

Here are notes from the Sept 1 Organic Network Conference Call. If you'd rather have the Word version, let me know and I'll attach the file to an email message. Note that the next call is scheduled for 8:30 am, Thu, Oct 6.

Minnesota Organic Network Conference Call Notes from September 1, 2005

Next Call: 8:30 am, Thursday, October 6, 2005; host: Bud Markhart (host should send out a reminder about the call several days ahead of the call); scribe: Paul Porter

Present on Sept 1 Call: Bill Wilcke, DeEtta Bilek, Hans Kandel, Noreen Thomas, Mary Jo Forbord, Helene Murray, Bud Markhart, Jim Riddle, Glen Schafer, Pauline Nickel, Milt Haar, Jeremy Lanctot, John Beckwith, Paul Porter, Meg Moynihan

Host: Mary Jo Forbord

Scribe: Bill Wilcke (I apologize for any misspellings or inaccuracies in these notes; please pass any additions or corrections along to me.)

Comments from Call Participants

Hans Kandel: Hans is a Regional Extension Educator in the Crookston office. He has been involved in a number of organic wheat and flax trials this year. He has witnessed quite a bit of crop disease this year.

Helene Murray: Helene is the Director of the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA). She announced that Chuck Casey, currently Dean and Director of the University of Minnesota (UofM) Extension Service, has been named the new Chancellor for the University of Minnesota \* Crookston \* pending approval by the UofM Board of Regents on September 9, 2005. Bev Durgan, currently Associate Dean in the UofM College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences (COAFES), has been named the new Dean and Director of Extension. A UofM St Paul student group that is managing an organic garden plot on campus is experiencing excellent sales through their on-campus outlets.

DeEtta Bilek: DeEtta is involved with farming and processing operations in central Minnesota and she is involved with the Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA). OCIA is continuing to work on insurance options for organic farmers. They are working with the UofM Center for Farm Financial Management on a revenue insurance application. They might have some meetings with farmers this fall and they would like to have an insurance session at the 2006 Minnesota Organic Conference.

Bud Markhart: Bud is a UofM COAFES faculty member in Horticulture. He traveled to Europe with Vince Fritz from the UofM's Southern Research and Outreach Center to plan for an upcoming organic class. They visited farms, universities, and government officials \* primarily in Germany. One of his UofM, St Paul classes this fall will use the student organic plot (Cornercopia) for hands-on experience. He is looking for the donation of a high-tunnel

greenhouse for use by the class. Bud was reappointed to a term on the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Organic Advisory Task Force (MDA OATF).

Noreen Thomas: Noreen introduced herself as an organic farmer north of Moorhead MN.

Jim Riddle: Jim is an organic consultant from southeast MN and he is the chair of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). Jim participated in a very successful "Cooks" event at the Minnesota State Fair on August 30, 2005; the event featured Twin Cities' chefs who talked about and cooked with locally produced ingredients. Jim has been reappointed to the MDA OATF. Winona County, MN, the county where Jim lives, is planning to undertake some economic development efforts that will support organic agriculture. Jim called the group's attention to a USDA Economic Research Service study that compares the impacts of US and European policies on organic agriculture; Jim will email a link to the study to members of the Organic Network.

Glen: Glen works for the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA). Glen has been appointed to the MDA OATF. Glen expects that FSA will be able to participate more in the 2006 Minnesota Organic Conference.

Pauline Nickel and Milt Haar: Pauline and Milt are located at the UofM Southwest Research and Outreach Center (SWROC) near Lamberton. SWROC will be hosting an Alternative Crops Workshop on September 8, 2005. The search for an Organic Coordinator to be located at SWROC is still open. Milt is continuing to do some research on Canada thistle populations.

John Beckwith: John works for the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). NRCS conducted five pasture-related workshops in 2005 and they expect to conduct ten to twelve workshops next year; he expects that at least some of the workshop content will be useful to organic farmers.

Meg Moynihan: Meg works for the Energy and Sustainable Agriculture division of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. The MDA OATF has just been appointed and the first meeting of the new Task Force will be October 24; Meg has the full list of OATF members if anyone wants the list. A planning meeting for the 2006 Minnesota Organic Conference will probably be scheduled during the week of September 12, 2005; Meg has a list of people who have volunteered to help with planning, but anyone from the Organic Network is welcome to participate. MDA is investigating a dispute over soybean check-off refunds; farmers who have 100% organic production are eligible for a refund of check-off funds paid on their soybean production, but at least one MN family has been denied a refund. Meg participated in a field day held on an organic dairy farm near Jordan MN (Reisgraf farm). Meg will be a presenter at USDA organic conference in Washington DC in early October.

Bill Wilcke: Bill is a UofM COAFES faculty member in Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering and the Regional Coordinator for the USDA North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) program. Letters to people who submitted NCR-SARE Research & Education preproposals are in the mail. The NCR-SARE call for

Farmer Rancher Grant proposals was recently released; proposals are due December 1, 2005. Bill was also reappointed to the MDA OATF.

Paul Porter: Paul is a UofM COAFES faculty member in Agronomy and Plant Genetics. Paul recently traveled to Iowa State University in Ames for a meeting about the Green Lands, Blue Waters effort; while in Ames, Paul met with an ISU student who has been involved in their organic student farm. Paul will be leaving for Australia in the near future to study cover crop research.

Jeremy Lanctot: Jeremy is an organic farmer and he also works for the Sustainable Farming Association (SFA). Jeremy has degrees in math and computer science and he has worked with Honeywell in the past.

Mary Jo Forbord: Mary Jo is a western Minnesota farmer and the Executive Director of SFA. Mary Jo's family hosted Grazefest on their farm in mid-August; the event attracted about 120 people. Grazefest will probably be held at the Forbords again in 2006 and in 2007, it will probably move to southeast MN. The 2006 SFA meeting will be hosted by the Central Chapter on February 18, 2006 in Little Falls MN.

#### Other Discussion

Organic Coordinator: Ads for the position will be posted on the Organic Network listserv.

#### NOSB Activity:

- NOSB has received many comments about organic dairy cows' access to grass, since dairy cows at a number of large organic dairies are confined during the full lactation cycle. NOSB suggested some changes and National Organic Program (NOP) staff have returned the suggestions to NOSB for clarification. Citizen comments to the Secretary of Agriculture's office could help resolve the issue.
- NOSB is also working on clarification of what synthetic materials can be used in organic processing operations.
- The NOP has reversed previous rulings and has now approved use of the USDA organic seal on pet foods and personal care products.
- NOSB is working to address concerns about the process for converting conventional dairy herds to organic.

Organic Farms to be Featured on TV: Meg is looking for photogenic dairy farms in central or eastern MN that would be candidates to be featured on a television piece that will be filmed in September.

#### Web Presence for Organic Network:

The SFA had previously volunteered to host a web page for the Organic Network on the SFA website. A brainstormed of items that might be included on the Organic Network web page include:

- Notes from Organic Network conference calls.
- Information about how to join the Organic Network and participate in conference calls.

- A copy of the interagency organic Memorandum of Understanding.
- A list of Organic Network members.
- Links to useful organic websites.
- Organic Network mission or purpose statement.
- Time and date for the next conference call.

Questions and comments:

- Are there really three different audiences that the Organic Network wants to reach (Growers, Consumers, and Researchers)?
- Should the website be primarily an internal communication tool for Organic Network members or should it be a vehicle for outreach to growers?
- An informational website for growers would be quite different from the proposed website and might be better as a stand-alone website.
- Some call participants seemed to prefer a very simple website that would have minimal maintenance requirements.
- It was suggested that Mary Jo and Jeremy consider the input provided on the call and come back to the group with a proposal.

Bill Wilcke