

## **ORGANIC CONFERENCE CALL**

Thursday, May 1, 2008

(Happy May Day!)

**NEXT CALL:** Thursday, June 5<sup>th</sup>

**Host:** Meg Moynihan

**Scribe:** Mystery person ... Contact Meg if you'd like to volunteer!

**ONE THE CALL:** Paul Porter (Host), Bud Markhart, Harriet Behar, Meg Moynihan, Jim Riddle, Bill Wilcke, Thom Peterson, Gigi DiGiacomo (Scribe).

## **ROUND ROBIN**

**Meg Moynihan:** Great read: Pew/Johns Hopkins report entitled: "*Putting Meat on the Table: Industrial Farm Animal Production in America*" <http://www.ncifap.org/reports/>

Copies of the new Minnesota Directory of Organic Farmers went out to handlers, processors and retailers. More will be distributed to wholesalers. If you are interested in multiple copies for bulk distribution, etc ... contact Meg.

MDA received a \$7,000 grant from OFRF(Organic Farming Research Foundation) to produce a report on organic Farm Business Management participants' financial results for 2007.

**GRANT OPPORTUNITY:** OFRF reminds us that the RFA for to USDA's Integrated Organic Program will be released in October 2008 and that now is the time to put together project/advisory groups (which MUST include farmers)

<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/fo/integratedorganicprogramicgp.cfm>

Also, OFRF reports that they've heard applications to the NRI's Agricultural Prosperity for Small and Medium-Sized Farms program are coming in slowly. Deadline is June 5. See

<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/fo/smallfarmsagriculturalprosperitynri.cfm>

**Jim Riddle:** Had a meeting one week ago at Lamberton to finalize plans for construction of a high-tunnel for research (high-tunnel funded by Organic Valley grant). High Tunnel will be located on land that has been in conventional, bulk acre production. This will be newly transitioned land with room for 4 high tunnels and field production of organic vegetables in the future. Current high tunnel plans are for one 32X48 ft. Plan to have high-tunnel in place by FIELD DAY: JULY 10<sup>th</sup>. If you want to exhibit or know someone who wants to exhibit at the field day, have them contact Jim.

Also met with Watkins (makers of spices) who have now launched a line of organic spices. They've invited Jim to speak at a summer event. Potential for future collaboration/research initiatives.

E-organic – developing policies and procedures. Launch date is mid-November. Content is being developed for E-Organic – extension’s official website for organics.

In farm bill, agreement that’s been reached DOES contain most of the organic language we’ve been seeking including cost share at \$22M; research for \$80M for research (16M/year); and \$5M for organic data collection. In addition, money is being authorized within EQUIP for a nationwide organic transition program.

**Bill Wilcke:** Held national SARE conference in March – positive comments. New positions being announced at the University related to organic dairy, cropping, alternative livestock, local foods and three graduate students. New hire at the U of M: Jeff Coulter is the new corn extension person replacing Dale Hicks.

**Gigi DiGiacomo:** Met with local retailers last week to discuss their interest in organic and a local buying/merchandizing campaign. Assisted with the retailer mailing of the Minnesota Directory of Organic Farmers sent out by MDA. Also, noted that progress is being made within AMS to include the organic price reports in the national database to make time-series data review possible. Gigi will provide more of an update in June following meetings that are taking place among AMS personnel in DC.

**Harriet Behar:** MOSES is sponsoring four field days in MN – June 25<sup>th</sup> (1-4pm) organic dairy, grazing; July 1<sup>st</sup> organic dairy farm and livestock feed production; July 22 in Goodhue MN, livestock feed and beef production; Sept 25<sup>th</sup> Wrenshall, MN late season crops, season extension and energy efficient root cellars. See MOSES website for more info and directions. Press release coming soon! ***If you have information/handouts that you’d like Harriet to display at the field days, send to Harriet.*** Began planning process for Organic University. Update on mentoring project (Fisher Merritts are mentors in MN). Going well – new organic farmers are finding mentors through this program.

**Bud Markhart:** Research with Emily Hoover – going to be looking at organic raspberries in high tunnels on campus and at Morris. Tomato-root stock project is coming along nicely – will be working with student organic farm this year. Outreach: Dream for Wild Health (Native American) farm – helping them envision a long-range plan and working with Heifer Int’l to explore the passing on of bean seeds in the same vein as the passing on of livestock; arguing that protein is protein no matter the source. Heifer has been very receptive. Dream for Wild Health has hired a farmer to manage their organic farm. Not certified yet but hope to become so.

Bud is now on the Board of Directors for MN Food Association. May Farm name has been changed to BIG RIVER FARM. Hoping to double membership this year. ***BIG RIVER FARM CSA still has shares available -- Alert potential subscribers if you know any.***

Spoke on Earth Day at U of St. Thomas about why it's important to buy and grow organic food. Lots of interest in the Student Organic Farm. Bud was also on the KSTP Home and Garden Show – delivered some eggs from the Student Organic Farm. The show was very supportive of organics. Emphasized how great it was that the U of MN was teaching organic and said they would be inviting Bud back.

New Class next spring: Impressionist gardens/food in France. Will conduct an organic tour in Provence and Normandy. Bud is looking for organic contacts in these regions – ***contact Bud if you know of French farmers in Normandy or Provence who speak some English and who would be open to hosting a student group.***

Going to China in one week to visit Shanghai University to discuss food systems.

**Thom Peterson:** Trying to survive the last three weeks of Farm Bill session. Still waiting for the needed votes. On the MN Legislative session: conference committee has been working on a Livestock Development Grant Program (fund with several \$M) to assist with upgrading livestock facilities (fencing, barns, etc ...). Minimum grant size = \$4,000; this is positive – it will allow smaller producers or low-tech producers to participate.

Property tax issues: some discussion about revamping green acres (20 acres or less) as it relates to development. Trying to create new definitions. Some organic folks involved.

Times are changing – there will be lots of debate about food prices; different atmosphere at the capitol this year.

**Paul Porter:** Oil seed press is in Clearbrook crushing oilseeds – meal will be fed to organic livestock. Oil will be used for heating oil and biodiesel. Cold spring at the organic student farm – not much planting yet. Of note, an article that appeared on STRIB website on Tuesday (April ) where Lamberton was on the list of corn subsidy recipients – rather high up on the list. Ranked # 1 in state of MN for receipt of subsidies. Used 2006 data and listed the top 20 recipients in MN. Lamberton was only experiment station listed.

**NEXT CALL:** Thursday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 8:30 -9:30 am.

Host: Meg Moynihan

Scribe: Up for grabs! We will assign someone ON THE CALL if no one volunteers beforehand ... **Beware.**

**Conference Call Operator:** 612-625-2003