

Minnesotans selected as 2005 Organic Farmers of the Year

For the second year in a row, a Minnesota farm family has won the prestigious Organic Farmer of the Year award from Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services (MOSES), a nonprofit educational organization.

This year's award was presented to Carmen and Sally Fernholz, of Madison, at the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference. With annual attendance of more than 1,750 people, it is one of the nation's largest organic farming conferences. The Fernholz family was recognized for their commitment to organic practices and contribution to organic research, marketing, and education.

"We congratulate Carmen and Sally for receiving this honor," Commissioner Hugoson said. "Their commitment to innovation in organic agriculture, strengthening markets, and sharing their wisdom with other farmers makes them true Minnesota agricultural leaders."

Carmen and Sally have been organic producers for more than 30 years. They grow corn, soybeans, legumes, and a variety of small grains including oats, barley, and golden flax on their 360 tillable acres. They also partner in a conventional hog operation. Today, Minnesota has more than 400 organic producers, but it wasn't always that way. Carmen and Sally's three adult children were interviewed by Beth Waterhouse, School of Agriculture Endowed Chair, for her book, *Time, Soil, and Children*. They talked about their experiences growing up in one of the first families to switch to organic farming in Minnesota. Now, with retail sales of organic food growing at 20 percent per year, the Fernholz family is part of a rapidly growing sector of the food industry.

Carmen has participated in a number of research projects with the U of M, MDA, the University of Minnesota Southwest Research and Outreach Center, and the Pennsylvania-based Rodale Institute. He is currently involved in an eight-year study to determine more effective management practices for Canada thistle using GPS-mapping and biological control with bacteria. Carmen is also a founding member and vice-president of the Organic Farmers Agency for Relationship Marketing (OFARM), an organization that coordinates the efforts of producer marketing groups to benefit and sustain organic producers. He was also a charter board member for the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) and is once again a current member of the MISA Board of Directors. Carmen also serves as Chair of the West Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership board and serves on MDA's Organic Agriculture Advisory Task Force.

A respected and engaging speaker on organic farming, Carmen has given numerous talks to members of the Minnesota Organic Farmers' Information Exchange (MOFIE) Mentor Hotline, an innovative network of 22 experienced organic farmers who answer questions about organic production, certification and marketing from curious or transitioning farmers. The service is free and available at <http://mofie.coafes.umn.edu>.

Student Farm at the U of M

Students at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus in the student group “What’s Up in Sustainable Agriculture (WUSA)” have been working to create the school’s student run campus farm. This student-led initiative started last summer with a vegetable production garden. Eight students participated in a bi-monthly summer seminar series and discussed and experienced various types of organic and sustainable gardening techniques such as composting, soil management, pest management and preservation of produce.

Last fall, students planned and brainstormed. They developed a solid mission and vision for the one acre of campus land that would become the permanent student farm plot beginning in the summer of 2005. Students are combining research, education and outreach and experimenting with and learning about perennial woody plants and grasses, companion planting, soil management, and many other practices. As winter approached, the field was planted with a cover crop of rye. While the rye is now dormant under the January snow, the planning process continues.

Students sought the help of several professors in the initial planning of the farm. This led to the creation of the Student Sustainable Farm Planning course; a course created by students and co-taught by Albert Markhart (Horticulture), Paul Porter (Agronomy) and Courtney Tchida (MISA). The course uses the publication, *Building a Sustainable Business: A Guide to Developing a Business Plan for Farms and Rural Businesses*. As students develop a business plan for their student farm, they are learning the steps to creating a sustainable farm or sustainable related business. The publication helps students look at values, goals, and strategic planning.

The location of the students’ one acre is significant. The one-acre plot is on the St Paul campus of the University of Minnesota. It is adjacent to the Gibbs Farm museum, which has a traditional Dakotah garden with native plantings and pioneer gardens with heritage seeds, along with a Dakotah Medicine Teaching Garden.



For more information about the student farm or to become involved with WUSA, contact Courtney Tchida, (612) 625-2738 or tchi0003@umn.edu.

A report from the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference 2005

This year’s Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference had a decidedly Minnesotan Theme. Carmen and Sally Fernholz were named the MOSES 2005 Farmers of the Year and all three keynotes were given in part by Minnesotans: Audrey Arner and Cynthia Vagnetti shared the “Voices of Minnesota Farm Women” video, Dana Jackson highlighted a number of projects going on around the state to connect farming and wildlife habitats, and Jim Riddle shared thoughts on the values that the organic community should strive to uphold.

The University of Minnesota Student Farm also made its debut in some ways at the conference. One-third of the students in the farm planning class attended the conference and were able to network with students from five other student farms around the Midwest. Resources abounded at the conference in all forms: workshops, tables, books, and new websites to explore. Two newer books I picked up for the Student Farm were *Micro Eco-Farming: Prospering from backyard to Small Acreage in Partnership with the Earth* by Barbara Berst Adams and *The Organic Farmer’s Guide to Marketing and Community Relations* by Rebecca Bosch. They’re both available through the MOSES bookstore or the Michael Fields Institute Bookstore.

-Courtney Tchida, tchi0003@umn.edu



Green Lands, Blue Waters

The Green Lands, Blue Waters Initiative brings the emerging discipline of sustainability science and the considerable resources of the land-grant institutions of the Upper Mississippi Basin to bear on big challenges: developing and implementing perennial-based agricultural systems and better understanding of their impact on the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico.

The goals of this 10-year regional initiative are to improve water quality and habitat diversity, reduce the size of the hypoxic zone in the northern Gulf of Mexico, while simultaneously increasing rural economic vitality. The approach is to develop the technical, financial, market, social, human, and policy infrastructure necessary to support perennial systems.

The initiative will first focus on two watersheds that disproportionately contribute nutrients and sediments to the Mississippi River and its tributaries, and will lay the foundation for widespread adoption of perennial systems throughout the Upper Mississippi Basin. "This concept is percolating throughout the whole Midwest. We're taking all of the activities and knitting them into a larger version," said Steve Morse senior fellow, College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences. In Louisiana, work will focus on the northern Gulf of Mexico coastal zone. For more information please visit our web site, www.greenlandsbluewaters.org. Or, contact Steve Morse, 612-625-7278 or morse033@umn.edu.

MISA Board Nominations

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) seeks your help in identifying individuals potentially willing to serve on its Board of Directors. A term on the MISA board is three years. You may nominate yourself or someone else to serve on the board.

Beginning in July 1, 2005, the following vacancies on the Board will be filled: Two sustainable agriculture practitioners (e.g., farmers and ranchers); and, one representative of the sustainable agriculture community (e.g., non-governmental organizations, business, government and citizen representatives).

The purpose of MISA is to bring together the agricultural community and the University community in a cooperative effort to develop and promote sustainable agriculture in Minnesota and beyond. Please submit the application/nominations form to MISA by 4:30 p.m., Friday, April 1, 2005. Nomination forms can be found at www.misa.umn.edu. If you have any questions, please contact the MISA office at (612) 625-8235 or misamail@umn.edu.



Upcoming Events

2005 3rd Crop Winter Series Producer Meetings. March 14, 2005 and March 28, 2005. Knights of Columbus Hall, Fairmont, MN. The March 14 meeting will focus on flax and the March 28 meeting will focus on amaranth and small grains. Contact Jeff Jensen, (507) 238-5449 or 3rdcropmarkets@earthlink.net for more information. Registration is free to anyone wishing to come, but pre-registration is requested.

Minnesota Grown Conference. March 15, 2005. U of M, St. Paul. The annual conference is targeted to garden centers, fruit and vegetable growers, livestock producers and others who market their products directly to consumers. Registration information, session details and presenter backgrounds are available online at www.mda.state.mn.us/mngrown/conference.htm or by calling the Minnesota Grown Program, (651)297-5510.

Phosphorus Conference 2005. March 29, 2005. U of M, St. Paul, Continuing Education Center. The theme of this year's conference is "Phosphorus cycling in agricultural, urban and aquatic ecosystems." For more information on the conference, including registration information, go to www.coafes.umn.edu/phosphorus or call Erik Kattan, (612) 625-1456. There is no fee for the conference, but pre-registration is requested.

Dynamic Farmers' Markets Spring Conference. April 5-6, 2005. Mark your calendar to attend one of the spring Dynamic Farmers Market Conferences that will be held in Staples on April 5 and Waseca on April 6, 2005. For more information, contact Terry Nennich or Mary Gieske from the University of Minnesota Extension Service Regional Center in Crookston (888) 241-0781.

Sustainable Farming Association of Central Minnesota Annual Meeting. April 8-9, 2005, Brainerd. The annual meeting includes a workshop on Friday with agroforester and farmer Mark Shepard that will explore ecologically based food production systems. Saturday includes the SFA of Central Minnesota Annual Meeting in the morning followed by Mark Shepard's presentation on permaculture based woody food crop production. For more information call Jim Chamberlin, (218) 828-6197 (days) or (218) 764-3020 (evenings). Or, visit <http://arb.brainerd.com/index.html>.

Living Green Expo. April 30-May 1, 2005. Minnesota State Fairgrounds, Grandstand Building. The 2005 Living Green Expo will feature over 220 exhibitors of products, resources, services, and information on a variety of topics. For more information, visit www.livinggreen.org.

What we're about...

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 Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences (COAFES); 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).

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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.

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