

Organic Conference Call Notes for August 4, 2005

Host: Bud Markhart, Scribe: John Beckwith, Participants: Helene Murray, Pauline Nickel, Paul Porter, Mary Hanks, Bill Wilcke, DeEtta Bilek, Noreen Thomas, Mary Jo Forbord, NW MN ??.

Round Robin:

Pauline:

Held the UM Day – Southwest on July 14th. It was their first attempt to do an event that cut across so many University functions. Had a very good K-12 session with the Chicago Field Museum. Had a rural health and safety session focusing on pharmacy issues and success stories such as Tyler, MN. 3 additional communities are being worked with at this time. Also did an alternative source of energy session with WC Development Commission with about 100 in attendance. The tours were held in the evening rather than morning with mixed comment.

Milt:

Tour of Prairie was held

Organic tour featured about 5 projects in the garden. A lot of idea sharing went both ways between experts and participants.

He is also participating in a proposed national initiative on natural product use. This includes vinegar, garlic, etc. They are seeking a grant for national project with other institutions.

Mary Jo:

She reminded participants of GrazeFest MN - 2005. It is the first such event. Partners include MDA, NRCS and UM. Early registration is due tomorrow. To be held on the Prairie Horizon Farm. The farm is in transition to organic with about 100 acres of natural prairie being grazed. All are invited and welcome to attend.

DiEtta:

She is calling in from the feed mill.

She hoped to hear about the 2006 Organic Farming Conference during this call. Mary will join later to update everyone on status.

Looking for input to newsletter.

Bill:

Organic Coordinator search is still in process.

He attended regional partnership meeting in July with Paula on the Lynn Brekke farm. Large pallet of garlic solution on the farm so they must be trying something out related to use of natural products. This might be of interest to Milt in his project.

They are in process of sorting pre-proposals. Notification of selection is anticipated at the end of the month for those to develop full proposals.

Paul:

They looked at organic wheat varieties on the Brekke farm.

There is an open house today at the student farm. 14 students participate at this farm and all are doing very well in their efforts.

He has heard of an IA County (Sioux City area) where the county set aside \$250,000 to assist with transition to organic agriculture. This is Bill's home county, Woodbury County. The initiative is coming from the county economic development leader. A very positive example of local government recognition of the importance of organic agriculture.

Helene:

Two new appointments made recently. Linda Uhland selected for WC Regional Partnership position. Kathy Draeger started with the Statewide Regional Partnership.

Bud:

He recently attended the American Society for Horticultural Science meeting and did two presentations. One was on the use of vinegar and acetic acid, raising several comments pro and con. The other on sweet corn transplants.

Also, the Organic Working Groups of the Society discussed organic curriculums being used across the country. This was a very good discussion and idea sharing time. A common thread is the value of on-farm experience – hands on work. The UM has an excellent set up with the fields just a block from the class.

He leaves for Germany with Vince Frita from Waseca. This is a trip to set up and plan the curriculum on an upcoming class on EU and US organics – production to consumption. Teleconference participants expressed great interest in becoming students again!

John:

He reported that USDA-FSA is now reporting information of participation of individuals on organic farms, small farms, limited resource farms. These reports will be available from FSA.

The conservation security program sign-up and initial acceptance is complete for 2005. Potential accepted contract holders are being notified.

Also, NRCS has a request for assistance from an RC&D to expand on a successful marketing system linking CSA's, non-profit nutrition/food providers, and educational efforts together. He will follow up with Helene on a similar effort she is aware of.

Mary:

She offered a reminder of GrazeFest coming up.

She anticipates getting together in next couple of weeks to get started on planning for the Organic Farming Conference. We will probably meet the week of the 22nd at MDA.

There is a think-tank group coming together (probably in September) to discuss promotion of organic livestock production, primarily dairy.

NW MN ?? (missed name)

Soybean biological control agents for rust control are being tried out. There is no current problem but this research will help prepare us for future events.

Flax – Starting to turn now. There are weeds coming through on the organic plots. Weeds are more of a problem in flax fields than in the organic wheat. This could cause problem with harvest and drying.

Noreen:

She has been busy considering uses of NASA satellite imagery. They are optimistic about receipt of a grant to obtain the imagery. This is a cooperative effort with U of Montana. Looking for input on how we might take advantage of this technology in organic farming.

They will also be working with youth groups to monitor different natural resources as part of project.

The United Soybean Board has a payment exemption for participation of organic growers. While they got this exemption last year, they were denied this year. This was due to a change in the crops listed on their organic certification (they added oats). She is working to resolve this with the Board.

The kids have the website up and running. Also have a hand on GPS program working with home school children. They've had up to 100 kids at farm recently to participate in this educational effort.

Next meeting 8:30 on September 1. Host: Mary Jo, Scribe: Bill

