

Conservation Stewardship Program sign-up open now!

The first sign-up for the Conservation Stewardship Program, the CSP, is open now. Farmers have until September 30 to file the preliminary application. Farmers who apply will then have more time to complete the conservation assessment and other paperwork for the program.

The 2008 Farm Bill authorized the Conservation Stewardship Program as a continuous sign-up program in all areas of all 50 states. The new CSP replaces the previous Conservation Security Program, which was limited to designated watersheds. You may recall that the old program had a three-tier system, in which farm or sections of farms went into higher tiers as they added more conservation practices. The new program has only one level; and a whole farm, all-in or all-out sign-up that includes rented as well as owned land.

The Conservation Stewardship Program focuses on working agricultural lands: cropland, pasture, range, privately-owned managed woodlands, and other types of privately-owned agricultural land. The intent of the program is not to take land out of agricultural production, but rather to ensure that production is done in a sustainable, resource-conserving manner. Farmers need not have a perfect whole-farm system right now in order to enroll. Applications will be scored to determine who is accepted for this first sign-up. Part of the scoring has to do with practices that you are already doing, but part of the scoring looks at practices that you are willing to adopt over the next few years in order to improve your conservation of resources.

The program is authorized to enroll 12.8 million acres of land per year over the next 10 years. Over the six years of its existence, the old CSP enrolled a total of about 20

million acres, so the new program has the potential to move well beyond that and really make an impact on how agriculture is practiced in this country. If you are a farmer who wants to grab this opportunity, here are resources that will provide you with more information, application materials, and assessment tools for your farm:

Using CSP on your Farm. Fact sheet from Land Stewardship Project that provides an overview of the program, www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/CSP10.pdf

Conservation Stewardship Program. Official website from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Provides program information, self-assessment checklists, and program application form. www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/new_csp/csp.html

Public comments on Conservation Security Program

The first Conservation Stewardship Program sign-up is underway, but the final rules for its implementation are still being developed. Public comments on the rules are still being accepted until September 28, 2009. If you would like to help shape the CSP final rule by submitting your comments, here are resources to help you do that:

Copy of the official Federal Register notice of the rules for CSP implementation, including instructions on how and where to submit your comments.:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2008/pdfs/E9-17812.pdf

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition web page detailing issues of concern for advocates of sustainable agriculture: sustainableagriculture.net/take-action/

Continuing education program available from SARE

The national Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program offers a continuing education program designed primarily for Cooperative Extension and Natural Resource Conservation Service personnel (particularly new staff members), and other

agricultural, natural resource and community development professionals. Eventually there will be five courses in the series. Courses 1 and 2 are now available free of charge through the eXtension online campus; visit the link above for information about how to register. Course 1 is Sustainable Agriculture: Basic Principles

and Concept Overview; Course 2 is Strategic Farm/Ranch Planning and Marketing.

For more info visit: www.sare.org/coreinfo/ceprogram.htm

New books on grasslands, winter greenhouse, youth

Grassland: Quietness and Strength for a New American Agriculture was written to increase our awareness of the vital role grass and grassland plants have in ensuring a sustainable future for American agriculture. This new book takes its inspiration from the classic USDA yearbook, *Grass: The 1948 Yearbook of Agriculture*, which was also written at a time of political, environmental, and economic turbulence. Published by the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America; edited by Dr. Walt F. Wedin and Dr. Steven L. Fales; forward by Wendell Berry.

Press release: www.leopold.iastate.edu/news/newsreleases/2009/051309_grass.html

Purchase: https://portal.sciencesocieties.org/Purchase/ProductDetail.aspx?Product_code=f0ac0629-5619-de11-958b-0013210e308e

The Northlands Winter Greenhouse Manual by Chuck Waibel and Carol Ford of Garden Goddess Enterprises in Milan, MN describes the design, construction and horticultural methods that Chuck and Carol use to produce fresh vegetables, using very little purchased energy, through the harshest Minnesota prairie winter.

Applying for grant funds

North Central SARE Farmer Rancher Grant <http://sare.org/ncrsare/prod.htm> The North Central Region Sustainable SARE has issued a call for proposals for farmers and ranchers to carry out sustainable agriculture research, demonstration, and education projects on their farms. A total of approximately \$400,000 is available for this program. Proposals are due December 3, 2009. For more information, contact Beth Nelson, Minnesota NCR-SARE, 612-625-8217, schre002@umn.edu

New and Improved Value Added Producer Grants NOFA Issued The USDA republished the 2009 Notice of Funds Available (NOFA) for Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG). www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/vadg.htm

The couple produces vegetables weekly for 18 families, from October to April, in a 16'x24' greenhouse. Foods grown include over 25 varieties of greens, such as arugula and minutina, pac choi, broccoli, chard and Chinese cabbage. "Lots of people told us we couldn't do it," said Waibel, "but it just took thinking outside the box and adapting ideas that have been around since the '70s. We want to share the bounty of our research and experience. People need to know that they can do much more for themselves than they think they can."

Contact: Chuck Waibel or Carol Ford, Garden Goddess Enterprises, 405 S. 4th St.

Milan, MN 56262; 320-734-4669; www.gardengoddessenterprises.com; newworld@fedteldirect.net

Youth Renewing the Countryside: Outstanding Youth, Uncommon Wisdom celebrates a diverse group of inspiring young people from across the country who are helping to build vibrant, healthy and sustainable rural communities. The book, developed by Renewing the Countryside, and co-published with Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) contains 50 stories, one from every state, written and photographed by young artists.

Common threads run through many of these stories: a sense of optimism, the rich

resources of 4-H and FFA clubs and educational programs that fostered a desire to remain rural, honoring traditional agricultural roots, embrace of technology and innovation, and collaboration with others in their communities.

Jan Joannides, co-founder of Renewing the Countryside and editor of this new book, sums up: "Whether you're the president of the United States or the mayor of a small town, despite the uncertain times in which we live, these stories assure us that we have great hope. These young people are not just renewing the countryside, they are changing the world."

Article: sustainablog.org/2009/06/11/renewing-the-countryside-five-reasons-why-the-next-generation-can-revitalize-rural-america/

Purchase: www.rtcmarket.org/content/youth-renewing-countryside

[BS%20Page/rbs%20map%202012-2008.pdf](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/map%202012-2008.pdf)

Applicants may submit a draft of their application to their USDA Rural Development State Office for a preliminary review anytime prior to September 30, 2009 to assess whether the proposed project meets eligibility criteria.

These grants will facilitate greater participation in emerging markets and new markets for value-added products. Proposals are due November 30, 2009. In Minnesota, contact the USDA Rural Development Business Specialist in your area for more information: www.rurdev.usda.gov/mn/RBS/New%20R

Organic farming news in Minnesota

Organic Cost-Share. Certified organic farmers in Minnesota can apply to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture for reimbursement of 75% of their costs for certification, up to a limit of \$750. Eligible costs include things like required testing and user fees that a farmer might have to pay as part of becoming certified by the National Organic Program (NOP). Certified organic farmers can apply for this reimbursement every year. Applications must be postmarked by October 15, 2009.

Find all the details plus application forms online: www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic/default.htm

Or contact Meg Moynihan, Agricultural Diversification Specialist at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture: 651-201-6616, meg.moynihan@state.mn.us

Directory of Minnesota Organic Farms. The 2009 edition of this list of organic farms

Lots about local food

Local Food Interest at the USDA. Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan issued a memorandum in mid-August, detailing her interest in local food and her intention to work to direct USDA program funding towards building local food system capacity in rural areas. She noted three programs in particular that could be used to fund local food system work: the Community Facilities Program, the Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program, and the Value Added Producer Grant program.

The memo is titled "Harnessing USDA Rural Development Programs to Build Local and Regional Food Systems." You can find the link to it on the MISA home page, or use this link: sustainableagriculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/local-food-memo.doc.pdf

ATTRA publications on finding farmland, farming in the city

These publications pack a lot of great information into a cartoon format that is available in either English or Spanish.

Finding Land to Farm: Six Ways to Secure Farmland

http://attra.ncat.org/calendar/new_pubs.php/2009/07/30/finding_land_to_farm_six_ways_to_secure

was released in early September.

Participation by farms is voluntary, and this year's directory lists 201 farms out of about 560 organic farms in the state. The directory is intended to be used to facilitate farmer-to-farmer sales, as well as farmer sales to brokers, processors, retailers, or other quantity buyers.

www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic/directory.htm

Organic Farm Performance in Minnesota. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture partners with the Farm Business Management program to compile and report data on production, financial performance, and profitability of organic farms in the state. In 2008, 74 farms participated in the Organic Farm Performance program. Of those farms, 48 were "completely organic" and the remainder had both certified organic and

Lanesboro Local A new website in southeastern Minnesota connects local growers, producers and artisans with consumers and businesses who value the extra special care and creativity that go into producing local bounty. Check it out at: www.lanesborolocal.org

Local Dirt website for finding, buying, and selling local food. Local Dirt is funded by the National Science Foundation, and is the only site that does not charge a markup or fee for selling online. The goal of the site is to give small and mid-sized farmers the same online sales advantages as large distributors. Finding buyers and automating the sales, invoices, and inventory is made as easy and fast as possible. Farmers can develop a free profile page that tells about their farm; list products for sale online; take

Follow a farmer, Pedro, as he loses access to land he had leased on a verbal agreement. As he searches for land to farm for the upcoming growing season, he visits with other farmers to learn about rental, lease, and purchase options for farmland.

non-certified production. The newly released report for the year 2008 shows that on average, organic farms were profitable in 2008, but not as profitable as in 2007. Organic crop farms tended to be more profitable than organic dairy farms. Organic dairy profits were probably reduced by increased feed prices, but organic dairy profits did not decline as much as conventional dairy profits.

The report includes discussion from Farm Business Management instructors about how to interpret the financial information, and how to apply it to your own situation if you are thinking about starting or transitioning to organic farming.

Read the full report:

www.mda.state.mn.us/news/publications/food/organicgrowing/2008orgfarmperf.pdf

online orders and payments, and have invoices automatically generated. The "selling" side of the site can be used by farms, local food producers, farmers' markets, farm cooperatives, and local food distributors. The "buying" side can be used by anyone: individuals, restaurants, grocers, schools, hospitals, and other businesses.

Find out more: www.localdirt.com

Livin' La Vida Local. The Minnesota Grown program is sponsoring an intern, Casey DeRosier, to travel the state and blog about local food and the farmers who grow it. Visit www.minnesotagrown.com and click on "Livin' La Vida Local" on the left side of the web page to check out the blog and to send suggestions for future visits.

Start a Farm in the City

http://attra.ncat.org/calendar/new_pubs.php/2009/07/30/start_a_farm_in_the_city

Follow an urban teenager, Desea, as she transforms a vacant lot near her home into a lush garden with help from her family and neighbors - and receives a surprise visit from a very senior government official!

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