

Organic Network Conference Call Notes October 4, 2001

Participants: Harriet Dehar, Jim Riddle, John Beckwith, Meg Moynihan (host), Bill Wilcke, Gigi DiGiacomo, Jeremy Lanctot, Pauline Nickel, Paul Sobocinski, Carmen Fernholz, Noreen Thomas and Milt Haar (scribe)

General Discussion based on Questions asked by Meg: Is the organic network working the way we want it to work? Do we need to invite more participants?

It was agreed that we should invite more people and organization to participate. Which groups? Environmental groups, more farmers, consumers, retailers and others were suggested. We would need to consider our agenda. These groups may not be interested in the current topics of discussion. We could invite guests to speak to the group and add legislative and research updates to the agenda. Several members agreed to contact a group or an individual. The group could make a pitch for participation at the MN organic conference.

The network could become a more formal association and serve as a unified voice for organics in the state. A different approach could be modeled on the new agriculture organic network. Participants are mostly farmers. A call takes place every other week from May through October. Faculty members mostly listen in and respond to questions and needs. Farmers share what they have been doing and share weather and marketing information. That is the kind of information farmers want.

What prompts long time listeners to continue? The conference call provides greater awareness of current issues, events, early information and opportunities. Source of feedback and sharing what is happening. The network has evolved over time to reflect the participants' interests. We agree to contact some groups to participate and will revisit this topic again.

Round robin:

Gigi: Organic Farmer Survey results are being summarized. Five new marketing questions were included in the survey. Gigi highlighted some results and will send details out to the network.

Milt: planting cover crops for no-till organic research, harvesting experiments, meetings next week and the week following on grants to support no-till organic research.

Carmen: Walter Goldstein of Michael Fields Institute visited the SWROC. Walter has a high methionine corn breeding program for organics. One of his study sites is at the SWROC.

Jim: Collaborative grant writing, for the no-till research for which he has outreach responsibilities. Recently, he attended a fund raiser, for the local farmers' market. Upcoming is an organic workshop in Houston County.

Harriet: MOSES has been funded to promote organic livestock. They will conduct classes, network, aired radio ads and had a booth at Farm Fest where interest was good. Also funded is a pilot mentoring program in organic livestock. Mentors are paid and they are looking for 9 mentors and 18 people to be mentored. If you know someone who would be a good participant in the program, let Harriet know.

John Beckwith: Busy with emergency response work to the recent flooding in SE Minnesota.

Bill: Openings on the SARE administrative council. Need three good candidates.

Jeremy and Noreen: Planting soybean into rye, results of this study should be available soon. Work on beneficial insects attracted to borders. Wild flowers and prairie grasses seem to attract the most beneficial insects. Japanese market certification process is very picky. A huge hog operation was recently turned down, a local first!

Paul: Flood relief doesn't look as if it will adequately assist organic producers. A conference call will be held later on Thursday with legislators and stake holders. Legislative language is still being developed and interpreted. Specialty crops are not specifically included in legislation. Costs associated with crop losses are included, but not fees needed to certify a new site. The NAP (Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program) is not very good option for organic growers because the program has very specific planting dates, every crop has its own set of paper work and only commodity prices are available. Contact at Tim Micheals in Vickman's office 651-296-5968 and Keith Beyer in Rep. Juhnke's office 651-296-9468 to ask that organic be included in assistance.

Next conference call Thursday, November 1st, Jim will host and John Beckwith will scribe.