

carolina farm
stewardship association



NC STATE
UNIVERSITY

Organic Commodities & Livestock Conference

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

8:00 a.m. - 4:15 p.m.

Pittsboro, NC



This conference is supported through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP). TOPP is a program of the USDA Organic Transition Initiative and is administered by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) National Organic Program (NOP).

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

8 - 9 AM	Registration, Breakfast* & Welcome
9 - 10:15 AM	Morning Breakout A
10:15 - 10:45 AM	Exhibit Hall & Networking
10:45 AM - 12 PM	Morning Breakout B
12 - 1:30 PM	Lunch & Keynote Panel*
1:30 - 2:45 PM	Afternoon Breakout
2:45 - 4 PM	Exhibit Hall & Networking
3:15 - 4:15 PM	Tour at CCCC Student Organic Farm

*Breakfast and lunch are in Exhibit Hall A.

Certified Crop Advisor CEUs

Eight conference sessions offer CCA CEUs, as highlighted at the bottom of each workshop description. If you would like to receive credit, please fill out the sign-in sheet for each session you attend.

Tickets on sale now!

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Saturday, April 25 & Sunday, April 26



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MORNING BREAKOUT A | 9 - 10:15 AM

Growing Food-Grade Organic Grains in the Southeast

Murray Brett, DaySpring Farms

Exhibit Hall A

Changing consumer preferences for locally-grown, organic, and whole-grain products have created new market opportunities for commodity farmers in the Southeast. DaySpring Farms is a Certified Organic Farm specializing in a full line of wheat flours and corn products, grown and managed, cleaned, and milled on-site. Murray shares a brief history of the farm and the transition from a business plan combining growing produce and running scrub cattle to row crop cultivation and the construction of an on-site grain cleaning and milling facility. He covers basic agronomy for growing food grains, including quality, health, and environmental standards; nutrient management; diverse rotations; and variety selection for high-value markets. The session also explores the economics of growing food-grade grains and opportunities in value-added production.

CCA CEUs: Crop Management: 1; Sustainability: 1.

Tracking Number: NC 53612.

Soy or No Soy? Making Informed Feed Decisions

Alyssa Atwater, Resaca Sun Feeds

Meeting Room A

Alyssa takes a practical look at soy-free feeds for livestock, covering why some farmers are moving away from soy, whether animals truly need it, and what it takes to replace soy in diets. She shares real-world data on growth, performance, and costs, as well as information about alternative ingredients and the impact of soy-free feeding on the end product. The goal is to help farmers weigh the costs and benefits of soy-free feeds and determine the best fit for their operation.

Establishing Sustainable Employment with the H-2A Visa Program

Catherine Watts, Labor Services International

Emma Hendel, Fair Share Farm

Meeting Room B

As farm businesses face growing labor challenges, many diversified operations utilize the H-2A visa program (for temporary agricultural workers) to ensure a seasonal workforce and fill labor gaps, while providing dignified employment on organic farms. Catherine covers the basics of the H-2A program, including costs, requirements, regulations, and the application process, while debunking common myths. Elliot delivers an administrative perspective, from advance planning and securing housing to managing employees, and explaining how the program has transformed operations at Fair Share Farm.

Evaluating Microbial Biostimulants in Organic Production Systems

Meeting Room C

Mallory Choudoir, NC State University

Microbial biostimulants are a rapidly growing class of agricultural inputs designed to improve crop performance, but their real-world benefits can vary widely. Mallory provides a brief overview of the current commercial landscape of biostimulants approved for organic production, their potential functions, and future research needs. She will share findings from field and greenhouse trials evaluating efficacy of certified organic microbial biostimulants for soybean and lettuce production. She will also summarize biostimulant considerations and best practices, with a goal of helping organic farmers assess the potential versus the practical reality of using microbial biostimulants in row and specialty crops.

CCA CEUs: Nutrient Management: 1; Soil & Water Management: 1; Sustainability: 1.

Tracking Number: NC 53613

Pasture Management From the Ground Up

Meeting Room D

Roddy Pick, Kingbird Pastures

Raising healthy animals begins with building healthy soil. As a grass-fed beef and goat herdsman, Roddy Pick has learned to focus as much on soil science and land stewardship as on livestock management, recognizing that a thriving ecosystem allows animals to flourish naturally. In this session, Roddy shares his holistic approach to caring for his 175-acre farm and cultivating a more resilient landscape. He explains how practices such as rotational and multispecies grazing, no-till farming, and eliminating pesticides and herbicides work together to restore the land—while producing nutrient-dense, high-quality meat.

Decision Trees: Determining If Silvopasture is Right for Your Farm

Exhibit Hall A

Wyn Miller, Appalachian Sustainable Development & Lick Skillet Farm

In this session, Wyn explores a range of silvopasture models, outlining their benefits, limitations, and key design and maintenance considerations. The discussion also covers practical pathways to implementation, including available funding sources and technical assistance. Models examined include softwood, hardwood, and mast systems, as well as variants such as coppice and pollard systems, grazed orchards, and poultry-based models. To support decision-making, Wyn introduces a silvopasture “decision tree” to help landowners identify the model best suited to their operation, along with a map highlighting financial and technical assistance resources.

CCA CEUs: Crop Management: 1; Sustainability: 1

Tracking Number: NC 53614

Soil, Sunflowers, and Fiber Hemp: Emerging Organic Research

David Suchoff & Alex Woodley, NC State University

Meeting Room A

Alex provides an overview of ongoing research on enhanced basalt rock weathering in organic systems, examining it as both a pH tool and a method for carbon sequestration. David discusses current research on the production of organic sunflower and organic fiber hemp.

CCA CEUs: Crop Management: 1; Sustainability: 0.5.

Tracking Number: NC 53617.

Growing Berries Organically in the Southeast

Craig Mauney, NC Cooperative Extension

Jay Dunbar, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association

Meeting Room B

Craig focuses on practical knowledge and skills for cultivating caneberry crops using organic methods, covering soil preparation, planting techniques, organic fertilizers, pest and disease management, pruning, trellising, and harvesting. Jay shares his experience managing a certified organic berry operation and the key factors for success in growing blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries in the Southeast.

CCA CEUs: Crop Management: 1; Sustainability: 1.

Tracking Number: NC 53616

Building Relationships & Trust with Organic Farmers

Debbie Roos, NC State Cooperative Extension

Meeting Room C

Organic farmers often feel excluded from land-grant programs due to a historical focus on conventional agriculture, a lack of organic-specific expertise among staff, and insufficient funding for organic research. Debbie explores practical strategies for Extension agents to build meaningful relationships and trust with organic farmers rooted in real-life experience. She leads a group discussion on how to engage respectfully with farmers' knowledge and foster long-term partnerships that support the success of organic farming, drawing from over 25 years of experience as an Agricultural Extension Agent serving sustainable and organic agricultural producers in Chatham County and surrounding areas.

CCA CEUs: Professional Development: 1; Sustainability: 0.5

Tracking Number: NC 53615.

On-Farm Organic Certification for Pastured Poultry

Rebecca Bills, R&R Acres

Meeting Room D

The limited availability of certified organic processors for small-scale poultry significantly restricts farmers' options for marketing organically raised birds. Rebecca shares the decisions that led her to pursue on-farm organic certification for poultry processing, the challenges she encountered working with certifiers, and the ongoing requirements for maintaining compliance. She also explores the true costs of raising certified organic pastured poultry, including the specialty feed blends she relies on to meet nutritional standards, and reflects on how organic certification has influenced her sales and market opportunities.

Strengthening Organic Agriculture With Local Supply Chains

Facilitated by Roland McReynolds, CFSA

Exhibit Hall A

Melinda Fitzgerald and Eric Henry, two regional business owners who work closely with Carolina farmers, share their insights on what's working—and what's not—in local agriculture and supply chains. The sector suffers from gaps in infrastructure, skilled labor, and technical training, leaving farmers with limited support and business owners facing difficult decisions. Drawing on decades of experience supporting farmers through community-based value chains, Melinda and Eric explore how investment in technical skills and strong local relationships—from farm supply stores to garment producers—can help growers weather global uncertainty, strengthen regional economies, and sustain organic farming at a human scale.



Melinda Fitzgerald
Country Farm & Home Supply

Melinda Fitzgerald is the owner-operator at Country Farm and Home, where she has helped expand access to organic and sustainable farming supplies across the Carolinas. After 13 years of teaching environmental stewardship to middle school students, she joined the family business in 2008. Melinda focused on broadening the store's selection of organic products and on strengthening connections between local farmers and the resources they need. Under her leadership, the business has grown significantly, serving a wider regional community through both in-store sales and expanding farmer delivery routes across the Carolinas.



Eric Henry
*TS Designs, Solid State Clothing,
Piedmont Agrarian Collaborative*

Eric Henry is the president and co-founder of TS Designs, a North Carolina-based apparel company known for building transparent, domestic supply chains. In 1994, when NAFTA shifted much of the apparel industry overseas, Eric redirected the company toward a sustainable, local model centered on a "triple bottom line" of people, planet, and profit. Under his leadership, TS Designs became NC's first apparel B Corporation in 2008. Beyond his company, Eric has helped strengthen regional supply chains and the local community through initiatives such as the Burlington Biodiesel Co-op, Piedmont Fibershed, and the Piedmont Agrarian Collaborative.

SAVE THE DATE:



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AFTERNOON BREAKOUT | 1:30 - 2:45 PM

Budget-Friendly Cover Cropping

Exhibit Hall A

Austin Menker, NC State Cooperative Extension

Recommendations for cover crop applications commonly rely on Extension research; however, these methods do not always translate to real-world conditions and can be cost-prohibitive for large-scale growers. Austin presents insights from a series of interviews conducted in 2025 with farmers who have used cover crops for 10 years or more. These interviews highlight common trends, practical recommendations, and on-farm applications, with an emphasis on budget-conscious strategies. The session helps farmers understand the importance of setting farm-specific cover crop goals to guide management, improve returns, and assess the fit of more budget-friendly strategies.

CCA CEUs: Soil & Water Management: 0.5; Crop Management: 0.5; Sustainability: 1.

Tracking Number: NC 53611.

Best Practices for Working with Your Meat Processor

Gerry Cohn, Firsthand Foods

Atiq Chaudhry, Chaudhry Halal Meats

John McQueary, Mary Mel Farm

Meeting Room A

Demand for locally produced meat has continued to rise since the pandemic, placing additional pressure on small and niche processors. This growth has, at times, led to processing bottlenecks, supply chain disruptions, and strained relationships between livestock producers and abattoirs. In this panel discussion, industry experts share best practices for working successfully with a local meat processor. Topics include effective communication, scheduling strategies, low-stress animal drop-off and pickup procedures, and clear, accurate cut-sheet instructions to help ensure a smooth, mutually beneficial partnership.

Lessons from the Field: Growing a Farmer Co-op

Donn Cooper, Georgia Organic Peanut Association

Meeting Room B

Established in 2019, the Georgia Organic Peanut Association is a farmer-owned cooperative that markets USDA-certified organic peanuts and other agricultural products. Donn discusses the factors that led him and fellow farmers to form the cooperative, the day-to-day realities of sustaining it, and the lessons they wish they had addressed earlier. He reflects on what has worked, what has not, and offers practical guidance for adapting the cooperative model to other commodities—creating new opportunities for small and beginning producers in the Carolinas.

AFTERNOON BREAKOUT | 1:30 - 2:45 PM

Understanding NRCS Programs and Updates in 2026

Karen McSwain, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association

Jaimie McGirt, Rural Advancement Foundation International

Meeting Room C

USDA-NRCS conservation programs offer technical and financial assistance to help farmers improve soil health, transition to organic production, adopt conservation practices, and strengthen whole-farm resilience. This session will explain how planning tools such as Conservation Planning Activities (CPAs) and Design & Implementation Activities (DIAs), together with conservation practices like Organic Management, support farmers in developing and implementing effective conservation systems. Presenters will also review recent NRCS updates, including the new Regenerative Pilot Program, and discuss what these changes mean for farmers deciding whether and how to engage with NRCS programs in 2026.

CCA CEUs: Professional Development: 0.5; Sustainability: 0.5.

Tracking Number: NC 53618.

FARM TOUR | 3:15 - 4:15 PM

Guided Tour of the Student Organic Farm at Central Carolina Community College

This tour meets at 764 West Street in Pittsboro (a 2-minute drive).

From the Chatham County Ag Center: Turn left onto US HWY 64 E, then take your first left into the CCCC parking lot. The farm is on your left.

Join Farrell Moose and Angie Oliva for a behind-the-scenes tour of CCCC's certified organic student farm—a year-round operation tucked into the college's Pittsboro campus. Farrell walks through the farm's five-year cover-cropping strategy and how field rotations are planned across its two productive acres. Angie gets into the practical realities of organic certification for a small-scale diversified farm.

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