

**NEXT CALL: June 4, 8:30 a.m.**  
**Need host and scribe**

### **Organic Network Call Notes, 4-3-09**

Attending: Wayne Anderson (DNR), Harriet Behar (MOSES) Doug Hartwig (NASS), Robin Martinek (NRCS), Meg Moynihan (MDA), Nigatu Tadesse (FSA), Noreen Thomas (Farmer)

Funding opportunities for possible Organic Network member collaboration:

- 1) SARE Professional Development Grants – to train ag service providers (Extension, agency staff, consultants, etc.) in sustainable agriculture topics. \$75K max/project, duration 2-3 years. Pre proposals are due May 22. Funded projects could start in January 2010 (estimated). More info at [www.sare.org/ncrsare/PDP/pdp.htm](http://www.sare.org/ncrsare/PDP/pdp.htm)  
**Wayne, Nigatu, and Noreen** said they were interested in discussing ideas further. **Meg** will convene a meeting.
- 2) USDA Risk Management Agency is offering \$10,000 for “Small Sessions” to “deliver training and information in the management of production, marketing, and financial risk to US agricultural producers.” Nobody on the call indicated an interest in partnering to do one of these. Members who want more info should visit: <http://www.rma.usda.gov/regs/2009/smallsessions.pdf> Proposals are due May 11.

### **ROUND ROBIN**

#### **Wayne:**

MN DNR and MN Pollution Control Agency employees will have a CSA delivering to their building this summer and the agencies' joint cafeteria is increasing local foods. MOSES conference was wonderful. DNR is the largest agricultural landowner in MN. It is supportive of organic agriculture and is looking for opportunities to do more, so call Wayne with ideas for pilot programs, demonstrations, etc.

DNR also involved w/ several University faculty on a hazelnut germplasm development/ breeding program.

#### **Doug:**

For the first time ever, the National Ag Statistic Service (NASS) will be conducting an organic production survey. It will go out in early-mid May to 20,000 producers who reported had organic or transitioning land on the 2007 Ag Census. Results should be out by the end of the year. Doug asked for help spreading the word to organic farmers and will provide a link to press release and other materials. He also offered help navigating the 2007 Ag Census results web site to anybody who would like it. Contact him at [dhartwig@nass.usda.gov](mailto:dhartwig@nass.usda.gov) or 651-296-3896.

#### **Nigatu:**

FSA helped support a very successful 4<sup>th</sup> Minority and Immigrant Farming Conference, which included sessions about transition to organic and compost. It is also a sponsor of the upcoming Women's Agricultural Leadership Conference (April 14). If anybody is planning a conference or event that targets underserved or disadvantaged farmers, women, or minorities, he or she should contact Nigatu, as he may be able to provide some funding assistance.

A group of Hmong farmers has been certified organic with assistance from Minnesota Food Association.

**Harriet:**

Upper Midwest Organic Farming conference had 2,652 people (!) and Minnesota's attendance was second only to Wisconsin's. MOSES is planning at least one organic dairy field day in Minnesota field day this summer – probably late July near St Cloud. MOSES will attend FarmFest (Redwood Falls) again this year in the Agripreneur Tent.

Update on EQIP organic transition program rollout in WI. WI is working on an outline of what would be expected of producers. Wisconsin has made organic conversion, energy, and beginning farmers a priority. There's not a lot of money in the pot (\$150,000) but still, organic is a priority. The Federal Register comment period hasn't closed yet, so no money can be disbursed until program rules are final, but this is how the program is shaping up in WI.

Harriet also noted that Dave White has been appointed NRCS chief. He is very knowledgeable about conservation, sustainable, and organic ag.

Calls to the MOSES organic information line have doubled in the last six months. MOSES is still looking for an outreach person (new hire).

**Robin:**

A new EQIP program funds "Conservation Activity Plans." It is not final yet, but the idea is that EQIP funds could be used to pay technical service providers to write plans (previously, EQIP only paid for practices, not plans). One type of plan that MN and a couple of other states are piloting is called a "Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition." This would provide \$X/plan to a technical service provider to work with a landowner who wants to become organic. The specifics of what this kind of plan would have to include are still being drafted — Robin's waiting for the final rules to come out and in the meantime has been researching what it would cost to write an organic transition plan.

**NOTE: EQIP will no longer be providing any incentive payments. Instead, EQIP will pay for specific practices (e.g., conservation cropping, no till, etc.)**

NRCS is also offering a new "Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative." This program provides funds **to organizations** (like the University or watershed groups) who have projects focused on getting farmers to implement conservation practices. (They have to be new practices (new to the farmer – not something he/she has been doing) and EQIP-eligible. There is **no** administrative money available, only money for the participating organizations to disburse to the participating farmers. The advantage of this program is that the projects don't have to go through the normal ranking process. Application deadline is April 23 and more info is on the NRCS web site.

**Noreen:**

Noreen and her family farm north of Moorhead. They have been surrounded by water and are now waiting for the second flood crest. She said everybody is kind of numb after all the sandbagging activity last week and remarked how wonderful college students and other kids have been – sandbagging, saving animals, etc.

Noreen has been working w/ Concordia College to plan a spring dinner w/ foods grown by local farmers. She also helps restaurants source local ingredients and local farmers find markets. They made about \$10K in sales this way last year. She remarked that there's a lot of confusion about what "local" is. She's speaking at a regional chefs' conference soon.

Lots of young, new/beginning farmers in the area and Noreen has been trying to help them find markets. Right now she's working w/ 15-20 kids. Some of the enterprises are gluten free apple pie, pork, chickens, turkeys, etc. See yahoo group <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MySistersFarm/summary> for more info.

### **Meg**

MDA received 419 organic certification cost share applications and has paid about \$241,000 so far.

We are currently doing a 2009 Minnesota Organic Farmer survey and have received about 275 surveys, which is about a 43% response rate. Wow! Are also collecting info for a *2009 Directory of Minnesota Organic Farms*.

The MN Organic Network listserv now has 126 members! After the decision in January to encourage more farmer involvement, Meg sent out e-mails and postcards, and more than 60 farmers have joined.

Things look grim on the budget front. Although the Governor's budget made no cuts to the organic program, we have heard that the House and/or Senate may remove the program's annual \$100,000 appropriation [\$85K for state organic cost share **or** "organic producer education efforts, assistance for persons transitioning from conventional to organic agriculture, or sustainable agriculture demonstration grants..." and the remaining \$15K for administration (e.g. organic farmer survey, Directory of Minnesota Organic Farms, workshops, etc.)

Recorded by: Meg Moynihan