

BEGINNING FARMER LAND CONTRACT GUARANTEE PROGRAM

The USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) launched a new nationwide program as of January 3, 2012: the "Beginning and Socially Disadvantaged Farmer and Rancher Land Contract Guarantee Program." The FSA also issued new rules that give more weight to on-the-job training in determining whether a farmer has enough experience to qualify for the loan guarantees.

The program was begun as a pilot program in 2002, and was included in the 2008 Farm Bill due to legislation introduced by Iowa Senator Tom Harkin and Minnesota Representative Tim Walz.

The program reduces the financial risk for retiring farmers who sell their farmland to a beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher. In order to qualify, the seller must sell their land on a contract for deed basis to a beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer. The program offers two options for risk reduction: 1) a guarantee of three years' amortized loan installments, plus payment of real estate taxes and hazard insurance premiums for the same three-year period; or 2) a 90-percent guarantee against losses to the seller over the term of the contract for deed.

FSA fact sheet on the program: http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/newsReleases?area=newsroom&subject=landing&topic=pfs&newstype=prfactsheet&type=detail&item=pf_20120120_farln_en_lcgrnt.html

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) information on the program: <http://sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide/farming-opportunities/contract-land-sales/>

Contact your local FSA office for more information and assistance in applying for the program. Find your local office: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=us&agency=fsa>

NEW COVER CROP DECISION TOOL & CASE STUDIES

A cover crop is any crop that is grown for the main purpose of improving the cropping system and is not normally harvested as a cash crop. The role of a cover crop may be to protect soil from erosion, decrease soil compaction and improve soil water-holding capacity, return organic matter and nutrients to soil, break a pest cycle, provide weed suppression, or any combination of these. Farmers who plant cover crops may not gain direct economic benefit from sale of that crop, but they can still gain profitability through avoided costs for fertilizer, pest control, and weed control; or in some cases by grazing livestock on the crop.

The Midwest Cover Crop Council has released a Cover Crop Decision Tool that currently contains cover crop information specific to Minnesota, Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan. Illinois, Iowa, North Dakota, and the Canadian province of Ontario have yet to go through their Decision Tool development process. Find the Decision Tool online: <http://mcccdev.anr.msu.edu/>

The Decision Tool is based on the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) handbook, *Managing Cover Crops Profitably*, but has been tailored to each state by an expert team using other literature, research results, and on-farm experience. (Online at <http://www.sare.org/Learning-Center/Books/Managing-Cover-Crops-Profitably-3rd-Edition/Text-Version>).

A series of drop-down lists allows the Decision Tool user to specify his or her county, drainage conditions, and cropping history. Three additional drop-down menus allow the choice of specific priorities or outcomes that the farmer hopes to achieve from the use of the cover crops. Information sheets can then be printed for each individual cover crop or mixture.

Minnesota's Decision Tool team was led by Jill Sackett, U of MN Extension Educator - Conservation Agronomist with Rural Advantage in Fairmont, MN. If you have questions about the Minnesota Cover Crops Decision Tool, contact Jill at 507-

238-5449, sacke032@umn.edu. To stay up-to-date on educational offerings and other information about cover crops, you can also 'like' UMN Extension - Conservation Agronomy on Facebook, or ask Jill to be added to the Minnesota Cover Crop Listserv and Rural Advantage's email list.

The Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison recently released two cover crop case studies. One details cover crop use on JenEhr Farm, a market vegetable farm: <http://www.cias.wisc.edu/crops-and-livestock/cover-crops-case-studies-jenehr-family-farm/>. The other presents cover crop use on the Gary Sommers farm, a 1500-acre farm that produces corn, soybean, and winter wheat. <http://www.cias.wisc.edu/crops-and-livestock/cover-crop-case-studies-gary-sommers-farm/>

WORKSHOP AND SEMINAR SERIES COMING UP

Living on the Land

The Living on the Land Workshop Series, offered by University of Minnesota Extension, is an eight-week course designed to arm landowners with agricultural information to enable them to be good stewards of their land. Workshops will be held on Thursday evenings from March 8 – April 26 from 6-9 p.m. One location will be in Hutchinson at the McLeod County Fairgrounds 4-H Café and the other location will be in Mankato's Historic Courthouse in the Conference Room.

Living on the Land topics include: plans for your land, water quality, protecting household drinking water, how plants grow, dealing with weeds, lawn and pasture maintenance, soils and farm equipment.

Early registration is \$175 until Friday, March 2 and all registrations received afterwards will be \$200. The registration fee includes participation of two people, for example a husband and wife team or two siblings, who may attend together and share materials. Benefits include useful

educational publications and an educational farm tour and dinner.

Register now because space is limited at each location. Contact Nathan Winter for the Hutchinson location at 320-484-4303, wint0146@umn.edu. Contact Diane DeWitte for the Mankato location at 507-304-4325, stouf002@umn.edu. View the Living on the Land Workshop Series brochure at the following link: <http://z.umn.edu/6b4>.

Beef Cow/Calf Days

Beef Cow/Calf workshops are a February tradition in Minnesota. The University of Minnesota Extension Beef Team will hold ten workshops: five in southern MN and five in northern MN. Topics covered will include pasture and forage management; mineral supplementation; genomic selection and replacement heifer selection; and (northern locations only), dealing with

wolves and wolf damage.

Registration for the meeting, which includes a meal and a proceedings booklet or CD, is \$20 per person. Please pre-register for any of these meeting at least 1 week in advance with the local coordinator. Find coordinators' contact information on this brochure: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/>

[beef/components/pdfs/2012_Statewide_Flyer_with_Tour_de_Forage.pdf](http://www.extension.umn.edu/beef/components/pdfs/2012_Statewide_Flyer_with_Tour_de_Forage.pdf) If you have any further questions, please contact Dr. Allen Bridges (gbridges@umn.edu; 218-327-4615) or check out the University of Minnesota Beef Team website at www.extension.umn.edu/beef.

Third Crop Producer Workshops

Rural Advantage in Fairmont, MN will host its 8th annual series of four workshops on crop alternatives to corn and soybeans. Workshops are held at the Fairmont Knights of Columbus, and are free. Carpooling from the University of Minnesota St. Paul Campus will be arranged by the Minnesota

Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, if there is sufficient interest. Contact MISA at 800-909-6472 or misamail@umn.edu.

The Third Crop workshop topics are Cover Crops on Feb. 6th, Local Food on Feb. 27th; Marketing Third Crops on

March 12th, and Bioenergy from Perennials on April 2nd. Find more information on the U of MN Extension – Conservation Agronomy Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/umn.extension.conservation.agronomy>; or contact Rural Advantage at 507-238-5449.

Schedule Your GAPs And On-Farm Food Safety Workshop

Day-long (9am - 4 pm) Food Safety workshops are being scheduled now for Feb – April 2012. The workshops are led by Michele Schermann (Agricultural Health and Safety Research Fellow with the University of Minnesota).

The workshops will provide:

- Hands-on assistance creating your own on-farm Food Safety Plan
- Best management practices for food safety on your fruit or vegetable farm
- Practical advice from other farmers about issues like record keeping and cost-effective ways to implement food safety practices on your farm

• A flash drive pre-loaded with a food safety plan template that you will tailor to your own situation, log sheets, supporting documents, how-to videos, and a short employee training video.

Even if you don't plan to get a GAPs (Good Agricultural Practices) audit (most farmers don't need one), having a documented Food Safety Plan is a good idea and is a great way to show buyers that you are proactively working on food safety and minimizing the risk of contamination of your fresh produce.

If you are interested in hosting or attending a workshop in your area, please contact Marilyn Johnson at 763-434-0400, or Michele Schermann at 612-624-7444 or safety@umn.edu. Dates and locations will be set according to regional interest. There must be at least 8 attendees to hold a workshop. Local Extension offices, farmers' markets groups, county farm groups or non-profits are encouraged to contact us to schedule a workshop for their affiliated farmers. Cost is \$40 per person and includes lunch, the pre-loaded flash drive, and a GAPs employee training video (retail value \$20.00).

ALL ABOUT SELLING MEAT WORKSHOP

MISA hosted the All About Selling Meat workshop on January 12, 2012 in St. Cloud. More than 90 farmers and others attended, and heard a great variety of information about meat marketing, processing, packaging, and regulations. Find more information about the day, links to power-point presentations, and other resources on the “Meat Workshop Proceedings” page on MISA’s website: <http://www.misa.umn.edu/FarmFoodResources/LocalFood/MeatPoultrySales/ProceedingsofWorkshop/index.htm>

MISA would like to especially thank our

speakers and panelists who did a wonderful job, and made us regret exceedingly the limited time we had to take audience questions. Speakers included Dr. Ryan Cox, U of MN Professor of Meat Science; Levi Muhl, Minnesota Department of Agriculture; Wayne Martin, U of MN Extension; Jan Joannides, U of MN Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems; and Carissa Nath, Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI). Processor panelists included Kathy Haugse of Sam’s Grocery in Tamarack, Gerard Hoffarth of St. Joseph Meat Market, Greg Johnson of Miltona Meats, Willie Willenbring of Plantenberg’s Meats in Rich-

mond, and Ron Nelson of Nelson-Shine Produce Company near Brainerd. Farmer panelists were Tom Barthel of Snake River Farm, John Peterson of Ferndale Market, Mike Stine of Stonebridge Beef, and Lynn Mizner of Chengwatana Farm.

The workshop was co-sponsored by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, the U of MN Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, and the Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems program at the University of Minnesota.

MISA WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBER

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture welcomes Vince Xiong as our newest board member. Mr. Xiong is a long-time gardener who has recently begun commercial vegetable production. He is enrolled in the Minnesota Food Association’s Big River Farms Training Program ([http://](http://www.mnfoodassociation.org/content/12480)

www.mnfoodassociation.org/content/12480), and is a certified organic farmer. His ultimate goal is to “... secure a farm of 40 to 100 acres, lease it to Hmong American farmers, and work alongside them, sharing the knowledge I have gained from the program.” He is deeply concerned about the connection between diet and

health, and believes that sustainability includes sharing knowledge and challenging barriers to caring for our food, physical health, and community health. Read a profile of Mr. Xiong: http://sfc.smallfarmcentral.com/dynamic_content/uploadfiles/1302/Vince%20Xiong.pdf

MISA GREENCORPS MEMBER EXPANDS OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

MISA has broadened its outreach work by serving as a host site for MN Green Corps, an AmeriCorps program that supports environmental jobs throughout Minnesota. Sarah Halvorson-Fried, the Living Green Local Foods Outreach Green Corps member at MISA, has expanded outreach efforts to include more youth and community education around local food, more engagement of students at the University of Minnesota in sustainable agriculture through involvement with and service-learning on Cornercopia Student Organic Farm, and more partnerships between Cornercopia and various schools and organizations in the Twin Cities.

This spring, 20 service-learning students

from the University of Minnesota will be working at Cornercopia throughout the semester, enabling us to explore new farming techniques and attend more community events. A HECUA City Arts intern is joining the Cornercopia team to help beautify the farm and create various promotional and outreach materials. Sarah will continue to bring lessons to primary and secondary schools on “where your food comes from,” “parts of the plant,” and pollinators, as well as hold community education workshops on growing seedlings indoors and home composting.

Meanwhile, plans for the summer are underway to partner with St. Paul and Minneapolis Public Schools, the Bell

Museum of Science, and the Community Design Center to bring more youth to the farm – expanding upon partnerships from previous seasons with Gordon Parks High School in St. Paul and Project Sweetie Pie in North Minneapolis. The “What’s Up in Sustainable Agriculture” (WUSA) seminar series, last held in spring 2009, has also been reinstated every Monday this semester from 12-1 pm in Borlaug 306. WUSA provides University students, faculty, staff and community members with a chance to come together and share their work and ideas around sustainable agriculture. Sarah will continue in the GreenCorps position with MISA through September 2012. Contact her at halvo370@umn.edu or 207-735-3962.

VISIT THE MISA BLOG AND CALENDAR FOR CONSTANTLY UPDATED INFORMATION

The MISA News blog
<http://misanews.wordpress.com>, is regularly updated with news of courses and workshops.

The MISA calendar
<http://misadocuments.info/calendar.html>, is updated nearly daily with sustainable agriculture-related workshops, seminars, conferences, and field days.

Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture

411 Borlaug Hall
1991 Upper Buford Circle
St. Paul, MN 55108



MORE WORKSHOPS, WORKSHOP SERIES, AND CONFERENCES

Visit these links for information about more workshop series that are ongoing or coming up:

- Local Foods College, offered at various sites in northwestern Minnesota:
<http://misanews.wordpress.com/2012/01/06/local-foods-college-series/>
- Annie's Project: Risk Management Education for Farm Women, offered in Jordan, MN
<http://misanews.wordpress.com/2012/01/13/annies-project-2012-jordan-mn-starts-feb-7/>
- Designing a Living Landscape Series, offered by Permaculture Research Institute Cold Climate at the Minneapolis College of Art & Design:
<http://www.pricoldclimate.org/events/designing-a-living-landscape-series>

Upcoming conferences:

- Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota Annual Conference, February 18 at College of St. Benedict in St. Joseph, MN.
<http://www.sfa-mn.org/conference/>
- Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) Organic Conference, Feb. 23-25 in LaCrosse, WI.
<http://www.mosesorganic.org/conference.html>

This newsletter is supported by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA)—a partnership between the Sustainer's Coalition and the University of Minnesota College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS) the University of Minnesota Extension; the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCRSARE) Professional Development Program (PDP). Send story ideas to MISA, 411 Borlaug Hall, 1991 Upper Buford Circle. St. Paul, MN 55108, (612) 625-8235, fax (612) 625-1268, e-mail: misamail@umn.edu. Editorial board members: Helene Murray, (612) 625-0220, murra021@umn.edu; Beth Nelson, (612) 625-8217, schre002@umn.edu; Bill Wilcke, (612) 625-8205, wilck001@umn.edu; Jane Jewett, jewet006@umn.edu and Kate Seager, (612) 625-8235, kseager@umn.edu. Please send address changes directly to: Kate Seager, kseager@umn.edu, MISA, 411 Borlaug Hall, 1991 Buford Circle, St. Paul, MN 55108. You can find more University of Minnesota Extension Service educational information at www.extension.umn.edu. Also check MISA's home page at 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.