

Organic dairies in Midwest can weather economic downturn

The New York Times published an article (http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/29/us/29dairy.html?_r=1) [Note: requires free sign-in to view article] on May 29 describing the economic travails of organic dairy farms in the Northeastern United States, that relied on expensive organic grain shipped in from states further west. The recession has led to a decline in demand for organic milk, and some organic dairies are selling their milk on the conventional market because their usual organic milk buyers have stopped taking milk. In Vermont, 32 dairy farms have gone out of business since December 1, 2008. The article painted a grim picture for the organic dairy industry as a whole.

Dennis Johnson, dairy researcher at the West Central Research & Outreach Center

in Morris, has encouraging words for organic dairy producers in Minnesota and surrounding states. He said that organic dairy should not be “pigeon-holed as a temporary or inferior niche market when it is compared with the commodity dairy industry.” He added, “Midwestern farmers are also challenged by low milk prices, although the situation may not be as dire as it is on the coasts. The Midwest is the logical home base of the U.S. dairy industry. It is close to feed grains, but also can produce excellent forage. The high cost of organic grain for energy supplementation emphasizes that organic producers should focus on producing abundant supplies of high quality forage to be consumed by dairy cows well adapted for forage utilization. Organic corn is more than \$10/bushel. ... The long run priority on organic

production research and outreach by agricultural scientists should be to develop more effective forage-consuming cows and better quality and increased yield of forages, including pasture.”

While there are a total of three organic research facilities at universities in the U.S., Dr. Johnson leads the only research program in the U.S. that has the capacity to compare the transition from conventional to organic dairy production. Dr. Johnson can be contacted at dairydj@morris.umn.edu. Read more about organic dairy transition research at Morris, MN: <http://www.mndaily.com/2009/06/09/u-researches-transition-organic-dairy-farming>.

Urban agriculture grows in the Twin Cities

City Backyard Farming

Recently, 24 people on an urban ag tour in the Twin Cities piled out of vans in front of a house in a St. Paul residential neighborhood. Xe-Susane Moua, the urban farmer on this small lot, shared her vision for her CSA (community supported agriculture) farm in the heart of an urban residential area—she wants to raise healthful food that is affordable to her neighbors—and earn an income! Susane has a SARE farmer-rancher grant to investigate producing a wide variety of fruits, herbs and vegetables on small plots of land, divided between her home site, two schools, and a larger ¼ acre lot a few blocks from her

home. She is keeping careful financial and production records, and by using intensive interplanting and crop succession plantings, has a business plan to produce crops valued at \$5.00 per square foot of raised bed.

Susane uses low input, organic methods to grow over 50 different types and varieties of vegetables. She is also a Master Gardener intern with Ramsey County Extension. If Susane’s enthusiasm wasn’t enough to captivate the group of people assembled on what would normally be a front lawn, the sheer abundance of fresh greens in the 1000 square feet of eight raised beds that fill Susane’s yard caught their attention.

Twin Cities Urban Agriculture Network

As interest in urban agriculture and local food systems continues to rise, so does the need for communication and networking between the many groups working in this area. The Twin Cities Urban Agriculture Connection, www.tcurbanag.com, is a new website built by and for those interested in urban agriculture. The new site provides a central location where people involved in urban agriculture can find information, links to urban ag groups, and events in our area and in other regions. If you have comments or suggestions for the website, please contact Andy Nelson at tcurbanag@gmail.com.

SWROC hosts organic field day in Lamberton

The Southwest Research and Outreach Center in Lamberton, MN, will host the University of Minnesota’s Organic Field Day on Thursday, July 9, 2009. “

University of Minnesota faculty will conduct field tours to present ongoing research on weed management strategies, organic no-till production, alternative crop

rotations, forage and cover crop establishment, perennial crops, forage effects on soil quality, and high tunnel season extension research.

The field day will include a delicious organic and local food lunch, with plenty of time to network and visit exhibits. The Organic Field Day is free and open to the

public. A small fee will be charged for lunch. If you plan to attend, or would like to have an exhibit, please register in advance by contacting the SWROC at 507-752-7372 or by sending an email to werne022@umn.edu.

Health care sector engaged with local and sustainable foods

The American Medical Association (AMA) recently approved a new Sustainable Food policy that supports a healthy and sustainable food chain within healthcare systems. Nationwide, more than 240 hospitals have signed the “Health Care Without Harm” Healthy Food in Healthcare Pledge to promote sustainable food systems within their facilities. Those institutions fulfill that pledge in a variety of ways; such as purchasing organic food, meat produced without the use of antibiotics,

and locally produced foods; and sponsoring farmers markets and food boxes for staff. Read the complete article: <http://www.environmentalleader.com/2009/06/18/ama-prescribes-sustainable-food-chain/>

Closer to home, the Minnesota Grown Program joined with HealthPartners in an effort to measure the health benefits of CSA Farm membership. Minnesota Grown identified CSA Farms that were willing to establish new drop sites for their vegetable

shares at five State of Minnesota office sites, the Hennepin County Government Center and three HealthPartners locations.

Participating employees at these drop sites allow HealthPartners researchers to access their health assessment data, and agree to take a survey (pre- and post-CSA membership) to measure the health benefits for the employee and their other household members. The study includes 395 participants. For more information contact Paul Hugunin, 651-201-6510.

Healthy Local Food exhibit expands at the State Fair

Come learn about the benefits of buying and eating local foods. Each day during the State Fair (Aug 27 through Sept 7) the Healthy Local Food exhibit will feature a different theme, including Food and Travel, Dine Local, Farm to School, and Food and Health. You can meet local food producers, taste a food sample prepared

fresh on our cooking stage, and find out what you can do to make a difference— simply by eating!

New this year! Come try some of the best (and freshest) fare at the Fair at our new Countryside Market, presented by Renewing the Countryside and

HealthPartners. Pick up fresh, local watermelon, a local maple syrup soda, and caprese salad on a stick! The market stand will be outside the front door of the Eco Experience. For more information go to: <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/ecoexperience/>

Reports examine status of organic agriculture in state, nation

The USDA has released a fact sheet about organic agriculture in Minnesota, based on 2007 Ag Census data. http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Minnesota/Publications/Other_Press_Releases/

MNOrgAgriculture.pdf (PDF, 330 kb)

USDA's Economic Research Service released a report entitled, 'Emerging Issues in the U.S. Organic Industry.' The report provides an overview of trends and issues in

the organic industry, such as shortfalls in supply, production costs, and competing labels. The report also discusses changes in policies for organic agriculture with the passage of the 2008 Farm Bill. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/EIB55/>

USDA reports on beginning farmers, direct marketing

USDA's Economic Research Service released a report on beginning farmers and ranchers, based on data collected in the 2007 Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS) as well as in the 1978 through 1997 Census of Agriculture. Among the findings: beginning operators (operating 10 years or less) make up about a quarter of all operators and account for about 10 percent

of total production; beginning farmers are more likely to be female, non-white, or Hispanic than more established farmers; beginners are younger than established farmers though nearly a third of them are 55 or older. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/EIB53/>

A new report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing

Service (AMS) shows direct-to-consumer farm marketing in the United States is growing faster than total agricultural sales. The two categories increased 104.7 percent and 47.6 percent, respectively, from 1997 to 2007. <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5076729&acct=wdmgeninfo>

Small farm events—save the dates!

The University of Minnesota Extension is again hosting a *Small Farm and Rural Living Expo* on the Scott County fairgrounds, in Jordan, MN on Sept. 12, 2009. The event will again include speakers about issues of concern to small acreage landowners and farmers, demonstrations on beekeeping, cheesemaking, food preservation, an “Aisle of Breeds,” a Kids Corner, trade show and music. Plan to attend! More information will be available soon on the Extension Small Farms website: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/SmallFarms/>

or for more information, contact Becky Rasmussen, 612-543-1316, eliza003@umn.edu.

The 5th *National Small Farm conference* will be held September 15-17, 2009 in Springfield, Illinois. The conference, held every three years, brings together land grant universities, community-based organizations and other stakeholders who work with small farmers and ranchers. The conference

aims to strengthen collaboration and partnership among groups and provide an opportunity to share new ideas in research, extension and outreach. Hosted by the University of Illinois Extension, the conference will include five short courses, 160 oral and poster presentations, seven tours and over 50 exhibits. Program and agenda at <http://www.conferences.uiuc.edu/smallfarm>

Sustainable agriculture demonstration grants awarded

Sustainable agriculture grants totaling \$100,000 will support seven on-farm research and demonstration projects in Minnesota, beginning in 2009. Available through the MDA's Sustainable Agriculture Grant Demonstration Program, the grants support three-year projects that have

potential to increase farm net profits, benefit the environment and improve the farm family quality of life. This year's crop of grant projects includes reduction of pesticide use and promotion of integrated pest management (IPM) among Hmong farmers; blackberry and raspberry

production in high tunnels; and production of mushrooms, hops, Saskatoon berries, and cherries. Read more about the grantees and their projects: <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/news/releases/2009/nr-2009-06-05-sagrants.htm>.

Farm Beginnings course signup is now open

The 2009-2010 sessions of the Land Stewardship Project's Minnesota-region Farm Beginnings course will begin this fall and are being held in two locations: River Falls, Wis., and Spicer, Minn. The deadline for registration is Aug. 26. For more information, call the Land Stewardship Project (LSP) at 507-523-3366 (Lewiston, Minn.) or 320-269-2105 (Montevideo,

Minn.). Details on the course content are available at www.farmbeginnings.org.

Farm Beginnings participants learn goal setting, financial planning, business plan creation, alternative marketing and innovative production techniques. Classes are led by farmers and other agricultural professionals from the area. The classes,

which meet approximately twice a month, run until March 2010, followed by an on-farm education component that includes farm tours and skills sessions. During the past decade, more than 350 people have graduated from the Minnesota-region Farm Beginnings program, and 60 percent of them are actively farming.

Minnesota Grown new and improved online directory

The Minnesota Grown program launched a new website version of its popular farmer directory at www.minnesotagrown.com. The newly redesigned site features the "bullseye" search: people can type in their zip code, and find all of the farmers closest

to their own home. Searches can also be done by food type, region, or county. Free print copies of the directory, featuring Olympian and Minnesota Grown Spokesperson Carrie Tollefson on the cover, are also available. Get yours at the

State Fair, order it online at www.minnesotagrown.com, or contact Brian Erickson at 651-201-6539, brian.j.erickson@state.mn.us.

Third Crops Walk-n-Talks scheduled

Third Crops are a variety of alternative crops that provide economic return and when placed strategically on the landscape, can build soil health, sequester carbon, retain water and nutrients, and improve the overall sustainability of agricultural production.

A series of Walk-n-Talks sponsored by Rural Advantage and University of Minnesota Extension are scheduled for summer and early fall, and will cover bioenergy crops, aronia berries, fruit and nut tree, vineyards, and more! Individual events are listed on the U of MN Extension Small Farm

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

Minnesota Cooks™ at the State Fair

For the seventh year, the Minnesota Cooks™ program (www.minnesotacooks.org) at the State Fair will celebrate the relationships between premier Minnesota chefs and local Food Alliance Certified farmers on September 1st

with a full day of demonstrations, discussions, and sampling of sustainable cuisine. The program will begin at 9:00 AM with a breakfast show and will continue throughout the day with a show at the top of each hour until 5:00 PM. All shows take

place on the Minnesota Cooks™ Stage in Carousel Park, just west of the Grandstand Ramp. As in past years, a calendar featuring enticing recipes will be available to all Minnesota Cooks™ attendees.

Organic Farm School offered by Women's Environmental Institute

The "Organic Farm School" series of courses are scheduled on Monday evenings through mid-August. There are also two Saturday field days as part of the series. Courses take place at the Midtown Global

Market located at 920 E Lake St, Minneapolis. Full class registration is \$120; drop-in for a single class is \$20; and drop-in for a field day is \$10. Some of the featured topics include permaculture,

biodiversity, urban agriculture, wild rice and biological patents, and dismantling racism through food justice. For more info or to register, call WEI at 651-583-0705 or visit www.w-e-i.org/organic-farm-school.

Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture

411 Borlaug Hall
1991 Upper Buford Circle
St. Paul, MN 55108



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.