

Speed dating for farmer/chefs

In response to growing consumer interest in local food, many restaurants and caterers are interested in finding local sources for their enterprises, but don't have the time to track down sources. Farmers tell us that they don't know where to begin, or don't have time to go knocking on restaurant doors to see if chefs are interested in what they produce. Larry Lev, a current School of Agriculture Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems at the U of MN, brought to us his Oregon experience using a networking process based on the principles of speed dating: fill a room with chefs and food buyers interested in buying local products, and farmers interested in selling directly to restaurants or institutional food services; give them five minutes to connect with someone and exchange information about

what they produce and what they're interested in buying; exchange business cards if they're interested in following up—then rotate.

Renewing the Countryside, Minnesota Grown, MISA, Green Routes, Heartland Food Network and Food Alliance Midwest, in partnership with local sponsors, are hosting three Farmer/Buyer Connection workshops in January with funding from a North Central Risk Management Education grant. The workshops will have information sessions to assist farmers and food buyers to connect and explore best practices in working together, followed by the networking opportunity—a chance to forge new relationships for the 2008 growing season!

The Farmer Chef Direct Marketing Workshops will be held in:

Twin Cities, Mon. Jan. 7, 2008;

Winona (SE Minnesota), Mon. Jan. 14, 2008.

Little Falls (North Central Minnesota), Mon. Jan. 28, 2008

If you are a farmer interested in getting your product into a restaurant, grocery store or institution (school, hospital, etc.), or a food buyer for a restaurant or other institution; or someone working in food systems and would like more information on the “got local?” series of workshops, please call 612-871-1541 or e-mail Lindsay at lindsay@rtcinfo.org

Food system discussions with Kate Clancy

Dr. Kate Clancy is one of the nation's leading authorities on food systems. She has a wealth of experience on topics including food policy, sustainable agriculture, pasture production, organic food, food safety, advertising and messaging, food systems planning, and community nutrition. Kate has been a Senior Scientist in the Food and Environment Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists. She was also the Managing Director of the Wallace Center for Agricultural and Environmental Policy and has served on the faculties of Syracuse University, University of Wisconsin-Madison and Cornell University. Kate has been occupying a School of Agriculture Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems at the U of MN from June to December 2007.

In addition to teaching a class on food systems this fall at the University of Minnesota, Kate's remaining time in Minnesota is filled with multiple lectures and discussions, providing ample opportunity for you to learn and to engage

in lively discussions.

She recently addressed the “What's Up in Sustainable Agriculture” student group on “The Public Health Significance of the Nutritional Differences between Conventional and Organic or Grass-fed Foods.” Kate addressed some of the confusion surrounding nutrition claims about organic and grass-fed products, and discussed the data from the viewpoint of public health and nutrition research. She noted the importance of distinguishing between statistical significance and public health significance.

Kate presented on “Food Systems and Land Use” at the Bell Museum's Café Scientifique on November 13th. Café Scientifique is a happy hour program for adults that brings research from the University of Minnesota and beyond into some of the Twin Cities' most unique bars and restaurants. Kate discussed the challenges to land use and posed questions

as to what the future of land-use planning ought to look like.

On December 4th, Kate will be at the SWROC in Lamberton, “Setting Local Food in Its Proper Place.” Kate will lead a dinner discussion about what elements of a local food system make the most sense, and whether there are elements of the global food system that make sense to an area interested in being self-reliant. It promises to be a thoughtful and lively conversation. For more information, contact Carmen Fernholz, fernholz@umn.edu, 320-598-3010

Rural Youth Summit—Moving forward by going back!

The Rural Youth Summit was “planned by and for young adults.” It seemed only fitting to have a summary of the Summit from a young adults’ point of view. Sara Johnson, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), intern, coordinated the conference.

The future for rural communities was the topic of discussion at the first Rural Youth Summit held in October in Ames, Iowa. The conference brought together young adults from across the Midwest and nation to share stories of success, as well as challenges to making a life and a living in rural communities. Initial conversations between youth made the following clear: young adults are not staying in rural areas, even if a desire to do so exists. Young adults brought up many challenges they face when trying to create a life in a rural area including: lack of broadband Internet access, lack of job opportunities and capital, the high price of farm land, and concerns about feeling isolated and lonely. Despite the numerous barriers the conference participants shared, the weekend was also a place for participants to encourage each

other to make an attempt to stay rural. Andy Larson gave a fabulous opening speech on how going back to rural areas is a way to move forward; young adults presented information on topics ranging from renewable energy opportunities for rural communities to bringing the local food movement to rural areas; North Dakota Representative Pam Gulleason, who has succeeded in making a rural life, shared her experiences and provided a leadership training. So the Rural Youth Summit was a chance to not just lament the many struggles youth face when “going rural,” but also an opportunity to celebrate the possibilities.

As many people migrate between rural and urban areas, and rural communities struggle to survive, it is clear that for there to be a future for rural America, youth need to step up into leadership roles and reclaim rural communities. From the energy and excitement seen at the Rural Youth Summit, it is also clear that there are many potential rural leaders among us. Speaker Andy Larson noted that many people

believe that moving back to rural areas is thought of as the antithesis of moving forward, but the Rural Youth Summit was a space where that notion was challenged. Youth gathered together, shared ideas and stories, dreams and hope for the future—they showed that although there are obstacles and much work to be done, there is a chance to revitalize rural America. The youth who gathered in Ames this fall may just be our next rural leaders, those declaring that there is a future for rural America. For more information about the Rural Youth Summit, contact Amy Stratton, IATP, astratton@iatp.org, 612-870-3433.

As a follow up, Sustainable Farming Association of MN will hold a “Youth Day” on Friday, February 1, prior to their Feb. 2nd annual conference, “Local Foods: The Next Step.” Both will be held on the Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. For more information about the Youth Day event, contact Anne Borgendale, communications@sfa-mn.org, 320-226-6318.

Morris alternative swine system research update

For the past two years, Dr. Yuzhi Li, Swine Scientist at the West Central Research and Outreach Center (WCROC) at Morris, has been researching farrowing and group nursery in deep-bedding, using a system and a facility that is similar to those used in Europe. Group farrowing and nursery systems have become more popular in Europe, and their use has been mandated in some countries. This topic is important for farmers who have chosen to raise pigs in this manner. They are seeking to fill consumer demand for pork that is considered to be raised in a “welfare friendly” manner. Using deep-bedded farrowing and group nurseries helps to distinguish the farm production system, opening up opportunities for niche marketing that enhance farm profitability.

Compared to what are now considered to be conventional systems, which involve housing the sows in crates throughout the cycles of gestation, farrowing, and gestation again, the deep-bedded system means that the sows are housed in straw based pens during gestation, farrowing, and nursery stages of production. Sows can move more

freely, and so be able to exhibit “natural behaviors.” This is thought to be better for the health and well-being of sow and piglets. However, there are two issues that complicate the story and both are being investigated by Yuhzi. First, even though allowed more space in deep-bedded systems, the sows are still confined. Dominant sows are aggressive toward sows lower in the hierarchy. In a truly natural setting, such as a wooded area, the weaker sows would have the chance to escape the aggression of the stronger sows. They can’t do this inside the confined space of a building. Since this affects productivity negatively, it is an area that warrants further study.

Second, the pre-weaning mortality rate is higher in deep-bedded systems than in conventional ones that use farrowing crates. High pre-weaning mortality can contribute to significant economic loss for the hog operation. A significant portion of pigs that are lost prior to weaning die in the first three days of life. Since the pigs are young and have limited mobility, they are unable to get out of the sow’s way, and so are crushed by the sow as she lays down.

However, mothering ability may be an inherited trait. Yuzhi observed that sows with a very high piglet loss in their first litter tend to continue to have high losses in subsequent litters. Thus, it may make sense to cull those sows that have significant pig loss in their first litter soon after weaning the piglets, since they are unlikely to improve their litter weaning performance. More work will be done in this area to help farmers reduce pre-weaning losses, and improve profitability.

For more information about the research into swine behavior in alternative systems at Morris, contact Dr. Li at yuzhili@morris.umn.edu, 320-585-6091 or Wayne Martin, Alternative Livestock Coordinator for MISA and U of MN Extension at marti067@umn.edu, 612-625-6224. Or consider attending one of the Alternative Swine Roundtable sessions that will be held around the state this winter. Contact Wayne for more information.

Minnesota Grown Offers Marketing Series

Minnesota Grown and the Minnesota Nursery and Landscape Association (MNLA) have teamed up to offer a fall series aimed at helping farmers and small business owners develop successful marketing plans. If you market a product or service to the public, this series is for you!

The series began with a two-part visioning and goal-setting session, scheduled on Oct. 31 and Nov. 8. The second session, on Nov. 29, will be a day-long course that introduces participants to advertising tools and promotional opportunities. The final, day-long session on Internet marketing will be held on Dec. 6.

Participants in the sessions should expect to get practical, hands-on assistance to identify business goals, create a marketing plan to help reach those goals, develop an advertising budget, design effective advertising materials, use the Internet to your advantage, and measure the success of your advertising efforts.

The sessions are supported in part by a Risk Management Agency (RMA) grant, allowing the sponsoring organizations to charge a lower tuition rate than they otherwise could. Minnesota Grown members and MNLA members receive an additional discount on the tuition. There is still time to register for the Nov. 29 and Dec. 6 sessions! A registration form and brochure

are available on the MNLA website: <http://www.mnla.biz/images/Seminars/October/2007MarketingSeries.pdf>

Or contact the Minnesota Nursery and Landscape Association at 651-633-4987. All sessions are at the Midland Hills Country Club, located just to the northwest of the St. Paul Campus of the University of Minnesota.

REMINDER: NCR-SARE Farmer-Rancher Grant and MDA Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant Calls

Two programs that enable Minnesota farmers and educators to test new and innovative ideas in sustainable agriculture have issued their calls for proposals for the coming year. Examples of projects funded and recently completed through both these programs are in MDA's annual Greenbook online: www.mda.state.mn.us/protecting/sustainable/greenbook2007.htm

NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher Grant

Competitive grants of up to \$6,000 are available for individual farmers and ranchers, and grants up to \$18,000 are available for groups of three or more farmers from separate operations who are interested in exploring sustainable agriculture. Farmers/Ranchers are invited to submit proposals that test, evaluate, and

adapt sustainable agriculture practices for their operations; conduct learning circles, educational events, field days or demonstrations to further disseminate information to farmers/ranchers; develop new technologies; or create or modify equipment. Proposals are due December 3, 2007.

To view the SARE Farmer-Rancher Call for Proposal and supplemental information online, go to: <http://ncr.sare.org/prod.htm> For more information or to receive an application in the mail, contact Joan Benjamin, 402-472-0809 / 800-529-1342 or jbenjamin2@unl.edu

MDA Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grants

MDA will award \$150,000 in Sustainable

Agriculture Demonstration Grants to help farmers, researchers and educators implement new sustainable farming systems. The MDA is accepting applications for these grants, which are available for three-year projects that benefit the environment, increase farm net profits through cost reductions or enhanced marketing, and improve the farm family quality of life. Proposals are due January 18, 2008.

To view the 2007-2008 application online, go to: www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/demogrant.htm. For more information or to receive an application in the mail, contact Jeanne Ciborowski at 651-201-6217 or jeanne.ciborowski@state.mn.us

Upcoming Events

December 1st. Planning for a Successful Sustainable Business, Milan, Minn.. Gigi DiGiacomo, Economic Consultant will present techniques and tools for sustainable business planning. The workshop is sponsored by the West Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership. Pre-registration required – call 320-734-4128 (Greater Milan Initiative) or toll free 1-877-889-4153 (Lac qui Parle Valley Community Education). Fee: \$20 includes workbook. Scholarships are available.

December 3rd. Farmers Take the Stove, Duluth, MN. The Lake Superior Chapter of the Sustainable Farming Association will be hosting the annual "Farmers Take the Stove" winter dinner and silent auction. The dinner will be open to the public and will highlight meals grown, prepared and cooked by farmers. For more information email: info@lakesuperiorfarming.org.

Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture

411 Borlaug Hall
1991 Upper Buford Circle
St. Paul, MN 55108



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