

Minnesota Organic Network Conference Call Notes from January 4th, 2007

Call Participants

Glenn Schafer, Helene Murray, Tom Peterson, DeEtta Bilek, Bud Markhart, Jim Riddle, Carmen Fernholz, Mary Jo Forbord Wayne Martin, Harriet Behar, Meg Moynihan, Gigi DiGiacomo (scribe), Paul Porter (host).

Rounding the Robin on an oddly warm day in January ...

- **Glenn Schafer, FSA:** FSA has named Perry Aasness as its new state executive director. FSA has announced increased incentive payments for landowners and farmers participating in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) II. Eligible watersheds include the Red River in Northwestern MN, Des Moines in Southwestern MN, and the Lower Mississippi in Southeastern MN. Glenn encourages folks to get the word out regarding new rates – this is a good opportunity for those interested in enhancing water quality.
- **Helene Murray, U of M:** MISA's Information Exchange is going to print with a new publication – a companion to its Local Food publication released in 2005. This new publication is aimed at producers and emphasizes resources that will be helpful to them for marketing. MISA hopes to have the publication available at the MN Organic conference. Other big news, Michael Pollan will be coming to the University April 19th for a discussion titled "What's for Dinner? The Ethics and Aesthetics of Eating. A fundraiser luncheon will follow (to benefit the Cornucopia Student Farm and Arboretum). Full-day fee: \$100. Contact Helene for more information. More news, MFA is searching for an Executive Director. Paul Burkhouse is the interim Executive Director.
- **Thom Petersen, MN Farmers Union:** Thom will be spending time working with the legislature and University to ensure adequate funding for organics. He has heard much talk during the first two days of the session about cloning. Senate has hired new Ag Outreach Director, Matthew Wohman, who will be based in Mankato. Dave Fredrickson will be Amy Klobuchar's new ag outreach director. Link to the Jon Tester Senate website:
http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/senators/one_item_and_teasers/tester.htm
- **DeEtta Bilek, OCIA MN:** OCIA has worked successfully on securing the AGR-LITE crop insurance for MN (total of 28 states participating in program). DeEtta and others OCIA members met with the new House Ag Committee Chair Congressman Collin Peterson regarding changes still needed with crop insurance program and notes that Peterson was surprisingly unfamiliar with issues facing organic producers. OCIA will be exhibiting at MN Organic and Value-Added conferences this winter. DeEtta adds that OCIA members have been raising questions regarding the new NOSB appointees. Jim Riddle responded by encouraging folks to get in touch with the new MN NOSB appointee, Katrina Heinze, who fills a scientist seat. She can be reached at: Katrina Heinze, PhD, CQE, is Number One General Mills Blvd., WO1-B, Minneapolis, MN 55426, Ph - 763-764-6384, email: katrina.heinze@genmills.com

- **Bud Markhart, U of MN:** Student organic farm was highlighted during the most recent Departmental review as an important training resource for students. Bud feels this recognition has given the farm increased credibility; raised it to a different level in the eyes of faculty. Moreover, there has been lots of interest among students about sustainable/organic food systems and production. Bud has seen an increase in students from different disciplines enrolled in his fall class. During the summer, Bud worked with Dream of Wild Health, a native American group whose mission is to educate inner-city youth by growing and preparing fresh food, particularly heirloom varieties. The group has land in Hugo where Bud assisted with the propagation (hand pollination) of heirloom corn varieties collected from elders. Stepping further back, Bud notes that one outcome of a class taught last spring (with trips to Iceland, Germany) is that he has had ongoing communication with a German carrot grower who is interested in coming to the United States to share his knowledge about organic vegetable production. He'd be an excellent resource and Bud encourages anyone interested to contact him for further information.
- **Jim Riddle, U of M/Organic Certifier:** Pulling together organic outreach working group – meeting in St. Cloud on Saturday at 12:00. Get acquainted meeting. 25 new acres in transition at Lamberton – received an OFRF grant to soil test, establish nutrient baselines, examine other soil properties to help with transition process. New item on organic ecology website: an updated summary of NOP regulations (<http://organicecology.umn.edu/wp-content/files/summary-of-us-organic-regulation.pdf>). Jim notes that the call for UMOFC posters has been extended through January 12th. Jim encourages MN participation. Posters should highlight research and other work related to organic agriculture. Visit the Organic Ecology website for more information: <http://www.organicecology.umn.edu/>. Jim is also working with Beth Nelson at MISA to revise an organic certification publication. Their goal is to have this printed and ready for MN Organic conference. There will be an organic workshop in Plainview, MN on January 23rd sponsored by SFA and Experiment Stations/University about “basics of organic certification.” Also working on article and issues surrounding cloning and organics. Jim has written an article and will be working with Charles Benbrook at the Organic Center (part of the Organic Trade Association) to explore the effects of cloning on animal and human health.
- **Carmen Fernholz, U of M/Organic Producer:** Carmen has put together a working group to help develop the research agenda at the university and will host a meeting in St. Cloud and another in Lamberton to discuss farm research. He has also been working on updating the MOFIE (Minnesota Organic Farmers' Information Exchange) website.
- **Mary Jo Forbord, SFA:** Mary Jo has been busy laying the groundwork for SFA Chapter conferences taking place this winter. She notes that the annual SFA conference (February 17 in St Peter) will focus on artisan cheese making. Registration forms coming out soon with Cornerpost. SFA is also participating in/organizing several other conferences including one called “Homegrown Economy” on February 26th in Morris. More details to follow. Mary Jo continues to participate in the MN Dairy Initiative and has been helping them determine

new directions for the future with a particular emphasis on grazing. She notes that there are two groups participating in the Initiative: those who view milk strictly as a bulk commodity and those who see it as a potential value-added product. SFA is also continuing its work with the Farm Business Management program to recruit farmers (grazers and organic producers?) for financial and business management classes. Lastly, Mary Jo says that there has been great work coming out of the American Dietetic Association (ADA) around nutrition and organics. She notes the ADA will host a meeting in PA September 29 – October 2, 2007 during which Organic Valley will be providing an all-day farm tour.

- **Wayne Martin, U of MN:** Wayne is new to the ‘O-Net’ call and glad to participate. He works with alternative livestock production systems: sheep, cattle, goats, hogs. He would like to help those producers interested in organics connect with resources.
- **Harriet Behar, MOSES:** Harriet will present and exhibit at the MN Organic Conference. She will do the same at the Practical Farmers of Iowa conference and will conduct an organic certification training session in Cresco, IA January 11th. Looking toward the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference (UMOFC) February 22-24, she is expecting at least as many participants as last year. Harriet has been getting a lot of calls on the newly established Organic Hotline and says that about half of the calls come from MN. She notes that there is a lot of interest in organic dairy, transitioning to organics. Kemps has been involved in organic milk for about six months – they are offering \$26/cwt, \$2 over conventional prices during the transition period, and are signing multi-year contracts. Kemps seems to have a good reputation with organic producers thus far.
- **Meg Moynihan, MDA:** MDA has 250 people pre-registered Friday for the MN Organic Conference (January 19-20). Meg considers this a very good response – higher than last year at this time. She chalks up the increased registration to good publicity and extra staff – keep things moving smoothly. Meg says they still need “hosts” for sessions at the conference to introduce speakers and welcome the group. If you are attending the conference and are willing to host a session or two, contact Meg. Meg has also been working with the administration to develop organic proposal that will be carried to governor. They are requesting funding for organic programs; to accomplish specific goals that come from the MDA based on recommendations made by the MN Organic Advisory Task Force. Task Force informs the commissioner. The MDA organic proposal will be bundled with other proposals from the administration. Meg announced that Country Choice Organic has begun discussion with companies/groups about an exhibit at the State Fair. It is unclear at this point what the focus of the exhibit will be: organics? sustainable ag? Meg will let us know if there are opportunities to weigh in on this discussion. At this point, no further meetings have been planned. Sidenote: Steele County has been successful with its organic display at the Fair. RMA continuing to discuss inter-cropping for insurance. Lastly, ERS released updated estimates of organic livestock, crop acreage estimates. Current through 2005. Available at ERS website: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/Organic/>. Noteable is a

dip in soybean production from previous years. May represent a shift in acreage as total organic acreage has increased.

- **Gigi DiGiacomo, U of M:** Gigi is recruiting farmers for the organic price reporting service that she and Jim Bernau (AMS) are in the process of developing for organic grains and livestock. She has sent out press releases inviting farmers to participate in the reporting and thanks those who have been helpful in placing announcements. Postcard “invitations” will be available at the upcoming winter conferences (MN Organic, UMOFC, and Value Added). She is also continuing to refine organic marketing questions for the MDA organic producer survey (due out in spring). Doug Hartwig (NASS, St. Paul field office) is helping design the survey questions.
- **Paul Porter, U of MN:** Paul is working with a new student this year on a Bio-diesel project where they will be dry-pressing oil out of canola or sunflower seed to use for bio-diesel. By-product is meal that can be used for animal feed. Paul feels the idea sounds very sustainable but says they still need to look at the economics. Cost for oil seed press and bio-diesel reactor is around \$25K. Could be cooperatively purchased by group of farmers. Seems best adapted for farms that raise livestock, including organic producers.

Next ‘O-Net’ Call

When: February 1st, 2007, 8:30 – 9:30 am
Where: Near your favorite phone, in your favorite chair
Host: Harriet Behar
Scribe: Wayne Martin
Call-in numbers: 1-800-909-6472 or in the Twin Cities 612-625-2003