



## **The Renewable Resources Extension Act (RREA) Program at Virginia State University, FY 2008**

The Renewable Resources Extension Act (RREA) program funds allocated to the Virginia State University (VSU) conduct programs through the Virginia Cooperative Extension. Agro-forestry is the primary focus. Two regions of Virginia, the coalfield counties of Southwest Virginia and the tobacco growing region of Southside Virginia, were identified for development of educational programs concerning non-timber forest products (NTFPs). More than 1,000 landowners in Southside Virginia participated in the USDA Tobacco Buy-Out Program in 2005-2006. These farmers no longer grow tobacco and are seeking new alternative crops. Many of them own forestlands which can be used for the production of American ginseng, goldenseal, shiitake mushrooms, and other NTFPs. The following educational programs were sponsored by the USDA CSREES Renewable Resources Extension Act funds in 2007 and 2008.

In October 2007, the above-mentioned Non-Timber Forest Products field meetings were held in two different locations in Southwest Virginia -- Buchanan and Grayson Counties. These practical in-the-forest demonstration meetings gave participants hands-on learning experience in site selection and planting of American ginseng, goldenseal, and shiitake mushrooms. Thirty-six persons attended the program in Buchanan County. Eighty-four persons attended the program in Grayson County. Instruction was provided by Andy Hankins, Extension Specialist-Alternative Agriculture at Virginia State University. All participants received two ounces of ginseng seeds and fifty goldenseal roots to take home and plant in their own woods. Each participant also carried home an oak log that they had inoculated with shiitake mushroom spawn at the workshop.

In November 2007, forty Virginia landowners received one pound of American ginseng seeds and 100 goldenseal roots to establish demonstration/research plots in their privately owned woodlands. Each participant also received a copy of an excellent book, *Growing and Marketing Ginseng, Goldenseal and Other Woodland Medicinals*, by W. Scott Persons and Jeanine M. Davis. These landowners received technical support covering site selection and planting from Andy Hankins and agriculture management agents from the Virginia State University Small Farm Outreach Program. These plots enable the landowners to learn by doing. Once the landowners establish successful initial stands of these botanical herbs, they may invest in more commercial scales of production. The local agriculture extension agents and local personnel from the Virginia Department of Forestry help monitor the growth of botanical herbs at these demonstration sites. Of the 40 participating growers, 10 are African-American landowners.

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