

## FOOTHILLS FARM SCHOOL FOCUSES ON DEVELOPING SUCCESSFUL, SUSTAINABLE FARMS

Are you interested in a small farm operation of your own? Ever wondered how to get started? Looking to diversify? North Carolina Cooperative Extension invites beginning and existing farmers to attend the 2015 Foothills Farm School.

More and more families are looking at ways to supplement their incomes and put their land into something productive. Quite often, we are faced with the question, "I have some land that I want to do something with... but I don't know what. Can you tell me what I can grow and make some money?" This is an open-ended question, because the success of an agricultural venture really depends on the market and the operator. A successful business starts with a good plan and lots of research, and agriculture is no different.

For individuals who are seriously considering or currently involved in farming, the Foothills Farm School is a great way to help answer these questions and more. The 2015 Foothills Farm School is designed to provide training in production practices and business planning.

This seven-month educational program focuses on operating successful small-scale and sustainable farms. The school offers seven seminars taught by agricultural professionals, which give farmers the tools to develop sustainable farming operations. Session topics include business planning, business structure, tax and legal issues, marketing, and risk management, among others.

The school also includes seven field trips to working farms, led by innovative, experienced farmers and agricultural professionals. Participants learn low-cost, sustainable farming methods in a range of production systems, including fruits, vegetables, livestock, and specialty crops.

Participants from the 2014 Foothills Farm School had the following to say:

- "I learned the pitfalls of farming and how to minimize mistakes with good planning."
- "Having to put together a cost analysis or budget for any service or enterprise being undertaken was an eye-opener. The Farm School encouraged me to rethink some of my plans and implementation."
- "This school was most helpful in opening doors in the field of agriculture and putting useful information at our fingertips."
- "Farm School taught me how to market my products and how to accurately price my products so that I was not undervaluing my labor and my expenses."
- "The class made us re-examine all of our products and profitability – long overdue!"



**Foothills farm school participants listen to Art Duckworth at Apple Orchard Farm on a chilly morning of January 2014 about whole farm planning.**

Classes meet at the Catawba County Extension Center on the first Tuesday of the month beginning on January from 6 to 9 pm. Farm field days are typically on the second Thursday of the month from 9 am to 3 pm. Farm field days will take place at various farms throughout the Foothills.

Space is limited. Registration deadline is Friday, December 5, and costs are as follows: one person, \$250; two people from the same farm, \$400. For more information, contact the Der Xiong or Kellyn Montgomery at Cooperative Extension Service by visiting <http://catawba.ces.ncsu.edu> or calling 828-465-8240.