

Sustainable Agriculture

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Get your new copy of the Greenbook

"Greenbook 2002" is the 13th annual publication from the Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA). It highlights progress reports from farmers and researchers participating in the Sustainable Agriculture On-Farm Demonstration Grant Program.

The Greenbook covers cropping systems, soil fertility, fruits and vegetables and livestock production. It also includes essays from Chef Lucia Watson, farmer Jim Van Der Pol and agricultural economist Dick Levins about ways to support farmers and communities.

You can request copies of the Greenbook from Wayne Monsen at (651) 282-2261 or Alison Fish at (651) 296-2776. Eventually, it will be available on the MDA website at www.mda.state.mn.us/esap/Greenbook.html

MDA is accepting applications for sustainable agriculture grants

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is accepting applications for grants from Minnesota farmers, researchers, nonprofit organizations and educators who have innovative ideas for sustainable farming systems.

MDA's Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program (ESAP) will award up to \$210,000 to grant projects this fiscal year. Individual grants up to \$25,000 are available for three-year projects that benefit the environment, increase farm net profits and improve farm family quality of life.

In past years, ESAP has typically received from 35 to 50 applications and awarded grants to between 15 and 20 of them.

For more information, contact Wayne Monsen at (651) 282-2261 or ESAP at (651) 296-7673. Applications will be available soon on the web at www.mda.state.mn.us/esap/, under "Demonstration Grants." Completed applications must be received at MDA by Dec. 13, 2002.

Carmen Fernholz is finalist for national award

Carmen Fernholz, a farmer from Madison, Minn., is a contender for a new national prize, the Patrick Madden Award for Sustainable Agriculture. The \$1,000 award by USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program will be presented Oct. 26 in Raleigh, N.C.

SARE - funded and administered by USDA's Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service (CSREES) - advances farming systems that are profitable, environmentally sound and good for communities.

Fernholz has perfected a profitable, environmentally sound grain production system on his 410-acre farm. He began farming in 1972 on 80 acres of marginal cropland. Over the decades, he increased his acreage to 410, and improved the soil with terracing, contour farming, controlled drainage and tree plantings. Today, he raises organic grain crops (barley, oats, wheat, flax, corn, soybeans and alfalfa) and about 1,000 hogs annually. He devotes 53 acres to prairie restoration, including permanent wetlands and nesting areas.

When faced with choices to stay profitable, such as getting bigger, Fernholz chose to trim his inputs, change to organic crop farming and revamp his marketing strategies.

"Even if you don't sell as 'certified organic,' you generally have significantly fewer actual dollars expended to produce a crop," Fernholz said. "You enhance the potential of making more profit that way. And if there is a premium, you're that much farther ahead."

Fernholz spearheaded an effort to bring a collective bargaining and marketing agency for organic producers (OFARM) to Minnesota and the upper Midwest. It provides seven farmer cooperatives representing more than 1,000 family farmers the means to gain a fair price for their products.

"The OFARM organization is an example of Carmen's commitment to agriculture as a whole, not only the land he farms," said Helene Murray, executive director of the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, which Fernholz helped found.

Fernholz is one of six finalists for the Madden Award, named for SARE's first director, Patrick Madden, a pioneer in the movement toward a strong, independent agriculture for all growers. The award recognizes a stellar producer who has explored ways to make farming more profitable, environmentally sound and good for communities and has served as an effective educator.

ATTRA has nearly 200 publications on sustainable agriculture topics

The Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA) project has nearly 200 publications on sustainable agriculture. Topics include livestock, poultry, agronomy, horticulture, alternative energy, organic certification and production, and establishing rural business cooperatives.

They're free, and may be ordered from ATTRA by calling (800) 346-9140. Or, download them from their website at www.attra.ncat.org.

ATTRA is a project of the National Center for Appropriate Technology and is funded by the USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service.

Hybrid poplar can be profitable crop in northern Minnesota

Hybrid poplar can compete with corn and soybeans as a profitable crop on many northern Minnesota farms, according to a new University of Minnesota publication.

Hybrid poplar is a short-rotation, woody crop that's typically planted and harvested in less than 15 years. Production of the crop has been developed and refined since the late 1970s, when it was considered a potential biomass fuel.

"Uses for this fast-growing tree have expanded beyond biomass," says Mike Demchik, an agroforestry management educator with the University of Minnesota Extension Service at Staples and one of the publication's six authors. Each of the authors has considerable experience with research and production of woody crops.

The publication, "Hybrid Poplars as an Alternative Crop," is a short introduction to help you determine if you might be interested in growing hybrid poplar. It covers site selection and preparation, soils and fertility, planting and planting stock, weed and insect control, production costs and potential profits.

You can check it out at www.cnr.umn.edu/cfc/nryb/nrr/. To order copies, contact Susan Seabury at (218) 879-0850, ext 108, or sseabury@umn.edu.

How would collective bargaining work for dairy farmers?

Let's say the nation's dairy farmers decide to work together to build economic power through collective bargaining. How might it work?

First of all, it's not about dumping milk, says Richard A. Levins, economist with the University of Minnesota Extension Service. Levins says the term "collective bargaining" brings images of the angry milk-dumping episodes of 40 years ago for many dairy farmers. And that's unfortunate, Levins says. "Collective bargaining is often confused with supply control," he says. "But many objections to supply control don't apply to collective bargaining."

There are about nine million milking cows in the U.S. "Let's say the milk from all of those cows was priced by a single agency acting on behalf of all dairy farmers, rather than by individual farmers trying to get the best deal on their own. You could call this the 'nine-million cow dairy,'" Levins says.

"In a nine-million cow dairy, individual farmers would continue to make their own decisions on how to run their individual dairies. They would sacrifice no freedom whatsoever," Levins says. "They would merely agree to work together in negotiating higher milk prices and enjoy whatever benefits marketing muscle might bring their way."

The nine-million cow dairy would not be big in the way individual dairies get big. "Individual dairies get big trying to cut costs and compete with neighbors," Levins says. "But they can't get big enough to match the size of the nation's largest processors and retailers."

For bargaining to be successful, there must be some threat to back it up, Levins says. "But there are better options than dumping milk. For starters, milk could no longer be dumped legally due to environmental regulations.

"Participating farmers could threaten to restrict the supply of milk to one processor, but not to others, as long as that processor did not agree to higher payments for milk. Or, farmer-owned co-ops could process milk into products for food relief operations," Levins says. "Other legitimate threats might come to mind."

The nine-million cow dairy would require much thought and study before it was put in place, according to Levins. "For now," he says, "we must learn to walk before we can run. Part of that process is getting used to new goals."

Levins may be reached at dlevins@apcc.umn.edu or (612) 625-5238). He has also written "An Essay on Farm Income," with more details on farmers building market power. It is available at no charge at <http://agecon.lib.umn.edu> or by calling the Waite Library at (612) 625-1705.

Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships get new director, college rep

Mary Vogel is the new statewide director of the Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships. Vogel begins her duties immediately, according to Charles C. Muscoplat, vice president and dean of the College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences.

Vogel brings a rich history and understanding of the Regional Partnerships, Muscoplat says. She has served on the Northeast Partnership board, as a member of the state coordinating committee and on partnership projects. Vogel has been a senior research fellow at the College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture and an Extension liaison since 1995. She has also worked for a number of architectural and design firms in the Twin Cities since 1979.

Muscoplat also appointed Helene Murray as the College's representative to the Regional Partnerships' Statewide Coordinating Committee (SCC). Murray is the executive director of the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA). "Murray has played a leadership role in MISA for the past nine years and has fostered citizen engagement from her position within the College," Muscoplat says. "I also acknowledge William Wilcke, professor in Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering, for his past service as the College's representative to the SCC."

The five Regional Partnerships function to sustain Minnesota's natural resource-based industries by addressing community-identified issues on a long-term basis. The College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences; the College of Natural Resources; and the Extension Service partner with citizens in the regions. The partnerships resulted from legislative funding to the University of Minnesota in 1997.

Animal agriculture environmental impact report is available

It's been said there's nothing more controversial in rural areas than the smell of manure. And the problem is magnified when the livestock are close to town.

Minnesota's "Animal Agriculture Generic Environmental Impact Statement" (GEIS) is now available and it discusses how livestock feedlots can co-exist with neighbors and the environment. The GEIS report includes ideas from hundreds of Minnesota residents throughout the state who've attended public meetings since the Minnesota Legislature funded the study in 1998.

Several agencies and the University of Minnesota conducted the study. Students, interested citizens, farmers and public officials will find the report helpful. If you're interested in delving into the topic, you'll find reading material that equals several books in length at www.mnplan.state.mn.us/eqb/geis/.

Calendar of events, 2002

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

Oct. 23-26. **On The Road To Sustainable Agriculture: A National Conference with a Southern Perspective (USDA SARE Conference)**, Research Triangle Park, N.C., www.mnplan.state.mn.us/eqb/geis/ or (919) 515-2261.

Oct. 31. **Grazing Workshop**, Brainerd, sponsored by USDA-NRCS, Mary Reetz (218) 829-3272.

Nov. 8-10. **Urban Rural Food Systems Conference**, Michael Fields Agricultural Institute East Troy, Wis., (262) 642-3303; gkahovic@michaelfieldsagainst.org, www.michaelfieldsagainst.org.

Nov. 16-17. **Traditional People, Traditional Diet**, featuring Sally Fallon, journalist, chef, nutrition researcher, homemaker and community activist. Nov. 16, St. Cloud Civic Center, (320) 594-2456, converse@rea-alp.com. Nov. 17, Staples, (320) 594-2456, converse@rea-alp.com

Nov. 21 **Self-Sustaining Rural Community**, Wadena, (218) 445-5475.

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).

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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.