

Sustainable Agriculture

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Wisconsin farmers doubt the benefits of livestock expansion

A clear majority of Wisconsin farmers don't support efforts to encourage expansion of livestock farms, according to a University of Wisconsin survey of 1,100 randomly selected farmers.

Survey respondents were least supportive of hog and poultry expansion—only 17 percent agreed that such expansions should be encouraged in their neighborhoods. Dairy and beef expansions were viewed more positively, although supporters were still in the minority (26–28 percent).

Farmers were most skeptical about the role of non-farm investors in expansions. Less than 15 percent of respondents agreed that outside investors should be encouraged to fund dairy herd expansions in their neighborhoods. Even fewer (eight percent) would encourage such investments to fund hog expansions.

Although non-farm groups have emphasized environmental concerns about large-scale livestock operations, the survey results suggest that farmers are **more** concerned about negative social and economic impacts on family farming and their communities.

- The majority of survey respondents (77 percent) did not agree that expanding local livestock production was likely to have negative environmental consequences.
- Over 72 percent of respondents agreed that replacing small family farms with large-scale farms using hired labor would have negative economic and social consequences.
- Only 16 percent of respondents agreed that more large farms would increase the competitiveness of Wisconsin agriculture.
- Nearly 89 percent agreed that maintaining a system of family-operated farms was essential to the future of rural Wisconsin.

Dairy farmers were less supportive of livestock expansion than crop farmers and other livestock farmers. Younger and more educated farm operators were more likely to favor the expansion of all types of livestock operations. Support for family farming was strong across all sectors. Those farmers who were most concerned about the future of family farming were the least likely to favor livestock expansion.

The report, called *Getting Bigger? Wisconsin Farmers' Views on Livestock Expansion* is available from the [Program on Agricultural Technology Studies](#), 1450 Linden Drive, Room 146, UW-Madison, Madison, WI 53706, (608) 265-2908, fax (608) 265-3020.

You can comment on proposed organic standards

Proposed national organic standards “take the heart and soul” out of the certified organic industry, says Marc Schwartz, an organic marketer and consultant to the Organic Growers and Buyers Association

(OGBA). Particularly vexing to the organic industry is the inclusion of sewage sludge, irradiation, and genetic engineering as allowable practices and materials.

Proposed rules would ban eco-labeling such as “no drugs or growth hormones used,” “raised without synthetic chemicals” and “pesticide-free farm.”

Comments on the proposed standards may be directed to the U.S. Department of Agriculture until March 16. “You need to address comments to specific numbered sections of the proposals,” Schwartz says, “or they may not even be read.” You can contact Schwartz at the OGBA office, (612) 572-1967, fax (612) 572-2527, or e-mail ogba@sprynet.com.

You can purchase a copy of the [proposed rules](#) for \$8 from the Federal Register by calling (202) 512-1800. Comments may be sent to the Web site or sent by fax to (202) 690-4632. They may also be mailed to Eileen S. Stommes, Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA, Room 4007-S, Ag. Stop 0275, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456.

Get involved in commodity council elections

Don't like how your commodity councils operate? Get involved by voting, although you'll no longer “go to the polls.” Low participation in commodity council elections has prompted a switch to mail-in votes this year. Farmers who voted last year will receive ballots in the mail. If you didn't vote last year, you can vote this year by requesting a ballot from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA).

Elections will be held for beef, barley, corn, soybean and wheat promotion councils. Request cards are available from county extension offices, or by calling MDA at (612) 296-6883. Request cards must be mailed to MDA by March 17, 1998.

Sowing sustainable relations in Cuba

Pastors for Peace, based in Chicago, Illinois, is sponsoring a one-week educational and humanitarian trip to Havana and the Cuban countryside. The March 22–30, 1998, trip offers the opportunity to meet with farmers, university researchers, and government officials who are leading the sustainable agriculture movement in Cuba.

Tour sites include farmers' markets, the University of Havana Agricultural School, urban gardens, a state-run dairy farm, a cooperative farm, a bio-pesticide laboratory, a community food education and preservation center, a reforestation and tourist complex, and a “green medicine” pharmacy. Pastors for Peace has been licensed by the U.S. Treasury and Commerce Department to make this trip.

Applications and a deposit for the March 1998 Agricultural and Humanitarian trip to Cuba are due by February 15. For more information contact Dana Kuehn at (612) 872-8980. The MISA offices has copies of brochures describing the trip in more detail: (612) 625-8235 or email: misamail@tc.umn.edu

“Freedom to farm” publication available from Land Stewardship

A new publication, Making the Most of Freedom to Farm: Innovative Uses of Flexible Planting Rules and Conservation Programs, is available for \$4 from the Land Stewardship Project, 2200 4th St., White Bear Lake, MN 55110, (612) 653-0618. It gives a summary of whole farm planning, highlights from the most

recent farm bill, and examples of what some farmers are doing to take advantage of provisions in the farm bill.

Candidates sought for alternative swine systems project

A project to develop profitable alternative swine production systems that enhance communities and protect the environment needs a person to spearhead the 18-month project. The project, administered by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA), will emphasize low-odor, energy efficient systems. It will develop new educational information on hoop housing, the Swedish model for farrowing and feeder pig production, and pasture-based production systems.

The project coordinator will work with farmers, lenders, agricultural service providers, educators, and vendors. A bachelor's degree is required. Applications are due Feb. 6, 1998, and should be sent to MISA, c/o Don Wyse, 411 Borlaug Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108. For more information call (612) 625-8235 or e-mail misamail@tc.umn.edu.

Competitive grants available to farmers and ranchers

Producer grants are available in the North Central region for farmers and ranchers interested in profitable, environmentally sound, and socially responsible agricultural systems. The grants are from USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program.

The grant program supports innovative farmers and ranchers looking for ways to overcome obstacles to a sustainable operation. SARE has \$225,000 available for awards of up to \$5,000 for individual producers investigating any sustainable practice or concept and up to \$10,000 for groups of three or more producers proposing creative marketing projects.

About 200 producer projects in 12 North Central states have received over \$800,000 since 1992. Topics have included reducing off-farm inputs, testing technologies, improving water quality, educating young people or consumers about agriculture, managing weeds and pests, recycling wastes, and creating markets for sustainable products.

Applications are available from [SARE's North Central Region](#) office at (402) 472-7081, fax (402) 472-0280, or e-mail sare001@unlvm.unl.edu.

U of M small farm task force looking for ideas

The small farm task force of the University's College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences is looking for ideas from small farm operators. "There's great diversity in the types of small farms," says task force chair Bill Wilcke, "and also in their problems, interpretations of their causes, and proposed solutions." And there are "no silver bullets or simple solutions that will work for all small farms," he adds.

Contact Wilcke with your small farm ideas at (612) 625-8205, fax (612) 624-3005, or wwilcke@extension.umn.edu.

Beneath the grass

*As I walk along this path,
I sense the Earth beneath the grass.
If it's true, and it may be,
That it's our God let's let it be.
For if we keep our water pure,
Then to any sickness we will find a cure.
I believe. . . Earth, Water
Wind and Rain
Along with Sun
Can extinguish, the worst of pain.
So. . .
As we walk along this path,
Let us sense the Earth
Beneath the grass.*

(MLP—"I would like to dedicate this poem to my parents, Jerry and Terry Perkins, for their mentoring, love, and appreciation for life and nature.")

Some important meetings...

Feb 10–12—Manure management conference, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, sponsored by the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS). Objective: build stronger bridges of understanding between livestock producers and society. Contact Bob Ball at (573) 876-0900 or Paul Miller at (515) 284-4370, or check the [Agriculture Network Information Center](#).

Feb. 13–14—Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group conference and discussions on issues such as those affecting agricultural policy and the Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture. Assissi Heights, Rochester, Minnesota. Call Duane Hvorka at (402) 994-2001 or local contact Mark Schultz at (612) 823-5221.

Feb. 20–21—Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference, Sinsinawa Mound Center, Sinsinawa, Wisconsin. Includes exhibits by businesses, nonprofit groups and farm organizations of sustainable and/or organic agriculture-related services, products, or information. The early registration deadline (with a reduced fee) is Feb. 6. Call (715) 772-6819 for registration information.

Feb. 26--Third annual flame weeding dialogue, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 701 Iowa Ave., Decorah, IA. Contact Doug Ault (507) 437-3085, Tom Wegner (612) 374-8400 or local contact Dave Burns (319) 238-3795. Call the church with inclement weather questions (319) 382-3963.

Feb. 28—Sustainable Farming Association (SFA) of Minnesota annual meeting, Holiday Inn, Alexandria. SFA members are receiving a mailing. Contact DeEtta Bilek at (218) 445-5475 or e-mail deebilek@wcta.net.

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.