

Sustainable Agriculture

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Organic agriculture--in the news nationally and in Minnesota

Organic agriculture made the national news recently with the introduction of the new "USDA Organic" seal.

A "New York Times" editorial titled "New day dawns for organic agriculture," called the new organic seal a "milestone in American farming." The editorial was reprinted in the Oct. 22, 2002 "Minneapolis Tribune."

"While most Americans tend to think of organic food as somehow healthier for themselves and their children, there is no hard evidence to support that," the editorial said. It continued, "The real value of organic farming is its impact on our soil and water and livestock, on the very idea of farming itself. For that alone, it deserves support."

"Organic farms do not contaminate groundwater, nor do they create toxic runoff. Their soil doesn't blow or wash away. This stands in direct contrast to the rest of American agriculture over the past half-century, a tale of grievous erosion, of poisoned wells and rivers, and an agricultural effluent that has created an enormous dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico," the editorial said. "Buying certified organic food is a way to support the health of the soil itself."

On the Minnesota scene, there are new organic training and networking opportunities. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program and a group of partners have been awarded a two-year, \$59,360 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program. The proposal was one of eight recommended for funding out of 30 proposals received.

The project, called "Elementary Organics: Multi-track Training for Minnesota's Agricultural Educators and Advisors," will focus on professional development. It will offer six regional, day-long training sessions that result in improved skills, technical information and professional relationships that help participants better serve organic clientele. The program will target staff members from a number of USDA agencies, the University of Minnesota Extension Service, MDA promotional and regulatory staff, and private lenders.

Along with MDA, project partners include these USDA agencies: Natural Resource and Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, Risk Management Agency, and Resource Conservation and Development Districts. Other partners are the U of M Extension Service and College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences; the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA), and producers.

Meg Moynihan from the MDA Agricultural Development Division is the project director. Contact Meg at (651) 297-8916 for information about participation or training opportunities for you or your staff.

Interested in organic networking?

In Minnesota, organics is not the domain of just one "organic organization." Staff members at many public entities and nonprofit organizations are doing important research, outreach, and networking to help Minnesota farmers who want to grow organically, organic processors, retailers and food buyers.

The Minnesota Organic Network is a group of about 20 individuals representing farmers, federal and state agencies and U of M Extension and research. The group uses e-mail and meets monthly by conference call to keep all these efforts connected. Members exchange information, support each other's work, undertake joint efforts, help each other capitalize on opportunities and plan activities.

Members share leadership for the network. The monthly conference call is sponsored by MISA and the electronic listserv is sponsored by the MDA. For more information, call Meg Moynihan of MDA at (651) 297-8916.

A message from the MISA board of directors nominating committee

We seek your help in identifying individuals potentially willing to serve on the board of directors for the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA.) You may nominate yourself or someone else to serve on the board.

Beginning in January 2003, board vacancies will be filled by two U of M representatives, one sustainable agriculture producer and one representative of the sustainable agriculture community. We seek to have the board reflect diversity, especially with respect to gender, race, student status, geographic area and occupation.

The purpose of MISA is to bring together the agricultural community and the University community in a cooperative effort to develop and promote sustainable agriculture in Minnesota and beyond.

Please visit our web site (www.misa.umn.edu) or contact the MISA office at (800) 909-6472 or (612) 625-8235 if you have any questions or to request an application form.

Application/nomination forms are due in the MISA office by 4:30 p.m., Wednesday, Dec. 4, 2002.

Get your copy of the 2003 'Renewing the Countryside' calendar

The 2003 "Renewing the Countryside" calendar is now available. This beautiful calendar features photos and excerpts from the "Renewing the Countryside" book published in 2002. Both the calendar and the book showcase Minnesotans protecting the environment, bringing new energy to the countryside and promoting Minnesota's rural communities through innovative businesses and community projects.

Calendars and books can be ordered online at www.renewingthecountryside.org or by calling (612) 870-3472 or toll free (866) 378-0587. Calendars are \$9.95 plus tax and hardcover books are at special price of \$29.95 plus tax (retail \$39.95) through the end of the year.

South Carolina dairy farmer receives Patrick Madden Award

Tom Trantham, a dairy farmer in Pelzer, S.C., is the first winner of a new national award, The Patrick Madden Award for Sustainable Agriculture. Trantham has perfected a profitable, environmentally sound grazing system for dairy cows.

The \$1,000 award by USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program was presented Oct. 26 in Raleigh, N.C.

The award is 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 who has served as an effective educator.

Carmen Fernholz, a farmer from Madison, Minn., was one of six finalists nominated for the Madden Award.

New fruit and vegetable IPM publications available

New fruit and vegetable publications on integrated pest management (IPM) are available from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA). One is called "A Beautiful Harvest: Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers Manage Pests." It profiles 15 Minnesota fruit and vegetable growers who use integrated pest management or organic farming techniques.

Check their website at www.mda.state.mn.us/ipm/ for more information. You'll also find a description of nine MDA sponsored research projects on IPM being carried out by the University of Minnesota.

Pork checkoff program declared unconstitutional

In an Oct. 25, 2002 ruling a federal judge in Michigan declared the entire pork checkoff program unconstitutional, and ordered Secretary of Agriculture Veneman to cease collections and operation of the pork checkoff program by Nov. 25, 2002.

U.S. District Court Judge Richard Enslen granted the Campaign for Family Farms' motion in its entirety, and rejected all of the defenses raised by USDA, the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC), and state pork associations. Judge Enslen ruled that the Campaign for Family Farms and the individual hog farmers who brought the lawsuit all had standing to raise the constitutional issues, rejecting in particular NPPC's personal attacks on the Campaign and the individuals. Farmers' Legal Action Group (FLAG) represents the Campaign for Family Farms and the individual hog farmers.

In unusually strong language, the Court recognized that requiring hog farmers to pay mandatory assessments that are spent to essentially subsidize the advertising budgets of the industrial agribusiness interests that are trying to put family farmers out of business, is "unconstitutional and rotten." Quoting Thomas Jefferson, the judge stated that "The government has been made tyrannical by forcing men and women to pay for messages they detest" through the pork checkoff program.

For more information, contact Susan E. Stokes of Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc., at (651) 223-5400.

Small communities need practical solutions to wastewater problems

Small, rural communities that haven't resolved drinking water and wastewater problems will have a hard time sustaining and promoting themselves.

And thousands of these small communities in Minnesota and neighboring states face wastewater treatment challenges, says Ken Olson, an educator with the University of Minnesota Extension Service. "These communities face the challenge of providing good wastewater treatment to protect themselves at an affordable cost," says Olson.

Olson, who specializes in on-site sewage treatment, says the typical home produces 75 to 100 gallons of wastewater per person every day.

Wastewater treatment problems aren't a "quick fix." Olson says it typically takes community members from three to seven years from the time they "get serious" about a solution until it becomes reality.

"Unsewered" communities include residents of thousands of small towns, hamlets and shorelands currently not served by centralized wastewater collection and treatment systems. A series of six seminars across the state will help these communities find viable solutions, Olson says.

They're intended for local elected and appointed officials, affected citizens and residents, and professionals such as engineers, consultants, builders, realtors and planners. The sessions all start with registration at 9 a.m. and conclude at 3:15 p.m.

They are scheduled as follows: Nov. 21, Beltrami Rural Electric, Bemidji; Jan. 9, Holiday Inn, Alexandria; Jan. 16, Holiday Inn South, Rochester; Jan. 23, Best Western Marshall Inn, Marshall; Feb. 6, Sawmill Inn, Grand Rapids; and Feb. 20, Medina Ballroom, Medina.

Early registration is \$40 per person, which includes lunch, handouts, presentations and a book titled "Small Community Wastewater Solutions." For more details, including registration information, contact Greg Miller, program coordinator for the U of M Onsite Treatment Program, at (800) 322-8642 or (612) 625-9797.

Sally Fallon will speak at Nov. 17 meeting in Staples

Sally Fallon--chef, nutrition researcher, community activist and author--will be the featured speaker at a Nov. 17 meeting in Staples. The Sustainable Farming Association (SFA) of Central Minnesota is sponsoring the conference titled "Butter, Fats and Oils, What's Best for You?" Fallon is the founder of the Weston A. Price Foundation for Wise Traditions in Food, Farming and the Healing Arts, a nonprofit nutrition education foundation in Washington, D.C. During the past four years she has presented lectures and seminars in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States.

For more information contact Linda Converse at (320) 594-2456 or converse@rea-alp.com. You can also download a registration form at www.sustainablefarmingcentralmn.com.

Calendar of events, 2002

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

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 Communities**, Embers America Grill, Wadena. Call (218) 445-5475, e-mail deebilek@wcta.net.

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.