

MISA releases new Farmstay publication

As interest grows in local foods, more people are hungry to establish a relationship with the farmers who grow their food and the land on which it is grown. They want to reconnect with their agrarian roots, or form new roots.

Agritourism offers farmers a way to capitalize on this interest while sharing their love of the land and farming with others. Farmstays, in particular, are a type of agritourism gaining popularity across the country. In the simplest terms, a farmstay is lodging available to paying guests on a working farm or managed forestland. Beyond this, a farmstay can take many forms: a farm family may convert a room in

their farmhouse to accommodate overnight guests, repurpose an outbuilding into a sleeping cabin, or build a new structure specifically for guests.

The newly released publication: *Farmstays: Diversifying your farm business through agritourism: A how-to manual for establishing a farmstay in Minnesota*, is a must-have for those considering starting a farmstay in Minnesota. It guides readers through a series of questions that range from “Is operating a farmstay for me?” to “How do I manage reservations?” Chapters include Elements of a Farmstay, Marketing, Setting up a Farmstay Business, Regulations, and

Putting it all together in a Business Plan. The publication also includes a Farmstay Start-up Checklist and several pages of resources.

The Farmstay Manual is a collaboration of the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, Renewing the Countryside, and STEP (Stimulating Economic Progress). The entire publication is available on line at www.misa.umn.edu. Farmers considering establishing a farmstay at their farms can request a print copy by contacting MISA: misamail@umn.edu or by calling 612-625-8235, or 800-909-MISA (6472).

Survey of meat producers

MISA and partners will soon be launching a survey for meat producers who have their meat processed for sales. The purpose of the survey is to understand the challenges and opportunities producers face related to processing livestock and poultry for meat sales. By collecting and analyzing this information, we hope to gain insight into

what is working and learn how things might be improved. If you have your livestock or poultry processed for meat sales, please fill out this survey when you receive it. If you want to be sure to receive a copy of the survey - please send your email address to Jan Joannides at joann001@umn.edu.

Farm to school

A recent survey of farmers by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) finds that 95% of farmers surveyed are either very interested (60%) or somewhat interested (35%) in selling their products to school food services. Among farmers who had sold food to schools, 87% called their experience either “very” (50%) or “somewhat” (37%) successful. All of the farmers who sold to schools reported that they received a fair price for their product.

The survey, completed by 67 small- and medium-scale producers and multi-farm collaboratives, showed strong interest in selling more locally grown foods to Minnesota K-12 schools and broad support for educating students about local food and

farming issues. The majority of farmers indicated that they would like to meet with school staff in the winter to discuss product needs for the next school year, and that they would like more information about which products schools want.

Farm to school programs in Minnesota have expanded greatly in recent years, with 123 school districts participating in 2010.

The complete results of the survey of farmers can be found online: <http://www.iatp.org/iatp/publications.cfm?accountID=258&refID=108021>

Results of a related survey of school food

services are also available: <http://www.agobservatory.org/library.cfm?refID=107972>

Minnesota farmers who sell or want to sell to schools are reminded that the “Finding Farmers” section in the MN Farm-to-School Toolkit is being phased out. The Minnesota Grown Wholesale Database is now taking care of farmers’ listings that can be searched by school food service directors and other buyers. Complete information about listing your farm in this database can be found on the Minnesota Grown website:

<http://www.mda.state.mn.us/food/minnesotagrown/procorner.aspx>

NCR-SARE Farmer and Rancher Grants

The Call for Proposals for these grants will not open until August, and the deadline for submitting proposals is not until December, but it's a good time right now to start thinking about ideas for a grant proposal and assembling a team of partners if you intend to apply. Applications that include several collaborators or advisors are generally stronger and are rated more highly in the review process than applications that feature just one farmer working alone on a project.

If you want to explore sustainable solutions to a problem through on-farm research, demonstration, or an education project, consider applying for a Farmer & Rancher Grant through North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE). Visit the Farmer & Rancher Grant web pages to find more information about the grant, samples of past application materials, even instructional videos on how to apply!

<http://www.northcentralsare.org/Grants/Types-of-Grants/Farmer-Rancher-Grant-Program>

2010 Recipients of NCR-SARE Farmer-Rancher Grants in Minnesota:

Nancy Lunzer has a 72.5 acre farm near Ogilvie, MN. Her farm includes a wooded area that is infested with buckthorn. Her grant-funded project will demonstrate buckthorn eradication using hogs. A small pilot project was successful, and she is now expanding this to ten acres. Hogs are fenced in to an area to intensively graze and tear out buckthorn; then the hogs are removed and the "hogged off" area is planted to grasses.

Diane Wilson of Dream of Wild Health/Peta Wakan Tipi received a grant to support their work on preserving and increasing seed stock of rare indigenous seeds. Their program includes an organic market garden and outreach to the St. Paul Native American community about nutritious diets. Native youth are hired to run the Mobile Market that makes fresh vegetables available to the community.

John Topic is experimenting with biochar

as a soil amendment. He is producing biochar from wood in small batches, and will be testing it in combination with compost and animal manure for land application. He also plans to test it in combination with legumes to restore pasture land. He plans outreach to private woodland owners about the potential for biochar production as an income stream.

Philip Batalden has an organic crop farm near Lamberton, MN. He is exploring the potential for income diversification by producing camelina, an oilseed crop. He is working with AURI and Organic Valley to press the camelina seed to produce an edible oil. The Farmer & Rancher grant funds will support research to determine the potential market for edible camelina oil.

2009 Recipients of NCR-SARE Farmer and Rancher Grants in Minnesota:

Eric Gundacker is working with cooperating farmers in southwest Wisconsin to grow blackberries commercially in high tunnels. Commercial grade blackberries require winter protection in USDA climate zone 4 and colder, and previous trials have shown that common winter protection practices used in zone 5 and warmer do not work farther north. Their goals are to develop a production protocol for commercial blackberry production in cold climates, and to test organic methods and Integrated Pest Management methods of production.

Cindy Hale raises pastured poultry and hogs near Duluth, MN. She will be testing combinations of hog grazing, poultry grazing with two different breeds of broiler chickens, and seeding with clover to accomplish pasture renovation without tilling and reseeded. Along with the pasture renovation project she will also be documenting the profitability of the two breeds of broiler chickens raised on pasture.

Katie Cramer will be testing the effectiveness of a winter-killed sorghum-sudangrass (Sudex) mulch for tomato production. Sudex mulch has had negative effects on crops when used as freshly killed mulch during the growing season, but has

not been tested as a winter-killed mulch. Weed control, blight incidence and tomato production will be monitored in plots with Sudex mulch and with hay mulch.

Elizabeth and Thomas Kackman of Lakeville, MN will work with a Kenyan women's group and the community gardens at the International Outreach Center to grow, harvest, and market Mwangani. Mwangani is a traditional Kenyan food staple used as a green vegetable. It has been difficult for immigrant Kenyan families to access this vegetable in Minnesota. The project will provide access to an important food for Kenyan families, as well as providing an income opportunity for the growers.

Mark Boen has a market vegetable farm near Detroit Lakes, MN. He will be working on integration of rotational grazing of sheep and chickens with cover cropping and vegetable production. His plan is to overseed cover crops into growing vegetable crops, then graze animals through those areas after the vegetable crop is harvested and the cover crop is established. He wants to find grazing and cover crop combinations that will simultaneously produce valuable pasture-raised meat and improve soil fertility.

Winona LaDuke/White Earth Land Recovery Project will use goat production to address several problems in an integrated way. Mob grazing of goats will be used to improve degraded pastures and clear weeds and underbrush. Goat milk will be provided to the local Native community to improve their diet. Many Native people are lactose intolerant, and it is hoped that goat milk-based dairy products will help them consume more dairy protein. Halal goat meat will be offered to Somali immigrants who have settled in the area, helping to build connections between communities. The project will also explore using compostable food waste from the Pine Point Elementary School as part of the goat rations.

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Karen Weiss will be exploring the use of a greenhouse with LED lighting and straw bale culture for year-round food production in Minnesota. Her objective is to create three growing seasons for organic production of tomatoes, peppers, strawberries, herbs, and salad greens. Straw bales would initially serve as the base of raised beds, topped with a growing medium. When no longer useable in this way, the straw bales would be re-used first as

mulch and then as compost. Greenhouse temperature, disease and pest pressure, days to harvest and yields will be monitored.

Field Days at NCR-SARE Farmer & Rancher Project Sites

Cool, wet weather in spring of 2011 has hindered the development of some of the funded projects. Check the MISA calendar at www.misa.umn.edu for more information on field days as the season progresses.

Cindy Hale of Clover Valley Farms has a field day scheduled for Wednesday, July 27, noon to 3 pm. They will be offering tours of their NCR-SARE and Minnesota Department of Agriculture supported farm research project: "Comparing the pasture restoration potential and financial viability of Cornish Cross vs. Red Broilers, in combination with heritage pastured hogs, for a small pastured poultry operation in NE Minnesota". See the MISA calendar for details including location.

Grazing and pasture resources

Interest in grazing animals is increasing, for a variety of reasons. Health-conscious consumers are buying grass-fed meats. Pasture access is required for certified organic livestock production. Grasses and other forage crops fit into the multi-year crop rotations that are encouraged or required for conservation-oriented farming systems, including certified organic production. As grain prices rise – and rise – farmers are looking to increase the forage component of livestock rations.

Minnesota has a strong research, Extension, and farmer network of people making grass-based agriculture work. Neighboring states are working on this too, which means that lots of resources are available to farmers who want to learn more about grass and forages.

Grazing Resources:

Minnesota Grazing Lands Conservation Association <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/~media/Files/protecting/conservation/glcabrochure.ashx>

This association includes a network of experienced graziers who volunteer to serve as mentors for other farmers, in all regions of the state.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Grazing Specialists

<http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/ecs/grazing/contacts/specialist.html>

There are five grazing specialists in the NRCS in Minnesota, each responsible for a portion of the state. The NRCS administers programs that provide cost-share funding to farmers who implement grazing systems that conserve soil and water resources. Local service centers in every county assist producers in developing grazing plans and

applying for program funds.

Pasture for Organic Ruminant Livestock: Understanding and Implementing the National Organic Program (NOP) Pasture Rule.

<https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/pasturerule.pdf> (PDF, 1.3 Mb)

Rotational Grazing

<http://www.mda.state.mn.us/animals/grazing.aspx>

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Rotational Grazing web page offers links to fact sheets, guidebooks, and manuals for planning grazing systems and managing grazing in sensitive areas such as streambanks.

Farm Beginnings applications now being accepted

The Land Stewardship Project's Farm Beginnings program is now accepting applications for the 2011-2012 courses. The courses will be held in two locations: Hutchinson and Rochester, MN. Farm Beginnings is a training program focused on getting more farmers on the land, farming sustainably. The 10-month program is intended for people of all ages interested in starting a farm business as well as established farmers pursuing a new farming enterprise. Farm Beginnings participants learn goal setting, financial planning,

enterprise planning, marketing, sustainable farming methods and become connected to a supportive network of farmers and resource personnel.

Farm Beginnings classes run from late October 2011 to March 2012 (approximately two classes per month) and are led by farmers and other agriculture professionals. The in-class portion of the program is followed by an on-farm educational component that includes farm tours, field days and connection to the LSP Farmer Network. The course fee is \$1500

for two people on the same farm enterprise (partial scholarships and flexible payment plans available). Interest-free livestock loans are also available for Farm Beginnings graduates.

The application deadline is August 1, 2011 and space is limited!

For more information on LSP's Farm Beginnings course and to apply, please visit www.farmbeginnings.org or contact LSP's Karen Benson at 507-523-3366 or lpse@landstewardshipproject.org.

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Cooking up the Good Life

Cooking Up the Good Life: Creative Recipes for the Family Table is a new cookbook by Chef Jenny Breen and writer Susan Thurston, both from Minnesota. The focus of the cookbook is on seasonal

ingredients of the upper Midwest. An advocate for inviting children into the kitchen, Breen has found that they are more apt to eat what they are connected to, whether by growing the vegetables, feeding

the chickens and collecting the eggs, or helping prepare the food. The book is published by the University of Minnesota Press, and is available in bookstores; list price is \$19.95.

High tunnel workshops

Vegetable, fruit, and specialty crop growers have many opportunities to learn more about season extension techniques this summer. High tunnels workshops and training events are happening in

Minnesota, South Dakota, and Nebraska in June and July. Please check the MISA calendar for more details!
www.misa.umn.edu.

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