

Sustainable Agriculture

Volume 5, Issue 6 –June 1997

New grant funds will bring field days for agriculture professionals

The Sustainable Farming Association (SFA) of Minnesota has received funding to conduct field days for extension educators, agriculture teachers, natural resource-conservation professionals and others. The grant funding will promote networking between SFA's 12 chapters to develop on-farm, farmer-led workshops and field days.

The two-year, \$61,000 per year grant was awarded through the North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program. Project director is DeEtta Bilek, chapter coordinator of SFA's central chapter. Also working on the project will be Tim King, program manager for SFA and the 12 SFA chapter coordinators.

Complete lists of ag professional offices and contacts within each chapter area will be developed. All areas of Minnesota will be included. A resource list of farmer-presenters, including area of expertise, location and information on family and farm history will also be developed. Local food products will be served for snacks and meals.

For more information, contact DeEtta Bilek at Rt. 1, Box 4, Aldrich, MN 56434, (218) 445-5475, fax (218) 445-5673.

Little sediment lost despite record spring runoff

You might think last winter's huge snowpack followed by a record spring runoff would also cause record amounts of soil to be washed into rivers. But little sediment was lost where an aggressive soil and water conservation program was used in a University of Minnesota research trial at Morris, Minn.

The dense snowpack at the university's West Central Experiment Station varied from three to five feet. "Just before it melted, it was half water," says soil scientist John Moncrief. He and other researchers monitored the snowpack on newly established runoff plots that were designed to measure the impact of various farming practices on soil losses and potential pollutants.

The small watersheds range from two to five acres. Slopes range from three percent near the top to 12 percent near the bottom. Runoff is measured at the bottom, where water passes through several fiberglass troughs called flumes. Measurements are made every minute.

An automatic "grab sampler" takes water samples every 10 minutes. The samples are then analyzed for sediment, oxygen-demanding materials (which deplete dissolved oxygen in water, causing stress in fish), and phosphorus (which causes algal bloom).

Two cropping systems are being evaluated. The first is corn and soybeans cropped with a very aggressive soil and water conservation approach. Plots were in corn in 1996 and yielded 135 bushels per acre, which

provided adequate crop residue to control erosion. Plots were planted on the contour and fall chisel-plowed, also on the contour. “As a result, we had 80 to 100 percent of the soil covered with corn residue this spring,” Moncrief says.

The second system is alfalfa and corn, also cropped with conservation techniques. The alfalfa plots were seeded in the spring of 1996 and went into winter with an excellent stand and about 6 inches of growth after the last cutting.

The project showed that with an aggressive soil and water conservation system, sediment lost even during a record snowmelt runoff from both alfalfa fields and corn ground is small, Moncrief says. He can be reached at (612) 625-2771, e-mail jmoncrief@extension.umn.edu.

CRP fact sheets now available

A set of 12 fact sheets on management options for lands enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is now available throughout Minnesota. The fact sheets were developed by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and you can get them from county offices of the University of Minnesota Extension Service. They're also available from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Soil and Water Conservation Districts and many other groups.

The 12 titles can be grouped into four topics:

- Evaluating the condition of your CRP land (weeds and pocket gophers, persistence of planted forages and converting to organic production).
- Leasing the land (basic considerations for leasing post-CRP land, maintaining conservation benefits on leased land, selecting a lease type and recreation leases).
- Keeping the land in grass (renovating for forage production, controlled grazing and harvesting hay and silage).
- Producing renewable energy (energy from biomass, harvesting the wind).

For more information, contact Barbara Weisman, Sustainable Agriculture Program, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, 90 W. Plato Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55107, (612) 282-6831, e-mail Barbara.Weisman@mda.state.mn.us.

Read the Whole Farm Planner

If you're curious about whole farm planning and wonder how farmers can use it in their everyday operations, read about it in the Minnesota Project's The Whole Farm Planner. Each issue has an in-depth profile of at least one farm using a different planning approach. Other stories cover research and farm planning experiences from many states. Policy developments and timely opportunities for input on upcoming rules and legislation are also covered.

The latest issue describes Holistic Management used on a community supported agriculture (CSA) farm in Ohio, a seasonal dairy operation in Minnesota, and an organic farm near Wrenshall, MN. Two Wisconsin farmers tell how they planned for a transition to rotational grazing. An announcement of the new Conservation Farm Option tells how farmers can apply for funds to implement whole farm plans.

For a free subscription, contact the Minnesota Project at (612) 645-6159, e-mail lkemp@maroon.tc.umn.edu. Or, find it through the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture's home page.

Alfalfa is a crop with many uses

“Alfalfa—a Crop With Many Uses” is the title of a July 1 seminar and field day at the University of Minnesota, West Central Experiment Station-Morris. The morning session starts at 9:30 a.m. and topics include a report from the Minnesota Valley Alfalfa Producers, storage losses, testing alfalfa biomass hay for quality and alfalfa leaf meal in beef cattle diets. Research tours will include alfalfa varieties for biomass production, alfalfa water use, effects of alfalfa on soil and water quality, and measuring harvest losses. For more information, contact the West Central Experiment Station at (320) 589-1711.

Exposition on value added products July 8

A value added exposition is set for the Montevideo Senior High School Training and Community Center Tuesday, July 8. It will emphasize value added agricultural products to increase income in rural communities and programs to help entrepreneurs. Advance registration, which includes lunch, is \$8 payable to VAP '97. Mail it to the Chippewa County Extension Service, Courthouse, Montevideo, MN 56265.

The exposition opens at 8 a.m. for viewing of about 40 exhibits. There will be 36 workshops to choose from. Examples include ostrich, bed and breakfast, herbs, tourism, bison and food marketing. Workshop presenters are currently involved in these businesses. There will be noon presentations by Congressman David Minge and Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture Gene Hugoson.

For more information contact Roger Larson, Chippewa County extension educator at (320) 269-6521.

LSP tour of Wisconsin dairy farms July 14

The Land Stewardship Project (LSP) tour of four prosperous, state-of-the-art Wisconsin dairy farms is Monday, July 14, via charter bus. University of Wisconsin extension educator John Cockrell, a nationally recognized grazing and seasonal dairy expert will be the tour guide. Contact LSP at (507) 523-3366.

Grazing school Aug. 5-6 at Morris

A grazing school at the University of Minnesota's West Central Experiment Station-Morris Aug. 5-6 will emphasize basic principles of grazing and how to develop an integrated system. Included is goal setting, economics, fencing and water, plant and soil considerations, animal issues, discussions with experienced graziers and a critical evaluation of a pasture at the Morris station. There will be a practical exercise on setting up a pasture system. Attendance is limited to 30 by pre-registration. There will also be a grazing and sheep day at the Morris station Sept. 20. For more information, contact Dennis Johnson at (320) 589-1711.

Coming events...

Field day sponsors include the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Sustainable Agriculture Program, Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) and the Sustainable Farming Association (SFA) of Minnesota.

June 28, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Field Day, “Collaborative Poultry Production and Marketing Network” and “Renovation of River Bottom Pasture and Stream Bank Management,” Jon Peterson, Route 1, Box 7, Peterson, MN 55962, (507) 864-2722.

July 5, 9 a.m. to noon, Field Day, "Small Farm Market Development: Mobile Poultry Processing," John Fisher-Meritt farm, 2612 Country Road 1, Wrenshall, MN. Contact (218) 727-1414.

July 12, 10 a.m. to noon, Field Day, "Soil Quality Factors Affecting Garlic Production," The Joel Girarding farm, one mile north of Cannon Falls on U.S. Hwy 52, go west on County Road 86 one mile to Gaylord Ave. Turn left on Gaylord. Contact Tim King at (320) 732-6203. (See July 28 listing)

July 13, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., "Soil Monitoring Workshop/Field Day," Greg Reynolds farm near Delano, (612) 972-3295.

July 17, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., pasture walk at the John & Alicia Watts farm near Evansville, (218) 267-5647.

July 18, 1:30 p.m., Field Day, "Development of Mating Disruption and Mass Trapping Strategy for Apple Leafminer Control in Commercial Orchards," Leidel's Orchard, 406 N. Hill St., La Crescent, MN. Contact Bernie or Rosanne Buehler at (507) 895-4832.

July 18, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Field Day, "Establishing Pastures Using Various Low-Input Practices," Ralph Lentz, Route 2, Box 78, Lake City, MN 55041, (612) 345-2557.

July 19, 11 a.m., Field Day, "Collaborative Poultry Production and Marketing Network," Greg Erickson farm, approximately four miles past Lewiston west on Hwy 25, left side of road. Contact Bev Sandlin at (507) 689-4370.

July 20, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., Field Day, "Alternative Point Sources of Water," Joseph & Mary Routh, North Light Farm, 4480 North Road, Grand Marais, MN, (218) 475-2245.

July 20, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., Field Day, "Grass and Forage Based Finishing of Beef and Pork," Lake Superior Meats Cooperative, 2553 County Road 3, Wrenshall, MN, (218) 727-1414.

July 22, 10 a.m., Field Day, "Dairy Steers and Replacement Heifers Reared on Pasture," Melissa Nelson, Route 1, Box 234, Ortonville, MN, (320) 273-2340.

July 28, 1:30 p.m., Field Day, "Soil Quality Factors Affecting Garlic Production," the Phill Arnold Farm, near Gutches Grove, southwest of Long Prairie at the intersection of County Highways 10 and 11. Contact Tim King at (320) 732-6203.

Late July, Wednesdays 2-4 p.m., Fridays 3-5 p.m. Come to the Duluth Farmers' Markets on market days (above) to speak with growers about the progress of markets. Wednesday market at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, 45th Avenue East and Colorado Street, Duluth. Friday market at the First United Methodist Church on the Skyline, 230 East Skyline Pkwy, Duluth. Contact Jenifer Buckley at (218) 727-1414.

Sept. 6, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., buckwheat workshop & field day, Tom Bilek farm near Aldrich, (218) 445-5475.

About this newsletter...

For the past year we've been funded by the Minnesota Extension Service and the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) with support from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

We're always looking for story ideas. 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: Helene Murray (612) 625-0220, murra@021.tc.umn.edu; Tom Wegner (612) 374-8400, twegner@extension.umn.edu; and Bill Wilcke (612) 625-8205, wwilcke@extension.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.