

EQIP Organic Initiative Signup

The Minnesota Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has nearly \$1.8 million in special funds available for a new Organic Initiative under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), to encourage the implementation of conservation practices associated with organic agriculture production. Organic producers may also apply for assistance under the general EQIP.

Applications from organic producers or producers in transition to organic farming will be accepted between May 11 and

June 30, and will be ranked on their contribution to conserving soil, water quality, and other resources. EQIP payments may not be used to pay organic certification costs.

“These EQIP funds are just the type of kick-start we need to directly assist emerging organic farmers,” said William Hunt, State Conservationist. “Interested producers with environmental problems that they would like to treat should apply at their local NRCS office.”

A fact sheet detailing the Organic Initiative can be found here:

www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/EQIP_20Organic_Agriculture_Fact_Sheet.pdf

Find local NRCS offices in Minnesota here:

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs&state=mn>

Regular EQIP program signup

Minnesota landowners are encouraged to submit 2009 applications to USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) for participation in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) by May 22. EQIP is offered through a continuous signup, but NRCS periodically makes funding selections as program dollars allow.

Minnesota NRCS has received \$21.5 million dollars to begin funding approved EQIP contracts.

A change with this year's signup is that the rate paid for enduring conservation practices has increased from 50 to 75% of the average cost of the practice. Farmers in some categories may be eligible for up to 90% of the average cost of the practice.

William Hunt, NRCS State Conservationist, recommends that landowners visit their local NRCS/SWCD field staffs to work on a conservation plan, which is a first step toward submitting an EQIP application. Find your local USDA Service Center, plus more information on EQIP and other conservation programs, here: www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/

Native Pollinators Conservation

The 2008 Farm Bill makes pollinators and their habitat a conservation priority.

On Tuesday, June 9th, Eric Mader, National Pollinator Outreach Coordinator of the Xerces Society, will present a day-long workshop providing an overview of the pollinator-specific language within the Farm Bill, and how to translate that language into on-the-ground pollinator habitat conservation. This day-long workshop will equip conservationists, land managers, educators and agricultural professionals with practical science-based approaches to increasing crop security and reversing the alarming trend of pollinator decline, especially in heavily managed agricultural landscapes.

Introductory topics include the basic principles of pollinator biology, the economics of insect pollination, recognizing native bee species, and assessment of pollinator habitat.

Advance modules will cover farm management practices for pollinator protection, the development of pollinator habitat enhancements, incorporating pollinator conservation into existing NRCS programs, selection of plants for pollinator enhancement sites, management of natural and urban landscapes, and the additional funding sources and technical support available to land managers. Throughout the workshop these training modules are illustrated by case studies of pollinator

conservation efforts around the country. A part of the day will be spent on the site of the student organic farm on the St. Paul campus, looking at pollinator habitat.

This workshop is co-sponsored by Minnesota NCR-SARE and the Xerces Society. There is no charge but pre-registration is required. For more information and to register online, go to: www.misa.umn.edu/Minnesota_SARE.html or contact Beth Nelson, 612-625-8217, schre002@umn.edu.

New online tool helps landowners seek conservation funding

Minnesota farmers and landowners can now use a new online tool to get key information about financial assistance for conservation projects. Developed by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), the new Minnesota Conservation Funding Guide is a "one-stop" resource for information about agricultural and natural resource conservation practices and payments. The guide provides quick access to overviews of more than 50 soil conservation, water quality, feedlot management, wildlife habitat and other

practices, with side-by-side payment comparisons.

MDA Conservation Program Specialist Barbara Weisman says the Conservation Funding Guide is designed to help landowners research the various options on their own prior to seeking advice from local, state or federal conservation experts. "Farmers and landowners usually have lots of questions about conservation programs," said Weisman. "This new online guide is a great place for them to start."

Conservation program payment details and eligibility requirements will continually be added to the tool to reflect recent and pending changes at the state and federal levels.

<http://www.mda.state.mn.us/protecting/conservation/funding.htm>

Profitability of diversified cropping systems

Under the market scenarios that prevailed between 1993 and 2006, intensive rotational grazing and organic grain and forage systems were the most profitable systems on highly productive land in southern Wisconsin. That's the conclusion

reached in an article reporting on the profitability of six conventional and organic systems, focussing on net returns and associated risk exposure. The results from the Wisconsin Integrated Cropping Systems Trial (WICST) are reported by Chavas et al.

in the 2009 March-April issue of *Agronomy Journal*. Read the abstract: <http://agron.sciijournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/101/2/288>

Webinars—information seminars viewed from the comfort of your desk

Many organizations are using webinars to efficiently and economically share information with a national audience. For example, ATTRA's recent Hoop House webinar drew over 700 attendees. If you missed it, the recorded webinar video is posted online: <http://www.attra.org/video>

For more information, go to: www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/ag_systems/in_focus/smallfarms_if_family_farm_forum.html To be placed on the mailing list to receive notices about future Family Farm Forums, contact Patricia McAleer, pmcaleer@csrees.usda.gov.

There are some computer system requirements for participating in a webinar. A broadband Internet connection is preferred. A satellite connection will probably work, but might give you some occasional delays. Dial-up connections probably won't work for live participation in a webinar. You need to have Adobe FlashPlayer, which is already present on most computers. It is a free download: <http://get.adobe.com/flashplayer/>.

The CSREES Family Farm Forum webinars in the past year covered "Farm Transitions—Exit, Entry and Planning," "Local Food Systems," and "Entrepreneurship." Those webinars are recorded and available for viewing online.

Another source of informational webinars is the eXtension website, www.extension.org, a collaboration of Extension services from across the United States. Click on "Resource Areas" to find webinars, audio recordings, and other resources on topics that interest you.

New UW Extension publication answers consumer questions about grass-fed beef

Farmers use a variety of systems to raise healthy animals. Today, most meat in the grocery store or at the local restaurant is from animals that were raised in a feedlot and fed significant amounts of grain in addition to hay and pasture. Grass-fed meat is from animals that are put "out on grass," or fed a forage diet. This allows animals to harvest their own food and dispose of their

own manure in the pasture.

"A consumer's guide to grass-fed beef" provides information about the health and environmental benefits of grass-fed beef and how to buy and cook this beef. This publication was developed by UW-Extension Emerging Agricultural Markets Team and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer

Protection. It is available for download or purchase from UW-Cooperative Extension Publications. <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/A-Consumers-Guide-to-Grass-fed-Beef-P1323C0.aspx>

North Central SARE releases new Brief Sheets

The North Central Region SARE (NCR-SARE) has released one page 'Brief Sheets' about SARE projects funded in their region. Topics covered include organic

farming, specialty crops, beginning farmers, bioenergy, alternative marketing, and agroforestry.

<http://sare.org/ncrsare/pubsres.htm>. They have also developed State Summary Sheets, available online at: www.sare.org/highlights/state_summaries.shtml

On the ground research—2009 on-farm research grants in Minnesota

Innovative Minnesota farmers always seem to have a number of interesting on-farm research projects or demonstrations around the state, and summer 2009 (and beyond, given the number of high tunnel projects happening) is no exception! Look for more information about these projects and about summer field days in upcoming newsletters.

NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher grants

-Dream of Wild Health (Diane Wilson and Sally Auger) will be working with the Garden Warriors youth program to bring native food to native communities at celebrations and farmers' markets in St.

Paul and Minneapolis. "Native youth teach healthy diets (learning to love vegetables!)."

-Juan Carlos Cervantes, Minneapolis, will be looking at organic pest management with "Build it and they will come: Integrating beneficial beetle habitat with organic growing systems economically."

-Inga Haugen, Canton, will be exploring alternative enterprises with "Indoor cultivation of mushrooms to diversify farm and test local markets."

- With her "City backyard farming" grant, Xe Susane Moua will be looking at the feasibility and profitability of operating an

urban CSA, with multiple backyard urban plots in St. Paul.

-Siona Nchotu, Brooklyn Park, will be working with Afro Eco to explore backyard farming with her grant, "The Minnesota African women sustainable backyard farming project."

-Ly Vang, Inver Grove Heights, will be using her organic plots to develop a DVD designed for "Increasing safety and sustainability and reducing the use of pesticides and other farm chemicals among Hmong Farmers."

Report outlines local food distribution models

Researchers sponsored by the Chefs Collaborative interviewed more than 50 chefs, farmers and distributors about what they think works best for moving local food from farm to consumer effectively, and

what they wish worked better. The research focused on large urban markets with partial year (rather than year round) growing seasons, and sought out examples that were different from conventional wholesale

distribution systems. The report is available as a PDF at:

<http://chefscollective.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/public-summary-final1.pdf>

Spanish Language ATTRA Publication Available As Audio Download

The ATTRA Publication *Nuevos Mercados Para Su Cosecha* (http://attra.org/espanol/resumenes/nuevos_mercados.html) is now available as

an audio download (http://attra.org/media/nuevos_mercados.mp3). This Spanish-language publication details strategies for farmers interested in

marketing their products to local institutions such as schools, colleges, hospitals, retirement homes and day care centers.

Announcements and upcoming events

June 18. Growing Bioenergy Crops. SROC, 6:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m. Waseca, MN. University of MN Southern Research and Outreach Center. This class is designed for landowners, professionals and residents who wish to learn more about cultural practices and challenges of growing bio-energy crops. We will tour the bio-energy crops planted at the UM Southern Research and Outreach Center and discuss current and future research goals. Registration is \$ 20. Pre-registration is requested. To register visit: <http://cfc.fans.umn.edu/wa/> or contact Kathy Eckwright, 507-389-6972 or 888-241-3214, eckwr001@umn.edu.

June 20. Grazefest, Mill City Farmers' Market, 8:00 a.m.-Noon. Minneapolis, MN,. Sample delicious, locally-grown, pasture-raised fare, meet Minnesota Farmers growing pasture-raised foods and learn about the benefits of pastured egg, pork, dairy, beef, goat, and sheep production. Plus much more! For more info contact SFA, (320) 226-6318.

July 8. Sustainable Bioenergy, 10:00 am - 3:00 pm Minneapolis, MN. IATP. This workshop for natural resource and agricultural educators focuses special attention on small scale bio-diesel and bioenergy crop options. We'll look at past bioenergy efforts and discuss the success and challenges faced by emerging

community renewable energy projects. Registration is required. Please email Amy Stratton at astratton@iatp.org to register or for questions.

July 9. Organic Field Day, SWROC, Lamberton, MN. 8:00a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Field tour stops will include: organic high tunnel; no-till roller/crimper research; soil pit comparing organic and conventionally managed soils; variety trials; forage research; weed control plots; and much more! Hear presentations on Tricks and Trades for Weed Control, Farm Business Management, and UMN Organic Research Reports. For more information please contact Molly Werner at 507-752-7372.

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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.