

Minnesota State Fair events

What would the Minnesota State Fair be without the Tuesday tasting event that Fairgoers have come to know and love? Minnesota Cooks returns to the Fair this year for the 8th time on Tuesday, August 31 with its customary heady mix of great locally grown food from Minnesota farmers, top chefs, and celebrity tasters! The event is organized by Minnesota Farmers Union and Food Alliance Midwest. Find all the details on the day's schedule, as well as

recipes from past years, online: www.minnesotacooks.net

The Eco Experience building at the northeast corner of the fairgrounds is open daily during the Fair, August 26 through September 6. Families attending the Minnesota State Fair are invited to explore new games and kid activities, including educational exhibits, hands-on activities, and family-fun entertainment on the Sustainability Stage.

Sponsored by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, the Eco Experience features Healthy Local Food exhibits as well as interactive exhibits such as "Green Street" and "Energy Star House." Find details at: www.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/living-green/living-green-events/eco-experience/the-eco-experience-at-the-minnesota-state-fair.html

Register for Farm Beginnings course

Interested in farming? Is the land calling you?

Land Stewardship Project's successful beginning farmer training program, Farm Beginnings, will be held this coming fall in both Winona and St. Joseph, Minnesota. Classes will begin at the end of October. The registration deadline is September 1, 2010. Early registration is recommended as space is limited. For more

information and to download an application, visit www.farmbeginnings.org Farm Beginnings is a farmer-led initiative that provides opportunities for beginning and transitioning farmers to learn firsthand about values clarification and goal setting, whole farm planning, enterprise development and low-cost, sustainable farming methods.

Farm Beginnings provides 39 hours of in-class training through classroom sessions followed by a series of on-farm field days. In addition, participants become part of an established Farmer Network providing access to farms and farmers in the region who are committed to working with beginning farmers. Please contact Karen Benson at 507.523.3366 or lpse@landstewardshipproject.org if you have further questions.

Food preservation mini-module series

Food preservation season is upon us! Ample rainfall this year has made the gardens bountiful, and it's time to dust off those jars and canners. Are you canning food safely? Suzanne Driessen, University of Minnesota Extension Educator in Food Science, has recorded 18 five-minute video slide presentations that cover a variety of safe food preservation topics. Find links to these presentations on the Extension Food Safety web page (scroll down to the bottom of the page): www.extension.umn.edu/foodsafety/

[Note: these may be difficult to view with a dial-up Internet connection. A satellite connection is adequate.]

If you can't access the video presentations, or even if you can, there are other ways to

get information about safe food preservation. Many fact sheets are available on the Extension Food Safety website: www.extension.umn.edu/foodsafety/components/foodpreservation.htm

Fact sheets on a wide variety of food preservation topics are also available on the website of the National Center for Home Food Preservation: www.uga.edu/nchfp/

The Ball Blue Book Guide to Preserving is a printed booklet that is generally available for \$10 or less where canning supplies are sold. This book covers canning, freezing, pickling, and jam and jelly. It provides up-to-date and safe procedures.

If you want to can a lot of food and your home kitchen isn't large enough or isn't

equipped with an adequate kitchen range, there are community kitchens you can use. Contact your county's public health department to find out where community kitchens are located in your area.

Homegrown Minneapolis (www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dhfs/homegrown-home.asp) has a list of available kitchen facilities in Minneapolis. Homegrown Minneapolis is partnering with U of M Extension to train interested Minneapolis residents to be "Community Food Preservation Guides". To learn more, or to apply, go to www.surveymonkey.com/s/FPNapplication

North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) Funds intriguing research, issues new call for proposals

Sandblasting Weeds

Frank Forcella, ARS (Agricultural Research Service) is a weed scientist based at the University of Minnesota Research and Outreach Center at Morris, MN. He is researching an unusual idea: sandblasting to control weeds in corn. Actually, the sandblaster rigged up to an ATV is blasting things like corn-cob grit, ground up walnut shells, and other types of gritty agricultural residue. This method gave the equivalent of 87 percent weed reduction at the end of the season in test plots, when the blasting was done at the one- to three-leaf stage of the corn. Corn yields in the grit-blasted test plots were comparable to hand-weeded check plots. The blasting has to be done when the weeds are quite small in order to be effective. Forcella recently obtained a grant from North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) to research the method further; particularly in a field-scale situation rather than just small test plots. If the method can be scaled up successfully and shown to be effective, it will be an attractive weed control option for organic farmers. Watch for future field days featuring the results of this research!

Information for this article was obtained from an article that first appeared in the Morris Sun Tribune | Morris, Minnesota By Tom Larson

Cover Crops

Rural Advantage, www.ruraladvantage.org, is an organization based in Fairmont, MN that works to promote profitable, environmentally sound options for agriculture in Minnesota. Rural Advantage is collaborating with Practical Farmers of Iowa on a grant from NCR-SARE to promote cover crops. The grant includes funding for workshops, listening sessions, and surveys to find out how farmers are currently using cover crops and what the barriers are to cover crop use. The grant also includes cost-share funds for 20 farmer cooperators in each state. Farmers can apply

for the cost-share of up to \$20 per acre on up to 20 acres for one year, to do an on-farm cover cropping demonstration. Farmer cooperators must be willing to participate in a field day on their farm that will be organized by Rural Advantage staff.

Rural Advantage's goal with the cost-share funds is to get a wide variety of different types of cover cropping demonstrations going throughout the state. Farmers who are interested in applying for this program should contact Jill Sackett, Extension Educator - Conservation Agronomist with University of Minnesota Extension and Rural Advantage: 507-238-5449, sacke032@umn.edu. She will assist in developing proposals, which will then be submitted to the grant administrators for a decision on funding. The NCR-SARE grant runs from fall of 2009 through fall of 2012, so there is still time to plan and apply for a one-year demonstration project. Corn and soybean farmers are particularly sought for this program, but all types of farms will be considered.

Call for Proposals for NCR-SARE Farmer-Rancher Grants and Youth & Youth Educator Grants

Farmer-Rancher Grants

Farmers and ranchers in the North Central Region are invited to submit grant proposals to explore sustainable agriculture solutions to problems on the farm or ranch. Proposals should show how farmers and ranchers plan to use their own innovative ideas to explore sustainable agriculture options and how they will share project results. Sustainable agriculture is good for the environment, profitable, and socially responsible. Projects should emphasize research or education/demonstration. Grants can range from \$6,000 for individual farmers up to \$18,000 for groups of 3 or more farmers. NCR-SARE expects to fund about 50 projects in the twelve-state North Central Region with this call.

Youth & Youth Educator Grants

These grants are a part of the Farmer Rancher Grant Program. Their purpose is to provide opportunities for youth in the North Central Region to learn more about sustainable agriculture. A total of approximately \$34,000 is available for this program. There are two options: 1. YOUTH GRANTS. These grants are for on-farm research, demonstration, or education projects by youth ages 8-18. Research and demonstration projects are for hands-on efforts to explore Sustainable Agriculture issues and practices. Education projects can involve teaching others about Sustainable Agriculture or attending a Sustainable Agriculture conference, workshop, or camp. \$400 maximum. 2. YOUTH EDUCATOR GRANTS. These are grants for educators to provide programming on sustainable agriculture for youth. \$2,000 maximum.

Interested applicants for either the Farmer-Rancher Grants or the Youth & Youth Educator Grants can find the call for proposals online as well as useful information for completing a proposal at <http://www.sare.org/NCRSARE/cfp.htm>. A hard copy or an emailed copy of the call for proposals is also available by contacting Joan Benjamin, at benjaminj@lincolnu.edu or 573-681-5545 or 800-529-1342. Be sure to use the 2010 application forms, since there are changes from last year. Proposals are due on Thursday, December 2, 2010 at 4:30 p.m. at the NCR-SARE office in Jefferson City, MO.

Potential applicants with questions can contact Joan Benjamin (contact information above). In Minnesota, farmers can also contact Beth Nelson, the Minnesota Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator, at schre002@umn.edu, or 612-625-8217.

New SustAgMarket Listserv

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture has established a new online discussion group, SustAgMarket. This is a place where rural farmers, urban farmers, and sustainable ag-related businesses and non-profit organizations can share information about goods and services for sale or trade. SustAgMarket is a Listserv that functions like MISA's other lists, Sustag and HealthyDebate: if you have something to sell or something you are looking for, simply post a message to the list. Posts will be archived online, but this Listserv does not have many of the features of online sales websites.

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture offers the SustAgMarket Listserv as a service to the sustainable agriculture community. MISA does not verify the accuracy of any posts, and will not be held responsible for any financial transactions that take place as a result of posts to SustAgMarket. Anyone entering a business transaction as a result of a post on SustAgMarket should exercise good common sense and business caution, and do their own verification of buyer or seller credentials.

Find information on how to subscribe here: www.misa.umn.edu/SustAgMarket.html

Conservation program sign-up now open

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has a general sign-up that is open through August 27, 2010. CRP is a voluntary program that assists farmers, ranchers and other agricultural producers to use their environmentally sensitive land for conservation benefits. Producers enrolling in CRP plant long-term, resource-conserving covers in exchange for rental payments, cost-share, and technical

assistance. Land currently not enrolled in CRP may be offered in this sign-up provided all eligibility requirements are met. Also, current CRP participants with contracts expiring this fall may make new contract offers. Contracts awarded under this sign-up are scheduled to become effective Oct. 1, 2010.

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) implements CRP on behalf of Commodity Credit Corporation. Farm Service Agency staff will evaluate and rank eligible CRP offers using an Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) for environmental benefits to be gained from enrolling the land in CRP. Visit your local FSA office to find out more about this program and to apply. For more information, visit: www.fsa.usda.gov/crp

Pollinator Incentives in the New CRP

New rules offer incentives for the establishment of pollinator habitat through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The current sign-up open until August 27 provides one of the largest pollinator conservation opportunities ever in the United States.

Priority ranking is offered for land enrollments that include pollinator-friendly wildflowers and shrubs. Under the current CRP enrollment system, landowners who

want to participate are ranked to prioritize enrollments that offer the most conservation benefits. To receive a higher score on the pollinator ranking criteria, participating farmers must plant at least 10 percent of the CRP acres in wildflower parcels (or at least one acre for CRP enrollments less than 10 acres in size). Ask about pollinator incentives when you visit your local Farm Service Agency office to sign up for CRP!

website, www.extension.umn.edu/smallfarms or for more information or to receive a flyer with all events, contact Jill Sackett, 507-238-5449, sacke032@umn.edu

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This newsletter is supported by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA)—a partnership between the Sustainer’s Coalition and the University of Minnesota College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS) the University of Minnesota Extension; the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCRSARE) Professional Development Program (PDP). Send story ideas to MISA, 411 Borlaug Hall, 1991 Upper Buford Circle. St. Paul, MN 55108, (612) 625-8235, fax (612) 625-1268, e-mail: misamail@umn.edu. Editorial board members: Helene Murray, (612) 625-0220, murra021@umn.edu; Beth Nelson, (612) 625-8217, schre002@umn.edu; Bill Wilcke, (612) 625-8205, wilck001@umn.edu; Jane Jewett, jewet006@umn.edu and Kate Seager, (612) 625-8235, kseager@umn.edu. Please send address changes directly to: Kate Seager, kseager@umn.edu, MISA, 411 Borlaug Hall, 1991 Buford Circle, St. Paul, MN 55108. You can find more University of Minnesota Extension Service educational information at www.extension.umn.edu. Also check MISA’s home page at www.misa.umn.edu. Our mission statement: To help bring people together to influence the future of agriculture and rural communities to achieve socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable farms and communities. To stimulate thinking and discussion about sustainability, we try to present items that reflect different points of view. This being the case, we aren’t promoting and don’t necessarily agree with everything we publish.