

Organic corn and soybeans are profitable in Southwestern Minnesota

A University of Minnesota research team working at the Southwest Research and Outreach Center at Lamberton, Minn., has found that organic production of corn and soybean can meet or exceed the profitability of a conventional production system.

The researchers tested three systems. The high-input conventional system included broadcast application of fertilizers, insecticides and pre-emergent herbicides. A low-input conventional system involved banding of fertilizers, banding of post-emergent herbicides, some mechanical weed control and limited insecticide use. The organic system used organic fertilizers, mechanical weed control and no synthetic chemical applications. For each production system a two-year corn-soybean cropping sequence was tested, as well as a four-year sequence of corn-soybean-oats/alfalfa-alfalfa.

The actual crop yields from the experiment were priced according to the Southwestern Minnesota Farm Business Management Association prices. For the two-year sequence, the researchers calculated the value of the corn and soybean yield. For the four-year sequence, they calculated the value of the corn, soybean, oat grain, oat straw and alfalfa. Organic price premiums were used only for the third and fourth year of the four-year organic system, to reflect the three-year organic transition period.

The four-year cropping sequence outperformed the two-year sequence for profitability, whether the production system was conventional or organic. When the organic price premiums for the third and fourth year were used, the four-year organic system was much more profitable than the four-year conventional systems: \$270/acre average net return for organic versus \$172/acre to \$173/acre average net return for the conventional systems. Without the organic price premium, the organic four-year system was equal in profitability to the four-year conventional systems.

A presentation of these research results can be found on the MISA website: <http://www.misa.umn.edu/Other/profitabilityorganiccropping.html>.

Sign-Up for Conservation Security Program is July 6 to July 30th

Yep, that's right—the long awaited Conservation Security Program registration is happening right now! The sign-up period is short and falls during the busy farming season, but help is available! The Center for Rural Affairs has opened a "hotline" to connect farmers and ranchers practicing effective conservation to the Conservation Security Program (CSP), created by the 2002 Farm Bill. The hotline's number is (402) 687-2100.

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a 2002 Farm Bill initiative written by Congress to provide financial assistance to farmers and ranchers who are solving key natural resource and environmental problems by adopting sustainable practices and systems. The CSP was designed by Congress to provide support to farmers and ranchers who are already engaged in strong conservation systems to protect soil, water, air, and wildlife or who will adopt more sustainable systems as part of the program. Information about this program can be found at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/>.

Traci Bruckner, policy analyst and hotline director for the Center for Rural Affairs, says, "This program is the most promising conservation proposal in the Farm Bill. It was designed by Congress

to reward the best conservation farmers and ranchers.”

However, Bruckner says USDA is intending to implement the program with some very severe geographic restrictions by limiting it to only 18 watersheds across the country for this first sign-up and expanding slowly to other watersheds on a rotational basis. “Add the weak and complicated payment methods they have proposed, and you have a much weaker program than Congress intended,” Bruckner says.

The Blue Earth watershed in southern MN/northern IA and the Lower Chippewa in western WI are the two watersheds in our immediate area that are eligible. To see requirements for sign-up and payment rates in those watersheds, or to view additional watersheds, go to http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/2004_CSP_WS/watersheds04.html.

The Center’s hotline is designed to assist farmers and ranchers with questions regarding how to apply and program eligibility. Eligibility questions will center on the self-assessment that farmers and ranchers will need to complete. A [self assessment workbook](#), available online at www.nrcs.usda.gov/news/index.html#workbook, is the first step in the application process. The workbook includes the [conservation benchmark inventory](#), which farmers will complete on their own first and then review with NRCS staff at the NRCS local office.

For more information on the CSP or the hotline, contact Traci Bruckner at (402) 687-2100 or email tracib@cfra.org. The Center for Rural Affairs Web site is <http://www.cfra.org>.

Who farmers are—the 2002 agricultural census

In 2002, the average American farmer was 55.3 years old, operated his farm as an individual or family-run business, owned land and buildings worth \$537,833, earned \$19,032 per year and had more women, Latino, Hispanic and black farming neighbors than just five years before.

Those are just a few of the numbers contained in the mountain of data the U.S. Department of Agriculture made public June 3 in its initial release of the 2002 Census of Agriculture. More detailed information will be released throughout 2004.

The Census, conducted by the government since 1840—but by USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) only since 1997—is a once-every-five-years snapshot of American farms and farmers. By law, each farmer must answer the detailed survey.

The 2002 Census is a treasure trove of numbers which, by themselves, reveal the who, where, what and how of American agriculture in 2002. When compared to previous Census, the 2002 numbers also reveal important trends among farmers and their farm operations.

See www.nass.usda.gov/census for details on the ag census.

(Adapted with permission from Issue 101, “The Final Word,” by Alan Guebert, <http://foodroutes.org>)

Interested in 3rd Crop options?

A “3rd Crop” is a non-row crop other than corn or soybeans. And a 3rd Crop is not one particular crop, but can be diverse crops incorporated into a farming system.

The Blue Earth River Basin Initiative (BERBI) at Fairmont, Minn., is working on 3rd Crop marketing ideas. They’ve developed guide sheets on flax, hay, high value hardwoods, hybrid hazelnuts, native plant and seed production, and woody decorative florals. Each guide sheet gives an overview of the crop and information on potential uses, production and management considerations, profit potential, market information and resources for further details.

If you’d like to learn more, contact Linda Meschke of BERBI at (507) 238-5449, or meschkel@berbi.org or check out these websites www.thirdcrop.org, www.berbi.org.

Value-added producer grant applications due July 30

Grant applications for USDA’s value-added producer grant (VAPG) program are **due July 30, 2004**. A copy of the FY04 notice and other information on the VAPG program is posted on the web at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/vadg.htm>.

In 2003, six grants were awarded in Minnesota, totaling \$1,103,480. Robyn Holdorf of the Minnesota USDA Rural Development office in St. Paul said that some good ideas don’t get funded

due to technical problems with the application—so don't hesitate to seek help! You can contact Robyn at 651-602-7812, robyn.holdorf@mn.usda.gov.

A list of other USDA Rural Development state offices is posted on the web at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/vapgstate.htm>. Information on the grant program is at: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/vadg.htm>

Several websites also provide assistance with VAPG applications:

—The Agricultural Marketing Resource Center at Iowa State University, www.agmrc.org/business/valueaddedgrant.html.

—Michael Fields Agricultural Institute in Wisconsin, http://michaelfieldsagainst.org/project_incubator_producer_grant.htm.

—The Oregon State University Food Innovation, <http://fic.oregonstate.edu/osu/vapg/>.

—The University of Nebraska Food Processing Center (FPC) has developed an application template, complete with easy-to-understand instructions at <http://fpc.unl.edu/Newsworthy/grant.htm#template>.

New grants program: small farms and rural communities

There's a new competitive grants program titled "Enhancing the Prosperity of Small Farms and Rural Agricultural Communities." Grants are intended to examine the interactions between economic, social, environmental and biological components important to the prosperity of small farms and rural agricultural communities.

The RFA can be found at http://www.csrees.usda.gov/funding/rfas/pdfs/nri_supp.pdf. Proposed projects must combine at least two of three "integrated" components— research, education, and extension. Projects must address small farms, rural agricultural communities, or both. Applications are being accepted until Oct. 5, 2004.

Check the New Agriculture Network newsletter out

The New Agriculture Network is the result of three universities —Michigan State University, Purdue University, and the University of Illinois—joining resources to bring seasonal advice to field crop and vegetable growers interested in organic agriculture. New information is posted twice a month during the growing season and less frequently during winter.

You'll find their latest newsletter at <http://www.ipm.msu.edu/new-ag.htm>.

Upcoming Events

July 16th WCROC Summer Field Day. West Central Research and Outreach Center. Contact the West Central Research and Outreach Center at 320-589-1711 for more information.

July 18th-19th SFA of MN ReUnion and ReCreation Celebration. Call Mary Jo Forbord at 320-760-8732 for more information.

July 20th Organic Field Day, Southwest Research and Outreach Center, Lamberton, MN. Contact Southwest Research and Outreach Center at 507-752-7372 for more information.

July 24th-28th Soil and Water Conservation Society Annual Conference at the Radisson Riverfront Hotel, St. Paul, MN. Conference details are available online at http://www.swcs.org/t_what2004conffrontpage.htm. For information or to register, contact Jody Ogg at 515-289-2331, extension 17 or events@swsc.org

July 28th-August 1st Renewable Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Fair, Little Falls, MN. For more information on how you can exhibit or be a part of this fair, contact David Winkelman at the Water Foundation, 218-764-2321 or david@bogfrog.com

August 3rd Organic Short Course for Ag Professionals- Red Lake Falls. Contact Curt Zimmerman at 651-296-6456 for more information.

August 6th-8th Upper Midwest Permaculture Design Workshop, Minneapolis, MN. For more information contact Paula at 612-870-3467 or permanentagriculture@hotmail.com

August 18th-20th 2004 Minnesota Rural Summit, Hibbing, MN. For more information call 507-644-8250, email at info@minnesotaruralpartners.org or visit the website at <http://>

www.minnesotaruralpartners.org/2004_summit/index.htm

September 8th Storing Forage for Winter Feeding—WCROC Pasture Walk. Contact Dennis Johnson at 320-589-1711 or dairydgj@mrs.umn.edu for more information.

September 11th The 11th Annual Duluth Harvest Festival, Bayfront Festival Park in downtown Duluth, MN. For more information visit <http://www.harvestfest.cjb.net/>.

More event calendars...

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, as you may well know, has an event calendar that includes most if not all of the sustainable agriculture happenings in Minnesota, plus a few in other states.

Several other organizations have event calendars that may be of interest to readers of this newsletter. Links to all of these calendars can also be found near the bottom of the calendar page on the MISA website.

Land Stewardship Project: Minnesota events related to sustainable agriculture and energy; primarily events sponsored or co-sponsored by LSP.

<http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/index-calendar.html>

Minnesota Crop Improvement Association: National and international events related to the seed industry http://www.mncia.org/SN_calendar_of_events.html

Minnesota Dairy Calendar: Farm tours, conferences, and workshops related to the Minnesota dairy industry. Sponsored by the Department of Animal Science, University of Minnesota. <http://www.ansci.umn.edu/dairy/calendar/dairycalendar.htm>

Minnesota Sustainable Communities Network: Events related to energy, air and water resources, agriculture and sustainable living. Sponsored by the Office of Environmental Assistance of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. <http://www.nextstep.state.mn.us/calendar.cfm>

Small Grains: Field tours, workshops, seminars, and conferences involving all aspects of production and marketing of small grain and other seed crops (wheat, barley, oat, rye, canola, sunflower) in Minnesota, Iowa, and the Dakotas. Sponsored by Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers, <http://www.prairieagcomm.com/calendar/calendar.cfm>

Sustainable Agriculture Network: Nationwide and international events, conferences, etc. involving sustainable agriculture. Sponsored by SARE, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education. http://www.sare.org/calendar/show_events.asp

What we're about...

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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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