

Notes from January 8 Organic Net work Call

Present: Gigi DiGiacomo, Bill Wilcke, Meg Moynihan, Rob King, Helene Murray, Thom Petersen, Carmen Fernholz, Harriet Behar

Round Robin Reports:

Bill: SARE is getting ready for the farmer/rancher grant review process. The committee is just beginning to assemble.

Meg: Sustainable Ag producer grant applications are due into the MDA offices by January 16. Everyone is encouraged to consider applying even though the economic environment is creating a sense of uncertainty about what will actually be funded.

The annual organic conference in St. Cloud is fast approaching. Registrations are already running ahead of 2008 -- with around 300 registered so far -- so everyone is hopeful and confident it will be a great conference once again.

The Eliot Coleman workshop on season extension production is virtually filled up. So if you are still planning to attend but have not registered please call ahead before planning on being able to attend.

Meg also remarked that the RMA outreach funding program is looking for some ideas from Minnesota. Specialty crops and under served producers are especially encouraged to get connected. Collaborative efforts are always welcome.

And finally Meg commented briefly about the growth of new organic producers somewhat slowing. The nature of the reasons for this slowing is not certain so if there are producers thinking of transitioning or in the process it is advised that you be contacting would-be buyers before the day of delivery approaches. Organic milk consumption is still predicted to continue for the foreseeable future. Applications for certification cost share have been coming in at a brisk rate. Application deadlines are the end of February so get them in on time.

Rob: There is a meeting of all faculty and staff across campus and across the state to attend a meeting on January 29th on the St. Paul campus to begin the process of identifying people interested in advancing organic and sustainable work at the University. Be in touch with Rob if you are interested.

Rob will be helping with the student garden on campus this year. He says there is a growing interest in participation among students. And Rob is working on data defining the economics of organic conversion to organic production.

Thom: The legislative session has begun so Thom is visiting with legislators. Ag issues are there and there also seems to be a fair amount of discussion about organics. Again the budget cloud is hanging over everything. Senator Klobuchar will be appointing a new State FSA director. Currently Glenn Schafer is the interim director.

Harriet: Getting ready for the 20th annual UMOFC. She is working on a mentoring project whereby would-be beginners in organic production could connect with experienced producers. If anyone know of a beginning producer wanting or needing this mentoring assistance be in touch with Harriet (888-551-4769)

Harriet and Jim Riddle are working again on a winter school to be some time in March and to be held in SE Minnesota, site to be determined.

Helene: Mentioned the great article in the January 1 issue of Agri News pertaining to the transitioning of 1/2 the dairy herd at WCROC to certified organic. She also mentioned that Paul Porter has begun his bike trip across Africa from North to South. To follow along go to <http://paulporter.wordpress.com>

Gigi: MISA has funded the development of an Organic Buyers directory within the state. It will include buyers of all levels and will also include some buyer specifications and requirements for product purchase.

Carmen: Mentioned the date for the 2009 Organic field day at Lamberton will be THURSDAY JULY 9 (not the 10th as was mentioned on the call!) So they are getting ready for and planning the agenda accordingly.

The balance of the hour was spent on discussing the future of the organic network conference calls and list serve. It was decided to move to quarterly calls in 2009. The dates are to be **Thursdays, 8:30-9:30 a.m. January 8, April 2nd, July 2nd and November 5th.** It was also decided to enhance the participation in the list serve part of the network with Helene and Meg working on making this happen through some promotional activity about the listserve.

Next call Thursday, April 2nd 8:30-9:30 a.m. Call the conference operator directly at 612-625-2003 or the MISA office to be transferred: 800-909-MISA (6472)

Submitted by: Carmen Fernholz