

# Agricultural News

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One of nearly 8,000 farm mediation cases conducted in Minnesota since 1986. (photo by Don Breneman)

## Mediation: A tough job they love

*(Editor's note: "The toughest job you'll ever love" is the Peace Corps slogan. It's also a good description of the role of mediators in the Farm Mediation program administered by the University of Minnesota's Extension Service.*

*This story evolved from talking with some long-time mediators who've handled nearly 1,000 cases and with Kathy Mangum, mediation program*

*director. Since mediation deals with private information, we summarized what they said rather than quoting individuals by name. Since the program began in 1986, there have been 7,994 cases in Minnesota).*

Mediation cases have lessened, but they're more complex. "It's getting harder," mediators say

about completing the mediation process.

The same people may be going through mediation more than once—with a different set of creditors—but their options are fewer. There may be new splitups in families or more people involved in mediation. One media-

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This archival publication may not reflect current scientific knowledge or recommendations.  
Current information available from University of Minnesota Extension: <http://www.extension.umn.edu>.

# Ag issues presented at State Fair

During the 1990 Minnesota State Fair a wide variety of agricultural issues were discussed by farm leaders and experts from the Minnesota Extension Service and Minnesota Department of Agriculture. The panel discussions were held each day of the fair in the agriculture wing of the Horticulture Building.

The idea for organizing 11 panel discussions came from Robin Kinney, farm editor for the Linder Farm Network in Willmar. She brought together Margaret Savard, from the department's commissioner's office and Martin Moen, radio specialist with the Educational Development System (EDS). This group assembled the panels and coordinated media coverage of the events.

The panels discussed topics like food safety and labeling, surface and groundwater quality, rural development, animal care, farm safety, the globalization of agriculture and the corporate consolidation of agriculture.

MES faculty who participated in the panels were Bill Schafer, food science and nutrition; Jack Sperbeck, EDS; Fred Bergsrud and Tom Brennan, ag engineering; Richard Goodrich, animal science;

Ken McNamara, agronomy and plant genetics; and John Lawrence, agricultural and applied economics.

A press release was written and faxed to major media outlets after each panel concluded its discussion of the topic. The stories were carried by the state Associated Press and United Press International newswires.

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## *The story was carried nationally by UPI*

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Martin Moen produced broadcast stories for radio stations throughout the state. These reports generated 51 calls during the State Fair. Several of the panel discussions were carried "live" on the Linder Farm Network and most were available via satellite to any station that wished to carry the program.

The story on food safety and labeling was carried nationally by United Press International. After the discussion on farm safety, several panel members, including Tom Brennan, walked over to WCCO Radio's booth at the State Fair and were interviewed "live" for over 30 minutes. In addition, stories about the panel discussions were featured in the weekly publications *Agri-News* and *The Land*.

The MES experts were joined on the panels by noted farm leaders like Al Christopherson, president, Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation; Jeff Bauman, president of the Minnesota Pork Producers Association; Dave Haugo, president of the Minnesota Wheat Growers Association; Lee Swenson, president National Farmer's Union; and Myron Halvorson, president, Minnesota Cattleman's Association.

*Martin Moen*

## Stories for innovative farmers...

Data Transmission Network (DTN) is looking for good subject matter stories to transmit to their over 5,000 subscribers in Minnesota.

Livestock marketing economist John Lawrence has arranged for DTN to carry up to one "page" or computer screen per week. We plan to update or change it two or three times weekly. That translates to two or three good stories weekly.

DTN says their subscribers "represent the most innovative and productive Minnesota agricultural operators." Their subscrib-

ers grow corn (76%), soybeans (75%), and wheat (31%). In terms of livestock, 39% are hog producers, 24% feed cattle, 11% have background/yearling operations and 10% have beef cows.

The stories edited specifically for this audience will also go out on EXTEND and to other media mailing lists maintained by EDS. Agents can use the stories in local media outlets.

Call Jack Sperbeck (612-625-1794) or Marty Moen (612-625-6243) with your ideas. The planned start-up date is early October.

*Jack Sperbeck*

*Agricultural News* is a publication of the Agriculture Program Area, produced by Educational Development System, Minnesota Extension Service. Ideas for stories and letters to the editor are encouraged. Contact Jack Sperbeck, 447 Coffey Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108. Tel. 612-625-1794.

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tor found more than 35 people involved in a single mediation. Reaching a settlement after several months seemed "a miracle" with millions of dollars balanced on the outcome.

To compound the problem, some farmers facing foreclosure have been subjected to fly-by-night scams.

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*...there have been suicides...*

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It can be very stressful. Regrettably, there have been suicides and some threatened suicides that were able to be averted over the months of the mediation process.

Phone calls to mediators' homes from early morning to midnight are not unusual. Even young family members know where to reach them at all hours. Immediacy is important. The reassurance of just talking with a mediator on the phone may be all the caller needs.

While mediators say they garner community respect, at times they feel vulnerable. They all learn "how not to take chances." At times they have worried about their safety and on occasion mediators have removed knives and even a gun at a mediation session. One mediator has never used it, but has carried Mace. But the unusual incidents such as these are a small, 5-10 percent of the total. More usual is the nonverbal communication: the looks, the florid faces, the tempers on edge in situations where the discomfort level is understandably high.

Mediators cite the wonderful training Minnesota Extension Service has given them. Some have become so interested they have even gone to centers outside the state for supplementary conflict resolution training.

Some mediators who are

Don Olson has accepted the position of program leader, agriculture in the Minnesota Extension Service. He will move from his current position as Ramsey County extension agent to state program leader on Nov. 1, 1990. His office will be in 146 Classroom Office Building on the St. Paul campus of the University of Minnesota.

Don will share the agricultural program leader responsibilities with Marilyn Grantham. A third vacant program leader position will remain open due to budget constraints. The two vacant positions were held previously by Duane Schrader who retired and Tom Thorburn who resigned to accept a position as director of agricultural programs with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

We are extremely pleased that Don has committed his many abilities and experience to this statewide leadership role in extension. He has over 30 years' experience as county extension agent in agriculture and 4-H/youth in Iowa and Minnesota. Don has B.S. and M.S. degrees from Iowa State University in agronomy and horticulture. Since coming to Minnesota in 1987, he has given leadership to dynamic extension programs in urban horticulture, yard waste manage-

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farmers find sitting on a tractor and cultivating is a good coping mechanism to counter "burn out." In a world where every problem has its attentive support system, mediators also draw on one another, informally, as they seek solutions to mediation problems. Mediation has reinforced what most of them already knew: that farm people are some of the most independent and fiercely proud people on earth, but that communication between couples on money matters can be missing. A



ment, water quality and master gardeners. He is the team leader for a statewide direct marketing education program.

While in the Cooperative Extension Service in Iowa, Don was the recipient of numerous awards including the Iowa Extension Certificate of Recognition for Outstanding Extension Programming, Distinguished Service Award from the National Association of Agricultural Agents and the Iowa State University Extension Outstanding Educator Award. He served as president of the Iowa County Agents Association.

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wife may be totally unaware of the financial condition of their joint farm venture.

Mediation becomes "a way of life" for mediators. "The most satisfying job I've ever had." "A humane, sensible way of working things out." "I've got more out of this than I gave," are how these mediators describe the process.

While the perception outside farming communities is that the farm crisis is over, the mediators know better.

Mary Kay O'Hearn

## Campus Profile

The variety of people he helps in his job makes life interesting, **Dick Epley** says.

One day he's apt to be working with a small meat processor who's worried about having a few thousand pounds of meal spoil. The next day, he may get a call from a consumer with a freezer on the blink and 100 pounds of partially thawed meat. "The consumer with the home freezer problem is just as concerned as the processor with the larger quantity," he says.



Epley came to the University of Minnesota as extension meats specialist in 1970. His clients include farmers, processors, regulators, meat retailers, food service operators and consumers. Although he works with both small and large meat processing companies, his expertise is particularly valued by the state's 200 or so smaller operators who can't afford in-house research and development. Most of the smaller "community" processors are members of the Minnesota Association of Meat Processors.

He's written a monthly column in the association's monthly bulletin for the last 20 years. He also writes a monthly column for

the Minnesota Beef Council and started the "About Meat" column that goes to extension agents on EXTEND.

He's seen the meats processing industry change considerably in the last 20 years. Many small processors used to get most of their business from custom slaughter of livestock for local farmers. That business has all but disappeared due to fewer farms producing livestock.

"Most of the processors who survived have put in sausage kitchens and make process meats with a flavor that's unique to the local community," he says. For example, he works with one processor in a German community who makes heavily spiced wieners and summer sausage that outsell national brands in the community. But the spicy foods won't sell in a Scandinavian community, where the "bland" taste is preferred.

Epley also enjoys cooperating on applied research projects with other faculty members. Recently he helped develop a new ground beef/wild rice product that's being made by a number of Minnesota processors.

His hobbies? "Everyone knows I enjoy golf. I also like to read and travel," he adds.

*Jack Sperbeck*

### Tell us who to make famous...

Would you like to see a colleague featured in a profile or success story in *Agricultural News*? Just contact editor Jack Sperbeck, EDS, 447 Coffey Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108. Telephone 612-625-1794.

### Tell us who to make famous...

## New Staff

On Sept. 17, 1990 **Sonya Gambrel** began her duties as coordinator, extension and dairy center programs in the Department of Food Science and Nutrition. Responsibilities include coordinating the outreach program of the extension management unit and the Minnesota-South Dakota Dairy Foods Research Center. Sonya received a B.S. degree in foods from Michigan State University and has done graduate work at Rollins College. Before coming to the University of Minnesota she was quality assurance manager at the Dean Foods Company.

On July 1, 1990 **Gary Gardner** was appointed as department head, Department of Horticultural Science and Landscape Architecture. Gary's educational background includes an A.B. degree from Oberlin College and A.M. and Ph.D. degrees from Harvard University. He was group leader, agricultural biotechnology department at Shell Development Company in California for several years, and most recently has been section head, Plant Sciences Department at Abbott Laboratories in Chicago and adjunct professor of biological sciences, University of Illinois at Chicago.

**Kevin Plante** has been appointed for the period Sept. 24, 1990 to Dec. 14, 1990 as temporary replacement in Nicollet County while Gary Hachfeld is on study leave. Kevin received an associate of applied science degree in diversified ag prod/pre-ag from the University of Minnesota, Crookston, and a B.S. in ag education from the University of Minnesota, St. Paul. He has participated in FFA's work experience abroad program in Western Australia, and most recently has served MES in West and East Polk and Mahnomen counties.

# Programs reduce water pollution

Start with some good research. Then get the results to the people who can use it—and fast.

"That's what the Land Grant System is all about," says soil scientist George Rehm. An example Rehm likes to use is nitrogen management on Minnesota's irrigated farms.



George Rehm

About 80 percent of Minnesota irrigators now use split applications of nitrogen fertilizer for corn production, according to a survey by Jerry Wright, agricultural engineer stationed at Morris who works with irrigators.

Split applications are one of several "best management practices" that can be used to reduce the potential for movement of nitrate nitrogen out of the root zone of an actively growing corn crop.

Research projects conducted over a 12-year period by soil scientist Gary Malzer for the University's Agricultural Experiment Station clearly showed that split applications produced the most effective and efficient use of nitrogen fertilizer for corn production on irrigated sandy soils. The results of these research trials were then taken to Minnesota irrigators by the Minnesota Extension Service. "We turned this information around fast. Farmers got the latest research data 'hot off the press,'" Rehm says.

Rehm emphasizes the team effort by many research and extension people. For example, nitrogen fertilizer management demonstrations conducted by county agents Denzil Cooper and Kendall Langseth at Staples

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## Viewpoint

### Applying marketing concepts to program development

Last month this column focused on program quality, specifically indicators of program quality. This month the focus is on one aspect of program quality—marketability.

Although marketability isn't specifically mentioned in the program quality indicators, it is implicit in the central question for problem selection. What important societal problems justify extension's attention?

Marketability deals with determining a "position" for our "products" (educational programs and materials) in meeting the needs of our "customers" (clientele). A position or "niche" in the market, in our case the market for agricultural research information and education, depends on three factors. It may help to think of these three factors as the end points on a triangle. You may recall from your plane geometry days that a triangle is a very strong structure.

The first factor or triangular point is **need** (an important, focused and "grounded" societal problem or concern). Needs need **not** be recognized by clientele—part of our responsibility as extension educators is **anticipating** clientele needs **before** most of them become aware of them. But if we know that clientele lack awareness that they need the information or education we have to offer, then we have to help them become aware of their need in the ways we use to promote the program.

The second positioning point is the **capability** of extension to deal with the need or concern. Our capability includes our research base (not only our own but what is happening on the cutting edge in our subject matter fields and in other academic disciplines), relative lack of bias, and our applied subject matter, program planning/delivery/evaluation, and teaching expertise.

The third point on the positioning triangle is **competition**. What are our "competitors" offering that address the same need? Our competitors may be crop and other agricultural consultants, adult farm management programs and industry product information programs.

We sometimes debate whether these sources are **actually** our competitors. Whether they are or not depends on how our current or prospective clientele view them, rather on than what we think. In many instances, other sources of agricultural information and education may not be truly or fully competitive. We may be able to collaborate with private industry or other educational organizations in ways that help everyone, especially clientele, by acknowledging our capabilities (strengths and weaknesses) in relation to those of other sources.

Actually determining our position or "niche" in the market for agricultural information and education would require doing market research to determine how we are viewed by our current and prospective clientele and what they perceive to be their most important educational and informational needs. We also need to do some structured anticipatory "futuring" activity such as environmental scanning to identify trends and their implications. The limited market research information that we have indicates that our current niche is more in "validating" information from other sources and helping our clientele adapt information and use it to make decisions for the longer term profitability, rather than being the initial, primary source of agricultural information.

More on this marketing topic in future issues—doing marketing research, "targeting" audiences for programs, planning programs for educational impact.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marilyn Grantham".

Marilyn Grantham  
Program Leader, Agriculture



## Agent Profile

One-on-one interaction with people who need information is one of the most enjoyable aspects of extension work for **Bob Fritz**.

Fritz is county extension agent for agriculture and county extension director in Pipestone County, where he has served for 14 years. He is also a cluster livestock agent in Cluster 11, which includes Pipestone, Rock, Nobles, Murray, Lyon and Lincoln counties. His cluster responsibilities are in dairy, beef cow-calf and sheep.

"We really enjoy the cluster concept here, and think it's very necessary," says Fritz. "Counties in this area cooperated in programming for years before clustering became an official part of extension."



He also believes in cooperating with other educational organizations. "We have a good working relationship with the Southwest Technical College in Pipestone," he says. "It's very important to us to maintain this relationship. The two organizations working together can be much more effective in programming."

Fritz grew up on a diversified farm in north central Iowa and earned a bachelor's degree in animal science from South Dakota State University in 1962. He was in charge of the Sheep Research Center at SDSU while an undergrad there. He continued in that capacity and did some teaching while completing a master's degree in meats and animal production at SDSU. He worked for Wilson Packing Co. at Albert Lea, Minn. for 10 years before getting into extension work.

"I had always been interested in extension," he says. "When I worked with Wilson's, I had close contact with Eldon Senske in Freeborn County. We also had an annual conference with county agents from southern Minnesota and northern Iowa."

Fritz has a 10 percent assignment in 4-H, working primarily in the 4-H livestock and meats judging areas. "I really enjoy contact with young people related to livestock educational programming and projects," he says. "I also enjoy seeing them develop skills they will need as adults, such as decision-making and public speaking."

Fritz uses some of his vacation time each year to judge livestock, usually sheep or beef cattle, at county and state fairs. He also keeps a small flock of sheep on the acreage near Pipestone where he lives.

His wife, Laurie, teaches home economics part-time at the local high school. The couple are the parents of two daughters—Melissa, who is in the sixth grade, and Denise, who is grown and married.

Joseph Kurtz

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showed that split applications are very efficient for corn production on irrigated sandy soils.

Results showed that 180 pounds of nitrogen per acre in split applications produced average yields of 190 bushels per acre in 1989. Irrigators were interested in split applications and quickly adopted the practice.

### Focus on nitrogen management for sandy soils will continue

Educational programs that focus on nitrogen management for crop production on sandy soils will continue, Rehm says. Split nitrogen applications as well as other best management practices will be a key component of the Anoka Sand Plains demonstration project for the next five years.

Malzer says many nitrogen management questions have not been answered. There is much that needs to be done. For example, a major project now in progress aims to develop a soil test to accurately predict the amount of fertilizer nitrogen needed to meet the yield goals established by an irrigator.

When this soil test is perfected, there will no longer be a need to use rules of thumb for nitrogen supplied by legumes and manures in making nitrogen fertilizer recommendations for irrigated crops. Minnesota irrigators have shown that they are receptive to using new management practices based on good research.

"There's no doubt they'll be quick to adopt the new soil test when it's developed," Rehm says.

Jack Sperbeck