

Sustainable Agriculture

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Dairy herd production costs are less with intensive grazing

Two years ago Bennett Osmonson, a dairy producer from Gully, Minn., wanted to expand the dairy operation. He'd been doing some crop farming, but found it less attractive due to the change in government programs and small grain disease problems. In addition, his son-in-law, Brian Olson, was interested in getting into the business.

Osmonson talked with Vince Crary, extension educator in Polk County. He also attended several Sustainable Agriculture Association meetings looking for ideas.

He saw a number of advantages to grazing, including reduced costs for storage of feed and manure.

Eventually the idea turned into a University of Minnesota Extension Service demonstration project. Two U of M colleges are involved--; the College of Veterinary Medicine and College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences.

The herd expanded from 60 to 120 cows. A stanchion barn was gutted and turned into a holding area and a new milking parlor was built. They also built a free-stall, curtain side barn, currently in use as a bedded manure pack facility.

"Veterinary costs have decreased and herd health has been good with the grazing system," Osmonson says. "There have been no foot and leg problems since we've been grazing. With the old barn, I needed to have the hoof trimmer in."

As part of the project, University veterinarians help monitor herd health and make management suggestions. The plan is to graze the herd for five or six months each year. "That means half the manure is distributed 'naturally', without mechanical equipment," Osmonson says.

Out of the project will come a demonstration model and economic figures to help determine the viability of dairy grazing systems in northern Minnesota. "We'll try to develop useful, easy-to-understand materials for other producers who may want to try this, says Doris Mold, agricultural economist with the U of M College of Veterinary Medicine. Mold will help develop information management programs to help track herd economics and other information. She'll also do a financial analysis of the effects of grazing and bringing another person into the operation.

For more information on the project, contact Crary at (218) 563-2465, e-mail: vcrary@extension.umn.edu.

Interested in a statewide animal agriculture study?

Members of the public can apply to serve on a citizen's committee to help guide a major study on the impact of animal agriculture in Minnesota. The Minnesota Environmental Quality Board has ordered a public, comprehensive study of animal agriculture in the state.

The study should allow Minnesotans on all sides of the issue to learn the facts, state their opinions, and weigh future policy options. The study is designed to provide a full public examination of environmental issues and the equally important social and economic factors.

You need to apply by April 24, 1998. Send your name, address and telephone number, along with relevant background, experience, and organizations you represent to: GEIS Advisory Committee, Environmental Quality Board, 658 Cedar St., St. Paul, MN 55155. Telephone (612) 296-4095, fax (612) 296-3698, e-mail eqb@mnplan.state.mn.us.

Enter your favorite pancake recipe

If you have a favorite, original pancake recipe, the Golden Gopher Pancake Cook-off is looking for you. Small companies with organic or grain recipes may be interested.

There are two divisions. One is for commercial restaurants and for-profit organizations; the other is an open division for families, individuals, and non-profit organizations. There are categories for grain pancakes (like buckwheat or whole wheat), fruit pancakes, and specialty pancakes. Proceeds will be used for University of Minnesota scholarships.

The cook-off is May 18 at the Earle Brown Center on the University of Minnesota's St. Paul Campus. But you need to have your registration in by April 24. For more information, contact Betty Davison or Kathy Donahue at (612) 625-6252, e-mail: david001@tc.umn.edu.

Will farmers be able to feed the world?

The world's agricultural, environmental and health communities must work together to help the world's farmers meet food demands over the next half century, says Vernon W. Ruttan, economist and Regents Professor at the University of Minnesota. Although Ruttan is cautiously optimistic, he says future gains in agricultural production will be hard. Biotechnology is not yet living up to its promise to provide an "encore to the green revolution," he adds.

There are increasingly severe environmental constraints on agricultural production, Ruttan says, ranging from the impact of fossil fuel consumption on global climate change; loss of soil due to erosion; and resistance of weeds, insects and pathogens to chemical controls.

And health could emerge as a serious constraint on agricultural production early in the 21st century. Factors include the resurgence of malaria and tuberculosis, AIDS, declining efficacy of antibiotics and the high cost of developing new drugs to control infectious diseases. "Little progress has been made in the control of several important parasitic diseases. And we are only beginning to confront the environmental health effects of agricultural and industrial intensification," Ruttan says.

A copy of his article entitled "Meeting the Food Needs of the World" is available in Staff Paper P98-4 from the Waite Library, Department of Applied Economics, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108, Tel. (612) 625-1705.

New Extension Service positions will be available

The 16 new field staff positions from the newly funded "Sustaining Minnesota's natural resource based industries" initiative will be opening in the next few months. The new positions cover a range of needs. Examples include alternative crops systems, tourism, private forest lands and shoreland vegetation in northern Minnesota; agricultural drainage and swine business management in southern Minnesota. Other programs include a statewide program on individual sewage treatment systems, urban land use planning and two new programs for new immigrants.

For more information, contact the Personnel Office, University of Minnesota Extension Service, 260 Coffey Hall, St. Paul, MN 55108. Tel. (612) 625-1794, e-mail mbandow@extension.umn.edu.

Mainstream farmers only "inches away" from buying into sustainability

Mainstream farmers and their neighbors are very close to espousing many sustainable principles, says Karl Kupers, a grain producer from Harrington, Wash. He says the choice of words when describing sustainable concepts is extremely important. "Words like 'stewardship' and 'profitability' build bridges with traditional farmers and commodity groups," Kupers said. "On the other hand, 'environmentally sound' and 'environmentally responsible' turn mainstream farmers off since the terms can't be measured.

"Economic viability" also turns farmers off, he added. "It implies that profits are evil. Profitability should be on the front of all sustainable publications," he said. Kupers spoke at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education (SARE) conference in Austin, Texas, March 4-5. The meeting marked SARE's 10th anniversary.

Also speaking at the conference and emphasizing profitability was Lorraine Merrill, a New Hampshire dairy farmer. She also writes for *Hoard's Dairyman* and is a member of the New Hampshire Commission for Sustainable Agriculture. "Profitable farms that nurture families and can be passed on to future generations should be our goal," she said.

"We're new grandparents, and that helps one see what's important and what's not. The parents live next to us and chose dairy farming as their career.

"The farm should support families, not the other way around. But without profitability up front, other goals won't work."

There were 15 attendees from Minnesota. Represented were farmers, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, non-profit groups, and the University of Minnesota. The U of M Extension Service funded scholarships to help farmers attend. For more information on the conference, contact Bill Wilcke at (612) 625-8205, wwilcke@extension.umn.edu.

Minnesota Crop Improvement Association needs field inspectors

The Minnesota Crop Improvement Association (MCIA) is looking for field inspectors starting in early summer. Inspectors are responsible for conducting field inspections of crops to determine whether fields

meet specified standards. MCIA provides training and supervision. Specific field inspection territories vary throughout Minnesota. For more information, call the MCIA at 1-800-510-6242.

New organic certification handbook available

A new publication is available for anyone interested in certifying organic crop acres in Minnesota. *Organic Certification of Crop Production in Minnesota* is a user-friendly guide produced by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) and the University of Minnesota Extension Service.

While focused on Minnesota certification, the concepts are applicable throughout the region. The cost of each manual is \$4 (Minnesota residents add 7 percent sales tax). For more information, call the University of Minnesota Distribution Center at 1-800-876-8636, or 624-4900 in the Twin Cities.

New county-by county study available on manure nutrients

A new national study showing nutrients available from livestock manure relative to crop growth requirements has been released. The county-by-county study, by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), shows the relationship between nutrients available in manure and the nutrients a crop could use.

It shows potential, rather than actual nutrient use. Neither soil test nutrient information nor actual manure use were analyzed. The study includes over 3,000 counties in 48 states. It's available on the [web](#). Single copies are available from NCRS by calling (202) 720-8644.

Grazing workshop in Chippewa County April 9

"Under the Sun: Managing Livestock Outdoors" is the topic of a grazing workshop Thursday, April 9 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Milan Community Center, Chippewa County. For more information, call (320) 269-2105.

Local community farm festival April 19

Interested in having fresh veggies and flowers delivered weekly? You can meet some local farmers who do that at a "Local Community Farm Festival" Sunday, April 19 from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. The festival is at Hamline University's Bush Student Center, corner of Snelling and Hewitt in St. Paul.

The day will be filled with music, cooking demonstrations, storytelling, activities for kids, talks on sustainable agriculture, and buying locally grown food. You'll learn about Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms, which provide scheduled delivery of locally grown food to consumers who support the farm with a membership fee. Depending on the farm, members can visit the farm and take part in festivals, work days, harvest, or canning and preserving.

The festival is sponsored by the Sustainable Resource Center's Urban Lands Program. For more information, call (612) 872-3299.

Active Citizenship Institute meeting April 24 in Minneapolis

A Minnesota Active Citizenship Institute meeting is scheduled Friday, April 24, 1998 from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Zion Baptist Church, 621 Elmwood Avenue North, Minneapolis. The church is on the corner of James Avenue North and Olson Memorial Hwy. (Hwy. 55).

Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. and the first presentation begins at 9 a.m. The Active Citizenship Initiative, convened by Senate Majority Leader Roger Moe and Lt. Governor Joanne Benson, is organizing a new basis for policy making in Minnesota that places the obligation to govern justly and wisely in the role we all have as citizens.

The program is hosted by the [African-American Citizenship Initiative](#) and is sponsored by a number of civic organizing groups including the University of Minnesota Extension Service. Registration fee is \$30, and includes lunch. For more information contact: Bonnie Bolin, University of Minnesota Extension Service, (612) 625-5756.

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.