

Sustainable Agriculture

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Get Your Directories for Minnesota Fresh Produce, Specialty Meats

Produce bought directly from the farm tastes better and is fresh enough to freeze or can. There may also be cost savings.

Minnesota Grown Fresh Produce & More is a directory that tells consumers where they can buy fresh produce throughout the state. And a new Specialty Meats directory is also available. Call the Minnesota Department of Agriculture at (612) 297-8695 or 1-800-657-3878 for copies of each.

The produce directory is organized into seven major regions of the state: Twin Cities, Northwest, Northeast, West Central, East Central, Southwest and Southeast. Within each region, markets are listed alphabetically by county. Listings feature each farm's name, address and phone number, produce available and other helpful information.

If you're marketing specialty meats or fresh produce directly to consumers, make sure you're listed in the directory. Contact Minnesota Grown, MN Dept. of Agriculture, 90 West Plato Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55107.

Farm Monitoring Project Looks at the Big Picture

More farmers are trying to develop highly sustainable farming systems that help create healthy ecosystems, profitable farming and improved quality of life for farm families. But what's been lacking are practical methods to assist farmers in observing the "big picture" of farming, says Dan French, a grass dairy farmer from southeastern Minnesota.

To meet that need, the Land Stewardship Project (LSP), the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA), the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota (SFA) and a team of 25 scientists, farmers and agency officials formed a monitoring project. Besides Dan and Muriel French, farmer team members include Joe and Marlene Finley, Ralph and Geri Lentz, Dave and Florence Minar, Jennifer and Mike Rupprecht, and Art and Jean Thicke.

One of the monitoring project's objectives is to test ecological, financial and social indicators to monitor the results of adopting sustainable farming systems. Monitoring is focused on management intensive grazing, including the impacts of planned grazing of stream banks. In this system, ruminant animals are pastured, replacing conventionally harvested feeds and confinement or drylot housing systems during the grazing season.

During 1994, team members established 60 permanent plots on six team farms. Results will be compared with plots established on neighboring farms. University of Minnesota soil scientists Deborah Allan and Jay Dorsey and LSP staff member Todd Lein are collecting biological, physical and chemical soil quality data from those plots. Pasture vegetative species and ground cover are being observed.

Volunteer "birders" under the supervision of team member and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staffer Tex Hawkins surveyed each team farm for breeding birds. Department of Natural Resources staffer Larry Gates arranged for volunteers and farmers to be trained to survey breeding frogs and toads on the farms.

Farm wells were sampled by hydrologist Larry Johnson. University fisheries scientists Bruce Vondracek, Karen Mumford and Laurie Sovell are studying streams passing through four of the team farms to analyze streambanks and fish populations. Ed Weir is assisting in water quality analysis.

Researcher Douglas Gunnink, university agricultural economist Richard Levins and the farmers are developing indicators to measure farm financial performance in relationship to farm family goals.

One of the project objectives is to model and disseminate a wholefarm research approach. As part of that process, all team members are completing detailed questionnaires pertaining to their quality of life. Rural sociologist Cornelia Flora, graduate student Alison Meares and MISA coordinator Helene Murray are leading this study. Team members are energized by the farmer-driven participatory process.

For more information, contact George Boody, Land Stewardship Project, 14758 Ostlund Trail N, Marine on St. Croix, MN 55047, (612) 433-2770, fax (612) 433-2704. E-Mail boody002@gold.tc.umn.edu --by George Boody

What if CRP Ends?

It's possible that the ten-year Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) might end or be scaled back in the next few years. This program provided cash payments to owners of land prone to erosion who stopped growing crops and planted grass or some other soilconserving cover on the land. Over the last seven to ten years, much of this land has developed a heavy biomass cover and high populations of wildlife. In some cases, the biomass includes undesirable weeds and brush, and the wildlife includes pocket gophers, which have created a very rough surface.

If CRP ends, many contract holders will no longer receive rental payments from the government and they will be looking for new uses for the land. Options are numerous, but could include taking the land out of grass and planting a conventional crop, planting trees or leaving the land in grass and:

- Just leaving it idle without any compensation;
- Finding some other conservation program that would provide rental payment;
- Raising ruminant animals;
- Establishing fee hunting; or
- Harvesting biomass for energy or hay.

Many organizations are interested in working with contract holders whose contracts are about to expire. The organizations first want to make sure contract holders are aware of all the options and then provide assistance as the options are carried out. In preparing to work with CRP contract holders, several organizations are conducting surveys, planning and conducting research on CRP land, and developing decision aids and informational fact sheets. A workshop was held on the St. Paul campus of the University of Minnesota in March to bring these groups together to exchange information, coordinate work and avoid duplication of effort.

One outcome of the workshop was a recommendation that a team be organized "to establish an information clearing house and coordinate research, demonstration and educational activities." A team has been formed and it has met once. Team membership is likely to be flexible, but currently includes:

- Board of Water & Soil Resources (BWSR)
- Consolidated Farm Services Agency (CFSA)
- Land Stewardship Project (LSP)
- Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Minnesota (**MAES**)
- Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA)
- Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA)
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Minnesota Extension Service, University of Minnesota (MES)
- Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA)
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- Pheasants Forever (PF)
- Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota (SFA)

At its first meeting, the team agreed to increase exchange of information among members and discussed ways to improve communication with each other and with contract holders. The team will be meeting approximately once a month for the next year or so. If you have questions or suggestions for the team, contact Barbara Weisman at MDA (612) 282-6831 or Bill Wilcke at MES (612) 625-8205. --by Bill Wilcke

Farmers Join Forces to Cut Costs, Share Knowledge

Groups of farmers are banding together in producer networks, alliances, clubs and new kinds of cooperatives to make farmers "more competitive with bigger, better-financed operators who can buy and sell on a large scale," according to *The Furrow* (March/April, 1995).

"The future doesn't necessarily belong to big operators," says Dennis DiPietre, University of Missouri agricultural economist. "The future belongs to those, big and small, who position themselves to gain long-term access to markets, information, financing and technology. Producer groups work well because no one person necessarily has all the answers or all the resources necessary for success."

The groups take different forms:

--Members of a milk and beef producers network in Minnesota share what they have learned about rotational grazing. Ralph Lentz, a beef producer and network member, says many farmers have gotten away from talking over the fence. The group gets farmers back to sharing information once again.

"By networking, we've avoided a lot of trial and error," says member Nancy Kohrs. Over the past three years, she and her husband, Duane, converted 80 acres of cropland to grass. "We didn't even know for sure how many acres of pasture we would need for our operation. It's nice to have a group whose members have already found answers to our questions."

--Producer networks are especially popular in the hog industry, where members may pool money to buy inputs in larger quantities, construct hog buildings and co-market loads of uniform hogs, which typically earn a premium price from packers.

--Collective marketing is the strategy used by 100 Wisconsin farmers who sell certified organic dairy products, eggs and fresh produce in national and international markets. --from Alternative Agriculture News and the Furrow

DeEtta Bilek Is New Central Chapter SFA Coordinator

If you have questions or news for the Sustainable Farming Association's (SFA) central chapter, contact DeEtta Bilek, Rt. 1, Box 4, Aldrich, MN, (218) 445-5475. She's the new chapter coordinator, replacing Tammy Keith-Wellstone. "My husband has retired from his outside employment and is now farming fulltime. We have been attempting to use sustainable farming practices for more than 12 years," she says.

Sustainable Agriculture Course Offered at Duluth Summer School

"Sustaining agriculture in the next century" is the title of a 2- credit University of Minnesota graduate course offered June 12-16, 1995 at Duluth. The course will emphasize farming systems that are profitable, friendly to the environment and compatible to quality family life. For more information, contact Don Olson at (612) 625- 9292 or dolson@extension.umn.edu.

We Can Use Your Story Ideas

Keep the story ideas coming. Send them to the editor: Jack Sperbeck, 405 Coffey Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108, (612) 625-1794. E-mail: jsperbeck@extension.umn.edu. Other editorial board members are Phil Larsen (612) 624-7451, Don Olson (612) 625-9292 and Helene Murray (612) 625-0220.

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.

Thank You Again...

to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program, for printing this issue.

Please turn the page for a listing of field days . . .

Calendar of Events--Sustainable Agriculture Field Days and Tours

*June 8, p.m. Swedish Style Hog Production. Nolan and Susan Jungclaus, Lake Lillian, (612) 664-4843.

**June 22, 1 p.m. Graziers Circle: 2nd Year Dairy Grazing. Kevin and Peggy Radermacher, Bellingham, (612) 568-2489.

*June 24-25 Raising Animals for Fiber (10 a.m. Saturday, 11 a.m. Sunday). Patty Dease, South Haven, (612) 236-7852.

*July 1, 1 p.m. Living Mulches in West Central Minnesota Wheat Production. Dave Birong, Grove City, (612) 857-2772, or (612) 773-5247.

*July 14, 1 p.m. Making the Transition to Certified Organic Production (third year project). Craig and Joanie Murphy, Morris, (612) 392-5176.

**July 20, 1:30 p.m. Graziers Circle: 3rd Year Dairy Grazing. Koenen Family Dairy, Clara City, (612) 367-2809.

*July 23, 12:30 p.m. Small Farm Strategies Project. Ken Peterson, Carlton (SFA, Northeastern Minnesota), (218) 384-3511.

*July 25, 1 p.m. Grazing Hogs--Farrowing and Finishing. Jason and Michael Hartmann, Gibbon, (507) 834-6308.

*July 31, 1 p.m. Alternative Agriculture for Future Markets. Brett Pearson, Cottage Grove, (612) 458-9760.

**Aug. 12, 2 p.m. Graziers Circle: Cow/Calf Grazing. Marshall and Bev Herfindahl, Boyd, (612) 955-2542.

**Aug. 19, 2 p.m. Outdoor Hog Production. Jim and LeeAnn VanDerPol, Clara City, (612) 847-3432.

**Sept. 9, 2 p.m. Graziers Circle: Pasture Planning. Craig Murphy, Morris, (612) 392-5176.

**Sept. 15 Grazing Stockers. Joe Rolling. Arco, (507) 487-5742.

**Sept. 16 Rotational Grazing Sows and Gilts. Byron Bartz, Barrett, (612) 528-2301.

Due to Minnesota's unpredictable weather, please contact the farmer before attending a field day or tour to confirm the date and time.

*Primary sponsor: Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program, (612) 296-7673.

**Primary sponsor: Sustainable Farming Association of Western Minnesota, (612) 269-2105.

This material is available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact your Minnesota County Extension Office, or, outside of Minnesota, contact the Distribution Center at (612) 625-8173.