

News

North Carolina Research Campus, Kannapolis

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Media Contact: Leah Chester-Davis, coordinator of communications and community outreach, N.C. MarketReady, 704-250-5406 or leah_chester-davis@ncsu.edu

Local Farmer Awarded Funding from N.C. Value-Added Cost Share Program

Nooherooka Natural: Delivering Value-Added Beef in Eastern North Carolina

KANNAPOLIS, N.C. – Ossie and Mary Betty Kearney, along with son Andrew, all farmers in Snow Hill, N.C., were recipients of an N.C. Value-Added Cost Share (NCVACS) award. The Kearneys own and operate Nooherooka Natural, a farm that specializes in Black Angus beef raised without added hormones or antibiotics. The Kearneys distribute their beef to retail locations, restaurants and individual families throughout eastern North Carolina. The business is at a pivotal stage of growth where demand for their product could outpace supply without careful inventory management. Nooherooka Natural is one of nine award recipients of the first round of funding available through the NCVACS program.

NCVACS is administered by N.C. MarketReady, a program of N.C. Cooperative Extension located at the N.C. Research Campus. The cost share program, funded by the N.C. Tobacco Trust Fund Commission, was launched in 2009 to encourage more North Carolina producers to apply for the VAPG federal funds and to generate more competitive applications. The Kearney's cost share award is valued at \$3,500 for professional grant writing assistance. Contingent upon receipt of a VAPG planning grant, the Kearney's will also be awarded \$10,000 in matching funds from NCVACS for a feasibility assessment.

"I'm looking forward to working with an outside professional who can help us analyze the business of the farm, says Mary Betty. "Of course, we keep the books regularly and see the cash flow, but we don't typically stop to analyze business performance. Doing so will help us see what the next step should be to maintain a viable, growing business."

Though the Kearneys have been farming for many years, it was only since 2003 that they began transitioning the farm to specialize in "natural" beef. The Nooherooka Black Angus herd is given no antibiotics, no added hormones and no feed additives. They are raised on pasture and grain finished with a corn and soybean ration grown on the farm. The Kearneys are in the process of applying for certifications as a farm that is Animal Welfare Approved and "Never ever" natural. "Never ever" demonstrates a commitment to never giving cattle any form of hormones, steroids, implants or growth stimulants. The "Never ever" designation is a step beyond certified natural, which allows antibiotic and hormone use provided a withdrawal period is met prior to harvest.

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Currently, Nooherooka Natural harvests two to three cows every two weeks. They work with a processor more than two hours away where the beef is dry aged for 21 days. Though the local market is rather sparse, the Kearneys have worked many delivery points into their return trip from the butcher, including stops in Pittsboro, Durham and Saxapahaw. Chatham Marketplace and Saxapahaw General Store are two retail grocers that receive biweekly deliveries. The Kearneys pick up the vacuum-packaged fresh beef (not frozen) and merchandise their retail-ready product at these two locations. The meat is stamped with a “freeze by” date that helps them keep the product offering at its freshest. Both grocers also have cafés that employ chefs who use fresh beef, including the more unusual cuts, in their daily menus.

Andrew Kearney works on the farm managing the row crop production. He grows corn, soybeans and tobacco, using no-till production methods whenever possible. They also employ three part-time workers. Of the 400 acres farmed by the Kearneys, 70 acres are devoted to cattle production.

Mary Betty handles the marketing which has included everything from television and radio advertising to a brochure and display at local festivals. Recently, Nooherooka Natural hosted a special event by donating beef soup bones for the East Carolina University campus dining staff to use in homemade soups for the students and faculty. A Soup Class was held in the dining hall and in exchange for a canned food donation, faculty received a bag of beef soup bones. Soup bones from Nooherooka and canned foods were donated to the Joy Soup Kitchen and campus kitchen.

Another marketing avenue they are exploring is the use of electronic communications, such as e-mail and the Internet. They also are currently realigning their marketing efforts to increase retail sales for greater profit potential. The NCVACS award is one of the first steps in growing the business to ensure there’s plenty of beef for their retail and wholesale customers. In the meantime, Nooherooka Natural is available by pre-ordering. For more information, visit their Web site at <http://www.nooherooka.com>.

N.C. MarketReady, formerly known as the Program for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture, is a program of N.C. Cooperative Extension, which is an educational outreach of N.C. State University and N.C. A&T State University. N.C. MarketReady’s multidisciplinary team builds partnerships and educational resources to help North Carolina agriculture be more profitable. N.C. MarketReady is a partner of the Plants for Human Health Institute at the N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis. Learn more at www.ncmarketready.org or www.ces.ncsu.edu.

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Writer: Megan Bame