

# *Sustainable Agriculture*

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## **Students in U of M class say farm payments should be restricted to family farmers**

Ask 20 people what a "family farm" is and you're apt to get 20 different answers with little room for agreement. But Richard A. Levins, economist and professor with the University of Minnesota Extension Service, says 23 undergraduate students in one of his classes narrowed it down to three criteria.

The family farm question was the final paper project for the class, which was divided almost equally between students with city and farm backgrounds. The students didn't agree on an exact definition, but Levins says there was general agreement on three points:

1. To be eligible for farm payments and to be a family farmer, one must make all major management decisions for the farm. The students said situations where off-farm corporations make management decisions--as happens frequently in broiler production--should not be eligible.
2. Again, to be a family farmer and eligible for farm payments, one must declare that his or her principal occupation is farming. "The students said that Scottie Pippen, Ted Turner and others who are clearly not farmers should not get farm payments," Levins says.
3. Farm payments should be based on financial need, not production levels. The students said only those who can demonstrate low income should receive payments. "This is more controversial, but also more in line with public perceptions," Levins says.

"Sometimes an old problem is best viewed through new eyes," Levins says. "I was pleased to see that almost all the students valued family farming and thought it should be supported. The trick is to bring what is actually being supported, and what the public thinks is being supported, more in line."

The applied economics course, "Economic Development of U.S. Agriculture," was taught by Levins, with guest lectures by Professor Emeritus Willard W. Cochrane and former Congressman David Minge. Levins may be reached at (612) 625-5238, or [dlevins@apc.umn.edu](mailto:dlevins@apc.umn.edu).

## **Register early for SFA Annual Conference at Northfield**

"Sustaining our Food System: Creative Alternatives to Globalization" is the theme of the Sustainable Farming Association (SFA) of Minnesota's 11th annual conference Saturday, Feb. 23. It will be held in the Science Center of St. Olaf College in Northfield.

The keynote speaker is popular speaker and author John Ikerd, professor emeritus of agricultural economics at the University of Missouri. His talk is titled "The Real Costs of Globalization--to Farmers, Consumers and Our Food Systems." Jenifer Buckley will preview the afternoon program with a presentation on "Foods Systems and Tools for Entering the Local Markets." Buckley coordinates the

Northland Food and Farming Initiative, a project that aims to strengthen the food system in northeastern Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin.

Registration and exhibits for the all-day program open at 9 a.m., but you'll pay a lower registration fee if you pre-register by Feb. 15. Registration information is available at [www.sfa-mn.org](http://www.sfa-mn.org), by e-mail at [deebilek@wcta.net](mailto:deebilek@wcta.net), or by calling DeEtta Bilek at (218) 445-5475.

### **Helene Murray is named director of MISA**

Helene Murray is the new director of the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) in the College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences, according to Vice President and Dean Charles Muscoplat.

Helene has held the coordinator position in MISA for the past eight years and is an adjunct professor in the Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics. She is also on the faculty of the MacArthur Interdisciplinary Program on Global Change, Sustainability and Justice. She has a B.S. degree in fruit science from California Polytechnic State University and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in horticulture and crop science, respectively, from Oregon State University.

"I wish to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the significant contributions of Professor Bill Wilcke over the past two years while serving in an interim capacity," Muscoplat says. "He has been extremely helpful in strengthening the partnership and understanding between the University and the sustainable agriculture community."

"I am confident in Helene's leadership and vision for incorporating initiatives addressing issues facing the rural and urban communities into the college priorities," Muscoplat says. Helene Murray may be reached at (612) 625-0220, [murra021@umn.edu](mailto:murra021@umn.edu)

### **New MISA board members have been appointed**

Five new Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) board members have been appointed by COAFES Dean Charles Muscoplat to serve three-year terms starting in January 2002. The 15-member board of directors consists of five farmers, five University representatives and five representatives of sustainable agriculture organizations.

**JoAnne Berkenkamp** is a private consultant in St. Paul providing management consulting services to senior leadership of various domestic and multi-national non-profits, foundations, and corporations. She specializes in program evaluation, planning, group facilitation and leadership development.

**Dale Hennen** has been employed by the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis as the director of the Rural Life Office since 1988. He has been working to advance the Catholic Church's perspective and role in developing a just food and agriculture system, and works with pastoral leaders in the rural parts of the Archdiocese on their unique ministry issues and concerns.

**Jacqueline Jacob** is an assistant professor with the Department of Animal Science at the University of Minnesota, specializing in poultry science. She spent four years on a poultry project in Mozambique and more recently was the poultry extension coordinator at the University of Florida. One of her U of M applied research programs involves the nutrition and management of pasture-raised and organic poultry.

**Bernadette Longo** is an assistant professor in the Department of Rhetoric at the University of Minnesota. She was previously a dairy and almond farmer in California and a faculty member at Clemson University. She is working to establish long-term collaborations with community groups and is focusing on developing informational and educational materials for target audiences. She says sustainable agriculture and environmental education topics are vitally important for students.

**Jim Stordahl** has farming experience and has worked as a consultant to commercial vegetable operations. Currently he is an Extension educator in Clay County, Minn. He is proactive in working with organic farmers in western and northwestern Minnesota and has been interested in exploring all impacts--positive and negative--of biotechnology on farmers. He is also involved in field research and demonstrations on reducing synthetic pesticide and fertilizer use.

### **Reconsider the value of Bt corn each year, economist advises**

Is the value of Bt corn worth the technology fee? That's the question to consider if you've been planting Bt corn and European corn borer infestations on your farm have been low, a University of Minnesota economist says.

"Corn borer populations in Minnesota and Iowa have been very low since 1998," says Terry Hurley, farm management economist with the U of M Extension Service. The 1997 growing season was the last year when borer populations were close to average (about one borer per plant in Minnesota).

Research by Hurley and co-workers Paul Mitchell at Texas A & M and Marlin Rice at Iowa State University shows an average value of about \$16 an acre for planting Bt corn in Minnesota. That's based on historical population trends through 1998. Assuming a technology fee of \$10 an acre, that leaves an extra \$6 per acre of profits.

"But if there are no corn borers around, there are no benefits to growing Bt corn," Hurley says. "The question that remains unanswered is whether Bt corn has changed these historical trends. If 50 percent of corn is Bt every year, that means 50 percent fewer borers in the next generation. And if you do that for a few years, borer populations become very small in a hurry."

"Some farmers who've been planting Bt corn may be in a situation where it becomes less valuable each year," Hurley concludes. He may be reached at (612) 625-0216 or [thurley@dept.agecon.umn.edu](mailto:thurley@dept.agecon.umn.edu).

### **Iowa study shows no economic advantage for farmers to plant GMO crops**

Genetically modified seed did not appear to impact a farmer's bottom line for either corn or soybean production, according to Iowa research from the 1998 and 2000 crop years.

Michael Duffy, associate director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, conducted the study. You can find the details in the winter 2001 issue of the Leopold Center's newsletter at [www.leopold.iastate.edu](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu).

### **Minnesota does not have a good environmental stewardship record, Anderson says**

It's a mistake to think that Minnesota is a leader in environmental stewardship, says Dennis Anderson, outdoor writer for the Minneapolis-based Star Tribune newspaper. "Minnesota's history has involved

transformation of the land, not stewardship," Anderson said in a recent talk on the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus.

"We like to think Minnesota has a better environmental record of protecting natural resources than say, Indiana does. But the only real difference is that we started with more natural resources," he says.

Anderson wrote a four-part series titled "The State We're In" that appeared in the Star Tribune in December 2001. It chronicled drainage of wetlands resulting in flooding, loss of wildlife habitat and silt-laden lakes. Titles of articles in the series included "Sea of Asphalt," "Ecological Disaster: Building Boom Threatens Lakes" and "Changing the Land to Suit our Lives."

"The key question we face is whether a capitalistic system can preserve natural resources," Anderson says. He may be reached at [danderson@startribune.com](mailto:danderson@startribune.com), and you can read the articles on the Star Tribune website at [www.startribune.com](http://www.startribune.com).

### **SARE grant applications available for educators, agricultural professionals**

The USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program in the North Central Region invites organizations and institutions to apply for competitive grants. The purpose of the grant program is to support professional development initiatives for agricultural educators and professionals who work with farmers and ranchers to adopt profitable, environmentally sound, socially responsible agricultural systems.

Almost 70 projects in 12 North Central states have been awarded over \$3.2 million since 1994. Past projects have included management intensive grazing, land use and community development, and community food systems and security. They've used a variety of educational delivery methods including workshops, on-farm tours, distance learning and in-service opportunities.

Applications are available from the North Central Region office and are due April 19, 2002. Applicant organizations must be located within the 12-state North Central Region. Funding decisions will be made in late-June 2002, and funds will be available in fall 2002. Call (402) 472-7081, fax (402) 472-0280 or e-mail [ncrsare@unl.edu](mailto:ncrsare@unl.edu) for an application. You can also find the application at [www.sare.org/ncrsare](http://www.sare.org/ncrsare).

### **Calendar of events, 2002**

These events are sponsored by numerous organizations. More information is available on MISA's website: [www.misa.umn.edu](http://www.misa.umn.edu).

**Feb. 23. SFA of Minnesota 11th Annual Conference**, St. Olaf College, Northfield. Keynote speaker is John Ikerd. Contact Carmen Fernholz (320) 598-3010 or DeEtta Bilek (218) 445-5475.

### **What we're about**

This newsletter is supported by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA). It's also supported by the University of Minnesota Extension Service, the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCRSARE) Professional Development Program (PDP), and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA). MISA is a partnership between the Sustainer's Coalition and the University of Minnesota College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences (COAFES).

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Also check MISA's home page at [www.misa.umn.edu](http://www.misa.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.**

To stimulate thinking and discussion about sustainability, we try to present items that reflect different points of view. This being the case, we aren't promoting and don't necessarily agree with everything we publish.