

## **Organic Network Call**

July 2, 2009

Participants: Bill Wilcke (Extension, SARE), Thom Petersen (MN Farmers Union), Wayne Edgerton (DNR), Nigatu Tadesse (FSA), Jim Riddle (UMN/Lamberton), Helene Murray (UMN/MISA) - host; Meg Moynihan (MDA) - scribe

**Next Call: Thursday,  
November 5th from 8:30-  
9:30 a.m.  
NEED VOLUNTEERS TO  
HOST & SCRIBE**

## **ROUND ROBIN**

### **Bill**

Will attend the first North Dakota organic field day in Dickenson (western ND) on July 14<sup>th</sup> and will report back.

SARE's Research and Education Program received 136 pre-proposals. That's more than previous years, but not much more. In August, thirty (30) will be invited to submit full proposals. Bill expects about 10 will ultimately be funded.

Extension has a number of small farm activities going on and Minnesota SARE coordinator Beth Nelson has been organizing carpooling and vans to various events. Extension educator Betsy Wieland organized a tour of metro-area grazing farms. It was pretty popular with Mill City Marketgoers, who seemed interested in more tours of nearby sustainable agriculture operations. Some ag educators went on tour, too.

### **Jim**

Announced that on July 8, there will be a researcher roundtable at Lamberton to report in and strategize about future projects.

Organic Field Day at Lamberton is next week, July 9. See details at [www.organicecology.umn.edu](http://www.organicecology.umn.edu) Will include soil pits, roller crimper, other forage/alternative crops, high tunnel/rowcover/open air management comparisons, etc.

Researchers from WI, Michigan State, IA State, North Dakota State, Rodale, and UMN will be meet about a current Integrated Organic Program grant project in Dickenson before the NoDak Organic Field Day.

Last week, Jim helped w/ two NRCS staff trainings focused on new EQIP Organic Initiative. Older employees asked more questions; younger staff seemed less engaged. He suggested to NRCS that it would be important to collect success stories of farmers who have enrolled in the program –both to publicize program and help farmers see what's possible for the next round. Jim is still involved with e-Organic web site ([extension.org](http://extension.org)) – and said maybe this would be a way to disseminate case studies.

MOSES conference planning meeting has occurred. There will be organic research forum embedded in conference.

See [e-organic.info](http://e-organic.info) – new material. Also organic YouTube channel.

July 10 Jim doing workshop for visiting Cochrane fellows from Mexico. Several of them will be writing Mexican organic livestock standards.

**Nigatu:** In addition to farm loan program, CRP, other commodity programs, NAP (noninsurable crops), Minnesota's FSA has partnership outreach fund that can be tapped and used to organize outreach activities for underserved audiences, especially minorities, women, and beginning farmers. Amount of \$ allotted depends on audience and is based on national office determination (rating systems). For example, this year, \$4,000 in partnership fund is available for UMN/Extension conferences/meetings. That money has not yet been used. FSA will be supporting Small Farm Expo, 4-H groups, American Indian Task Force. Any group invited to submit request for 2010 for outreach activities. Process: if state-level activity, request through state office. If county-level activity, request w/ county service center.

### **Thom:**

At the Federal level – MFU is doing a lot of work on climate change issues. Also working on dairy issues – more the conventional side, but organic, too. MFU’s state office has been hearing a lot of bad PR and criticism about organic dairy -- because some dairies leaving people are concluding that there’s no demand for organic milk, etc. Has been trying to put in perspective – demand hasn’t fallen, it’s just not growing as fast, etc.

Noted it is helpful to now have FSA state committee and director in place. Roger Vogt (from NE MN – long term interest in sustainable agriculture and dedicated MN Organic Conferencegoer) is on committee because Senator Klobuchar recognized importance of having sustainable ag/ organic voice.

**Meg:**

Received 45 applications for 15 seats on the MN Organic Advisory Task Force – a record in her experience. The new *Directory of Organic Farms* and *Organic Farm Performance Report* will be out soon. While cost share will continue to be available because federal money is currently available, other MDA organic program offerings are likely to decline in light of budget cuts. Similarly, we expect there will be a MDA Sustainable Ag Demonstration Grant program in 2010, but it was not funded for 2011. 18” x 24” *Organic Farm Please Do Not Spray* signs are in the works and will be available free of charge to MN certified growers and those who stipulate that they are organic/exempt from certification requirement. Progress is occurring on the Minnesota Grown Organic logo. More later.

**Wayne:**

Emphasized aspects of sustainable and organic agriculture at a private land specialist meeting in Windham in June and it went really well. Land Stewardship Project director George Boody and farmer Tony Thompson presented. DNR will do a similar event in Spicer next year and would love to have organic farmer come in and talk about practices and their impacts on wildlife, so please send him suggestions.

Recent native pollinator workshop was excellent and attended by about 50.

DNR’s Working Lands Initiative funding continues for innovative conservation work on working lands to augment wildlife habitat and populations. Got approved for \$1+ million in funds for those types of efforts in certain counties in prairie pothole region of the state. Are continuing the Luverne and Mary Jo Forbord’s farm effort to convert brushland back to grazeable prairie.

**Helene:**

MISA board is currently looking for 2 farmers and 1 community member.

MISA and the Regional Partnerships will be at MN Pollution Control Agency’s EcoExperience one day (Sept 3) at State Fair this year at the Local Foods Booth.

U of M’s *Solutions* magazines has article about Morris dairy organic transition and one about Paul Porter’s bike trip across Africa. See both at <http://www.cfans.umn.edu/solutions/> Paul’s trip was cut short by an accident, but he’s going to get right back on that bike next year.

**IDEA SWAP**

Nigatu: FSA has county committees of 3-5 members. The 2009 elections are in progress. Last day to get nomination forms August 3. Ballots must be in by November. There are currently 252 members across MN. Of these, 165 are male whites. 89 are female whites. 7 are Native American, 1 is a Hispanic farmer. Nigatu doesn’t know how many organic farmers are serving on county committees. **It is important for organic and sustainable farmers to be involved in elections.** These committees do real work – choose county directors, etc.

Thom noted that his wife, Alana Petersen, is going to be the state director for Senator Franken, who will be seated next Tuesday. Although Senator Franken won’t be on Ag. Committee, he is very interested in organic and sustainable agriculture issues.

Meg noted that 40 paid students are enrolled in Women's Environmental Institute's evening "Organic Farm School" this year (and one is driving down from Duluth to attend!). She is on the board of the new Organic Field School at Gardens of Eagan, which met in person for the first time last weekend and is discussing OFS@GOE's unique role and educational potential in the context of so many other organic education and outreach activities happening in the area.