

MN Organic Network Conference Call Notes

8:30 am, June 28, 2007

Present: Pauline Nickel (host), Bill Wilcke (scribe), Helene Murray, Harriet Behar, Milt Haar, Jim Riddle, Meg Moynihan, Carmen Fernholz, Paul Porter, Gigi Digiacomo, Bud Markhart

MOSES Proposal to the McKnight Foundation – Harriet and Jim

- MOSES has submitted a proposal to the McKnight Foundation for a tri-state (SE MN, NE IA, and W WI) organic training program on organic livestock feed.
- The project would include production and market access.
- This project is especially relevant right now because supplies of feed grains are tight and feed grain prices are high.
- Jim has received approval to write a letter of support for the proposal on behalf of UMN; he will write the letter next week.
- Meg has sent a letter of support for the proposal on behalf of MDA.
- MOSES should hear whether the proposal is funded in September.

Organic Dairy Shortcourse – Meg

- This project is funded by an NCR-SARE Professional Development Program grant.
- The primary subcontractors are SFA of MN and DATCAP in WI.
- The first workshop will be held just prior to the MN Organic Conference in St Cloud MN; the Organic Conference will be held January 18-19, 2008 and the dairy workshop will be held January 17, 2008.

MDA Organic Farmer Survey – Meg

- MDA distributed its organic farmer survey this past spring.
- Meg is still analyzing the data, but the response rate for the survey has been very good and Meg provided some preliminary results. If someone has a need for data on organic farming in MN, they can contact Meg.
- Gigi, who is serving as a UMN Endowed Chair and is conducting an organic marketing project, partnered with Meg on the survey and added some marketing questions. Gigi provided some preliminary results.
- Several members of the MDA Organic Advisory Task Force (Thom Peterson, Bill Wilcke, and John DePaolis) met with the head of the Minnesota ag statistics unit about inclusion of organic information in the annual MN ag statistics. Ag statistics seemed to be very willing to include organic information in the annual report of MN ag statistics and they met with Meg to explore opportunities for collaboration. Several Organic Network members suggested that the annual ag statistics survey include questions about farmer outlook for the future, so that we can assess whether there are differences in outlook between organic and conventional farmers.

SWROC Organic Field Day – Jim, Carmen, & Milt

- The SWROC organic field day will start with continental breakfast at about 7:30 am on July 11, 2007.
- The field day will include plot tours, workshops, exhibits, and book sales by MOSES.

- Wayne Martin, from MISA, is organizing a session over the noon hour to honor LSP and MFU for their roles in promoting acts favorable to organic agriculture during the last MN Legislative session. A number of state and federal Legislators and representatives from non-profit organizations will be invited.
- There will be a session at 7:00 pm on July 10 at 7:00 pm to discuss organic research. Members of the Organic Network – especially members who will be coming into Lamberton early for the organic field day - are invited to attend the session.
- There will be a round table discussion at the end of the field day to discuss research needs for organic agriculture. Meg will provide information about organic research needs from the recent organic farmer survey for that session. Information gathered during the session should be useful to help UMN decide how to use organic funds it received as a result of the last Legislative session.

Legislative Report – Helene & Meg

- Helene reported that UMN received an increase in the Ag State Special for the first time since 1999. UMN received an extra \$400,000 in recurring funds. It is understood that these funds will be used for organic and alternative agriculture, but it has not been determined exactly how the funds will be used. The Deans who would make decisions about the use of these funds are quite supportive and intend to gather stakeholder information from faculty and non-profit organizations before deciding how to use the money.
- MDA received an increase in funding for the organic cost share program and for an organic MN Grown program. If there is increased funding from the federal government for organic cost share, or if for some other reason, not all of the funds allocated by the MN Legislature are needed for cost share, the funds could be available for the sustainable ag grant program.

Reports from Organic Network Members

Helene

- The student organic farm on the UMN St Paul Campus is doing very well and is currently selling produce at several sites in the Twin Cities. They had lots of strawberries to sell this year.
- Larry Lev, from Oregon State, will be an Endowed Chair later this summer and he will conduct some marketing workshops in MN.

Bill

- NCR-SARE is organizing R&E preproposals for review.
- Met with the head of MN Ag Statistics as one of the representatives of the MN Organic Advisory Task Force.

Bud

- Is on his way to visit the May Farm near Stillwater.
- Mentioned that strawberries from the student farm were part of a strawberry research project.
- Carmen asked if Steve Poppe, from UM-Morris, was involved in the strawberry project. Bud responded that Steve was not currently directly involved, but that Steve is working with some people from UM-Twin Cities who are involved with the student strawberry project.
- Bud was also asked what he knew about the new high-tunnel publication from UMN. Paul mentioned that Terry Nennich, one of the authors of the high-tunnel publication, has had a high-tunnel project in the Crookston area. Bud has not worked very closely with some of the horticulturists involved in high-tunnel work.

- Bud mentioned that the student farm had added chickens this year.

Paul

- Held a biodiesel field day near Wannaska MN on August 27. The field day was well attended and it briefly doubled the population of Wannaska.
- At the field day, Paul met an organic farmer who is interested in pressing oilseeds for the vegetable oil.
- Paul emphasized that the chickens raised on the UMN student farm are still transitional and are not certified organic.

Harriet

- MOSES is seeking nominees for its organic farmer of the year award.
- MOSES will be holding an organic research symposium this year in conjunction with the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference in LaCrosse WI.
- Harriet will be attending the SWROC organic field day and she will have an exhibit at Farm Fest. She is seeking organic farmers from southwest MN to help staff the Farm Fest exhibit. Several Network members suggested names of farmers; if you have suggestions for Harriet, feel free to send them to her.
- Has been working with the new Wisconsin Organic Advisory Task Force.
- Has been working on pipeline/organic farming issues in WI. A WI DATCAP employee has created a GIS map showing the location of all the organic farms in Wisconsin.
- Will be participating in an organic workshop in NE IA on July 17.

Meg

- Has a report on the first year of the MDA Farm Business Management Project. MDA printed about 1000 copies of the report and the report will soon be posted on the MDA website. Oral presentations on the results will be presented at a number of organic conferences, workshops, and field days over the next year.

Carmen

- Reported on a number of workshops and issues that he will be involved in over the next few months.

Jim

- Jim, Carmen, and Erin Silva from UW participated in a panel session on “Innovative Technologies for Organic Farming” at an international meeting of the society of ag and biological engineers (ASABE) in Minneapolis on June 18, 2007.
- Attended a summit on organic agriculture in Colorado; is concerned about some of the doubt being cast on the integrity of organics by the recent release of a list of in-organic minor ingredients that can be used in organic products.
- His wife, Joyce Ford, is spending a lot of time on pipeline/organic farming issues in MN.

Next Call

- 8:30 am, Thursday, September 6, 2007. Helene will host and Milt will scribe.