

Organic Phone Conference
February 1, 2007

Participating:

Bud Markhart, Carmen Fernholz, Gigi DiGiacomo, Glenn Schafer, Harriet Behar, Helene Murray, Jim Riddle, John Beckwith, Meg Moynihan, Milt Haar, Paul Porter, Wayne Martin

Facilitator: Harriet Behar

Scribe: Wayne Martin

Carmen Fernholz, U of Mn/Organic Farmer:

- Met on campus with Jim Riddle and Craig Sheaffer to discuss the research agenda at Elwell Farm. They will continue to develop it and are open to ideas from others.
- Question to the group: “How do we do more research to benefit local production?”
- Always looking for more research ideas. Please send a brief paragraph describing any ideas you might have.
- Will send out the legislative agenda on organic research funding.

Jim Riddle, U of Mn/Organic Certifier:

- The legislative agenda is proposing \$1.1 million dollars dedicated to research in organic agriculture.
- USDA released a farm bill proposal that will increase farm payment for organic certification cost share maximum from \$500 to \$750 per farm. Asking \$25 million for five years for that program. Currently \$4.7 million in research, asking for \$10 million for an unspecified number of years. Maybe the EQIP program will be enhanced as well.
- FDA has also announced that meat and milk from cloned animals is ok to eat. Jim has put an analysis of the cloned meat issue on The Organic Center website at www.organic-center.org. There is a lot of discussion about the progeny of cloned animals within the organic community.
- The updated version of the MDA guide to Organic Certification is almost done, and now is at the printer.
- 40+ farmers at an Organic Transition Workshop in Plainview last week.

Glen Schafer, FSA:

- The 2007 Farm Bill, can be read in its entirety at the USDA website.
- In the current proposal, there will be further limits on hay production, but CRP will be continued.
- To find out more, and to show support, contact either or both Farm Bureau and Farmers Union, preferably online. Emails work.

Milton Haar, U of Mn:

- Meeting with Craig Sheaffer to discuss a USDA Risk Mgmt Grant Proposal
- Will be attending the Weed Science Conference in San Antonio next week.

Meg Moynihan, MDA:

- Mn Organic Conference had 425 people attend this year, over 100 more than last year's total. Overall a great event! Please send ideas for speakers for next year.
- The Status of Organic Agriculture in Minnesota, A Report to the Legislature, will include data on the economics of organic agriculture.
- On Saturday March 24, Meg will participate in a Red Lake Falls Chamber of Commerce Ag Day, and will give a talk on organic agriculture, titled "Why Organic?"
- Gene Hugoson was reappointed as Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.
- The Pine Island Chamber of Commerce is looking for speakers/exhibitors for an April 20-22nd event: "Organic and Sustainable Agriculture, Green Energy and Alternative Medicine Expo." Contact is Cheri Oelkers cher_bear_33@hotmail.com contact her to speak or exhibit.
- Eco Farm Conference held in California January 24-27, 2007. A huge annual event.
- Michigan Dept of Agriculture Organic Program is currently in a state of flux. Meg facilitated a summit meeting to discuss the future for that program. She highlighted Minnesota's efforts, including the MN Organic Network.
- The development of a MN Grown Organic label for the MN Grown Program is included in the Governor's legislative initiative.

Paul Porter, U of MN Agronomy:

- Courtney will receive an award from MN Horticultural Society for the U of MN Organic Garden. (Already received.)

Bud Mark hart, U of MN Horticulture:

- WUSA Seminar was great! The speaker talked about the history of Organic Valley.
- Upper Midwest Regional Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conference & Trade Show February 6 & 7, 2007, St. Cloud Civic Center - St. Cloud, MN

John Beckwith, NRCS:

- Hiawatha Valley RCD Value Added Conference was held last week. Went well!
- Will attend the Upper Midwest Organic Conference
- Invasive Plant Conference will be held March 7-8 in St Cloud.
- Would also like to hear about ideas for the new farm bill.

Gigi DiGiacomo, Ag Economist and MISA Board Member:

- Interviewing a lot of farmers. Still developing a price reporting model.
- Developed marketing questions for inclusion in MDA's 2007 Organic Producer Survey. The survey will be sent out soon to all certified organic farmers in MN.

Harriet Behar, MOSES:

- MN Organic Conference was great! Very nice people in Minnesota!
- MFA local foods initiative is called Big River Foods. Already buying from local farmers. Wants to buy heirloom varieties of pork, vegetables, etc. **BIGGEST CHALLENGES:** Price, volume, minimal handling. Locally grown costs more than what large purchasers are currently paying. Certified organic not as feasible because of price. St. Olaf spends \$2.25/student meal, and U of Mn spends \$2.35/meal. Joci Tilsen is the MFA contact.
- Upper Midwest Organic Conference February 22-24. Big River Foods will meet on February 23. Already 200 more registrants than at this time last year for the conference.
- Harriet is writing an article for the Organic Broadcaster about FSA loans going to organic farmers.
- Harriet will attend the Wisconsin Farmers Union meeting this weekend.
- She gave a presentation to an Organic Colloquium class of 45 students at U of WI.
- Next Tuesday will be the first meeting of the Organic Advisory Council with the Governor of Wisconsin.

Jim Riddle, U of MN:

- U of WI has created a position similar to his.
- Jim and Carmen will attend an organic conference in Portland Feb 26-28.

Events:

- SFA meeting Feb 3 in St Charles.
- LSP Breakfast at the Capitol on Feb 6.
- Organic Livestock Day Feb 13.
- SFA Annual Conference at St Peter on Feb 17.
- Home Grown Economy at Morris on Feb 26.
- Winona County Organic Meeting at Signature's Restaurant on March 9.

Next Meeting: March 8th

Scribe: Meg Moynihan

Facilitator: Carmen Fernholz