

WANTED: organic livestock research

Interest in organic livestock production is growing rapidly, and that means we need research to support organic production and marketing. You'll find both a summary and the full report on priority needs identified for organic livestock research at www.misa.umn.edu, under "What's New." The survey on organic livestock research was conducted as part of Jim Riddle's tenure as Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems at the University of Minnesota.

The following research topics were deemed most important by organic livestock and crops producers, researchers, inspectors and certifiers:

- Economics and profitability of organic livestock production
- Approved organic methods of parasite management
- The relationship between organic soil building methods and livestock health and nutrition
- Analysis of the nutritional and health value of organic livestock products
- Approved health care options for livestock

On the MISA home page you'll find lots of other timely information, including a report on "Best Management Practices for Producers of GMO and non-GMO crops," a bulletin also written by Jim Riddle during his time as an endowed chair. Check it out, bookmark the MISA home page and make it part of your regular browsing!

Help for going into grass-based dairying

If you're interested in organic or grass-based dairying, the Minnesota Dairy Initiative (MDI) and Sustainable Farming Association (SFA) can help.

Jeremy Lanctot has been hired by SFA to deliver support to organic and grazing dairy farms throughout Minnesota, as part of the Dairy Initiative. Jeremy coordinates with other regional MDI teams, as necessary, to insure specific needs of these farms are met. You can call Jeremy for more information, or ask him to come to your farm for a no-obligation assessment.

The purpose of the assessment is to identify areas where you would like assistance to reduce costs, reduce labor, improve animal health, improve net profit, enhance quality of family life or protect the environment. Often, a first step is to link you with an experienced organic and/or grass-based farmer who can come to your farm to give you an objective view of the entire farming operation.

MDI is a producer-led initiative to energize a healthy and vibrant dairy industry in Minnesota. SFA is a project partner, along with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Minnesota Milk Producers Association, the University of Minnesota and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.

Contact Jeremy Lanctot at (320) 278-2002, jeremylanctot@direcway.com, or 17734-335th St., Sunburg, MN 56289

Grass-based dairying is a good option for beginning farmers, according to a two-year study of 15 young and beginning dairy farmers in southern Iowa by Ag Connect. By using rotational grazing, grass-based dairy farmers can reduce feed costs by half over conventional confinement dairies. Pasturing allows beginning farmers to use marginal farmland, thereby reducing land costs. "We found that it is possible to enter a grass-based dairy business with as little as \$50,000 on as few as

40 acres,” says Tim Ennis, principal investigator of the study. “We believe that grass-based dairying has exceptional potential in production agriculture today because 160 acres may reasonably produce a gross income of up to \$1,000 an acre.”

For more information, go to <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/newsletter/2003-2leletter/dairies.html> or contact Tim Ennis, Ag Connect, (641) 333-4656.

Needed: experienced organic producers for mentoring program

The Minnesota Organic Farmers Information Exchange is looking for experienced organic producers to offer information and guidance to other organic producers. Mentors agree to answer e-mail questions and phone calls during specified times. For more information, go to <http://mofie.coafes.umn.edu>, and then click on “mentor hotline.” Or, call Emily Evans at the Southwest Research and Outreach Center in Lamberton, (507) 752-7372.

Tips for planning a local foods banquet

Have you thought about hosting a local foods banquet in your area, but don't know where to begin? Jane Jewett, coordinator of the MISA Information Exchange, recently shared the lessons learned from their experience in northeast Minnesota. We thought we'd pass it along.

The Aitkin County Farmers Union had great success with a local foods banquet held Dec. 11, 2003. Sixty-one people attended the event in Palisade, Minn. It began with a social gathering at 6:30 p.m., followed by a delicious meal with food supplied by area farmers.

Farmers Union volunteers organized the entire event, from sending out invitations to cooking to decorating the tables. By the day of the banquet, 82 volunteer hours had been put in on planning and preparations. An additional 110 volunteer hours were put in on the day of the banquet.

What went right?

- The appearance of the banquet room was attractive and festive, with white paper table covers, decorations of evergreen boughs, and red placemats that showed the farmers' share of the cost of various foods.
- All of the area newspapers were invited to send a representative. All of the papers did so, and followed up with articles about the event.
- A diverse group of people attended; including local government officials, state legislators, members of civic organizations, newspaper editors, and the farmers who supplied the food.
- Following the meal, Minnesota Farmers Union President Doug Peterson discussed economic and health reasons for buying food locally, providing excellent context for the meal.

People were charged \$5 to attend the event. Thanks to donations of food from the farmers and to grant funding from the Northeast Minnesota Sustainable Development Partnership, the Farmers Union cleared nearly \$250 on the event; all of which was donated to area food shelves.

The banquet was held as part of a larger effort by the Northeast Minnesota Sustainable Development Partnership to promote local food systems. This event advanced that goal by making people aware of the delicious food available in their community. People attending the banquet were encouraged to consider using local foods for events in their own organizations.

Find details about the banquet at <http://www.aitkinfarmersunion.org/banquet.html>; a Local Food Dinner Planning Guide is at

<http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/foodfarm-main.html#LFDPG>.

2004 MOSES Organic Farmer of the Year

The MOSES 2004 Organic Farmer of the Year Award was presented to Martin and Atina Diffley at the recent Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference in LaCrosse. This award bestows the highest honor to a Midwest farm family practicing outstanding leadership in their community and organic land stewardship.

Certified organic since 1975, Martin and Atina Diffley are exemplary organic vegetable growers who use innovative marketing and experiment with green manure crops and compost. The Diffleys

have inspired and educated many young people on organic vegetable farming through their on-farm intern program, which was the first in the Midwest. They currently farm 140 acres near Farmington, Minn.

Alternative swine discussion groups are meeting

Farmer Roundtable Discussion Group (RTs) allow producers to talk about what works—and what doesn't—with alternative systems such as pasture, hoops and deep bedding. RTs are being held at different locations around state:

- March 17, Southern Research and Outreach Center, Waseca, 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m.
- March 23, Nobles County Courthouse, Farmers Room, 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m.
- April 1, Grumpy's Restaurant, Grand Meadow, 6 p.m.-9 p.m.
- April 6, Pizza Ranch, Redwood Falls, 6:30 p.m.-9 p.m.

For more information, contact Wayne Martin, Alternative Swine Production Systems Program, at marti067@umn.edu, (612) 625-6224. By the way, Niman Ranch is looking for more producers. For more information contact Niman Ranch at (641) 998-2683, or e-mail Paul Willis at pwillis@frontiernet.net.

Siehl Prize for Excellence in Agriculture seeks nominations

You're encouraged to nominate an outstanding individual or team for the Siehl Prize for Excellence in Agriculture. Three Siehl Prize laureates will receive monetary awards of \$50,000 each to recognize and reward extraordinary work in agriculture in one of three categories: production, agribusiness or academic/knowledge. The nominee must currently reside OR must have resided in Minnesota for a period of at least five years OR hold a degree from the University of Minnesota.

The prize is in keeping with the spirit of philanthropist Eldon Siehl, who wanted to address the importance of agriculture in food production and alleviating world hunger. The prize is administered by the College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences at the University of Minnesota.

Nominations are due May 1, 2004, with prizes to be presented in November. More information on the prize and the nomination form can be accessed at the College's Web site, www.coafes.umn.edu/siehlprize. Or, call (612) 625-5706 to have a brochure mailed to you.

Community Food Projects grants available for 2004

The Community Food Projects (CFP) Competitive Grants Program provides the major funding source for community-based food and agriculture projects in the U.S. Approximately \$4.6 million in grant funds will be available in 2004; proposals are due April 14, 2004

The CFP program supports projects that help meet the food needs of low-income people, increase the self-reliance of communities in providing for their own food needs, and promote comprehensive responses to local food, farm, and nutrition issues. It's administered by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service of USDA. The 2004 Request for Applications (RFA) is available at http://www.reeusda.gov/1700/funding/04/04RFA_Community_Food.htm.

Professional Development Program call for proposals

The North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) program has announced its 2004 Professional Development Program call for proposals. Funded projects will further NCR-SARE's goals of fostering environmentally, economically and socially sustainable agriculture.

The Professional Development Program (PDP) provides funding to increase the knowledge and skills of educators within the Cooperative Extension Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, other governmental agencies, and educators and service personnel in the non-profit and for-profit sectors serving the food and fiber system. Although all proposals will be considered, this year the PDP is calling for proposals in education program evaluation, serving socially disadvantaged

audiences, sustainable agriculture and community development, community food systems and community food security, and agroforestry and alternative land use issues.

For more information, click on www.sare.org/ncrsare/cfp.htm or contact Paula Ford, (785) 532-5328, pford@oznet.ksu.edu; or in Minnesota, Beth Nelson, (612) 625-8235, schre002@umn.edu.

Patrick Madden Award for Sustainable Agriculture

Do you know of a farmer or rancher who truly is outstanding in the field, on the range or at the farmers market? Do you find yourself pointing to this person again and again when you need an example of a truly “sustainable” producer? The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program announces its second award for farmers and ranchers who raise food or fiber in ways that are profitable, good for families and communities, and beneficial to the environment.

Four winners will receive \$1,000 each and a travel scholarship to “Toward a Sustainable Food System,” the SARE conference in Burlington, Vt., Oct. 19-21, 2004. All producers farming in the United States and its protectorates are eligible, except for previous winners and finalists. To nominate someone, go to www.sare.org/madden (no self-nominations, please).

The nomination deadline is May 10, 2004.

Upcoming Events

March 16th. Minnesota Grown Marketing Conference. We’ve assembled a program of exciting speakers and presentations that will impact your business and most importantly your bottom line. For more information, or to request a brochure and registration form, contact: The Minnesota Grown Program at 651-297-5510. The Minnesota Grown Marketing Conference is being held at the Earle Brown Center at the University of Minnesota St. Paul Campus.

March 27th. Beginning Farmer and Rancher Conference: Realities and Opportunities, Kearney, NE. Concurrent workshops will be held on whole farm planning, estate planning, risk management insurance and more. Land Stewardship Project will sponsor a bus to the conference. For more information contact Heidi Busse, 507-523-3366 or visit <http://www.cfra.org/bfrc/default.htm>.

April 2nd. Linking Landscape and Water Quality in the Mississippi River Basin for 200 years: Emerging Issues in Soil and Water. The second annual William E. Larson and Raymond R. Allmaras lecture will be held on Friday, April 2 2004 at 2:00 PM. For questions, please contact Dr. Neil Hansen at hansennc@mrs.umn.edu (320-589-1711) or Dr. Satish Gupta at sgupta@umn.edu (612-625-1241). Located in 335 Borlaug Hall, 1991 Upper Buford Circle, St. Paul Campus.

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).

Send story ideas to the editor: Jack Sperbeck, 405 Coffey Hall, 1420 Eckles Ave., University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108, (612) 625-1794, fax (612) 625-2207, e-mail: sperb001@umn.edu. Other editorial board members: Helene Murray, (612) 625-0220, murra021@umn.edu; Beth Nelson, (612) 625-8217, schre002@umn.edu; and Bill Wilcke, (612) 625-8205, wilck001@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.

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