

Profits in unlikely places

“Discovering profits in unlikely places—”the title of that overview about agroforestry practices is even more appropriate today than it was in 2000, when the publication was written. Incorporating shrubs or trees into your farm landscape does double duty by yielding both a cash crop and environmental benefits. Those benefits may include providing a windbreak, reducing soil erosion from wind and water, and providing shade for livestock. Some trees and shrubs are remarkably drought tolerant, yielding under poor conditions. Others, like willows, are able to survive short periods of being covered with water and so can be planted on frequently flooded areas. Learning circles operating in western Minnesota have been sharing information about establishing different willow species and exploring markets for woody florals (see MDA’s Greenbook, 2007). Hardwood plantings are an

investment in the future. In southern Minnesota, Tim Gieseke calls his black walnut plantings his IRA fund. He planted seedlings on a hillside and used contour “curbs” and gravel infiltration holes to increase infiltration into the soil and reduce runoff (Greenbook, 2005.)

There is now even greater interest in perennial trees and shrubs as biomass to be used as an energy source. The Center for Integrated Natural Resources and Agricultural Management (CINRAM) has been working with willows and other species to determine their biomass potential (Greenbook, 2007.) Together with other researchers at the University of Minnesota they recently received a North Central Sun Grant to carry out trials of willows, poplars and alders across Minnesota.

To learn more about agroforestry practices, you can attend an agroforestry workshop for

natural resource and agricultural professionals. This will provide a valuable overview for farmers and professionals who work with farmers. These workshops will be offered twice in upcoming months: in Willmar, on March 20, 2008 and in Lanesboro on June 5th, 2008. More information about the workshops and a complete schedule for the Willmar course is online at: www.cinram.umn.edu or contact Diomy Zamora, 218-828-2332.

The MDA Greenbooks can be found online at: <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/protecting/sustainable/greenbook.htm> or call 651-201-6673 for a print copy.

“Discovering Profits in Unlikely Places: Agroforestry Opportunities for Added Income” can be viewed or ordered (\$2.50) online at www.misa.umn.edu/Misa_Publications2.html or call 1-800-876-8636.

Crops in the City

On a 2.0 acre plot of land in north Milwaukee, the people of Growing Power (www.growingpower.org) are growing a community food system and providing food for more than 2000 people a year. In Kansas City, Missouri, Bev Pender has transformed abandoned city lots into Soul and Soil Gardens, and sells her fruits and vegetables at farmers’ markets and delivers to area seniors. Her gardens are just one of several stops on the urban farm tour sponsored each spring by the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture (www.kccua.org).

Local food entrepreneurs even have their eyes on tiny, backyard plots of land. In Portland, Oregon last summer, “Your Backyard Farmer CSA”

(www.yourbackyardfarmer.com) provided 25 households with “small sustainable organic farms at your backdoor and fresh, in-season produce from your farm to your fork.” The “Boreal Scapes CSA” in Duluth,

Minnesota is poised to follow suit this summer, offering Duluth and Superior dwellers the opportunity to have vegetable and fruit gardens in their own yards tended by professional urban farmers for the summer season.

Urban agriculture is attracting a lot of attention, fueled in part by concern about community food security, and the food deserts that exist in both cities and rural areas. In Minnesota we have places like the community garden at Celeste’s Dream; a garden that is not divided into individual plots, but planned, planted and tended communally. Participants share in the bounty and share the garden’s bounty with others, including their neighborhood food shelf. City schools are also beginning to add greenhouses to their building plans.

The idea of small spaces growing food for communities isn’t just for large metropolitan areas. On a -20 degree day in January, 50 people took turns basking in

the tropical 85 degree climate of Carol Ford and Chuck Waibel’s small passive solar greenhouse, built onto the back of their garage in Milan, Minnesota. Carol and Chuck grow greens that are part of a winter CSA that serves 15 families in the area—and they have a waiting list! In nearby Willmar, a high school student group energized by energy concerns is revamping an abandoned greenhouse. They hope to eventually be able to raise fresh produce for their school’s own cafeteria.

You can learn more about urban agriculture and community gardening at Garden Works Spring Resource Fair, in Minneapolis on Saturday, March 29th. For more information, see www.gardenworksmn.org or call 612-278-7123. Will Allen from Growing Power in Milwaukee will kick off the day, highlighting his work with growing community food systems.

New farm energy publication from SARE

As energy prices climb across the country, farmers are turning more and more to clean energy practices. From energy-saving light bulbs to solar panels to fuels grown and processed on the farm, farmers are making their operations more profitable, efficient

and cleaner. "Clean Energy Farming: Cutting Costs, Improving Efficiencies, Harnessing Renewables" features innovative SARE-funded research and examples of farmers who are improving energy efficiency while saving money, implementing farming

practices that both save energy and protect natural resources, and producing and using renewable fuels. Order or view online at www.sare.org/publications/energy.htm, or call 301-504-5411.

Planning to attend the 2008 SARE Conference on March 25-27 in Kansas City, Missouri?

Don't miss your opportunity to learn from pioneering farmers, ranchers, researchers and educators that are changing the face of American agriculture. The conference will feature three days of farm tours, posters,

and breakout sessions highlighting 20 years of cutting-edge SARE funded research and education. Join a nationwide community of farmers, ranchers, researchers, and educators that shares a passion for a quality,

enduring agriculture and help SARE plan for 20 more years of success. For more information and registration, go to www.sare.org/2008Conference

New eXtension Website Launched

An educational partnership of 74 land-grant universities in the United States has launched eXtension, an interactive learning website delivering research knowledge to the public (www.extension.org). The informational material on the site is organized around resource areas including Community, Family, Farm, and Pest

Management. The farm resources currently on the site relate to Beef Cattle, Dairy, Cotton, Horses, and Livestock and Poultry Environment. Additional resources are continually being added. eXtension is also offering online learning opportunities, such as a free online "webinar" on Value Added Products (<http://www.extension.org/>

events/536) on March 26. You need a fast Internet connection and a fairly recent version of a browser (Internet Explorer, Safari, or Mozilla) to participate in a webinar, but it's easy to do – just click on the link provided.

Insect biological control resource

A revised edition of "Biological Control of Insects and Mites" is now available. This publication covers basic biological information on insect pests, and supplies examples from common groups of insect predators, parasitic insects, nematodes, and insect pathogens. Learn how to enhance the effectiveness of natural enemies, what to know

when ordering natural enemies, how to handle shipments, and how to assess the costs and feasibility of using natural enemies. The book also includes information about other types of non-chemical control methods, and how to manage the conditions in which your crops grow to make them less favorable to pests. The book is

available to view online (25.5 Megabyte PDF-too large for a dial-up Internet connection) or to order (\$15.00 plus p&h) from <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Insects-Diseases-C31.aspx>, or call 877-947-7827.

Forbords honored for their conservation practices on Prairie Horizon Farm

The Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society (TWS), comprised of wildlife professionals and enthusiasts from agencies, universities, and the private sector statewide, presented their 2008 Conservation Award to Luverne and Mary Jo Forbord, Prairie Horizons Farm.

Luverne and Mary Jo were nominated for their unwavering desire to change the Minnesota landscape through sustainable farming. Luverne and Mary Jo own and operate the 480-acre Prairie Horizons Farm in south central Pope County, the farm Luverne grew up on. They raise crops and cattle on their land, which is mostly grassland. They gave up their dairy cow herd about five years ago and planted much

of their acreage to native grasses and alfalfa hay. They recently achieved organic status on their pasture and hay lands including a number of acres of native prairie. They cross-fenced the grasslands into small paddocks through which they rotate a cross breed of angus beef cattle, raising and finishing them entirely on grass. Prairie Horizons beef is processed less than 10 miles from the farm, so Forbords have calculated that they use only ½ a gallon of fossil fuel per animal produced, from calving to slaughter. The Forbords believe that prairies not only benefit wildlife but also can provide a viable and satisfying opportunity for rural communities to survive and thrive; their goal is not just sustainable farming or sustainable wildlife

populations but sustainable communities as well. Part of their vision includes education and outreach. They have brought thousands of people to their farm to learn about grazing and farming in a sustainable manner.

Mary Jo and Luverne Forbord are making an impact on the future of biomass energy and sustainable farming throughout Minnesota. It is a pleasure to rove their farm and hear bobolinks and meadowlarks singing in grasslands and native prairie on their farm. The Forbords are true prairie lovers and conservationist who are educating Minnesotans about the value of native grasslands for production agriculture, clean water, and wildlife benefits.

Funding Opportunities: A number of grant application deadlines are coming up quickly!

Farmers Market Promotion Program

The USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) grants are targeted to help improve and expand domestic farmers markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs and other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities. Approximately \$1 million is allocated for Fiscal Year 2008 for the FMPP, with the requirement that the maximum amount awarded for any one proposal cannot exceed \$75,000. Entities eligible to apply include agricultural cooperatives, local governments, nonprofit corporations, public health corporations, economic development corporations, regional farmers' market authorities and Tribal government. Proposals are due March 24, 2008. www.ams.usda.gov/fmpp/

Small Minority Producer Grant Program

The Small Minority Agriculture Producer grants are made to Cooperatives or Associations of Cooperatives whose governing board and/or membership is comprised of at least 75 percent minority. The primary focus of this grant is to provide technical assistance to small, minority agriculture producers. Eight awards of up to \$175,000 are expected to be made under this program. Proposals are due April 8,

Upcoming Events

March 18th, **University of Minnesota - Organic Winter School**. Lamberton, MN. The March Lamberton Winter School will run from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., with the same line up of speakers and topics as Litchfield. At 2:00 p.m., the focus will shift to presentations on formation of an on-farm water quality monitoring network, led by Ann Lewandowski, director of the U of M Water Resources Center. Pre-register before Friday, March 14 by contacting Molly Werner at 507-752-5062 or werne022@umn.edu.

March 25, 27, **Organic Dairy 101 for Dairy Support Professionals**. The last two Minnesota offerings of this popular workshop will be held Tuesday March 25 in Rochester and Thursday March 27 in McIntosh. Go to www.sfa-mn.org or call Anne Borgendale 320-226-6318 for more information.

2008. www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/smpg/smpg.htm.

Value-Added Producer Grant

USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service is seeking applications for the Value-Added Producer's Grant (VAPG) program. Approximately \$18.4 million is available through the program this year for grants to assist independent producers, agriculture producer groups, farmer and rancher-owned cooperatives, and majority controlled producer-based business ventures with the production, processing and marketing of value-added agricultural products. Value added products include those created through processing of raw products; through special production or marketing practices (such as grass-fed meats); or through physically separating a product from other, similar commodities (such as identity-preserved food-grade soybeans). Both working capital grants of up to \$300,000 and planning grants not exceeding \$100,000 are available through the program, with documentation of either cash or in-kind matching funds required. All potential applicants are strongly urged to contact their Rural Development State Office to discuss their projects and make inquiries concerning the application

March 30-31, **The Home Grown Economy 2008: Connecting Local Foods and Economic Opportunity**. Crookston, MN. Local food can provide opportunities for profit for farmers and other rural entrepreneurs and main street businesses who want to participate in processing and distribution functions that help meet the needs of larger retail and institutional customers. Congressman Collin C. Peterson of Minnesota's 7th Congressional District sponsored the first Home Grown Economy conference in 2007, and is again sponsoring this conference in 2008. For information or to register for the conference, contact: Toni Merdan - tmerdan@prtcl.com or 218-998-2055.

process. Proposals are due March 31, 2008. www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/vadg.htm

Commodity Partnerships Small Sessions Program

The Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC), operating through the Risk Management Agency (RMA), announces the availability of approximately \$500,000 (subject to availability of funds) for Commodity Partnerships for Small Agricultural Risk Management Education Sessions (Commodity Partnerships Small Sessions Program). The purpose of this cooperative partnership agreement program is to deliver training and information in the management of production, marketing, and financial risk to U.S. agricultural producers. The program is to give priority to educating producers of specialty crops, underserved commodities, and crops not insurable with federal crop insurance; including livestock and forage. A maximum of 50 cooperative partnership agreements will be funded, five each in ten designated RMA Regions. The maximum award for any agreement will be \$10,000. Proposals are due March 24, 2008. www.rma.usda.gov/aboutrma/agreements/

April 7th. **University of Minnesota - Organic Winter School**. St. Charles, MN. The April 7th St. Charles Winter School is being organized in collaboration with the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service. Jim Riddle and Craig Sheaffer, U of M, and Harriet Behar, MOSES Organic Outreach Coordinator, will team-teach the school. The event will focus on the production of organic feed crops, ways to minimize risks, and will feature a panel of experienced organic producers. For more information or to register for the St. Charles event, contact Harriet Behar at 608-872-2164 or harriet@mosesorganic.org.

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