Richburg Farms – September's Feature from the Florida Small Farms Study Tour, May 2007

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Twenty UF-IFAS and FAMU faculty members from diverse disciplines and counties participated in a week-long in-service training tour of 24 successful southeastern small farms (Breman, Hochmuth, Treadwell and Landrum, 2007).

The Richburg Farm is a success story of how a traditional corn, soybean, and small grains farm in rural South Carolina transitioned to success through innovation, experimentation, and marketing.

Richburg Farms has diversified for economic reasons, with the assistance of their Extension agent, Russell Duncan, and by experimentation with clientele’s crop preference. The 35 acres of diverse crops (strawberries, tomatoes, cucumbers, watermelons, muscadine grapes, and blackberries) are concentrated around David's home, a focal point for creative marketing. From this marketing base, David hosts school tours which are marketed as far as 30 miles away. Spring school tours feature hay rides, a small petting zoo and a clam shell full of u-pick strawberries. Strawberries are one of his major enterprises, primarily marketed as U-pick, but some are sold at the farmers market in Manning. Fall school tours feature pumpkins under a tree and building life-like scarecrows for the kids to take back to their classes. He charges five dollars per child and has approximately 2,000 school youth tour each year. Fall is usually his best season for the school tours.
Muscadine grapes are picked and directly marketed at the farmers market, as are the tomatoes, watermelons, and cucumbers. Field crops occupy the remaining 665 acres. This farm shows how marketing can help a family farm even in a rural area with a limited clientele population.

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Many lessons can be learned from the Richburg Farm that might help farmers in Florida. The main theme of trying to provide a farm experience for urban clientele throughout the calendar year is an important key to success. The farm promotes its calendar from April through November as follows (Treadwell, 2007):

April – May: Strawberries (U-pick, we pick), hanging baskets, bedding plants, country gift items.

June – August: Tomatoes, other summer vegetables in season.

August – September: Muscadine grapes.

October – November: Pumpkins, decorative fall items, school tours, hayrides.

Another lesson that can be learned is how convenient the Richburgs make the farm visit for clientele. They have picnic tables, children play areas, rest rooms, petting pens of goats and sheep, hayride wagons designed for safety and youth, an interesting and varied wooded as well as planted route for the hay ride, and standardized containers for U-pick crops. Churches and civic groups are welcomed and accommodated through marketing and a reservation system that caters to the group activity. Essentially, a large group reserves the rights to the farm for the day.

County faculty who would like to help their farmers with vegetable production information can obtain the most current UF-IFAS recommendations should obtain a copy of the 2006-2007 vegetable production handbook for Florida (Olson and Simmone, 2007).

References:
