

New marketing resource available for organic farmers

Farmers interested in selling organic food products now have access to the “2009 Minnesota Directory of Organic Buyers” which lists about 100 Minnesota-based retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers, and other buyers of organic commodities and food products.

Within the directory, buyer listings are organized by company name, county, and product. Listings include company contact information as well as company purchasing preferences to help farmers better connect with buyers.

“The purchasing preference data is important and distinguishes the directory from other buyer listings,” says Gigi DiGiacomo, University of Minnesota research fellow who worked with an advisory team to develop the directory. “By knowing buyer preferences in advance, farmers can make a well-informed sales call to buyers.”

The directory project was funded by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) after more than 40 percent of certified organic respondents to the “2007 Minnesota Organic Farmer Survey” (conducted by the Minnesota

Department of Agriculture), said a buyer directory would be helpful. Directory applications were mailed to more than 850 Minnesota-based buyers of food products. The directory was printed with support from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

The directory is available online. View or download at www.misa.umn.edu. For a print copy, contact the MISA at misamail@umn.edu or 612-625-8235.

Extending the Season

Midwest Season Extension website

Growers have a new website to help them learn about the many new and exciting growing opportunities in season extension. www.midwestseasonextension.org links to the latest research results from farmers and institutions in our region, and provides information about ongoing projects and upcoming events. If you have resources, ideas, links or pictures to add and share, contact MISA at misamail@umn.edu, 612-625-8235. The website was made possible with funding from Sow the Seeds Fund in cooperation with Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) and Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA).

USDA launches high tunnel pilot study to increase availability of locally grown foods

Minnesota is one of the 38 states included in the study announced by the USDA in December. Part of the “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” initiative, the study will help farmers use high tunnels to increase the availability of locally grown produce in a conservation-friendly way.

The 3-year, 38-state study will verify if high tunnels are effective in reducing pesticide use, keeping vital nutrients in the soil, extending the growing season, increasing yields, and providing other benefits to growers.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will provide financial assistance for the project through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the EQIP Organic Initiative, and the Agricultural Management Assistance program. For more information about eligibility, deadlines, and sign up for this practice, contact your local USDA Service Center. Go to www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov to locate your nearest Service Center. You can also view Minnesota NRCS's fact sheet on “Seasonal Tunnel Structure for Crops” at: www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/tunnels/FactsheetSeasonalTunnel.pdf

Thermal Banking Greenhouses

Video from the field highlights Steve Schwen's season extension success story. This is the first in a series of "how-to" videos

funded by the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program and produced by Cooking Up A Story.

At Minnesota's latitude, farmers who can extend their growing season have a distinct advantage in the marketplace. Steven Schwen (Earthen Path Organic Farm, Lake City, Minn.) starts earlier in the year with warm-season vegetable seedlings in his greenhouse, and continues production into the fall and even the winter months growing cold-tolerant crops. Part of what makes Schwen's operation unique is the innovation of thermal banking, which significantly reduces the energy costs of running a greenhouse for cold-season production. Schwen's thermal banking greenhouse is a key component of his farming operation, particularly in this time of global climate change and energy insecurity. He feels this project moves him closer to his ultimate goals of energy independence and self-sufficiency. North Central Region-SARE's Farmer-Rancher Grant program provided critical assistance for Schwen in the beginning phases of his project. Go to: www.sare.org/publications/FromTheField_Schwen1.htm

New Resources

Funding

The most common question posed to MISA and SARE staff is, “Where can I find funding for my project?” One of the best resources on that subject has been updated and “Building Sustainable Places” is now available on the ATTRA website. This guide is useful for anyone seeking help from federal programs to foster innovative enterprises in agriculture and forestry in the United States.

Specifically, the guide addresses program resources for community development, sustainable land management, and value-added and diversified agriculture and forestry. View or download at www.attra.ncat.org/guide/, or for a print copy, call 800-346-9140. Spanish, Lao and French language support for this publication is available by calling 1-800-411-3222.

The “Building Sustainable Places” guide is a collaborative publication of the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), and several USDA agencies, and includes content based on work by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

New or newly revised publications from SARE

“Crop Rotation on Organic Farms: A Planning Manual” provides an in-depth review of the applications of crop rotation including improving soil quality and health, and managing pests, diseases, and weeds. Consulting with expert organic farmers, the authors share rotation strategies that can be applied under various field conditions and with a wide range of crops. The book includes instructions for making rotation planning maps and discusses the transition to organic farming.

Promote Your Products

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture invites Minnesota producers who offer their own agricultural products for sale to the public to join Minnesota Grown, along with more than 1,000 members. The program promotes local farm products through events, provision of free merchandising materials, and by

Order online at www.sare.org/publications/croprotation.htm. Published by the Natural Resource, Agriculture and Engineering Service (NRAES) and funded in part by SARE.

“Building Soils for Better Crops, 3rd edition.” Use ecologically based techniques to improve soil with SARE’s recently revised handbook. This is a one-of-a-kind, practical guide to ecological soil management, now expanded and in full color. It provides step-by-step information on soil-improving practices as well as in-depth background—from what soil is to the importance of organic matter. Case studies of farmers from across the country provide inspiring examples of how soil—and whole farms—have been renewed through these techniques. Order or view online: <http://www.sare.org/publications/soils.htm> or call 301-374-9696.

“Land & Power: Sustainable Agriculture and African Americans.” Black American agricultural experiences are grounded in unique cultural, historical, and ecological experiences, informed by the values and history of the African Diaspora. In 2007, more than 100 people gathered at Tuskegee University to move innovation in sustainable agriculture forward and contribute to the overall diversity of thought in sustainable agriculture.

“Land & Power: Sustainable Agriculture and African Americans” features a selection of the presentations, posters, discussions, and performances that made up this extraordinary, joyous event. The authors capture the perspectives of various Black American cultural leaders about land and

power as they relate to sustainable agriculture and Black American traditions. Order or view online: <http://www.sare.org/publications/landandpower.htm> or call 301-372-9696.

New Farm to School Tools

The new “Farm to School Tips, Tools & Guidelines for Food Distribution & Food Safety” manual is intended to provide information, insight and useful tools for farmers and school food service directors interested in Farm To School (FTS) program participation, distribution and food safety. The manual includes a brief overview of the FTS program in the U.S. and Oklahoma, gives guidance for meeting food safety protocols, discusses results from surveys of Oklahoma schools and food service distributors regarding FTS participation and perception, and provides a summary of tips and suggestions from FTS program coordinators and participants.

The manual also includes information on two new tools for use by farmers and school food service directors that are currently being used in Oklahoma: a distribution cost template which will help producers understand the true costs of produce delivery and assists in the determination of “farm gate” values for their crops, helping them to make determinations regarding the optimal delivery methods for their FTS produce and a produce calculator which will help farmers determine the amount of produce to be delivered to meet the demands of a school nutrition program and figure cost per serving of produce. Both calculators can be downloaded from: www.okfarmtoschool.com

production and distribution of the printed and online Minnesota Grown Directory.

Producers of Minnesota-grown food products, and some non-food products such as wool and firewood, can join Minnesota Grown for only \$20 annually. Listing in the Minnesota Grown Directory costs an

additional \$40. You can register and pay online at www.minnesotagrown.com, or call 651-201-6469 to request an application. Producers wishing to be listed in the print version of the 2010 Minnesota Grown Directory must apply no later than March 1, 2010.

Educational opportunities

U of M Extension offers workshops for small farm and acreage owners

Whether you dream of owning acreage in the country or already own property but need a holistic plan to meet your goals, the Living on the Land Workshop Series, offered this spring by University of Minnesota Extension, can help.

The eight-week course is designed to arm landowners with agricultural information to enable them to be good stewards of their 40-acre (or less) tract. The course will begin with goal setting and individual property inventory, then address soil, plant and water basics. The series will be taught at two locations: Tuesday evenings at Monticello High School, beginning March 2, or Thursday evenings at Ranchero Supper Club in Webster, beginning March 4, from 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Early registration is \$150 until Feb. 19 and all registrations received after that date will be \$175. For more information and to register, go to: www.extension.umn.edu/smallfarms/index.html or contact Brenda Postels (Monticello) 763-682-7394, post0060@umn.edu or Laura Kieser (Webster) 952-466-5306, torb0022@umn.edu.

Urban Agriculture

USDA announced a \$900,000 grant to the Wallace Center at Winrock International, Little Rock, Ark., to run the Healthy Urban Food Enterprise Development (HUFED) Center to increase access to healthy, affordable foods, including locally produced agricultural products, to underserved communities.

Congress created the HUFED Center in the 2008 farm bill. The center is designed to respond to the need to redevelop a food enterprise structure in the United States to make healthier, affordable food available in

Upcoming events

Remember to check the MISA calendar for upcoming events. Here's a reminder about a few that were mentioned in our last issue:

Home Grown Economy

The "Home Grown Economy 2010—Equipping You to Build Community Based Food Systems" conference will be held in Marshall on February 15th and 16th, with interactive video sessions held on Tuesday, February 16th at: University of Minnesota, Crookston; University of Minnesota, Morris; Bemidji State University; and Minnesota State Community and Technical College in Fergus Falls.

Congressman Collin Peterson sponsors and hosts this conference in cooperation with the University of Minnesota and Minnesota State Colleges & Universities. Representative Peterson notes, "Changing attitudes about food, its impact on health and well-being, and growing opportunities for small farmers have sparked a movement across the country and in Minnesota of consumers seeking out locally grown foods."

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack will deliver the keynote address. Ken Meter of Crossroads Resource Center will speak about "Nurturing Economic recovery through Home Grown Foods," followed by a panel discussion with community-based food system innovators Melvyn Hauser, Bo Olson, Rhys Williams and Terry VanDerPol to end the joint morning session. After lunch, each site will conduct

low-income areas; to improve access for small and mid-sized agricultural producers; and to promote positive economic activities generated from attracting healthy food enterprises into underserved communities.

The HUFED Center will provide training and technical assistance for food enterprises and award sub-grants to eligible entities for healthy food enterprise development. More information on the HUFED Center can be found at: www.wallacecenter.org/our-work/current-initiatives/

SFA Annual Conference, February 20, Northfield, Minn.

Organic Farming Conference, February 26-27, LaCrosse, Wisc.

facilitated discussions focused on food system issues specific to their community, before re-connecting with the other sites via interactive video to wrap-up the conference. For more information and to register, go to www.regionalpartnerships.umn.edu, or contact Congressman Peterson's office at 218-847-5056.

Minority and Immigrant Farming Conference

The Minnesota Food Association, the Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women in Minnesota, and the USDA-Farm Service Agency will co-host the 5th Annual Minority and Immigrant Farming Conference on February 19-20, 2010 at the Wilder Foundation Office in St. Paul.

The theme of this year's event is Growing Profits on Your Small Farm. This conference promotes the success and viability of small and beginning minority and immigrant farmers by offering workshops on seeking land and negotiating leases, marketing, organic certification, costs of production and record-keeping and seeking grants and loans, and more. For more information and to pre-register, go to: www.mnfoodassociation.org or call 651-433-3676.

Urban Agriculture Classes

The Permaculture Research Institute Cold Climate is offering five Wednesday evening classes on urban farming to be held on the Augsburg College campus in Minneapolis. Classes begin February 17 and will cover "SPIN" (small plot intensive) farming, organic, and biointensive production, field layout, and marketing strategies. Classes will be taught by Courtney Tchida, administrator of the student organic farm on the University of Minnesota's St. Paul Campus. For more information and to register, go to: www.pricoldclimate.org

3rd Crop Producer Meetings, February 8th and 22nd, March 8th and 22nd, Fairmont, Minn.

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