

St. Martin Parish Horticulture Advisory Leadership Council (ALC)

The St. Martin Parish Horticulture ALC met on September 18, 2007. The council members included Mary Serrette, June Theriot, Rayln Boudreaux, Odel Trahan, Tom Mullally, and Debbie Richard. Each member was asked to introduce themselves and provide some personal information. The purpose of the Advisory Council was explained: a) to develop an effective educational program taking into consideration the situation, needs and expressed desires of the people of the parish; b) to give people an opportunity to express felt needs and desires for programs by the Extension Service; c) to provide an opportunity to involve the leadership of the people for whom the program is intended; d) to provide an educational experience for the persons who are involved; e) To develop public awareness of the value of Extension programs; f) to assure Extension personnel that planned Extension programs will meet the needs of their clientele.

Council members were selected because they are recognized as a leader in their community and respected by their peers. The primary role of Council member is to represent the needs of their peers and assist the Ag Center in developing, implementing and evaluating high quality programs to meet the parish needs. Member responsibilities and roles were discussed.

Horticulture enterprises are important to Louisiana and the local economy. Commercial vegetables are grown on 10,281 acres in Louisiana with a farm value of \$48 million. The commercial vegetable crops grown in St. Martin Parish are okra (70 acres), tomatoes (10 acres), cayenne pepper (4 acres), cabbage (2 acres), and sweet corn (10 acres). The farm value of the commercial vegetables in St. Martin Parish is \$750,000.

In Louisiana, there are numerous fruit/nut crops grown which include: citrus, blackberries, blueberries, peaches, strawberries, figs, muscadines, pears and pecan. Citrus was grown on 748 acres with a farm value of \$3.6 million. In St. Martin Parish, there was seven acres of citrus grown with a farm value of \$70,000. Louisiana harvested 17 million pounds of pecans in 2006, which is 3 million pounds above the recent state average of 14 million pounds. The crop consisted of 6.3 million pounds of improved pecans and 10.7 million pounds of native pecans. The gross farm value was \$18 million, which is an increase of \$13 million over last year's value. In St. Martin Parish, pecans are grown on 850 acres, 100 acres of improved varieties and 750 acres of native trees. The farm value of the pecan crop was \$486,000. Fig trees are grown on ten acres in the parish with a farm value of \$5,250.

The 2006 gross farm value of home vegetable gardens in Louisiana was estimated to be \$60 million. In the parish, there was 3100 home vegetable gardens with a farm value of \$620,000.

The council expressed concern for the residential developments that are coming up throughout the parish. Valuable farmland has been lost to the housing boom. Consumer horticulture information will continue to increase with influx of new parish residents.

Numerous horticultural topics were discussed to address the various needs of the parish clientele. The following topics were suggested as educational workshops for the next year: a) community gardens; b) composting; c) butterfly gardens; d) new ornamentals for Louisiana landscapes; e) weed control; and f) organic principles. In conclusion, the council members were thanked for cooperating with the Extension Service in planning, implementing and evaluating educational programs.