

Sustainable Agriculture

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MISA awards six educational materials grants

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture is pleased to announce the funding of six interdisciplinary teams that will create educational materials that support the development of sustainable agricultural systems. A competitive grants process was announced last fall that offered up to \$25,000 per project. The six teams will work with the agricultural community to identify issues and information needs on specific topics, create educational materials to address the issues and needs, and to identify user-friendly formats and delivery systems for the new materials.

The six teams that were funded include:

- Developing Marketing and Business Planning Materials for Sustainable Agriculture Farmers and Entrepreneurs. Coordinator: Susan McAllister, Marketing Consultant, St. Paul, MN; (612) 644-5183.
- Guide to Integrated Soil Management. Coordinators: Dave Huggins, Southwest Experiment Station, PO Box 428, Lamberton, MN 56152-0428; (507) 752-7372; Deborah Allan, Department of Soil, Water and Climate, 439 Borlaug Hall, St. Paul, MN 55108; (612) 625-3158; and Ann Lewandowski, Department of Geography, 414 Social Sciences Building, Minneapolis, MN 55455; (612) 871-9315.
- Creation of Educational Materials for the Transition to Organic Production and Certification of Organic Crops in Minnesota. Coordinators: Lisa Gulbranson, New Horizons Management Services; (612) 645-6764; and Anne Woods, Director, Midwest Organic Alliance, North Plaza Bldg., Suite 208, 5217 Wayzata Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN 55416; (612) 593-2790.
- Whole Farm Planning Educational Materials Development. Contact: David Mulla, Department of Soil, Water and Climate, 439 Borlaug Hall, St. Paul, MN 55108; (612) 625-6721; and John Lamb, The Minnesota Project, 1885 University Ave., W. #315, St. Paul, MN 55104; (612) 645-6159.
- Self-Guiding Decision Support System for Producers Choosing Alternative Hog Production Systems. Coordinators: Prescott Bergh, Outreach Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Agriculture Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program, 90 W. Plato Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55107; (612) 215-0367; and Peter Reese, Strategic Marketing and Product Development Consultant, New Market, MN.
- Developing a Minnesota Agroforestry Resource Guide. Contact: Jan Joannides and Scott Josiah, co-coordinators, Center for Integrated Natural Resources and Agricultural Management (CINRAM), 115 Green Hall, U of M, St. Paul, MN 55108; (612) 624-7418.

The funding for these grants was made possible thanks to the 1995 Minnesota Legislature's appropriation to MISA (through a contract with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture) for the development of a sustainable agriculture information exchange. Other activities resulting from this funding include the development of a sustainable agriculture World Wide Web site here in Minnesota, coming soon. For more

information on the grants or MISA's Information Exchange, contact Debra Elias at (612) 625-8217, or e-mail elias005@maroon.tc.umn.edu

Marketing information highlights SFA annual meeting

Marketing was what 175 attendees to the Sustainable Farming Association (SFA) of Minnesota annual meeting heard about February 24 in Duluth.

Keynote speaker Laura Freeman, of Laura's Lean Beef in Lexington, Ky., told how she developed her business into a multi-million dollar enterprise serving national markets. She spoke extensively about the company's quality standards and the special relationship Laura's Lean Beef has developed with its farmer-suppliers to maintain those quality standards. Following a workshop given by Freeman, a group of farmers from SFA's Coteau Ridge Chapter agreed to meet with representatives from Laura's to explore the possibility of forming a co-op to ship to the company's new Omaha processing facility.

On a more local level, almost all of the 175 attendees toured the mobile chicken processing bus owned by the SFA Northeast Chapter. The bus can travel from farm to farm to process relatively small lots of chickens in a sanitary and efficient manner. The chickens are then marketed directly to customers by the farmers. The bus works well, according to Jim Taylor of the Northeast Chapter, but supplying labor economically has been a problem.

Laura and Marvin Bihl, Clearwater, Minn. direct marketers of organic beef, also spoke at the conference. "This has worked well for us," Laura, a retired nurse, said. "We only have a small herd but we wanted to prove it could be done. We wanted to develop a model for others to use on a larger scale."

Conference attendees also heard from Craig Murphy of western Minnesota on how to profitably produce and market organic grains, and from Mike Olund of northeastern Minnesota about the production and marketing of organic greenhouse tomatoes. In addition, there were workshops on the economics of rotational grazing.

"This was an excellent conference. Duluth was a great place to hold it and the Northeast Chapter was a gracious host," SFA Program Manager Tim King said. Next year's annual meeting is scheduled to be held in southeastern Minnesota.

For more information contact, King at (612) 732-6203.

Swine producers have many options

In spite of highly publicized images of the inevitability of huge hog confinement systems dominating the agricultural landscape in the near future, there is good news to report about the swine industry. That was the upshot of a conference held in mid-February in Ames, Iowa. The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa Pork Industry Center, Beginning Farmer Center, Iowa State Extension, and Iowa Pork Producers Association brought together pork producers and experts to look at ways to raise swine besides large confinement systems.

The day-long conference drew some 230 persons--over 130 of them farmers--to exchange "how-to" information on a host of options still open to swine producers. The group examined ways to remain competitive in the rapidly changing industry. They drew on the experience of Swedish scientists and farmers attending the conference who produce pork under some of the most stringent environmental and

animal welfare rules in the world. They looked at changing markets, animal welfare and husbandry, and systems that use outdoor production, deep bedding, and low-cost hooped and remodeled structures.

The conference was upbeat, can-do, and positive. The consensus of the group was that the independent small producer will continue to represent a viable and vital segment of Midwest pork production. Producers left with optimism and ideas, perhaps summed up best by one who said, "After today, I am not discouraged about raising hogs. This meeting showed me that options exist besides the large total confinement systems." Another said, "I was thinking of quitting my operation, but now I believe I can compete."

A proceeding of "Swine System Options for Iowa" is currently in production and will be available later this spring from the Leopold Center at no charge. If you want to receive a copy of this publication when it becomes available, please contact the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at (515) 294-3711; e-mail at leocenter@iastate.edu Adapted from an article by Dennis Keeney, director, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

MISA board members profiled

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) is governed by a Board of Directors. According to the MISA by-laws, the 15-member board shall be comprised of seven sustainable agriculture practitioners, four U of M employees, and the remainder representing the community. In the April, May and June issues of the newsletter, we will be profiling the MISA Board members.

Carol Ekarius and her husband operate a diversified livestock operation in Verndale, Minnesota. Seasonal grass-based dairying is the primary enterprise, supplemented by direct marketing of beef, pork and lamb. Carol is actively involved with the Sustainable Farming Association, and is past chair of the Central Chapter. Her term on the MISA board is from the beginning of 1996 through 1998.

Randy Meyer and his family operate "Pine View Dairy, Inc.," a family-held farm corporation located in Lake City, Minnesota. Their farm includes a 95-cow semi-seasonal dairy, rotationally grazed on 280 acres, with hay, oats, barley, winter rye and sorghum-sudan in rotation. The farm is 100 percent certified organic and the family markets milk through CROPP (Organic Valley). Randy's other affiliations are: state chair, SFA; chair, Hiawatha SFA; local advisory board member for Midwest Organic Alliance; and board member for local Wells Creek watershed. Randy's appointed term is from the beginning of 1996 through 1998.

Deon Stuthman is a professor in the Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics at the University of Minnesota, where he leads the oat breeding and genetics research project. He has shifted some of the project emphasis to more sustainable agriculture-related activities, including the variety release of Pal, a semi-dwarf oat that is well-suited for companion cropping. He currently serves on the board of the American Oat Association, and is treasurer as well. Deon is chair of MISA's Finance Committee and a member of the Executive Committee. He recently served as president of the Council of Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST). Deon grew up on mixed crop and livestock farms in northeastern Nebraska. Deon's appointed term is from the beginning of 1995 through 1997.

Mark Thell and his family operate a 230-acre beef and vegetable farm in Carlton County, which they purchased in 1987. Through direct market, roadside stand, and u-pick sales they are able to market most of their beef, sweet corn, chickens, eggs, raspberries, peas and barley themselves. All of the components of their operation are integrated as much as possible. They recently started using rotational grazing practices with their 50-head herd of cows and calves. Mark serves on the Sustainable Farming Association Northeast Chapter Board of Directors, and also works off the farm. His appointed term is

from the beginning of 1995 through 1997.

Bruce Vondracek is the Assistant Unit Leader of the Minnesota Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and an Adjunct Associate Professor in the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife. His areas of research include stream quality, fish habitats and restoration, and biological indicators in aquatic ecosystems. Bruce is a member of the Monitoring Team funded by MISA. His appointed term is from the beginning of 1996 through 1998.

We can use your story ideas

Keep the story ideas coming. Send them to editor Joseph Kurtz at 405 Coffey Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108; phone (612) 625-3168. E-mail pkurtz@extension.umn.edu Other editorial board members are Helene Murray (612) 625-0220, Don Olson (612) 625-9292 and Bill Wilcke (612) 625-8205.

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.