Growing Mushrooms for Fun and Profit.
University of Florida IFAS Extension

Introduction
Nationwide there is a demand for locally grown food, and an increased demand for gourmet mushrooms like shiitake and oyster species. Florida’s climate is conducive to growing mushrooms on renewable resources such as cereal straws and cotton seed hulls. The Extension Agents wanted to promote and deliver a new technique of growing mushrooms on straw in bags to growers since it has a higher biological efficiency production rating than growing mushrooms on logs. Materials were designed and developed for small farmers, Master Gardeners and hobbyist growers.

Objectives
The objectives of this program were:
1. Develop educational materials, and annually deliver three small-scale shiitake and oyster mushroom production programs for farmers, Master Gardener volunteers, and gardeners.
2. Annually, 100 class attendees will increase their knowledge by 50% on small-scale shiitake and oyster mushroom production.
3. Annually, class attendees will produce 100 pounds of oyster or shiitake mushrooms.

Methods
- Several PowerPoint presentations were developed.
- Tri-fold informational brochures were designed for bag culture of oyster mushrooms, and for log culture of shiitake mushrooms.
- Banners were developed to help market the program.
- Agents developed learning modules with the following topics: general mushroom information, shiitake and oyster mushroom production, handling and processing, and marketing.
- Agents also developed mushroom toolkits that included mushroom spawn, shredded wheat straw, lime, an air-filter patch bag, catalogs, and a step by step production fact sheet.
- A tripod pulley system was built to demonstrate ways to pasteurize larger quantities of straw.

Summary
516 small farmers and gardeners attended a total of 14 workshops to increase their knowledge of small-scale shiitake and oyster mushroom production
- The average knowledge gain was 79%.
- An end-of-program survey at 2012 Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises Conference found that 96% of participants responded positively to the information on edible mushroom production with 61% indicating plans to initiate production based on this information.
- Similar 8-hour workshops offered by the private industry are valued at $400 per farmer. When this value is multiplied by 163 (the number of participants in workshops) the total value is $65,200.
- Agents have given out 350 inoculated oyster mushroom kits and 252 inoculated shiitake mushroom logs valued at $24 and $26, respectively. A total value of $14,952.

Conclusions
Following completion of the workshops, attendees have grown approximately 1,050 pounds of oyster mushrooms and 3,740 pounds of shiitake mushrooms valued at $38,320 ($8/lbs.) These workshops have been extremely popular and can be duplicated in Florida as well as other states.