

NC Cooperative Extension, Craven Center



Agricultural Update

January 2026

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Important Note: Registration deadline for events listed below will vary from as few as 24 hours prior the event to as much as 3-4 days prior the event so please register as much in advance as possible. Also, while attendance is open to anyone, meals, when served, will only be provided for those that register in advance.

UPCOMING EVENTS

US Flue-cured Tobacco GAP meetings have been scheduled. For producers within NC, all meetings are scheduled for January 2026. Below is the scheduled meetings. All will be held within the NC Extension office of the location listed and will begin at 9 AM. Specific details, updates, cancellations, or changes are posted at [GAP Connections](#).

Date	Location
Jan 20th	Goldsboro
Jan 28th	Greenville

The NC Commodities Conference will take place on January 14-15, 2026 at the Greenville Convention Center located at 303 SW Greenville Blvd., Greenville, NC. Please Note : This is now a one day event on Jan 15th, 2026! Registration, agenda, hotel discounts and more information is found at the [NC Commodity Conference website](#).

Strawberry Grower Meeting – This meeting will be held on January 16 from 10AM - 12PM at the Lenoir County Extension Office (1791 Hwy 11/55 Kinston, NC). Presenter and topics include: Dr. Mark Hoffmann - Frost/Freeze Protection, Fertility, Variety Selection; Caleb Bollenbacher - Spring Disease Management; and, Dr. Lorena Lopez - Spring Insect Management. Pesticide credit for 1.5 hours for categories N, O, D, X will apply.

Area Corn & Soybean Production - Join us on January 22, 2026 from 9 am - 12:30 pm at the Jones County Civic Center, 832 NC-58, Trenton, for updates from NC State University faculty members, Dr. Nick Piggott and Derek Washburn to examine economic outlook, commodity markets, enterprise budget tools and more. Additional topics to be presented include soil moisture measurements for crop management, compliance with the Endangered Species Act, and, NC Soybean On-Farm Trail Results. Pesticide credit of 2 hours for Categories, N,O, D & X apply. The meeting will conclude with a meal for those that register in advance on Eventbrite. Register [HERE](#).

Private Applicator Safety Training - Immediately following the Area Corn & Soybean Production meeting on January 22, 2026, we will provide 2.0 hours of credit for Private Applicator Safety Training (Category V). For those that do not wish to attend the previous meeting, simply join us at 2 pm at the Jones County Civic Center, 832 NC-58, Trenton, NC. Registration in advance required. Register [HERE](#).

Vegetable Insect and Disease Update – This meeting will be held on January 26 from 10am – 12 PM at the Lenoir County Extension Office (1791 Hwy 11/55 Kinston, NC). Presenters and topics include: Dr. Jim Walgenbach - Insect Control in Fruiting Vegetables and Cucurbits; Dr. Adrienne Gorny - Nematode Control for Vegetable Growers; Speaker TBD - Be On the Lookout - Emerging Diseases and Insect Pests in Vegetables; Pesticide credits for 2.0 hours for categories N, O, D, X pesticide credits apply.

Area Soybean Schools

In depth discussion for soybean production will be provided by joint efforts of NC Extension and NC Soybean Producers Association. These regional meetings will provide recent information and research data for soybean production in NC. Advance registration is required. Note that meeting time will vary by location. Register using the links in the article below.

*Mark Eubanks now serves as the Pesticide Coordinator and will present these classes. For questions regarding the certification process or other license concerns, please contact him at 252-633-1477 or by email to: meubank2@ncsu.edu

HOLD THESE DATES

As always, we reserve the right to make last minute changes but we have the following dates, topics and locations that we can share.

- February 16, 2026 - Peanut Production meeting in Pitt County
- February 20, 2026 - Area Cotton Production meeting to be held in Trenton, NC

Area Soybean Schools

In depth discussion for soybean production will be provided by joint efforts of NC Extension and NC Soybean Producers Association. These regional meetings will provide recent information and research data for soybean production in NC. Advance registration is required. Note that meeting time will vary by location. Register using the links below.

[Salisbury, January 22](#)

[Monroe, January 22](#)

[Elizabeth City, January 23](#)

[Smithfield, January 29](#)

[Jackson, January 30](#)

[Lumberton, February 3](#)

The Soybean School webpage is: <https://www.ncsoy.org/soybean-schools>

2026 Tobacco Short Course Application Deadline

The application for up to 30 participants to attend the Tobacco Short Course held Monday, February 2nd, 2026 through Wednesday, February 4th, 2026 is now open. This course will provide a one day flue-cured tobacco grading school, a site visit to a manufacturing facility, and lectures from NC State faculty and staff. Rooming will be at Homewood Suites - Crabtree, 5400 Homewood Banks Dr., Raleigh, NC 27612, and seminars will be in Raleigh (location TBD).

The production course will include current information on seedling production, sucker control, disease and insect management, mechanization, labor, and more.

Applications will be given priority in the following order: North Carolina tobacco growers; newly hired extension. All applicants should deliver the completed application to the Extension agent responsible for tobacco in their county Cooperative Extension office for signature no later than January 22, 2025. Contact your local Extension Agent for an application.

Using Crop Enterprise Budgets to Determine Breakeven Cost

Based on NCSU 2026 Enterprise budgets, one should examine all production inputs closely to evaluate the return on investment. If there is not strong evidence of a positive return of investment for use of a product, do not use it. Too, marketing will be critical to realize a profit. Without much price movement projected (at the time of writing, corn 2026 and 2027 December prices were about \$4.60 and \$4.70/bu, respectively), it will be important to book at least some of the 2026 crop during the winter months when prices tend to be highest. (Of course, anything can happen but it appears that unless trade resumes with China or that some catastrophe occurs within a major grain production region, prices are not likely to fluctuate much.) These budgets can be customized for your exact expenses and selling price to help you plan better. If you do not know your exact expenses, then use the existing NCSU Enterprise budget

estimates.

Below are highlights of the NCSU corn and soybean enterprise budgets for 2026* at different yield levels. Note that within the corn budget, it takes about 158 bu/ac average to break even for total production cost. This budget does not include land rental. As such, if one adds \$50/acre paid for rent, it will take a production average of 169 bu/ac to break even.

High Production for Corn (180+ bu/ac sold at \$5.23/bu) = \$838.60 cost per acre resulting in revenue of \$102/acre. Profit will be \$102 minus any payment of rent for land.

Moderate Production for Corn (140 bu/ac sold at \$5.23/bu) = \$726.66 cost per acre resulting in revenue of \$5.54/acre. Profit will be \$5.54 minus any payment of rent for land

Low Production for Corn (120 bu/ac sold at \$5.23/bu) = \$661.55 cost per acre resulting in a loss of **\$33.95/ac**. Additional loss will include whatever price is paid for rent.

These figures show that one should not grow corn on land that will not produce at least 140 bu/ac of corn at the given price. (Breakeven yield for the low production level is 139 bu/ac!). Unlike the "high and moderate production" levels, one cannot reduce seeding rates or fertility at the "Low" production level.

Soybean budgets show a similar trend. Generally soybean production at the high level (70+ bu/ac) continues to realize a profit. Moderate yield of 50 bu/ac may be profitable on land that is owned. Low yielding farms with about 35 bu/ac or less are not profitable even with no land rent included in the budget.

High Soybean Production (70+ bu/ac sold at \$11.42/bu) = \$590.22 cost per acre resulting in revenue of \$208.78. Profit will be this amount minus any land rental.

Moderate Soybean Production (50 bu/ac sold at \$11.42/bu) = \$546.69 cost per acre resulting in revenue of \$24.31/ac. Profit or loss will be this amount minus any land rental.

Low Soybean Production is not recommended. Given current input costs, if no land rent is paid, break-even yield is 33 bu/ac sold at \$11.42/bu.

Given narrow potential profit margins, it is indeed critical to know actual cost and evaluate land rental agreements. One will also need to answer some difficult questions. As example, with \$50 land rental provided in this example, breakeven at the given price is about 55 bu/ac for soybeans. However, payment of \$100/ac for land rent raises the breakeven production level to 59 bu/ac. In this case, is 59 bu/ac average yield really realistic for you? Be realistic in your evaluation. If one does not have a historically high soybean average, then one cannot pay \$100/acre and still be profitable. (To put this in perspective, the 3-year average for corn for this region is 149 bu/ac. The 3-year average for soybean is 42 bu/ac)

One fallacy is that higher rent can be paid yet inputs elsewhere can be reduced to offset the higher land rent cost. Reality shows this not to be the case. Something as simple as omitting lime application will negatively impact yield. Reducing required fertilization will impact yield. Eliminating pre-emergence herbicides will reduce yield. Should any one of these reduce yield even 10% below the target, well, one loses profit. The bottom line is that one cannot reduce input enough to offset the lower commodity prices.

While these budgets project a grim situation, there is hope. We are not facing a "new situation". We've been in this place before. There are two reasons we've survived this in the past. First, for most, equipment is older or at least paid in full. As such, we can cash flow our businesses using machinery equity or other equity. Secondly, government payments usually resume due to lower commodity prices. These two factors have kept us farming in the past so count on them to continue to aid us in 2026. So, for at least 2026, aim to break even to "live another day" until commodity prices increase and/or production prices decrease. This is not an "ideal goal" but until more favorable conditions exist we must manage cautiously. (Perhaps we might even get

lucky and Congress will pass a favorable Farm Bill!)

Now is also a great time to examine labor and equipment for optimum use. Plan as well as possible (we can't fix any weather related delays) to ensure that planting, weed management applications, lay-by fertilization, scouting, and other management decisions will be as timely as possible.

**These figures are provided within the NCSU 2026 Interactive Grain Budget <https://cals.ncsu.edu/agricultural-and-resource-economics/extension/business-planning-and-operations/enterprise-budgets/grain-budgets/>. If you know your expenses and can break them into cost per acre, one can determine breakeven cost for variable and total costs at differing yield and price levels. If assistance in this process or navigating the Excel sheet is needed, please contact us and we will be glad to help.*

Note: Derrick Washburn worked to create these budgets and will be a guest speaker at our Area Corn & Soybean Update at the Jones County Civic Center on January 22, 2026. If you have questions regarding the budget figures, equipment assumptions/use, etc., please plan to attend this meeting.

2026 Private Applicator Safety Training

Mark Eubanks will provide future classes for recertification of those with pesticide licenses. Due to construction work on the Craven County Agricultural Building, most classes in 2026 will be held in other counties or within the Craven on a limited basis. As such, pre-registration will be required to ensure we have adequate seating space. (All rooms have a capacity of 20).

To date, scheduled and approved classes are listed below. Check the [NCDA & CS Pesticide Training Course Calendar](#) or our [Event Webpage](#) in early 2026 for registration information.

- **Jan 22nd** immediately following the Area Corn & Soybean meeting at the Jones County Civic Center. Aim to begin at 2pm.
- **Jan 29th** at the CMAST Building in Carteret from 2-4 pm, Pesticide Safety, Category V
- **Feb 11th** at the CMAST Building in Carteret from Carteret from 9 am-1pm,. This class offers Private Applicator Safety, Category V and Specialty Credits for Category X
- **Feb 25th** at River Bend Large Conferences Room (51 shoreline Drive New Bern) from 9 am-1pm. This class offers Private Applicator Safety, Category V and Specialty Credits for Category X.

Ways to Meet the Target Production Cost

Each farm will indeed have differing input costs. However, profitable grower generally have lower input cost yet still obtain higher yield. Here are some tips that may provide means to meet that goal.

- Apply recommended lime between December and February when possible. It generally takes lime 3-6 months to react with enough soil to alter the soil pH. Thus, the optimum pH will be obtained from June-July when plants are at optimum stages of growth.
- Unless recommended by the NCDA & CS soil test report, do not broadcast phosphorus. Rather band phosphorus within a starter fertilizer. Excess amounts are generally any amount more than about 10 lbs./ac of actual phosphorous when the soil phosphorous index is moderate to high. As such, try to select starter fertilizers that do not contain high phosphorus. (Note: NCSU data shows that soils with high soil phosphorus do not yield higher corn yield when only a nitrogen starter is used (i.e. no phosphorous in the starter). Read this data in the [HERE](#).
- Apply the recommended amount of potassium but not excessive amounts. This is especially true if the potassium index is 50 or higher. Excess potassium will not increase yield.

- Where hard pans exists, break the hard pans with deep tillage when the soil is dry. Compacted soil layers that limit root systems, water movement, nutrient movement and biological activity reduce yield drastically.
- Choose most of your varieties based on your soil type, anticipated planting date, known disease pressure and OVT data. One should always try new varieties but do so on a limited basis. (For corn, soybean and wheat, use the tool [HERE](#). For cotton, visit [HERE](#).)
- Evaluate seeding rates carefully. For corn, unless soils are considered highly productive, avoid the higher seeding rates. For moderate corn yield, plant populations of 28,000-30,000 are generally acceptable. For soybean, reduce seeding rates to aim for a final plant population of 70,000-100,000/acre. The main point is that seed cost can easily result in \$100/acre or more. If excessive rates are planted, this is even higher! So, don't plant more than needed.
- Utilize pre-emergence herbicides when possible. Not only does this aid in control of many herbicide resistant weeds, it also provides for better early season crop growth. In some cases when early season pre-emergence products work well, it may delay or even negate the need for a post-emergence. (Well, at least for some fields. Some fields have such severe weed pressure that it takes multiple steps to manage weeds!)
- Apply post emergence products when weeds are less than 3 inches tall. Doing so will results in faster and generally higher weed mortality to increase yield. If the field historically requires more than one post-emergence application, often including another pre-emergence herbicide with the first application will eliminate the need for a second post-emergence application.
- Should adverse wet soils or cooler temperatures prevail, don't delay remedial actions such as application of lay-by nitrogen, early season insect management, weed control or other pest related problems.
- Aim to adjust your nitrogen rate for corn based on historic yield and soil type. Any other strategy will simply reduce profit. Nitrogen recommendations for corn are found at <https://realisticityields.ces.ncsu.edu/> **
- Avoid application of products that have not consistently proven to increase yield. There are indeed products that have been tested that when used under specific circumstances have shown to increase yield. However, most require a very specific set of circumstances to work. They have not been proven to work consistently. This includes various forms of nitrogen promoted to be more efficient. Read more [HERE](#).
- Some products have been proven to work but will only provide economic benefit under specific conditions. As example, Corteva's Utrisha N and Pivet Bio Proven 40 have been shown to provide equal or better yield when reduced rates of nitrogen are applied to corn. However, if one uses these products and also applies excessive nitrogen, not only will you not likely realize results from these product but you will reduce profit. So, aim to apply 100-120 lbs./ac of nitrogen should you use these products to remain profitable.
- Be timely. This seems simple, but it is not always possible. Prepare now to plant early, be aggressive to manage pests, and harvest early.

** Using Pamlico as the county, corn production of 187 bu/ac is reasonable on a Goldsboro soil when applying 147 lbs./ac of actual nitrogen. A soil of the Rain series in Craven is expected to make 180 bu/ac with 137 bu/ac of nitrogen. On-farm trials within these counties have shown that nitrogen rates of 150 lbs./ac will habitually produce 150-200+ bu/ac. Nitrogen is NOT the limiting factor in these cases. Other management decisions and weather are yield reducing factors.

Craven County Agricultural Building Remodeling

Just a reminder that remodeling is scheduled for the Craven County Agricultural Building beginning in September 2025 through June 2026. As such, the auditorium will be closed to the public during this time. Production meetings, events, pesticide classes, etc. will be held in

other buildings within the county or in other counties. Please note the location in these counties when announcements arrive in future emails, web posts, or newsletters.



NC Farm Help Line

Tariffs, low economic prices, unpredictable weather, age, labor problems, and many other factors contribute to stress of farming. In fact, whether we like it or not, agriculture has one of, if not the highest, accidental death rates due to equipment use, as well as the highest suicide rate for occupations. Do consider potential impact of things that can be a negative influence on production but please don't worry about things you cannot change! If you find yourself depressed, well, we can listen! If you are not comfortable discussing issues with us, help is available 24/7, through the Help Line that connects individuals experiencing a crisis or in need of other help with resources including mental health, financial, legal, farm safety/health, Cooperative Extension and more at 844-325-3276 or online at <https://ncfarmstress.org/crisis-and-resource-lines/>. Additionally, for tobacco producers, legal or labor assistance is available free from [GAP Connections](#)

Disclaimer:

Recommendations for the use of agricultural chemicals are included in this publication as a convenience to the reader. The use of brand names and any mention or listing of commercial products or services in this publication does not imply endorsement by the NC Cooperative Extension Service nor discrimination against similar products or services not mentioned. Individuals who use agricultural chemicals are responsible for ensuring that the intended use complies with current regulations and conforms to the product label. Be sure to obtain current information about usage regulations and examine a current product label before applying any product.

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Español

"Para dar cumplimiento a la Ley de Estadounidenses con Discapacidades (ADA), Extension aceptará las solicitudes de adaptaciones razonables que realicen las personas con discapacidades. Por favor, envíe las solicitudes de adaptaciones a: Mike Carroll at 252-633-1477 or email: mike_carroll@ncsu.edu. Las solicitudes podrán ser atendidas con mayor eficacia si se notifica con al menos 10 días de antelación al evento."

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<https://diversity.ncsu.edu/report-a-concern/>*

*You may also file a complaint with the USDA Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights for
discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability.
<https://www.usda.gov/oascr/program-complaints>*

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