

# *Sustainable Agriculture*

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## **No easy answers to decision case studies**

Can a farm family expand the hog operation and still live peacefully with their neighbors? Do you take land out of crop production and replace it with vegetative strips? How do you maintain crop yields and be a good steward of water quality? Tough questions and they'll be addressed at three training conferences this fall. The sessions are Sept. 26 at LaCrosse, Wis., Oct. 17 at Fairmont, Minn., and Oct. 24 at St. Cloud, Minn. All sessions run from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. There is no registration fee. Facilitators are Cindy Arnevik and Kent Thiesse, educators with the Minnesota Extension Service; Tammy Dunrud, with the University of Minnesota's Program for Decision Cases; and Helene Murray, Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA). For more information, contact Tammy Dunrud, 411 Borlaug Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108, (612) 624-1211. (E-mail:dunru001@gold.tc.umn.edu)

You can also get the set of three "Minnesota River Decision Cases" from the Minnesota Extension Service, University of Minnesota. The decision cases are based on real life examples, although the names have been changed.

The Wilder Farm is a four-page summary of Jay Wilder's dilemma in deciding whether to take crop land along the Chippewa River out of production and replace it with vegetative buffer strips through a program promoted by the local FFA chapter. The issue with the Hugel Farm is whether price protection through the Feed Grain program is high enough to offset yield penalties with a new no-till system. And the Falke Farm delves into the volatile issue of livestock expansion and its effect on community relations, water quality and other environmental issues.

The case studies include a teacher's guide and slide sets for two of the farms. The "Minnesota River Decision Cases" are available for \$25 plus shipping charges. For details, call 1-800-876-8636, or 624-4900 in the Twin Cities.

## **River Friendly Farmer program recognizes deserving farmers**

The new "River Friendly Farmer" program recognizes farmers for doing their part to protect Minnesota's rivers and watersheds. It's been popular in Minnesota and has created interest in other states. To help introduce the program, the Minnesota Alliance for Crop Residue Management is sponsoring four meetings in September. The meetings start with registration at 10:30 a.m. and are scheduled as follows:

- Sept. 17, Bede Ballroom, University of Minnesota-Crookston
- Sept. 18, Brigittes Café, Clearwater
- Sept. 24, Holiday Inn South, Rochester
- Sept. 25, Southwest Experiment Station, Lamberton

Agenda items include the program's purpose, nomination process, proposed recognition of deserving farmers and the perspectives of ag business and farm groups. For more information, contact Tim Wagar at (507) 280-2866 or Michael Price at (612) 290-3677.

### **Consumer awareness workshop set for Sept. 14 in St. Cloud**

Howard Lyman, director of the "Eating with Conscience Campaign" in Washington, D.C.; and Dan Guenther and Margaret Pennings of Common Harvest Farm near Osceola, Wis., will speak at a consumer awareness workshop Sept. 14 in St. Cloud, Minn. Consumers will learn more about where food comes from and how to promote family farmers who produce healthful food while leaving a positive effect on families, communities and the environment.

Guenther and Pennings will talk about Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). Their Common Harvest Farm provides organic produce to 300 to 500 individuals (150 shares) for 20 weeks of the year, from June 1 through Nov. 1. They farm six acres of intensively cultivated land. Weekly labor requirements are 200 hours, about half of which comes from interns. The project helps people learn to eat foods in season, cook with fresh food ingredients and prepare nutritious meals quickly—to connect them with where their food comes from.

Lyman is a fourth generation farmer from Montana. He was involved in agriculture when the message was "get bigger or get out." He says chemically based agricultural production methods are not sustainable and is convinced that changes must come from producers and consumers at the grassroots level.

Registration begins at 10 a.m. The program also includes presentations by the Central Chapter of the Sustainable Farming Association and the Good Earth Food Coop. Pre-registration postmarked by Aug. 31 is \$12; \$20 thereafter. Contact DeEtta Bilek, Rt. 1, Box 4, Aldrich, MN 56434, (218) 445-5475.

### **Southwest Minnesota CRP field day is Sept. 5**

A field day at the Lincoln County Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) will be held Thursday, Sept. 5 from 9:30 until noon. The demonstration site and field day is located two and one-half miles north of Lake Benton on State Highway 75 and three-fourths of a mile east on County Road 121. Crop options, tillage and no till options, weed control and insect controls will be among the practices demonstrated.

The CRP project stemmed from the magnitude of CRP in Southwest Minnesota, says Bob Byrnes, Lyon County extension educator. In the six counties of Southwest Minnesota, 1,489 contracts covering 100,135 acres expire in 1996, 1997 and 1998. In anticipation that some of that land will return to production, questions that have arisen include: What agronomic and management practices should be used? What are the economic consequences? Following the goals of CRP, what strategies are appropriate to limit soil erosion and protect water quality? What farm system alternatives are feasible?

In response, the Minnesota Extension, in cooperation with the Lincoln Soil and Water Conservation District received permission to use currently enrolled CRP land in Lincoln County for research and demonstration purposes. Demonstration research activities started near Lake Benton in 1995 and are continuing through 1996, Byrnes says.

Agronomic issues addressed focus on corn, soybeans, alfalfa, and small grain growth and development plus weed, insect and gopher control in first-year post-CRP. Economic issues focus on cost of production versus economic return. Environmental issues addressed include biomass management, tillage and no till

residue management as well as mineralized inorganic nitrogen impacts on surface and groundwater quality. For more information, call the Lyon County extension office at (507) 537-6702.

### **LSP case study: sustainable, family-raised hogs are sustainable**

The Land Stewardship Project's (LSP) latest farm case study shows that sustainable hog production on a diversified operation can be profitable and good for the environment. The report, "An Agriculture That Makes Sense: Making Money on Hogs," focuses on the 50-sow hog enterprise of one Minnesota crop and livestock operation. In the analysis, the farm's production records are compared to the averages of the top performing operations as reported in a regional Minnesota Farm Business Management program annual report.

The case study farm minimizes expenses through such production practices as outdoor farrowing and low cost housing. Instead of focusing on increasing productivity, the farm family involved in the study emphasizes profitability. The enterprise produces hogs for about 13 cents per pound cheaper than the industry standard. For a copy of the study, send \$4 (that includes postage, but Minnesota residents add 6.5 percent sales tax) to: LSP, 2200 4th St., White Bear Lake, MN 55110. For information on bulk orders, call LSP at (612) 653-0618.

### **SARE preproposals for project funding due Sept. 13**

Preproposals for funding research and education/demonstration projects are due at the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) office Sept. 13, 1996. Priority areas for FY-97 funding include emerging issues, integration and diversification of farming systems, sustainable livestock systems, networking, food systems, environmentally sensitive land and water resources, and environmentally sound management practices. Last year, 17 proposals were funded and the average grant was \$70,000 over two years. For more information, contact Don Olson at (612) 625-9292.

### **Machinery cost figures available in publication, web site**

What does it cost you per acre to operate a combine? To chisel plow? A good reference is a new publication available from the University of Minnesota's Extension Service. It's called "Minnesota Farm Machinery Economic Cost Estimates for 1996." Get one from your county extension office, or call 1-800-876-8636, or (612) 624-4900 in the Twin Cities area. Or, check the Web site for the Minnesota Extension Service; select the Crops option (under Topics).

### **Worm Wise News is a new magazine**

The International Worm Growers Association sees the "lowly earthworm playing a significant role in resolving many environmental problems, such as overuse of chemical fertilizers, depleted topsoil fertility, soil contamination and the growing landfill crisis." The association has recently gone international and received support from foundations and universities around the world. They've started a new quarterly publication, Worm Wise News. For more information, contact the International Worm Growers, P.O. Box 900184, Palmdale, CA 93543.

## Other resources . . .

The new, 3rd edition of the Sustainable Agriculture Directory of Expertise is available in both softcover and electronic versions. For details on the directory's content, contact Andy Clark, Room 304 National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, MD 20705-2351, (301) 504-6425, fax (301) 504-6409, e-mail: [san@nal.usda.gov](mailto:san@nal.usda.gov)

"The Farmer's & Gardener's Resource Catalog" is a free catalog with 60 listings of agricultural, gardening and herb books and special reports. It's available by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to New World Publishing, 3085 Sheridan St., Placerville, CA 95667. Or, check the New World Publishing Web site.

## 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, (612) 625-1794. E-mail: [jsperbeck@extension.umn.edu](mailto:jsperbeck@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.

## Calendar of Events

Sept. 4, 11 a.m.	Variable rate fertility on ridged corn and soybeans, Howard Kittleson, Blooming Prairie, (507) 593-7158
Sept. 5, 1 p.m.	Buckwheat growers group marketing, Tom Bilek, Alddrich, (218) 445-5475
Sept. 5, 10 a.m.	Grazing day, West Central Experiment Station, Morris, (320) 589-1711
Sept. 5, 9:30 a.m.	CRP demonstration & field day, Lake Benton, (507) 537-6702
Sept. 7, 2 p.m.	Low input hog system, James and LeAnn Van Der Pol, Kerkhoven, (612) 847-3432
Sept. 7, 10 a.m.	Perch enterprise budget, John Reynolds/Midwest Fish & Crayfish, Merrifield, (218) 765-3030

Sept. 11, 8 a.m.	Fall field day, Southwest Experiment Station, Lambertton, (507) 752-7372
Sept. 12, 8 a.m.	Fall field day, Southern Experiment Station, Waseca, (507) 835-3620
Sept. 12, 10 a.m.	Increased forage production via better control of water runoff, James Sovell, Ivanhoe, (507) 694-1486
Sept. 12, 11 a.m.	Silage making demonstration, Doug Gunnink, Gaylord, (612) 237-5162
Sept. 13, 1 p.m.	Non-chemical weed control, Craig and Joanie Murphy, Morris, (320) 392-5176
Sept. 14, 10 a.m.	Diversified grazing, Ed and Cathy Radermacher, Bellingham, (320) 568-2110
Sept. 16-18	New approaches to rural nonpoint source pollution, Holiday Inn, La Crosse, Wis., (612) 972-3908 for conference information
Sept. 21	Sheep day, West Central Experiment Station, Morris, (320) 589-1711
Sept. 26, 3 p.m.	Interseeding hairy vetch in sunflower, Hans Kandel, Moorhead, (218) 253-2897