

Sustainable Agriculture

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New farm policy ideas will be discussed at April 12 symposium

Two new farm policy ideas will be discussed at a symposium on the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus Wednesday, April 12. The session, which is in the St. Paul Student Center Theatre, starts at 9 a.m. and ends at noon.

Willard Cochrane, professor emeritus in the Department of Applied Economics, will discuss "A Food and Agriculture Policy of the 21st Century." Cochrane, a well-known policy analyst who was President Kennedy's top farm advisor, has authored farm bills featuring supply control and commodity price supports. But now Cochrane sees the world differently, and says the family farm is so endangered that only decisive public action can save it.

Carmen Fernholz, a farmer from Madison, Minn., and Sheila Ehrich, a farmer from Elmore, Minn., will discuss the Farmers' Summit platform. This is farmer-led and features collective action by farmers rather than government intervention. Fernholz and Ehrich will also discuss ways farmers can increase biodiversity, improve rural communities and thrive in a world dominated by global corporations.

Sponsors are the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA), Visions for Change and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP). An introduction to the symposium, a detailed agenda and the two discussion papers are available for review at MISA's website, www.misa.umn.edu, or by calling the MISA office at (612) 625-8235 or (800) 909-6472.

MISA welcomes new staff

MISA has hired two part-time staff members to replace the position vacated by Debra Elias Morse. Debra worked with MISA's Information Exchange for the last five years. She has moved on to pursue independent consulting.

Beth Nelson has been hired on a half-time basis as the associate program director for the Information Exchange. She has a Ph.D. in Plant Physiology from the U of M, and extensive experience in basic and applied research. Her primary role will be to coordinate publications on a variety of research and educational topics. You can reach Beth at (612) 625-8217.

The Information Exchange has also hired Jane Grimsbo Jewett as the "Ask MISA" coordinator. Jane will work part-time answering questions that come into MISA from a variety of venues (phone, www, e-mail) as well as provide oversight for MISA's www page www.misa.umn.edu.

Jane has an M.S. from the U of M's Department of Agronomy & Plant Genetics. Contact her via the MISA office (612) 625-8235 or 1 (800) 909-6472.

Emily Green will begin April 10 as the coordinator for the Regional Sustainable Development Partnership Program (75 percent time) and with MISA (25 percent time). Emily's role will be to facilitate the work of the Statewide Coordinating Committee of the partnerships as well as the research and educational activities identified in each region. Emily is a recent M.S. graduate of the U of M's Department of Horticultural Sciences. Contact her via the MISA office.

New MISA board members

Four people have been named to three-year terms on the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture's board of directors:

Gregg Johnson is an assistant professor in the Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics at the U of M and is based at the Southern Experiment Station, Waseca. His interests are in integrated weed management with an emphasis on applied weed ecology. Gregg is also involved in research on the spatial/temporal dynamics of weed populations across variable landscapes and in information acquisition and management.

Albert (Bud) H. Markhart, III is a professor in the Department of Horticultural Science at the U of M. Bud's interests is in environmental physiology and organic growing systems for commercial production and homeowner gardening. He teaches "Growing Plants Organically: What it Means to be Green?" and is a member of the Sustainable Agriculture Minor faculty. Current research interests focus on the use of cover crops in organic production systems, the effect of low root zone temperature on crop growth, and hydroponics.

Mike White is a professor in the Department of Animal Science at the U of M, where he holds a research and teaching appointment. His primary research interests are in cellular and molecular regulation of muscle growth and development in meat-producing animals, with a specific focus on the role of the insulin-like Growth Factors (IGFs) and their binding proteins. His work focused on the regulation of muscle growth in swine and other meat animals. He currently co-teaches two courses, "Principles of Animal Growth and Development" and "Environment, Global Food Production and the Citizen."

Jan O'Donnell is the executive director of the Minnesota Food Association. She has served as MFA's executive director since 1996. She has been active in the food systems sector for the past 25 years. Jan has a strong commitment to food cooperatives and spent ten years as a manager of food cooperatives.

You can contact MISA Board members via the MISA Office: (612) 625-8235, (800) 909-6472, e-mail: misamail@tc.umn.edu.

For farm families, cooperative marketing can be key to survival, success

The keys to survival and success for many farm families may be cooperation and collective action in marketing, according to a new publication from the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA). Robert King from the U of M's Department of Applied Economics and consultant Gigi DiGiacomo wrote the guide.

Here are some reasons why acting on your own may not work as well as cooperating with others:

- It may be difficult to maintain the steady flow of high-quality product required to establish a consistent presence in the marketplace.

- You may not be able to take advantage of size economies in processing, transportation and advertising.
- It's hard for one person to run a farming operation and devote the time required to develop the specialized skills and personal contacts needed for successful marketing.
- And, if you sell your products in a market where there are only a few large buyers, you may not have the market power needed to bargain for a fair price if you act independently.

Cost of the new publication is \$4.75 plus shipping charges. It may be ordered from the Distribution Center, University of Minnesota Extension Service. Call 800-876-8636 and ask for number 7539. Or, order by e-mail: shopext@umn.edu.

New soil management series can help both large, small producers

The new "*Soil Management Series*" can help producers with a small vegetable plot as well as those with thousands of corn and soybean acres grown for international markets.

Since your farm is unique, the series won't tell you the best way to manage your soil. What it will do is help you more effectively use recommendations from universities, consultants and other advisors. It gives you the background science to monitor soil and modify general recommendations for your own soils.

The series has five publications: Soil Management, Compaction, Manure Management, Organic Matter Management, and Soil Biology and Soil Management. They're sold individually for \$3 or as a complete set for \$13, plus shipping and sales tax.

The new publications, written by Ann Lewandowski of NRCS, are from the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA). They may be ordered from the Distribution Center, University of Minnesota Extension Service. Call 800-876-8636 and ask for series 7398. Or, order by e-mail: shopext@umn.edu.

MISA Information Exchange is free and waiting for you to use it

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) has an Information Exchange service that is free and available to the public. The MISA web site at www.misa.umn.edu is one way to get at the Information Exchange. Click on the heading "Sustainable Agriculture Information" on the left side of the home page, and you will find the "Database of Resources," a searchable database of sustainable agriculture documents, web sites, and organizations.

New resources are constantly being added to the database. Click on the "Calendar" heading, and you can find events—workshops, seminars, farm tours, etc.—that are happening in Minnesota, the Upper Midwest, or nationwide. Click on the "Announcements" heading, and you can find jobs or internships in sustainable agriculture, opportunities for grants, venues for presenting research results, and new sustainable ag resources.

The "MISA Publications" heading will send you to online versions of documents prepared by MISA staff or with MISA funding. The titles include "Monitoring Toolbox," "Organic Certification of Crop Production in Minnesota," and "Whole Farm Planning: Combining Family, Profit, and Environment."

If you have not found exactly what you were looking for on the MISA web site, click on the "Ask MISA" heading. You can then type in a question on any agriculture-related topic, hit the "Send" button, and

within a week a MISA staff person will contact you with an answer, useful resources, or both. Recent “Ask MISA” requests have included questions about where to get a certificate for import/export of agricultural products, how to preserve flowers, and the environmental impact of cattle production.

Don't have Internet access? No problem—you can call, fax, e-mail, or write the MISA office with your “Ask MISA” request. Call (612) 625-8235 or toll-free (800) 909-MISA. The fax number is 612-625-1268 (please write “MISA” on your fax). E-mail can be sent to misamail@gold.tc.umn.edu, and regular mail to: MISA, 411 Borlaug Hall, 1991 Buford Circle, St. Paul, MN 55108.

Ranchers, farmers, Extension educators, researchers, consumers, anyone with an interest in sustainable agriculture are invited to use this powerful resource!

April 28 is deadline for USDA Sustainable Agriculture grants

Farmers can apply for grants of from \$5,000 to \$15,000 to conduct research or education/demonstration projects that further the goals of sustainable agriculture. The grants are from USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program in the North Central Region. Applications are due April 28, 2000.

Producers must reside in the 12-state North Central Region. Funds will be available in mid-fall for the 2001 crop production season. Call (402) 472-7081 or e-mail sare001@unlvm.unl.edu for an application. You can also find the application at www.sare.org/ncrsare.

MDA Energy and Sustainable Agriculture's first field day of the year

It's field day time, and an early one is Thursday, May 18, 2000. **Establishing a Rotational Grazing System in a Semi-Wooded Ecosystem: A Comparison of Frost Seeding to Impaction Seeding on CRP Land and Wooded Hillsides Using Sheep.** For more information, contact James Scaife, Rt. 2, Box 93, Rushford, MN 55971, (507) 864-2896. Sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program.

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.