North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

Agricultural Research Program

Consumer demand is growing for antibiotic- and hormone-free pork from animals raised in accord with animal welfare guidelines.

N.C. A&T helping tobacco farmers replace lost income

GREENSBORO, N.C. – A growing market for premium pork spells new opportunities for struggling tobacco farmers in North Carolina.

The Agricultural Research Program at North Carolina Agriculture and Technical State University is showing downsized tobacco farmers how to raise old-fashioned hog breeds outdoors, without the use of antibiotics or hormones, and in accord with animal welfare guidelines. In so doing, they are meeting a growing consumer demand for upscale meat products. These consumers are willing to pay a higher price – either out of a desire to support animal welfare and sustainable agriculture – or because the product just tastes better. The project has grown out of Dr. Charles Talbott's research interest in developing alternative hog diets that can yield superior flavor.

Chefs and gourmet cooks praise the flavor that these sustainable production practices impart, while small farmers are enthusiastic about a new opportunity to replace income lost to cutbacks in their tobacco allotments.

"The meat tastes so much better. I think that's going to make the difference for the small producer," says Hollie Brown, a farmer in Duplin County who has seen his tobacco allotment cut in half, and is now raising hogs to supplement his income.

As the second largest swine producing state in the country, North Carolina has plenty of potential to develop new markets for pork. This is just one of many projects at the School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at N.C. A&T to help limited resource and downsized tobacco farmers find other crops and livestock that can compare in profitability with the golden leaf.

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