

Sustainable Agriculture

Volume 7, Issue 1 – January 1999

Agricultural research, educational programs at Morris reflect diversity

There are no “average” farms in Minnesota, Gary Lemme says. “Our agriculture is extremely diverse in both commodities and production systems,” says Lemme, head of the University of Minnesota West Central Experiment Station at Morris.

“Within this diversity is the consistent theme that people are involved in agriculture to provide their families the quality of life and economic security to meet contemporary expectations,” he adds. The Morris station is adding and redirecting positions to address a wider range of production systems.

Including social scientists and Extension educators as part of the faculty at Morris will permit interdisciplinary teams to address research issues in a comprehensive way. “There are no easy answers,” Lemme says. “We need complex answers to complex questions. It starts with identifying an issue, then doing the research and communicating the results. Active citizenship involvement is very important.”

Positions at Morris are now organized around interdisciplinary teams that address high priority issues identified by area citizens. There’s heavy emphasis on grazing by dairy scientist Dennis Johnson, sheep researcher Bill Head and agronomist Greg Cuomo (see grazing story below). John Moncrief works on soil management and water quality, animal scientist Lee Johnston does swine research and Extension irrigation engineer Jerry Wright works with area irrigators.

New faculty members at Morris include Margot Rudstrom, farm profitability with emphasis on livestock systems; Neil Hansen, water quality of mixed crop-livestock systems; and Jodi DeJong, Extension educator, environmental stewardship education. Positions in the process of being filled include an animal scientist in swine systems, emphasizing low capital production approaches; an agricultural sociology research associate to investigate the impacts of changes in the livestock industries on families and rural communities; and a community organizer/Extension educator to build linkages among active citizens, communities and the University of Minnesota.

Lemme and other researchers and educators at Morris can be reached at (320) 589-1711.

Pasture forage left after grazing boosts regrowth

Forage left in a pasture at the end of the grazing season isn’t wasted. In fact, the opposite is true, says Greg Cuomo, forage agronomist at the University of Minnesota’s West Central Experiment Station at Morris.

“Forage left in a pasture after grazing helps the pasture to regrow more quickly,” says Cuomo. “This means more forage will be available for the next grazing season.”

Cuomo cites results from a three-year study at the West Central Experiment Station. Grazing intensity treatments were grazed to leave 2-4, 4-6 and 6-8 inches of residue after grazing. Pastures that were grazed to leave 6-8 inches of residue produced 5.5 tons of forage per acre per year over the three-year study. Pastures grazed to leave 4-6 inches produced 5.4 tons per acre per year, but those grazed to leave 2-4 inches of residue produced only 4.7 tons per acre per year.

The pastures used in the study contained cool-season grasses (smooth bromegrass, bluegrass and quackgrass) and legumes (alfalfa, red clover and birdsfoot trefoil). Cuomo can be reached at (320) 589-1711.

More small meat processing plants could help hog farmers

Low hog prices have created more business for Minnesota's 139 custom slaughter plants. Dick Epley, meats specialist with the University of Minnesota Extension Service, says most are at capacity because of the low hog prices and the busy venison processing season. However, selling pigs to consumers for custom processing offers a little relief for some producers.

There are some important points to remember about custom slaughter, Epley says. First, custom slaughter is exempt from federal inspection by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) This means the animal, carcass and organs are not inspected for wholesomeness. So it's important that custom slaughtered animals appear healthy.

And since the animal and carcass have not been inspected, retail cuts can't be sold. But up to four people may own one animal and divide the meat up four ways.

However, Minnesota has 27 plants that slaughter hogs under USDA inspection, Epley says. Two of these are quite large, so that leaves 25 small plants that kill pigs under USDA inspection. These plants can buy pigs from a producer, slaughter under USDA inspection and sell the pork out of their retail case. Or, they can sell the pork to local outlets such as the supermarket, cafe or school.

The Minnesota legislature recently funded resumed inspection of state slaughter establishments. And with the Minnesota Meat Inspection system being approved by USDA, Epley says it's expected that about 30-35 of the current custom slaughter plants will switch to Minnesota inspection. These plants, once they are approved, will be able to function just like a USDA plant with one exception—the plant will not be able to ship meat across state lines. However, Epley expects the interstate ban will be lifted sometime in 2000 or 2001.

What's the implication of 30-35 more small plants slaughtering livestock under inspection? First, Epley says the plants will try to sell to local markets like the supermarket, cafe, or school. If they are successful, producers might see opportunities to partner with the processor to develop a branded product (pork, beef or lamb).

“The interest in branded meat products should get another big kick when the USDA finalizes the standards for organic meat,” Epley says. “I think we are in for some interesting and exciting times.” (See related story below)

Epley can be reached at (612) 624-1735, fax (612) 625-5272, or e-mail repley@che2.che.umn.edu.

An example is the Lake Superior Meats Cooperative...

The Lake Superior Meats Cooperative is a group of farmers working to make their natural meats products available locally and to open an inspected meat processing plant in northeastern Minnesota. For more information, contact Jill Pertler at LSMeats@aol.com.

“You can farm” workshops emphasize creative livestock production, marketing

Joel Salatin has been called one of America’s most successful farmers, and he’ll be presenting three workshops in Minnesota Jan. 19-21. Salatin, a pioneer in the production and marketing of grass-based livestock production, will talk about how he and his family make a comfortable, sustainable living on their 550-acre Virginia farm.

The family markets poultry, beef, pork, eggs and rabbit meat directly to more than 400 consumers. Their operation has been featured in a number of national publications, including *National Geographic*.

The workshops will have both afternoon and evening sessions, including dinner with Salatin. Pre-registration is strongly encouraged. Call the contacts listed below for details on fees and locations. The schedule is:

Jan. 19 (Tuesday), Granite Falls, 1:30 p.m., American Legion Hall; and 5:30 p.m., 95th Club. Contact Terry Van Der Pol or Audrey Arner at (320) 269-2105.

Jan. 20 (Wednesday), Shakopee, Best Western Canterbury Inn, 1:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. Contact Caroline van Schaik at (651) 653-0618.

Jan. 21 (Thursday), Rochester, Best Western Apache Motel, 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Call Richard Ness at (507) 523-3366.

Minnesota Organic Conference Feb. 16-17 in St. Cloud

Want to succeed in the organic market? You need to know what your customers want. And with that in mind, The Minnesota Organic Conference Feb. 16-17 in St. Cloud will feature Lynne Rosetto Kasper, a chef, author, speaker and one of the country’s most respected authorities on food.

Kasper educates consumers nationwide on the taste and other benefits of organic and local foods. Her national radio program, *The Splendid Table*, has won the 1997 James Beard Award for best national radio show on food. More information on the radio program, including recipes, is available on the Web at <http://www.table.mpr.org/>.

The conference will emphasize crops that are in demand and how to grow and market organic crops. It’s intended for a wide audience: certified producers, those considering certification, and people wanting to learn how to become better managers and reduce off-farm inputs, regardless of whether they go into organic production. For registration information, contact Jan Gunnink, (507) 237-5162, or e-mail prescott.bergh@state.mn.us.

Livestock marketing conference March 4 at Mankato

A marketing seminar for livestock producers looking to increase profitability without expanding is scheduled Thursday, March 4 at the Best Western Hotel and Conference Center in Mankato. The conference will feature examples of producers working with other producers and processors to add value to their livestock through value-added processing cooperatives and direct marketing.

Two groups from Oregon and Kansas will share their experiences and there will be examples of what Minnesotans are doing to develop new markets.

Doc and Connie Hatfield of Oregon Natural Beef will explain how their cooperative grew from 14 members in 1985 to 29 members today, processing about 4,500 head of cattle per year. They don't own a processing facility and have all their animals custom processed for domestic and international markets.

Diana and Gary Endicott of All Natural Beef represent a 20-member cooperative in Kansas. They will share their experiences in marketing their premium product to up-scale supermarkets in Kansas City.

Registration is \$10 before Feb. 25 and includes lunch. Registration at the door is \$20 per person. For more information, contact Terry Dalbec at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, (651) 215-0368.

Other important events in 1999...

Saturday, Jan. 9, Western SFA Annual Meeting (Marketing), Congregational Church, Montevideo, (320) 847-3432.

Thursday, Jan. 12, first in a series of three Whole Farm Planning workshops, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., Frontenac, (between Red Wing and Lake City). Other dates are Feb. 2 and 23. Contact Beth Knudsen, DNR, (651) 345-5601 for more information.

Saturday, Jan. 16, Princeton SFA Winter Workshop, Earthway Farms, South Haven, (612) 389-4920.

Friday, Jan. 22-Sunday, Jan. 24, Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, Madison, Wis. Call Dave Butcher (218) 568-8624.

Saturday, Jan. 23, Northeast SFA Annual Meeting (Biosolids or Sludge?), Cloquet Forestry Center, Jenifer Buckley (218) 727-1414, sfa@skypoint.com.

Saturday, Jan. 30, Central SFA Annual Meeting (Harvest the Sun), Browerville Community Center, DeEtta Bilek (218) 445-5475.

Saturday, Jan. 30, Hiawatha Valley SFA Annual Meeting (Profitability Through Diversity), Sawyer's Inn, Goodhue, Sandy Hadler, (507) 732-5503.

Thursday, Feb. 4, Crop and Soils Day, Southwest Experiment Station, Lamberton, (507) 794-2382.

Thursday, Feb. 4-Friday, Feb. 5, Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference, St. Cloud (651) 436-3930.

Tuesday, Feb. 9-Wednesday, Feb. 10, Adding Value on the Farm: Value Added and Marketing Conference, Holiday Inn, Eau Claire, WI. Contact Larry Swain (715) 425-3083, swain@wisplan.uwex.edu.

Wednesday, Feb. 10-Thursday, Feb. 11, 24th Annual Minnesota Forage Conference, Kahler Hotel, Rochester (651) 436-3930.

Friday, Feb. 19-Saturday, Feb. 20, 2nd Annual Minnesota Grazing Conference, Victoria Inn, Hutchinson. Contact Jan Gunnink, (507) 237-5162.

Friday, March 5-Saturday, March 6, 10th Annual Upper Midwest Organic Conference, Sinsinawa Mound, WI. Contact Faye Jones (715) 772-6819, e-mail fjeoc@win.bright.net.

Friday, March 12-Saturday, March 13, Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota annual meeting, Earle Brown Center, University of Minnesota St. Paul Campus. Contact DeEtta Bilek, (218)445-5475, 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.