

2007 Farm Bill

Summer has arrived and along with all the wonderful good stuff to eat, we are afforded a feast of opportunities to learn and exchange information about successful production and marketing practices, and to discuss farm policies that encourage sustainable farming systems. There is a sense of urgency to policy discussions this summer, as Congress prepares to write the new 2007 Farm Bill. Periodically Congress

reauthorizes a variety of farm and food laws through a multi-year, omnibus farm bill. This omnibus approach allows a comprehensive look at food, agriculture, and rural policy. There are real opportunities for broad-based coalitions to influence the development of United States farm policy throughout the Farm Bill legislative process.

New MISA Board Members

Three new members have joined the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture's Board of Directors as of July 2006. Representing the diverse agricultural community, they bring a wealth of experience to MISA's mission to "bring together the agricultural community and the University community in a cooperative effort to develop and promote sustainable agriculture in Minnesota and beyond."

Bill Hutchison is a Professor and Extension Entomologist at the University of Minnesota and has been involved in conducting Integrated Pest Management (IPM) research and educational programs over the last 25 years. Bill believes "that

many of the foundations of IPM are quite compatible with the goals of sustainable agriculture, including the agricultural production goals for environmental integrity, social responsibility and profitability."

Rob King is a Professor and Department Head for the Department of Applied Economics at the University of Minnesota. Over the past 20 years Rob has conducted research on a range of issues related to farmer cooperative formation and management, and believes "cooperatives can play an important role in the evolution of community-based sustainable farming systems."

Dan Miller is a farmer from Spring Valley, Minnesota as well as a Farm Business Management Instructor with Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. Dan is a strong advocate for sustainable agriculture and feels that "as consumers become more concerned about not only the healthfulness of their food but also the origin of their food and the methods by which it was grown or raised the demand for food produced in a wholesome way will increase."

To learn more about the MISA Board, or to contact these new Board members or other current members, go to www.misa.umn.edu.

Farm Bill: Where to Get Information and Join the Policy Discussion

Organizations and Websites:

There are several coalitions of organizations working to advance sustainable agriculture policy: the Sustainable Agriculture Working Groups (SAWGs); the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (SAC); and the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture (NCSA). For a thorough explanation of "who does what" and how these organizations work together to advance national sustainable farm policy, see the Frequently Asked Questions on the Midwest SAWG (MSAWG) website: www.msawg.org/FAQ.html. Briefly, the

five regional SAWGs are networks of organizations working for a system of agriculture that is economically profitable, environmentally sound, family-farm based, and socially just. The MSAWG membership list is an impressive roster of the many nonprofit organizations in Minnesota that promote policies to support sustainable agriculture. The SAC is an alliance of groups AC began as an advocacy effort by MSAWG, but is expanding to claim a national membership. For the past 15 years, SAC has been the primary presence and face in Washington, D.C. for sustainable agriculture advocacy. SAC

sends weekly updates and a monthly newsletter to members about happenings in Washington, D.C. The NCSA (www.sustainableagriculture.net) is an alliance of partner organizations, coalitions and networks that work together to identify consensus positions and strategies for national sustainable agriculture policy, as well as education and mobilization of the grassroots for action. The NCSA issues action alerts, a monthly e-newsletter, and the quarterly "AG Matters" newsletter.

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Attend conferences and forums

Sustainable Farm Bill Workshop and Rally
SAC and MSAWG are holding a 2007 Farm Bill Kick-Off event, August 14, 2006 in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. At the Farm Bill Kick-Off you will learn about the many important conservation, research, beginning farmer, competition and marketing initiatives along with effective communication strategies for non-profits. To register, go to www.msawg.org or contact Margaret Huelsman (317) 536-2315, mhuelsman@msawg.org.

"A Midwest Homecoming: Sharing a New Tradition of Sustainability," the 2006 Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education national conference will also have a fair share of policy discussion among the 30 educational sessions. Join us in Oconomowoc, WI, August 15-17, 2006 for tours, workshops and presentations that are guaranteed to expand your outlook about agriculture. Topics range from policy roundtables about green payments, the next 25 years of the sustainable agriculture movement and the past, present and future of the Farm Bill to practical presentations about raising heritage turkeys and agricultural tourism. Go to www.sare2006.org for schedule, program, and registration information.

Read up

- Public comments are available from last year's USDA-sponsored Farm Bill Forum Listening Tour. Go to www.fas.usda.gov/info/factsheets/FB2007/farmbill2007.asp and click on "Farm Bill Forum Comment

Other Issues that Invite Public Comment

USDA standard for grass-fed marketing

Proposed USDA rules will require livestock marketed as "grass-fed" to receive 99% of their lifetime ration from forages. Producers who want to use the "grass-fed" label will have their practices verified by the USDA. Text of the standard appeared in the May 12 Federal Register and is available online in PDF (www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/stand/ls0509.pdf, 63K). Comments must be received on or before Aug. 10, and should refer to Docket No. LS-05-09. Comments can be made by e-mail to: marketingclaim@usda.gov or can be mailed to: Chief, Standardization Branch,

Summaries". Each of the 41 subject areas has a summary paper with data about the topic, a summary of general opinions expressed and a list of specific suggestions that were conveyed.

- In January, the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition released highlights from their own analysis of the complete transcripts of the 52 USDA Farm Bill Forums. The topics most often addressed by the speakers were enhanced conservation and farmland stewardship initiatives, addressed by 40 percent of the participants; new investments in agricultural and rural development and entrepreneurship, addressed by 32 percent; and ideas to assist young, beginning, and minority farmers, addressed by 22 percent. A 2-page summary of the SAC analysis and a press release are available at www.msawg.org.

- USDA is releasing a series of 2007 Farm Bill theme papers. To date they have released papers on Risk Management, Conservation and Environment and Rural Development. Go to Farm Bill Forum comment page (above) and click on USDA Analysis Papers under "Related Topics".

- "What's Cooking for the Farm Bill," in the Spring 2006 AG Matters newsletter: (www.sustainableagriculture.net/docs/Spring2006.pdf)

- U.S. farm policy geared towards driving down prices for corn and soybeans to benefit food companies is a significant contributor to the nation's obesity epidemic, according to "Food without Thought: How U.S. Farm Policy

Livestock and Seed Program, AMS, USDA, Room 2607-S, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250-0254. Comments can also be made online, at www.regulations.gov. In the Keyword or ID box, use the keywords "grass (forage) fed claim."

National Animal Identification System (NAIS)

The NAIS is a USDA program designed to provide rapid identification of livestock and premises in disease outbreaks. The proposed system is being developed in three phases—premise identification first, animal identification, and animal tracking.

Contributes to Obesity," a new report by Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP). <http://www.iatp.org/iatp/publications.cfm?accountID=421&refID=80627>

- The Center for Rural Affairs has developed a series of white paper drafts that outlines proposals for Conservation, Research, and Rural Development Titles of the 2007 Farm Bill. They welcome comments: http://www.cfra.org/resources/2007_farmbill_menu.htm

Voice Your Opinion

A web-based farm bill feedback form allows producers throughout the nation to provide the House Committee on Agriculture with feedback about current farm policy as well as input about the future of farm policy. The form can be accessed at www.agriculture.house.gov and clicking on the Farm Bill Feedback icon; or directly at www.agriculture.house.gov/inside/feedbackform.html

House and Senate Agriculture Committee Farm Bill field hearings

July 17 – Senate Ag Committee, 9am Cape Girardeau, Missouri

July 22 – House Ag Committee, 9am Marshall, Minnesota

July 24 – Senate Ag Committee, 9am Ankeny, Iowa

For exact locations, more information and live audio of the hearings go to: www.agriculture.senate.gov, and www.agriculture.house.gov/

Although a gradual implementation plan has been proposed, there is currently no federal action requiring participation (www.usda.gov/nais and click on "NAIS Implementation Plan" in "Related Topics" box.) However, MN and WI have approved measures that make premise identification mandatory by 2008. There are concerns about the cost of individual animal identification, and that those costs may be heaviest for small farms and ranches if they are required to identify individual animals, as opposed to larger facilities that move

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animals in lots. In early June, the USDA released a bulletin addressing some of the concerns of small-scale and non-commercial producers about NAIS: (click on "Non-Commercial Producer Guidance" in

"Related Topics" box.) Currently, working groups for various animal species are meeting to discuss the best method of identification. Get involved-the USDA encourages grassroots involvement in the species working groups. The working group information is on the left side of the NAIS Web page (www.usda.gov/nais); under

"Browse by Audience" click the "Select a Working Group" dropdown button. Stakeholders can also submit comments to a particular working group via e-mail at animalidcomments@aphis.usda.gov. Include the species name and the term "working group" in the subject line of your e-mail.

University Of Minnesota To Host First International Conference On Animals In Organic Production

From August 23-25, 2006, the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus will be the epicenter for organic livestock producers and researchers, when the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) holds the international conference on organic livestock.

Leading organic livestock researchers and producers from throughout the world will share state-of-science research findings and production information during the three-day event.

Complete information about the conference, including on-line registration, can be found at:

http://www.ifoam.org/events/ifoam_conferences/IFOAM_Animal_Production_Conference.html

For more information, contact Jim Riddle, Organic Outreach Coordinator, 507-454-8310, jriddle@hbc.com.

Tilling the Barn

No, you're not misreading that header, and it's not a misprint! A new innovation in dairies these days is the compost barn—a facility that is similar to a freestall barn, but in place of the freestalls and alleys, has a composted bedding pack of fine, dry sawdust. The bedding is stirred twice a day with a tillage implement to aerate the pack and aid composting, and to provide a clean surface for the cows. Farmers using this system report that cows in compost barns are clean, comfortable, healthy (fewer lameness problems and lower somatic cell counts) and productive.

Researchers from the University of

Minnesota and the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute will be teaming up with farmers to answer some critical questions about bedding pack management—starting with "What type of bedding material works best?" With funding from the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, researchers will begin a five-phase project that will include surveying farmers currently using compost barns, testing various bedding pack materials under controlled lab conditions and in a pilot project, and finally, on several Minnesota farms. For more information about compost barns or this research project, go to [http://](http://www.extension.umn.edu/dairy/management/compostbarns.htm)

www.extension.umn.edu/dairy/management/compostbarns.htm or contact Mindy Spiehs, Regional Extension Educator at 320-589-1711, spie0073@umn.edu

On Tuesday, July 18th from 11 to 2:30, the University of Minnesota Extension Service, Carver County will host a tour of two compost dairy barns in northern Carver County. The tour is free but you must RSVP by Friday, July 14th to (952) 466-5300. Go to www.extension.umn.edu/dairy for more information, or call Laura Kieser, 952-466-5306

Grazefest Minnesota to Feature Beef and Dairy Grazing

The Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota (SFA of MN) is expanding Grazefest Minnesota to feature state-of-the-art grazing information for both beef and dairy. Grazefest Minnesota is an interactive, educational grazing event that includes pasture walks, speakers, demonstrations, and delectable locally produced, pasture-raised foods.

On Friday August 4th, Dr. Alejandro La Manna, Dairy Grazing Specialist with the National Agricultural Research Institute of Uruguay, will keynote at the U of MN West Central Research and Outreach Center (WCROC) near Morris. He will address the economics of several different extended

crop rotations with forage and grain crops. Dr. Dennis Johnson will guide tours of WCROC's dairy rotational grazing system.

After lunch in the Horticultural Garden, Grazefest will move to Prairie Horizons Farm near Starbuck, hosted by owner/operators Luverne and Mary Jo Forbord. Gearld Fry, a Grass-fed Genetics Consultant and founder of Bovine Engineering and Consulting, will deliver the keynote speech on *Beyond Seeing: Develop your Sixth Sense for Top Grass-fed Genetics*, followed by a demonstration on scrutinizing cattle to predict optimal success on grass. A tour of the Prairie Horizons rotational grazing operation will feature the Forbord's new

pipeline watering system, and a variety of grazing options at work on the farm. Preregistration for Friday is required, registration fee is \$45 per person. For more information, go to www.sfa-mn.org or contact Mary Jo Forbord, 866-760-8732, mforbord@sfa-mn.org

On Saturday August 5th, 12:30 pm, Grazefest Minnesota will move to the Molitor Farm near Rockville for a tour of the Molitors' 300 cow dairy, recently transitioned to organic production. There is no charge and registration is not required. For more info, contact Jeremy Lanctot, SFA of MN Dairy Initiative Coordinator at 320-980-2333 or mdi@sfa-mn.org.

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Healthy Local Food and the State Fair

Think those two don't mix? Think again! The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the State Fair are launching a new venture this year. They are remodeling an entire building into the "Eco-Experience". This exhibit will feature everything from a

sustainably-built house to hybrid vehicles. One section will be *Healthy Local Foods: Thousands of Miles Fresher*. Daily themes will allow producers, retail partners and non-profit partners to tell the story of how the foods on our plates are connected to larger

societal issues. For more information contact *Renewing the Countryside*, 612-251-7304, jan@rtcinfo.org.

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 Service; the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCRSARE) Professional Development Program (PDP); and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA). 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.