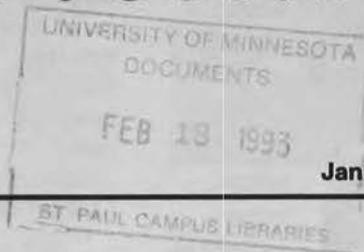


# Agricultural News

Volume 5, Issue 1

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## It's the next revolution in agriculture

If you've been reading farm magazines lately, it's been hard to miss the major articles on crop residue management.

Meetings and trade shows have been attracting large numbers of farmers. Agriculture program leader Don Olson attended a Crop Residue Management conference and trade show in Des Moines, Iowa, in early January. Over 1600 farmers were there—400 of them from Minnesota. They paid an \$85 registration fee.

"I sat by farmers from Wisconsin, Nebraska and Iowa. They're looking for ways to cut production costs and reduce chances of environmental damage. Some of them are getting 175 to 200 bushels of corn and 50 to 60 bushels of beans using conservation tillage," he says.

Crop residue management has been called a quiet revolution, an exciting change, and the number one farming practice that farmers are using to practice sustainable agriculture practices. Conservation tillage is now applied on 57 percent of the U.S. crop acres, up from 30 percent two years ago.

There's still work to be done. Olson says he sees too much tillage being done as he drives across Southern Minnesota.

"Farmers control most of the natural land resources in the country. We need to stress that conservation tillage has more effect on water quality than any other production practice.

"Now is the teachable moment for important conservation, tillage

and water quality issues. From a political standpoint, our urban neighbors don't understand that farmers are interested in the environment. We need to help more farmers adopt conservation tillage practices; then communicate with environmental groups and legislators.

"How successful we are will have a lot to do with how agriculture will be treated in the next three to four years," he says.

Residue management training sessions for field staff and other agricultural professionals are scheduled in mid-March at Rochester, Lamberton, Morris, St. Cloud and Crookston.

*Jack Sperbeck*



Economics is driving farmers to adopt minimum tillage methods. (photo by Don Breneman)

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

# Over 700 attend Farm Family Workshops

A series of 10 workshops in Southern Minnesota on the theme, "How to Thrive, Not Just Survive, as a Farm Family," attracted over 700 people in January and February. The program involved 23 county extension offices and five clusters.

"This program was fun to work on," says Peter Scheffert, Goodhue County extension educator-agriculture. The 14-member planning committee put the program together—and fast. The initial planning session was Nov. 10; sessions started in mid-January.

The original idea was to have one-day financial management workshops. When the agents met, the idea quickly spread to a broader, interdisciplinary approach involving both agriculture and home economics.

## A three-part approach was used.

1. The committee wanted a "kick-off" that would get people excited for the later sessions. They settled on Dr. Ron Hanson, a nationally known farm family communications expert from the University of Nebraska.

2. Hanson led seminars with professionals who work with farm families. Bankers, clergy, social services and business people came.



"The approach was 'what is your role as a professional when caught in the middle

dealing with farm families under stress,'" Scheffert says.

3. Follow-up sessions are being taught by specialized agents. Topics for farm family participants included financial management, decision making, profitability and economic stability, family living, and estate planning.

Scheffert says the committee was unique. "Everyone took a job and did it. It was fun to see agents with fire in their eyes, excited about how this program could help. This program is an example of how extension can be flexible and responsive."

Farm Credit Services and an innovative grant from the director's office helped with financial and child care scholarships and other expenses.

Jack Sperbeck

## IN THE NEWS...

Several agricultural programs have been highlighted in farm magazines and other media outlets lately. Agricultural engineer John Chastain was amazed to find 175 dairy farmers at a farm meeting on flat parlor milking systems. "There were also four editors there," he says. Thus far major stories have appeared in a number of state and national publications, including *Dairy Herd Management*, *Minnesota Farmer* and *Dairy Today*.

Still on the dairy topic, the mid-January issue of the *Minnesota Farmer* had five pages on the Dairy Initiatives program, including the cover story and an editorial. *Dairy Today* had a two page story, and *Agri News* has carried several articles.

Kent Thiesse, Blue Earth County, put together a report for his county extension committee on effective use of the news media. One of his many news media activities is a monthly feature article titled "Farm Programs" in *The Land* newspaper. A readership study conducted in May, 1992 identified the monthly feature as the second most read section of the publication.

Chuck Schwartau's article last fall on "Farm Safety is Too Late For Two More" (see page 3) attracted "lots of attention," he says. "A number of people told me the article was 'close to home' for them. They either knew someone who had been in a serious farm accident, or had close shaves themselves," he says.

Let us know about your news media activities. Or, nominate a co-worker!

*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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## Gettings

✓ The beef Integrated Resource Management (IRM) committee is "in the data collection phase now and will soon have changes and recommendations coming," reports Bill Lazarus, farm management economist and committee member. Brent Woodward, animal science, is committee chair. Committee members have expertise in beef

production systems, pastures, nutrition, health, marketing and farm management.

✓ Plant pathologist Dick Meronuck says he's getting calls on moldy corn. Information on mycotoxins in feed is available in AG-FO-3538, *Molds and Mycotoxins*. Call Dick at 612/625-6290 if you have questions.

# Farm safety is too late for two more

(Editor's note: This is a reprint of an article sent to county newspapers by Wabasha County extension educator Chuck Schwartau).

Within four days, two more young farmers within 15 miles of my home died in farm accidents. The first was a young father who was driving his car in his own driveway. This is a rather long farm drive that he had probably driven thousands of times in his life. Apparently, while driving in the lane, he was distracted and didn't see another member of his own family coming the opposite direction with the combine. The head-on collision resulted in the death of the vehicle's occupant.

The second incident was reported to me in a rather eerie telephone call at about 10 p.m. on a Friday evening. After I answered the phone, the caller asked whether I was the extension agent he hears on the radio some mornings. I replied that I do have a program a couple of mornings a week that he has probably heard. The caller then identified himself as a milk hauler from a neighboring town and said, "Well, we lost another farmer tonight."



When I heard that statement, many different things went through my mind. Was the milk hauler

feeling down himself because he had lost another dairy account who was quitting business, or had a despondent farmer possibly committed suicide because he knew of no other way to deal with some stress? I wasn't sure how to react, or just what to say, so I didn't say anything. After a brief pause, the caller then told me of a farmer who had been killed that evening by a combine head falling on him when a hydraulic hose had broken.

This man was shaken. He had been at the scene. He said he was related to the victim by marriage. He told me another farmer at the scene said, "And this for d—— \$1.60 corn."

This man called me at that time of the night because he knew I

often spoke of farm safety on my radio program. Sometimes it is the subject of a whole program, sometimes it is just a parting thought at the end of the program.

This man was calling out to someone he felt could AGAIN stress the importance of farm safety and doing the LITTLE things that can prevent tragic accidents like these two incidents from happening to some other farm family. Little things like not taking your own driveway for granted as a safe place to drive without giving it your full attention. Little things like taking a moment to drop the safety jack or hydraulic ram block before going under a combine head.

It is too late for these two young men who were so much a part of their families and communities. They will be remembered, but never enjoyed again by their families and friends. Maybe their future contributions to their communities will be the reminder of the little things that can keep farming from being a killer occupation again.

*Chuck Schwartau*

## Urban programs must be more visible

"We must convince urban citizens and their legislators that agriculture works for them," says Gary Gardner, head of the Horticultural Science department.



"The 'rules' for funding agriculture programs in Land Grant universities have changed. Metro-

politan areas now control the votes and our urban agricultural programs must become more visible," Gardner says.

"This is true even in more 'rural' states like Iowa and Nebraska. In Nebraska, the Omaha area controls the legislature; and Iowa is going the same way.

"We do a lot of outstanding work in urban areas. I'm not sure we have to necessarily 'do' more, but we need to 'broadcast' it so we're more visible," he says.

The Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, Dial-U, and Master

Gardener programs and work with the commercial nursery and landscape industry are examples of how citizens in the Twin Cities metropolitan area are served by University of Minnesota agriculture programs.

In addition, the commercial horticultural industry is a \$1.5 billion business in Minnesota, measured by retail value.

In the U.S., landscape crops rank third—behind only corn and soybeans—in wholesale farm cash receipts.

*Urban Programs Continued on page 4*



# Peterson visits Poland

(Editor's note: Blake Peterson, program coordinator for the Dairy Initiatives program, returned from Poland in December. Here is his report)

I had the opportunity to spend 6 months (June to December) in Poland as a part of the Polish/American Extension Project. My wife, Janice, and I lived in Bialystok, Poland a city of about 300,000 people in Northeast Poland about 25 miles from the Belarus border. I was one of 10 extension workers from the USA that was in Poland for the 6 month period. I was teamed with an extension agent from Pendleton, Oregon. There were 4 other teams at other locations at the same time.

John Cunningham, Big Stone County; Wayne Hansen, Redwood County; and Claudia Parliament, Ag. Economics had each been on 6-month assignments prior to my visit. Kevin Klair, Center for Financial Management is currently in Poland. Each team goes to a different site and spends 6 months working with Polish counterparts helping them develop extension programs that can be delivered to Polish clientele.

My partner, Mike Stoltz and I helped the Polish extension staff develop programs in marketing, business plan development, cooperatives, machinery economics and working with advisory committees. We also helped them set up a demonstration farm to demonstrate new technologies.

The Bialystok province (also the city name) is largely an agriculture province located about 200 kilometers northeast of Warsaw. The province is one of the largest in Poland with 1,005,464 hectares (2.47 acres per hectare).

There are 53 administrative districts with 3 large cities, 14 smaller cities and 36 rural communities. Unlike other former communist countries most of Poland's farmland remained in private ownership during the Communist period.



The average size of privately owned farms in the Bialystok province is 8 hectares with about 5.2 hectares being under cultivation. The province is located above the 53rd parallel which makes it equal to about 300 miles north of the Minnesota/Canada border.

When we left in early December the days were already very short and when we arrived last June we went for walks at 10 p.m. in daylight. Normal work days for Polish extension workers are 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Poland is about 10% larger than Minnesota in size and has a population about 10 times ours with nearly 40 million people. While Minnesota has about 85,000 farms, Poland has about 3.5 million.

The total extension staff in Poland numbers nearly 5,000 people, with nearly all working in agriculture. Youth programs are just getting started and the Home Economics staff is small in numbers.

In our extension centre (ODR) we had 127 staff with some assigned to the centre and most assigned to one of the 6 regional centres or to individual communities (gminas). Most staff were well trained and highly motivated.

We found that many were working outside of their area of training. An example was our chief interpreter who has a Master's Degree in plant pathology but was working as a swine specialist. People were hired based on how well they fit into the system; then were assigned an area to work in.

When we traveled from Warsaw to our work site we took two new automobiles that we used during our 6 months; and two new computers with printers. We left all these at the extension centre when we left. We were also able to purchase 7 additional computers and one large copy machine for the centre from project funds.

Like all countries that have made a drastic change in their form of government, Poland has experienced some difficulties. But they have moved rapidly to adjust and are going to be a major force in the European Community in the near future. Their new Prime Minister, Hanna Suchocka, is said by some to be the next Margaret Thatcher of Europe.

We found all the necessities we needed to live very well. Food is plentiful and new privately owned businesses are starting up daily and in most cases thriving. One of the major problems hindering economic growth is a fairly high rate of inflation that is coming down rapidly each year and very high interest rates. Farmers wishing to borrow money must pay 50-55% interest.

*Blake Peterson*

## Urban/Continued from page 1

Gardner says it's important for county offices to maintain a strong University of Minnesota identity. "It may be tempting to keep a low profile when another part of the university is getting bad press. But if legislators

don't perceive extension as part of the university, no one is being well served in the long run," he says.

Gardner says the hardest question is deciding which programs we're going to drop due to budget cuts. "We can't continue to lose positions and

still deliver the same programs.

"Our traditional agricultural clients—farmers and their farm organizations—must support urban outreach programs or risk having their programs cut. It's simply a matter of political survival."

*Jack Sperbeck*