality of fruits and vegetables, offer protection from climatic extremes, extend seasonality to generate significantly more revenue, ease the transition from conventional to organic food production, offer a solution to diminishing farmland availability, help provide a source of diverse locally grown food, and advance economic sustainability for many fruit and vegetable growers.

However, a key production component within high tunnels is plastic mulch as a row cover, which provides primary weed control, conserves soil moisture, increases crop yield, modifies soil temperature, and shortens the time to harvest for many crops. Mulch is comprised primarily of plastic manufactured from non-renewable petroleum feedstocks and in many regions is non-recyclable, which raises concern about the environmental sustainability of these highly desired production systems. There are more and more biodegradable mulch alternatives on the market. But, are they truly biodegradable? Are they more environmentally friendly?

The purpose of this collaborative project with Washington State & Western Washington Universities, Texas Tech and Texas A & M University is to:

1) develop management strategies for using mulches on high value crops (tomatoes, lettuce and strawberries) in high tunnel systems that mitigate against inclement weather (high winds, heavy rains, high humidity) and pest/disease threats, and in so doing

2) test the biodegradable mulches on the market and develop a new mulch in high tunnel systems for the Pacific Northwest (cool marine climate), Mid-South (hot, dry climate) and Southeast (hot, humid climate) regions,

3) gain a better understanding of mulch biodegradation and the potential effects on soil ecology and root health, which will help to

4) promote research and development on biodegradable mulches in the future.

For this project, four new 30’ x 96’ high tunnels will be built at the UT Organic Crops Unit this fall.

This project is funded through the USDA Specialty Crops Research Initiative Program.
Question of the Week

Q: I had late blight on the tomatoes in my garden this summer. What should I do to ensure that it doesn't come back again next year? - F.Z.

A: Dr. Steve Bost, Extension Plant Pathologist, recently wrote about what you can do to prevent late blight from overwintering in your garden or field in the October 29th issue of the fruit and vegetable IPM newsletter, Fruit Pest News, available at http://eppserver.ag.utk.edu/Extension/fpn/fpn.htm.

First, it's important to recognize the symptoms of late blight that you saw during the production season. Late blight causes large, irregular-shaped leaf lesions. On the fruit, a firm, light brown rot develops, often beginning on the stem end (see photos at right).

Dr. Bost mentions that the three main ways that late blight overwinters are:

1) in potato tubers that manage to survive the winter, either in culls piles or in the ground;
2) in tomato greenhouses, where the host lives year-round; and
3) as thick walled spores called oospores that can survive in the soil for long periods of time. To form oospores, it requires the presence of two mating types of the pathogen. It is unlikely, but unknown, if the two mating types are present in TN this year.

Home gardeners need to be vigilant in destroying their infected tomato and potato plants as spores from home gardens can serve as a source of spores that could infect commercial farms next year, as these spores are easily dispersed by wind.

Here is an additional recommendation for gardeners from the University of Massachusetts Extension (http://www.umassvegetable.org/LateBlightAlertforTomatoandPotato.html#Home):

If symptoms of late blight were present on the plants in your garden, these plants should be removed, and not left in the garden all winter. Plants should be placed in a plastic bag, secured and discarded in the trash or completely buried 2' or so underground so plants decompose and will not re-sprout. Plants should not be composted, put on a cull pile, or left outside. Your neighbors, not to mention commercial growers, will appreciate your proper disposal of the infected plants.

To be prepared for next year, you can also download a copy of the UT Extension publication PB1215 Disease Control in the Home Vegetable Garden for control options at: www.utextension.utk.edu/publications/pbfiles/PB1215.pdf.

Weather Report

If you didn’t see leaves changing color, it would be hard to believe it is fall with the warm and sunny weekend weather we have had.

As we start the week, we have more sun with a few clouds coming in and a good chance of rain on Tuesday across Middle and East TN. East TN high's will be in the 60's most of the week, with a quick dip down into the upper 50's on Tuesday. Low's will stay in the low to mid- 40's, with a brief dip into the upper 30's in the middle of the week.

In West TN, high's will remain in the mid- to upper 60's throughout the week with low's ranging from the low 50's down into the upper 30's.

Fall gardens are in full swing. We planted cool season crops and strawberries in our high and low tunnels at the end of September. The crops we planted include spinach, mesclun mix, mizuna, radish, carrots, kale, leeks and onions.

In our high tunnels, we harvested mizuna, or Japanese mustard, and radishes last week.

The outdoor crops have been covered with winter weight row cover to get them through the colder weather ahead (see picture at right).
Upcoming Events

24th Annual Southeast Vegetable and Fruit Expo, December 1-2, 2009, Myrtle Beach, SC
For more information, visit: http://ncvga.com/.

Irrigation Show, December 2-4, 2009, San Antonio, TX
For more information, visit: www.irrigationshow.org/.

24th Annual Sustainable Agriculture Conference, December 4-6, 2009, Black Mountain, NC
For more information, visit: www.carolinafarmstewards.org/SAC09.shtml.

Kentucky Fruit & Vegetable Conference & Tradeshow, January 4-5, 2010, Lexington, KY
For more information, visit: www.kyvga.org/meetings.html#jan4-5.

Southeast Regional Fruit & Vegetable Conference, January 7-10, 2010, Savannah, GA
For more information, visit: www.gfvga.org/2010%20Conf%20Note.htm.

Indiana Horticultural Congress, January 19-21, 2010, Indianapolis, IN
For more information, visit: www.inhortcongress.org/.

For more information, visit: www.ssawg.org/.

More details coming soon.

Come to THE horticultural meeting in Tennessee. This is a joint meeting between the TN Fruit and Vegetable Association, the TN Viticultural and Oenological Society, the TN Farm Wine Association, the TN Flower Growers Association, the TN Farmers’ Market Association and new this year, the TN Agritourism Conference. This horticultural extravaganza will have an expanded tradeshow, plus the added comradery of the other associations. Mark your calendar! For registration information and program details, visit: www.tnthe.com/THE/Welcome.html.

6th Annual Tennessee Organic Growers Conference (TOGA), March 5-6, 2010, Cool Springs, TN
For more information, visit: http://tnorganics.org/events/conference.

17th Annual Organic Growers School Spring Conference, March 6-7, 2010, Asheville, NC
For more information, visit: www.organicgrowersschool.org/content/1505#.

21st Annual Florida Postharvest Industry Tour, March 8-12, 2010, Florida
For more information, visit: www.hos.ufl.edu/sosaweb/PHI.htm.

2010 Greenhouse Tomato Shortcourse, March 9-10, 2010, Raymond, MS
For more information, visit: http://greenhousetomatosc.com/.

For the most up-to-date list of Upcoming Events, visit: http://vegetables.tennessee.edu.