

Organic Network Notes
Thursday, March 08, 2007

Next Call April 5 at 8:30

Host: James Riddle

Scribe: Helene (not Helen) Murray

Pauline Nickel, Meg Moynihan (scribe), Jim Riddle, Helene Murray, Carmen Fernholz (host), Bud Markhart, John Beckwith, Thom Petersen, Gigi DiGiacomo, Wayne Martin, Don Wyse

Upcoming events:

Next week: Winona Co Local Foods Forum and Expo.

April 4 workshop in Caledonia – ***ABCs of Organic Certification*** + Craig Sheaffer's risk mgmt project.

March 22 Extension Organic Workshop in LeCenter (Ryan Nelson organizing)

April 2 (tentative) Extension Organic Workshop in Buffalo (Nathan Winter organizing)

April 20-22 Sustainable and Organic Expo in Pine Island (Chamber of Commerce/Econ Dev. Auth.)

Sometime in May – seedbed preparation workshop on Carmen's farm near Madison

July 11 Organic Field Day at Lamberton

Link to the new AMS Organic Grain and Feedstuff Report: http://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/nw_gr113.txt

Round Robin

Jim Riddle: was recently in New Hampshire – UNH at organic livestock conference. First land grant w/ certified organic dairy herd (40-head Jerseys) and have been shipping milk 1 mo. Jim and Carmen were in Portland at E-organic meeting – well attended by mx land grants and nonprofits. Also went to Oregon State where they learned the USDA Integrated Organic Program grant to fund development of E-organic was partially funded and for 2 yrs and not 3. But still, over \$600,000. UMN to get some – not sure how much. . E-organic is a nationwide Extension initiative to develop resource materials for distribution through Extension. 30 diff subject area groups. One is Organic. Initially, effort got \$50K (to Oregon State – 33% staff person plus participant travel) seed money to start. Now has this grant. Short term focus – launch site this fall w/ fundamentals. Foci vegetables and dairy. FAQs, ask the expert, etc.

[Bud said there's been lots of conversation within Hort about the E-organic initiative as a whole. Concerns about what electronic will do to local programming -- will ultimately people just be sent to web sites rather than personal program delivery. Pauline has heard concerns about applicability of info in diff parts of the nation. Jim said organic team is committed to including local and regional examples and resources.]

On Cloning: NOSB has draft recommendation posted for comment. It does not address issue of offspring. Jim thinks it's weak. Jim will raise issues at MN OATF meeting next week.

Upper Midwest Organic Conf had poster session that included info from MN but not in a high traffic area. U of Wisconsin had a poster highlighting the U researchers and staff that are doing

organic work. Jim wants to do similar for MN. Carmen and Bud both interested. Minor faculty in Sust Ag list is already on MISA web site.

Bud: Just got USDA Integrated Organic Program grant. Multi-state grant and Bud is a PI. (insert from email) Rated #4 out of 60 proposals!!! Title: *Improving organic field- and high tunnel-based vegetable production by grafting*

Cooperating States are: Ohio, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Minnesota. MN share of \$800,000 three year project is \$150,000.

Objectives:

1. Develop tomato rootstocks that improve production and fruit quality in organic field and high tunnel-based systems.
2. Examine soil, rootstock and scion interactions that influence the plant's response to abiotic and biotic stress.
3. Assist organic farmers in making optimal use of grafting and high tunnels.

Student organic farm going well. Good turnout at Upper Midwest Organic Conf. session.

Helene: Just spent a week in Jamaica (!) at tropical research center. It has been run as commercial farm and transitioning to sustainable ag. approaches. Have 400 A certified organic now. Also Brahma bulls selected for tropics, and red and black Jamaican herds. Trying to figure out how to make work as a system.. Team from UMN went down to consult and advise. Team thinks there is opportunity for research and classes. Also: *MN Organic Certification Guide* is back from printer.

Wayne: Wants to know if anyone went to livestock presentations at Upper Midwest and how they were.

Gigi: Second AMS Organic Feed and Grain Market News Report is out. Corn and soybean prices included now. Will be expanding and published every other week. Lots of discussion about it.

Has been approached by producers interested in seasonal wholesale and retail price reporting for vegetables in MN and has talked to New Farm about collaborating. They are now doing terminal market veg for Chicago and other places. She may hold brainstorming sessions. Has also talked to F&V people at AMS (RMA funded them to do F&V price reporting) but unclear what this will look like now – sounds as though will be national-level.

Also going to do an organic buyer survey for MN and maybe upper Midwest – learn about buying practices, outlook for organic. More brainstorming sessions. Also planning trip to DC to meet with Carolyn Dimitri at ERS about their experience doing an organic handler. (ERS still working w/ data and that report is not out yet.) ERS commented they had poor response rate in MN!

Don Wyse: He and Sheaffer, Craig, working on several projects involving many cooperators – incl. Lamberton and Waseca. Have both research and education pieces.

Legislative initiative for organic at U – don't know where it stands but getting idea out that there should be substantial investment in organic research and extension. Decisionmakers at the U need to keep hearing about capacity and potential to leverage outside interest and support. Frustrating to go up against competing ideas within U system. Deans and department heads need to hear more.

Thom Petersen: Yesterday, House Ag Finance (Chair, Junke) started to put together “Ag Special” for UMN. Thinks organic piece (and lots more) was included. Also alternative swine stuff. Next step is for House Ag Finance to recommend to Higher Ed Cte. (Rukavina). Higher Ed is getting a lot of pressure from U to not earmark funds for special projects – that U doesn't like to be told what to do. The total in Ag Special is \$58 million. Energy is v. important this session but there have been comments that it is sucking up a lot of funding. Switchgrass, prairiegrass etc. supposed to go to U. Everything competes. More meetings this afternoon. Finance ctes working on bills this week. Leadership is saying there is no new money. So will be interesting to see how works out.

[Carmen commented Organic Network members have to be in touch w/ legislators to let them know how important organic issues are.]

There are 2 other big organic pieces – Organic Certification Cost Share (HF0846 SF1039 cost share and “MN Grown Organic” in HF 1202 and SF 1001: Senate Ag is putting together budget this week. (Also may include MDA sustainable ag demonstration grant program)

Sens. Tony Lourey and Steve Dille introduced SF 1660 to create “Food Safety and Defense Task Force. Coordinate educational efforts on food safety. (Dept of Ag.)

Lourey plans to introduce a bill to help school to buy local and organic. \$ would go to Dept of Education. Wyse commented that about 2 yrs ago a group met in WI and proposed that concept – local food system is a security issue for the country. What would happen in face of disaster when you couldn't move food across state lines?? Wyse suggest refloating proposal. **Don will send to Thom and Meg.**

Also, MDA has a department bill that would, among other things, repeal the dairy pricing act (currently can't sell milk for less than 5% above wholesale or use it as a loss leader, etc. Sen Hann has introduced the bill. Interesting issue. What would this do to organic market if big retailers could sell organic for \$1-2/gal to get people into the stores. What is precedent there?

John Beckwith: NRCS was at Upper Midwest Organic Conference. Enjoyed it. NRCS has chief and 3 regional assistant chief s- political appointees. Have new chief for Central region (incl Minnesota) Christina Muedeking. From farm outside of Tracy MN and went to UM Morris. Used to work for Minge. Thom knows her and says she'll be good addition. If farm bill passed and rulemaking comes about, she'll be influential.

Meg: Is continuing on board of National Assn of State Organic Programs. MDA doing 2007 Organic Farmer Survey right now. 530 mailed out to people Meg has reason to believe are certified. Responses coming in thick and fast – 150 to 175 or more already. Includes big marketing section contributed by Gigi to help her Endowed Chair research. Endowed chair program also helped w/ stamped return envelopes, which has to be helping return rate. First Pine Island Sustainable/Organic Event will run Apr 20-22. Chamber of Commerce and Econ Dev. Authority cosponsoring. Organizer Cheri Beth Oelkers 507-356-8309 is still looking for speakers. Meg will do a basic “What is Organic?” session. Meg testified before Senate Ag, committee this week – provided overview of organic ag in MN and highlighting a few MDA organic efforts. Lively discussion among members who wanted to know why certification is so expensive. Meg sent follow up letter to Chair Vickerman and Sen Lourey, who is chief author of organic cost share bill. MN Organic Advisory Task Force will meet March 16.

Carmen: is considering possible new research trials in cooperation w/ Michael Fields Ag Institute – Open pollinated corn, including high methionine, compost tea trials, biocontrol of aphid (Meg to send him info about MDA biocontrol program. Mostly works w/ weed biocontrol, but has cooperated on sb aphid biocontrol project at U). Also wants to trial oils out there on the market touted as effective against sb aphid.. Organic Field Day is July 11. Looking for keynote suggestions. CFANS Dean Levine is one. Kate Clancy another (nutritionist in Endowed Chair and is a good speaker.) Going to Winnipeg next week to talk to Forage Council about organic forages. As part of RMA grant, Carmen has set up seedbed preparation workshop on his farm in May. Transitioning 24-25 more acres at Lamberton with contouring cost shared by NRCS EQIP. This year will be oat/red clover after earth moving this spring. Would give uniform starting base. Has been approved and have funding, good help from NRCS on cost share. There are some complications w/ waterway re-working – unknown yet whether earth moving will be done in spring or fall.

Jim and Helene leaped at the chance to host and scribe, respectively, for the next O-N call, which will occur April 5 at 8:30 in the morning.