

# CAROLINA-VIRGINIA

## FARMER

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# Sweet variety

By RICHARD DAVIS

**A**N otherwise unnamed and uncelebrated sweetpotato variety known as 573 received much of the grower interest at the recent Sweetpotato Field Day at the Horticultural Crops Research Station in Clinton, N.C. The new variety, NC99-573, is likely to be released in 2009. It piqued the interest of grower Kendall Hill of Tull Hill Farms in Kinston, N.C., at the field day.

"This is the second year they've been here on the farm," notes Hill. "Everybody says they yield well, have a good shape and have real good plant production."

The new variety also rated tops with Billy Little, Wilson County Extension sweetpotato specialist. "This new 573 is somewhat more akin to the Beauregard than it is to Covington insofar as it is a little quicker grower than Covington," Little says.

"It is also a real good plant producer. Rather than Beauregard and Covington, a grower could grow Covington and 573 as two variety mixes. They would pack well together and also give a little bit of a [management] offset at harvesting and planting. That would be a good mix for a sweetpotato grower in North Carolina," he adds.

The look at 573 through re-

### Key Points

- A new sweetpotato variety is capturing interest of growers.
- Researchers are developing sweetpotatoes for biofuels.
- Low production costs important for biofuels sweetpotatoes.

search done by North Carolina State University horticulturist Craig Yencho and breeder Ken Pecota exemplifies some of the extensive research work on sweetpotatoes done at NCSU. North Carolina is the No. 1 sweetpotato-producing state in the country. In light of that, Hill notes the state rightly deserves a first-rate program.

"We've always got to keep moving forward," Hill says. "If you don't move forward, you're going backward."

"Also, sweetpotato varieties have a way of declining in their capabilities," he adds. "Normally, four or five years — maybe 10 years — is about as long as a sweetpotato will last before the genetics start breaking down. ... And technology is all about something new coming out and replacing what you're using. We need a program because some of the other varieties are adapted better to other growing regions than they are here. Even though we are No. 1, those other growing regions have some really nice sweetpotatoes, and they are competitive."



**THE NEXT BIG THING:** With variety breeder Ken Pecota at his side, North Carolina State University horticulturist Craig Yencho holds up NC99-573, a new sweetpotato variety likely to be released in 2009 that has great potential and grower interest. The variety grows well with good plant production, and has good yield and a nice shape for the food market. Yencho and Pecota were at the Sweetpotato Field Day at the Horticultural Crops Research Station in Clinton, N.C.

### Biomass appeal

Yencho and Pecota also had their work in biomass sweetpotatoes, potentially for biofuels production, at the field day.

"They are still a long ways off on that, but at the same time are making good headway on it," Little says. "You are looking at a totally different sweetpotato for biomass production — one that is high in dry matter and

also one that can basically be mechanically produced from start to finish. With the price you'd probably get for sweetpotatoes for ethanol production, it would be hard to justify a lot of hand labor."

Yencho and Pecota have been working on using sweetpotato seed pieces for planting. "You could set them with a dump tank like they do Irish

potatoes and then dig them with an automated machine," Little explains. "You could use a sweetpotato digger and auger them up into a truck or a bin so basically a human hand would never touch the sweetpotato — it would be all mechanical. We are looking at lowering production costs in a way that could really become interesting in ethanol."

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