

Sustainable Agriculture

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*College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences
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upcoming newsletter.**

CHANGING THE APPROACH TO REGULATION OF LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS IN MINNESOTA

How well-versed are you in statutes and rules that pertain to farmer-raised foods, homemade foods, and small-scale and local food enterprises? Cottage Food Law, food samples at farmers' markets, multi-user commercial kitchens, on-farm food service -- if you're a little fuzzy on some of the details of how Minnesota statutes apply, rest assured that so is nearly everyone else. Farmers, food entrepreneurs, buyers, educators and regulators all sometimes get tangled up in the details of how to apply food statutes and rules to innovative small-scale food enterprises. Confusion about the regulations can lead to loss of markets for farmers and food entrepreneurs, unnecessary restrictions on sourcing decisions by food buyers, and sometimes unsafe and illegal food products entering commerce.

A group of food regulators, farmer and food entrepreneur representatives, and University of Minnesota staff have come together to try to understand how the food regulatory system functions for small-scale entrepreneurs, and how to improve it. Coordinated by staff members of Renewing the Countryside, the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture at the University of Minnesota, and University of Minnesota Extension, this focused project has been underway for nearly a year.

A key finding of the group is that food entrepreneurs often hit obstacles or dead ends in their efforts to launch a food business. This can happen due to shortcomings in a business plan, mistakes or misunderstandings by inspectors, zoning issues, insurance issues, or other factors -- and often it's a combination of factors. Examples are detailed in case studies developed through interviews with farmers, food entrepreneurs, and food inspectors.

One "next step" priority of the group is establishment of a regular schedule of regional meetings of MDA, MDH and delegated authority field staff; farmers, food entrepreneurs, and food system advocates (such as SNAP educators and SHIP coordinators). A grant proposal has been submitted that, if funded, would begin this effort using the existing Food Safety Partnership

meeting schedule and MDH regional offices as meeting spaces. Meetings would include FSMA information, feature case studies of food entrepreneurs from each region, and encourage discussion and problem-solving among all participants.

The case studies and details about “next step” priorities can be found on the project web page. For more information, contact any of the committee members listed on the web page: <http://misadocuments.info/Bushgrant>

SLOW MONEY MINNESOTA LAUNCHES PILOT LOAN PROJECT IN SE MN

“Slow Money” is to the world of agricultural finance and investing what “Sustainable Agriculture” is to the world of agricultural production. Sustainable agriculture is often described as farming with an eye toward the triple bottom line of environment, economics, and quality of life. Slow Money makes financing accessible to small and mid-sized farms and food entrepreneurs, on terms that enable them to pursue innovative enterprises, make a reasonable profit, and contribute positively to their local economies.

Renewing the Countryside is taking the lead in building the Slow Money Minnesota movement, which builds on years of work by many businesses and organizations including the natural food co-ops, farm-to-table restaurants, non-profit organizations, and farmers. The Grow a Farmer Fund campaign was officially launched on May 3, 2016. This fund will provide small-scale sustainable farmers with low interest loans that will help them improve their operations and increase their triple bottom lines.

Why is this fund needed? Small-scale farming is hard work and it is challenging to make a decent living. On top of that, small-scale farmers are the folks that have the hardest time securing bank financing because they often lack collateral, are too small, or are trying something new (and thus are too risky for traditional lenders.) A handful of programs do provide small loans and grants to these type of farmers, and this program will complement those funds. “It’s not that there’s not money out there for small farmers and food enterprises, it’s just that it doesn’t flow as easily as it should,” said Renewing the Countryside Executive Director Jan Joannides. “This fund will enable ordinary people to support southern Minnesota’s local foods economy, thereby increasing both monetary capital and social capital for small-scale sustainable farmers.”

The Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) will house the Grow a Farmer Fund, and donate their time and expertise to manage it. Farms located in 20 counties in southeastern Minnesota will be eligible to apply for loans during this pilot phase, but the goal is to expand the fund and eligibility around the state. Small farms using sustainable practices that can demonstrate potential to improve their operations and increase their bottom lines will be eligible for loans of up to \$15,000. The eligible projects are broad because every farm business is different. Examples might include building a winter greenhouse to extend the growing season,

installing an automatic watering system for efficient livestock production, or covering start-up costs for perennial crops that take several years to produce a saleable crop. Money from repayment of loans will go back into the loan fund and be available for other farmers. This way the money will continue to circulate in the community, providing enduring support for small-scale sustainable farmers.

More about:

Slow Money: <https://slowmoney.org/>

Slow Money Minnesota: www.slowmoneyminnesota.org/

Grow a Farmer Fund: <https://smifoundation.org.presencehost.net/philanthropy/community-foundation-giving/grow-a-farmer.html>

SARE GRANTS AWARDED IN MINNESOTA FOR 2016

The North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) Program is pleased to announce the projects recommended for funding in Minnesota for the 2016 Farmer Rancher and Partnership competitive grant programs.

Minnesota Farmer-Rancher projects selected to receive funding:

- Winona LaDuke of Ojibway Growers in Ponford: \$15,000 for “Anishinaabe Traditional Food Restoration for Local and Market Consumption.”
- Russ Martie of Martie Farms in Monticello: \$7,460 for “Subsurface Irrigation & Aerogation to Improve Productivity and Reduce Nutrient Movement.”
- John Mesko of Lighthouse Farm in Milaca: \$12,139 for “Assessing the Value of Hay Litter During Winter Bale Grazing.”
- Vernon Uit De Flesch in Worthington: \$7,398 for “Increasing Soil Health and Infiltration with Cover Crops.”

Minnesota Partnership Grants funded in 2016:

- Spencer Herbert with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture in North Mankato: \$30,000 for “On-Farm Research to Quantify the Value of Cover Crops for Nutrient Crediting.”
- Annalisa Hultberg with the University of Minnesota in St. Paul: \$29,897 for “Building Capacity via Peer-to-peer Food Safety Education with Hmong-American Fruit and Vegetable Farmers.”
- Marla Spivak with the University of Minnesota in Saint Paul: \$30,000 for “Causes of Honey Bee Queen Failure in Commercial Beekeeping Operations.”

Read descriptions of these projects online at www.northcentralsare.org/Grants/Recent-Grant-Projects

Since 1988, Minnesota has received \$9,164,890 from the NCR-SARE program to support 235 projects, including 60 research and/or education projects, 24 professional development projects and 111 producer-led projects. Minnesota has also received additional SARE support through multistate projects. The program, part of USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, funds projects and conducts outreach designed to improve agricultural systems.

FARM BEGINNINGS COURSE REGISTRATION OPEN UNTIL SEPTEMBER 1

The Land Stewardship Project's well-known and highly successful Farm Beginnings® course will begin this coming fall in two locations: Northfield, MN and Glenwood, MN. Farm Beginnings is a 12-month course that includes help for beginning farmers to clarify their goals and strengths, establish a strong enterprise plan and start building their operation. The course uses a mix of farmer-led classroom sessions, on-farm tours, and an extensive farmer network for mentoring. Cost of the course is \$1,500 per "farm unit;" either a farmer or two farming partners from the same farm. Payment plans are available. Early bird registration by August 1, 2016 offers a \$100 discount. Find the details on the Land Stewardship Project website, www.landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farm; or contact Karen Benson, the Farm Beginnings Application Coordinator, at lpse@landstewardshipproject.org or 507-523-3366.

SUSTAINABLE SHEEP & FIBER COMMUNITY OF NORTHERN MN NOW ACCEPTING MEMBERSHIPS

The Sustainable Sheep and Fiber Community (SSFC) of Northern Minnesota works to empower producers, educate consumers, build relationships and support communities through support of farmers, fiber artists and crafters. The SSFC sponsors events and educational opportunities for producers, consumers, fiber artists and youth that provide information on the environmental and economic sustainability of sheep and fiber animals.

The Sustainable Sheep Farming event, usually offered in February, offers multiple seminars and educational opportunities for anyone interested in sustainable practices for raising sheep. Another sponsored event is the Fosston Fiber Festival, which celebrates the fiber heritage of northern Minnesota while showcasing local fiber producers and artists. A range of workshops make fiber art and craft technique accessible to anyone.

The Sustainable Sheep and Fiber Community is currently open for memberships. When you become a member, you become part of a movement to help shape the future of sustainable sheep and fiber farming in Northern Minnesota. Membership benefits include:

- Voting rights for the board of directors
- A page on the Sheep Community website
- A listing in our Farm Producer or Artisan directory

Annual membership fee is \$20. For more information and a membership application, visit the group's website: www.sheepcommunity.com; or contact the coordinator, Alethea Kenney: sustainablesheep@gmail.com

The Sustainable Sheep and Fiber Community of Northern Minnesota is sponsored in part by the Sustainable Farming Assn of Minnesota, the Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, and the Northwest Minnesota Foundation.

SILVOPASTURE SUMMER TOUR

Silvopasture means “grazing in the woods.” It is an agroforestry technique that pairs grazing of livestock with intensive management of forages and of tree production for firewood, lumber, fruit or nut production, or other products. Silvopasture is a system that can be profitable because of the benefits to both livestock and trees: the trees provide shade and shelter for the animals, while the animals reduce or eliminate underbrush and allow the valuable trees to thrive.

More about silvopasture in Minnesota:

www.extension.umn.edu/environment/agroforestry/silvopasture/silvopasture.html

Good management is key to success of the system. Overgrazing can reduce the forage productivity and lead to soil erosion or damage to the trees. Diomy Zamora, Agroforestry specialist with University of Minnesota Extension, has been conducting research on silvopasture systems in Minnesota. He and project collaborators are offering a tour on June 22, of research areas in Crow Wing County.

More about the Silvopasture tour:

www.sfa-mn.org/event/grazing-in-the-woods-silvopasture-tour/

FAREWELL TO JILL

Minnesota SARE and MISA bid Jill Sackett Eberhart a fond farewell with best wishes for her new endeavors. Jill and Kate Seager have been the co-coordinators for the Minnesota SARE program, and Jill has also had a position in the Regional Extension office in Mankato, MN. Her last day with Extension will be June 30, and as of July 6 she will be joining the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources as an area Board Conservationist. Jill says, “Thank you to all

those farmers and ag and natural resource professionals that are working to spread sustainable agriculture practices across Minnesota and the Midwest. I appreciate having the chance to work with you all during these past years. Thank you for all you do.”

SUMMER READING

Locally Laid – How We Built a Plucky, Industry-Changing Egg Farm – from Scratch. By Lucie Amundsen. <http://locallylaid.com/the-book/>

The Color of Food: Stories of Race, Resilience and Farming. By Natasha Bowens. <http://thecoloroffood.com/>

A Murder in Mohair – newest title in the Black Sheep Knitting Mystery series by Anne Canadeo. <http://cozy-mysteries-unlimited.com/black-sheep-knitting-mystery>

City of Refuge by Starhawk - the sequel to the Fifth Sacred Thing, a fictional utopian/ dystopian, permaculture-based future. <http://starhawk.org/city-of-refuge-the-sequel-to-the-fifth-sacred-thing/>

The Urban Farmer by Curtis Stone - great read for small scale farmers looking to increase their profitability. <http://theurbanfarmer.co/book/>

WHAT WE'RE ABOUT . . .

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 Service; the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCRSARE) Professional Development Program (PDP); and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA).

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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.