

Sustainable Agriculture

Volume 3, Issue 10 –October 1995

MISA has Grants to Build Teams, Create Educational Materials

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) is pleased to announce two calls for proposals. "Team Building Planning" grants are available to support development of interdisciplinary teams to integrate the economic, social, and ecological concerns associated with the long-term viability of agriculture.

Four-page pre-proposals are due Dec. 8, 1995. Pre-proposals accepted for funding will receive up to \$10,000 from MISA to develop a full proposal by October 1996. Priority topics for this call for preproposals include integrated cropping systems, alternative livestock systems, marketing, business planning for sustainable agriculture, agricultural systems that support water quality, whole farm planning, agroforestry, conversion of conventional agriculture systems to organic systems, and other emerging topics related to sustainable agriculture. Funding for this call for pre-proposals is provided by **MISA**.

Funds are also available to "Create Educational Materials for Sustainable Agriculture." MISA invites proposals from interdisciplinary teams to develop educational materials supporting development of sustainable agricultural systems. Topics identified for this call for proposals include business planning for sustainable agriculture, integrated cropping systems, alternative livestock production systems, organic agricultural systems, general informational materials describing sustainable agriculture, whole farm planning, and other emerging issues.

Proposals are due to MISA by Dec. 15, 1995. Four to six teams will be funded up to \$25,000 each to develop educational materials. This project will be coordinated by MISA with funds provided by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

For copies of the complete call for proposals contact: MISA , 411 Borlaug Hall, U of M, St. Paul, MN 55108; (612) 625-8235; e-mail: misamail@gold.tc.umn.edu For questions about developing a proposal or pre-proposal, contact Helene Murray, MISA Coordinator, (612) 625-0220; e-mail: murra021@maroon.tc.umn.edu

Dairy Farm Graziers say Quality of Life has Improved

On-farm surveys were conducted on 29 Minnesota dairy farms which were using management intensive grazing (MIG) as the primary feeding system for their dairy herds in 1995. Specifically, graziers were questioned about the effects of MIG on their quality of life, production strategies, equipment used, and business management decisions. The survey was conducted by the Sustainable Dairy Farming Research Team funded by MISA.

All graziers agreed that their quality of life has improved as a result of MIG. Graziers reported that their labor requirements were impacted two ways: (1) Their labor needs (in terms of time) were reduced, and

(2) the type of work they were doing changed. Time savings reportedly resulted from reduced planting, harvesting, processing, and feeding, as well as manure handling.

But the shift from repetitious and physical type labor (raking and baling hay, repairing equipment) to management type duties (pasture and business management) excited graziers more than time savings.

Graziers typically controlled the size of the grazing area by dividing the pasture into square/rectangular paddocks or long strips. Cross wires were often then used to subdivide paddocks and strips into grazing areas sized for 12-24 hours of grazing. Most graziers reported that beginning grazing heights ranged from 8-12 inches and the ending heights ranged from 2-5 inches. Several farmers allowed their milking groups to selectively graze the top "few" inches and would use followup groups (often heifers and dry cows) to finish grazing.

Pastures were developed by: 1) improving existing pastures (previously continuously grazed), 2) pasturing "old" hayland, and 3) directly converting cropland. Graziers introduced desired forage species by frost seeding and with no-till and conventional drills. Some of the most desired forage species listed include: orchard grass, timothy, quackgrass, smooth brome grass, reed canary grass, red clover, and birdsfoot trefoil. While desired forage species varied, most agreed that a 60:40 ratio of grass to legume was their goal.

Many graziers reported that "high-tech" fencing and watering equipment has reduced or eliminated the use of feed harvesting and processing equipment as well as manure handling equipment. High tensile and smooth steel wires along with steel and wood posts were commonly used for perimeter fencing. Poly wire and plastic or fiberglass posts were used for most temporary fencing. Surface laid plastic water lines, equipped with "quick" coupling devices were typically used to supply portable water tanks.

Many graziers explained that grazing has not affected their business management decisions, rather it was changes in their business management goals which lead them to grazing. Most respondents viewed grazing as a tool to help them reach their business, family, and personal goals.

The Sustainable Dairy Farming Research Team was formed in 1993 by several dairy graziers, researchers from the University of Minnesota's West Central and Southern Experiment Stations and the departments of Dairy Science, Applied Economics, and Agronomy and Plant Genetics, as well as the USDA-ARS Soil Conservation Laboratory. Its objectives were to provide information for dairy farmers to 1) increase profitability, 2) minimize negative environmental impacts, and 3) to improve the quality of life for dairy farmers.

The research team was funded by MISA to evaluate strategies for recovering existing pastures and establishing new pastures; and to conduct an extensive survey of Minnesota dairy farmers who are adopting management intensive grazing as their main feeding system.

For more information, contact Brian Loeffler, Dept. of Applied Economics, U of M, St. Paul, MN 55108, (612) 625-1226, e-mail: loeff006@gold.tc.umn.edu (Brian Loeffler)

River-Friendly Program Recognizes Farmers for Stewardship

The new River-Friendly Farmer program recognizes farmers who are doing their part to improve river water quality. Farmers will be selected by local coalitions of government agencies and organizations. Any farmer in the Minnesota River Basin who satisfies a list of ten criteria (an example is limiting soil loss on

highly erodible land) may be nominated. The criteria include soil conservation, nutrient management, manure management and pesticide use.

The statewide program is sponsored by the Minnesota Alliance for Crop Residue Management and contributing organizations and businesses. They include the Minnesota Extension Service, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, CENEX/Land O' Lakes, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc., Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation, Board of Water and Soil Resources and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

"Many farmers are doing a good job of managing their crop and livestock operations to protect Minnesota's rivers. Through the RiverFriendly Farm program they'll start to receive the recognition they deserve," says Don Olson of Minnesota's Extension Service. The program needs your help. As a farmer, member of an organization or as a concerned private citizen, you can nominate a farmer, get a local organization involved or sponsor activities. More information is available from your local county extension educator or district conservationist. Or, contact Don Olson, 146 COB, U of M, St. Paul, MN 55108, (612) 625-9292, e-mail: dolson@extension.umn.edu

Wallace Institute Report Refutes the "Newest Agricultural Myth"

A new report by the Wallace Institute challenges the "newest agricultural myth" that chemically-based intensive agriculture will meet all our production and environmental goals while feeding eight to 10 billion people in the next century. The report, by Tracy Irwin Hewitt and Katherine R. Smith, argues that the ecological impacts of chemically-based, intensive agricultural systems are serious and costly.

Other highlights: Chemically-based, land-intensive systems don't guarantee high productivity--and may not even sustain high yields. And, sustainable and alternative agricultural production techniques often compete with and sometimes outshine their conventional counterparts. Intensive Agriculture and Environmental Quality: Examining the Newest Agricultural Myth is available for \$4 from the Henry A. Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture, 9200 Edmonston Rd, #117, Greenbelt, MD 20770, (301) 441-8777, e-mail: hawiaa@access.digex.net

Sustainable Ag Programs Maintain Funding for New Fiscal Year

In late September a House-Senate Conference on the 1996 Agriculture Appropriations Act approved level or slightly reduced funding for most federal sustainable agriculture programs for the 1996 fiscal year. (From the October, 1995 Alternative Agriculture News, published by the Henry A. Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture).

Soil and Water Conservation Annual Meeting Jan. 19

The Minnesota Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society will hold their annual meeting Jan. 19, 1996 at the Kelly Inn in St. Cloud. The topic is "Whole Farm Planning," and will include speakers on holistic resource management, the Ontario Environmental Farm Plan and local perspectives and approaches. Registration information will appear in the SWCS newsletter later this year. For more information, contact Mary Hanks at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, (612) 296-1277.

Get Your Copy of Greenbook '95

Over 50 reports of on-farm research and demonstration projects are available in the Greenbook, highlighting the farmers, researchers and educators involved in the Sustainable Agriculture Grant Program. It's published by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Sustainable Agriculture Program., 90 W. Plato Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55107-2094, (612) 296-7673. Get a copy!

A Dec. 14 Workshop on the Benefits of Sustainable Agriculture Practices

A workshop on the quality of life and financial benefits of sustainable agriculture practices is scheduled Thursday, Dec. 14, at the Hearthside in Long Prairie. It's a follow-up to the bus tour for ag professionals held in August and is being coordinated by the Central Chapter of the Sustainable Farming Association (SFA).

The keynote speaker will be Fred Kirschenmann, an organic grain farmer from North Dakota. There will be a farmer panel of Central Chapter SFA farmer-members representing a variety of sustainable farming systems. Other presenters will include Chris Barnier, credit manager of the Morrison County Farm Service Agency; Don Olson, Minnesota Extension Service; Bill Oemichen, Minnesota Department of Agriculture; and Terry Hetland, an animal nutritionist.

A \$5 fee helps cover the sustainable foods lunch and other expenses. You can send a \$5 check payable to Central SFA along with your registration to DeEtta Bilek, Rt. 1, Box 4, Aldrich, MN 56434. If you have questions, call her at (218) 445-5475, or Fax (218) 445-5673.

Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association Meeting Feb. 1-3

The annual meeting, educational conference and trade show of the Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association is scheduled Feb. 1- 3, 1996. The Thursday and Friday sessions and trade show are scheduled at the Civic Center in St. Cloud. Saturday's marketing sessions, coordinated by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, will be held at the Holiday Inn.

Bill Wilcke Joins This Newsletter's Editorial Committee

We welcome Bill Wilcke to our editorial committee. Bill is an engineer with the Minnesota Extension Service and a MISA board member. He cochairs the Crop Systems Specialization effort of the Minnesota Extension Service along with Tim Arlt, Steele County educator.

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 Helene Murray (612) 625-0220, Don Olson (612) 625-9292 and Bill Wilcke (612) 625- 8205.

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.