

# NATIONAL SWEET POTATO NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2008

## The President's Message

by George Wooten, NC

On behalf of the entire North Carolina sweet potato industry I invite you to the city of Asheville located in the Great Smoky Mountains of — where else — North Carolina. We want your participation in “Climbing Hills, Building Mountains” — a sweet potato mountain that is.

In chilly January each year since the early 1960's, growers from all across the nation have convened in a sweet potato producing state to gain information from the experts, network with other growers and just have fun. Since the first convention in 1962, we have climbed many hills and crossed numerous hurdles which include development of micro technologies for better quality seed, efficient field production techniques, controlled atmosphere storage for year round marketing, increasing processing and merchandising dynamics. Yet, there are more hills to scale but the sweet potato mountain

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## USDA- ARS Names Jackson New Sweet Potato Breeding Program Chief

Dr. Michael Jackson recently was assigned responsibility for the sweet potato breeding program at the U.S. Vegetable Laboratory (USVL), Charleston, SC.

Although a research entomologist by training, Dr. Jackson has worked closely with plant breeders for the past 28 years as a USDA-ARS scientist. During the first 15 years of his ARS career, he worked on tobacco insect pests with a major portion of that research dedicated to host plant resistance studies. He is a co-author on the release of several

insect-resistant tobacco cultivars.

In 1994, Dr. Jackson was reassigned to the USVL to work on insect pests of vegetables. During that time, he has primarily worked on cucurbits and sweet potatoes. The sweet potato studies have been primarily related to the development of pest-resistant sweet potato germplasm.

Dr. Jackson has been actively involved in the development of the pest-resistant sweet potato germplasm that has been released by USVL.

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## 2009 Convention Set for Baton Rouge

by Mark Fields  
 Board Member, LA

The Louisiana Sweet Potato Association wants you to mark your calendar for the 2009 Convention of THE UNITED STATES SWEET POTATO COUNCIL, January 25, 26 & 27, 2009 at the Hilton Capital Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

The Hilton Capital Center is just 10 minutes from the Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport and 1 hour from New Orleans International Airport. The Capital Center is the perfect location, adjacent to the Shaw Arts Center, steps from the State Capitol, minutes from LSU (Geaux Tigers) and great food and entertainment everywhere. We encourage guests to make their room reservations as early as possible.

The Hilton Capital Center is located at 201 Lafayette Street, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Phone: 225-344-5866, Fax: 225-906-0595, Website: [www.hiltoncapitalcenter.com](http://www.hiltoncapitalcenter.com)



## NC Sweet Potato Commission To Host 46th Annual Sweet Potato Convention

The NC Sweet Potato Commission invites all sweet potato growers and industry associates to the 46th annual convention of THE UNITED STATES SWEET POTATO COUNCIL. The convention will be held at the

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### REGISTRATION FORM for the Annual Meeting & Convention of THE UNITED STATES SWEET POTATO COUNCIL

January 20-22, 2008 ♦ The Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa, Asheville, NC 28804  
 Book your hotel reservations at 1-800-438-5800 or [www.groveparkinn.com](http://www.groveparkinn.com)

Please print information for each person attending the convention:

\$250/person postmarked by 12/21/2007 (Adults & Children) \$300/person late registration

Company Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

#### All Persons Registering Under Same Business Name & Address

FULL NAME (M) Male (F) Female (C) Child (Age of Child please) Spouse (S), Sponsor, Exhibitor, Speaker

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Total Number Registered: \_\_\_\_\_ Registration Rate \$250.00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Total Amount: \_\_\_\_\_ \*\*\*Spouse Tour: Number Attending \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to: North Carolina SweetPotato Commission, then send check and registration form to:  
 North Carolina SweetPotato Commission, PO Box 575, Selma, NC 27576  
[ncsweetsue@aol.com](mailto:ncsweetsue@aol.com) / 919-989-7323 Phone / 919-989-3015 Fax

## Covington Marketing Information

by G. C. Yencho, Associate Professor and Leader,  
Sweetpotato and Potato Breeding and Genetics Program,  
NC State University, Raleigh, NC

**C**ovington, a new variety of sweetpotato recently released by NC State University in 2005-2006, is the first "graduate" of the North Carolina SweetPotato Commission-funded "Grower Participatory Breeding Project." In this project, sweetpotato growers are actively involved in the sweetpotato breeding and variety development efforts of the NC State Sweetpotato Breeding Program. It is the first of what we believe will become a series of NC State bred conventional and specialty-type sweet potatoes that are highly nutritious and attractive. All varieties will be released as *Plant Patent Pending* varieties.

'Covington' is an orange-fleshed, smooth-skinned, rose-colored, table-stock sweetpotato that will account for roughly 65% of NC's acreage in 2007. 'Covington' produces yields equal to 'Beauregard', the dominant sweetpotato variety produced in the United States, but it is 5-10 days later in maturity. The storage roots of 'Covington' are generally shorter and more uniformly shaped and fewer "jumbos" are produced as compared with 'Beauregard', resulting in higher "pack-out" by sweetpotato packers.

The dry matter content of packed 'Covington' roots typically averages 18 to 19%, which is slightly higher than that of 'Beauregard', which typically averages 17 to 18%. Over 14 replicated trials conducted during 2006, Brix levels in fresh, cured 'Covington' storage roots averaged 9.2 with a low of 7.0 and high of 12.0; compared to 'Beauregard' which averaged 7.8 brix and ranged from 5 to 9.5.

In terms of disease resistance, 'Covington' is resistant to the russet crack strain of sweetpotato feathery mottle virus, moderately resistant to southern root knot nematode. 'Covington' is also more stable and less sensitive to genotype

by environmental interactions (measured as an improved overall appearance score, and the percentage of culls and off-types present at harvest), all of which are considered to be major flaws in the variety 'Beauregard'.

The flavor of the baked storage roots of 'Covington' has been judged to be excellent by standardized and informal taste panels. 'Covington' typically scores as well or better than 'Beauregard' in taste panels.

**Note:** Covington is a US *Plant Patent Pending* variety. For information on how to obtain a license to propagate and sell Covington please contact Dr. Daryl Bowman, Director, NC Foundation Seed Producers, Inc., at (919) 515-2827 or by e-mail at [daryl\\_bowman@ncsu.edu](mailto:daryl_bowman@ncsu.edu). For further information on the production characteristics of 'Covington', please contact Dr. Craig Yencho, Leader, Sweetpotato and Potato Breeding and Genetics Programs at (919) 513-7417 or by email at [craig\\_yencho@ncsu.edu](mailto:craig_yencho@ncsu.edu). •

## Boniato Production in South Florida

by Teresa Olczyk  
Extension Agent, UF IFAS Miami-Dade County, FL

**B**oniato is a Cuban name for the tropical sweetpotato [*Ipomea batatas* (L) Poir]. *Boniato* is easy to distinguish from other sweetpotatoes by its white or light cream colored flesh and dark pink to burgundy skin. The flesh is also drier, starchier and less sweet than the traditional yellow or orange-fleshed sweetpotato. *Boniatos* are eaten boiled or sliced and fried.

The popularity of boniatos increased significantly with the rapid expansion of the population of immigrants from Cuba and other Caribbean islands into the Miami area.

Today *boniato* is an important year-round commercial crop for South Florida growers with about 3,500—4,000 acres planted each year. Interestingly, the majority of the farmers producing *boniatos* are of Cuban heritage. The most popular variety in commercial production in South Florida is

## New Variety "Evangeline" Released in 2007

by Don La Bonte, Professor,  
School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences, LSU AgCenter  
and Tara Smith, Assistant Professor  
LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station

**A** new sweet potato variety, "Evangeline", was released by the LSU AgCenter in February. In 26 trials to date, *Evangeline* has been a consistent performer.

The yield and overall quality of this sweet potato in small plot studies has been comparable to *Beauregard*. *Evangeline* does seem to produce fewer jumbos than *Beauregard*, so potentially, this could translate into a few more U.S. # 1's for producers. Growers behind on harvest may have more time to still capture #1 grade instead of jumbo grade.

*Evangeline* has an excellent quality as a baked and canned product. This variety is noticeably sweeter than *Beauregard* coming out of the ground. The sugar content of the two cultivars is different, with *Evangeline* having more sucrose, thus the sweeter taste. The additional sucrose also

increases the palatability of this sweet potato as a microwaved product. We have also found that the texture, flavor and overall quality of *Evangeline* after baking do not appear compromised when roots are harvested under adverse conditions (cold and water stress); however, roots do not resist rotting to any greater degree than *Beauregard* when soils are saturated.

Disease resistance is similar to *Beauregard* except that *Evangeline* has resistance to southern root knot nematode. Plant production was good in 2007 with several growers reporting sprout production on par with *Beauregard*; however, *Evangeline* does not appear as resilient as *Beauregard*, and pre-sprouting of seed potatoes is encouraged and recommended. Plant production has been decreased in some experimental plots in comparison to *Beauregard*. Pre-sprouting and taking care not to bed too deeply should be considered with *Evangeline*.

Limited quantities of *Evangeline* seed will be available in 2008 to Louisiana producers. The LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station is currently dedicating a portion of its production acreage to *Evangeline*. Patent protection is being sought for *Evangeline* and reasonable usage fees will be applied.

Please contact us ([DLabonte@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:DLabonte@agcenter.lsu.edu) or [TSmith@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:TSmith@agcenter.lsu.edu)) if you have questions regarding 'Evangeline' or any other aspects of the sweet potato breeding and foundation seed programs. •

For more information about  
THE UNITED STATES SWEET  
POTATO COUNCIL, contact:  
Charles Walker,  
Executive Secretary  
Tel (803) 788-7101  
e-mail: [CharlesWalker@worldnet.att.net](mailto:CharlesWalker@worldnet.att.net)

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**Convention** (from Page 1)

famous Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa in Asheville, NC, from January 20 to 22, 2008.

For hotel reservations, please contact Grove Park Inn directly at 1-800-438-5800 or visit [www.groveparkinn.com](http://www.groveparkinn.com). If you reserve on-line, please select the *Group registration category* on their website. All reservations require a **group code** to receive the special conference rate. It will be sent to you by email after you have registered using the form on Page 1.

A complete listing of the agenda, registration, sponsorship and exhibitor opportunities can be found on the NC Sweet Potato Commission website:

[www.ncsweetpotatoes.com](http://www.ncsweetpotatoes.com)

**President's Message**

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tain is growing higher and higher.

North Carolina's program committee has worked feverishly to develop a program that is not only informative and thought provoking but pleasurable. It is our hope that you will register either on-line at [www.ncsweetpotatoes.com](http://www.ncsweetpotatoes.com) or using the form provided in this newsletter. I know you will enjoy every minute spent in our great state.

Come on in; pull up a chair; set a spell by the roaring fire; chow down on the mighty fine vittles and shop 'til you drop. This convention will be memorable—you have our word on it.

**46th Annual Convention of THE UNITED STATES SWEET POTATO COUNCIL**

January 20–22, 2008 ♦ The Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa, Asheville, NC 28804

~ Tentative Convention Agenda ~

**Saturday, January 19**

- 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM Sweet Potato Collaborators Meeting, Taft Room, MN
- 3:00 PM to 7:00 PM Hospitality Suite, Room 4065

**Sunday, January 20**

- 8:00 AM to 12:00 noon Sweet Potato Collaborators Meeting, Eisenhower Room, FG
- 1:00 PM to 7:00 PM Registration, Ballroom Area
- 1:00 PM to 5:30 PM Exhibits Set Up, Grand Ballroom A
- 1:00 PM to 8:00 PM Silent Auction, Grand Ballroom A
- 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM Meeting, Board of Directors, The United States Sweet Potato Council, Coolidge Room, DE
- 3:00 PM to 5:30 PM Hospitality Suite, Room 4065
- 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM Reception, Grand Ballroom Pre-function Area
- 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM Opening Banquet, Grand Ballroom, B&C

**Monday, January 21**

- 7:30 AM to 9:00 AM Breakfast, Grand Ballroom B
- 7:30 AM to 12:00 noon Registration, Ballroom Area
- 7:30 AM to 12:00 noon Silent Auction, Grand Ballroom A
- 9:00 AM to 12:00 noon Exhibits Open, Grand Ballroom A

**9:00 AM Educational Seminars**

Sponsor: **McCain Foods**

Moderator: **Jonathan Schultheis**, NC State Univ.

- 9:00 AM Growth Numbers — Reason Businesses Fail, by **Dave Kohl**, AgriVisions, LLC
- 10:30 AM What's Up with Value Added in North Carolina, by **John Kimber**, NC Sweet Potato Commission Foundation, Inc.
- 11:00 AM Managing Soil Insects in Sweet Potato in the Southeastern U.S., by **George Kennedy**, *W. N. Reynolds Distinguished Professor of Entomology* at NCSU
- 11:30 AM State Highlights, by **Charles Walker**, Executive Secretary, The United States Sweet Potato Council
- 12:00 noon Lunch at Biltmore Estate; *Depart from the Vanderbilt Wing*
- 3:45 PM Biltmore Winery Tour
- 5:30 PM to 7:00 PM Meeting, Board of Directors, The United States Sweet Potato Council, Coolidge Room, DE

- 5:30 PM to 8:00 PM Hospitality Suite, Room 4065 Evening *On Your Own*

**Tuesday, January 22**

- 7:30 AM to 9:00 AM Breakfast, Grand Ballroom B
- 9:00 AM to 12:00 noon Exhibits Open, Grand Ballroom A

**9:00 AM Educational Seminars**

Sponsor: **East Coast Farm Credit**

Moderator: **Gerald Holmes**, NC State University

- 9:00 AM Immigration & Labor Issues Forum
- Facilitator: **Roger Bone**, Bone & Associates  
 Participants: **David Rouzer**, Rouzer Co.  
**Lee Wicker**, NC Growers Assn.

- 10:30 AM Weed Management in Sweet Potatoes, by **Dr. David Monks**, NC State University
- 11:00 AM Sweet Potatoes Across the Pond, by **Sue Langdon**, Executive Director, NC Sweet Potato Commission & **Andrew Ball**, *Sous Chef*, London's Ritz Hotel
- 11:30 AM Business Meeting, US Sweet Potato Council
- 12:00 noon Lunch, Grand Ballroom B
- 2:00 PM to 5:30 PM Hospitality Suite, Room 4065
- 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM Reception, Grand Ballroom Pre-function Area
- 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM Closing Banquet, Grand Ballroom, B&C

**Ladies Tour Schedule**

**Monday, January 21 — Biltmore Estate Day Tour**

- 9:00 AM Depart for the **Biltmore House** for a self-guided tour.
- 12:30 PM Join the men at **Deerpark Restaurant** for an all-inclusive family style lunch.
- 3:45 PM **Biltmore Winery Tour**
- 5:30 PM Approximate time of return to Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa.

**Tuesday, January 22 — "Funky-Junque" Shopping — Asheville Style**

- 8:45 AM Depart for downtown **Asheville** and experience **Funky-Junque Shopping**
- 12:00 PM Lunch at a downtown restaurant.
- 1:30 PM Return to Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa.

**Sweetpotato Collaborators and Council's Convention Share Same Venue**

The annual meeting of the US National Sweetpotato Collaborators Group will also meet at the Grove Park Inn & Spa in Asheville, NC. The Collaborators will meet for two days, January 19 and 20, 2008. The Convention will run January 20-22, 2008.

Holding both events with overlapping dates and at the same location will serve two purposes: (1) Allow interaction between collaborators and sweet potato growers; and (2) Enable collaborators to attend all, or part, of the Convention without making a separate trip.

Source: <http://nscg5.viazivitamu.org>

**No AgJobs Yet?**

by **Charles Walker**, Executive Secretary

The Congress tried twice during this past summer to pass a Comprehensive Immigration Bill. Each time, it failed to pass. The AgJobs bill was part of each of the two Comprehensive Immigration Bills that failed to pass. Then, there was some effort and speculation that California Senator Dianne Feinstein would introduce AgJobs as a stand alone bill. That didn't happen, either. Then, there was some effort and speculation that Senator Feinstein would attach AgJobs to the Farm Bill. That didn't happen, either.

The Bush Administration then decided that maybe it could help our farmers by making some beneficial changes to H-2A via the regulatory process. This might be a more realistic way of changing, or

reforming, the H-2A to make it more user friendly to growers. This process was started recently. The National Council of Ag Employers (NCAE) developed and recommended a list of regulatory changes to the Bush Administration. At first reading, these NCAE recommendations seemed quite reasonable. However, the issue of replacing the Adverse Effect Wage Rate with the prevailing wage rate was conspicuous by its absence from NCAE's list of recommendations.

Sweet potato growers did not support AgJobs and THE UNITED STATES SWEET POTATO COUNCIL has lobbied against it all along. As of now, growers will have to see how the regulatory process will eventually work out. •

**No "No-Match" Letters for 2007**

In a November 14 release from United Fresh Produce Association, it was stated that the Social Security Administration (SSA) will not be sending out "No-Match" letters in 2007. However, SSA has let it be known that "it will resume the issuance of no-match letters in 2008 and focus on wage reporting for 2007." •

**Jackson** (from Page 1)

His research will continue focus on developing improved sweet potato genotypes that have multiple pest resistance. He is establishing cooperative research efforts with other US sweet potato investigators. •

## California Sweet Potato Update

by Scott Stoddard, Farm Advisor, UC Cooperative Extension, Merced, CA

The harvest season for 2007 has finally wrapped up in California. It was a long one this year. Thanks to a warm and dry spring, more acres than normal were planted in April, and many growers were finished by the first week of June. Harvest began around July 10 for some varieties. According to USDA crop estimates, California was expected to dig 13,300 acres this year, a 37% increase from a decade ago. If this figure is realized, this will be the most acreage planted in the state since 1959.

Fall weather was not ideal for harvest, but not bad enough to jeopardize the crop either. Merced County experienced slightly cooler than normal temperatures but no significant rainfall in September and October. In general, we had a good growing season, though the dry spring may have contributed to the *Beauregard* crop sizing erratically. Many growers have commented on the high percentages of jumbos this year in *Beauregard*, which I also noted

in my own test plots. As a result, these fields had a very high total yield, but #1 yield was down. However, reduced yields from significant acreage that was harvested early, especially for the Japanese-types, will offset the *Beauregard* yields. When combining all varieties, I estimate yields slightly less than last year, to about 700 boxes per acre. My estimate for total production this year is 372 million pounds.

Variety development maintains strong importance for the California industry, especially so because of impending new rules and restrictions regarding fumigation use. Acreage planted to *Covington* will probably increase substantially, perhaps between 2000 to 3000 acres. *Beauregard* will still dominate the orange flesh market, but much of the production will go to processing rather than retail sales. Despite being a variety that is 20 years old, no other sweet potato has the yield potential, nor the yield reliability, of *Beauregard*.

The new purple skin/white flesh variety *Murasaki-29* had a moderate year at best. This potato grows slow and requires a full season to make reasonable yields. Growers who tried it in 2007 have learned that it probably should be "planted

first, harvested last" as a general rule of thumb. I have high hopes that new virus-tested plants will improve production in 2008.

Fumigation has been and will be a critical issue for the industry in the coming months and years. In 2008, new air quality regulations designed to limit VOCs (Volatile Organic Carbons) will further restrict the use of all fumigants between April and November. This comes on top of all the other issues growers must already deal with, including buffer zones, Telone caps, and methyl bromide phase out. In fact, it is the fumigation issues that are largely responsible for the keen interest in new varieties that have multiple pest resistance characteristics bred into them.

The other big looming issue for next year is water, or the lack of it. Like the Southeast, California is also experiencing a severe drought. Last winter was one of the driest on record, which has resulted in very low reservoir levels and a rapidly dropping groundwater table throughout the San Joaquin Valley. Water restrictions may be implemented for the 2008 season unless the Sierra Nevada Mountains receive good snowfall this winter. •

## Alabama Sweet Potato Crop Update

by Arnold Caylor

Superintendent

N. Alabama Horticulture Research Center, Cullman, AL

The growers in the south part of the state have had a pretty good growing season. They got more rain than we did in the northern part. Most of the crop has been harvested. They still lack a little bit but should finish the harvest soon. Sales are pretty good.

The growers in the north part of the state have had a pretty difficult summer. We have been extremely hot and dry. We have about a 20 inch rainfall deficit. Some of our growers are almost through harvesting while others are about half way through. The potatoes have a good set, but they are small due to a lack of rain. A lot of the growers were waiting to get a rain to let the potatoes size up some more. Movement of the crop has been good. •

## Demand for Mississippi Sweet Potatoes Continue to Trend Upward

by Benny Graves

Executive Director, MS Sweet Potato Council

Planted and harvested acres of sweet potatoes are up for Mississippi in 2007. Tight supplies of '06 sweet potatoes combined with increasing demand convinced Mississippi growers to plant 20,000 acres in 2007. This is an increase of 4,000 acres from the previous year.

Like many other areas of the south east, the 2007 crop was produced under extremely dry conditions. Only a few timely rains saved the Mississippi crop from being a disaster and allowed growers to actually harvest a decent crop. The impact of the drought limited the sizing up of this year's potatoes at harvest time. The result has

been fewer jumbos and some yield reduction.

The upside of the dry fall harvest season is that all acres were harvested in a timely fashion. Potatoes were stored in good condition and hopefully will pack out at a high percentage later on in the year.

*Beauregard* remains Mississippi's dominant variety, with a few other varieties produced for special niche markets. The Mississippi Council continues to educate buyers and consumers about the healthy attributes of sweet potatoes. The sweet potato is a proven Super Food which everyone should include in their diet. •

## Boniato

(from Page 2)

"slips" are covered with soil almost to the tip of the cutting. The field is fertilized usually twice during the growing season with the side dressed granular fertilizer. Herbicides and pesticides are applied as needed.

Each field has multiple shallow wells used for the overhead irrigation by moving a large watering canon also called a "big gun" from well to well. Fields are harvested with a potato digger and *boniatos* are preliminarily graded and then hand packed in the field into 50 lb plastic crates. Additional grading occurs in the packing house where *boniatos* are washed and packed into 50 lb bags or boxes.

There is great variability in yields depending on the time of the year and individual grower's practices. The average yields reported in Miami-Dade County are 5-6 tons per acre in contrast to much higher yields reported for regular sweet potatoes in other areas of the state.

The most threatening pests are sweet potato weevils and nematodes. Wire worms, beetles and white grubs are also common. Freshly harvested *boniatos* are available throughout the year, and the crop is not cured for long-term storage as the common sweet potato is. It is, therefore, prone to bruising and root decay which prevents long-time storage.

Other challenges for south Florida *boniato* growers include high production costs, limited availability of labor, increased land values and loss of agricultural land due to rapidly encroaching urban development. •

## The Minimum Wage Increase

Based on an "Alert Memorandum" received from the National Council of Agricultural Employers and dated 8/15/07, Congress has increased the minimum wage from \$5.15 per hour to \$7.25 per hour in three increments. Effective 7/24/07, the federal minimum wage increases to \$5.85 per hour. On 7/24/08, it increases again to \$6.55 per hour; and finally, on 7/24/09 it increases to \$7.25 per hour. •

## Louisiana Sweet Potato Update

by Tara Smith

Extension Specialist, LSU AgCenter, Chase, LA

As of November 1<sup>st</sup>, the 2007 Louisiana sweet potato harvest was approximately 90% complete. The harvest conditions have been more cooperative than those experienced in 2006, when late season rains caused several acres to go unharvested. In light of last year's weather disasters, several producers increased their harvesting capacity in 2007 and employed the use of additional harvesters or hand laborers to harvest a portion of the crop. Barring any unforeseen weather events, producers should wrap up the harvest by November 15<sup>th</sup>.

The production year started off on a positive note, and as a whole, Louisiana producers are experiencing an average to slightly above average crop. Soil moisture and temperatures were ideal for planting in May and June and as a result, the majority of the crop was planted by June 15<sup>th</sup>. We experienced an unusually wet July across the state, with most production areas receiving 10-12 inches of rainfall in July. The excess moisture contributed to delayed maturity and harvest operations began a couple of weeks later than expected because early plantings were slower to size than normal.

Insect pressure has been heavy across the state this year. Cucumber beetles were the most prevalent insect that was targeted in scouting and management programs. Producers in North Louisiana experienced heavier populations of this insect than they had in recent years and most were scouting and spraying weekly. In addition, several producers in south Louisiana reported significant pockets of white grub damage on a few early planted acres.

A new variety "Evangeline" which was released by the LSU AgCenter in early 2007 was planted in small plots on several farms this year. In addition, several acres of Evange-

line seed were planted at the LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station in 2007, and many Louisiana producers will have an opportunity to evaluate the variety on a limited commercial scale in 2008.

Producers in general are pleased with the 2007 crop. Acreage is down compared to 2006, but yields and quality have been good and will partially compensate for the reduction in acreage. Movement of the early harvested portion of the 2007 crop has been strong. Louisiana producers are pleased with the current prices they are receiving and are confident about the quality of the potatoes going into storage. •

## Processor Report

by Norman Brown, Sr.  
Vice President  
Bruce Foods Corporation

The tonnage of process grade sweet potatoes purchased by processors has increased nicely over the 2005 and 2006 crop seasons. Prospects for sales of 2007 crop sweet potatoes are good. Some of the frozen processors have added the sweet potato to their product line and are having success in the marketplace.

The traditional processors of canned, dehydrated, chips, snack sweet potatoes are seeing a gradual increase in their market for sweet potato products. The good news of the high nutritional value of the sweet potato is gradually getting the focus of the consumer.

As always, marketing all sweet potato products is a giant battle for supermarket shelf space. Because in order to gain a spot on the grocers shelf or frozen food case a new product has to displace a product now in that space. This is costly because the trade requires heavy advertising or slotting fees in order to stock the product. •

## North Carolina Sweet Potato Update

by Billy Little

Commercial Horticulture Agent  
NC Cooperative Extension, Wilson County Center

Even at the time of writing this report November 2, our 2007 sweetpotato crop is not over. This has been one growing season that our growers will remember for a long time and not in a positive manner.

As everyone is aware we have been through the most severe and prolonged drought in NC history. We have set and broken so many records for heat, lack of rain, decline of water tables, and depleted irrigation sources that I could use all the space in this article just listing them.

Even with our 2007 corn crop, cotton crop, soybean crop and many other row and vegetable crops listed as statewide disasters, our sweetpotato crop has offered us a little ray of sunshine.

When harvest of sweetpotatoes started it was a pleasant surprise to see very good quality of the roots. The roots had sized just right, insect damage, especially wire worm and flea beetle, were almost non-existent, skin texture, and shapes were very good. The down side was the yield was reduced. Instead of the usual 6-7 roots per hill with a mixture of #1, jumbo, and canner, our beginning harvest was more in the line of 3-4 roots per hill but uniform in size and #1.

When we look at the total acres of sweetpotatoes in NC, we do see an increase of acres in 2007 over 2006. In 2006, there were around 40,500 acres reported, and in 2007, we have 41,200 reported at this time and still a couple of months to go before final acre figures are calculated.

Unfortunately, as the harvest season progressed, we saw yields decline further as size up had not taken place. You can almost equate this with the sweetpotatoes planted in the first part of the planting season

and receiving some spotty showers and the latter planted crop that received very little spotty rain. Growers have used our extremely warm fall to delay harvest on many fields to optimize size potential, and this has been a big help as size and yield have increased as a result of much needed rain.

Our growers mainly planted two varieties this year, *Covington* and *Beauregard*. *Covington* accounts for around 65% of the acreage.

The management of sweetpotato production took a turn this year. A new insect management control program developed by Dr. George Kennedy, Mark Abney and input from the NCSU Sweetpotato Research Team was implemented. The preliminary reports look promising with possible fine tuning needed for certain conditions that arose in fields with insect damage.

The questions and concerns about fuel costs, labor issues and weather during the 2007 crop will carry right on into the 2008 crop.

The 2007 SweetPotato Field Day held at Cunningham Research Station in October was well attended by growers and many positive comments were received on the projects and research being conducted by the NCSU Research Team. Just to mention a few of the highlights covered were:

- Post harvest disease and decay control strategies
- Timing and applications to reduce insect damage
- Weed management
- Response of *Covington* to nitrogen rates and applications
- Breeding and genetics
- Biofuels and value added

In the typical NC Sweetpotato fashion, the growers, packers, research and extension team look forward to the 2008 season. •

While meeting with various members of its Sweet Potato Congressional Coalition in Washington this past June, The U.S. Sweet Potato Council took time for a photo (right). Pictured from left to right: Howard Fiskerly, Council Treasurer, MS; Randle Wright, Board Member, MS; Arnold Caylor, AL; Charles Walker, Executive Secretary, SC; Kim Matthews, AR; Representative Marion Berry of AR; Terres Matthews, AR; George Wooten, President, NC; Benny Graves, Executive Director, MS Sweet Potato Council; and Brian Breaux, LA. Farm Bureau, LA.



### The Council Recognizes Its 2007 Associate Members

Our Council is very proud and thankful for its 2007 Associate Members and is happy to recognize them in this issue of the newsletter. Associate members have an interest in the sweet potato industry and are willing to make an additional investment in the Industry and the activities of our Council. Our 2007 Associate Members are:

### Dividends Still Coming in From 2006 WeightWatchers Promotion

As of this writing (11/15/07), sweet potatoes have been featured for a year, and are still being featured under the *Market Fresh* Section of **Weight Watchers'** website. This is free publicity that sweet potato growers probably could not buy if a dollar value was placed on it. You can see for yourself by going to the short-cut link to WW's website at the bottom of this article.

The feature consists of a basket of fresh sweet potatoes and an article about sweet potatoes written by Michelle Olson. At the end of Ms. Olson's article, you will also find four different sweet potato recipes.

The short-cut link to the sweet potato page in the Weight Watchers' website is:

<http://tinyurl.com/2r4yda>

Name	Company	Amount (\$)
Walter C. Kichler	W&E KICHLER & SONS, Elberta, AL	50.00
Dani Summers	GOWAN COMPANY, ( <i>Imidan</i> ), Tucson, AZ	400.00*
Sam Winterberg	BRIGHT HARVEST SWEET POTATO Co., Clarksville, AR	1,000.00
Craig Arnold	ARNOLD FARMS, Winton, CA	50.00
Dan Bremer	AgWORKS, Lake Park, GA	50.00
Kelsey McKoin	McHE FARMS, Bonita, LA	50.00
Walter Tuna	Libuse, LA	50.00
Shelton Ruffin	OAK GROVE PRODUCE, Oak Grove, LA	50.00
Jimmie Turner	PLUCK PRODUCE, Belzoni, MS	50.00
	MCCORMACK FARMS, Middletown, NJ	50.00
Jim Weaver	HELENA CHEMICAL CO., Laurinburg, NC	250.00
Danny C. Pierce	CROP MANAGEMENT SERVICES, Princeton, NC	50.00
Craig Yencho	N.C. STATE UNIVERSITY, Raleigh, NC	50.00
Pender Sharp	SHARP FARMS, Sims, NC	50.00
Cindy Jones	SPRING ACRES SALES CO., Spring Hope, NC	50.00
Richard Anderson	ANDERSON FARMS, Tarboro, NC	50.00
Butch Parker	WEYERHAUSER, Wilson, NC	50.00
Marion L. Pridgen, Jr.	MARION L. PRIDGEN FARMS, Wilson, NC	50.00
Wiley A. Boyette, Jr.	ROCK RIDGE FARMS, Wilson, NC	50.00
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2,450.00</b>

\*This represents payment for an ad insert placed in the newsletter by Gowan Co.



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**Merry Christmas & a Happy and Prosperous New Year To All Sweet Potato Growers**