

Organic Network Notes Call Notes for October 5, 2006

Attending:

Carmen Fernholz, Hans Kandel, Mary Hanks, Meg Moynihan, Milt Haar, Pauline Nickel, Helene Murray, John Beckwith, Thom Petersen, Jeremy Lanctot, Mary Jo Forbord

Host: Carmen

Scribe: Meg

Round Robin

Thom: MN Farmers' Union is getting ready for the upcoming legislative session. Watching elections. There are a few organic pieces coming up - will hv more info next month.

Helene: Can almost announce endowed chair holders, but not quite.. If anybody attended/watched dean interviews (there are 3 candidates) pls send her feedback. A list of comments will be going to provost. Bio info is online - go to <http://www.cfans.umn.edu/deansearch.html> Or, contact Helene 612-625-0220 to get an audio of the interview(s) Search is open until filled*

Hans: Working on organic flax trial data. Lots of drought stress - so low yields. Expect big differences in hand weeded vs. no weed plots. Also, have done soybean cyst nematode (SCN) sampling in Red River Valley. Don't expect to find them, but this is part of RMA grant going on to investigate SCN.

Some have been reported in Clay Co (maybe as far N as Ada. Suspect beet trucks may be transferring soil particles and the creepy (ed.) nematodes. Is working on grant proposals for wheat variety trials. SARE proposal not going to be funded. Now working w/ NoDak on a proposal to wheat growers. Idea to take wheat variety types for adaptability to organic systems. Meg suggested OFRF as possible funder. Hans is on it.

Mary Jo/Jeremy: SFA just published CornerPost (50th edition). Put(ting) together retrospective of articles from past. Will be out for distribution this winter. Annual Conference at Gustavus Adolphus Feb 17, 2007 in St. Peter.

MDI - SFA leads the organic/alternative Minnesota Dairy Initiative team for the state. A "common funds" pot of money exists. SFA proposed online forum for farmstead cheesemaking and was approved. MJ feels this is landmark bellweather change for on-farm value added investment through common funds and indicates change in mindset of MDI members and leaders.

Food safety/local food systems*Mary Jo commented on her view that there must be a balance between local, small, and safe. On biomass - implementation by many ethanol plants will determine what farm landscape will look like (what is grown).

Jeremy is working on more resources for dairy geographical regions. Putting together 1-pg flyer of how start transitioning. Other resources exist and he will draw from them . Expects 50 new certified organic dairy farms in next year. Some processors worried about being able to handle capacity.

Quite a number of farms in NW MN will be coming on line next year. That part of state is opening up. Nov 7 at Central Lakes College FBM joint grazing/organic meeting workshop. Intro to organic standards and transition. Working on peer-groups - Jeremy working w/ MDI regions on how to get those set up.

Organic feed: do they have enough? Is an issue for step-by-step checklist for producers to consider - ratio cows/acres/purch feed needs Carmen says OV is concerned. MORE TO DISCUSS THAN THERE WAS TIME FOR. SUGGESTED TOPIC FOR A FUTURE O-N CALL.

Milt/Pauline: are harvesting soybeans now - a rate/date planting study coming off (the Sheaffer RMA study). Milt says looks interesting . Measuring diff in sb varieties and competitiveness w/ weeds. Group at SWROC has been (internally) discussing internally future of Elwell. Also had a Canada Thistle Day - mgmt issues, ecology, biology. Not organic-specific - more how to manage CT in natural areas. Lots (ecology) does x over to organic. Good attendance - 80 people!!

John Beckwith: NRCS is working on an info piece on pollinators - may be of interest to organic growers. Howard Moechnig the grazing specialist is retiring effective beginning of year and John expects a new hire. WesMin RC&D got grant for productive conservation - alternative sustainable resource-protecting crops. Will be having a first meeting sometime soon (not clear what relation to organic, but worth mentioning.)

Carmen: continuing to work on RMA grants - at station and on own farm, too. Carmen and Mary Jo attended ARS meeting in Morris to provide info for 5-yr gathering on priority setting, etc. That station in 2nd or 3rd yr of doing research on organic rotation. Carmen taking lead on Elwell direction. Has email list and will get info out to everybody. Wants to get info out broadly, so pls share.

Meg: Reported there is a draft legislative initiative in review by Commissioner's Office that would increase base program funds for organic at MDA, provide dedicated funds for organic demonstration grants, and expand cost share program. Two other organic-related draft initiatives elsewhere in agency are to increase funds to organic/sustainable MDI team and to develop a "Minnesota Grown Organic" identity under the state "Minnesota Grown" program.

Meg also reported this year's cost share funds are now gone and that there's a new 2-pg color fact sheet about organic dairy info sources at MDA web site <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/esap/organic/organicdairyresources.pdf>

Meg had long visit w/ Cathy Greene at Economic Research Service in Washington yesterday. New organic farm and acreage estimates will be posted in November. It appears that soybean acres are down. Two new ERS organic reports are in the works. Several USDA agency leaders have expressed strong personal interest in organic, which can only be good...

Mary:

MDA has announced an internal reorganization that will effectively dissolve the division Mary and Meg work for. Staff is still waiting to see final structure/decisions and will keep the Organic Network apprised as things unfold.

Discussion: Organic Conference Planning

MDA looked at evals from last year, did post card to all organic community requesting input for topics/speakers, press release asking for input.

We hv already confirmed two keynoters. Diana Endicott from KS - organic farmer and she manages marketing coop. She'll speak Saturday. Also, Mary-Howell and Klaas Martens from New York crop farm and run an organic feed business speaking Friday. All will do breakouts, too -- we told them to pick their topic and we'd fit it in.

Convention center is reserved. Hv the caterer and local/organic forager on board. Kelly Inn rooms are blocked for us. In wake of the spiffy "save the date" postcard we sent out, are getting lots of email and calls from new exhibitors/vendors for trade show. Sponsor/exhibitor packets will go out next week.

Feedback from call participants on program:

Soybean - aphids big deal this year. Lots of farmers looking for answers. Phil Glogoza from Moorhead tried lots of products to control aphids on organic farms. Also looked @ overwintering. He did that at request of Comstock farmers. Good fit b/c SB Growers want to support the conference. They hv suggested having Jim Orf talk about variety development. Trials at Lamberton and on Carmen's Farm.

Nematodes - would go w/ aphids and varieties? Sen Yu Chen could help us. He is at Waseca.

Rotation - Carmen would like to work w/ Glen Borgerding on that..

Weed mgmt in Fruit and Veg - How about Greg Reynolds, Martin/Atina, John Fisher Merritt, Mike Jacobs (EZ Bean), get resource from MFVGA, Bud Markhart

Maybe repeat Harry Hoch apple session - well received last year..

Strawberries - Brian and Laura Wilson, Jeremy, Brad and Kristi Fernholz. All fairly new organic strawberry growers.

Soil Quality: Don Reikoske from ARS in Morris? Don did research on Carmen's farm and Carmen thinks he'd be excellent. George Bird also suggested (nematologist from Michigan State)

Frank Forcella - ARS Morris biological information on weeds

Herd Health - Ann Wells DVM from ATTRA.

Dairy Transition: Peter Ruegemer, Joe & Tom Molitor, Joe Borgerding. Needs 1.5 hours not 1!

Local food - Dorthy Rosemeier good source of names. What should session topic be? Suggestions: Check in w/ all of other local food startups. We hear about waxing/waning. Big picture - startups. How can we further their collective/collaborative work. Representative from coops. What is status of local foods in MN?

Next meeting is November 2

Host: Helene

Scribe: Mary Jo

-Submitted by Meg Moynihan, Scribe