

Sustainable Agriculture

Volume 7, Issue 8 – August 1999

Communities need plan to retain farm families, economist says

What happens to the economies of small towns when farms go out of business? It depends on the type of farm and whether the farm family stays in the community.

“When crop farmers go out of business, the land is typically farmed by another farmer from the area,” says Vernon Eidman, head of the Applied Economics Department at the University of Minnesota. So some of the economic activity from that farm may stay in the community.

But when a local livestock farm hangs it up, production is apt to shift to a larger unit that may be in another community or state. And farmers with larger operations are less apt to buy their farm supplies locally, says Eidman, and he cites a 1994 University of Minnesota survey.

The survey of 30 members of the Southwestern Minnesota Farm Business Management Association was conducted by John Chism, a graduate student, and Dick Levins, economist with the University of Minnesota’s Extension Service. The study showed farm size was an important indicator of how likely a farmer is to spend locally for needed farm goods and services.

Several people in the study said that many larger crop farmers were grouping together to purchase seeds and chemicals from factory or wholesale outlets. They bypassed local sales people and received lower prices. Large livestock farmers were also buying more of the feed ingredients, antibiotics and livestock from distant suppliers who offered better prices, higher quality service or a more consistent supply of top quality animals.

Many respondents said that as farmers’ businesses grow, the primary managers might add labor, management or enter into contracting arrangements. This lets them devote more time to procuring farm inputs from distant sources to save money, get better service or garner a superior product.

An intriguing study in Iowa showed that farmers who lived in town were more apt to buy locally than did farmers who lived on the traditional farmstead, Eidman says. Apparently if you had to jump into the pick-up, you might decide to go 40 miles to a larger town and instead of going 20 miles to the closest town. But buying just down the street was tempting for farmers who lived in town.

A key point, Eidman emphasizes, is what happens to the local economy when families leave farming but continue to live and work in the community. “This could actually be a positive factor in the local economy if the non-farm income the family earned was more than the farm income.

“There are no easy answers, but small communities need to be planning how to keep people in the community if they leave farming. Most people would like to remain in the community,” Eidman says. “A

strong non-farm economy is very important to maintain small towns.” He can be reached at (612) 625-0231.

Rural Response program has new website

A new website with hundreds of references to help rural families in crisis is now available. You can access it by contacting any county office of the University of Minnesota Extension Service, or by entering www.extension.umn.edu, then clicking on Rural Response.

Topics include alternative agriculture, career exploration, communities and rural development, crops, livestock, families and youth, family financial management, farm safety and health, legal issues, marketing ag commodities, stress and change management and sustainable agriculture.

Rural Response is part of the Extension Service’s three-phase response to the economic and social crisis in rural Minnesota. Other partners in the Rural Response Coalition of public and private organizations are the Association of Minnesota Counties, Minnesota Bankers Association, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the University’s College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences. Contact your county Extension office for more information.

Small farm tours for aspiring city, suburban farmers in August

There could be some 30,000 farmers in the Twin Cities metropolitan area—almost half of the farms in Minnesota—if landowners chose to farm commercially.

“There are over 5,000 landowners in Washington County alone with parcels of between 10 and 80 acres,” says Bob Olson, educator with the University of Minnesota Extension Service. “In the entire metro area we’re looking at a good 30, 000,” says Olson, “and many of them are interested in doing some farming.”

Olson, who coordinates a Living on a Few Acres program, has organized a number of informal farm tours at several Washington County locations in August. Tentative dates range from Aug. 5 to Aug. 19, starting about 6:30 p.m.

Tour plans include a small vineyard; organic, fresh market farm; Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm; hydroponic vegetable farm; commercial bee keeping operation; commercial small fruit farm; and a flower farm.

For a brochure with more details on the small farm tours, call the Washington County Extension Office in Stillwater at (651) 430-6800.

Preproposals for SARE competitive grants due Sept. 10

Preproposals for sustainable agriculture research and education activities are due to USDA’s North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program Sept. 10, 1999. About \$1.1 million is expected to be available for projects in fiscal year 2000, for implementation in mid-to late 2000. Preference will be given to proposals of \$100,000 or less. For more information, call (402) 472-7081, e-mail sare001@unlvm.unl.edu, or check the website at www.sare.org/ncrsare.

Cancer prevention conference

“Turning the Tides II Conference: Environmental Action for Cancer Prevention” will be held October 15-16, 1999 at RiverCentre in downtown St. Paul, Minn. The conference is convened by the Women’s Cancer Resource Center and provides an opportunity to hear nationally recognized experts discuss environmental issues and their relationship to cancer and the prevention of cancer in our communities. Call (800) 908-8544 or (612) 729-0491 to register or to get more information.

Streamside grazing workshop to be held near Lanesboro

A two-day Streamside Grazing Workshop will be held Sept. 8-9, 1999 at Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center near Lanesboro. The registration deadline is Aug. 10.

The first day of the workshop will feature presentations on animal behavior, animal health, economics of grazing, and the impact of animals on water quality. Speakers include experienced graziers, and nationally known agency personnel and faculty from several universities. The second day of the workshop will feature a tour of several grazing operations in southeast Minnesota.

The workshop is sponsored by the MN-IA-WI Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative and was planned primarily by farmers and members of agricultural associations. To get a copy of the agenda and a registration form, contact Dennis Neffendorf at NRCS in St Paul, (651) 602-7867.

Calendar of 1999 events...

These events are sponsored by numerous organizations. More information is available on MISA’s website: www.misa.umn.edu

Thursday, August 5, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Citizens’ Forum on the Economic and Social Crisis in Rural Minnesota. Locations statewide. Contact Mike Liepold, (507) 357-2251.

Thursday, August 5, 3:00 to 6:00 p.m., Bemidji. Farm Tour at Country Acres Pick-Your-Own Organic Blueberries. Contact Kathy Schmit, (218) 751-0193.

Sunday, August 8, 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., Finland. Integrating Livestock Profitably into a Fruit and Vegetable Operation. Contact David Abazs, (218) 353-7736.

Tuesday, August 10, 6:30 to 9:00 p.m., Appleton. Two projects combined into one field day. #1: First and Second Grazers in a Year Round Pasture Setting Served by a Frost Free Water System. Contact Dan and Don Struxness, (320) 752-4733. #2: Using Cereal Rye for Reduced Input Pasture Establishment and Early Grazing. Contact Greg Cuomo, (320) 589-1711.

Wednesday, August 11, 1:30 p.m., Evansville. Learning Advanced Management Intensive Grazing Through Mentoring. Contact Bob Stommes, (218) 948-2349.

Thursday, August 12, 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., Waseca. Ag Drainage and Crop Management Field Day. Contact Southern Research and Outreach Center, (507) 835-3620.

Friday, August 13, 1:00 p.m., New Ulm. Managed Production of Woods-Grown and Simulated-Wild Ginseng. Contact Willis Runck, (507) 359-4308.

Tuesday, August 17, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Farmington. Adding Value to Small Farms through Processing Excess Production. Contact Jeffrey Adelman, (651) 463-3543.

Tuesday, August 24, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Ivanhoe, Hendricks, and Arco. Three projects combined into one field day. #1: Increased Forage Production Through Control of Water Runoff. Contact James Sovell, (507) 694-1486. #2: Living Snow Fences for Improved Pasture Production. Contact Mike Hansen, (507) 694-1825. #3: Using Black Medic (*Medicago lupulina*) as a Protein Source in Grazing Corn. Contact Joseph Rolling, (507) 487-5742.

Wednesday, September 1, 9:30 to 11:30 a.m., Grand Rapids. Flame Burning for Weed Control and Renovation with Strawberries. Contact David Wildung, (218) 327-4711.

Wednesday, September 1, 1:30 to 3:00 p.m., Lewiston. Growing Corn with Companion Crop Legumes for High Protein Silage. Contact Stanley Smith, (507) 523-2874.

Thursday, September 2, 2:00 to 9:00 p.m., Sebeka. Introduction to Biodynamic Production Workshop. Contact Duane and Ann Morgan, (218) 732-4866.

Wednesday, September 8 and Thursday, September 9, Lanesboro. Streamside Grazing Workshop. Contact Dennis Neffendorf, (651) 602-7867.

Friday, September 10, 12:00 to 4:00 p.m., Morris. Legume Cover Crops Interseeded in Corn as a Source of Nitrogen. Contact Dian Lopez or Alan Olness, (320) 589-3411 ext. 131.

Saturday, September 11, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Duluth. Harvest Festival. Contact the Northeast Chapter, Sustainable Farming Association, (218) 727-1414.

Saturday, September 11, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., Kerkhoven. Low Cost Hoop Gestation. Contact Steve Stassen, (320) 264-5932.

Monday, September 13, 3:00 p.m., Red Lake Falls. Interseeding Hairy Vetch in Sunflowers and Corn. Contact Hans Kandel, (218) 253-2897.

Saturday, September 18, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Bloomington. From Farm to Fork: Reclaiming Our Food System from Corporate Giants. Contact Suzanne McIntosh or Andrea Kiepe, (612) 623-3666.

Tuesday, September 21, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., Hutchinson. Reviving and Enhancing Soils for Maximizing Performance of Pastures and Livestock. Contact Doug Rathke and Connie Karstens, (320) 587-6094.

Thursday, September 23, 10:00 a.m., Northfield. Dry Edible Beans as an Alternative Crop in a Direct Marketing Operation. Contact Diane and Bruce Milan, (507) 645-8282.

Saturday, October 2, 1:30 p.m., Palisade. Surface Application of Liming Materials. Contact Jane Grimsbo Jewett, (218) 845-2832.

Tuesday, October 12, 3:00 p.m., Shevlin. Increasing Quality and Quantity of Pasture Forage with Management Intensive Grazing as an Alternative to Grazing Wooded Land. Contact Michael Harmon, (218) 657-2592.

Thursday, October 28, 1:00 to 5:00 p.m., Windom. Development of a Low-Cost Mechanism for the Interseeding of Companion/Cover Crops in a Corn-Soybean Rotation. Contact Tony Thompson, (507) 831-3483.

About this newsletter...

For the past year we've been funded by the Minnesota Extension Service and the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) with support from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

We're always looking for story ideas. Send them to the editor: Jack Sperbeck, 405 Coffey Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108, (612) 625-1794. E-mail: jsperbeck@extension.umn.edu. Other editorial board members: Helene Murray (612) 625-0220, murra@021.tc.umn.edu; Tom Wegner (612) 374-8400, twegner@extension.umn.edu; and Bill Wilcke (612) 625-8205, wwilcke@extension.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.