

Sustainable Agriculture

Volume 6, Issue 1 – January 1998

You can raise hogs close to town and still be a good neighbor

How do you remain a "good neighbor" while operating a swine farrow-to-finish system next to town? A deep straw bedded finishing system with hoop buildings has worked for Mark and Nancy Moulton, Rush City, Minn.

They wanted to try the deep straw-hoop system for environmental and economic reasons. Their farm is less than a quarter-mile from a new school, and the town of Rush City is expanding toward their farm. They ruled out liquid manure systems because of odor problems, and found neighbors weren't bothered by odor from the deep bedded system. The Moultons are "doing everything they can" to reduce odor problems, says Rod Elmstrand, Chisago County extension educator.

Mark has used many systems to raise hogs, from dirt lots to modern slatted buildings and "most things in between." He says the hoop house is by far the best for reducing odor, but "the key is enough bedding." They use 75 large bales (about 1,000 pounds each) per year in a 30' by 72' building in continuous operation.

"The better the building is bedded, the less odor is produced," Mark says. He uses cornstalks since the only cost is for baling. The stalks "take a detour" after holding up the corncob by going through the barns to bed the pigs, then out to the field again to become soil organic matter. The Moultons are working with an environmental consultant to monitor air quality and subsoil nutrients.

They've found energy costs from electricity and propane are sharply reduced in the deep bedded system. Their waterer works well (without heat) in all weather conditions, so the only electricity used for the hoop buildings is for pumping water. Propane isn't needed since the bedding pack composts and provides heat for the growing pigs.

Mark says there's only a small difference in labor requirements between hoops and slatted floor confinement buildings. "I'd gladly spend another 10 minutes with 180 hogs to have one-third the debt and better working conditions," he says. The deep bedded system doesn't require daily or weekly cleaning--only after each group is sold. Cleaning is done with a front-end loader on a tractor or skid steer with a grapple fork, and takes three to four hours. Adding bedding takes one-half hour per week--no different than checking pigs in confinement.

And it's easier to observe animals in this system since the environment is better. With no odor or dust in the hoop house, it's a pleasant chore, not a job you dislike. Mark and Nancy had found that if they were bothered by dust or odor, they weren't going to spend the necessary time to do the job right.

The first four groups totaling 560 pigs had average daily gains of 1.8 to 1.915 pounds per day. Feed conversion ranged from 3.08 to 3.8. The group with a 3.8 conversion rate was put in the hoop house at

109 pounds and sold at 260 pounds, which decreased the conversion rate. The Moultons say this system allows them to be more profitable per hog produced.

The Moultons can be reached at 51420 Game Ave., Rush City, MN 55069, (320) 358-4632. (Adapted from *Greenbook '97*, published by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program, 90 W. Plato Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55107, 612-296-7673.)

Earle Brown Center's FARM project features Minnesota foods

The catering service at the Earle Brown Center on the University of Minnesota's St. Paul Campus is buying food directly from several Minnesota farmers. The center's "FARM" project (Farms, Agricultural Resources and Markets) features serving top quality Minnesota products to some of its 65,000 yearly visitors who attend continuing education activities.

"Many people today know little about the people and processes behind the food we eat," says Susan Barker, catering manager at Earle Brown. "We have a unique opportunity to showcase some of the exciting resources of our St. Paul Campus as well as Minnesota food producers and distributors," she adds. The project highlights products developed at the University and the people who developed them. Some rich personal stories behind the food being served are shared with the guests.

Here are some Minnesota products enjoyed by student scholarship recipients from the College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences at their awards banquet:

--Three kinds of apples--Haralson, Honeygold and Honeycrisp--developed by the Horticultural Science Department. Honeycrisp is the department's most recent release.

--Dutch Gouda cheese and smoked bison from Mary and Joe Eichten, Center City. The Eichtens studied cheesemaking at the University's Food Science Department.

--Minnesota wild rice. For the past 25 years there's been a comprehensive research program in the Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics. Annual Minnesota production of processed grain exceeds 5.5 million pounds.

--Mini-pumpkin cheesecakes were created for the University by Lady Dianne Foods in Lakeville. Fresh apple cider came from Pepin Heights Orchards in Lake City; decorative pumpkins and gourds from Rum Hollow Farm in Princeton and Kornder Farm in Belle Plaine.

For more information or to check into contracting for food sales, contact Susan Barker at (612) 625-8706, or barke005@cafe.tc.umn.edu.

Funding proposals to LCMR are due Feb. 13

The Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR) is accepting proposals for projects designed to help sustain and enhance Minnesota's natural resources. Proposals must be received or postmarked by Feb. 13, 1998, and will not be accepted by fax or e-mail. Applications are open to anyone who can demonstrate public benefit.

About \$38 million is available; grants range from under \$100,000 to over \$1 million. Funding priorities will go to proposals in several strategy areas: local initiatives, state and metro parks, recreation areas and

trails, historic sites, water quality, agricultural and natural resource-based industries, urbanization impacts on natural resources, innovations in energy transportation, decision-making tools, environmental education, critical lands or habitats, native species planting, native fish species, and exotic species.

LCMR staff will conduct proposal workshops throughout the state on Jan. 20, 21, 27, and 28. Details are available from the LCMR at (612) 296-2406.

DeEtta Bilek is new SFA program manager

DeEtta Bilek is the new program manager for the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota. She replaces Tim King, who resigned after serving over two years in the position. DeEtta continues her position as central chapter coordinator. She can be reached at (218) 445-5475, e-mail deebilek@wcta.net.

Grant funding will help farmers convert to rotational grazing

Diagnostic team members are being selected to help dairy farmers convert to rotational grazing and other sustainable farming methods. The pilot program will have a team in four areas of Minnesota—northwestern, central, east central, and west central. Each will have four team members—two farmers and two from agencies or industry. They will work on a one-to-one basis with individual dairy producers. At least eight farm families will be selected statewide.

Grant money came from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture; the program is being administered jointly by the Minnesota Forage and Grassland Council and the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota. For more information, contact DeEtta Bilek at (218) 445-5475, e-mail deebilek@wcta.net.

Sustainable farm mentors needed

The first group of 12 Farm Beginnings apprentices is starting an intensive nine-month program of workshops and hands-on training. The collaborative project of the Land Stewardship Project (LSP) and the Wabasha County Extension office was created to provide on-farm experience for people interested in getting started in dairy farming using low-cost, sustainable methods.

The project can still use a few more farmers willing to teach would-be farmers successful farming methods. Call LSP's Lewiston office at (507) 523-3366 if you're interested.

New farming methods is topic of Jan. 16 workshop

"Planning for a Future: Viability of New Farming Methods" is the title of a workshop scheduled Friday, Jan. 16, at Sauk Centre. It's sponsored by the Sustainable Farming Association and the University of Minnesota Center for Integrated Natural Resource and Agricultural Management.

During the workshop, farmers will team up with agricultural agency employees to present information on the economics of a rotational grazing dairy, a timberbelt agroforestry project, and alternative hog production systems. The workshop will also present ideas about whole farm planning and the direct marketing of farm products.

The workshop will be held at the Sauk Centre City Hall, with registration beginning at 8:30 a.m. Registration is \$5 at the door. Lunch is provided, and will feature locally grown foods. For more information, contact DeEtta Bilek at (218) 445-5475, e-mail deebilek@wcta.net

Forage Workshop, Minnesota Forage Conference set for early February

Minnesota's 23rd Annual Forage Conference is scheduled for Feb. 4-5, 1998, at Ruttger's Sugar Lake Lodge near Grand Rapids. Resource people include successful producers, university educators from five states, and forage industry experts. The conference will be preceded by a Forage Crop Production Workshop for certified crop advisors Feb. 3-4.

It's sponsored by the Minnesota Forage and Grassland Council, the Northeastern Forage Council, and the Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association. Registration information is available from the Forage Council, 411 Borlaug Hall, 1991 Buford Circle, St. Paul, MN 55108, (612) 625-3747.

Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association conference Feb. 5-7

The 1998 Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association (MFVGA) annual meeting and trade show is Feb. 5-7 at the Civic Center in St. Cloud. Trade show hours are 8 a.m. to 6:15 p.m. Thursday and 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Friday. Saturday's marketing conference at the Holiday Inn will include farmers' markets, marketing organic products, and business management for direct marketers. For more information, contact the MFVGA office at (612) 434-5929.

Seventh annual SFA meeting Feb. 28

The seventh annual meeting of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota (SFA) is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 28, at the Holiday Inn in Alexandria. Speakers include Rebecca Bilek on the science of global climate change, and Mark Seeley on the possible effect of El Nino on Minnesota weather. Bilek has a Ph.D. in chemistry and specializes in atmospheric chemistry; Seeley is the extension climatologist at the University of Minnesota.

Wayne Monsen, Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program, will report on the Minnesota Whole Farm Planning working group. Also speaking will be Dennis Rabe from Eagle View Farms, Lake City, Minn. SFA members will receive a mailing in February. If you'd like to join SFA, send \$20 to DeEtta Bilek, RR 1, Box 4, Aldrich, MN 56434. Call the Alexandria Holiday Inn at (320) 763-6577 for room reservations.

Other meetings...

--Jan. 20, 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Decision Case Study Workshop, Wilder Forest. Open to anyone interested in whole farm planning. Contact DeEtta Bilek at (218) 445-5475, e-mail deebilek@wcta.net.

--Feb. 3, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., "Farmers and Environmentalists: Do we share common values?" For farmers, conservationists, environmentalists, and stewards. Good Counsel Education Center, Mankato. Contact John Lamb, the Minnesota Project at 1-800-366-4793, e-mail water007@tc.umn.edu.

--March 5-8, "Building on a Decade of Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education." First national SARE conference, Austin, TX. Call (301) 314-7884, e-mail bmitchel@umdacc.umd.edu.

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.