

Minnesota Organic Network Conference call notes 2/7/08

Attending: Mary Jo Forbord (Sustainable Fmg Assn of MN), Jim Riddle (guest host, UMN SWROC and private consultant), Harriet Behar (MOSES), Bill Wilcke (UMN Extension and NCR-SARE), Carmen Fernholz (UMN SWROC and Farmer), Meg Moynihan (scribe, MN Dept of Ag.), Pauline Nickel (UMN SWROC), Gigi DiGiacomo (consultant)

Round Robin

Harriet: Updates – spoke at Organic Dairy 101 course day before MN Organic Conference and thought it went well. Commented on diverse group of attendees. Will be doing addl workshops in MN:

March 1 sponsored by Midtown Global Market at Midtown YWCA working w/ Hmong and Hispanic Farmers to help them understand organic certification.

April 7 doing workshop in St. Charles, MN w/ Jim Riddle on Organic Certification and RMA tool for farmers.

April 8 Cannon Falls promoting organic livestock feed production

August 5-7 at FarmFest – last year saw many farmers interested in organic. Every county gives out Farmer of the Year, thinks 3 were certified organic. There ensued a little discussion about the idea of a sustainable ag tent or area at Farm Fest. Evidently, discussions along these lines were started by Organic Valley last year. Harriet said she would find out what's happening and report back to group.

Gigi – has been going through data from her organic grocery store survey and will be presenting some of the data at several upcoming events. One thing has jumped out: many retailers said they were interested in getting a directory of organic farmers. Gigi suggested sending them the MDA Directory of Organic Farms.

Also, 70-85% of respondents said they would like an organic buyer directory and would list themselves. Gigi has submitted proposal to MISA do organic buyer directory. It would include Retailers, restaurants, grain buyers/bulk commodities, brokers, mfg, processors, cooperatives. Is thinking of other funders including SARE and OFRF. “Organic Valley Farmers Advocating for Organics Fund” was suggested – quick turnaround and not a lot of bureaucracy.

Comment from Jim: WI Organic Dairy 101 session in Madison yesterday turned out well. 30 people attended despite bad weather. (This workshop is part of an NCR-SARE grant to the MN Dept of Ag. The SFA of MN and WI Dept of Ag are both members of the overall project team. DATCP has a contract to do 3 sessions in WI; SFA to do 4 in MN. See www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic for link to more program info.)

Mary Jo: 40 youth attended a recent “Youth Sustainability” event at Gustavus Adolphus College. The attendees discussed various questions around sustainability. SFA is digesting that input. Also held successful 17th Annl SFA Conf – Local Foods the Next Step.” A highlight was getting Sustainers Coalition together.

SFA has put on two Organic Dairy 101 workshops so far. St. In St. Cloud, 65 attended. Hue Karreman did the vet portion. Great evaluations for Hue and Harriet, too. Also farmers big hit. A banker in attendance asked Extension's Jim Paulson to deliver his presentation there. Also held one this week in Marshall. Had 25 people and are certainly hitting our target audience: . NRCS, DHIA, MDA, Vets, BAH,

tech college teachers, FBM – has been really great. Dr. Alvaro Garcia (SDSU) was the vet presenter. He gave a good presentation but the vets who come really want to know about tx. There was more skepticism at Marshall than in St. Cloud. We hv noticed some voids. Want to have a certifier on board b/c there were some tough questions about treatments and practices. Dr. Jordarski is going to be our vet in Rochester. McIntosh is open as far as a vet goes. Were hoping that by now good MN resource would surface. In sum, these sessions are highly popular. Are already picking up diffs in different regions.

Other events: Homegrown Economy Conference Mar 31 at Crookston – Collin Peterson office sponsoring again and is most interested in economic advantages and connections.

GrazeFest MN August 1 and 2 in Central part of state. Joel McNair who publishes GRAZE is keynote. Kent Soberg and Dan Middendorf.

Bill Wilcke: Reports Extension educators are busy gophers this time of year. SARE will shortly be reviewing farmer ranching grant proposals and will use some local extension educators to facilitate small groups reviewing proposals. The Natnl. SARE conference will be held in Kansas City end at the of March (25-27). MN SARE office will take a van to that meeting and has some scholarship money for “educators” so spread the word (contact is Beth Nelson at U of MN). News on the Extension small farm team – Bill’s heard they may be filing a position for small farm educator to head up that effort, but no specific plans to date.

Carmen: Was recently at Michael Fields Ag Inst in SE Wisconsin to talk w/ researcher Walter Goldstein about his project to develop high methionine corn. (The NOP is still talking about sunseting synthetic methionine.) Walter has some promising research and Jacquie Jacob at UMN has done some feeding trials. SWROC doing some varietal trials and are part of an IOP (Integrated Organic Program) grant proposal in for this research. Craig Sheaffer’s RMA-funded organic farmer risk tool is continuing to progress. There’s also progression on no-till organic research. They’re purchasing a new NT drill at Lamberton and may retrofit a NT corn planter to be used this year at St. Paul. May do some crimping/rolling demos at July 10 organic field day at Lamberton. Roller is already at Lamberton.

John Beckwith: All the RC&Ds in MN are updating area plans (5 year plans). Quite a few have organic farming/ag as an area of interest. They are and will be considering what their niche might be in organic farming – promotion, development, etc. Their strengths are as outreach into community, offering training. If you have thoughts, talk to John later or be thinking about it. Councils develop the plans facilitated by coordinators.

Also, was in Virginia, MN recently meeting w/ Laurentian Council. U of MN Duluth students and advisor interested in forming an organic farming club/organization. Have a couple of acres available to them there. Opportunities for student: student - school: school connections? Laurentian is going to be following up. (Courtney Tchida at UMN mentioned as a great contact re: St. Paul Stuent Organic farm, along w/ Bud, of course. New Coordinator at Laurentian is called Paul Sandstrom.

(Health report on RC&D: is now a permanent program in Farm Bill so yearly reauthorization is no longer required. Nevertheless, the President’s budget zeroed the program out, again, this year. Supporters will be lobbying on RC&D’s behalf.

Meg: 1) New MN Directory of Organic Farms should be out shortly. 2) Cost share payments also in process – claims for those certified 3 years or fewer have already been cut. The remaining funds have to be pro-rated among all the rest, requiring lots of calculating and spreadsheeting. MDA received 359 on-time applications this year. 3) MN Organic Conference was, we modestly think, a big success. Registration was 415 or 425 or something. Hue Karreman, Carmen, Jeff Moyer, Rob Marquese, Tom

Franzen were all huge hits. Moderated roundtable farmer discussions not so much. Thanks to all those who presented, moderated, hosted, and contributed ideas. 4) Those of you in Twin Cities TV market who watch KARE-11 may see Meg in a piece on organics in the Extra next week. We have a little trepidation because it is sweeps week... 5) RMA has several requests for proposals out currently <http://www.rma.usda.gov/aboutrma/agreements/> . The agency has been a generous funder of organic projects for MDA, UMN, MOSES and others. 5) In addition, Rural Development just released RFA for its Rural Business Opportunity Grants program. Meg had some experience w/ this back when she was in Michigan and think it merits a gander <http://www07.grants.gov/search/search.do?mode=VIEW&oppId=40617> 6) There's been progress on the MN MOU on Organic Agriculture. Several additional public agencies and educational institutions are interested in signing on. They have until March 1 to submit comments on the draft of the new MOU to MDA. 7) MDA contracts w/ UMN to run commercial pesticide applicator recertification trainings and approached Meg last fall about including a module on organic farming. Meg delivered it at 3 locations and recommended Jim Riddle, Nathan Winter for other locations. Interesting and Meg's heard it went pretty well at all locations, in view of a fact that these are hundreds of people who are required to attend mandatory classroom instruction to get their licenses... 8) interest in converting expiring CRP acres to organic is increasing. Meg, Brad Carlson and John began work on a fact sheet a few years ago. Meg intends to unearth it and continue. MOSES also evidently has info.

Pauline: Reports SWROC is working on "University on the Prairie" a program targeting students in 8-10 grade encouraging them to pursue science which was a big hit last year. Also, staff addition – Kelly Belina, MS agronomy UMN. Is 50% time as a Fellow. Has been in CA past 2 years working with SAS research analysis program. Kelly will be contributing statistical expertise to organic area and other station efforts. Also lots of interest in garden and prairie area.

VICMS (long term variable input cropping study that includes organic) discussions continue about future of that trial. Have had excellent research and support from faculty like Wyse, Sheaffer, Allan. Looking @ making major changes w/ VICMS study and how we use that land resource. This year, looking @ feed analysis. Carmen and Wyse have been discussing nutrient density comparisons between conventional and organic management systems. Interested in laying out a research q or two in this area. Have been consulting metabolic scientists, vegetable researchers, etc. Want to put together team of people to develop a research question or two and seek a major grant next fall. In interim, going to be doing some feed analyses. Also hearing more talk about high tunnels – may want to do some high tunnel research there to compare growth in conventional vs organic by placing high tunnel across plots...the idea that Lamberton could serve some vegetable research that could become a big part of producer, but this still in **very** early discussion stage.

In response to a question about the Legislature's appropriation to the University for organic agriculture, Pauline reported this matter has been in discussion. There are still details to work out on that and other legislative funding. So it's getting close, but decision needs to be made within the College as well as Extension.

Jim Riddle: Will be delivering several presentations:

Feb 12 ABCs of Organic at Albert Lea Library

Feb 22 in LaCrosse, WI and Mar 13 in Loyal, WI - Organic Dairy 101 sessions (for ag professionals).

Winter Organic Schools: March 4, Litchfield; March 18 in Lamberton (in concert w/ water resources discussion), April 7 in St. Charles (focus on feed crop production opps.)

March 7 Winona Co. Local Food Forum & Expo

July 10 – SWROC field day to include someone from Michael Fields Ag Inst. methionine, Jeff Moyer and demo of roller-crimper, on-farm oil press.

Last week attended an advisory panel mtg in connection w/ a grant Francisco Diaz Gonzalez has to develop less toxic sanitizers for use in organic processing. At least one promising thing is emerging – electrolyzing salt/water electrolyzed that produces sanitizer and surfactant. Will post info www.organicecology.umn.edu

Also...NOP just posted notice of reorganization. Mark Bradley now in charge of accreditation. Richard Mathews in charge of standards development. There's also a Compliance Division but no one yet named to head that. Barbara Robinson remains in charge of everything.

Appointed by popular acclamation:

Next host: Bud

Next scribe: Helene

Next date: March 6