

University of Minnesota student farm completes USDA Organic Certification

Cornercopia students at the student organic farm on the St. Paul campus have used organic farming practices since they started growing fruits and vegetable in 2005. The students decided to take the farm through the organic certification process so that student interns would gain experience in the recordkeeping and production rigor needed to attain and maintain USDA Organic Certification. The farm has been in organic transition since November 2004, when the student acquired the land and planted it into a cover crop. This means that the farm has followed all the rules and regulations detailed in the National

Organic Program and has been inspected yearly by the Minnesota Crop Improvement Association. On August 19th 2008, the farm completed the process and received official certification, making Cornercopia the only acre of certified organic land on the St. Paul Campus! "Every year students become more involved in the certification process with recordkeeping and research what options we have to control pests, disease and weeds. Giving students this real world experience is what the farm is all about," says Courtney Tchida, Student Program Coordinator for MISA.

Key elements to becoming certified organic: 1) the farm used no synthetic fertilizers or pesticides during the 3-year transition period; 2) the farm used organic seed whenever possible; 3) the farm used appropriate rotation and fallow areas; 4) the farm kept detailed records of all inputs and seed sources used on the farm; 5) the farm follows a plan to promote plant and animal diversity on the farm and keep as much of the soil covered with plants or organic mulch as much as the time as possible. Now Cornercopia can proudly display the USDA Organic Logo!

Bovine TB Update

Minnesota's bovine tuberculosis (TB) status was downgraded in April of 2008 after four cattle herds in northwestern Minnesota were found to include cows with TB. Right now, the entire state has a "Modified Accredited" TB status, which means there are testing requirements for beef animals moving out of the state. Feeder cattle from Minnesota herds often go to feedlots out of state, so many Minnesota cattle producers are affected. There may be price discounts on feeder cattle that don't have documentation of a negative TB test, because the buyers will then bear the extra costs of testing.

State officials are working to get a "split-state" status, in which only the TB-affected area in northwestern Minnesota would have the Modified Accredited status, and the rest of the state would have a higher status with fewer restrictions. However, the USDA has not approved this split-state status as of mid-September, and it is not certain that the approval will be granted before this year's spring calves begin to go to market in mid-October. Also, surrounding states are not obligated to recognize the split-state status even if the USDA approves it. Wisconsin

has already announced that it will not recognize split-state status. Beef cattle producers throughout Minnesota need to plan and act as if the Modified Accredited status will be statewide for the duration of this TB outbreak. More information on TB in Minnesota is on the website of the state Board of Animal Health: <http://www.bah.state.mn.us/tb/index.html>

The testing requirements for different classes of beef animals:

Slaughter animals: Beef animals moving out of Minnesota directly to a state- or federally-inspected slaughter facility do not need to be tested.

Breeding livestock: Must come from a herd that has had a whole-herd test within the past 12 months showing that the herd is TB-free. In addition, the individual animals being shipped must have had a negative TB test within the 60 days prior to shipping.

Feeder livestock that are sexually intact: These animals must generally meet the same requirements as breeding livestock. This is less of an issue for male beef animals, which are typically castrated. Feeder heifers, however, must either meet

the same requirements as breeding livestock, or be spayed, or go to an approved feedlot.

Feeder livestock that are spayed or castrated: Each individual animal being shipped out of Minnesota must have had a negative TB test within 60 days prior to shipping.

Veterinarians around the state received training in heifer spaying techniques, so this option is available to cattle producers. With the increase in testing requirements and some producers choosing spaying, veterinarians are going to be very busy this fall. Cattle producers should decide soon on the best approach for their herd, and get on their vet's schedule for testing. The University of Minnesota Extension Beef Team has developed a decision tool to help producers determine their best option, called "Costs of TB Marketing Requirements:" <http://www.extension.umn.edu/Beef/>.

Money available for innovative sustainable agriculture projects

North Central Region SARE Farmer-Rancher Grant Program

Got a great idea you'd like to try out on your farm? Farmers and ranchers in the North Central Region can submit grant proposals to support innovative sustainable agriculture project ideas. Projects should emphasize research or education/demonstration. Grants can range from \$6,000 for individual farmers and up to \$18,000 for groups of three or more farmers.

Since the inception of the NCR-SARE F-R grant program in 1982, Minnesota farmers have received 86 farmer rancher grants totaling almost \$600,000. NCR-SARE expects to fund about 50 projects in the twelve-state North Central Region this year. Projects funded last year in Minnesota ranged from looking at novel winter protection methods for blueberries, to multiple species grazing strategies and using traditional herbs and plants to prevent chronic health problems in the Hmong community.

There are a couple new twists to the grant program this year—the Farmer Rancher Grant Program will accept project proposals by both mail and email, and beginning farmers and/or youth may apply. The proposal receipt deadline is Monday, December 1, 2008 at 4:30 p.m. For more information and to access the application, as well as helpful tips for applying, go to: www.sare.org/NCRSARE/prod.htm

To discuss ideas or if you have questions, contact Joan Benjamin, NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher Grant Program Coordinator, at jbenjamin2@unl.edu, 402-472-0809 or Beth Nelson, Minnesota NCR-SARE Coordinator, schre002@umn.edu, 612-625-8217.

MDA Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant Program

Minnesota farmers and non-profit, university, or state and federal agency personnel who work with farmers may also

apply to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) Sustainable Agriculture Grant Program. Priority is given to projects that are farmer initiated and all non-farmer initiated projects must show significant collaboration with farmers. MDA will award up to \$150,000 for the 2009 Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant Program. Competitive grants for up to \$25,000 are awarded to individuals or groups for on-farm sustainable agriculture research or demonstration projects in Minnesota. The purpose of the Grant Program is to fund practices that promote environmental stewardship and conservation of resources as well as improve profitability and quality of life on farms and in rural areas.

NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher Grants are due December 1, 2008

MDA Sustainable Agriculture Grants are due January 16, 2009

More information and a 2009 Application packet are online at: www.mda.state.mn.us/about/divisions/esap.htm Tips on preparing a solid, competitive application as well as common pitfalls to avoid are included in the newly revised 2009 packet. You are encouraged to contact MDA with questions or to discuss ideas. Proposals are due Friday, January 16, 2009. Note that faxes and/or Emails will NOT be accepted for this program, so plan to mail early or hand deliver to the office.

National SARE conference presentations online

For ideas about the types of innovative projects that are happening all around the country, you can now access online many of the presentations from SARE's national conference, held in Kansas City last March: www.sare.org/2008conference Note that many of the presentations are quite large. Contact the MISA office if you're having

trouble downloading a presentation and would like a smaller pdf file.

MDA's Sustainable Agriculture 2008 Greenbook now available

MDA's newly available 2008 Greenbook highlights reports from MDA and SARE grant projects. *Greenbook 2008: A Multitude of Ideas to Sustain Agriculture* highlights 22 projects in five major topic areas: alternative markets and specialty crops; energy; fruits and vegetables; cropping systems and soil fertility; and livestock. Among this year's projects are strategies for developing a Saskatoon berry market, intercropping with a high tunnel to achieve maximum production, feeding in-line alfalfa/grass bales to eliminate fall and winter "flat spots" in grassfed beef production, and aerial seeding of winter rye. Greenbook 2008 is available online at:

www.mda.state.mn.us/protecting/sustainable/greenbook.htm, or call 651-201-6673 for a free print copy.

Grant writing help

Look for information about a late October/early November grant writing workshop for farmers on the MISA website in October. In the meantime, you can look up SARE's "How to conduct research on your farm or ranch" bulletin, available to view or download online at: www.sare.org/publications/research.htm, or contact Beth Nelson for a print copy: schre002@umn.edu, 612-625-8217.

Grantwriting assistance for minority or women farmers, 2008

If you are a woman or minority farmer or rancher, you are invited to use a new grantwriting assistance project of the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute.

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MFAI will help you apply to grant programs of the US government that will help your farming business. These can be programs of any federal agency, not just the USDA. This is done by matching you with an experienced grant writing advisor in your state. The advisor helps you choose a grant program that fits your goals, outline a plan of work for you to follow to meet the

application deadline and all proposal or application requirements. The advisor helps identify local partners (agency staff, nonprofit organizations, or local volunteers with experience in grant writing and managing projects) to strengthen your project and to help complete the proposal. With local partners, the advisor can assist you in preparing the proposal, including editing drafts, to ensure timely submission with necessary forms, attachments, and

letters of support. For more information, contact the Midwestern Coordinator, Deirdre Birmingham, deirdreb@mindspring.com or call 608-967-2362. Information is also available on the grant writing assistance program's www.michaelfieldsagainst.org/programs/policy/producer_grantwriting_assistance.html.

This project is funded by the USDA Risk Management Agency's Outreach

MISA welcomes six new members to its Board of Directors

Six new members will be welcomed onto MISA's Board of Directors at the September meeting. Representing the diverse agricultural community, they bring a wealth of experience to MISA's mission to "bring together the agricultural community and the University community in a cooperative effort to develop and promote sustainable agriculture in Minnesota and beyond." This year there were openings for one practitioner, three University representatives, and two community representatives.

Jolene Januschka is a CPA working in St. Paul, Minn. Jolene grew up on a farm in central Minnesota that uses sustainable agriculture practices as a part of their diverse operation—they raise organic grass fed beef, organic pork, free range chickens, organic soy beans, corn, wheat and rye. She is a strong supporter of local foods and is excited to be a part of that work.

Kari Oquist has a Master's degree in Water Resources Science and is a Monitoring Program Manager for the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization in Lauderdale, Minn. Kari researched conventional farming practices on soil physical properties and water quality as a part of her Master's thesis at SWROC. As part of this work she also compared organic and conventional farming practices' impacts on the environment and was introduced to organic farmers. Kari feels it is "imperative for the University to develop partnerships with farmers—a partnership where faculty, farmers and farm organizations share their knowledge and experiences is essential to further sustainable agriculture efforts."

Marcia Ward raises sheep on her small acreage in Dakota, Minn., and uses her farm and sheep to teach kids about animal agriculture. She is active in 4-H, the Experiment for Rural Cooperation (Southeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership), and on numerous state and local government committees. Marcia stated that "We as a society have an obligation to keep our land productive and protected for future generations." Marcia is a Winona County Commissioner.

Todd Arnold lives in St. Paul, Minn., and is on the faculty at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Todd helped to spearhead the Sustainability Studies Minor at the University of Minnesota and teaches the course "Sustainable People, Sustainable Planet." "I like to impart on students that eating mindfully is perhaps the most important single change that they could make in their lives to help achieve sustainability." Todd has been especially involved in issues relating to wildlife (primarily waterfowl) production in prairie landscapes for the last two decades. "The future of prairie wildlife is intimately related to decisions that occur in working agriculture landscapes." Todd has his Ph.D. in Zoology, M.Sc. in Wildlife and is an Associate Professor in the Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Biology.

Okechukwu Ukaga is the Executive Director for the Northeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership and is an Extension Professor based in Cloquet. As a program director and extension professor, Okey's goal has been to "create

'free spaces' and 'grounds for innovation and experimentation' that facilitate a richer and more vibrant reciprocal partnership between the University of Minnesota and the citizens of Minnesota based on the concept of empowering people to define and meet their own needs."

Kris Johnson currently coordinates the University of MN Ecosystem Science and Sustainability Initiative and is a graduate student in the Conservation Biology Program. Kris was recently named a 2008 Bush Leadership Fellow and will use that support to complete dissertation work evaluating the economic and environmental tradeoffs of alternative agricultural land uses working with communities in the Minnesota River Valley. "We must fundamentally change what we grow and how we grow it to restore ecological and social health to agrarian landscapes and rural farm communities." Kris brings a strong and diverse academic background, a deep understanding of systems theory, a working knowledge of sustainable agriculture and unique experience in conducting community-engaged, sustainability science research.

To learn more about the MISA Board, or to contact Board members, go to www.misa.umn.edu/People.

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