

Market News

A recent \$3.9 million USDA grant is being used to help North Carolina's small-scale farmers develop a supply-chain system of their own. The five-year project, led by the Center for Environmental Farming Systems at NC State University - includes participation by Lowes Food grocery chain, Fort Bragg and others who can offer input on what larger retail and institution-based consumers need, reported *News Observer*. [Full Story](#)

Russia could produce 80 million metric tons of grain in 2013, an improvement on the drought-weakened harvest of 2012, according to a top Russian official quoted by *Interfax*. The Deputy Agriculture Minister stated the figure was not a firm forecast for the year but was the government's strategic target after a 24% year-on-year decline in the harvest in 2012. In 2011, Russia harvested a record 94.2 million tons of grain, a year after the country imposed a one-year export ban after a prolonged heat wave resulted in a dismal harvest of 61 million metric tons, reported *The Wall Street Journal*. [Full Story](#) (WSJ Subscription Required)

Shipments of corn from Illinois fell more than 30% last year, and soybeans were down 16%. Unprocessed soybeans and corn were the state's seventh-largest export last year, at nearly \$1.95 billion. "We came close to economic catastrophe when ongoing drought conditions threatened to disrupt the movement of billions of dollars in goods along the Mississippi River," stated Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) who introduced legislation to improve how the Mississippi River Basin is managed during extreme weather, reported *Crain's Chicago Business*. [Full Story](#) (Free Registration Required)

Irish scientists have spent the winter cloning new potato stock in an attempt to fight off blight. In the spring, they will start the test by setting out more than 2,000 transplants in a fenced field at the Irish agricultural research service's farm. Genetic engineering remains highly controversial in Europe, and the research in Ireland has spawned a campaign against it, reported *The Washington Post*. [Full Story](#)

U.S. lean-hog futures were lower March 18 amid weak pork

demand, speculative selling and broad pressure on commodities resulting from worries about Europe. CME lean hogs for April were recently down 0.5% to 79.3 cents\lb. Several factors are pressuring the hog market, including sluggish export demand for pork, as China has been buying domestic supplies to support its own producers. U.S. pork exports fell 15% by volume in January, and domestic pork supplies are relatively high as consumers are thought to be switching to lower-priced chicken instead of pork, reported *The Wall Street Journal*. [Full Story](#) (WSJ Subscription Required)

A sudden blast of Arctic air shocked late-planted soy fields in parts of Argentina's main grains province Buenos Aires, putting pressure on harvest expectations. The government expects a harvest of 51 million to 52 million tons of soybeans while consumer nations - in need of food supplies after disappointing grains crops in the U.S., Russia and Australia - are counting on Brazil and Argentina to provide ample harvests, reported *Reuters*. [Full Story](#)

JemD Farms, a leading greenhouse vegetable grower based in Leamington, ON, is adding to its greenhouse farm portfolio with a state-of-the-art farm and distribution center in Virginia. The U.S. operation will add to the company's current 400-plus acres of production and will be marketed under the "Red Sun" label, reported *The Produce News*. [Full Story](#)

Growers of Vidalia onions are asking the Georgia agricultural commissioner to set the official start date for shipping the trademarked sweet onions as April 15. Several growers stated in mid-March they plan to begin shipping small volumes April 8, reported *The Packer Online*. [Full Story](#)

UCLA researchers genetically engineered tomatoes to produce a peptide that mimics the actions of good cholesterol when consumed, according to a study published in *Journal of Lipid Research*. An early study found that mice that were fed these tomatoes in freeze-dried, ground form had less inflammation and plaque build-up in their arteries, reported *Science Daily*. [Full Story](#)

Buyers should expect light volume of Florida spring sweet corn until much later in the deal. An early March freeze harmed nearly half of early spring volume and is increasing demand and prices.

Growers lost up to 45% of the deal's early production, according to the president of Florida Sweet Corn Exchange and vice president and co-owner of R.C. Hatton Farms, reported *The Packer Online*. [Full Story](#)

Cattle ranchers in Northern California claim grasses are slow to grow this year, leading to challenges finding enough forage for their herds. While last year saw a dry fall and wet spring, this year has included the opposite pattern - a wet fall and dry spring, reported *California Farm Bureau Federation*. [Full Story](#)

A new series of citrus varieties was presented for launch this year from The Citrus Crops Program at the University of California. Presented during the first day of Citrus 2013, the two new varieties plans to launch this summer, after investigating them for more than 15 years. With less seeds, high brix and resistance to fungus, the new varieties should be able to produce two seasons in one year, reported *Fresh Plaza*. [Full Story](#)

Prices for avocados are increasing due to rising demand, weather-related issues and a decrease in production. Some 30 million-lbs. are expected to be harvested, and while it is a lot of fruit, it is less than the winter production. Mexican production is expected to continue until June and California deals could extend into October, reported *The Packer Online*. [Full Story](#)

The mango season in South Africa will likely finish earlier than normal this year. "The climatic conditions during the growing season were not particularly good either, volumes this year will be down from last year's 65,000 tonnes to 50,000 tonnes. The season will come to a close at the end of March instead of April, but there may still be some fruit available into April," stated Rudolf Badenhorst, reported *Fresh Plaza*. [Full Story](#)

The Florida Department of Citrus' 2013-14 advertising effort will more specifically focus on Millennials as the rising market for OJ consumers while still keeping faith with baby boomers, the traditional market. In their beverage purchases, millennials tend to favor smaller sizes that they consume frequently and on-the-go, reported *The Lakeland Ledger*. [Full Story](#) (Free Registration Required)

Drinking coffee or other caffeinated beverages to stay awake is linked with a 63% lower crash risk for long-distance truckers, a new study finds. Australian researchers looked at 530 truckers who had a crash while on a long-distance trip and 517 who did not have a crash in the previous year. The study was conducted between 2008 and 2011 in New South Wales and Western Australia. Forty-three percent of the drivers in the study said they consumed caffeinated products -- such as coffee, tea, caffeine tablets or energy drinks -- to help them stay awake while on the road, reported Health Day. [Full Story](#)

The U.S. and Mexico officially implemented the pricing agreement on imported tomatoes from Mexico. The principles to the pact were agreed to in early February and set higher minimum prices for most tomatoes. The deal is now in effect after being submitted for public comment, reported *Fresh Plaza*. [Full Story](#)

York County, PA potato farmers are working to create new varieties of the crop to help it resist diseases and solve storage issues. One variety, the Dark Red Norland potato, works well in various soil conditions, matures early and stores well. Trials are also under way to develop a blue potato that is high in antioxidants, and another variety that has an orange flesh and is high in vitamins, reported *YDR.com*. [Full Story](#)

USDA is seeking nominations for the Mushroom Council. The Mushroom Council includes eight U.S. producers and an importer. The U.S. members represent three production territories: Region 1, which covers the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and all states except Pennsylvania, which is Region 2 and California, which is Region 3. [Full Story](#)