

Organic Network Conference Call Notes
September 6, 2007

Present: Jim Riddle, Bud Markhart, Meg Moynihan, Paul Porter, Gigi DiGiacomo, Thom Peterson, Helene Murray, Carmen Fernholz, Bulgarian visitors

Jim: welcomed our 7 Cochrane Fellows here from Bulgaria. They work primarily with herbs for medicinal, culinary and essential oils. This week they will be visiting the farms of Greg Reynolds, Atina and Martin Diffley and Cedar Summit farm among others.

Jim reported that he learned last week that Organic Valley has funded a \$50,000 project for research on no-till vegetables. The grant does not cover equipment costs but he is very excited to begin work on this. The money comes from a organic research and education check off program for organics. He will provide CROPP with a quarterly progress report. Jim also noted that there is a new graduate student working with Don Wyse and Craig Sheaffer who is interested in research in this area.

A question about the funding for organic research from the ag state special was raised. Helene reported that Deans Durgan and Levine met last week with representatives of Land Stewardship Project's policy committee to get their input on priorities. The next steps are to confer with faculty this fall. The deans said that decisions would be made by January at the latest.

There is an open house at Waseca scheduled for September 13 from 4:00-8:00 p.m. at the Southern Research and Outreach Center. The organic program and MISA will have displays at the event.

Jim, Meg and Thom noted that there was a flood response conference call convened by Jim Boerboom at MDA yesterday. It is estimated that up to 100 farms and 200 processors could be effected by the flooding in the SE part of the state. Initially Whole Foods cancelled all contracts they had with growers in the 7 county area but after visiting farms and sites in the area they have resumed buying from farms able to sell produce. Food cooperatives and IATP are working to raise funding to help farmers in the region through the Sow the Seeds campaign. A paper outlining information to help farmers in the region has been posted to www.organicccology.umn.edu is available. Jim said he will be sending out a note the organic listserv when new items are posted on the organic ecology web site.

Organic certifying agencies are doing their best to document farms afflicted by the flooding. There are two primary concerns, food crops directly flooded are not fit for human consumption. The second is future contamination issues that may be a problem.

Bud said he is teaching a new class and is excited that the faculty of the department of horticulture are excited about developing a new series of courses for students interested in organic fruit and vegetable production.

Paul noted that he continues to work with the oil seed press research and that there is growing interest in pressing soybeans for oil and meal.

Meg noted that it is important for flood victims and organic certifying agencies to contact them with a list of what they need. A primary concern is about synthetic compound contamination. MDA is putting together a web site to provide information for certifiers.

Meg said that the 2006-07 organic certification cost share program is now open and available to the estimated 560 farms and 172 processors in the state. Reimbursement rates have gone up but the fund distribution priority will be to those farms certified for 3 years or less. They are in the process of collecting information for next year's organic directory. Meg asked that we help get the word out about these two efforts. She said that processors will not be listed in this directory due to time and funding constraints but is open to the idea.

The ESAP demonstration grant program is now accepting applications. Open to all project ideas that have meaningful farmer involvement. The closing date for applications is January 18, 2008. The Demonstration Grant Program provides funds for farmers, agricultural researchers, educators and non-profit groups to explore innovative and creative ways to enhance the sustainability of a wide range of farming systems. Grants of up to \$25,000 are awarded on a competitive basis for up to three year demonstration projects. Projects have demonstrated management intensive grazing, diversified cropping systems, soil fertility and manure management, alternative weed management, low-capital beginning farmer strategies, marketing and specialty crop opportunities. Grant Application ([MS Word: 214 KB / 12 pages](#))

The next Minnesota Organic conference is scheduled for January 18-19, 2008 in St Cloud, MN. Please send ideas for workshops and keynote speakers to Meg asap.

Meg noted that there is an editorial in today's Star Tribune by Dennis Avery entitled: The consequences of organic farming. Find it at: <http://www.startribune.com/562/story/1404039.html>

Gigi noted that an organic buyer and processor directory is a possibility and a grant to OFRF has been submitted to do this; Meg notes that interest is high. Gigi reported that telephone survey of retailers is underway and should be completed by the end of October. Both urban and rural retailers are being contacted.

Carmen has been busy on the farm with harvest. There is interest in Lamberton in doing research on no-till soybeans and vegetables. He said that Kate Clancy will be speaking at a dinner conversation series meeting in Lamberton on December 4, like to focus on local foods. He noted that OFARM's annual meeting starts today.

Thom said that he is getting ready to receive input from Farmers' Union members in 70+ counties over the next couple of months. He will also be spending a week in Washington DC on farm bill issues. Farmers' Union, Food Alliance Midwest and Renewing the

Countryside just completed the Minnesota Cooks event at the State Fair. There is a high interest in this event and lots of media coverage. Helene noted that the calendars look great and that MISA hosted the local foods booth for a day during the fair in the EcoExperience building.

Upcoming events:

Saturday, Sept 8 - Field Day at Ray Yokiels' farm in Wells, MN

Saturday, Sept 8 - Harvest Festival, Bayfront Park in Duluth

Jim noted that Whole Foods is expressing interest in the good agricultural practices (GAP) audit process. He also said he learned recently that local Chipotle restaurants are buying bell peppers from the May Farm and are seeking to source more products locally.

Carmen said that Del Monte packing in Sleepy Eye is interested in packing more organic products. Bud suggested that he be in contact with Vince Fritz in Waseca who is interested in learning about demand for organic products.

Next meeting: Thursday, October 4, 2007, 8:30-9:30 a.m.

Host: Meg Moynihan

Scribe: Paul Porter

submitted by Helene Murray