

Minnesota Farm to School Toolkit for Food Service website

Farm to school programs are receiving a lot of attention these days. Concern about a rise in obesity and diet-related metabolic disorders among children combined with increased interest in supporting local economies have lots of people thinking hard about the food that kids get in schools. Placing locally-grown food on school lunch plates can help spark students' interest in a healthier diet, get school food service dollars reinvested in the community, and provide concerned parents and administrators with a short, transparent, traceable route that the food traveled from farm to plate.

According to a recent survey of food service directors by the Minnesota School Nutrition Association (<http://www.agobservatory.org/library.cfm?refID=105219>), many school food service directors are interested in farm to school programs, but lack time to explore options

or implement new strategies. This can be an overwhelming obstacle to a food service director who is already under enormous time and budget constraints. A toolkit of ready-to-use materials could go a long way toward increasing participation in farm to school programs.

The Willmar School District in western Minnesota has gradually incorporated locally purchased food into its cafeteria menu over the last four years. In response to requests to share their information, Annette Hendrickx Derouin (Willmar's Director of Food and Nutrition Services) and Lynn Mader (U of M Extension, Family Development) have been working with the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture and an advisory team to develop an online toolkit for Minnesota school nutrition programs. The toolkit contains information and materials to assist in planning a farm to school program;

sourcing, preparing, and serving local foods; and promoting the food to students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Ready-to-use items include cafeteria menus and recipes complete with nutritional information, sample newsletter and announcement pieces, trivia game "fun facts," posters, and tested methods for getting students to sample the food. While most of this website toolkit is intended specifically for food service, the website also provides links to resources to learn more about farm to school programs, including classroom and community connections. Check out the website: www.mn-farmtoschool.umn.edu. For more information, contact Lynn Mader, made0036@umn.edu, 612-708-8635.

Attend U of M 'Living on the Land' livestock workshop

The University of Minnesota Small Farms Program is offering a three-part workshop this spring for farm owners who are thinking about adding livestock to their small farm setting. The series, titled "Living on the Land Livestock Workshops" will be held on Mondays, May 4, May 11, and May 18, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on the St Paul Campus.

Demand for Extension workshops that focus on livestock has increased in the recent past, reflecting the growth in the number of small farms (1-49 acres) in Minnesota and across the nation. As most of the major Farm Belt states lose farms by the thousands, Minnesota is bucking the trend. According to the recent USDA Census figures, from 2002 to 2007 the state gained 2,200 small to micro sized farms. Goat and poultry production on small farms has expanded, and most beef and

sheep production in the state already occurs on small farms

The Living on the Land Livestock Workshop series is designed for the person who is thinking about raising animals, but has little experience with the production of livestock. The first evening will be an overview of the different breeds of sheep, goats, beef, poultry, and swine, and their characteristics. The second evening will be a discussion of the nutritional needs of each species, and disease prevention. The third evening will focus on building facilities needed for each, animal handling and welfare, and manure composting.

A great group of speakers has been assembled to cover each topic area. Peat Willcutt has developed a specialty in urban poultry production, and will talk about heritage breeds of chickens as well as turkeys, ducks, geese, and game birds. From

the University of Minnesota, a variety of specialists will talk about their area of interest. Speakers include Alfredo DiCostanzo (beef), Laura Kieser (sheep & goats), Marcia Endres (Animal Welfare & Handling), Katherine Waters (Food Safety), Ann Goplen (Disease), Betsy Wieland (Feeds, Manure, Composting), and Wayne Martin (Swine, Facilities).

The cost to attend all three workshops is \$50 if registered by Apr. 24, and \$75 afterward. You can bring one friend for free. The registration deadline is Apr. 27. Register online: <http://umnnext.cmiregistration.com/ProgramDetail.aspx/LivingLandLivestockStPaul>

For more information, contact Wayne Martin, livestock educator with U of M Extension, at 612-625-6224 or marti067@umn.edu.

U of M Morris organic dairy conversion

The West Central Research and Outreach Center (WCROC) in Morris, Minn. Has begun a year-long process to transition 70 cows to organic dairy production. When complete, Morris will be the third research facility in the U.S. to have an organic herd. The WCROC will have 100 cows in its conventional low-input herd, making it the only research facility in the country capable

of comparing organic and conventional herds at its research site.

The organic dairy herd transition is a part of increased programming for organic research, teaching and outreach at the U of M, in response to growing demand for information about organic and sustainable agriculture practices. The center will also

transition 100 to 300 acres of pasture and 150 acres of cropland for feed for the herd over the next three years. For more information contact Dennis Johnson, dairydgj@morris.umn.edu.

Organic Certification of Vegetable Operations publication now available

Are you interested in getting your vegetable operation certified organic, but don't know if you qualify? Are you confused by organic record keeping requirements? What factors should you consider, when choosing a certification agency? In the new publication, *Organic Certification of Vegetable Operations*, Jim Riddle explains organic certification

requirements in understandable terms. The publication explains the requirements for organic seeds, seedlings, greenhouses, crop rotations, soil amendments, pest and disease control inputs, harvest, and storage, as well as how to transition your operation to certified organic production. The publication, written for eOrganic, contains

examples of record keeping forms used by organic produce growers. Available online: <http://swroc.cfans.umn.edu/organic/vegetable.pdf> or contact Jim Riddle, riddl003@umn.edu, 507-429-7959 for print copy.

Grass Roots Guide to the 2008 Farm Bill

The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's (SAC) Grassroots Guide to the 2008 Farm Bill walks you through each of thirty-four 2008 Farm Bill programs most important to sustainable agriculture, serving both as a "report from the trenches" of what survived the most recent farm bill fight, and as a guide to new policies and funding opportunities for farmers, ranchers, and grassroots organizations.

The farm bill programs are clustered into seven chapters: Conservation and Environment, Farming Opportunities, Local and Regional Food Systems and Rural Development, Organic Production, Sustainable and Organic Research, Renewable Energy, and Competitive Markets and Commodity Program Reform.

Each program within each chapter follows the format: 1) the basic intent of the farm bill program, including eligibility requirements 2) changes that the 2008 Farm Bill makes to the program if it was initially authorized in a previous bill 3) legislative citations 4) funding levels 5) implementation information and 6) the contact information for the respective administrative office within the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This publication is not a digest of the entire farm bill—the Guide highlights the programs and policies that were Sustainable Agriculture Coalition priorities. The farm bill implementation process is just beginning, and the web-version of the *Grassroots Guide* will be continually updated

to reflect any changes or additional information as new rules and guidelines are posted. Readers and users of the Guide are encouraged to follow the electronic version to keep up with the latest information.

<http://sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide/>

Risk management online tool available

USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) has launched an online resource to aid farmers and ranchers in focusing on how to protect against down-side risks, as well as how best to take advantage of up-side opportunities in the market. The new resource, a sub-site of the RMA Web site

called Farm-Risk-Plans (<http://farm-risk-plans.usda.gov/>) allows producers to complete a risk management checklist, identify their enterprise's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and explore a wealth of risk management information.

<http://www.rma.usda.gov/news/2008/11/1104agriskplans.html>

2009 Community Garden Spring Resource Fair

Saturday, March 28th, 9:00am-4:00pm,
Unity Church-Unitarian, St. Paul.

The Fair will have workshops tailored for community gardening and ways to enhance the urban food system. Paula Westmoreland will be the morning keynote speaker, sharing permaculture's principles of community and ecological agriculture.

Workshops will include: Aquaponics 101, The Urban Barnyard, Preserving Food Safely, Doing More with Less: Superabundant Small Gardens, Breaching Barriers to Just Food, Creative Consensus Building for Community Gardens, Organic Soil Building, Farm Dreams: Assessing Risks and Resources to Start a Farm Business.

Event details and workshop descriptions can be found online at: www.gardeningmatters.org or call 612-492-8964 for more information.

Homegrown Minneapolis

Homegrown Minneapolis is an initiative to develop recommendations for the City of Minneapolis to improve sales, distribution and consumption of fresh, locally grown foods to positively impact the health, food security, economy and environment of the City and the surrounding region.

The initiative brings together key partners from local businesses, city government, community organizations and residents. This group of stakeholders will develop recommendations for the City around a

variety of topics including: encouraging the production and consumption of locally grown foods; improving health by increasing access to fresh, healthy foods for Minneapolis residents; creating employment and small business development opportunities; connecting Minneapolis residents to existing resources such as local farmers markets. Four subcommittees are meeting to develop focused recommendations for future development and support related to: farmers markets; community, school and

backyard gardens; small enterprise urban agriculture; and commercial use of locally grown foods. More information and notes from stakeholder meetings can be found on the website:

<http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dhfs/homegrown-home.asp>

Announcements and upcoming events

4th Minority and Immigrant Farming Conference

The Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women in Minnesota, Minnesota Food Association, and USDA-Farm Service Agency will jointly co-host the 4th Minority and Immigrant Farming Conference on March 20-21, 2009 at The Wilder Foundation's Auditorium on 451 South Lexington Parkway at the corner of University Avenue in St. Paul, MN. The conference theme is *Helping To Grow Profits On Your Small Farm*. The two-day conference will focus on knowing your production costs, composting, transitioning to organic farming, managing agricultural risks, food safety, marketing, Farm Bill and policy, and applying for grants and loans. Register on line by March 9, 2009 at www.mnfoodassociation.org; or by calling MFA at 651-433-3676, or the Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women in Minnesota at 651-255-0799. The

conference will be interpreted into Laotian, Hmong, Spanish, Karen and Cambodian languages. The conference hosts invite farmers of any language to register. Interested participants please call the hosts with translation or other needs.

The training conference is intended to foster partnerships between non governmental community based organizations, MDA, and the USDA Agencies to assist minority, limited resources and underserved farmers in Minnesota and Western Wisconsin.

The Role of Ecology in Modern Agriculture

Larson/Allmaras lecture on Emerging Issues in Soil and Water. Wednesday April 15th at 2:00 p.m. in 335 Borlaug Hall. The featured speakers will be Dr. G. Philip Robertson, a Professor of Ecosystem Science in the Department of Crop and

Soil Sciences at Michigan State University and a resident faculty at the W.K. Kellogg Biological Station. Since 1988 he has directed the NSF Long-Term Ecological Research (LTER) Program <http://lter.kbs.msu.edu> in Agricultural Ecology at the Kellogg Biological Station. Please mark your calendar for the lecture event. If you need more information, please contact Dr. Satish Gupta at sgupta@umn.edu, 612-625-1241.

Paul Porter and Tour D'Afrique

Food and agriculture from Cairo to Cape Town at 10 MPH. Follow Professor Paul Porter as he travels by bicycle through 10 African countries from January 10 to May 9, 2009. For more information:

<http://paulporter.wordpress.com> and <http://www.tourdafrique.com>

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