

Farm to Cafeteria Workshops a Success

Did you know that one in every three children (31.7 percent) ages 2 to 19 is overweight or obese? That the current generation is on track to have a shorter lifespan than their parents? How about that k-12 food service directors have about \$1.00 to spend on food per student lunch! * That the food waste produced in the United States each day would fill the Rose Bowl stadium to the top?

Those stunning statistics were part of the information delivered by Stephanie Heim, U of M Extension Farm to School Coordinator, in setting the stage for “Farm to Cafeteria” workshops held around Minnesota in March and April. While public interest in healthier food options has been steadily increasing, it really took off this spring—fueled in part by Michele

Obama’s “Let’s Move” campaign, aimed at eliminating childhood obesity in a generation (http://www.letsmove.gov/tfco_fullreport_may2010.pdf), and of all things—a reality t.v. show which follows chef Jamie Oliver’s attempts to transform the Huntington, W Va school food system.

It wasn’t all bad news. Stephanie concluded with examples of success stories in Minnesota of farmers and food service buyers who are working together to provide healthy lunches to school children, college students and health care facility workers and patients, while at the same time benefiting the local economy. The Minnesota workshops brought together more than 500 educators, food service personnel, farmers, and SHIP (Statewide Health Improvement Program)

coordinators to learn about ways to get local foods on the menu in schools, hospitals, and other institutional settings.

Minnesota Department of Agriculture inspectors also presented information about state regulations pertaining to farm to school purchases. Some food service buyers were surprised to learn that farmers are an “approved source.” Food services can purchase fresh, raw produce grown by the farmer, directly from the farmer, with no special licensing requirements. A farmer can also obtain licensing and approval of facilities to become an “approved source” for certain types of processed foods and meats.

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Loon Organics CSA is First in New Case Study Series

Laura Frerichs and Adam Cullip of Loon Organics are often asked to share the story of how they’ve gone from beginning farmers to operating a successful organic vegetable farm, marketing through both a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model and the Mill City Farmers’ Market. Sarah Stai of EcoSmith Consulting saw a way to capture their story and use it to provide a unique online resource for beginning farmers—a “technical case study”—one that combines the personal narrative with embedded links to online resources with detailed information. She worked with Laura, Adam and the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA), Renewing the Countryside and University of Minnesota Extension to develop the online case study. Beginning farmers now have an elegant tool to help them really grasp the challenges and rewards of starting up a CSA farm. Sarah

follows Laura and Adam through their first four years of farming: from their starting arrangement with Gardens of Eagan as their landlord and mentor, on to buying their own property and expanding their business into their full-time employment. Their story is interwoven with detailed information about how they met their challenges, and sprinkled throughout with embedded links to information and resources that will help new CSA farmers along every step of the way. From understanding soils to writing a business plan; from mapping out tomato plots to deciding what machinery to buy; it’s all here!

Interact with the Loon Organics case study online at <http://sustagprofiles.info>; or find a printable PDF version at the same website. If you are one of the first 25 people to review the online case study and

complete a survey, you will receive a free print copy of the MISA publication, *Building a Sustainable Business: A Guide to Developing a Business Plan for Farms and Rural Businesses*”

The Loon Organics case study is the first in a series of technical case studies developed by EcoSmith Consulting and published by MISA that will detail several different types of crop and livestock farms. For more information contact misamail@umn.edu, 612-625-8217.

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Panel discussions that featured local buyers, sellers, aggregators and MDA and Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) inspectors provided valuable information and examples of how food service directors approached the challenges and reaped the benefits of sourcing local products at each of the workshop locations. In Cloquet, attendees heard how two schools are taking different approaches to bringing local foods into their school cafeterias: one through a distributor, and one through direct connections with a farmer. Farmers heard that food service directors and distributors are interested in purchasing locally. Food service directors and distributors heard that farmers are interested in selling to them.

Following the panel discussions, Brett Olson, Renewing the Countryside, introduced “speed dating”—an exercise which involved having food service directors rotate from table to table during dinner to meet and exchange contact information with farmers interested in providing product. Following dinner, school food service personnel met with Lynn Mader, IATP and SHIP coordinators to learn about available tools to help them plan menus with locally grown products. Farmers met with Beth Nelson from MISA and Michele Schermann from U of M Agricultural Health and Safety to talk about marketing to institutions and developing on-farm food safety plans demonstrating good agricultural practices.

The take-home message from the workshops is that there are many possibilities around local food in Minnesota! Fred Kirshenmann recently contrasted being “optimistic” with being “hopeful.” He said that both optimism and pessimism are really fatalistic—they

represent a view that things will or won’t work out, regardless of our actions. Being hopeful implies that things can work out—but the outcome could depend on our efforts. We are hopeful that we Minnesotans can improve our health and support local economies and that these workshops built a “critical mass” of people with knowledge and motivation who can now build or expand creative farm-to-cafeteria programs in their communities.

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The workshops were planned by local teams, supported by grants awarded to MISA, the Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships (RSDP), IATP, and Renewing the Countryside, funded by the Risk Management Agency, NCR-SARE, SHIP and Minnesota Grown.

Schools or other food services that would like to start a farm-to-cafeteria program but aren’t sure how to begin are encouraged to visit the Minnesota Farm-to-School toolkit: www.mn-farmentoschool.umn.edu. The toolkit contains a wealth of information about how to begin a program; as well as specific information, recipes, ready-to-use newsletter articles and posters for 20 food items grown in Minnesota. Resource people are also available to answer questions and help food service directors

launch local food programs. Each workshop provided a resource list specific for that location. For more information, contact Stephanie Heim, heim0106@umn.edu, 507-319-0263 or Lynn Mader, lmader@iatp.org, 612-708-8635.

*From May 13, 2010 USDA Press Release. Congress is currently considering legislation to bolster the Child Nutrition Act, which authorizes the National School Lunch, School Breakfast, and Summer Food Service Programs. These programs serve nearly 32 million children each school day and work in concert to form a national safety net against hunger. Improving the Child Nutrition Act is the legislative centerpiece of First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! Campaign and highlighted in the White House report, *Solving the Problem of Childhood Obesity Within a Generation*, released Tuesday, May 11. By passing strong reauthorization legislation, with the full \$1 billion annual increase requested in President Obama's budget, the Administration hopes to reduce hunger, promote access, and improve the overall health and nutrition of children throughout the country. To learn more about the First Lady's Let's Move! campaign, visit www.LetsMove.gov.

The Obama Administration has proposed a historic investment of an additional \$10 billion over ten years, which would enable training for school food service workers, upgraded kitchen equipment, and additional funding for meal reimbursements for schools that are enhancing nutrition and quality. Additionally, this investment will allow additional fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat and fat free dairy products to be served in our school cafeterias and an additional one million students to be served the healthy diets in school.

Healthy Debate

Healthy Debate is a new listserv established by MISA to provide a forum for people to discuss their ideas and opinions regarding sustainable agriculture and its intersection with politics, society, and advocacy. The “Sustag” listserv remains an information-

only forum where event notices, job opportunities, field days, and the like can be posted. If discussion and debate is what interests you, please join Healthy Debate. Instructions for subscribers are here: www.misa.umn.edu/HealthyDebate.html.

Agricultural Plastic Recycling in Minnesota

Agricultural plastic films have some great benefits. Forages can be harvested at their peak of nutrition and packed into “ag bags” to create high-quality ensiled fodder for animals. High tunnels constructed from framing materials covered with plastic films are extending the growing season for fruits, vegetables and flowers around Minnesota, and providing farmers with extra income from the sale of those crops. Plastic mulches also help farmers with season extension and provide some weed control as well. What happens to those plastic films, though, when their useful life is over? Farmers have long identified agricultural plastic disposal as a difficult issue. Burning the films releases pollutants into the air. Simply piling them up on the farm creates an unsightly trash pile, and stagnant water pooling on the discarded films can provide a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Some farmers bundle up the films and haul them to a landfill, but pay high fees for the disposal, and the plastics don’t break down in the landfill.

Agricultural plastics recycling projects have been underway in other parts of the world for years. A Pennsylvania website lists eight in-state recyclers that accept agricultural

plastic: www.proprecycles.org. New Jersey’s Department of Agriculture directly administers a plastic recycling program, and recycling is mandatory for that state’s farmers: www.state.nj.us/agriculture/divisions/md/prog/recycling.html

Plastics recycling is a comprehensive

Interested in agricultural plastic recycling in Minnesota?

Contact:

Genesis Poly Recycling

www.genesispoly.com/ag/index.html

507-344-2180

program in Great Britain, www.agwasteplastics.org.uk/?lang=_e, and is mandatory there as well, as a way to conserve limited landfill space in that island nation. Brazil has achieved 94 percent recycling for its plastic agrochemical containers: www.agribusinessweek.com/brazilian-system-for-recycling-of-empty-agrochemical-

packages-becomes-global-benchmark/.

Minnesota is now getting on board with this agricultural plastic recycling trend. Farmers in Minnesota have an environmentally sound, lower-cost alternative for the disposal of waste plastic. Genesis Poly Recycling, <http://www.genesispoly.com/ag/index.html>, is a facility in Mankato, MN that accepts deliveries of waste agricultural and horticultural plastic. Currently the facility is accepting only rigid plastics, but expects to begin accepting plastic films this July. Individuals can call the main office at 507-344-2180 to schedule a drop-off. Pick-up can also be arranged, for a fee. Plastic containers must be triple-rinsed, free of dirt, and all metals must be removed. Plastic films must be baled prior to delivery to the plant. A network of 9 drop-off sites in Wisconsin and 5 to 6 in Minnesota is under development. Check the Genesis Poly website often over the next couple of months for updates. (Source: Wess Damro, Genesis Poly Recycling.)

Updates from Minnesota Board of Animal Health

Rabbit owners need to be aware that calicivirus has been identified in rabbits at one location in Pine County, MN. Calicivirus causes Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease, also known as Rabbit Viral Hemorrhagic Disease. It is contagious and often fatal, and can move so quickly that the rabbit may exhibit no signs of illness before it dies. The location where the virus was identified was thoroughly cleaned with help from the Minnesota Board of Animal Health staff, but rabbit owners in Minnesota should still take precautions. Isolate any new animals that you bring in and watch for signs of disease. If you have

sudden and unexplained rabbit deaths, especially a series of them, notify your veterinarian immediately. Pay extra attention to sanitation. This is a disease that is easily spread, but it can be contained if precautions are taken.

The USDA is in the process of changing the way it handles tuberculosis in cattle. According to a recent press release from the Minnesota Board of Animal Health, the USDA will no longer automatically downgrade a state’s TB status if two or more infected cattle herds are found in the

state. Under the new rules, the USDA would take into account the risk of further disease transmission as well as the state’s efforts to test for and eradicate the disease, and may decide not to downgrade the state’s status. This affects Minnesota cattle producers because some states have now reduced their testing requirements for cattle being shipped from Minnesota. For more details, see the press release: <http://www.bah.state.mn.us/tb/releases/tbnr2010-04-15.html>.

Urban Agriculture

New resource on urban soils and soil testing.

Interest in urban agriculture continues to grow! Betsy Wieland, Hennepin County U of M Extension was fielding so many calls for information about urban soil testing that she worked with Hennepin County Environmental Services, MISA and Gardening Matters to develop a resource: “Urban Gardens and Soil Contaminants: A Gardener’s Guide to Healthy Soil.” http://misadocuments.info/Urban_Soil_Contaminants.pdf

NCR-SARE has also funded some projects on cleaning up soil contamination. The database of funded projects can be found by searching “project reports” on the SARE website: www.sare.org.

News from Cornercopia—U of M student organic farm

Cornercopia student organic farm has taken advantage of this early spring and already has 10 different succession crops in the ground. Interns will be spending the summer growing, researching, conducting sales, organizing volunteer opportunities, and outreach experiences including a second year partnering with Gordon Parks High School for a summer school class. Cornercopia also supplied Backyard Harvest with greens, *Brassicas*, herbs and edible flowers in 2009 & 2010, and supplied Ecological Gardens with a number

of greens, herbs and edible flowers for Minnesota's first rooftop farm in Richfield, MN. Contact Courtney Tchida for more information: tchi0003@umn.edu

U-Pick urban farm

Xe-Susane Moua, City Backyard Farming, who last year marketed produce from her half-acre urban CSA is debuting a new urban marketing technique—St. Paul’s first urban “U-Pick Farm.” Visitors will be invited to harvest their own organic vegetables and pay based on bag size.. For more information: www.citybackyardfarming.com

Richfield Rooftop Farm

Another first! The Cornerstone Group, a local real estate development company is boasting the first Minnesota roof-top farm in Richfield. They partnered with Ecological gardens to design raised bed structures that will grow tomatoes, peppers, carrots, radishes and chives this first season. The produce from the Cornerstone Rooftop Farm will be used at Lucia's Wine Bar and Lucia's to Go. Read more at: <http://simplegoodandtasty.com/2010/05/08/finding-space-in-an-unlikely-place-minnesotas-first-rooftop-farm>

Growing Power training in Minnesota

Will Allen, urban farmer and founder of Growing Power in Milwaukee was recently named one of Time Magazine’s 100 most influential people in the world. And now you don’t have to travel to Milwaukee to attend a Growing Power training! The Women’s Environmental Institute will be hosting a weekend training July 24-25 on its farm in North Branch Minnesota. Will Allen will also be at Little Earth in Minneapolis on Friday, July 23 for a community workday, followed by a lecture on “The Food Revolution” at Coffman Union on the U of MN campus. For more information go to www.w-e-i.org.

CSP Sign Up just Announced

June 11th is the deadline for applications to the 2010 round of the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) provided this resource list to help producers sign up for CSP.

- ATTRA recently posted an updated step-by-step guide to the CSP application process to their which includes links to the self-screening checklist and other relevant forms and background information. Producers are

also invited to call the ATTRA toll free hotline number at 1-800-346-9140 (English) and 1-800-411-3222 (Spanish) for additional help or further information. Go to <http://www.attra.ncat.org/csp/>

- The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF), has a set of frequently asked questions about CSP, specific to organic producers. Go to http://ofrrf.org/policy/federal_legislation/farm_bill_implementation/csp_faq.html

- The Center for Rural Affairs’ Farm Bill Helpline can offer direct assistance to farmers and ranchers. Call 402-687-2100 and ask for the Farm Bill Helpline.

New Publications and Resources:

New Website links Midwest farmers with land: The Land Connection has launched a new website to connect retiring farmers in the Midwest with young or aspiring farmers who are looking for land to farm using sustainable techniques, www.midwestfarmconnection.org.

From SARE Outreach:

[What is Sustainable Agriculture?](#) is a 12-page sampler of best practices in sustainable production. Along with descriptions of techniques, this full-color publication includes eight profiles from around the country of producers, researchers and educators who have implemented them to reap success. Download for free at www.sare.org/publications/whatis.htm, or order print copies: www.sare.org/WebStore, or call 301/374-9696.

[Local Harvest: A Multifarm CSA Handbook](#) This 130-page manual gives concrete details on strategies for forming and maintaining a multifarm CSA, including advice on staffing, volunteer boards, distribution, and legal topics. Available for download as a free PDF <http://sare.org/publications/csa/csa.pdf> or order a print copy from the SARE website.

[Managing Alternative Pollinators: A Handbook for Beekeepers, Growers and Conservationists](#)

During the past 50 years, America has witnessed an almost 50 percent decline in the number of managed honey bee colonies. With two-thirds of the world's crops requiring pollination, beekeepers and growers are seeking pollination alternatives and ways to bring honey bees back from the brink. This handbook is a first-of-its-kind,

step-by-step, full-color guide for rearing and managing bumble bees, mason bees, leafcutter bees and other bee species that provide pollination alternatives to the rapidly declining honey bee. Written by Eric Mader of the Xerces Society Pollinator Conservation Program; Professor of Entomology Marla Spivak; and Elaine Evans, author of *Befriending Bumble Bees*, the book includes expert information on the business and biology of pollination, and guidance on raising the alternative bee species. Download SARE's *Managing Alternative Pollinators* for free at www.sare.org/publications/pollinators.htm. To order print copies (\$23.50 plus \$5.95 s/h) visit www.sare.org/WebStore.

[The Small Dairy Resource Book](#)

SARE Outreach announces the release of its newly updated *Small Dairy Resource Book*, a thorough collection of resources for farm families interested in capitalizing on value-added dairy products. The publication is available online only. Download it for free at www.sare.org/publications/dairyresource.htm.

[New Program Helps Farmers with Media Relations](#)

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition has launched FARM (Farm & Agriculture Resources for Media) <http://sustainableagriculture.net/take-action/farm-and-agriculture-resources-for-media-farm/>. This project champions the voice of sustainable agriculture by providing media training and tools for farmers. FARM includes a new three-part NSAC toolkit that helps farmers share their personal and authentic story and strengthen their media connections. The toolkit includes: *Media & Public Relations Tool Kit for Farmers*;

Media Training for Farmers Webinar; and listing on the NSAC FARM Database.

From the Leopold Center

[Researchers Study Impact of Increased Fruit and Vegetable Production](#) Expanding the fruit and vegetable industry in the upper Midwest could have a huge economic impact in the region. A new analysis from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University in collaboration with regional partners estimated potential state and regional economic values associated with increased production of fresh fruit and vegetables in a six-state area. The study included two scenarios and was conducted by Iowa State economics researcher David Swenson and included data from Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin. The results of the analysis can be found in "Selected Measures of the Economic Values of Increased Fruit and Vegetable Production and Consumption in the Upper Midwest." (http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/research/marketing_files/midwest.html)

[New Series on Economics of Growing Alternative Crops](#) A new series of crop and livestock enterprise budgets available from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the Beginning Farmers Center at Iowa State University gives farmers a quick overview of what alternative operations might work for them and how. Enterprise budgets for sweet corn, sorghum, popcorn, sheep and beekeeping are provided available and cover the capital, labor and management requirements. The crop budgets sheets are now available for download on the Leopold Center web site at: www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs/enterprise.html.

Do you have a story you would like featured in the Sustainable Agriculture newsletter? Send your submission to misamail@umn.edu and we'll consider adding it to an upcoming newsletter.

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