

Innovation and entrepreneurship

Farmers in sustainable agriculture have long been at the forefront of innovative approaches to farming that are profitable while taking into account social and environmental costs. In this issue we look at agricultural entrepreneurship from several angles.

MDA's 2008 Sustainable Agriculture field days and demonstration grant awards

Farmer innovation has long been supported by grant programs for farmers like MDA's Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant Program and SARE's Farmer-Rancher grant program. MDA has announced their schedule of summer field days and 2008 grant awards. Read the Greenbook for information about progress on past projects, www.mda.state.mn.us/protecting/sustainable/greenbook.htm. The 2008 edition is coming soon! For more information about MDA's Sustainable Agriculture Grant Program, contact Jeanne Ciborowski, jeanne.ciborowski@state.mn.us, 651-201-6217.

MDA Summer Field Day schedule:

Because Minnesota weather is unpredictable, please contact the grantee to confirm the date and time of field day.

Joe Bowman, Belle Plaine, 952-873-3998, is researching and demonstrating strategies for managed rotational grazing by cattle, sheep, and poultry. July 17, 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm.

Carmen Fernholz, Madison, 320-598-3010, is looking at viable alternative phosphorus sources for farm operations where animal manures are not available or where commercial NPK fertilizers are not an option. August 20, 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

Andy Hart, 507-876-2256, is testing aerial seeding of winter rye into fields of standing row crops in SE Minnesota. August 1, 15 and 31—locations and times TBD.

Jim Luby, St. Paul, 612-624-3453, will share information about the culture and management of cold-hardy kiwifruit. August 30, 1:00 pm.

2008 MDA Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant awards announced

Michael Hamp, Wadena County, will experiment with the use of shade cloth and water misters over lettuce and herb beds to lower air temperatures in mid-summer that would result in an extended growing season.

Dallas Flynn, Otter Tail County, will use solar energy to heat the soil in an attempt to extend the growing season for high tunnel vegetable production.

Kelly Smith, Carlton County, will research growing hardy greens such as spinach and arugula in unheated hoop houses under row cover to extend the vegetable growing season.

Al Ringer, St. Louis County, will investigate conventional and non-conventional types of winter protection for blueberries during the winter months.

Sam Kedem, Dakota County, will examine ways to extend the market season for organic strawberries.

Koua Vang and Cingie Kong, Chisago County, will design a production system to increase cultivation of the Goji berry in Minnesota.

Jeff Duchene, Fillmore County, will conduct aerial seeding of winter rye into cropland to extend the grazing season.

Jerry Tourtillott, Roseau County, will demonstrate the use of warm-season grasses such as bluestem and switch grass as a source of livestock forage for both organic and conventional farms.

Ryon Walker, Itasca and Carlton Counties, will compare conventional seeding, no-till interseeding, or broadcasting of annual cool and warm-season grasses utilizing pastures used as winter feeding areas.

Joe Bowman and Michelle Gransee-Bowman, Scott County, are studying managed rotational grazing by cattle, sheep, and poultry.

"Agripreneurs" front and center at Farmfest

Diversified agricultural enterprises and local food marketing opportunities will also be attracting attention at Farmfest this year with the debut of the "Agripreneurship" specialty pavilion. Located just inside the main gate entrance, the pavilion will focus on a wide variety of ways that farmers can generate additional income on their farm. Exhibitors will provide information about alternative energy, conservation development, orchards, alternative animal farming, organic agriculture, sustainable agriculture, vineyards and more.

A series of educational discussions will provide overview information about business planning, wind and other on farm energy alternatives, organic production and marketing and other opportunities. Tom Rothman of the Minnesota Farm Network will moderate panel discussions with "agripreneurs" who will share insights about their successes and challenges! Farmfest will be held August 5-7 at the Gilfillan Estate in Redwood County, Minnesota. For more information about the Agripreneurship Pavillion, go to www.farmshows.com/ffst or contact Wayne Martin, 612-625-6224 marti067@umn.edu

Innovation and entrepreneurship (cont.)

Agriculture, microenterprise and rural economic development

Christy James of Renewing the Countryside, has promoted agritourism as a viable microenterprise and one that can substantially contribute to rural economic development. Christy has long felt that the microenterprise community and the sustainable agriculture community could benefit from working together. Now she is even more convinced, since she attended the National Summit on Entrepreneurship put on by the Association of Enterprise Opportunity (AEO, www.microenterpriseworks.org). The AEO

conference was preceded by a day-long special Rural Summit with the theme “place, livelihood, and community.” The Rural Summit provided attendees a chance to exchange ideas with others working in microenterprise development, Buy Local efforts, rural economic development, cultural and heritage initiatives and sustainable tourism or agriculture. Promoting Regional Flavor/Buy Local was also a major focus of the AEO conference. Regional Flavor Learning Clusters are one of three rural initiatives of AEO, and a northwestern Minnesota Learning Cluster is lead by the White Earth Land Recovery Project.

Michelle Long from Sustainable Connections in Portland, OR, spoke about their Think Local First campaign (www.thinklocalportland.org). Another organization of interest is Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE, www.livingeconomies.org). Christy was able to take advantage of a Minnesota SARE Professional Development Travel Grant to help her attend the Summit, and is eager to share information from the conference with others. For more information, contact Christy at christy@rtcinfo.org, 612-963-0467.

Bioenergy production and sustainability

Two upcoming August field days invite farmers, as well as conservation and agricultural educators, to discuss sustainable bioenergy. The Bioenergy Crops & Water Quality Agroecology Summit will take place at Tony Thompson’s Willow Lake Farm near Windom, on August 15 from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm. With its native grasses, wetlands, ponds, and waterways, Willow Lake Farm is well-situated to demonstrate the water quality benefits of bioenergy crops. Topics addressed will include water and nutrient holding capacity of perennial

bioenergy crops, cover cropping, and climate change and the future of bioenergy crops. Demonstration of an oilseed press and a look at the conservation drainage system on Willow Lake farm will top off the day.

The following Friday, August 22, A Whole-Systems Approach to Bioenergy tour will take place on the Forbords’ Prairie Horizons Farm near Benson, Minn., from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Speakers will examine native grass and other biomass cropping systems’ productivity, profitability

and environmental benefits from on-farm, on-the-landscape and in-the-market perspectives. The day will include a tour of the Productive Conservation on Working Lands native grass field study. Both bioenergy field days are part of Rural Advantage’s 3rd Crop series, Walk-n-Talks, and were planned in collaboration with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP, www.iatp.org) with support from a NCR-SARE professional development grant. For more information or directions, contact the Rural Advantage office at 507-238-5449.

“Living on the Land: An EXPO for Rural Property Owners”

“Living on the Land” will be packed with useful information for small farm owners and rural residents who want to practice good land and resource stewardship. It will be held at the Scott County Fairgrounds in Jordan, MN on Saturday, September 6th. The Living on the Land EXPO will include presentations and roundtable discussions related to living on small acreages, including caring for livestock, pasture and lawn care, and zoning regulations, as well as

“how-to sessions” on hot topics such as vegetable gardening and season extension, energy-efficient houses, beekeeping, and information about starting an agriculture-based business. A resource fair will feature vendors showcasing products, programs, and equipment designed for acreage owners. A special feature will be an “Aisle of Breeds” featuring livestock suited to small farms and acreages, as well as other entertaining demonstrations. The EXPO

will be open from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm with seminars starting at 9:30 am. Vendors will be available throughout the day. Concessions will be provided all day by the 4-H clubs. The EXPO is organized by the University of Minnesota Extension. For more information, go to www.extension.umn.edu/county/scott and click on Living on the Land EXPO in the “Hot Topics” box, or contact Tana Haugen-Brown, 763-241-2720, thbrown@umn.edu.

New online grape IPM guide available

The University of Minnesota, in cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, has developed an online Integrated Pest Management Guide for Commercial Grape Growers (<http://fruit.cfans.umn.edu/grape/IPM/gra>

[peipmguide.htm](http://fruit.cfans.umn.edu/grape/IPM/gra)). This guide was developed to help support the rapidly expanding growth of vineyards in the state. The guide includes insect and disease pest management information specific to our Minnesota climate.

A Farm to Table Tour : 6th annual Minnesota Cooks event at State Fair

Food Alliance Certified growers, extraordinary Minnesota chefs, and hungry fair-goers will all come together on Tuesday, August 26th at the 6th annual Minnesota Cooks program at the State Fair. Minnesota Cooks is a unique event that celebrates the fabulous foods produced right here in Minnesota. Discussions and demonstrations with area chefs, farmers, and celebrities help educate consumers about the importance of supporting locally grown food and sustainable agriculture. The program will begin at 8:30 am with a special, first-time breakfast show and will continue with a show at the top of each hour from 10:00 am until 5:00 pm on the Minnesota Cooks Stage in Carousel Park, just west of the Grandstand Ramp.

The Minnesota Cooks event features 16 of Minnesota's premier chefs who will present 45-minute demonstrations using ingredients supplied by sustainable Minnesota farms. During the last 10 minutes of each 45-minute demo, local celebrities as well as audience members will have the opportunity to sample the delicious dishes created. "The Great Minnesota Get-Together is the perfect venue for the Minnesota Cooks program because it brings farmers, consumers, and chefs together to showcase the great food we have to choose from right here in our state," said Doug Peterson, Minnesota Farmers Union President.

The beautiful and informative Minnesota Cooks 16-month calendar will be available for free at the event. Produced by Renewing the Countryside, the calendar is packed with stunning photography, enticing recipes, and the meaningful stories characteristic of chef/grower relationships.

Minnesota Cooks is sponsored in part by Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI) and is co-presented by Minnesota Farmers Union, Food Alliance Midwest, and Renewing the Countryside. For more information about Minnesota Cooks and to see the list of participating chefs, please visit www.minnesotacooks.org or contact Jill McLaughlin of Food Alliance Midwest, 651-209-3382, info@minnesotacooks.org.

Reducing input costs and other strategies for making it in a tight hog market

Hog farmers are struggling to break even as feed and energy inputs have skyrocketed. Prices for live hogs have increased, but have not kept pace with cost increases in feedstuff. Feed costs represent 65 to 75 percent of the variable costs of swine production. As corn and soybean prices continue to climb, farmers are looking for alternatives to the traditional corn/soy swine diet. However, cost isn't the only consideration in looking at alternative feedstuffs. Nutritional value, palatability, ease of handling and any potentially negative factors that might limit use must also be taken into account.

July workshops at two locations will present options for producing, feeding and marketing hogs:

- Wednesday July 16, Redwood Falls Community Center, 3:00 - 8:30 pm
- Monday July 28, St Charles Community Center, 3:00 - 8:30 pm

The workshops will begin with a resource fair featuring agencies and organizations that provide services and resources for sustainable hog farmers. Beginning at 4 pm, speakers from the University of Minnesota and Iowa State University will discuss the latest research. You will also hear from

Minnesota farmers who are using alternative feeds, engaging in niche or alternative marketing, and keeping fixed costs low by renovating older buildings.

There is no fee for the workshops but a light supper will be served at a cost of \$5 per person. These workshops are sponsored by the Land Stewardship Project and the USDA's Risk Management Agency and Farm Service Agency. Participants should reserve a spot by contacting Amy Bacigalupo at the Land Stewardship Project, 320-269-2105 or amyb@landstewardshipproject.org.

Grazing Workshops

The increase in feed prices and the recent grass-fed label standards established by the USDA (<http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2007/pdf/E7-20328.pdf>) are sparking greater interest in production methods for grass-fed meats and dairy products. Please see the MISA calendar for detailed information on these upcoming grazing events; or contact the

MISA office at 800-909-6472 for more information.

Beef Grazing Workshop, Kettle River, July 21

Wisconsin Grazing School, Fond du Lac, July 22

Grazefest Minnesota, August 1

Grazing Bus Tour, August 2

Wisconsin Grazing School in Richland Center, August 19-20

Sheep Grazing Workshop in Proctor, Aug. 21

Pope County Working Lands Initiative and Rotational Grazing tour in Benson, Aug. 22

Entrepreneurial sustainable agriculture DVD available

The Western Rural Development Center has released a DVD, "Alternatives for Processing, Packaging, Labeling, and Marketing into Retail/Internet Environments". The video includes six

training segments: The Producer Perspective, Marketing into Local Markets and Sustainable Marketing, New Venture Creation, eCommerce Technology and Overview, A Primer on Processing Foods to

Add Value, and Farm Bill and Funding Opportunities for New Agriculture Marketing and Enterprises. Educators can order the DVD from the WRDC at 435-797-9732, wrdc@usu.edu.

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