

Our Minnesota winter can be challenging—but along with short days and unpredictable weather, we also have a number of winter opportunities! Whether you want to join the discussions about the future of local food, learn about high tunnels and winter greenhouses, explore organic dairying, learn about using horses in sustainable logging, or read up on interesting organic marketing research—you're in luck!

Season Extension

Growing consumer interest in locally-grown food has restaurant chefs, food co-ops and grocery produce buyers clamoring for ways to have local produce available for a longer time in Minnesota. One approach to help producers extend the local growing season in our northern climate is to use high tunnels. These structures range in cost, but are very economical to build when compared to building a green houses.

Terry Nennich, a University of Minnesota Horticultural Extension Educator who has worked extensively with high tunnels, agrees that high tunnels are definitely a hot topic. Terry will be giving overviews about high tunnels at several upcoming conferences, including a session at the Minnesota Organic Conference on Jan. 18th which will include information about organic production in high tunnels. Terry will team with extension educators to present a day-long workshop for high tunnel beginners,

“Getting Started in High Tunnel Production” in St. Cloud on Feb. 11, 2008 (prior to the Upper Midwest Regional Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference.) The following day, Feb. 12th, an afternoon session at the conference will also focus on high tunnel production, include information about organic production and nutrient management, and conclude with a grower's panel discussion about their high tunnel experiences. For more information about the MFVG workshops or to register, go to: www.mfvga.org.

Also of interest, a manual developed by Terry Nennich, Dave Wildung and Pat Johnson, “Minnesota High Tunnel Production Manual for Commercial Growers”, is now available online at: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/M1218.html>. or contact the Minnesota Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association office at 763-434-

0400 or info@mfvga.org for a print copy. Passive solar greenhouses can also be an economical way to extend the season—right through the winter! Carol Ford and Chuck Waibel operate a winter vegetable CSA, which includes fresh greens grown in their 18 by 22-foot greenhouse in Milan. On January 19th they're presenting a workshop on “Building Community with a Greenhouse,” in Milan, Minnesota. The workshop will cover design and construction, as well as vegetable production techniques and community building. The workshop will also include a tour of their winter greenhouse—now packed with ready to cut salad greens! The workshop is sponsored by Garden Goddess Produce, the Land Stewardship Project, Earthrise Farms and Depot Studios. For more information or to register, contact Carol or Chuck at newworld@fedteldirect.net

Got organic milk?

The number of organic dairies is increasing to meet a booming consumer market for organic dairy products. If you are an agricultural professional interested in organic dairy production, you should plan to attend “Organic Dairy 101: A Workshop for Dairy Support Professionals.” Four day-long professional development workshops are being held throughout Minnesota. Come find out about the organic certification process, recordkeeping, economics and outlook for organic dairying, livestock health and nutrition, pasture management and organic dairy resources. Hear from certified organic dairy farmers and dairy support professionals about the successes and challenges of

organic dairy production. Organic Dairy 101 will be held in Minnesota: Thursday, Jan. 17 in St. Cloud; Tuesday, Feb. 5 in Marshall; Tuesday, March 25 in Rochester; Thursday, March 27 in McIntosh. More information and registration at www.sfa-mn.org or call Anne Borgendale at 320-226-6318. All workshops run from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The price of the workshop (\$35) includes lunch featuring organic foods.

Three organic dairy sessions designed specifically for veterinarians will emphasize herd health and nutrition. They will be held in Wisconsin: Wednesday, Feb. 6 in Madison; Friday, Feb. 22 in La Crosse (at the Upper Midwest Organic Farming

Conference); Thursday, March 13 in Clark County. More information on those sessions at: www.cias.wisc.edu/organic_farming. “Organic Dairy 101 for Dairy Support Professionals” is sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, and numerous local partners. Funding is provided through a grant from the North Central Region SARE Professional Development Program.

Youth Sustainability Confabulation—we want you—you are the future!

Confabulation—from the Latin word “confabulari,” meaning “to talk together.” If you are a college student, teenager, young farmer, aspiring farmer or just a regular person under the age of 35 who cares about sustainability issues and thinks the future is an exciting, yet slightly scary place, you need to attend the Youth Sustainability Confabulation on Friday, Feb. 1, 2:00 p.m.

at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. The Confab aims to create a forum to amplify the voice of youth, and to connect you with other young adults concerned with sustainability. A World Café setting will guide you through rotating informal small group discussions. You will have the chance to discuss a wide range of sustainability issues: What forces are driving

change? How do you envision the world in the year 2050? The afternoon will wrap up over tapas made with local ingredients. There is no cost for the Confab and free overnight hostel-style accommodations are available on the Gustavus Adolphus Campus. Register online at www.sfa-mn.org or contact Anne Borgendale, 320-226-6318, communications@sfa-mn.org

Local Food—how to keep up with all that’s happening?

In Minnesota, many organizations are involved in building local, sustainable food systems. The challenge is keeping up with all of the work!

New positions

Though certainly not new to the local food scene, two veteran sustainable agriculture advocates will be using their talents to promote and coordinate local food efforts in new positions in 2008.

Maggi Adamek will be working as an Extension Research Fellow with the Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships to coordinate efforts, gather information, assess research and information gaps, and build relationships between groups promoting and conducting research on local food systems. “There are a whole bunch of us doing this,” Maggi noted, “but we’re not as well connected as we could be—how do we develop a coordinated response?” A key function of her job will be to support and provide strategic development to local food efforts in different parts of the state. But in working with the Regional Partnerships, Maggi also sees an opportunity to help the University of Minnesota formulate a response to the needs of local food work—a means to identify and address some of the larger system obstacles, like barriers to distribution and barriers to farm-to-school programs. Maggi looks forward to coordinating the Partnerships’ work with the University of Minnesota’s new Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute, as well as the

Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) and individual faculty who are working on local food issues. Maggi can be contacted at mademek@umn.edu.

JoAnne Berkenkamp recently joined the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) as Program Director for Local Foods. This new program reflects IATP’s commitment to local, sustainable food systems and will range in scope from local to national and international. JoAnne will also connect local food efforts with IATP’s activity in the health, rural development, trade and environmental arenas. For the past 11 years, JoAnne has led an independent consulting practice working with non-profits, food businesses and foundations across the United States. Her consulting work focused on market development for locally and sustainably grown food and the creation of farmer-owned businesses. She is a past Chair of the MISA Board and the Mississippi Market natural food cooperative. JoAnne’s email address is jberkenkamp@iatp.org.

Tools to keep up to date in local food work Minnesota Food Works is a loose-knit group of non-profit organizations, state government agencies, local governments, University of Minnesota centers, and individuals involved in local food systems work. The group meets by conference call on the third Tuesday of every month, and those not able to attend the call receive meeting notes. The conference calls keep participants informed about what other

groups are doing, foster connections and collaborations among the participants, and highlight current issues about local food. The group has also served as a point of contact for others who are seeking information or help with local food-related activities. If you would like to be added to the list of participants, please contact Jane Grimsbo Jewett at jewet006@umn.edu.

Local Food Happy Hour—Twin Cities metro. For the past year, people working on local food issues in the metro area have been meeting informally the first Tuesday of each month from 5 to 7 p.m. to chat. Since early summer, the group has been meeting at Common Roots Café at Lyndale Ave and 26th St in South Minneapolis. This has been a great opportunity for groups from diverse organizations to come together around this common issue. Beginning in January, Happy Hours will highlight a different topic each month. On January 8 (note date change due to New Year’s Day holiday) there will be a brief presentation by those working with Emergency Food agencies and their efforts to provide local food to low income populations. Pat Kerrigan from Emergency Foodshelf Network, Kate Mudge from Second Harvest Heartland, and Brian Noy from Augsburg College’s Campus Kitchen will share their work from 5:45 to 6:00. For more information about the Local Food Happy Hour or to get on the mailing list, contact tclocalfoodhappyhour@gmail.com

Land stewardship for small acreages course to be held this spring

“Living on the Land: Stewardship for Small Acreages” is being launched as a pilot course this spring by University of Minnesota Extension. The nine-week course is designed to arm landowners with basic 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 class will be taught by extension educators and natural resource professionals, and will include a farm site visit. The class will meet Monday evenings

at Independence City Hall, (Hennepin County), Feb 25-April 21 from 6:30-9:30 p.m. For more information or to register, contact Betsy Gilkerson Wielund, 612-596-1175, Elizabeth.Gilkerson@co.hennepin.mn.us

Equine Forestry documentary to be aired on Public Television

Tim Carroll of Cedar Horse Logging in Lyle, Minnesota has been logging with draft horses for fifteen years. He is seeing increased demand for low-impact tree harvesting methods, but fewer people trained to do horse logging. Using funding

from a SARE farmer-rancher grant, Tim teamed up with Twin Cities Public Television and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy to produce a 30-minute documentary, "Equine Forestry." The program showcases the environmental and

economic value of horse logging and will first air on Twin Cities Public Television at 9:00 p.m. Jan. 12. Check your local public television schedule for additional times.

Conferences—see MISA calendar (www.misa.umn.edu) for more events

Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota's annual conference: "Local Food: the Next Step", Saturday, Feb. 2, St. Peter, Minnesota. Moving forward in local food work is the central theme of this year's conference which will begin with a plenary session featuring the Executive Directors of the Sustainers' Coalition member organizations: Rebecca Bauman, The Minnesota Project; George Boody, Land Stewardship Project; Mary Jo Forbord, Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota; Jim Harkness, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy; and Glen Hill, Minnesota Food Association. The group will share information about their organizations' work in local food and discuss next steps in local foods work. For more information and to register, go to: www.sfa-mn.org/conference.php or call 320-

226-6318.

Minnesota Organic Conference and Trade Show, Jan. 18-19, St. Cloud, Minn. The Keynote Address at this year's conference will be delivered by Robert Marqusee, "Why Organics Make Good Economic Development Sense." Robert is the Director of Rural Economic Development for Woodbury County, IA. Woodbury County adopted the 'Local Food Purchase Policy' in January, 2006 and became the first county in the nation to mandate the purchase of locally grown organic food. For more information and to register, go to: www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic/conference.htm or call 651-201-6012.

Midwest Value Added Conference and Local Food Summit, January 24-25, Eau Claire, Wisc. This year the Value Added Conference will be held in conjunction

with the 2nd WI Local Food Summit. The Summit celebrates the diverse array of local food initiatives underway in Wisconsin. Last year's Summit addressed distribution of product challenges. For more information and to register, go to: www.rivercountryrfd.org/valad.htm or call 715-834-9672.

Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference, Feb. 21-23, La Crosse, Wisc. In addition to the many symposia on all topics organic, for the first time in 2008, the conference will include the Organic Research Symposium, bringing important research relevant to organic systems to those who will be able to use it in their fields, barns, labs and classrooms. For more information and to register, go to: www.mosesorganic.org/umofc/intro.html, or call 715-772-3153.

Organic Marketing Survey Results

Organic crop and livestock demand has continuously outpaced supply. This puts organic growers in the driver's seat when it comes to marketing, making it worth their effort to research marketing options and find the best price.

Information about how certified organic farmers market their products, the challenges they face in doing so and their related resource needs is useful to beginning organic farmers, as well as to experienced organic growers considering expansion into wholesale markets, and to conventional growers interested in transitioning to organic management. Organic marketing information is also useful to lenders who must qualify loans for organic enterprises, to educators who are monitoring this dynamic marketplace, and to extension agents and government representatives who must develop tools that will be useful to future generations of organic growers.

In response to the demand for marketing information, six marketing-related

questions were included in the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's 2007 Organic Farmer Survey. These questions were developed in collaboration with the University of Minnesota's School of Agriculture's Endowed Chair Program.

The survey responses indicated that Minnesota's organic farmers are confident marketers who use a variety of distribution channels and sales practices to move field crops, produce, livestock and dairy products. The majority of survey respondents were field crop producers who utilized brokers and forward contracts to market their products. When asked how much of income comes from the sale of organic products, more than half of all respondents said organics accounted for 90 to 100 percent of sales. Very few farmers marketed certified organic products in conventional markets— suggesting that demand for organic commodities produced in Minnesota was strong in 2006.

Most producers use word-of-mouth to identify buyers, although a number of

Minnesota's organic farmers make good use of member organizations, conferences and trade shows to line up sales. When asked about current marketing challenges, the majority of respondents focused on "cheap imports" and expressed concern about the impact of these commodities on domestic prices. Minnesota's organic farmers also expressed concern over what they consider a lack of public knowledge or understanding of "the benefits of organic production." When asked what type of marketing resources would be "most helpful," over 40 percent of producers called for an "Organic Buyer Directory" with another 38 percent calling for price reports.

For more information about the organic marketing survey, contact Gigi DiGiacomo, University of Minnesota, Endowed Chair in Agriculture Program, 612-710-1188 or rgdigiacomo@earthlink.net. For the full organic farming survey results, contact Meg Moynihan, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, 651-201-6616 or meg.moynihan@state.mn.us.

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MDA Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grants

MDA will award \$150,000 in Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grants to help farmers, researchers and educators implement new sustainable farming systems. The MDA is accepting applications for these grants, which are available for three-year projects that benefit the environment, increase farm net profits through cost reductions or enhanced marketing, and improve the farm family quality of life. Proposals are due January 18, 2008.

To view the 2007-2008 application online, go to: www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/demogrant.htm. For more information or to receive an application in the mail, contact Jeanne Ciborowski at 651-201-6217 or Jeanne.ciborowski@state.mn.us

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