

Sustainable Agriculture

Volume 6, Issue 8 – August 1998

Minnesota Grown program helps connect low income consumers to producers

A Minnesota Grown Community Food Project is helping connect both rural and urban low income consumers directly to Minnesota food producers. It's a joint effort of the Minnesota Food Association, Sustainable Resources Center, and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

The pilot program is designed to supply low income people, both working and unemployed, with nutritious, safe and affordable food that is to the extent possible, produced and processed in Minnesota. "We want to promote self-reliance, economic development and job creation in the pilot communities," says Jan O'Donnell of the Minnesota Food Association.

Pilot sites include the Frogtown neighborhood in St. Paul, the Phillips neighborhood in Minneapolis, and the town of Morris. Some of the communities do not have a full service grocery and only limited access to nutritious, affordable local products.

Part of the program is a Minnesota Grown Food Voucher system being started with funding from the 1998 Minnesota Legislature. "This is an effort to link a government assistance program into direct purchasing from Minnesota producers and processors," O'Donnell says.

Distribution and selling opportunities are scheduled at two Minnesota locations:

Aug. 15 and Oct. 3, Cedar Ave. Field, 25th St. East and Cedar Ave., Minneapolis (\$19,000 of voucher distribution). Requested foods include all fresh produce, wild rice, maple syrup, blueberries, chicken, beef and hominy.

Aug. 28 and Sept. 19, Minnesota Grown Product Fair, Morris (\$18,000 voucher distribution).

Sellers need to provide their own tables, awnings or other equipment. Selling will begin at 8 a.m. and end at 6 p.m. at each site. Contact Tris McCann at (612) 872-3298 for more information.

Where have all the farmers gone?

I observe the end of the owner-operator in farming," says Joe Degnan, former editor of Farm Industry News (FIN) magazine. "Independence and individual business decision making—one of the last forts of private business—is at risk. One farmer I know calls it the 'Wal-Marting' of agriculture."

Degnan's opinion piece was in the May-June issue of FIN. A condensed version follows:

"There is an unwritten policy of trying to eliminate farmers as an integral part of agriculture and it is

disguised with many terms, like efficiency or industrialization. And I stay angry when I hear farmers kidding themselves—jumping on the industrial-ag bandwagon as if it is some Holy Grail, a moral crusade.

Food is not cheap... somebody's making lots of money, but it isn't you (the farmer). And in terms of size and efficiency, neither one equals the other. It is a proven fact that from 300 acres up and 1,000 hogs or bigger, size absolutely does not increase efficiency. Size of operation is not the issue. We should instead be focused on the dollar value farmers are awarded for their part in the food chain.

Growing food and feeding people is a very noble, priceless occupation. I put it at the top of all professions. So why is it at the bottom of the economic ladder? And why are so many large corporations trying to control it?

We are headed for another economic free-fall in agriculture. The super rich, super established will survive. But I believe we have a wrong-headed farming strategy. We have no assurances for food security—no safety net, no regulatory control over corporate strong-arming and a crumbling rural infrastructure—bridges, schools, rails and storage. As Thomas Jefferson noted, America is too large, physically, to not have a strong rural community.”

U of M looking for pork producers who use alternative systems

The University of Minnesota is looking for pork producers interested in alternative systems for raising hogs. “The University is developing a research and educational program on Alternative Swine Production Systems,” says Julie Tranquilla, associate director of the program. “The intent of this program is to gain a better understanding of these production systems in Minnesota conditions. Developing educational tools for use by pork producers interested in using these systems is also a goal.”

As the program develops, Tranquilla is looking for input from interested producers. “If you are using hoop structures, deep-bedded systems, pasture farrowing, or some other pork production system that you consider to require relatively low capital investment, please send us your name and a little information about yourself,” she says. “We’d also like to hear from you if you’re simply interested in finding out more about these systems. We’d like to know what questions you have and what kind of research projects would interest you. In addition, we’re looking for producers to participate in on-farm research focusing on pig production and economic viability.”

Tranquilla says those joining the mailing list for Alternative Swine Production Systems will receive information about publications, field days, and conferences concerning these production techniques.

To join the list, write down your name, address, and phone number and indicate if you are currently using pasture for hogs, deep-bedded housing, hoop structures, or some other system. Also indicate any pork production challenges relating to your system with which you would like help. Send the information to Julie Tranquilla, 385 Animal Science/Vet Med., University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108, telephone (612) 625-6224, e-mail tranq001@tc.umn.edu.

U of M vice president for agricultural policy accepts Florida position

Mike Martin, dean of the College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences (COAFES) and vice president for agricultural policy, has accepted a position at the University of Florida. He will become vice president for agriculture and natural resources there effective Oct. 12. We would like to thank him for his support of sustainable agriculture programs in Minnesota.

Pre-proposals for SARE grants due Sept. 11

The North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR SARE) program has just released a call for research/education pre-proposals. Priority areas for the coming year are:

- Synthesizing and Communicating Results of Past NCR SARE Project Results
- Consumer Preferences for and Buying Practices of Sustainable Products
- Assessment of Risks Associated with Sustainable Agriculture
- Economic, Environmental and Social Impacts of Integrated Farming Systems
- Emerging Issues

The first priority on synthesizing past research is an excellent opportunity for someone looking for a project to work on as part of an advanced degree program. Pre-proposals are due Sept. 11, 1998, and successful applicants have until Jan. 22, 1999, to complete full proposals.

Approximately \$1.3 million will be available to fund 15 to 20 projects starting fall 1999 in the 12-state North Central Region.

You can get a copy of the call for pre-proposals by downloading it from the NCR SARE web site or by emailing sare001@unlvm.unl.edu or calling (402/472-7081), the NCR SARE office in Lincoln, Neb. Feel free to contact Helene Murray (murra021@tc.umn.edu) or Bill Wilcke (wwilcke@extension.umn.edu) for more information.

The Monitoring Tool Box: a new guide to on-farm monitoring

The Monitoring Tool Box is now available for farmers interesting in learning easy-to-use techniques for monitoring the impact of management decisions on their land, finances and family. It's a handy, 115-page guide that shows families how to fit monitoring into their daily farm activities. Sponsors included the Land Stewardship Project (LSP), the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) and SARE. It's available for \$35, which includes the accompanying video *Close to the Ground*, and a subscription to a new monitoring newsletter. Contact LSP, PO. Box 130, Lewiston, MN 55952, (507) 523-3366.

Calendar of 1998 events...

These events are sponsored by numerous organizations. For more information, you can check MISA's website.

August 13, Field Day, Lac Qui Parle County. First and Second Grazers in a Year Round Pasture Setting Served by a Frost Free Water System. Contact Dan & Don Struxness (320) 752-4733

August 15, Field Day, St. Louis County. Evaluating Kura Clover's Potential for Long Term Forage-Legume Persistence. Contact Tony Jedlicka (218) 476-2892

August 18-19, Field Day, Morrison County. Management Intensive Grazing Groups. Contact David Stish (320) 584-8159

August 20, 6:30 p.m., Organic Grower's Tour, Angie and Craig Anderson farm, Dassel. Contact the Meeker County Extension Office (320) 693-5275

August 20, Two Projects in One Field Day, Lincoln County. Increased Forage Production Through Control of Water Runoff and Nutrient Recycling; contact James Sovell (507) 694-1486. Living Snow Fences for Improved Pasture Production; contact Mike Hansen (507) 694-1825

August 22, Field Day, Wadena County. Management Techniques for Buckwheat Production and Marketing. Contact Tom Bilek (218) 445-5475

August 25, Field Day, Itasca County. Forage Mixture Performance. Contact Itasca County SWCD (218) 326-6595

Sept. 2, 2-5 p.m., Horticulture Day, North Central Experiment Station, Grand Rapids, (218) 327-4490

Sept. 3, Two Projects in One Field Day, Red Lake County. Interseeding Hairy Vetch in Sunflower; contact Hans Kandel (218) 253-2897. Bringing CRP Lands into Organic Production with Buckwheat, Rye and Hairy Vetch Cover Crops; contact Jaime DeRosier (218) 253-2861

Sept. 3, Beef/Forage Field Day, North Central Experiment Station, Grand Rapids, (218) 327-4490

Sept. 5, Field Day, Crow Wing County. Yellow Perch Enterprise Budget. Contact John Reynolds (218) 765-3030

Sept. 9, Fall Field Day, Southwest Experiment Station, Lamberton, (507) 752-7372

Sept. 10, Corn & Soybean Day, Southern Experiment Station, Waseca, (507) 835-3620

Sept. 10, Field Day, Otter Tail County. Learning Advanced Management Intensive Grazing Through Mentoring. Contact Richard Drevlow or Bob Stommes (218) 736-2049

Sept. 10, Field Day, Stevens County. Legume Cover Crops Interseeded in Corn as a Source of Nitrogen. Contact Alan Olness or Dian Lopez (320) 589-3411 ext. 131

Sept. 10, Field Day, Dakota County. Dry Edible Beans as an Alternative Crop in a Direct Marketing Operation. Contact Diane & Bruce Milan (507) 645-8282

Sept 12, Two Projects in One Field Day, Swift and Chippewa Counties. Low Cost Hog Gestation; contact Steve Stassen (320) 264-5932. Hoop Houses and Pastures for Main Stream Hog Producers; contact Josh VanDerPol (320) 847-3432

Sept 12, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., 5th Annual Bayfront Harvest Festival, Duluth. Hosted by the SFA of Northeast Minnesota, (218) 727-1414

Sept. 19, Grazing/Sheep Day, West Central Experiment Station, Morris (320) 589-1711

Sept. 22, Field Day, Meeker County. Reviving and Enhancing Soils for Maximizing Performance of Pastures and Livestock. Contact Liberty Land & Livestock (320) 587-6094

Sept. 26, Homesteading Workshops & Family Fun Day, Princeton SFA Chapter, (612) 389-3748.

About this newsletter...

For the past year we've been funded by the Minnesota Extension Service and the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) with support from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

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.