



Down to Earth: Reports from the Field

Innovative Small Farmers' Outreach Program (ISFOP): EAST CENTRAL REGION

Farmer Profile: Jeri Villarreal, Our City Farm, St. Louis, MO

By: Miranda Duschack, ISFOP Small Farm Specialist

Big things are happening at Our City Farm, an urban farm in the Gaslight Square district of north St. Louis City. With a bright smile, owner Ms. Jeri Villarreal stated with pride, "Our City Farm now has a greenhouse." The 14-foot by 24-foot polycarbonate greenhouse is her farm's newest addition; last year's big improvement was a waterline with a frost-free hydrant. With each investment, Jeri is turning a vacant lot into a lush urban farm. She also grows vegetables in a small high tunnel in her backyard. And she raises pastured chickens at an organic farm in nearby Ferguson, Missouri. Our City Farm offers three weekly community supported agriculture (CSA) box options: (1) 8-11 varieties of seasonal vegetables, (2) frozen 4.5—5.5 lb. whole chickens, and (3) eggs sold by the dozen. Its CSA customers can choose to buy a one-box option or any combination of the three. Jeri also sells all of these products à la carte at her Tower Grove Farmers' Market booth. The 2013 growing season marks Ms. Villarreal's fourth year raising poultry and produce for sale.

Our City Farm grew out of Jeri's eldest daughter's need to have a pet without the allergy-producing dander of a dog or cat. Jeri and her husband Carlos chose laying hens. The chick-



Jeri Villarreal at her farm in St. Louis, MO. (Photo courtesy of Jeri Villarreal.)

ens could serve as pets and also provide healthy eggs for their children. The children were delighted with the birds; the family enjoyed the eggs and sold the extras to friends. Soon they were butchering the birds for meat. Then, Jeri began growing vegetables. Her friends and coworkers regularly asked for products. Jeri saw the unmet demand for local products; she turned her hobby into a business by starting an urban farm.

Often, it can be challenging to launch an urban farm. First, one must learn about ordinances that regulate agricultural production within the city limits. Usually there are livestock, poultry and honeybee restrictions. A farmers' production must be tailored to meet these requirements. Space and city laws limit bird quantities. For that reason, Jeri raises the laying hens and meat birds on a nearby farm. She and Carlos increase profits by adding value to their finished product. They raise free-range chickens and only feed soy-free grain; this way, they can certify the birds as naturally grown. They also harvest the birds according to Islamic halal standards. These standards require the use of a sharp knife and the recitation of specific prayers. In St. Louis, several Muslim ethnic groups (Bosnians, East Africans and Middle Easterners) buy meat slaughtered in accordance with their religious

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Farmer Profile: Jeri Villarreal

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customs.

The next issue was to select the site to grow the vegetables. In St. Louis, there are blocks of vacant lots where houses once stood. Some of the lots are still privately owned. Others have been reclaimed by the city's Land Reutilization Authority; these can be leased or purchased. The businesses and homes that once covered these lots now lie beneath a thin layer of soil. Other lots are partly covered with concrete pads under which gasoline tanks are buried. Debris makes it difficult to till the soil. Also, there might be heavy metal contaminants in the soil; such soil is unsafe for planting food crops. It is critical to know the site history and test the soil. After a search, Jeri and Carlos found an acceptable site just a few miles from their home. It took Jeri about a year to navigate the St. Louis City purchasing process. Their first action after buying the property was to install raised beds. They filled these with topsoil and compost from reliable sources. Now, the vegetables they grow are delicious and nutritious.

This work has inspired Jeri to rethink her relationship with the American industrial food system. As she says, "Growing my own food is the best way to regain control over food quality and safety." To that end, she began trying different mixes of soy- and corn-free poultry feed. She applied for and received a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant to aid in the development of chicken feed. She is working with a University of Missouri Extension Poultry Health Specialist to create a nutritious soy- and corn-free



*Chicks being raised inside a chicken tractor.
(Photo courtesy of Jeri Villarreal.)*

formula. Jeri's farming practices reflect her personal values of high quality and environmental responsibility. One can taste the difference in her farm fresh produce, eggs and chicken. ■

Farmers' Market Profile: Lake St. Louis Farmers' and Artists' Market

By Janet Hurst, FOW for Franklin and Warren Counties

The Lake St. Louis Farmers' and Artists' Market is a great place to be on a Saturday

morning. Customers and vendors are pleased with this high traffic market that boasts a good blend of products. This venue is a "producer-only" market. This means that the items for sale are locally grown or made and sold by the vendors themselves.

Shoppers find a wide variety of

locally produced items, such as freshly baked goods, produce, handmade soaps, arts and more. As a bonus, consumers get to know the people behind the table.

Farmers' markets fuel local economies; many of the dollars spent stay in the area. The steady income that local farmers and producers receive is the direct benefit. Also, there are intangible rewards. These include community awareness and social activities. Consumers are also able to see the association between food and farm. Sadly, many do not make that connection until they shop at a farmers' market. This venue strengthens community relationships and builds the local economy. It does so by bringing farmers back into the spotlight. It allows for the exchange of information, commerce and farm-fresh food. Everyone wins!

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IPM Corner: The Dreaded Spotted Wing Drosophila is Causing Extensive Fruit Damage in Missouri

By Dr. Jaime Piñero, State Extension Specialist—Integrated Pest Management

What is the Spotted Wing Drosophila?

The Spotted Wing Drosophila (SWD) is a small vinegar fly, about 0.1 inch in length. For the past two years, it has become a pest in several areas of the U.S., including the Midwest. It has caused economic damage to berries, grapes and softer fleshy fruit, such as peaches. It is native to Japan, so this insect is invasive to the U.S. In late June 2013, a monitoring system deployed by Lincoln University's Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program detected the SWD in Missouri.

Why should I be concerned about the SWD? Is the situation that serious?

The SWD very quickly became a devastating pest of berry crops in Missouri. Adults were first detected in monitoring traps in

monitor for this invasive pest. To find out whether the SWD is present, you can prepare the most effective and economical trap using a clear plastic deli-type cup. Bait it with a mixture of water (6 oz.), active dry yeast (1/2 table-spoon) and sugar (as shown in figure 1). Note the small holes that are made on the sides of the trap that allow the flies to enter. A small yellow sticky card can be placed inside the cup. In this way, flies that are attracted by the bait and enter the trap are retained by the card. This will allow you to more easily identify any flies caught in the trap.

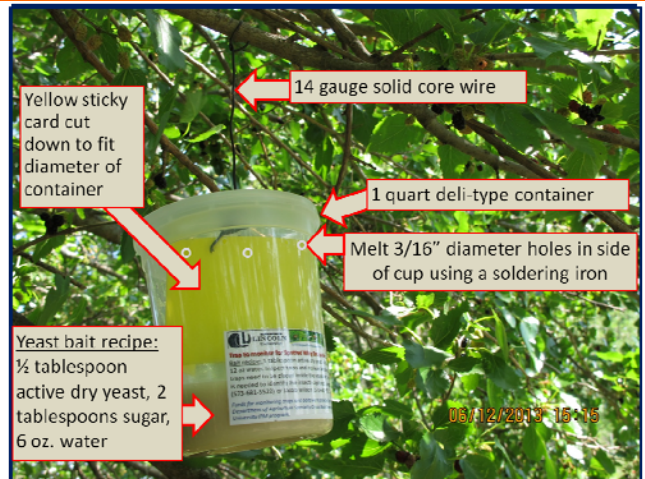


Figure 1. How to make a yeast-baited trap to monitor for SWD.

Spotted Wing Drosophila larvae exiting blackberries.



late June 2013. By early August, infestations of blackberry fruits had already occurred. By mid-August, the SWD was infesting crops statewide.

In addition to small fruit crops, this invasive insect also attacks some stone fruits (cherries, nectarines, peaches), high tunnel tomatoes and wild hosts (including poke-weed, autumn olive, crabapple, nightshade, Amur honeysuckle and wild grape). Raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, elderberries and grapes are at the greatest risk. Picture 1 shows larvae leaving infested blackberries.

How can I monitor for this pest?

It is very important that you learn how to

How do I know whether flies (trapped or active on fruits) are the SWD?

SWD flies look similar to the small vinegar flies that are found near or on fermenting fruits and vegetables. SWD males have one black dot on each wing. The females do not have dots on their wings; they have a serrated egg-laying device called an ovipositor. It is used to cut a slit into the skin of intact fruit to

lay eggs. This makes the SWD a more significant pest than other similar flies.

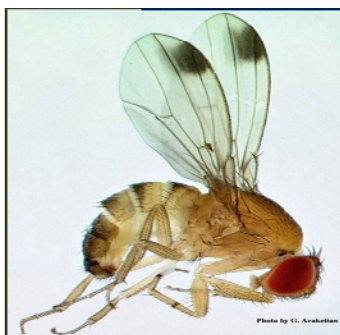
How can I manage the SWD on my farm or in my yard?

Below are some IPM options that can help to reduce larval infestations by the SWD:

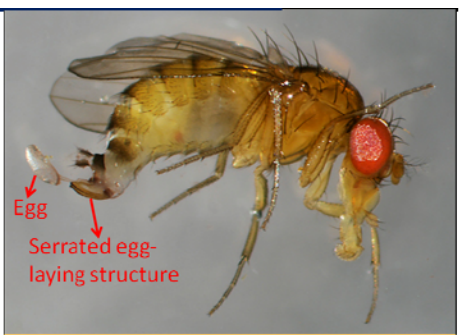
1. Exclusion: For small plantings, one option is to use a fine mesh screen with openings that are less than 0.98 millimeter (0.039 inch) wide (18 mesh or finer). Mesh screens will also exclude pollinating insects. Therefore, it is best to cover your plants after the fruit is set.

2. Canopy Management: Thin the plant row to 3-4 strong canes per square foot. As you do so, eliminate weaker shoots, and open the canopy. Or, consider a trellising system to open the canopy. This may make plantings less attractive to the SWD. It will also improve spray coverage.

3. Sanitation: Remove overripe fruit from production areas as soon as possible. Growers in other parts of the U.S. have sent pickers through fields with one container to collect good fruit and another to collect overripe fruit. The purpose is to minimize egg-laying and larval development sites. ■



Spotted Wing Drosophila males have one black dot on each wing.



Female's wings lack the dot on the wings. They have a serrated ovipositor (egg-laying structure) at the tip of the abdomen.

ISFOP

If you are a small farmer and need information, please contact an ISFOP Farm Outreach Worker (FOW). FOWs live and work in your community. They can provide information on ways to better manage your resources, reduce expense and increase income. They can also provide information on other programs and resources that may increase your income and the overall quality of life for you and for your family.

You are eligible to participate if you meeting the following requirements:

- Your family lives on a farm, rural or urban.
- Farm products or income from the farm are necessary for you to live where you do.
- Your family provides the management and most of the labor for your farm.
- Your total annual family income is less than \$50,000.

How to Contact East Central Regional ISFOP Farm Outreach Workers:

- **Miranda Duschack**, East Central Regional Coordinator, St. Louis County and City

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- **FOW**, Lincoln and St. Charles Counties

Vacant

**For general information
call the LUCE ISFOP office at (573) 681-5312.**



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Lake St. Louis Farmers' and Artists' Market

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Carl Saunders, market manager, shown above selling his fresh produce and baked goods.

Carl Saunders is the market master of the Lake St. Louis market. He states, "We usually have between 50 and 60 vendors. This is our second year at The Meadows at Lake St. Louis. This shopping center is located at the intersection of Highway 40 and Lake Saint Louis Boulevard. It is just 15 minutes west of Chesterfield and only minutes away from I-70 in Wentzville or St. Charles; we have a good customer base in the area. The market is open every Saturday morning from 8 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., through October."

Loyal vendors make the trip each Saturday morning. They set up booths filled with tasty treats, such as cinnamon rolls, cookies and focaccia bread. Farm-fresh eggs and a variety of produce fill many of the booths. Early in the season, you can find broccoli, cauliflower, spinach and salad greens. And, later, you will find strawberries or tomatoes followed by an abundance of watermelon and sweet corn. Customers can also buy locally produced meats and cheeses.

This market features more than food. You can find locally made pottery, metal sculpture and soaps. There are a num-

ber of plants and grasses and even handmade children's toys.

"We host special events throughout the summer," says Saunders. "Our goal is to grow deep roots between citizens, growers and artisans." Learn more about the market at <http://www.localharvest.org/ofallon-farmers-artists-market-M35705> or www.lakestlouisfarmersandartistsmarket.com. ■