



**PROGRAM SUCCESS**  
**Agricultural Development Center and R-GROW**



In the fall of 1998, Giles County Extension Leader James Dennis Taylor asked one of his farmers, "How are things going?" Ed Rollins, poultry and beef farmer and agri-entrepreneur, replied that he was considering bagging his poultry-waste compost and selling it. Taylor asked about product stability, packaging and marketing, and Rollins said he could use help in those areas. Taylor mentioned Extension's new Agricultural Development Center (ADC), and Rollins quickly submitted an application to the ADC for assistance with his value-added farm product.

Specialists from the ADC made an on-site visit with the Rollins family and studied the compost facility and procedures. They discussed the volume of the product that could be produced and the compost product attributes. The ADC specialists investigated organic regulations, analyzed the composting procedure to minimize odors, and investigated certification for use in organic production. They also worked on developing a "market-preferred" package and determining all regulations and requirements for developing the product. They evaluated the results of customer surveys through product test marketing. The 50-pound, clear bag with very little labeling or eye-appeal (photo at right) was re-vamped into a more customer-friendly, 22-pound, multi-color print white bag (photo at top).



After changing the bag, sales of R-GROW increased ten-fold in one year. Brochures and business cards were developed, as was a complete trade show exhibit (sample brochure below). In addition, significant investments have been made in one-on-one personal visits with potential vendors.



Today Ed Rollins' R-GROW organic soil conditioner sells in more than 35 farm, garden and landscaping stores across the state and in north Georgia. Packaged in the attractive 22-pound bag, R-GROW prominently displays the "Pick Tennessee Products" logo. According to Rollins, the product "exemplifies the ultimate example of a value-added product, because it takes farm waste and turns it into a \$300 per ton revenue-generating enterprise." Rollins now finds himself featuring his value-added farm product at retail store trade shows, consumer and homeowner fairs and at various grower workshops and seminars. Rollins has even appeared on television touting R-GROW's availability at a national chain home and garden center.