

# *Sustainable Agriculture*

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## **New study finds farmers are optimistic about the future of dairying**

Some Minnesota farmers who graze their dairy herds are optimistic about the future of the state's dairy industry, according to a new study of 29 grazing operations. You can find the study results in a new publication, *Knee Deep in Grass*, available from county extension offices in Minnesota. You can pay with your credit card by calling the Minnesota Extension Service Distribution Center at (612) 624-4900 or 1-800-876-8636. The cost is \$5 plus shipping charges and 7 percent sales tax for Minnesota residents.

Management intensive grazing (MIG) techniques are being rapidly adopted in parts of Minnesota. The report summarizes in-person interviews conducted in 1994 with 29 Minnesota dairy farm families using MIG practices. The farms were typical Midwestern dairy farms; almost all were single family operations averaging 58 cows and approximately 300 acres of land.

The families said their quality of life improved after adopting MIG since they shifted from repetitious tasks such as baling hay and repairing equipment to duties like pasture and business management. And graziers with seasonally freshened dairy herds reported even more time savings, especially during the dry period.

Profits on farms using MIG improved since farms have drastically reduced input purchases such as feed and fuel. Many people support the idea that MIG can slow the exodus of Minnesota dairy farms and reduce further rural degradation. MIG helps maintain profits on small to mid-size family dairies, preserves existing community jobs and encourages farm children to continue farming.

MIG may help Midwestern dairies compete with large western dairies. Charlie Opitz, a large-scale Wisconsin dairy grazer, says "If the Midwest realizes that grazing is the cornerstone of dairying here, California can't touch us." The report was published by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) and the Minnesota Extension Service. Authors are Brian Loeffler, Earl Fuller, Dennis Johnson and Helene Murray. For more information on the project, contact Dennis Johnson, West Central Experiment Station, Hwy. 329, Morris, MN 56267, (320) 589-1711. Email: [dairydgj@caa.mrs.umn.edu](mailto:dairydgj@caa.mrs.umn.edu)

## **Thompson field day report available**

The fall field day at the Thompson's (Dick, Sharon and Rex) farm in Boone, Iowa is one of the best educational events in sustainable agriculture. The 1996 field day featured a new design for an open front building to isolate single sows for farrowing. Rex designed the new "isolit" after getting suggestions for the design at the 1995 field day.

Their annual report is available by sending \$10 to Thompson-On-farm Research, 2035-190th St., Boone IA 50036-1560, (515) 432-1560. The report is over 90 pages long. In addition to their research results, it has discussions of the Thompson's sources of inspiration and their ideas on education and rural development.

Their research and education program is partially supported by funding from Jean Wallace Douglas through the Wallace Institute and other sources. However, Dick, Sharon and their son Rex support themselves from their 300-acre grain and livestock farm. The money they get for research and education doesn't cover all expenses.-by Jim Tjepkema, (507) 256-4847

### **Report available on 2,4-D and other phenoxy herbicides**

Loss of the phenoxy herbicides in the U.S. would seriously reduce our ability to manage broadleaf weeds in over 65 crops and many non-cropland situations, according to a report from the National Agricultural Pesticide Impact Assessment Program. The national task force was chaired by Orvin C. Burnside, a weed scientist at the University of Minnesota. Comments regarding the future need for phenoxy herbicides should be sent to Judith M. Coombs, Special Review and Reregistration Division, Office of Pesticide Programs, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 401 M. St. S.W. (7508 W), Washington, D.C. 20460, telephone (703) 308-8046 or FAX (703) 308-8773.

All pesticides registered before November 1984 must either be re-registered by 2001 or have their use discontinued. This legislation could result in the cancellation of nearly half of all our pesticides, the report says, and 2,4-D and other phenoxy herbicides are part of this review. Copies of the report are available from Orvin C. Burnside, Department of Agronomy & Plant Genetics, 411 Borlaug Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108, (612) 625-9763.

Comments regarding the future need for phenoxy herbicides should be sent to Judith M. Coombs, Special Review and Reregistration Division, Office of Pesticide Programs, 20460, telephone (703) 308-8046 or FAX (703) 308-8773.

### **MISA program review report set for Nov. 15**

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) is conducting a five-year review to gauge MISA's progress to date, define its future course, gather information from the public and share information about MISA's goals and activities. The review consists of three steps. First, an independent consultant will interview nine people familiar with MISA programs and goals. Second, a mail survey will be conducted to reach the broader audience MISA has worked with. And third, an outside review panel will visit the Twin Cities area on Nov. 14-15, 1996.

The review panel is chaired by Dr. Jerry DeWitt, Iowa State University Extension Service and ISU entomology professor. Other panel members include Senator Tracy Beckman, third term legislator from Bricelyn, MN; Dr. Marilyn DeLong, associate director, University of Minnesota's College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences; Dr. Mary Hanks, supervisor of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Energy and Sustainable Agriculture program; Mr. Marvin Johnson, farmer and mayor of Independence; Minn.; Ms. Margaret Smith, farmer and Iowa State University extension educator; Dr. Conrad J. Weiser, dean emeritus of the College of Agricultural Sciences, Oregon State University.

The review committee will hold a public seminar to present preliminary findings at 11 a.m. Friday, Nov. 15, 1996 in room 306 Borlaug Hall on the University of Minnesota's St. Paul Campus. Contact MISA for more information about the review or public seminar.-Helene Murray, MISA Coordinator, (612) 625-8235, misamail@gold.tc.umn.edu

### **Buckwheat is an old crop with new possibilities**

Buckwheat pancakes, buckwheat muffins and buckwheat pasta were some of the menu items sampled by visitors to a buckwheat farm tour at Tom and DeEtta Bilek's farm near Aldrich earlier this fall.

A major export market for buckwheat could be Japan, where buckwheat pasta products are major consumer items. Buckwheat is the major ingredient in several types of pasta produced in Japan and shipped to the U.S. In addition to the grain crop, buckwheat has other potential uses. It can be used for weed control and for use on land coming out of the Conservation Reserve Program. It can be planted and used as a green manure, plow-down crop after about 30 days of growth.

The Bileks would like to form a group of farmers interested in forming a buckwheat association. They could raise their own crops, then work together to clean, store and market as a group to get the best price for their product. The Bileks, through the Central Minnesota SFA chapter, have a three-year lease on a buckwheat cleaning machine, partially funded through a grant from the Sustainable Agriculture Program of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the Agricultural Utilization and Resource Institute (AURI). Tom Bilek has mounted the cleaning machine on a four-wheel trailer so it can be hauled to other farms. He hopes the machine's availability will help convince other farmers to grow buckwheat.

For more information, contact the Bileks at Rt. 1, Box 4, Aldrich, MN 56534, (218)-445-5475, FAX 445-5673. (includes information from the Staples World, Sept. 12, 1996)

### **Where food comes from was topic of consumer awareness workshop**

"Ask people where food comes from and they'll say 'the grocery store,'" says Glen Borgerding of Freeport, chair of the Sustainable Farming Association of Central Minnesota. "They (consumers) take food for granted and are disconnected from its true source. We are trying to help them achieve appreciation for food," he said at a recent consumer awareness workshop in St. Cloud. The workshop was sponsored by the SFA's Princeton chapter, the Minnesota Extension Service, Minnesota Institute of Sustainable Agriculture and the Land Stewardship Project.

Another co-sponsor was St. Cloud's Good Earth Food Co-op, which prepared and served a lunch of locally produced foods, including bread, tomatoes, melons, cheese, stir-fry vegetables and ice cream. Speakers included Dan Guenther of Osceola, Wis. He and his family operate Common Harvest Farm, a Community Supported Agriculture project that provides organic produce for about 400 people during the growing season.

Somehow, Guenther said, American culture has lost the love of eating, the joy of cooking and the zest for farming. Preparing meals is considered a drudgery and families spend nearly half their food dollars outside the home. People who eat food have been separated from the farmers who produce it. But he delivers produce from his farm within hours of when it's picked. "I know these people and they know me. There is trust and understanding." (condensed from the St. Cloud Visitor, Sept. 26, 1996)

### **Heifer Project International now working with urban agriculture programs**

It's traditionally been a rural organization, but now Heifer Project International (HPI) is starting a program in Chicago, Ill., that will introduce animal agriculture to the urban poor. Other countries have long appreciated the value of livestock in cities. Europe has over 800 "city farms" that provide urbanites with the opportunity to work with animals and the land.

Several community groups in Chicago are interested in incorporating animals into their programs. Ideas range from raising honeybees on rooftops to cultivating vacant lots with draft power. HPI will provide

livestock and training to project recipients. The program is in the initial fund-raising stage, but HPI officials say there's great potential for farm animals to help address some of the problems associated with being poor in the city.

For more information, contact Skip Polson at 1-800- 422-0474 or Alison Meares at (312) 395-9330.

### **Coming events**

Dec. 6-7, Holistic Resource Management with Allan Savory, St. Francis Center, Little Falls. Registration is \$35, which includes meals. Contact DeEtta Bilek, (218) 445-5475.

Feb 6-7, 1997, Farmer-Led Watershed Initiatives Conference, Good Counsel Academy, Mankato. Contact Jim Kleinschmit or Emily Green, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), (612) 379-5980. Email: water@mtn.org

March 3-9, 1997, a farm tour to the Netherlands/Dutch "yardstick" tools for measuring environmental impacts. Contact Emily Green, IATP, (612) 379-5980. E-mail: egreen@iatp.org

### **Don Olson retires**

It was back in 1993 when Don Olson had the vision to start this newsletter. Some of us thought we'd have a hard time coming up with enough story ideas to fill one page front and back six times yearly. But Don was right and our skepticism was put to rest as we soon had plenty of story ideas for a monthly, four-page newsletter.

Don retired from the Minnesota Extension Service on Oct. 31. We're going to miss his friendly, effective and efficient way of dealing with this newsletter and with sustainable agriculture programs throughout the state.

With Don's retirement, Bill Wilcke will be coordinating sustainable agriculture programs for the Minnesota Extension Service. Bill is an extension engineer. He's on this newsletter's editorial board and is a MISA board member.

### **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.