

Sustainable Agriculture

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Extension Service appoints task force on rural options

Recent floods, tornadoes, crop diseases and low commodity prices have been in the news. But adversity in many rural communities is a long-term trend that warrants special attention, says the dean and director of the University of Minnesota Extension Service.

Director Katherine Fennelly has appointed a task force on rural options to address problems in rural Minnesota. The panel is looking at ways to help families and communities create long-term alternatives in an era of change and transition, Fennelly says.

Chair of the panel is Jan Baedke, extension educator in Faribault County. There's a lot being done already, she says, and we'll document this before recommending other programs.

Megatrends such as declining populations in rural towns are worrisome. Some people in rural communities are in denial about rural problems and don't talk about them, Baedke says, but we will recommend programs that can make a difference to families and communities in transition.

A total of \$160,000 of special funding has been provided by the University of Minnesota Extension Service, the College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences and the College of Human Ecology.

The panel will serve for one year to address problems facing rural Minnesota and develop strategies and programs to address them, Fennelly says. Other panel members are from the Extension Service and other University of Minnesota units located throughout the state. For more information, contact Jan Baedke at (507) 526-6240, jbaedke@extension.umn.edu.

MISA issues call for proposals

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) is soliciting proposals for research, education, and outreach projects that will enhance landscape, human, and animal health. Requested funding amounts can range from \$5,000 to \$50,000; a total of \$100,000 is available at this time.

Eligible lead applicants include faculty and staff affiliated with the U of M, other public and private institutes of higher education, or with Minnesota non-profit, tax-exempt organizations. Interdisciplinary teams are encouraged to apply. Teams that include faculty and staff members of the U of M's College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences are particularly encouraged to apply.

Deadline for receipt of proposals is Thursday, Nov. 12, 1998. For a complete copy of the request for proposals contact MISA at (612) 625-8235 or (800) 909-6472, or visit the [MISA site](#).

Keeping cows in the corn even during winter storms

We want to graze our cows in our corn fields all winter, says Milan, Minn., farmer Donald Struxness. This will be much more economical than raking and baling the corn stalks, bringing them to the drylot, and then hauling some of the stalks and all the manure back to the field.

But keeping most of the family's 100 cows in the fields all winter means developing shelter, water and fencing. They planted 8 acres of shelter belt and field windbreak in 1997 and another 22 acres of trees in 1998 with the CRP program. Some of the trees will be harvested after the CRP contract is over. The trees will take 7 to 12 years to give major wind protection.

Struxness has received funding to help develop the idea from the 1998 North Central SARE Producer Grant Program. SARE is the Sustainable Agriculture and Research Education program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

He has used research from the Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station in Laramie, Wyo., to develop six portable (10 by 20 foot) panels made of used oil well pipe welded in a rectangular frame. The panels will be set in a 90-degree wedge shape pointing into the prevailing Northwest wind on a gentle rise in the cornfield. This will prevent water from standing in the V shape that is protected.

Struxness also plans to trench water lines into each field at 6 and one-half feet to keep the water as warm as possible. Round hay bales will be spread in rows 30 feet apart throughout the corn stalks. Hell uses a hot wire to strip graze the corn stalks and bales. Well only have to roll the round bale feeders a few feet and move the electric wire. No tractor will be needed, Struxness says.

There will be 1,000 small square bales stacked at each end of the portable panels for hand feeding inside the shelter in severe weather. We will take four soil samples at similar distances from the shelter to see how evenly the manure is spread by the cows, he adds.

A multimillion dollar resource goes to waste each fall in western Minnesota, Struxness wrote in his project proposal. Hundreds of thousands of acres of nutrient-rich corn stalks never see a single cow enjoy a fallen ear or a tasty husk before they are plowed, chiseled and just left to catch some snow. The problem has grown as livestock have disappeared and farms have become larger.

Livestock that are here are bunched together in small lots that smell bad, breed flies in summer and accumulate frozen manure in winter. The manure melts in spring, turning into a quagmire that tends to run to the nearest creek as we wait for the fields to carry a tractor and spreader.

A new approach must be tried. Both grain and livestock farmers could benefit from this project. It could lead to a cooperative effort for grain and livestock farmers that address economic growth and the environment.

Struxness is working with a dozen cooperators and consultants from various educational, public and non-profit groups. He can be reached at (320) 734-4877, fax (320) 734-4942, or by e-mail at bstruxness@lqpv.k12.mn.us.

Sustainable agriculture grant applications due Dec. 15

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture's (MDA) Sustainable Agriculture Program is accepting applications for grants through Dec. 15 to research and demonstrate innovative solutions for sustainable agriculture. Individuals and teams of farmers, researchers and educators are eligible for up to \$25,000 in grants to help get projects started.

Successful grant applications will increase net farm profits, benefit the environment and improve a farm family's quality of life. Said MDA Commissioner Gene Hugoson.

Projects must be conducted on farms and are funded for three years. Joint applications for watershed projects or farmer groups are encouraged.

Applicants are encouraged to contact program staff to solicit feedback in developing proposals. An independent panel of farmers and agricultural specialists will review applications. A summary of current grants underway is available in the free, recently published Greenbook 98.

For more information and applications, contact Wayne Monsen, Grant and Loan Program Coordinator, Sustainable Agriculture Program, Minnesota, Department of Agriculture, 90 West Plato Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55107, call (651) 296-7673 or see [MDAs Home Page](#) on the World Wide Web.

Funding available to develop manure digester technology

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) has \$200,000 available for zero interest loans on projects demonstrating farm manure digester technology. For more information or an application, contact Robert Iwan of MDA at (651) 296-3820, robert.iwan@state.mn.us.

The Migrant Experience in Minnesota offered winter quarter

Some 15,000 to 20,000 migrants work in Minnesotas fields and canning factories yearly. An interdisciplinary course offered winter quarter at the University of Minnesota explores legal, health, labor, housing, educational and other issues impacting the lives of migrant farm workers. In addition, the 4 credit-course will include the role of migrant labor in the context of Minnesotas agricultural economy.

The colloquium-style course includes readings, guest speakers, and community designed research projects. It's open to upper level undergraduate, graduate and University College students. This class is the prerequisite for those wishing to apply to the University-Migrant Projects Summer Internship Program.

For more information, contact the University Migrant Project at (612) 625-6389 or e-mail migrant@tc.umn.edu.

Phil Larsen is named interim dean and vice president

The new interim dean of the College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences (COAFES) and vice president for agricultural policy is Phil Larsen, who has been associate dean of COAFES since 1996. Larsen was head of the Department of Plant Pathology from 1985 to 1994. He helped start this newsletter in 1994 when he coordinated sustainable agriculture programs for COAFES.

The position he'll be assuming on an interim basis is now held by Mike Martin, who has resigned effective Oct. 26 to accept the position of vice president for Agricultural and Natural Resources at the University of Florida.

If you have nominations for Martin's permanent replacement, send them to the office of Robert H. Bruininks, executive vice president and provost, at (612) 625-0052, e-mail funk@mailbox.mail.umn.edu.

Calendar of 1998 events. . .

Tuesday, Oct. 13, Beltrami County, MN. Farm tour at Del Stubbs farm near Solway. Contact (218) 243-2145

Thursday Oct. 15 through Saturday, Oct. 17, Brainerd, MN. Land Use Leadership Conference - New Approaches to Land Use Policy Making. Contact Elizabeth Lund (218) 829-3591, ext. 8856

Saturday, Oct. 17, Field Day, Winona County, MN. Small Farm Composting of Urban Wastes. Contact Dick Gallien (507) 454-3126

Saturday, Oct. 17, Field Day, Todd County, MN. Regional Tour of Homes Using Alternative Energy. Contact Greg Nolan (320) 594-6317

Saturday, Oct. 24, Field Day, Stearns County, MN. An Alternative Management System in an Organic Community Supported Market. Contact Candace Mullen (320) 236-7852

Friday, Nov. 13 through Sunday, Nov. 15. Michael Fields 8th Annual Urban-Rural Conference in SE Wisconsin. Contact (414) 641-3303

Wednesday, Nov. 18, Field Day, Goodhue County, MN. Extending the Grazing Season with the Use of Silage Clamps. Contact Jon Luhman (612) 388-6789

These events are sponsored by numerous organizations. More information is available on MISA's website.

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.