

Sustainable Agriculture

Volume 10, Issue 7 – July 2002

Crop yields will drop if erosion continues, soil scientist says

The scars of soil erosion continue to show throughout southern Minnesota. And if erosion continues at this pace, highly productive soils will no longer be able to sustain high yields, says a University of Minnesota soil scientist.

"This is the fourth year in a row of severe erosion," says Gyles Randall, U of M soil scientist at the Southern Research and Outreach Center at Waseca. "The agricultural community, especially corn and soybean farmers, should be very concerned when severe losses of highly productive soils and impassable gullies continue to develop."

"Now is the time to start making plans for less fall tillage," Randall says. "The best tillage system we've observed for keeping erosion in check is soybeans no-tilled into standing corn stalks, especially when combined with strategically placed, sufficiently wide grass waterways. Farmers are encouraged to observe these soybean fields and start asking questions about this easy and productive soybean cropping system."

Most farmers do some major tillage after corn. And with the corn-soybean rotation so prevalent, there's very little protection against erosion. Tremendous gullies develop, and a complacent attitude of "it happens" seems to exist, Randall says.

"No-till following corn works very well," Randall says. "We have the machinery to do it, we can get good stands and excellent weed control and yields and it's inexpensive. Some farmers are doing it very successfully, and can't understand why their neighbors aren't."

Randall may be reached at (507) 835-3620 or randa012@umn.edu.

Consider anthrax vaccinations for grazing cattle in northwestern Minnesota

As northwestern Minnesota livestock producers attempt to recover from devastating floods in their area, state veterinarian Bill Hartmann advises them to consider anthrax vaccinations for livestock that will be grazing later this summer on land that flooded.

Anthrax is a naturally occurring disease caused by the bacteria *Bacillus anthracis*. All warm-blooded animals are susceptible to the disease, but cattle, horses, sheep and goats are most commonly affected. Since the bacteria form spores that can lie dormant in soil for years, outbreaks typically occur in areas where animals have previously died of anthrax. Heavy rains and floods can bring the spores to the surface, where grazing animals can ingest them. Livestock infected with anthrax die quickly.

Fortunately, the risk of humans developing anthrax from naturally occurring bacteria is extremely low. Minnesota has recorded no human cases of anthrax since 1953. However, anthrax in livestock is an ongoing problem in northwestern Minnesota. During the summer of 2001, the state confirmed anthrax cases on 21 different farms in northwestern counties. Nearly 100 cattle, two horses and two free-ranging whitetail deer died from the disease. Kittson, Roseau, Marshall and Polk were among the affected counties.

Given this history of anthrax among livestock in northwestern Minnesota, Hartmann believes it is prudent for livestock producers to vaccinate grazing animals. In previous years, farmers had to hire veterinarians to administer anthrax vaccinations. However, the Minnesota Board of Animal Health recently modified its rules to allow individual farmers to vaccinate their own livestock after getting a prescription from a veterinarian. Vaccinations generally cost less than \$2 per animal.

"Many producers in northwestern Minnesota already vaccinated their animals earlier this year, but those who haven't should consider it - especially if they are going to be grazing cattle on land that flooded," Hartmann said. "The way I look at it, \$2 is cheap insurance for an animal that is worth more than a thousand dollars."

Using the anthrax vaccine will not jeopardize organic status for certified organic livestock producers, says Jim Riddle, a member of the National Organic Standards Board from Minnesota. Hartmann may be reached at (651) 296-2942 x 27.

Specialty forestry products: it's all in the selling

You can't make money growing specialty forestry products (SFPs). The money is in the selling, say University of Minnesota educators who attended a recent workshop at the Arbor Day Farm, Nebraska City, Neb.

SFPs can be profitable, but you need to understand the unique nature of niche markets before you invest money in producing them. Most SFP markets are niche markets, and this requires producers to spend more time and energy marketing them, compared to conventional row crops.

Many of these unique crops aren't suitable for large-scale production. Since large producers don't control most markets, there are usually opportunities for new growers.

SFPs generally fall into four categories: medicinals and botanicals, forest-based food products, woody decorative florals, and handicraft products and specialty woods.

Most SFP enterprises are risky, either because products are perishable or the markets are small and easily saturated. Prices can be volatile and government programs may be limited.

Some products have seasonal markets, such as pussy willows in spring, holly during the holiday season and berries for fresh fruit sales only when they're ripe. Others, such as curly willow and frozen fruit, have more year-round markets. And a few large processors dominate some markets, such as for cedar oil.

Some processors or wholesalers may purchase products from only a few producers. Jelly, jam, juice and wine producers often establish contracts with a limited number of berry growers or harvesters. This allows them to avoid the high costs of dealing with a large number of growers who bring small quantities of fruit of variable quality to their processing facilities.

In addition, newcomers to SFPs may have problems finding production or market information. Existing producers may be fearful of losing their already small markets and thus unwilling to share information. Despite these realities, there are many market opportunities for producing a range of SFPs. Four brochures are available that detail the production and marketing of SFPs:

- Marketing Specialty Forest Products
- Productive Conservation: Growing Specialty Forest Products in agroforestry Plantings
- Edible Woody Landscapes for People and Wildlife
- Hybrid Hazelnuts: An Agroforestry Opportunity

You can find them on the Internet at <http://www.unl.edu/nac/>. Or, call (507) 375-1275 or (800) 204-1295 to order printed copies. Mailing costs are \$1 each.

You can also contact the U of M faculty members who attended the SFPs conference: Dean Currant of the Center for Integrated Natural Resource and Agricultural Management (CINRAM) in St. Paul at (612) 624-4299, or Extension Service educators Mike Demchik, Staples, at (218) 894-5167 or Gary Wyatt, St. James, at (507) 375-1275.

Regional Partnerships initiative seeks at-large members for coordinating committee

The University of Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships has two vacant seats for at-large citizen representatives on the Statewide Coordinating Committee (SCC).

The SCC leads efforts to identify and attract resources within the University of Minnesota system to support the Regional Partnerships initiative. The SCC also facilitates cross-regional communication, learning, collaboration, and accountability among all five Regional Partnerships.

At-large citizen members must represent geographical areas of the state that are not currently covered by the Regional Partnerships (see www.regionalpartnerships.umn.edu for a map). They are expected to attend meetings every other month (usually on the U of M St. Paul campus), contribute to discussion and critical thinking about Regional Partnerships work and provide an unbiased perspective on regional programming and development reports.

Please contact the Regional Partnerships office at (612) 625-8235 or (800) 909-6472 for more information or to request a nomination form. Nominations are due Aug. 1, 2002.

Check the Haylist website if you're buying or selling hay

Producers who are buying or selling hay will want to check the University of Minnesota Extension Service "Haylist" website at www.haylist.umn.edu. If you don't have access to the web, contact a county office of the U of M Extension Service.

Watch the website for future information about hay donations to people in drought areas.

Minnesota Grown Directory for 2002 is available

The Minnesota Grown Directory is your passport to farm-fresh produce, meats, plants, flowers, Christmas trees and more. Developed by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, the guide allows you to search for a farm or market by area.

The guide is free from MDA, Minnesota Grown Program, 90 West Plato Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55107-2094, (651) 296-4939. It is also available on the web at www.minnesotagrown.com.

Calendar of events, 2002

These events are sponsored by numerous organizations. More information is available on MISA's website: www.misa.umn.edu.

July 10. **Alternative Methods for Wintering Dairy or Beef Cattle**, Ralph Lentz, Lake City, (651) 345-2557.

July 12. **Reduced Input Dairy Systems Tour**, Summer Field Day at the U of M West Central Research and Outreach Center, Morris, (320) 589-1711, dairydgj@mrs.umn.edu.

July 13. **Big Woods Dairy Demonstration Farm Open House**, Nerstrand-Big Woods State Park, (507) 526-2388.

July 16. **Organic Crop Tour, Doug Lundeen farm**, Cokato, (320) 693-5275 or toll-free (877) 993-5275, schwa049@umn.edu.

July 14-17. **American Forage and Grassland Council Annual Conference/Trade Show**, Best Western Thunderbird Hotel/Convention Center, Bloomington, Minn., www.afgc.org.

July 18. **Blueberry and Tomato Field Night**, Staples Central Lakes Ag Center, (877) 977-7778 or (320)589-1711, jwright@umn.edu.

July 20. **Summer Organic Symposium**, Don and Sylvia Dufner farm, Buxton, N.D., (605) 627-5862, trhaigh@itctel.net or www.npsas.org.

July 24-25. **Field Course in Organic Management**, U of M Research and Outreach Center, Lamberton, (507) 752-7372 or swroc.coafes.umn.edu.

July 25. **Organic Crop and Dairy Tour**, Martin Jaus farm Gibbon, (320) 693-5275 or toll-free (877) 993-5275, schwa049@umn.edu.

July 25. **Potassium Rate Trial on an Established Grass/Legume Pasture; Determining Economic Rates for Grazing/Haying Systems**, Dan and Cara Miller, Spring Valley (507) 346-2261.

July 26. **Fifth Annual Organic Field Day**, U of M Research and Outreach Center, Lamberton, (507) 752-7372 or swroc.coafes.umn.edu.

July 27. **Woolly Cupgrass Research**, Leo Seykora, Owatonna, (507) 451-2906.

July 29. Research/Demonstration Garden for New Immigrant Farmers at UMore Park, Nigatu Tadese, Rosemount, (651) 423-2413

Aug. 1. **Alternative Swine Program Field Day**, West Central Research and Outreach Center, Morris. RSVP by July 27 to Wayne Martin at (612) 625-6224 or (877) 258-4647, e-mail marti067@umn.edu.

Aug. 2. **Sustainable Agriculture Field Day--Rearing Dairy Heifers in Feedlots or Grazing Alfalfa**, Roger Imdieke farm, Elrosa, (320) 589-1711, dairydgj@mrs.umn.edu.

Aug. 12-14. **Windy River Renewable Energy Sustainable Agriculture Fair- Photovoltaic Workshop (siting and installing small photovoltaic or PV electric systems)**, Long Prairie, (320) 594-2456 or converse@rea-alp.com.

Aug. 13. **Organic Management Practices for Prairie Land Watersheds**, Madison, Minn., (320) 598-7321-ext. 3, or srf@mnmadison.fsc.usda.gov.

Aug. 17. **Windy River Renewable Energy Sustainable Agriculture Fair**, Lion's Park, Long Prairie, (320) 594-2456 or converse@rea-alp.com

Aug. 21. **Digesters for Managing Animal Waste**, Holiday Inn, St. Cloud, (651) 645-6159, x21, or cnelson@mnproject.org.

Aug. 23. **Alternative Swine Production & Pasture Broilers and Layers**, Colin and Carla Wilson, Dan and Lorna Wilson, Paullina Iowa, (612) 625-6224 or (877) 258-4647, marti067@umn.edu.

Aug. 24. **Land Stewardship Project 20-year Celebration**, "Keeping the Land and People Together, Good Counsel Hill, Mankato, (651) 653-0618, lspwbl@landstewardshipproject.org.

Sept. 12. **50 Years of Weed Observations, Alternative Beef & Hog Production**, Richard and Sharon Thompson, Boone, Iowa, (612) 625-6224 or (877) 258-4647, marti067@umn.edu.

What we're about

This newsletter is supported by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA). It's also supported by the University of Minnesota Extension Service, the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCRSARE) Professional Development Program (PDP), and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA). MISA is a partnership between the Sustainer's Coalition and the University of Minnesota College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences (COAFES).

Send story ideas to the editor: Jack Sperbeck, 405 Coffey Hall, 1420 Eckles Ave., University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108, (612) 625-1794, fax (612) 625-2207, e-mail: sperb001@umn.edu. Other editorial board members: Helene Murray, (612) 625-0220, murra021@umn.edu; and Bill Wilcke, (612) 625-8205, wilck001@umn.edu. Please send address changes directly to: Bill Wilcke, Biosystems & Agricultural Engineering, 1390 Eckles Ave., St. Paul, MN 55108.

Also check MISA's home page at www.misa.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.**

To stimulate thinking and discussion about sustainability, we try to present items that reflect different points of view. This being the case, we aren't promoting and don't necessarily agree with everything we publish.