

A medley of organic research in Minnesota

Two Organic Coordinators named. Two new staff members will coordinate and support efforts to expand the University's statewide organic program in the areas of research and outreach. Jim Riddle and Carmen Fernholz are joining the Southwest Research and Outreach Center (SWROC) staff as organic agriculture coordinators. Carmen, from Madison, MN, will be the organic agriculture coordinator for research management; Jim, who lives in Winona, MN, will be the organic agriculture coordinator for outreach. Based out of SWROC, their duties will involve activities throughout the University system and at other research and outreach centers. "Both Jim and Carmen are recognized, well-connected and committed individuals who will make organic agriculture systems a priority," commented Pauline Nickel, SWROC head. "They will invigorate research and educational efforts through strong partnerships within and external to the University of Minnesota." Jim's experience in the field of organic agriculture extends over 25 years. He began farming organically in 1980 and conducting organic inspections in 1987. Most recently,

Jim served as chair of the National Organic Standards Board. Carmen began farming organically in the early 1970s and was certified as an organic producer in 1974. Carmen has been active in numerous associations and organizations which promote organics and sustainability in agriculture. In the past, Jim and Carmen also individually served as the Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems at the U of Mn. Both will start work on January 17.

Student organic farm. The first season at the U of Mn, Twin Cities student organic farm was clearly a success! The farm produced an abundance of healthful food, sold primarily to the University community at the Minneapolis Campus Farmer's Market. Students learned by doing—experiencing first hand the details of organic crop production and applied scientific research, and the farm served as a resource for community education and outreach on issues of organic and sustainable farming. As we plan for the new year, we hope to establish perennial guilds and build hoop houses to extend the growing season. We will also refine marketing options, expand research

initiatives, and hone our record keeping skills toward organic certification. Soon, another group of interns and volunteers will come to know the meaning of the farm motto, "Learning to grow, growing to learn." Check out the profiles of the summer 2005 intern research projects online at: <http://sof.coafes.umn.edu/> click on Internships & Projects! For more information contact Courtney Tchida, Student Program Coordinator at tchi0003@umn.edu or 612-625-2738.

Southwestern Research and Outreach Center. The SWROC in Lamberton has 120 certified organic research acres and has been working with U of Mn researchers and farmers for 15 years to conduct research that emphasizes the development of cropping systems that efficiently cycle water, nutrients, and energy, while at the same time enhancing profitability in organic systems. Results from those projects are presented at a mid-July field day. The SWROC is part of a team working with the USDA Risk Management Agency to develop a comprehensive database on risk

(Continued on page 2)

Minnesota Organic Conference and Trade Show set for January 20 - 21

More than 300 people are expected to attend the annual Minnesota Organic Conference at the St. Cloud Civic Center. George Seielstad, a University of North Dakota aerospace scientist who uses images taken from space to study earth science and environmental issues, will deliver a "big picture" keynote presentation on Friday, January 20. Organic dairyman and entrepreneur Francis Thicke (Radiance Dairy, Fairfield IA) will speak on Saturday. Six concurrent tracks will offer 35 breakout sessions focusing on organic field crops, fruits and vegetables as well as organic

certification, greenhouse production, soil health, beef and hog production, alternative crops, composting, weed and disease management, marketing strategies, post-harvest handling and storage, spray drift issues, and farm business management. In response to strong demand and high prices for organic milk, one track will be dedicated to organic dairy issues including transition, breeding, animal health, market opportunities, parlor design, feed, and grazing management.

"Every experience level—from beginners to those with many years of organic farming

under their belts—will find interesting, worthwhile workshops and roundtable discussions at the conference," said Meg Moynihan, MDA Organic and Diversification Specialist. "Conference attendees will also have a chance to sample local, organic food which will be served at lunches and the morning and afternoon breaks," noted Moynihan. Full program details and registration forms are available by calling 651-201-6012 or visiting www.mda.state.mn.us

management in organic cropping systems. When completed in 2009, organic crop producers throughout Minnesota and neighboring states will be able to use the information to identify locally-verified practices for reducing risks associated with weeds, pest insects, disease and drought. Additionally SWROC coordinates the Minnesota Organic Farmers' Information Exchange (MOFIE). MOFIE is an organic farmer mentor network that links producers with information needed to farm organically and successfully by connecting

with other experienced organic farmers. For more info visit www.mofie.coafes.umn.edu.

Southern Research and Outreach Center (SROC) The SROC in Waseca transitioned 13 research acres to organic production and conducts research with U of Mn Extension and researchers on cover crops, and organic wheat production. Last year, a mid-June organic field tour highlighted research projects at the Center and on nearby farms. They also are a partner in the Risk Management database grant.

Extension. In northwestern Minnesota,

Hans Kandel and Jim Stordahl, U of Mn Extension educators have been working with Paul Porter, U of Mn researcher, to test oat, wheat and soybean varieties and organic production methods on farms in their area, and hosting summer bus tours to visit those farm trials.

Farmers. Farmers are also writing grants, conducting research and reporting their findings in the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's annual Greenbook publication or at conferences like the Minnesota Organic Conference and the Upper Midwest Organic Farming

Organic Farm Business Management cost share program

MDA is offering a cost share program for organic producers who enroll in a Farm Business Management program. During the next three years, the MDA will pay 80 percent of the tuition cost, with the producer paying the remaining 20 percent.

In the FBM program, farmers work one-on-one with a farm business management instructor learning the principles of business management. They learn to use specific tools like FINPACK, a farm financial management software program, and FINBIN, a benchmarking database that helps them measure their own performance against thousands of other operations. Ultimately, they learn to maintain and use quality records to make sound business decisions.

This work is funded by USDA's Risk Management Agency and includes project partners from the U of Mn Center for Farm Financial Management, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system,

For more information contact

Meg Moynihan

651-201-6616

www.mda.mn.us

Organic Crop Improvement Association—Minnesota Chapter #1, and the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota. The Independent Community Bankers of Minnesota are also promoting the project.

"Organic agriculture is clearly an important

and growing part of our farm economy," MDA Commissioner Gene Hugoson said. "And even though many organic producers assert that this farming approach has proven profitable for them, the information is anecdotal. The farm business management project will collect real-world information that makes it possible for farmers, lenders, researchers, and policy makers to get a better handle on the economic performance of organic operations."

For more information about how to enroll, producers can call Meg Moynihan at the MDA 651-201-6616 or download the brochure from www.mda.state.mn.us

Five Years for What? Reflections of an Outgoing NOSB Member -Jim Riddle

I was appointed to the USDA's National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) in January, 2001. During my five years on the NOSB, we fulfilled our statutory mandates to provide advice to the Secretary of Agriculture on establishment and implementation of the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) and to review petitioned substances. We saw the Final Rule implemented on October 21, 2002.

While I was on the board, the NOSB adopted Principles of Organic Production and Handling. We developed draft standards for apiculture, mushrooms, and greenhouses. We made recommendations to strengthen existing pasture requirements

for ruminants and outdoor access requirements for all species. We developed standardized Organic System Plan templates, which are used by many certification agencies and are posted at www.attra.org.

We established transparent and inclusive procedures for the review of substances petitioned to be added to or removed from the National List, including procedures for the five-year "sunset" reviews required by OFPA. We adopted guidance to help distinguish "synthetic" from "non-synthetic" substances. We developed criteria to help the board consistently determine if a substance is compatible with organic

production and handling.

We submitted recommendations to improve the labeling, certification, accreditation, compliance, and enforcement provisions of the Final Rule. We wrote and refined a Board Policy Manual that guides the work of current and future boards. We overcame challenges encountered during the first four years to establish and strengthen collaboration between the NOSB and the staff of the USDA's National Organic Program. We oversaw the hiring of the NOSB's first Executive Director.

(Continued on page 3)

As new regulations are written to implement court rulings in the Harvey v. USDA lawsuit and recent amendments to OFPA, members of the organic community must work together to preserve the powers of the NOSB over the National List; require that all substances used in or on processed organic products are subject to NOSB review; and require that all dairy replacement animals be fed and managed

organically, regardless of how an operation converted to organic production.

When OFPA was adopted in 1990, the NOSB was established as the gatekeepers for organic integrity. The NOSB must continue to take stands to establish – and maintain – rigorous standards that protect consumer and producer confidence in the organic claim. Board members must keep in mind that they are the voice of the public. The board should collaborate with the USDA whenever possible, but cannot be

afraid to speak up on behalf of the organic community, as needed.

Present and future boards need to be cognizant of past NOSB recommendations and precedents; seek public comments on draft recommendations; be inclusive and transparent; and make sure that someone keeps good records and makes them available to the public in a timely manner. Many things change in five years, but the commitment to protect and maintain organic integrity must remain constant.

Porter Presents at IFOAM meetings in Australia

Paul Porter, U of Mn researcher, attended the International Scientific Conference on Organic Agriculture–15th International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) Organic World Congress, in Adelaide, Australia in September, 2005. He presented a seminar on no-till organic soybean production

following a fall-planted rye cover crop. Over 1,000 delegates attended the conference and there were several hundred presentations. The proceedings from the conference are available at www.isofar.org/adelaide2005/proceedings.html. Paul also did a site visit to the University of Adelaide, a university which has hosted U of Mn

students. His trip was sponsored in part by SARE's North Central Region Professional Development Program (PDP) and the U of Mn's International Programs Office. For more information contact pporter@umn.edu, 612-625-6719.

Poultry Your Way

Poultry Your Way: A Guide to Management Alternatives for the Upper Midwest is a new publication that describes marketing, processing, and production alternatives. It exposes producers to basic information about poultry production options and includes profiles about farmers in the Upper Midwest who are using those systems. MISA and the MDA produced Poultry Your Way, with funding from North Central Region SARE and in collaboration with the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, University of Wisconsin, the Michigan

Agricultural Stewardship Association and the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota.

Poultry Your Way

www.misa.umn.edu

Click on Publications

1-800-909-MISA

of Poultry Your Way is available free from MISA, 612-625-8235, 800-909-6472, misamail@umn.edu or from the MDA, 651-201-6012, www.mda.state.mn.us. The document can be viewed in full text on-line at www.misa.umn.edu, click on Publications.

Jacque Jacob, Poultry Extension Specialist at the U of Mn, provided technical expertise for this publication. A print copy

Announcements and Upcoming Events

Announcements

Land Stewardship Project Introduces Audio Magazine. The Land Stewardship Project has introduced *Ear to the Ground*, a "podcast," or audio magazine that listeners can download with free software and listen to on a computer or portable player. <http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/podcast.html>

Ag Opportunities on the Air. Diversification is an important strategy for farmers looking to balance environmental performance, profitability, and quality of

life/satisfaction on their farms. A series of broadcasts on all the member stations of Minnesota Farm Network bring you stories of people doing innovative things on their operations. These broadcasts are also available for download by visiting <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/mgo/radiooops.htm>

Upcoming Events

Midwest Value Added Conference. January 27-28, 2006. Eau Claire, WI. Heather Flashinski, 715-834-9672, <http://www.rivercountryrcd.org/valad.htm>.

Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference.

February 2-3, 2006. St. Cloud, MN. For more info contact info@mfvga.org, 763-434-0400 or visit http://www.mfvga.org/education_umrgvvc.shtml

SFA Annual Meeting. February 18, 2006. Little Falls, MN. For more information visit www.sfa-mn.org

Upper Midwest Organic Conference. February 23-25, 2006. LaCrosse, WI. For more info contact info@mosesorganic.org, 715-772-3153, <http://www.mosesorganic.org>

Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture

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



This newsletter is supported by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA)—a partnership between the Sustainer’s Coalition and the University of Minnesota College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences (COAFES); the University of Minnesota Extension Service; the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCRSARE) Professional Development Program (PDP); and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA).

Send story ideas to MISA, 411 Borlaug Hall, 1991 Upper Buford Circle. St. Paul, MN 55108, (612) 625-8235, fax (612) 625-1268, e-mail: misamail@umn.edu. Editorial board members: Helene Murray, (612) 625-0220, murra021@umn.edu; Beth Nelson, (612) 625-8217, schre002@umn.edu; Bill Wilcke, (612) 625-8205, wilck001@umn.edu; Jane Jewett, jewet006@umn.edu ; Kate Seager, (612) 625-8235, kseager@umn.edu and Jack Sperbeck, (612)625-1794, sperb001@umn.edu. Please send address changes directly to: Kate Seager, kseager@umn.edu, MISA, 411 Borlaug Hall, 1991 Buford Circle, St. Paul, MN 55108.

You can find more University of Minnesota Extension Service educational information at www.extension.umn.edu. Also check MISA’s home page at www.misa.umn.edu.

Our mission statement: To help bring people together to influence the future of agriculture and rural communities to achieve socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable farms and communities. To stimulate thinking and discussion about sustainability, we try to present items that reflect different points of view. This being the case, we aren’t promoting and don’t necessarily agree with everything we publish.