

Organic Network Notes November 2, 2006

Attending: Bill Wilcke, Jim Riddle, Carmen Fernholz, Glen Schaeffer, Meg Moynihan, Noreen Thomas, Host: Helene Murray Scribe: Mary Jo Forbord

Scribe note: Please excuse the acronyms. Hopefully MISA has a master list for you to consult. By spelling them out, I would be typing and researching into the wee hours of the morning. My advice for unknown acronyms? ASK MISA

http://www.misa.umn.edu/Ask_MISA.html Thanks!

Round Robin

Glen Schaeffer:

John Monsen, FSA State Director, has resigned to work for AgStar. Dan Hockert has been named Acting State Director until a new political appointee is named. Glen works in the FSA's Conservation area, and reports that CREP sign-up is underway in NW, SE, and SW MN. State adds a RIM incentive to CREP payments and RIM rates have recently almost doubled. This increased rate should increase interest and participation. An easement is involved.

Expanding wetlands restorations (aka "the duck project") will increase incentives for participation, particularly in the prairie pothole region.

Livestock Assistance Program sign up begins next week and continues until Dec. 30th. Applications available at FSA offices. The application involves a self-certification for producers in 34 counties that are designated for drought disaster payments. Questions should be directed to the MN Department of Ag. After the application period closes, MDA will calculate how much each producer will get from the predetermined, fixed pot of money. Those eligible include only beef and sheep. Dairy producers are ineligible.

Meg Moynihan:

The Organic Producer Directory has been reprinted. Contact Meg for copies. Meg received an alert regarding a call for organic research program proposals from the CSREES Integrated Organic Program for an upcoming research deadline of December 18, 2006.

Just announced: AGR-Lite revenue insurance will be available in MN for 2007. Jim Bernau, 515-284-4460, USDA-AMS, is expanding their market news service, and beginning regular market news reports for organic—still in the development phase. He is looking for connections with producers and buyers that are willing to provide more information for price discovery. The goal is more consistent, objectively sourced information that is initially focused on the upper Midwest. Question about AMS topic from Carmen: Is there a downside? He feels a growing pressure to place organic commodities on the same basis as other commodities, and that price premiums would be endangered. Jim Bernau has talked to OFARM.

Re-organization plan for MDA has been postponed until after the election.

The Organic Conference planning process is moving along well, and the program is almost ready to go to the printer. Accommodations for exhibitor overflow is in the

works. Last year there were more exhibitors than space. Ads are being offered in the program this year to provide an alternative means of involvement and generate revenue. Ann Wells, DVM from ATTRA, has been confirmed to speak on dairy and small ruminant health issues.

Meg recently participated in a discussion with RMA about seeding soybeans into standing rye, and surrounding issues, including whether or not this is, or could be, an insurable practice. It was a good discussion without resolution at this time.

Jeff and Pam Reisgraf dairy farm in Scott County have their 147 acre dairy farm for sale.

Dave and Florence Minar have received the MDA Good Neighbor Award
Ralph Lentz is receiving an Agri-Growth Award tonight.

Jim Riddle:

Jim presented to WUSA about the IFOAM Livestock Conference.

An outcome of IFOAM was the start of an international list-serve of veterinarians interested in organic practice, coordinated through IATP.

Jim attended the Agricultural Research Service's planning workshop in Atlanta. It was encouraging to note the increasing focus on organic research priorities, and to learn that \$14-17 million is currently spent on organic research. Dave Archer, ARS economist, presented on his recent research on the economic analysis of organic systems. Jim also attended the NOSB meeting in Washington, DC.

The board is currently awaiting the proposed rule on pasture requirements that has been delayed for release, at least until the end of the year. The board elected new officers—and for the first time, an all-female slate was elected. Discussion was held about the organic aquaculture draft, and the draft for organic pet food is moving forward. In-depth discussion around single-celled organisms qualifying as livestock became somewhat belabored. The definition of livestock to include “other non-plant life” has opened the door to these discussions. This points to the need for continued oversight of the NOSB.

Jim is heading up the organic certification portion of a new nationwide electronic extension service (e-extension) that will launch in about one year.

The process is underway to convert 25 new acres at Lamberton to organic production, with plans to track and document from baseline through the certification process

Noreen Thomas:

Corn harvest is wrapping up in Northwest MN

Noreen will be offering an organic cooking class to the public this winter, and is organizing an organic list-serve to share information on organic food procurement and other related topics.

A date of June 2, 2007 has been set for “Going Green on the Farm”, that Noreen and Lee will be hosting on their farm near Moorhead. An invitation was extended for participation.

NW MN is involved in a Pesticide Exposure in Children study, in conjunction with the U of M Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships. Noreen is meeting with the advisory group, which is just getting started. A process of documentation called “Photovoice” will be utilized to capture input from mothers of small children around the topic of pesticide exposure.

Teresa Podoll of Practical Farmers of Iowa is exploring, with others, the fate of soybean research and promotion dollars paid by organic soybean farmers. The issue being explored is, can the mandatory check-off go to a research foundation that does organic soybean research?

Mary Jo Forbord:

SFA 16th Annual Conference will be held in St. Peter, MN on Feb 17, 2007. Keynote speaker is Jerry DeWitt of the Leopold Center. Dr. DeWitt is a long-time sustainable agriculture leader at the state, regional and national levels. Along with He also continues as coordinator of the Iowa State University Extension Sustainable Agriculture Program. He is also an accomplished photographer of rural scenes and life. Artisan Cheese making for Beginners is a new initiative of the Sustainable Farming Association of MN. MN Cheese-maker and writer Jodi Ohlsen-Read is developing content for a cheese-making discussion forum on the SFA website, and an afternoon track of the SFA Annual Conference will be devoted to the concept of Artisan Cheese making, and include the following topics:

1. Introduction to American Artisan Cheese making
2. Learning from Our Neighbors in WI
3. Meet our resident Cheese makers
4. How/where to learn more about artisan cheese making
5. Tools of the Trade

Organic Farm Business Management

Certified organic farms in Minnesota qualify for a rebate on their Farm Business Management (FBM) program tuition, starting at 80 percent during the first year in the program, 70 percent in the second year, and 60 percent in the third year. To find out how enroll in FBM, farmers should contact the FBM program at their local MnSCU campus, or go to www.mda.state.mn.us/esap/organic and click on “Farm Business Management for Organic Producers.”

Mary Jo attended the Organic Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Integrated Agricultural Systems National Program planning conference for the next 5 year cycle in Atlanta last week. An encouraging and hopeful direction is developing within the ARS research agenda. Additional perceptions from the Atlanta meeting were:

1. Like farmers, researchers are not all in the same place regarding what they view as priorities for the future of agriculture. Participatory research using a systems approach, seems to hold the most interest and relevance for organic and sustainable agriculture at this time.
2. Scientists who want to conduct participatory, interdisciplinary and/or systems research are not given the proper incentives to do so—a rough equivalent of expecting farmers to protect natural resources and diversify cropping systems with incentives placed to do the opposite.
3. Some research attention has turned from a bottom line of higher yields to environmental effects of farming practices, and also economic research and analysis. Social aspects receive the least attention—i.e. incorporating an agriculture that is good for people and communities.
4. Dave Archer, ARS economist, is one of only 6 economists in the ARS system. He recently participated in a Working Lands Initiative team meeting in Western MN to provide an economic perspective to landscape change. For more info on ARS program 207:
http://www.ars.usda.gov/research/programs/programs.htm?np_code=207&docid=13776

Carmen Fernholz:

25 new acres will soon be in organic transition acreage at Lamberton. The plan is to grow the process into a grant proposal for organic transition, with one of the goals to be one year ahead of a group of organic producers in transitioning.

A legislative initiative for organic agriculture is under discussion, to perhaps direct new funding into the U of M budget that is earmarked for organics. Carmen expects that the initiative will be formulated and gain momentum after the election, and provide more long-range funding for research at sites across the state.

RMA grant and alternative cropping systems grants are moving forward.

Carmen is working with Glen Borgerding to develop and conduct on-farm research around low phosphorus levels in soil, for organic systems that do not include livestock.

Bill Wilcke:

Jill Auburn of the SARE National Program presented at the ARS Program 207 in Atlanta, and was recently in MN for a SARE Administrative council meeting to discuss long-range policies. NCR-SARE held a reception to celebrate and inaugurate its new headquarters at the University of Minnesota.

In the middle of call for proposals for 2006 Farmer Rancher Grants due December 1, 2006. Beth Nelson is holding a workshop to assist producers and resource people in grant-writing on November 15th, 2006 in Hutchinson, MN

36 pre-proposals have been invited to submit full proposals for the SARE Research and Education Grants. Decisions for funding will be reached next spring.

Helene Murray:

The MN Farmer's Union Annual meeting will be held on November 18 – 19, 2006, featuring Al Franken as the keynote speaker.

Dr. Jose Garcia at the University of Missouri has produced a Spanish translation of our popular publication, "Building a Sustainable Business: A Guide to Business Planning for Farms and Rural Businesses."

"Una Guía para Desarrollar un Plan de Negocios para Granjas y Ranchos."

<http://agebb.missouri.edu/sustain/espanol/negocios.pdf>

Dr. Garcia has also put together a publication in Spanish and English of a series of power point presentations entitled:

Introduction to Risk Management in Agriculture: A compilation of materials used in a risk management education project targeting Latino and immigrant farmers

<http://agebb.missouri.edu/sustain/lac/RiskMgmt.pdf>

Possible Upcoming discussions for future organic network calls:

- **Sharing information about possible legislative initiatives**
- **Growing interest among and numbers of female landowners in land use and management issues**
- **Organic Feedstocks—supply, demand, trading and information depots**

Next meeting is December 7th, 8:30 am (the first Thursday of the month)

Host: Meg Moynihan

Scribe: Glen Schaeffer

-Notes Submitted by Mary Jo Forbord, Scribe