

# *Sustainable Agriculture*

**Volume 3, Issue 6 –June 1995**

## **Funding Received for Sustainable Agriculture Information Clearinghouse**

Funding of \$200,000 over two years was appropriated by the Minnesota Legislature for the Minnesota Institute of Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) to develop a sustainable agriculture information clearinghouse. The bill was signed by Gov. Carlson May 24. It calls for MISA to "gather, evaluate, publish and disseminate sustainable agriculture information to a broad audience."

MISA will work in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) to put together several user-friendly information packages on sustainable agriculture topics identified by the community. The information will be distributed in both printed and electronic formats through the clearinghouse. You'll be able to request information from the clearinghouse by phone, fax, mail, e-mail or in person.

MISA and MDA will work with farmers, researchers, nonprofit organizations and government agencies on the project. An advisory committee that includes these groups will be established within the next few months. If you'd like more information on the project or wish to be involved, contact Debra Elias at 612/625-8235, or 411 Borlaug Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108-1013. Fax 612/625-1268 or e-mail [misamail@gold.tc.umn.edu](mailto:misamail@gold.tc.umn.edu)

## **PLANETOR is an Environmental, Economic Farm Planning Tool**

Do your farming practices have a potentially detrimental effect on the surrounding environment? How will environmental impacts change if you change production practices? And finally, how will implementing changes to your farm affect the financial status of the business? PLANETOR--a comprehensive software program to evaluate individual farm operations—can help answer these questions.

PLANETOR combines site-specific environmental models with individual farm economic planning data to evaluate the impacts of reducing or changing pesticide use; nitrogen, phosphorus or manure applications; tillage systems; and crop rotations. PLANETOR helps you look at longrange goals and strategies for your farm and compare different environmental and conomic impacts in an average year.

The PLANETOR Version 2 program is now available and training sessions are being offered from late June through mid-September. Cost of the two-day training sessions is \$100 and the software may be purchased for an additional \$149. For more information, contact the University of Minnesota's Center for Farm Financial Management at 1-800-234-1111.

## **"Industrial" and "Sustainable" Agriculture Can't Survive Together**

"Industrial" and "sustainable" agriculture can't mutually survive—one will eliminate the other, according to Marty Strange, program director and co-founder of the Center for Rural Affairs, Walthill, Neb.

He said the conflict is not the difference in production practices, but rather in market structure and public policy. Strange spoke at the May meeting of the Twin Cities Ag Issues Roundtable, sponsored by the University of Minnesota's Department of Applied Economics.

Strange said a goal of industrial agriculture is to control the market by eliminating open markets. "The large, corporate hog operations in North Carolina are an example of industrialized agriculture that's designed to destroy competition by systematically discriminating against smaller operators.

"And from a public policy standpoint, industrial agriculture wants to shed or externalize risk by having the public pick up the bill for farm programs. Large, industrialized farms are the main benefactors of farm programs that were originally designed to keep smaller producers on the farm. What farm programs really do is adjust the farm economy."

Strange defined industrial agriculture as the process of converting raw materials to finished products, whereas sustainable agriculture is more concerned with continual and renewal resources and energy such as solar to maintain life cycles. "Sustainable agriculture is an idea—a goal of permanence," he said.

"Neither sustainable nor industrial agriculture exists in pure forms. Most farms have some of both and each farm has some tension between the two," he said. The difference is a moral choice between the goals of the two concepts. "Neither is 'natural' since they both disturb natural processes. And the sustainable agriculture movement finds this discomfoting," he said.

Strange said characteristics of industrialized agriculture include specialized, large-scale farms; a concentration of, and fewer producers; standardization and uniformity of production and product; individual practices opposed to whole systems; and a management centered emphasis. "But the management is not sophisticated—it's RLS or 'read the label, stupid,' type management.

"Sustainable agriculture focuses more on permanence and durability and less on immediate profits. It's more diversified, less specialized, with more emphasis on scope than scale. Sustainable farmers must do more things well. Production is more cyclical or seasonal and more in harmony with nature. Sustainable farmers internalize risk, but reduce it by diversification."

At the farm level, the Southwestern Minnesota corn-soybean producer is "livid" due to excess rain that delayed spring fieldwork. "But the sustainable producer who's diversified as part of internal risk management says 'my alfalfa and oats look great. I can use this moisture come August and my crops are holding it in the soil.'"

Ag Issues Roundtable meetings cover a variety of topics and are held periodically from October through May. For more information, contact Steve Taff at 612/625-3103.

### **School of Agriculture Alumni Fund Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems**

The University of Minnesota's School of Agriculture Alumni Association has raised \$425,000 to fund its Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems. Campaign funds were combined with a \$75,000 contribution from the Minnesota Legislature and a \$500,000 match from the university to create a \$1 million endowment.

The School of Agriculture Chair will be a short-term, rotating position staffed with visiting scholars and experts from Minnesota and around the world. The domain of the chair will include departments in the College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences and the Colleges of Natural Resources,

Veterinary Medicine and Human Ecology. Off campus, it will tap the world of experienced farmers as well as legislative, government, foundation and business leaders.

The chair will be administered by the Minnesota Institute of Sustainable Agriculture (MISA). Representatives of the School of Agriculture Alumni Association on the Endowed Chair planning committee are Al Mayers, St. Paul; Marvin Johnson, Maple Plain; and Rose Marie Bergherr, Bloomington.

The School of Agriculture taught students on the St. Paul campus from 1888 to 1960. It set the stage for higher education in agriculture and home economics in Minnesota. For more information on the Endowed Chair, contact MISA at 612/625-8235. E-mail [misamail@maroon.tc.umn.edu](mailto:misamail@maroon.tc.umn.edu)

### **Sustainable Agriculture Decision Case Materials Available**

Sustainable agriculture decision cases complete with videos are available from the Minnesota Extension Service. The materials present two real-life farm families and a dilemma each is facing. The VanDerPol family needs to decide whether to move to a ridge-till system. The Perkins family is deciding whether to expand their 8-row planting equipment to 12 rows. Along with videos, the materials include a teacher's guide, a written summary of each case and exhibits.

Full sets are available for \$25 plus 7% for Minnesota residents. Ask for #EP-6584-F2 from the MES Distribution Center, University of Minnesota, 20 Coffey Hall, St. Paul, MN 55108-6069. Fax orders can be taken at 612/625-6281. Or to place a credit card order, call 612/625- 8713.

### **Value-Added Products Exposition July 6 in Montevideo**

You'll get new ideas on how value-added agricultural products can increase income in rural communities at a July 6 exposition at the Montevideo High School and Training and Community Center. There will be 60 exhibits available for viewing starting at 8:30 a.m.

At 9:15 the keynote address on marketing skills will be given by Michael Foster of Flint Communications. And from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. there will be 64 workshops from which to choose. Examples include organic vegetables, organic milk, dried flowers, venison, apples and strawberries. All presenters are currently involved in their businesses. Your advance registration of \$8 includes lunch. Make checks payable to VAP '95 and mail to Chippewa County Extension Office, Courthouse, Montevideo, MN 56265; 1-800-247-0412 for more information. You can also call the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI) at 612/589-4532.

### **Alternative Livestock Conference July 27-29 on St. Paul Campus**

There'll be practical information on production, economics and marketing for beginning as well as established producers at the Alternative Livestock Conference July 27-29 on the University of Minnesota's St. Paul Campus. Animals to be covered include alpaca, bees, bison, free-range chickens, deer, elk, emu, geese, goats, llama, ostrich, rabbits and reindeer. For more information call Judy Sunvold at 1-800-367-5363 or 612/625-2636.

### **Bus Tour for Ag Professionals Aug. 3**

A bus tour focusing on sustainable farming practices and programs for agricultural professionals is scheduled Aug. 3, starting at 9:30 a.m. The tour will start at the University of Minnesota's Central Minnesota Research and Education Center at Staples. Other stops include the Tom and DeEtta Bilek farm near Aldrich and the Carol Ekarius and Ken Woodard farm south of Verndale. Sustainable Farming Association members are asked to contact their bankers, feed-seed-fertilizerimplement dealers, legislators and veterinarians. For reservations or more information, contact DeEtta Bilek at 218/445-5475.

### **We can use your story ideas**

Keep the story ideas coming. Send them to the editor: Jack Sperbeck, 405 Coffey Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108, Tel. (612) 625-1794. E-mail: [jsperbeck@extension.umn.edu](mailto:jsperbeck@extension.umn.edu). Other editorial board members are Phil Larsen 612/624-7451, Don Olson 612/625-9292 and Helene Murray 612/625-0220.

**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.

### **Calendar of Events--Sustainable Agriculture Field Days and Tours**

June 30, 7:30 a.m. Summer Station Day, University of Minnesota, West Central Experiment Station, Morris, 612/589-1711.

July 1, 1 p.m. Living Mulches in West Central Minnesota Wheat Production, Dave Birong, Grove City, 612/857-2772, or 612/773-5247.

July 13, 1 p.m. Pasture walk at the Doug and Twila Ward farm near Browerville, 612/594-6169.

July 14, 1 p.m. Making the Transition to Certified Organic Production (third year project). Craig and Joanie Murphy, Morris, 612/392-5176.

July 19 Crops & Soils Day, University of Minnesota, Northwest Experiment Station, Crookston, 218/281-8602.

July 19, 10:00 a.m. Dairy grazing and liquid manure's effect on pastures at Scott and Pam Gaudette's farm near Sebeka, 218/472-3237.

July 19, 11 a.m. Self-sustaining Crop Rotation, Shamrock Farms, Goodhue. Call Bruce McNamara at 612/258-4506.

July 20, 1:30 p.m. Graziers Circle: 3rd Year Dairy Grazing, Koenen Family Dairy, Clara City, 612/367-2809.

July 22, 1:00 p.m. Scotch Highland Cattle. Bridget Renlund and Frank Wergin, Northfield. Call Mert Taylor 612/758-3587.

July 23, 12:30 p.m. Small Farm Strategies Project, Ken Peterson, Carlton (SFA, Northeastern Minnesota), 218/384-3511.

July 25, 1 p.m. Grazing Hogs--Farrowing and Finishing, Jason and Michael Hartmann, Gibbon, 507/834-6308.

July 25, 1:00 p.m. Pasture walk at the Dan and Rosie Middendorf farm near Osakis, 612/352-3397.

July 31, 1 p.m. Alternative Agriculture for Future Markets, Brett Pearson, Cottage Grove, 612/458-9760.

Aug 12, 1 p.m. Beginning Beef, Tom Coffield and Pat Schiltgen, Webster, MN. 507/744-2146.

Aug. 12, 2 p.m. Graziers Circle: Cow/Calf Grazing, Marshall and Bev Herfindahl, Boyd, 612/955-2542.

Aug. 19, 2 p.m. Outdoor Hog Production, Jim and LeeAnn VanDerPol, Clara City, 612/847-3432.

Aug. 26, 1 p.m. Produce/Soil Building Tour at the Gerry and Ana Wass "Field Song Foods" north of Little Falls; 612/745-2593.

Sept. 8, 12 p.m. Pasture walk at the David and Rochelle Cook farm near Clarissa; (218) 756-2692.

Sept. 9, 2 p.m. Graziers Circle: Pasture Planning, Craig Murphy, Morris, 612/392-5176.

Sept. 15 Grazing Stockers, Joe Rolling, Arco, 507/487-5742.

Sept. 16 Rotational Grazing Sows and Gilts, Byron Bartz, Barrett, 612/5282301.

Sept. 22, 1 p.m. Marcia Rapatz and Greg Nolan farm near Browerville, 612/594-6317

Due to Minnesota's unpredictable weather, please call to confirm the date and time.