

It was July, 1993, and the first issue of Sustainable Agriculture read:

"We'd like all Minnesotans who are interested in protecting our environment while maintaining a desirable lifestyle to 'buy into' sustainable agriculture." That was written by Phil Larsen, then head of the Plant Pathology Department and coordinator of the sustainable agriculture initiative for the (then) Minnesota Extension Service.

I was the first editor of this newsletter. And almost 13 years later, as I'm preparing to retire in a few weeks, I do think more people are "buying into" sustainable agriculture. I take little credit for that, but editing this newsletter proved to be one of the more interesting, satisfying projects I worked on at the University of Minnesota.

-Jack Sperbeck, sperb001@umn.edu

After 38 years of service to Extension, Jack Sperbeck, news editor, will be retiring on

May 31. Jack has been responsible for releasing news to the many news outlets throughout the state, and has served as the editor of the Sustainable Agriculture Newsletter since it began. We thank him heartily for his work in keeping the community informed about issues in sustainable agriculture, and we will miss his insight and keen eye on our editorial board. A retirement party for Jack will be held on May 22 from 3-5 p.m. in 120 Coffey Hall. Good luck, Jack, and thanks for everything!

University of Minnesota and Sustainers' Coalition Renew Sustainable Agriculture Agreement

The University of Minnesota and the Sustainers' Coalition have renewed their commitment to work together as part of the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA). The Sustainers' Coalition is a group of non-profit organizations that includes the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Land Stewardship Project, Minnesota Food Association, The Minnesota Project and Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota.

The new five-year agreement will extend the work of MISA until 2011. "Sustainable agriculture in Minnesota has grown greatly since MISA began in 1992. This growth has provided new revenue streams for Minnesota farm families and new options for Minnesota consumers," said Helene

Murray, MISA executive director.

The University of Minnesota and the College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences have been MISA partners since MISA's inception in 1992. The new agreement adds the University of Minnesota Extension Service to the partnership. "The addition of the Extension Service to MISA provides us with additional opportunities to develop educational programming linked to research on sustainable agriculture," said Beverly Durgan, dean and director of the University of Minnesota Extension Service.

"The Sustainer's Coalition will continue to advocate for a systems approach to agriculture that balances environmental soundness, social equity, and economic viability. We are pleased that the

University of Minnesota has renewed and expanded its commitment to research and programming related to sustainable agriculture," stated Mary Jo Forbord, Executive Director of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota.

MISA's purpose is to bring together the agricultural community and the University community in a cooperative effort to develop and promote sustainable agriculture in Minnesota and beyond. More information about MISA is available at <http://www.misa.umn.edu>

Avian Flu

Avian Influenza (AI), or Bird Flu, has been getting a lot of media coverage lately. Understanding and tracking avian influenza viruses is a complex task, according to U of MN Poultry Specialist, Dr. Jacquie Jacob. The influenza family of viruses is classified into types and subtypes. Even within those subtypes, the influenza viruses are classified as low pathogenicity or high pathogenicity, based on their ability to cause disease in chickens infected with the

virus. The H5N1 virus causing problems overseas is highly pathogenic—it causes fatal disease in many of the infected birds.

Possible entry points of the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus to North America are being closely monitored. Migratory bird populations are being watched in Alaska, where wild birds migrating north from Asian and European countries may mingle with wild birds migrating north

from the United States and Canada. Poultry imports are banned from countries that have had an H5N1 outbreak. One of the biggest concerns, however, is smuggling of infected wild birds into the U.S. The United States has a program that regularly tracks other subtypes of avian influenza that are already circulating here. According to the Centers for Disease Control, "In the United States, from 1997 to 2005, there

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were 16 outbreaks of low pathogenic avian influenza viruses (H5 and H7 subtype) and one outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N2) in poultry.”

What does this mean for small flock poultry production, pastured poultry, or other forms of outdoor rearing? If H5N1 is found in U.S. migratory birds, poultry production may be ordered indoors, at least

temporarily, in the area where infected wild birds were found. If H5N1 is found in a poultry flock, regardless of the size of the flock or the production method used, the entire flock will be killed and the area quarantined. This is the standard procedure followed with other types of H5 and H7 avian influenza outbreaks as well, to quickly stamp out the spread of the disease. Farmers are compensated for their killed birds, and can return to poultry production after the disease threat has passed. There

are biosecurity measures that small flock owners should take to minimize the risk of exposing their flocks to any type of avian flu, or other diseases. The information above is compiled from the resources listed on MISA's Avian Flu page, http://www.misa.umn.edu/Avian_Flu.html

Preparing for Animal Disease Outbreaks

Minnesota had been bovine TB-free since 1971, until a cow traced to a Minnesota beef cattle herd tested positive for the disease in July, 2005. Since then, cattle in five beef herds in northwestern Minnesota have tested positive for bovine TB. Those herds have been depopulated. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has downgraded Minnesota's TB status to Modified Accredited Advanced, which means some additional testing requirements must be met before shipping Minnesota breeding cattle outside the state.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), or mad cow disease, is also of concern. To date there have been eight cases of BSE confirmed in North America; five in Canada and three in the United States. Cases in the United States: December, 2003 - Washington state, cow imported from Canada; June, 2005 - Texas, cow born in the U.S.; March, 2006 - Alabama, cow born in the U.S.

On April 28, 2006 the USDA released a report on the prevalence of BSE in the

United States. Testing has been done on 735,213 beef animals over the past seven years. The report states that there are most likely between 4 and 7 cases of BSE currently in the U.S., which is less than one case per million adult animals.

The above information on bovine TB and BSE was compiled from the U of MN Extension Service Beef website, and the Minnesota Board of Animal Health website. For more information, visit those sites: www.extension.umn.edu/beef/ www.bah.state.mn.us/diseases

In response to concerns about emergency preparedness in the event of a U.S. livestock disease outbreak, the USDA has initiated a National Animal Identification System (NAIS). The NAIS is intended to allow investigators to trace back a diseased animal to its farm of origin within 48 hours of its discovery, as well as tracing any other animals that may have been exposed, helping to limit the scope and expense of the outbreak. We will include more

information about the NAIS and comments from proponents and opponents of the system in a future newsletter. Visit the USDA's Animal Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS) website for current information: <http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais/index.shtml>

For more information about National Animal ID for cattle, as well as information about grazing, pasture management and livestock handling, plan to attend one of the "North Country Cattlemen's College" workshops that will be held at 7 locations throughout the state between June 21 and June 29th. A flyer with agenda, locations and dates, and contact information for each location will be posted at www.extension.umn.edu/beef, or contact Lori Schott, Regional Extension Educator, Mora, 320-225-5055, weddl002@umn.edu for more information.

Minnesota Environmental Initiative (MEI) Awards - 2006

The Environmental Initiative Awards honor innovative projects that have achieved extraordinary environmental outcomes by harnessing the power of partnership. Some of the most innovative environmental projects in Minnesota have been accomplished through collaborative processes, often involving a broad range of organizations from the business, nonprofit

and government sectors. MEI established the Environmental Initiative Awards in 1994 to recognize these projects and their many partners, to inspire other organizations to replicate successful environmental projects and to encourage innovative approaches to environmental problem-solving.

The Clean Energy Resource Teams

(CERT) received the Partnership of the Year Award for the "finalist project that best exemplifies MEI's mission to build partnerships that develop solutions to Minnesota's environmental problems." CERT projects consist of six regional teams around Minnesota. Each has tailored a plan for a clean energy future that will make the

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most of their region's renewable resources and other technologies. They explore problems associated with conventional energies and their uses, and identify alternative and preferred forms of energy. Partners in the CERT project include the Minnesota Department of Commerce, The Minnesota Project, the U of MN Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, the Southwest Regional Development Commission and community members from across the state. Without the commitment and involvement of these community partners, including farmers,

local officials, utilities, academics, federal and state agency staff, business owners and other community members, the project never would have moved forward.

The Third Crop Initiative received the Award in the Land Use Category. The Third Crop Initiative, a program of The Blue Earth River Basin Initiative's (BERBI) promotes diversified cropping systems that can provide ecological services to the public, economic return to the farm family and community benefits through local agricultural processing. The project is based on the idea that a third crop rotation (after corn and soybeans) can provide much

needed diversity, help build soil health, reduce pests and disease, and reduce pollution impacts from agricultural non-point sources. Partners in the Third Crop Initiative include the BERBI, farmers in the Blue Earth watershed, The U of MN, The Center for Integrated Natural Resources and Agricultural Management (CINRAM), the Soil and Water Conservation Districts in the Blue Earth Watershed, The Legislative Commission on Minnesota's Resources and county governments.

For more information visit <http://www.mn-ei.org/awards/finalistswinners.html>

NCR-SARE Research and Education Preproposals Due June 20th

The NCR-SARE Program has announced their annual call for preproposals to fund research and education (R&E) programs in sustainable agriculture. The R&E grant program is an excellent opportunity for collaboration between universities, extension offices, farmers, ranchers, and non-profit groups. The program awards annual grants ranging between \$10,000-150,000 to approximately eleven recipients per year. Funded proposals are expected to contribute to farmer or rancher profitability, environmental quality, and the enhancement of the quality of life of

farmers or ranchers, rural communities, and society as a whole. NCR-SARE strongly encourages applicants to involve farmers and ranchers in their projects.

In Minnesota, recent NCR-SARE R&E grant awards are funding research on dairy compost barns, "green" tourism campaigns that supports local food use, radio "minutes" on the Farm Network for diverse agricultural production and marketing practices, research on sustainable beekeeping, and the development of guidebooks for producers to explore poultry and dairy production options.

The current call for research and education preproposals is available through the NCR-SARE web site at <http://www.sare.org/ncrsare>. Please be sure to download the 2007 call, since preproposal content and format requirements have changed significantly. Also note that hard copies of the preproposal must be received in the new St. Paul NCR-SARE office by 4:30 p.m. CDT on June 20, 2006. Individuals may also request the preproposal form or more information by contacting Bill Wilcke at wilck001@umn.edu or 612-625-8205.

Green Routes Website Launch

Just in time for planning summer trips—Green Routes has launched their new website, www.GreenRoutes.org. The website is an easy-to-use tool to help you find one-of-a-kind places to eat locally grown food, and experience unique cultural attractions, and activities. Also hot off the

press are four new convenient pamphlets that you can add to the Tamarack and Upper Minnesota River Valley pamphlets already in your glove compartment. New brochures are available for Bluff Country, Pine & Lake Country, Agassiz, and the North Shore. For more information, or for

copies of the pamphlets, contact Renewing the Countryside, 1-866-378-0587, rtc@rtcinfo.org

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Upcoming Events

Farm Beginnings Dairy Tour. June 3rd. A Farm Beginnings public tour of a dairy grazing operation near Canton, MN. For details, contact Karen Stettler in LSP's Lewiston office at 507-523-3366 or stettler@landstewardshipproject.org.

Dairy Goat Tour. June 3rd. Kimball, MN. Co-sponsored by Wright County Extension and Minnesota Dairy Initiative. A tour of this organic goat dairy operation, followed by an Ice Cream Social! \$5.00 individual, \$10 per family. Contact: Brenda Postels, 763-682-7381, post0060@umn.edu.

Symposium on Small Towns and Rural Summit. June 6&7. University of MN-Morris. For on-line registration and more information go to www.centerforsmalltowns.org or call 320.589.6451.

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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).

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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.