

TAG Workshop at FVSU Attracts Hundreds of Georgians

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Maryann Ondrovic woke up early September 20 to attend the free one-day Small, Beginning, and Limited Resource Farmer Workshop at Fort Valley State University. She and her husband, Richard, said they had no regrets driving from Dublin to attend the event. "It surpassed our expectations. We've never attended one of these meetings before," Ondrovic said. "I was not expecting the high caliber of expertise that we found here";

The event, sponsored by Team Agriculture Georgia (TAG) and the USDA Risk Management Agency, was for the benefit of agricultural landowners and producers. The workshop included information sessions and educational materials about technical assistance and various services available to them. Nearly 300 people attended the free workshop, held in the C.W. Pettigrew Farm and Community Life Center. Many said they left with a wealth of information. The Ondrovics attended the event because they are considering growing organic fruits or vegetables for their own consumption and to sell locally. "We just want to be aware of what's going on in the environment. We don't think food should be shipped from Mexico or China; we should buy local," Maryann Ondrovic said. "You buy a strawberry today and it doesn't taste like a strawberry. The fruit today doesn't have any taste." The couple attended three sessions and learned about several farm-related issues, including marketing, selecting enterprises, financial support for business owners, and raising organic produce. Suzanne Welander, Communications and Outreach Director for Georgia Organics, addressed issues of locally grown produce during her luncheon presentation. The non-profit representative described a buy local movement that's gaining interest from consumers who want to support farmers, eat healthy, and enjoy the fresh taste of vegetables and fruits. "The consumers are feeling a lack of connection with where their food comes from," Welander said, referring to big companies in the food industry. The event also offered sessions about aquaculture, pastured poultry, beekeeping and sustainable natural resources. Experts from several institutions and organizations, including Fort Valley State, The University of Georgia, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and the Georgia Forestry Commission, led the session workshops. "There was a large turnout today. It's obvious that there is a definite need for this workshop," said Marc Thomas, TAG chairman. "The purpose of this event was to show farmers, and potential farmers, the different options available to them to earn income." This is the 19th workshop TAG has coordinated since its inception in 1996, Thomas said. TAG—comprised of representatives from federal and state agencies, agricultural groups, agricultural institutions and non-governmental agricultural organizations—was created to further outreach efforts and availability of agricultural resources to benefit producers and communities, and conserve natural resources. "Overall, we hope the workshop attendees gained some knowledge and training to be more efficient and better managers of their operations," Thomas said. "Also, we wanted to provide them with the tools needed to accomplish their farming goals";

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