

Farmer-Rancher Grants

Farmers and ranchers in the North Central Region are invited to submit grant proposals to explore sustainable agriculture solutions to problems on the farm or ranch. Proposals should show how farmers and ranchers plan to use their own innovative ideas to explore sustainable agriculture options and how they will share project results. Projects should emphasize research or education/demonstration. New this year,

there are three types of competitive grants: individual grants (\$7,500 maximum), partner grants for two farmers/ranchers from separate operations who are working together (\$15,000 maximum), and group grants for three or more farmers/ranchers from separate operations who are working together (\$22,500 maximum).

Interested applicants can find the call for proposals online as well as useful information for completing a proposal at <http://www.northcentralsare.org/Grants/Types-of-Grants/Farmer-Rancher-Grant-Program>. Farmer-Rancher grant applications are due at the NCR-SARE office in Jefferson City, MO by 4:30 pm on Friday, December 2nd, 2011.

Youth and Youth Educator Grants

Youth Grants are for on-farm research, demonstration, or education projects by youth ages 8-18. Research and demonstration projects are for hands-on efforts to explore Sustainable Agriculture issues and practices. Education projects can involve teaching others about Sustainable Agriculture or attending a Sustainable Agriculture conference, workshop, or camp. \$400 maximum.

Interested applicants can find the call for proposals online as well as useful information for completing a proposal at <http://www.northcentralsare.org/Grants/Types-of-Grants/Youth-and-Youth-Educator-Grant-Program>. Youth and Youth Educator Grant Proposals are due at the NCR-SARE office in Jefferson City, MO by 4:30 pm, Thursday, January 12, 2012.

benjaminj@lincolnu.edu or 573-681-5545 or 800-529-1342.

In Minnesota, interested farmers, youth, or youth educators may also contact Betsy Wieland or Kate Seager if you have questions, need assistance with the application, or want to discuss a project idea. Betsy's contact information: phone 612-625-8217, email eliza003@umn.edu. Kate's contact information: phone 612-625-8235, email kseager@umn.edu.

Youth Educator Grants are for educators to provide programming on sustainable agriculture for youth. \$2,000 maximum.

The NCR-SARE contact person for all of these grants is Joan Benjamin, Associate Regional Coordinator and Farmer Rancher Grant Program Coordinator;

Conservation Stewardship Program Resource

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) has released an updated version of the Farmers' Guide to the Conservation Stewardship Program. The Guide is intended to help family farmers, ranchers, and foresters understand the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) enrollment process. It includes step-by-step enrollment guidance, definitions, information on conservation activities eligible for CSP payments, and helpful hints.

The Conservation Security Program targets priority resource issues. All CSP participants must already exceed stewardship standards for at least one

priority area, and agree to exceed standards for additional priority areas through the adoption of advanced conservation management practices. Priority areas include water quality, wildlife habitat, soil quality, and erosion; and in some areas of the country, water conservation and air quality.

In three years of operation the program has enrolled nearly 30,000 farmers and ranchers operating over 37.5 million acres of farm and ranch land that is now under five-year, renewable CSP conservation contracts. Individual farmer contracts are capped at \$40,000 per year, with the average-sized contract currently running

between \$15,000 and \$20,000 per year. CSP is a continuous sign-up program, meaning producers can apply to enroll at any time of the year. However, there is generally one cut-off date at which point NRCS will rank all proposals on hand and determine which will be awarded contracts for that year. Enrollment is competitive. About twice as many farmers apply as can be funded.

The Farmers' Guide to the Conservation Stewardship Program is available for download at <http://www.sustainableagriculture.net/> publications. Printed copies of the Guide can also be purchased. To inquire about ordering printed copies, email NSAC at intern@sustainableagriculture.net.

Farm to School—Resources and Reminders for Farmers

Farm to School programs are up and running in 123 school districts in Minnesota, according to surveys conducted by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP): <http://www.farm2schoolmn.org/?q=node/404>.

Farmers who are interested in supplying their products to schools can make connections with school food service buyers – and other kinds of buyers as well – by registering in the Minnesota Grown Wholesale Database. Wholesale Database registration is free for farmers who are already Minnesota Grown members. Farmers who are not currently Minnesota Grown members can register for the price of a Minnesota Grown license: \$20 per year. That license fee also buys access to other marketing services provided by Minnesota Grown, including free point-of-sale materials.

Wholesale Database registration is open to all sizes of farms. There are all sizes of buyers looking for locally grown food – from restaurants that want a few pounds of peppers per week, to schools that want a single food item for a one-time special event, to schools that want a long-term commitment for delivery of a variety of products. Find Minnesota Grown

Wholesale Database information at this link: <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/food/minnesotagrown/procorner.aspx>. Contact Casey DeRosier for assistance with registering: Casey.Derosier@state.mn.us, 651-201-6469.

Farmers who want to market their products to schools can find helpful resources at the University of Minnesota Extension's Farm to School – Farmers website: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/farm-to-school/farmers/>. You will find information about how to set up farm field trips, links to food safety and GAPs information, and links to other resources to help with marketing and promotions, planning, and working with food service personnel.

Farm practices that can affect food safety are a concern for many wholesale food buyers. Farmers who sell to schools, stores, distributors, or other food businesses may be asked if they have GAPs (Good Agricultural Practices) certification, or a farm plan for food safety. Training materials for farmers to learn about GAPs and to develop their own on-farm food safety plans are available from the University of Minnesota: <http://safety.cfans.umn.edu/>. Contact Michele Schermann for more information or

assistance with the materials: 612-624-7444, safety@umn.edu. Training sessions on GAPs are scheduled periodically. Check back at the website for upcoming training session information; or visit the MISA calendar at <http://www.misa.umn.edu>.

Farmers may also find it useful to read some of the materials that are being presented to school food service personnel and other potential buyers of local food. These documents frame the questions that farmers are likely to encounter from potential buyers. “On-farm food safety information for food service personnel” is a U of MN Extension fact sheet that lists potential areas of concern and what kinds of on-farm food safety practices buyers should be looking for. Find it here: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/farm-to-school/docs/farm-food-safety-questions.pdf>

A more detailed document on local food purchasing regulations, directed at school personnel, is “Legal Issues Impacting Farm to School and School Garden Programs in Minnesota,” produced by the Public Health Law Center at the William Mitchell College of Law. <http://publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/ship-f2s-school%20garden%20legal%20issues-2011.pdf>

Whole Farm Profitability Analysis of Organic and Conventional Cropping Systems

The Department of Applied Economics at the University of Minnesota has released a new study comparing organic and conventional crop systems: <http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/103790/2/Delbridge%20AAEA%202011%20v2.pdf>

A major aim of this study was to account for different farm sizes and machinery requirements on organic and conventional farms. The authors note that organic farms tend to be smaller than conventional farms – an average of 664 acres for organic vs. 1095 acres for conventional farms enrolled in the Farm Business Management program in Minnesota. The size difference affects management costs per acre. Organic farms use crop rotations that require more types of specialized farm equipment than similar-sized conventional farms require; which

may affect machinery ownership costs per acre.

The analysis found that the maximum acreage that could be effectively managed as an organic crop farm was roughly half that of a conventional farm, assuming similar complements of machinery. This relationship held true over three different size groupings of machinery, and was due to the greater number of field operations required for organic management, as well as stiffer yield penalties in an organic system if planting or weed control tasks were delayed. The machinery operating costs plus purchased input costs were lower for organic farms than for conventional farms at all three machinery size groupings. This was due to lower weed control costs in the organic system, despite an average of more machinery passes per year in the organic system. Ma-

chinery ownership costs were also lower per acre for organic farms than for conventional farms.

When full organic price premiums were used in the analysis, organic farms had higher net returns than conventional farms at all three size groupings of machinery – even though the conventional farms had roughly twice as many acres as the organic farms. The researchers conclude that organic cropping systems are a low-risk alternative that may be especially attractive when farm acreage is limited. They note, however, that initial purchase of equipment is a cost to a grower who wants to transition to organic production.

Third Annual Urban Agriculture Bus Tour a Success

University of Minnesota Extension and SARE partnered to offer the bus tour on August 30th. As the interest in growing more food in urban settings continues to increase dramatically, the annual tour gives people an understanding of how Minnesotans are growing food in the city. Roughly 75 people attended throughout the day. Attendees included farmers, University of Minnesota staff, organizations supporting urban agriculture, staff from several city governments, and interested community members. The focus of the tour this year was on policy issues and how they create or eliminate barriers for urban agriculture enterprises across the Twin Cities metro area. Each tour stop discussed these barriers as well as what is working well. Barriers ranged from lack of capital to deer control, to restrictive or non-existent ordinances. Keys to success included supportive communities, regulators, and fellow growers.

The day started with updates from St. Paul - Ramsey Food and Nutrition Council staff and members, and Minneapolis city staff and Homegrown Minneapolis leaders. The first tour stop was at Grow!TwinCities, a greenhouse in Maplewood where several small urban agriculture enterprises are working collaboratively to support each other. The second stop was at a site in St. Paul owned by Sparc, a non-profit community development organization, with multiple market gardens in operation. Lunch was at the University of Minnesota's Urban Research and Outreach Center in North Minneapolis, where The McKnight Foundation discussed its involvement in convening urban food advocates. The first afternoon stop was at Eco-City MN, a market garden run by a young entrepreneur in North Minneapolis. The second afternoon stop was at Chad Hebert's aquaponics operation in South Minneapolis, the first commercial

aquaponics business in Minneapolis. The last stop was to a potential redevelopment of the closed Lyndale Gardens greenhouse in Richfield.

Attendees appreciated seeing these enterprises and visiting with their creators in person, especially for the mushroom production and the aquaponics setup, which are rare in Minnesota. Another highlight was City staff gaining a clearer understanding of what urban agriculture enterprises need to be successful, as they work on ordinances appropriate for these enterprises. And, as always, the time to visit and network with other farmers and organizations was highly valued. Minnesota SARE and Extension would like to thank all the hosts and participants for making the day a great success.

2010 Organic Performance in Minnesota

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture has released its annual report on financial performance of organic farms in Minnesota, available online: http://www.finbin.umn.edu/docs/2010_Organic_Farm_Performance_Min.pdf. The report is based on the participation of 54 completely organic farms and an additional 25 partially organic farms in the Farm Business Management program in 2010. "Minnesota has nearly 700 certified organic farms, and they are an important part of our farm economy," MDA Organic and Diversification Specialist Meg Moynihan said. "We're pleased to see net farm income for organic operations rebound after a tough year in 2009."

For the 54 completely organic farms participating in 2010, average net farm income was \$63,384 compared to \$18,821 in 2009. Average net farm income was higher than 2010 levels in both 2007 and 2008, but with fewer farms participating. Overall, conventional farms performed better than organic farms in 2010, due to an exceptionally good year for conventional grain farmers. Organic dairies had higher net returns per cow than conventional dairies in 2010: \$759 per cow for organic compared to \$189 for conventional. Organic dairies also operated with higher debt levels than conventional dairies.

Financial information obtained from more than 2,000 Minnesota farms enrolled in the Farm Business Management program is entered into the "FINBIN" database operated by the Center for Farm Financial Management at the University of Minnesota (<http://www.cffm.umn.edu>). The public has access to this database to view detailed reports on financial performance in most sectors of Minnesota's farm economy: <http://www.finbin.umn.edu>. The privacy and anonymity all participants' data is strictly protected.

Whole Farm Planning Publication Revised

Whole Farm Planning: Combining Family, Profit, and Environment was first released in 1998. It provided information about several farm planning tools that are no longer available or that have evolved into other programs. MISA director Helene Murray revised and updated the publication with a current list of resources, and it is now available online: <http://www.misa.umn.edu/Publications/WholeFarmPlanning/index.htm>

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2012 Winter Conferences Are Coming! Save These Dates!

Check the MISA calendar at <http://www.misa.umn.edu> closer to these dates for detailed event information.

January 12: Workshops before the Minnesota Organic Conference, St. Cloud, MN

January 13-14: Minnesota Organic Conference, St. Cloud, MN

January 18: Workshops before the Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conference, St. Cloud, MN

January 19-20: Upper Midwest Regional Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conference and Trade Show, St. Cloud, MN

January 27-28: Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society (NPSAS) Winter Conference, Aberdeen, SD

February 18: Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota Conference, St. Joseph, MN

February 23-25: MOSES Organic Farming Conference, LaCrosse, WI

This newsletter is supported by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA)—a partnership between the Sustainer's Coalition and the University of Minnesota College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS) the University of Minnesota Extension; the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCRSARE) Professional Development Program (PDP). Send story ideas to MISA, 411 Borlaug Hall, 1991 Upper Buford Circle, St. Paul, MN 55108, (612) 625-8235, fax (612) 625-1268, e-mail: misamail@umn.edu. Editorial board members: Helene Murray, (612) 625-0220, murra021@umn.edu; Beth Nelson, (612) 625-8217, schre002@umn.edu; Bill Wilcke, (612) 625-8205, wilck001@umn.edu; Jane Jewett, jewet006@umn.edu and Kate Seager, (612) 625-8235, kseager@umn.edu. Please send address changes directly to: Kate Seager, kseager@umn.edu, MISA, 411 Borlaug Hall, 1991 Buford Circle, St. Paul, MN 55108. You can find more University of Minnesota Extension Service educational information at www.extension.umn.edu. 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.