

Minnesota Organic Network Conference Call November 3, 2005

Participants: Paul Porter, Noreen Thomas, Glen Sheaffer, Bud Markhart, Jeremy Lancot, Pauline Nickel, Milton Haar, Matthew Harbur

Moderator: Paul Porter

Scribe: Matt Harbur

Round-robin:

- Matt: working on programming for Minnesota Organic Conference in Jan 2006; also, U of M will receive grant from Risk Management Agency Research and Development program to conduct statewide research on organic farming practices – will form 5 learning groups around MN and will invite other agencies to participate
- Pauline: new organic coordinators search will begin shortly – will hire two half-time coordinators, one for research and another for extension. K-12 program will include education on organics.
- Noreen: on-farm field day is scheduled for 6/10/2006 – will offer hands-on learning on composting in partnership with Moorhead Community Ag. Network participants are welcome to present research there.
- Glen: As liaison for organic issues at FSA, is trying to devise statewide promotion of organic agriculture; network participants are invited to submit materials to get out to public
- Jeremy: ready to start SFA organic website – waiting for finances to be settled
- Bud: will host Hort 4000: International Experiences in Agriculture this spring – topic of course will be comparison of EU and US standards for organic agriculture. Course will include European tour. Experiences from course will likely be used for education presentations around Minnesota afterwards. Also, Bud has discussed organic curriculum with Agricultural Food Science Academy
- Noreen: getting lots of questions about EU organic standards -- for example: large farms are not considered acceptable sources of manure; stricter restrictions on trace minerals in fertilizers; larger “factory” organic farms not acceptable. For BioSuisse certification, farms also need to have desirable impacts on local community. Also, Noreen is now milling grains for artisan bread makers
- Milt: led University and high school students on Elwell Agroecology Farm tours.
- Paul: attended IFOAM meeting in September – IFOAM is publishing book on long-term agroecological studies, so Paul has submitted chapter on VICMS study. Chapter focuses on history of site with brief description of ongoing work. Also, Agronomy Society of America meeting next week will have symposium on seed savers and breeding for organics – will include work that Paul and Hans Kandel have done in NW MN.

Special topic: what will organics look like in next 5 years and how can research be most-supportive? (Matt was instigator.)

- Noreen: important research topics include 1) green manures that work, 2) aphid management with beneficial insects and 3) models for small farm viability
- Paul: need to have research for middle-sized farms, like Fred Kirshmann is doing at Leopold Center in Iowa. Need to continue to think about diversified operations.
- Noreen: machinery needs for organics are changing rapidly – need unbiased information from University on rotavators, use of harrows (e.g. what speed?).
- Noreen: need to think about international food markets, e.g. selling beans to Taiwan. International food contracts are very soild.
- Noreen: farmers may be receptive to more intensive field margin management, provided that it produces products or aesthetic benefits. EQIP funding may also be used to improve headland management.

Next meeting:

December 1 @ 8:30am. Noreen will host and Milt will scribe. See you then!