

Resources for beginning and transitioning farmers

Financial Management Program Scholarships Available for Transitioning Farmers

The transition from conventional to certified organic practices is a three-year process for crop and pasture production. Effective financial management during this time is important for short and long-term farm prosperity. Transitioning or recently certified organic dairy and/or grain farmers in Minnesota are invited to participate in a USDA-funded "Tools for Transition" project. As a qualified participant, you will enroll in the Farm Business Management (FBM) education program and receive a scholarship worth up to 90% of FBM tuition fees. FBM participants meet in small groups and one-on-one with farm business management instructors to develop accurate business records, financial statements (eg. cash flows, projected profitability statements, balance sheets, and risk analysis), and annual farm business analyses. These new statements can be used to monitor financial performance during transition, map progress toward personal goals, and, most importantly, make informed business decisions. To learn more about the FBM program and scholarships, contact Meg Moynihan, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, 651-201-6616 or meg.moynihan@state.mn.us.

Starting to Farm Course from Farm Business Management

Are you interested in starting a farming operation, but you don't know where or how to start? This six-night, live, interactive, on-line course will get you started in understanding the process, programs, and direction you need to turn your interest into reality.

The course, worth 3 Farm Business Management Credits, will be presented by three instructors with nearly 50 years of combined experience in working with farms

from start-ups to farm families transitioning out of the farm business. Whether you are looking to take over your parents' farm, starting a CSA, creating a new enterprise on your existing operation, starting a vineyard, or providing your own food, this course will cover the topics that will help get you started.

The course costs \$433.35 for Minnesota residents. Non-Minnesota residents are asked to contact the instructors for more information. The course will take place on Tuesday evenings January 18, 25; February 1, 15, 22; and March 1 from 7:00 to 9:00 (CST).

This is an online course. You will need a computer with internet access. You can use your computer microphone & speakers or telephone for the voice portion of the program.

For more information contact Steve Zenk, FBM Instructor, steve.zenk@ridgewater.edu, Mike Mastey, FBM Instructor, mike.mastey@ridgewater.edu, or Zach Rada, FBM Instructor, zach.rada@ridgewater.edu or contact us by phone at 320-222-7561 or email one of the instructors.

Upcoming Agritourism Development Courses

Attention Farmers: Are you interested in developing a promising new revenue stream while sharing the scenic, cultural, recreational, or educational values of your farm? Agritourism might be your answer. Agritourism encompasses a wide variety of profitable enterprises from simple farm stands, to u-pick operations, to full blown farmstays accomodating overnight guests. Inviting guests on your farms, though, comes with a whole new set of considerations, challenges, and opportunities.

Renewing the Countryside and the Sustainable Farming Association, with the

support of the North Central Risk Management Education Center, are offering farmer-entrepreneurs interested in developing or expanding agritourism businesses the opportunity to participate in day-long business development courses specifically tailored to agritourism, followed by ongoing assistance with feasibility analysis, business planning, and one-on-one mentoring from experienced agritourism operators. Participants will learn the latest trends in Minnesota tourism and agritourism, what regulations they will face as the expand into agritourism, what liability considerations they are likely to encounter, how to identify and reach out to target markets, and how to design their visitor experience. Also, each participant will begin developing the agritourism scenario they imaging on their farm, and planning to make their new venture a success.

Two courses are being offered, one standalone course in Winona, and one in conjunction with the SFA Annual Conference in St. Joseph. Course dates are: January 18, 2010, 9am-4pm, Tau Center, Winona State University, Winona, MN and February 19, 2010, 8am-4pm (including conference keynote address), SFA Annual Conference Gorecki Center, College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, MN.

To register for the Winona Course, please visit <http://agritourism-winona.eventbrite.com/>
To register for the St. Joseph Course, visit www.sfa-mn.org/conference.php for SFA conference registration info.

A \$15 Materials fee will be assessed for each participant. The St. Joseph course also requires regular registration for the SFA annual conference.

Conferences, Conferences, Conferences

There are great conferences to take advantage of throughout the winter. These conferences bring in superb speakers and offer informative and helpful breakout sessions as well as opportunities to share information with other farmers. We highlight a few of the major conferences below, but check out the MISA calendar for more events and workshops.

The Minnesota Organic Conference & Trade Show, January 14-15, St. Cloud
Farmers, buyers and curious consumers are encouraged to save the date for the annual Minnesota Organic Conference. Scheduled January 14-15 in St. Cloud

The conference includes 36 educational breakout sessions and a trade show featuring 62 seed, fertilizer and equipment dealers, organic buyers, certifying agencies, and organizations that provide information and assistance to farmers.

Watch the conference web site www.mda.state.mn.us/organic/conference for updated information about attending the conference or exhibiting at the trade show. Please contact Mary Hanks at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture for more information: 651-201-6277 or mary.hanks@state.mn.us

Midwest Value Added Conference, January 27-28, 2010, Madison, WI

This conference will feature world-renowned Farmer Joel Salatin of Polyface Farm, who will give a keynote speech on Thursday morning as well as be involved with other conference activities that day. River Country RC&D is also pleased to welcome USDA Rural Development Wisconsin State Director Stan Gruszynski, who will give a keynote speech Friday morning.

For more information about the Value Added Ag Conference, please visit: www.rivercountryrcd.org/valad.html

Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota Conference, February 18-19 St. Joseph, MN

Mark your calendars for the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota's 20th Annual Conference. The event is being held at the College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, MN. The conference will feature Woody Tasch, founder of Slow Money as the keynote speaker. Visit www.sfa-mn.org for conference details, or contact Anne with SFA at communications@sfa-mn.org, 320-226-6318.

MOSES Organic Farming Conference
February 24-26, 2010, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

Join us this February in La Crosse, Wisconsin for an educational weekend packed with 70+ workshops, 150+

exhibitors, terrific food, foot stompin' entertainment, acres of food and farming books, and plenty of time and space to network and mingle.

For more information, go to: www.mosesorganic.org or call 715-772-3153.

6th Immigrant and Minority Farmers Conference, February 4-5, 2011 in St. Paul, MN. The Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women in Minnesota, Minnesota Food Association and USDA-Farm Service Agency will jointly co-host the 6th Immigrant and Minority Farmers Conference on February 4-5, 2011 at the North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters Event Hall, 710 Olive Street, St. Paul, MN. Registration is on-line at www.mnfoodassociation.org, or by calling MFA at 651-433-3676, or the Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women in Minnesota at 651-222-0475. This conference is free to farmers; others \$20 for one day or \$30 for two days. For more information contact Ly Vang, at 651-222-0475, e-mail: lyvangaahwmn@yahoo.com; Joci Tilsen at 651-433-3676 ext. 14 or e-mail: jtilsen@mnfoodassociation.org; and Nigatu Tadesse at 651-602-7705 or email nigatu.tadesse@mn.usda.gov.

Green Lands, Blue Waters initiative names new director

A well-known expert in rural development and environmental management has been named director of the University of Minnesota's Green Lands, Blue Waters initiative.

Richard Warner, who joined the initiative in early October, has spent more than 20 years supporting rural development and environmental management in the U.S. and internationally. He grew up in Minnesota on the Mississippi River and received both his bachelor's and master's degrees from the university. He says his experiences there provided him with a broad based background in the physical and biological sciences with a local, applied perspective.

He has done extensive work promoting agriculture and forestry, and sustainable management of land and water. He plans to lead Green Lands, Blue Waters from the perspective that the success of farms and farm communities are as essential for good management of land and water as they are for production of food, fuel and fiber.

The Green Lands, Blue Waters initiative is a consortium of land grant universities, farm organizations, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies supporting a new generation of agricultural systems in the Mississippi River Basin. Its primary objective is to develop and promote profitable agricultural enterprises that integrate more perennial plants and other continuous living cover into

multifunctional agricultural systems. Through farm and community-based programs, education, outreach, research, and policy development, the initiative partners are strengthening farm communities and improving the health of agricultural lands and waters. It is hosted on the university campus by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture and the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences. You can contact Richard by calling 612.625.3709 or emailing rhwarner@umn.edu.

Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture selects five new board members

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture has appointed five new board members to three-year terms: Loretta Jaus, Phil Batalden, Derric Pennington, Julie Ristau and Glen Hill.

Loretta Jaus is an organic dairy farmer from Gibbon who is also the Central Region Leader for Organic Valley's Farmers in Marketing Program. She works with the staff in coordinating farmer involvement in the cooperative's outreach and education efforts and serves as a key Midwest farmer contact.

Phil Batalden is a fourth-generation family farmer in southwestern Minnesota. For the past 37 years, he has grown corn, soybeans, wheat and other specialty grains. In 1998 he transitioned to organic agriculture. He has extensive experience with grains and livestock. His interests are in the areas of sustainable cropping systems, small farm income diversification, biodiversity and local food systems. Batalden is a former member of the Southwest Research and Outreach Center advisory committee and currently serves on the Highwater Township board of supervisors.

Derric Pennington is a research associate in the Applied Economics and Bioproducts and Biosystems Engineering departments at the University of Minnesota. Currently he is working with an interdisciplinary team to model the implications of alternative land-use planning scenarios for food and biofuel production on the joint provision of ecosystem services and biodiversity conservation at local, regional and national scales. He has recently completed the Farm Beginnings program and has volunteered with many local organizations. He is currently a visiting scientist at World Wildlife Fund in Washington, D.C.

Julie Ristau is co-director of On the Commons and is co-chair of Homegrown Minneapolis. She helped launch the Utne Reader magazine and was the executive director of the National League of Rural Voters.

Glen Hill is Executive Director of the Minnesota Food Association. He also serves on the boards of the Minnesota Environmental Fund, the Minnesota Environmental Partnership, the National Immigrant Farming Initiative and the Greater Stillwater Area Chamber of

Commerce.

"I am extremely happy to welcome these five people to the MISA board of directors," said Helene Murray, MISA executive director. "Each brings a wealth of talent and knowledge to our work."

All five will serve on the board through August 2013. MISA is a partnership between the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences at the University of Minnesota; the Sustainers' Coalition, a group of individuals and non-profit organizations; and University of Minnesota Extension.

MISA brings together the diverse interests of the agricultural community with interests from across the university community in a cooperative effort to develop and promote sustainable agriculture in Minnesota and beyond. Its board of directors includes equal representation of sustainable agriculture practitioners, university representatives, and representatives from the sustainable agriculture community including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and citizens. For more information about MISA visit www.misa.umn.edu.

Minnesota Grown Wholesale Database

Minnesota Grown has created a new online wholesale database available for use by Minnesota Grown members who sell to grocers, restaurants, schools, distributors or other wholesale accounts. Members who market their products to wholesale accounts and who are looking for additional accounts are invited to participate. Because there won't be a printed version of this database, Minnesota Grown members can participate free of charge. Likewise, there are no fees for buyers who use the database.

It doesn't matter how many accounts you service or how big your farm is. Wholesale accounts come in all sizes. Some are small accounts that prefer deliveries from farmers through the back door; others are much larger and only work through distributors. The important thing is that you'll have the opportunity to describe your business and products in enough detail so that buyers can identify which farms are appropriate for them to contact.

In addition to basic information like contact and product information, this new database gives you the option of providing additional information unique to wholesale accounts. For example, you can list any third party certifications you have obtained (including GAP certification), the level of liability insurance you carry, and whether you supply distributors, deliver store direct, or both. Buyers will be able to search based on all of these items. The goal is to make it easy for buyers to contact suppliers who meet their criteria and to avoid the frustration that comes from talking to people who aren't a good fit for your business. We've also included several places where you can describe your farm, products, background, etc. in your own words. Once you provide the basic information, we'll invite you to submit photos and logos to make your listing more attractive.

You can submit your listing online by visiting the MEMBERS page of

www.minnesotagrown.com. If you are not yet a member of Minnesota Grown, but would like to be in the wholesale database, you can also find information about joining Minnesota Grown on that MEMBERS page. If you'd rather receive a printed form to fill out and mail back, contact Casey DeRosier at 651-201-6469 or e-mail her at casey.derosier@state.mn.us. Remember - this wholesale database is only for members who are seeking to expand the number of wholesale accounts they supply. Items marketed directly to consumers can only be listed in the regular Minnesota Grown Directory.

Feel free to contact either Paul Hugunin at 651-201-6510, paul.hugunin@state.mn.us or Casey DeRosier at 651-201-6539, casey.derosier@state.mn.us

Government Takeover of Your Garden? What the Food Safety Bill Really Means

This article is online at: <http://www.rodale.com/food-safety-bill>. It is receiving updates as the legislation moves through the process of passage.

The Senate's recently passed food-safety bill intends to make our food system safer, but it's also raised a lot of fears. We separate myth from reality.

By Leah Zerbe and Emily Main at the Rodale Institute

The Food Safety Modernization Act (S. 510) finally instituted provisions that will, hopefully, make Salmonella-tainted spinach and poisonous peanut butter things of the past. Though it's intended to make our food system safer, the bill has heightened fears among some that it could do everything from abolishing farmer's markets to making backyard gardens illegal. So let's take a closer look at some of the most widely disseminated myths about the bill.

Myth: The food-safety bill is now law.

Truth: Not yet. The bill won't become law until the House of Representatives either passes S. 510 or reconciles it with the version they passed last year, H.R. 2749. "We will now push hard for the House to pass this version of the bill," says Ferd Hoefner, policy director at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. Otherwise, he adds, small-farm and organic advocates may lose ground on some hard-fought battles that went into shaping the Senate bill.

Myth: The bill will eliminate roadside farm stands, farmer's markets, and community-supported agriculture programs (CSAs).

Truth: Not likely.

Thanks to the Tester-Hagan Amendment, which was passed with the Senate bill, that's not the case. The amendment protects small farmers and producers who sell directly to consumers, either on their farms or at farmer's markets in their home states or within 275 miles of their farm, and who make under \$500,000 in yearly profits from those paperwork and inspection requirements. As a result, CSAs and farmer's markets are no longer threatened. (Be sure to encourage your House representatives to include this protection by voting for the Senate's version or to

otherwise maintain it as part of the final House legislation.)

Myth: The bill serves the interests of Monsanto.

Truth: Not exactly, but agribusiness did influence the result. This myth started when Internet bloggers found out that the husband of the congresswoman who initially got the ball rolling on food-safety legislation did contract work for Monsanto. The agribusiness giant responded to that rumor by saying that he no longer had ties to the company, and that Monsanto had no opinions on food-safety legislation(!).

Still, says McGeary, there is a small kernel of truth to this myth. "I don't think this bill was Monsanto-driven, but I do think it was agribusiness-driven." Politicians were under such pressure from consumers to do something about foodborne illnesses that Big Ag companies knew that they would have to deal with some sort of new legislation, she says. So, the industry worked with politicians to get a food-safety bill "that doesn't cause them too many headaches," McGeary says. "The things that are in this bill are things that agribusiness can deal with." Because of that, some serious food-safety problems aren't being addressed, most notably, the concentrated animal-feeding operations that are the primary source of E. coli outbreaks. "Agribusiness didn't want to deal with that, so the bill doesn't deal with that."

Myth: The bill won't do anything about egg contamination.

Truth: Yes it will. Shortly after the bill passed, a few news agencies were reporting that the food-safety bill leaves out eggs. And therefore egg recalls like the massive Wright County egg recall that occurred earlier this year (and added urgency to the bill's passage) could continue to be a problem. But that's not the case. The U.S. food system is regulated by a dozen agencies, as diverse as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Department of Homeland Security, and each agency oversees specific elements of the food supply. The FDA does have authority to regulate and inspect egg producers, like Wright County, as long as those eggs remain in their shells (like the kinds you buy by the dozen at the grocery store). Once those eggs are taken out of their shells and

put into other foods, such as a quiche, they do fall under the purview of the USDA. But as long as the FDA does its job, contaminated eggs will never make it into processed foods.

Myth: The bill makes it illegal to grow your own garden.

Truth: Really? Come on now. When all this talk of a food-safety bill surfaced last year, vague language in the House version of the bill (H.R. 875, which never passed) caused full-blown hysteria on the Internet, with some email campaigns claiming the bill, if passed, would ban home gardening. "There were some well-taken concerns, but many were blown out of proportion," says Mark Kastel, cofounder of The Cornucopia Institute, an advocacy group working to protect family farmers. "There is nothing in the current bill that would impact home gardening, whatsoever. This was started by people panicking over broad language in the legislation originally being debated that gives the FDA purview over food safety in general," explains Kastel. "Since no sale is taking place there is nothing to oversee in terms of home gardening."

Patty Lovera, assistant director of Food and Water Watch, a consumer-advocacy group, reiterates the point that the bill would not ban homegrown food, but rather kicks into effect for operations that sell some kind of food. (And, as mentioned, there are provisions in the bill that exempt small-scale farms or processors that sell direct to consumers at farm stands or from the farm.) "There has been a lot of uproar about food-safety legislation for the last two years, and a lot of the rumors about various pieces of legislation seem to be rooted in bad information that was put out originally about a House bill (H.R. 875) that never even got a hearing," explains Lovera. "The bill that passed the House last year (H.R. 2749) and the bill that passed the Senate (S. 510) are different from H.R. 875. And most of what circulated about H.R. 875 was not accurate—it even reached the point of getting a Snopes page."

So go ahead and order from winter seed catalogs with full confidence.

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Myth: The bill makes it illegal to own or store seeds.

Truth: Keep saving those seeds. If you've seen documentaries like Food, Inc., it's easy to understand how people become uneasy when restrictions are put on seed cleaning and seed saving, something farmers have relied on for centuries. Although the current state of patented genetically engineered seed is putting seed companies out of business and limiting farmers' choices, this particular issue is not addressed in this bill, as far as sustainable farm groups are concerned. "There is no basis in this whatsoever," says Kastel, who notes that one of the original bills debated in the House included a seed cleaning provision, but it never passed.

"The bill does not cover seeds," adds Lovera. "It covers plants that process food and the production of fruits and vegetables."

Myth: It exempts small farms from having to be safe.

Truth: Small farms still need to keep clean. While this bill does provide some exemptions for small farms that meet certain conditions, such as selling more than half of their product through direct sales, selling less than \$500,000 of product a year, or selling within a state or within 275 miles of the farm, small operations are still subject to relevant state or local rules on safe food and health codes. "Farms of all sizes will have to act responsibly. Just because smaller, direct marketers will be exempt from regular inspections, fees, and other requirements does not mean that they won't have to still file good handling protocols," says Kastel. "Also, they will still be subject to state law where intra-commerce is regulated."

Myth: This bill completely misses the mark in preventing foodborne illness.

Truth: It's a good start, but there's more work to be done. While there's definitely truth in the fact that much more needs to be done to clean up our industrial food system, some food-safety experts see this bill

as one important piece of the puzzle. "There's absolutely more to do to make our food supply safer, and we agree that reining in factory farms is necessary," says Lovera. "But this bill was focused on one piece of the system, the program at FDA. It didn't cover livestock or meat inspection, which are USDA issues."

The Farm Bill, the issue of antitrust enforcement and competition policy at USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture), and environmental policy covering factory farms are all really important, too, Lovera adds, and we need to keep focusing on those in the future. "The legislation that passed the Senate is a step towards making the FDA do its job better for produce, processed foods, and eggs."

Also see: "A Sustainable Agriculture Perspective on Food Safety" from the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition; http://sustainableagriculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Sustainable-Food-Safety_FINAL.pdf

Child Nutrition Reauthorization Passes with Farm to School

The recently passed Child Nutrition bill includes \$40 million in mandatory funding for a new Farm to School program run by the USDA. The Farm to School program, which was authorized in the 2004 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act but never funded, will offer competitive grants to schools or non-profit organizations to develop purchasing relationships with local farmers, plan seasonal menus, build

school gardens, develop hands-on nutrition education, and provide solutions to infrastructure problems including storage, transportation, food preparation, and technical training.

"I am so thrilled that the House of Representatives has passed 'The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act' – a groundbreaking piece of bipartisan legislation that will

significantly improve the quality of meals that children receive at school and will play an integral role in our efforts to combat childhood obesity," said First Lady Michelle Obama in a statement released just after passage of the bill.

MDA YouTube videos cut consumer confusion about organic

Organic or natural? When it comes to food labels, there is a difference – but all of the different claims that appear on food labels can be very confusing and difficult to sort out. MDA organic specialist Meg Moynihan says while organic labeling can be complex, consumers deserve to understand these labels so they know they're getting what they want – and what they're paying for.

"We created this video series to help consumers read and interpret organic claims," said Moynihan. "Food manufacturers use all kinds of terms to influence buyers. A product labeled '100 percent natural' may still contain additives or preservatives. In contrast, 'organic' is a highly regulated claim. These products must meet federal organic requirements and the farms and food

companies that produce them must be inspected by a USDA-approved agency."

This engaging, amusing, and very informative series is posted on MDA's YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/mnagriculture>.

Do you have a story you would like featured in the Sustainable Agriculture newsletter? Send your submission to misamail@umn.edu and we'll consider adding it to an upcoming newsletter.

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EXTENSION

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