

Minnesota Organic Network Conference Call Notes from January 5, 2006

Call Participants

Noreen Thomas (host), Glenn Schafer (scribe), Carmen Fernholz, Bill Wilcke, Helene Murray, John Beckwith, Tom Petersen, Mary Jo Forbord, DeEtta Bilek, Meg Moynihan, Jeremy Lanctot, Pauline Nickel, Milton Haar, Lori Scott, Phil Batalden, Matt Harbur & last, but not least, Jim Riddle.

Rousing Round Robin

- **Mary Jo:** The 15th annual conference of SFA will be held in Little Falls, MN, on Saturday, February 18; <http://www.sfa-mn.org/index.php>. Nominations can be made online for the 2nd annual SF Emeritus award for farmers or the SF Distinguished Service award for non farmers; printed material is forthcoming.
- **DeEtta:** OCIA is focused on Organic conference on January 20-21 in St. Cloud, as of late. Will be discussing grants/funding for educational sessions for AGR-lite (Risk Management/crop insurance product) future program availability and potential; session locations and dates TBA, with one to be held at the Organic conference and one at the MnFVGA conference in February.
- **Carmen:** Will be speaking at the NFO annual convention in Sioux Falls, SD, next week on organic marketing and to the Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) meeting on Saturday, January 14 in Des Moines, IA on organic flax growing. <http://www.practicalfarmers.org/>
- **Meg:** Organic conf. planning is progressing; no estimates on registrations yet, but 54 exhibitors are signed up. There will be a dedicated organic dairy track and other great things; continue to spread the word! MDA is working with SFA and MISA, among others, to produce two FREE publications: "Poultry Your Way" - hot off the press; and, "Dairy Your Way" - coming soon. Both are comprehensive in scope, from production to marketing and beyond. Copies will be sent to those participating in today's call. Federal organic cost share funds have been depleted with about 150 unpaid; switching to State funds now for growers only. Anticipating this dilemma, the program was clearly promoted as "first come-first served." However, we're pursuing more money from NOP. Attending a Moorhead organic event on Jan. 11 and a Minnesota Shippers Assoc. specialty crop opportunity event in Fergus Falls, on Jan 12. Getting positive responses on the organic FBM/FinBin project and have received enrollments; continuing to spread the word. MDA encourages farmers to enroll early in the year. MDA is now happily situated in its new home!
- **Tom:** Looking forward to the Organic Advisory Task Force (OATF) meeting on Jan. 19 in St. Cloud. Preparing talking points for the upcoming legislative session that begins on March 1; many important issue to be addressed such as the impaired waters program, dairy investment tax credit, bonding for RFA money and fertilizer issues.

- **Jeremy:** Organic dairy work - Organic Valley will be holding a meeting at the American Legion in Marshall, MN on Jan 12; Al Haas is contact at Organic Valley. Pride of Main Street is also providing financial and practical transitional help to farmers in preparing for certification. Has been communicating with other growers in an effort to balance supply; curious about meeting with marketers to determine produce needs for the year.
- **Pauline:** Some portions of Pauline's information were highly confidential and classified; therefore, no notes could be printed. However, rumor has it Carmen and/or Jim may leak the information if properly persuaded. Otherwise, SWROC may be adding acres to its organic land area, as SWROC is becoming the agro-ecology leader (as well as, K-12 education) ROC site; the native prairie program is also being developed that may be good for organic research.
- **Matt:** Working with RMA on a risk management partnership; developing a tool for organic producers to plan a crop rotation in terms of cropping history, production, soils, management and marketing. This project is in its embryonic stage, so a farmer task force is sought to advise the development of the tool; 'networkers' can nominate individuals, either transitioning or certified farmers. FinBin organic project participants were noted as potentially good candidates; also, having a meeting at the Organic conference may generate some interest.
- **Glenn:** FSA is discussing the FinBin organic project and getting the word out to FSA's Farm Loan Program personnel. There's significant interest in the project from the agency's perspective; FSA will put the word out via its county/state newsletters.
- **John:** NRCS State Association of RC&Ds are working on a grazing conference.
- **Noreen:** The "Gear-head" competition, a celebration of creative thinkers and farm ingenuity that helps improve the environment, economics and quality of life, is set for the Organic conference. Entries are still being accepted; free registration for next year, plus PRIZES! The "bar" is set low, with the expectation of fun set high. The "Minnesota Inventors Congress" is a state agency that helps inventors in protecting their creations; the agency provided material for the booth at the conference. <http://www.inventhelper.org/> Otherwise, there is concern amongst organic farmers that fertilizer costs will drive conventional producers to plant more soybeans, thereby affecting the possibility of an aphid problem. Organic hay is in high demand right now.
- **Bill:** The bid was accepted to move the SARE program to Minnesota over the next few years; reviewing research and education proposal; grad student grants are due next week; also reviewing farmer/rancher grants. National SARE conference to be held in Oconomowoc, WI Aug. 15-17, 2006, hosted by Minnesota's region.
- **Helene:** Next Sustainable Ag. Newsletter is coming out soon online and in print. Student Organic farm is being offered for the second year, taught by Paul Porter and Bud Markhart. Bud says, via Meg, that the Green Expo is on now at the Minneapolis Convention Center; in addition, there's still room in his Hort 4000 course, which includes a trip to Iceland and Germany in May.

Web Site Update - Jeremy

Notes should be all in the site <http://www.sfa-mn.org/organicnet/index.html>. The colors are beautiful!
Should the members' Web sites be added to the membership list; would it be useful to network members?
Send link information to Jeremy if interested, and any other comments about the site.

Next Network Call

Host: Jim Riddle

Scribe: Matthew Harbur

Date: Thursday, February 2, 2006, (Ground-hog's Day: Will you have half your hay that day?)

Time: 8:30 AM, in your favorite chair, next to your favorite phone

Number: 1-800-909-6472 or 612-625-2003; tell the operator you're hankering to rap with the groovy group of organic folks.

Respectfully submitted by:

Glenn R. Schafer

Agricultural Program Specialist

Minnesota FSA State Office

651-602-7704

FAX 651-602-7743