Sustainable Agriculture

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Agri-tourism can add extra income to farming operations

They range from rural bed and breakfasts to petting zoos, farm tours, roadside vegetable farms and fee-based hunting. Called "agri-tourism" operations, they can help non-farm people learn about agriculture and provide supplemental family income that may beat looking for off-farm employment.

A pilot program initially sponsored by the University of Minnesota's Rural Development Council has identified over 100 families in four counties who are interested in exploring agri-tourism options. The counties are Wabasha, Goodhue, Olmsted and Dodge. The program is now being handed over to the farm family/private sector to develop, says Marc Weigle, a community program specialist with the Minnesota Extension Service.

A local leadership group of about 15 people will soon be organizing to identify interested farm families in the four-county area and develop a map of possible tour routes. Based on attendance at a recent workshop, Weigle says there's lots of interest in agri-tourism throughout Minnesota.

For more information on agri-tourism, contact Toni Smith, extension educator with the Wabasha County Extension Office at (612) 565-2662, e-mail: tsmith@extension.umn.edu. (See the next story for more information on the Rural Development Council).

U of M Rural Development Council has partnerships with 10 communities

The University of Minnesota's Rural Development Council was established in 1992 by President Nils Hasselmo to support rural and community development. The council is based on the commitment of the land grant university to teaching, research and outreach—and its special responsibility to the public.

To help foster and evaluate university partnerships with communities, the Rural Development Council initiated a pilot program in 10 communities that brings university student interns and faculty into communities to assist with locally identified projects. Evaluation is a key part of the project, says Roger Steinberg, extension educator with the Minnesota Extension Service and a member of the council. "We hope to learn how the university can more effectively help rural communities," he says.

Wabasha County was part of an early pilot project with the council. Current community internship proposals are: Center for Small Towns project, Grant County; Rural Communities in Transition Academy (regional project); county Services Restructuring Program, Scott County; Land Use Decision Making, city of Marshall; Translating Ecologically Based Development into Public Policy, Cambridge; Changing Patterns of Rural Land Ownership in Goodhue and Wabasha Counties; School Within a School, Sibley County; Building an Agri-Tourism Infrastructure, Wabasha, Goodhue, Olmsted and Dodge counties; Beginning Farmer Education, Wabasha County; and an Eagle Watch Interpretive Center-Architectural Model, also in Wabasha County.

For more information on the possibility of internships, contact Carla Carlson at (612) 624-5260, e-mail: ccarlson@hhh.umn.edu.

The council, which is chaired by G. Edward Schuh, dean of the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, recently co-sponsored a session on rural development with Minnesota Rural Partners. Council members come from colleges and departments on the Twin Cities and coordinate campuses with outreach as part of their mission.

Hoop structures for hogs cost less, but consider the pros and cons

Many swine producers looking for lower cost structures are interested in "hoop" structures to grow and finish swine. The Quonset-shaped hoop structures can be used successfully to finish pigs, but producers need to be aware of the advantages and disadvantages.

Manufacturers are offering these units for sale, but there's little objective information to help producers decide if a hoop structure is a good investment. However, a new 16-page publication can help. It's called "Hoop Structures for Grow-Finish Swine," AED-41, published by the Midwest Plan Service.

It has answers to basic questions about hoop structures; design and construction details; information on managing ventilation, bedding and manure; and a cost analysis with a sample budget. Here are issues for producers thinking about building hoop structures to consider:

- Hoop structures used as swine housing aren't fully proven. There's little history to show how reliable and durable they'll be.
- Managing winter ventilation is crucial. Hoop structures should not be closed so tightly that moisture and warm air are trapped inside.
- Hoop structures have lower fixed but higher operating costs (like bedding, labor, animal efficiency) than confinement facilities.
- Hoop structures are versatile and can be used for other things such as storing machinery.
- Since hoop structures have a lower initial cost, producers can test their capability in swine production without a large investment.
- If you'd need more than one hoop structure for a swine operation, the residue generated with more than four hoop structures would become overwhelming.

The bulletin was written by faculty from the University of Nebraska and Iowa State University and reviewed by extension and research faculty throughout the North Central Region.
It's available for $4 per copy (plus tax) from Terry Capaul, 219 Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108, (612) 625-7024.
The Midwest Plan Service facilitates cooperation among the land grant universities of the North Central Region in producing publications on equipment for crop and livestock production. A complete catalog of their materials is also available from the above address.

How does managed grazing affect stream ecology, water quality?

One important way to control nonpoint source pollution on farms has been to manage riparian areas carefully—traditionally by establishing filter strips of vegetation. The problem? It takes land out of

production and requires fencing and vegetation maintenance.

Rotational grazing may be an attractive alternative to protecting streams with filter strips. It can be a compromise between excluding livestock along streambanks and continuous grazing, which causes water pollution and degrades streambanks. An ongoing study sponsored by the Agricultural Ecosystems Research Project of Wisconsin is evaluating management options for riparian areas.

The research is being conducted on spring-fed trout streams on 19 southwestern Wisconsin farms. Potential best management practices being studies are ungrazed vegetative filter strips and rotationally grazed pasture. They're being compared to continuously grazed riparian areas. Information about the fish and aquatic insect populations of the streams is being collected to evaluate stream health.

Stream bank characteristics are being measured to determine the soil erosion potential of different management options. Wildlife being studied includes birds, amphibians and small mammals. The first season of the two to three-year study is completed.

At this stage, researchers say, fish and aquatic invertebrate communities seem less affected by local land use practices than by overall condition of the watershed (the effects of what is going on upstream have a bigger influence than what is going on at the study site). However, terrestrial wildlife are responding to local management of the riparian area at the study site.

For more information, contact Laura Paine, University of Wisconsin Agronomy Dept., 1575 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706, (608) 262-6203, e-mail: lkpaine@facstaff.wisc.edu.

Join a CSA farm for fresh vegetables

Consider joining a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm if you're interested in receiving fresh, naturally-produced vegetables every week during the growing season. CSA is an arrangement where people buy shares in a farming operation on an annual basis.

In return, farmers provide a weekly supply of fresh, natural produce throughout the growing season. Details of the share arrangements and prices charged for the shares vary from farm-to-farm.

Shares are often sold out by early spring. More than two dozen CSA farms have sprung up in the Twin Cities-western Wisconsin area in the past decade. For a listing of CSA farms in the region, call the Land Stewardship Project's Twin Cities office at (612) 872-0618, or the Minnesota Food Association in Minneapolis at (612) 872-3298. For a national listing of CSA operations, call the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association toll-free at 1-800-516-7797.

On Lake Superior: environmental education conference set for May 17-19

The "On Lake Superior: Environmental Education Conference" May 17-19 in Duluth will explore topics from sustainable communities to three-legged frogs. Consider attending if you teach, train or inform others about environmental issues—or are just interested in the environment.

In addition to speakers and diverse concurrent sessions, there will be field trips like sea kayaking and a trip to the International Wolf Center in Ely, Minn. Activities are designed to encourage family participation.

Workshops such as "The Power of Play: Playful Activities for Building Community," and "Safe Home,

Clean Earth" will help you educate people about the environment and to deal with hazardous household products responsibly. In total, there will be nine field trips, six workshops and 36 concurrent sessions.

Concurrent sessions are built around six conference themes: The Classroom and Beyond, Sustainable Communities, The Natural Environment, Economics and the Environment, Lake Superior, and New and Innovative Programs.

The conference web site provides registration forms and information. Registration must be received by April 30 for a special rate. For registration questions, contact Best Meetings at 1-800-958-8875.

The conference is sponsored by the Minnesota Association for Environmental Education, the Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance and the Minnesota Environmental Education Advisory Board.

About this newsletter...

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We're always looking for story ideas. 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. Other editorial board members: Helene Murray (612) 625-0220, murra@021.tc.umn.edu; Tom Wegner (612) 374-8400, twegner@extension.umn.edu; and Bill Wilcke (612) 625-8205, wwilcke@extension.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.