

# NC MEDICINAL HERB NEWS

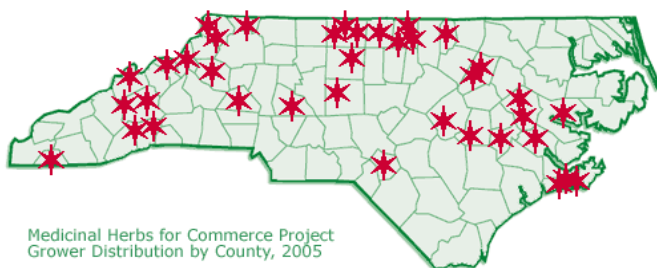
A Newsletter of the North Carolina Medicinal Herbs for Commerce Project—Dr. Jeanine Davis, Project Leader

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## WHAT'S NEW IN THE MEDICINAL HERBS FOR COMMERCE PROJECT?

By Libby Hinsley



Medicinal Herbs for Commerce Project  
 Grower Distribution by County, 2005

This map, developed by Kari Brayman - Communications Specialist, shows the distribution of cooperating farms involved in the Medicinal Herbs for Commerce Project this year.

This spring, the Medicinal Herbs for Commerce Project and all the growers involved are gearing up for the third year of the project. We have just finished a winter season in which we offered two highly successful day long in-service training sessions for NC Cooperative Extension personnel. Between a training in Fletcher and one in Raleigh, we ended up training a total of 32 Extension agents and other personnel representing 26 counties. We are glad to have more agents out there who are engaged and equipped to assist growers in their areas in the production and marketing of medicinal herbs.

Our January Buyer/Grower meeting in Greensboro was also a great success.

Many of our cooperating growers made connections and began building relationships with a number of buyers.

We currently have approximately thirty-five cooperating growers who will be producing, and if all goes well, selling!, a variety of high quality medicinal herb crops this season. Right now, growers are starting seeds in greenhouses for crops like German chamomile, Valerian, Dandelion, Skullcap, *Echinacea purpurea*, and Catnip. Some of our more experienced growers are expanding their acreage or adding new crops to trial. Many are beginning the process of becoming Certified Organic, and some are considering creating their own value-added products.

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Thanks to our Project funders:



## FOR YOUR CALENDAR

**March 3:** Northern Piedmont Specialty Crops School. Roxboro, NC. 919-603-1350.

**March 11:** Organic Growers School. Flat Rock, NC. [www.organicgrowersschool.org](http://www.organicgrowersschool.org).

**March 14:** Homestead Milk Production Shortcourse. NC Cooperative Extension, Burlington, NC. 336-375-5876.

**April 8:** Spring Herb & Plant Festival. 8-5 p.m. Piedmont Farmers Market. Kannapolis, NC. 704-784-1925.

**April 22-23:** Annual Piedmont Farm Tour. Carolina Farm Stewardship Association. [www.carolinafarmstewards.org](http://www.carolinafarmstewards.org); 919-542-2402.

**May 5-6:** Spring Vegetable and Herb Conference. Mountain State University, Beckley, WV. [www.mountainstate.edu/usda](http://www.mountainstate.edu/usda).

**May 9:** Swine Unit Dedication and Kick-off to the "Season of Sustainable Agriculture" Celebration. Center for Environmental Farming Systems. Goldsboro, NC.

**May 13:** Enhancing Small Farm Profitability with Medicinal Plants. 10-4 p.m. Sleepy Hollow Farm, Dalton, GA. Space limited—call or email to sign up. 706-259-7647; [info@sleepyhollowherbfarm.com](mailto:info@sleepyhollowherbfarm.com).

**May 13-14:** NC Chapter of American Herbalist Guild and MoonBranch Botanicals hosts 1st annual Lunar Beltane on the Creek, a gathering in Yellow Creek, NC. Call 828-479-2788 or visit [www.nc-ahg.org/](http://www.nc-ahg.org/).

## A WORD FROM WOODY WOODWARD



The winter weather blues are nearly over. March is upon us and springtime planting can't be far away. Some growers have plants started already; some have volunteers breaking out from beds of last year. No rest for the weary.

To those who attended our project's growers and buyers meeting held in Greensboro in January, we want to express deep appreciation for your participation in this event. As we all learned at this meeting, there is nothing like exchanging with the folks who will be buying your crops to learn from them and they in turn learn from you. Events like this don't come around too often but when they do, it is in growers' long term interest to attend. If you missed this one, we encourage you to stay attentive to coming events and plan accordingly. As many who attended

this past meeting expressed, you will be amply rewarded.

To growers who are just getting started growing, cultivating and preparing medicinal herbs for market, you are probably finding out how long it will take to reach a point where you earn substantial income. To the buyers supporting the project, you too are learning that working with experienced growers, yet new to medicinal herbs, requires patience to reach that high level of quality. Patience is something that can only be practiced when needed. Your true pots of gold at the end of the rainbow will consist of much more than the monetary rewards you realize by being part of this project. God bless you all.

As some of you may know, as of March 24, 2006, I will no longer be involved with the Medicinal Herbs for Commerce project. It has been my pleasure to work alongside two very competent staff members in Libby Hinsley and Amy Hamilton. They will remain to coordinate the project. I will forever be grateful to the growers from North Carolina for the year I've spent amongst you. It has truly been a learning experience.

Enjoy these tidbits of herbal lore from our resident Herbalorist, Amy Hamilton:

### HERBA-LORE

Did you know you could cure chapped lips by kissing the middle-bar of a split rail fence? (Jeanne Rose) Try this at home!

You can revive drowning bees and flies by putting them in the warm ashes of pennyroyal, after which it is said that, "they shall recover their lyfe after a little tyme as by ye space of one houre" (M. Grieve). Obviously, early scientific experiments with herbs were rather rudimentary!

If you are bothered by warts, simply apply fresh peach leaves to them, then bury the leaves. It is

said that by the time the leaves are decayed the warts will have fallen off!

Calendula, otherwise known as marigold, got its Latin name (*Calendula officinalis*), from the observation that it bloomed in every month of the calendar year. It used to be called Jackanapes-on-horseback.

In the old days, it was believed that digging mandrake root would cause death – that the root would shriek and groan as it was dug and no one who heard it would live. Instead of a person digging it, then, the root could be tied to a dog who would pull it out of the ground and die in place of the person.

## AMY HITS THE ROAD

Amy Hamilton has recently hit the road to make visits to many of our cooperating farmers. One of the highlights of her road tour has included performances of her original song, "Growing Weeds in the Sticks." The song was inspired by the spirit and dedication to the farming life of our cooperating growers. The words are as follows:

Dr. Davis from NC State  
Well she came up with a real good plan  
and we hope it's gonna work out great  
Maybe help us keep our land

Chorus: *Growing weeds in the sticks*  
*Never knew how much this farming life meant to me*  
*Growing weeds in the sticks*  
*I hope this Echinacea (or other herb) comes thru for me*  
*Through for me!*

I tried tobacco, corn, and hay  
Peanuts, soybeans, and grapes  
but it all seemed to come to naught  
so I guess I'm gonna give it a shot  
Chorus

This here's my family's farm  
and right here is where I was born  
I met my wife right down the road  
glad she don't mind using a hoe  
Chorus

From Avery to Alamance  
Person, Rowan, and Vance  
Mitchell, Nash, and Clay  
What will all our neighbors say?  
when they see us...Chorus

Hopefully you can catch her next time she passes through your town, and let us know if you come up with your own song about medicinal herbs!



Amy plays "Growing Weeds in the Sticks" at Mike Faucette's farm in Guilford County.

## GROWER PROFILE: SUSAN AND MICHAEL MERRILL

By Libby Hinsley

Susan and Michael Merrill farm a beautiful piece of mostly wooded land in Madison County, where they demonstrate some of the waning traditions of Appalachian mountain culture. Susan and Michael began farming together 13 years ago and selling produce to local restaurants in Asheville and Weaverville. They are now an integral part of the Madison County Farmers Market and the Wednesday evening tailgate market in downtown Asheville. Although not currently certified organic, their farm has been certified in the past and they plan to certify it again. The Merrills have always produced their crops according to organic methods, and they've always used draft animals, too. Currently, they grow a variety of produce with the help of their team of draft mules that they have worked with for seven years. As Susan remarks, "The mules are everything their reputation suggests. But luckily, we're a little more stubborn than they are!"

The Merrills phased out of tobacco production a couple of years ago, and are interested in medicinal herb production as a way to continue diversifying their farm. They are blessed with plentiful woodlands where many native medicinal plants grow naturally. They have always wild-crafted herbs for their own use and have always had an interest in doing more with them, but they've never known how to market herbs on a larger scale. This year, they plan to grow



Susan and Michael Merrill

Holy Basil as well as False Unicorn (*Chamalirium luteum*). They hope the Medicinal Herbs for Commerce project will connect them with market outlets and give them a boost into a new level of medicinal herb production. The Merrills recently purchased some new crop land that will allow them to expand their operation. The new land is much flatter than what they've been working with, but as Susan says, "It's a lot more work because you have to bend over twice as far!" They also hope to someday do more of their own value-added processing of herbal products, Appalachian crafts, and furniture.

Part of the Merrill's hope is to preserve some of the rich Appalachian cultural tradition they see disappearing around them. "We're trying to diversify our farm as much as we can because this is the kind of life that we want to live. There aren't that many people that plow with animals anymore or that know how. This is such an incredible culture, and it's dying out. People are so used to going to Wal-Mart now and not doing for themselves, and we'd like to uphold some of the rich traditions that are being lost." Susan and Michael also home school two of their children, Chance and Ezra. A major part of this education is focused on the land, and learning how to work and run the farm. As Susan says, "They'll know how to take over the farm if they want to, which I hope they do. I think they realize how unique their lifestyle is."

## HERB OF FOCUS: SKULLCAP

A few cooperating growers in the mountain region are growing Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*) this season. This could be a promising perennial herb for North Carolina



Skullcap on a cooperating grower's farm, 2004

growers to consider. Currently, abundant seed is difficult to come by. However, we were able to secure enough seed to trial a few acres of this crop. Although Skullcap can be direct seeded or trans-

planted, due to the limited seed currently available, it will be important to start these seeds in a greenhouse to optimize plant survival.

Skullcap is a member of the mint family and as such, will likely spread to fill in the beds where it is planted. It likes a steady supply of moisture, as it is naturally found growing on stream banks and in other moist areas. Growers can likely expect one harvest of the aerial parts during the first year, followed by multiple cuttings per season after the first year. Skullcap has a long history of medicinal use among Native Americans, and it is currently used by many as a mild sedative in cases of anxiety, depression, and insomnia. It is also used to treat digestive discomfort.

The Medicinal Herbs for Commerce Project has never had a grower take a crop of Skullcap through to the point of drying it in a forced air dryer. This is one of the many crops that our growers will experiment with this year, providing us and many others with valuable data about what works and what doesn't work in western North Carolina for this crop.

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**Medicinal Herbs for Commerce: A project to encourage the diversification of NC farms**  
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**HERB DRYERS COME TO THE MOUNTAINS**

*By David Grimsley*

An exciting feature of the 2006 Medicinal Herbs for Commerce Project is that we're providing forced air herb dryers to our twelve new cooperating growers in the mountain region. Funding for these dryers was received from the N.C. Rural Economic Development Center through our cooperation with the Land of Sky Regional Council because forced air dryers are less commonly available in the mountain region than in other regions of North Carolina. We hope that by providing growers with dryers, we can give mountain growers as much of a chance as anyone for success with medicinal herb production and marketing.

Right now, we are weighing our options on the type of dryer/kiln that will best suit our growers. One is a metal shed from Lowes and will be insulated with building code Styrofoam. Inside, three stacks of shelves will be

built lengthwise with two aisles in-between. The shelves will actually be a wire lathe that will enable the warm air to be forced past the drying product, cycling to the top and back into the vent to pass by the fan and heat coils again. In order to be outfitted with this style herb dryer, most places will need a 12'x16' pre-poured 4-6 inch concrete slab or a level 10'x14' plywood platform before the dryer delivery date. Everyone will also need a 220 volt electric hook up



(at least arranged) before the dryer is in place. The building itself will measure 14'x10'x8' (see picture at left).

The second option is a pre-manufactured dryer that is designed specifically for the herb industry. De Cloet Ltd. is the manufacturer, and we are waiting to hear whether or not their models fit within the means of our budget. Meanwhile, you can check out their dryers online at: [http://www.decloet.com/product\\_pages/kiln\\_pages/lgspecialty\\_page.html](http://www.decloet.com/product_pages/kiln_pages/lgspecialty_page.html).

As a Research Assistant with the Medicinal Herbs for Commerce Project, I am making arrangements for and installing the herb dryers. I have been able to get around to most mountain farms recently, and I appreciate everyone being so flexible and hospitable. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me at [David\\_grimsley@ncsu.edu](mailto:David_grimsley@ncsu.edu) or 828.684.3562, ext. 357.