

Southern Regional Small Fruits Consortium Grant Progress Report

Submitted by Deborah B. McGiffin; Moore County Extension Director & Principal Investigator

Project: Development of consumer education resources for muscadine products and health benefits for Extension programming

Since March 16, 2020, the day most of North Carolina governmental and educational institutions went into "lockdown" and throughout the remainder of 2020 the Moore County Extension office has had to endure considerable programmatic restrictions across all Extension program areas, and additionally has withstood a consequential staff reduction. Due to the retirement of Taylor Williams, our previous horticulture agent, having two other agents out on extended medical leave, having to abide by the county policy which mandated limiting on-site county staff, and switching Extension from face-to-face to all online remote programming, as the Moore County Extension Director, my first and foremost responsibility was to direct county Extension staff and programs under COVID-19 operational protocols, as required by the State of North Carolina and County of Moore, as well as, pick up the administrative slack as a result of the situations already described. Additionally, other co-investigators listed in the grant proposal as referenced above and awarded to the Moore County Cooperative Extension Service from the Southern Region Small Fruits Consortium last January, were also pulled away from their normal Extension duties to develop relevant virtual programs and content that addressed the interruptions in agricultural supply chains and other interruptions to the livelihoods of North Carolinians brought on by the pandemic. All of these factors substantially thwarted our ability and the timeline to complete the grant as originally proposed. Because of these issues, in October I did request and was granted a one-year extension to fulfill the consumer educational resource development project that SRSFC generously funded.

We are committed and looking forward to resuming our contractual obligation and desire to fulfill the terms of the grant proposal. As this year is looking hopeful for an eventual return to more normal routines, I don't foresee any substantial obstacles that would again curtail implementing the grant fully, and furthermore, I should have the committed attentiveness of the co-investigators whose expertise and advice is essential to developing accurate and quality consumer materials and resources on muscadines. Therefore, as we move forward we intend on successively completing the project explained in the grant proposal by the end of 2021 by concentrating on the following objectives:

- 1) Developing web-based in-service agent training modules on marketing strategies for promoting muscadine grapes to consumer markets.
- 2) Developing consumer educational videos on the health benefits of muscadine grapes.
- 3) Creating and updating region-wide consumer education publications that focus on muscadines in home gardens and the health benefits of muscadines. Publications will include a 2-page handout to give out at consumer events and a longer more in-depth web-based version.

The rationale for pursuing this project is to promote the muscadine industry by making consumers aware of the health benefits of consuming muscadine grapes. Muscadines are rich in phytochemical antioxidants and recent studies have found that muscadines can inhibit the growth of certain forms of cancer. The muscadine grape is native to and widely grown throughout the southeastern US. However, it is consumer acceptance that drives muscadine production and profitability. Consumer acceptance and awareness of the nutritional health advantages of

muscadines and of the various ways muscadines can be consumed can be achieved by developing resources that Extension agents can present and use to educate consumers.

Our team will work with the muscadine growers' association in North Carolina and similar structures in GA and SC to develop educational resource materials which will include videos and documents, and they will be vetted by researchers and Extension professionals. Once developed they will serve as a resource for 4H, Family and Consumer Sciences, Agriculture, EFNEP, grower associations and other Extension programs. Additionally, printed materials can be displayed at county Extension Centers for consumers to pick up, and posting the resources online will ensure a diverse consumer audience is reached and also has access to the educational information. Development by Extension ensures the credible, educational, and sustainability of these materials and will serve to benefit the financial viability of muscadine producers and the healthful benefits to consumers.

Below is the revised timeline and outline of the materials to be produced and finalized in the during 2021:

Outline of outcomes:

Product	Content	Timeline	Outreach via
Videos	2 videos, one including interviews with experts on health benefits (e.g. Dr. Perkins-Vaezie) and one with growers and specialists on muscadines. A videographer will be helping to create video content	Jan 2021 – Aug 2021: Develop video content; Aug-Sept 2021: Shooting footage; Oct 2021-Dec 2021: Editing and completing final video production.	Web Portals (NCSU grape portal, GA viticulture blog, Clemson Extension Homepage), social media and YouTube channels (e.g. Dr. Hoffmann's YouTube channel).
2-page Handout	Developing a 2 page print handout on muscadine health benefits and production for consumers to distribute in GA, SC and NC. Help with the Local Foods initiative, 4-H initiative, GA and NC specialists, and Clemson Extension Service.	Jan 2021-Aug 2021: Developing content and layout. Aug 2021 – Dec 2021: Printing and distributing in three states.	Print Media Advertisement through 4-H programs, local foods programs, consumer portals in NC, SC and GA.
Web Document	Developing a 6-7 page web document in accompany to the 2-page flyer on muscadine health benefits and production for consumers to distribute in GA, SC and NC. Help with the Local Foods initiative, 4-H initiative, GA and NC specialists, and Clemson Extension Service.	Jan 2021-Aug 2021: Developing content and layout. Aug 2021 – Dec 2021: Implementing the web document in three states.	Advertisement through 4-H programs, local foods programs, consumer portals in NC, SC and GA.
Agent Training	Develop web-based in-service agent training modules in areas of marketing strategies	Jan 2021-Aug 2021: Develop agent training modules; Aug 2021 - Dec 2021: Implement agent training sessions.	Trainings hosted through Zoom Video Conferencing platform and housed on NCSU Local Foods Agents' Resources Portal.

Budget: Printing costs: \$1,500
 Video Production: \$2,000
 Agent training: no additional cost
 Travel: \$1000
 Student Help: \$500
Total Budget: \$5,000