

FOOD PRODUCTION SUCCESS & SUPPLYING LOCAL GROWERS DIRECTLY

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Situation

North Central Florida's climate and pests create a challenge for both small farmers and gardeners alike. A lack of both actionable knowledge and availability of well-adapted plants further compound the challenge local growers experience. The objective is for local growers to acquire and implement knowledge as well as make available plants directly from the extension agent that otherwise would not be available.

Objectives

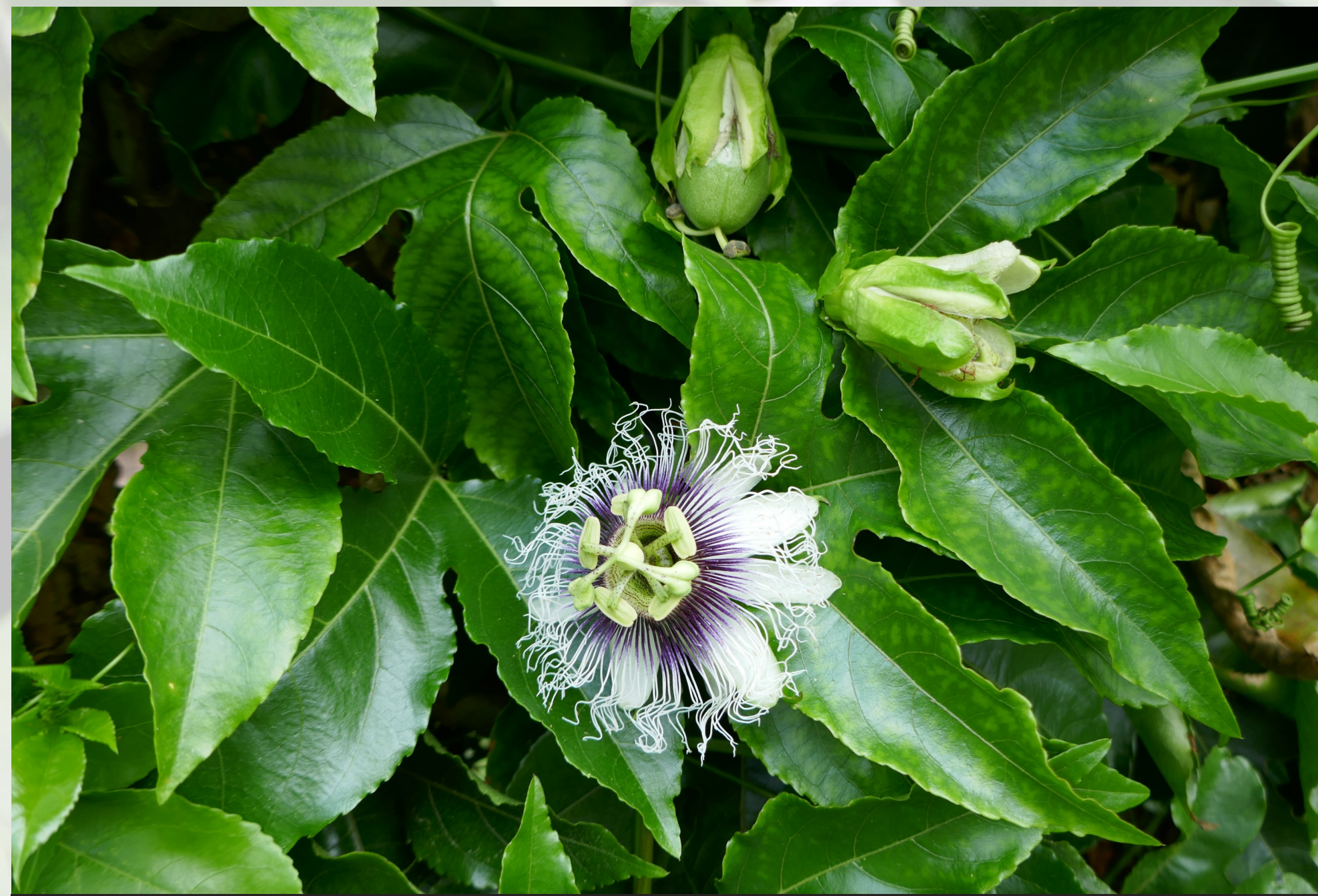
Participants will gain knowledge about how to provide for essential crop needs and about specific crops that are well-adapted for the North Central Florida region. They will adopt practices which will allow them to easily and sustainably produce their own food with fruits and vegetables.

Methods

Topics Discussed

- Essential plant needs.
- Variables you can control.
- Site selection & how to plant correctly.
- Vegetable options.
- Fruit options.
- Maximizing production.

Over the past year, nine programs were offered which consisted of a presentation and time for questions and answers. Topics detailed key variables associated with food crop production. The agent made a bulk purchase of sweet potato slips to be distributed to local growers. To advertise the sweet potato slips, posts were made on social media, flyers distributed, and program attendees were notified of the sale. A sweet potato fact sheet was also created and provided to everyone who purchased sweet potato slips. Additionally, bulk purchases of passion fruit plants were made and distributed to local growers. An EDIS publication was created about passion fruit production.



Passion fruit flower and stages of fruit development



Slips were sorted, packaged, and distributed to local growers



Sweet potato harvest



Mature purple passion fruit

Results

Programs were well attended (n=2,210). Post-program surveys (n=105) indicated that all participants gained knowledge and 92% specifically stated at least one aspect of the program they had implemented. A total of 332 passion fruit plants were purchased, most of which by local small farms. More than 2,500 sweet potato slips were distributed to approximately 95 individuals. Completed post-harvest surveys (n=26) indicated two and a half pounds of sweet potatoes per slip planted.

Conclusions

This programmatic effort successfully helped participants gain knowledge and use that knowledge to begin fruit and vegetable production which likely would not have occurred if the plants were not directly supplied. Due to the high demand and program participant adoption of program objectives, this effort has helped to grow the local food system.