

**Organic Network Call Notes**  
**April 3, 2007**

**NOTE: for the May 1 call, dial 612-625-2003 to connect. The MISA 800# will not be available on May 1. Host: Paul Porter Scribe: Gigi DiGiacomo**

Attending: Harriet Behar (host), Jim Riddle, Bill Wilcke, Helene Murray, Carmen Fernholz, Paul Porter, John Beckwith, Gigi DiGiacomo, Meg Moynihan (scribe)

**ROUND ROBIN**

**Jim Riddle (UMN SWROC)**

Next Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> Organic Winter School, St. Charles. Focus on organic feed production. Jim very excited about the farmer panel.

Last week Jim attended National SARE conference. Mostly working on E-Organic project – nationwide initiative to consolidate best info on organic agriculture (incl. existing materials). Numerous public and private institutions are involved and it is a collaborative, open process. Content will come out through E-Extension – a nationwide initiative in all sorts of areas. Projected launch of organic content is mid-November 2008. Funded for 2 years by a USDA-IOP grant. Are getting “signals” about seeking additional funding from IOP and SARE.

Has applied to run for IFOAM world board. Election will be at generally assembly in June in Italy.

Next week will be in Twin Cities for local foods task force that Extension is putting together. This afternoon is a symposium about what to do on land at the Lamberton station that has been in VICMS trials.

Lamberton Organic Field Day will be July 10. Field tours, demonstrations, etc. Walter Goldstein (Michael Fields Ag Inst.) and Jeff Moyer (Rodale) will both speak. Exhibitor opportunities will be available.

**Meg Moynihan (MDA)**

Reported that a new *Directory of Minnesota Organic Farms* will soon be published. Also reported progress on revision and expansion of the Minnesota MOU on Organic Agriculture. The current MOU expires at the end of April. A number of additional state and federal agencies have reviewed new language and are interested in signing on.

Update on organic dairy PDP: MDA has a grant with North Central Region SARE to offer organic dairy training to agriculture professionals. MDA subcontracted with Wisconsin Dept of Ag to hold three trainings in Wisconsin and with SFA of MN to do four in Minnesota. All the trainings have now been delivered.

The Minnesota Organic Advisory Task Force met yesterday and discussed a number of items, including content for the next *Status of Organic Agriculture in Minnesota* legislative report. The

MDA has the responsibility for preparing this report, which is due in November 2007. Please send any ideas to Meg.

**Bill Wilcke (UMN Extension and NCR SARE)**

Extension staff have been doing a lot in organic recently and several Extension people spoke at the Organic Dairy 101 workshops. Extension has also sponsored several other organic workshops and crops days recently. Several extension educators attended the national SARE conference. Some cooperated in “Homegrown Economy” workshop in Crookston (local foods and rural development – Rep. Collin Petersen’s office sponsored this event). Hans Kandel’s position has been filled w/ Russ Severson, former local educator in Polk and Red Lake. Russ seems open to organic but may not initiate organic projects and programs to the extent that Hans did.

Bill shared some preliminary information about new Extension a position (or positions) in Twin Cities area – small farms and/or urban agriculture and/or organic agriculture.

**Helene Murray (UMN MISA):**

Also attended SARE meetings and said they were great. More than 800 people attended. There were lots of organic workshops.

The University has decided to convert some of dairy herd at Morris (WCROC) to organic. Dennis Johnson moving full speed ahead on this project. Let’s feature Dennis and this topic on a future Organic Network call.

**Carmen Fernholz (UMN SWROC)**

Hopes to have good turnout at VICMS symposium today at 408 Hayes Hall. Want to decide the future of those 40 acres. Want to come out of symposium w/ sense of direction.

Still working closely w/ Craig Sheaffer on an RMA grant to develop tool for organic producers.

No-till organic project moving ahead. Roller has been acquired; waiting for the hitch. Will be demo-ed at July 10 field day.

Carmen working w/ Pauline Nickel and Terry Nennich re: growing interest in high tunnels and season extension veg. production. Have located a site at Lamberton and hope to have high tunnel erected out there for research and education.

Will be going to Crookston next week for an April 10 workshop on high tunnels. Would like to do something similar at Lamberton. Went to meeting Midwest Cover Crop Council – talking about cover crops and third crops on landscape.

Finally, attended meeting about buffer strips in riparian areas w/ state agencies and Monsanto, Dow, Syngenta. The chemical companies are interested because of acetochlor issue. The buffers strips are intended to protect water and may be cellulosic energy production. Connection w/ organic? -- maybe these native grasses could be permanent perennial energy buffers in organic. Setback: RIM clean energy initiative pulled out of bonding bill, so future uncertain.

**Paul Porter (UMN Agronomy)**

The on-farm oil seed press was at LaCrosse conference. Is currently at UM Crookston. Within a month or so, will move to Clearbrook Elevator (certified organic) and will use on organic soybeans to demonstrate to investors that this concept is sound and produce organic meal and oil for energy use (not human consumption).

Paul's grad student went on tour to Germany looking at press operations there. Press will travel to a number of field days this summer, including Lamberton. Maybe Farm Fest, but there are some limitations.

**John Beckwith - NRCS**

Nothing to report. Still waiting on that pesky Farm Bill.

**Pauline Nickel – UMN –SWROC**

Reiterated the interest and importance of determining a new direction for VICMS. This land base requires a significant financial investment every year so wants to hear from researchers about their interests and have a serious discussion that will determine whether to maintain, discontinue, etc. Won't maintain the trial if nobody wants to use it.

Reported that locally there is more interest in new things – horticulture, thistle, etc. than in VICMS but do have lots of historical samples stored that could be used and analyzed, too. Unfortunately, have not had consistent funding support for it, so other programs have had to subsidize VICMS. Want to make sure these expenditures are really relevant.

Tunnels: there has been interest and first small tunnel will go up on South farm (not organic). Will be more a demo and learning tunnel. Possibility of tunnels to go up on organic land in future. Complimented Jim and Carmen on planning for 08 summer field day.

Pauline also reported on a new position: Nancy Ehlke and Pauline have been working on PD for a cropping systems position w/ focus on organic. Advisory committee has highly recommended and the Dean has been supportive. Will be 40/60 research extension covered by Parker Sanders funds (plus some support dollars from College). Between ½ Milt's time and ½ new person's time, SWROC will have one full-time faculty position in organic.

**Gigi DiGiacomo (Consultant)**

Attended and presented results of retailer buy local survey at *Homegrown Economy* survey and had some press interest. Will be working on generating reports from retailer survey – will be posted on MISA site. USDA's Market News Service continues to grow and add farms reporting their sales prices.

**Harriet Behar (MOSES)**

Will present at St. Charles workshop – part of a larger MOSES project trying to increase organic livestock production in upper Mississippi watershed. Another workshop will be held in Cannon Falls on April 8, also other states.

Is working on setting up some summer field days and fall workshops. Will be following up w/ people who attend to see how their transition is going. Challenge with high conventional prices.

WI's organic group wants to contact other state advisory councils. Will present to Ag Board in May to try to become standing, rather than *ad hoc* council. Are putting together short newsletter for state agencies to keep them informed of activities, issues. Seed law in Wisconsin is going to be updated in next session. National level seed association effort to pre-empt local control, especially regarding prevention of GMO crops. WI's seed law is up for renewal next session. One proposed change was to take some American Seed Assn language that would have removed local control. Actions by WI task force have removed this language from draft but the group is maintaining vigilance because it may be put back in before it goes to legislature. Have asked for seat on any seed committees.

Group discussed the organic/sustainable ag tent proposed for FarmFest? Someone reported Wayne Martin is coordinating it along with with Kate from Rural Advantage. They are having hard time filling large tent (40 booths). Nine organizations interested so far – thinking about trying to get a smaller tent instead. Call Wayne or Kate for more info.

**Next call: May 1**

**Host:** Paul Porter

**Scribe:** Gigi DiGiacomo