

Minutes of the December 6th Organic Network Conference Call.

Host: Gigi DiGiacomo Scribe: Paul Porter

Those present: Pauline Nickel, Milt Haar, Carmen Fernholz, Bill Wilcke, Meg Moynihan, Helene Murray, Mary Jo Forbord, Bud Markhart, Paul Porter, Gigi DiGiacomo

Round Robin Discussion:

Pauline Nickel: There was a 'Diner Conversation' at the SW-ROC with Kate Clancey (MISA chair) leading a discussion on Local Foods. There was great local food served, but attendance was down due to poor weather conditions. New faces in attendance were good.

Milt Haar: There was a discussion on December 5th on the St. Paul campus on future organic funding opportunities. Grant ideas centering on nutritional quality of not only commodity crops but also perhaps vegetables grown on the VICMS land at the SW-ROC (which has an 18-year history of organically and conventionally managed land may not get submitted this funding cycle. Milt, Carmen and others are working on a proposal with ISU on no-till and cover crops.

Carmen Fernholz: 1.) Craig Sheaffer is in the process of setting up meetings for 'learning groups' associated with a grant he is working on – stay tuned.
2. Carmen was in Canada for 10 days recently talking with producers about organics. Meg wondered how Canada's new organic standards will jive with those of the NOP, and whether there will be import/export issues.
3. Several other states have Organic Producer Associations. Carmen voiced that perhaps Minnesota would benefit from such an association.

Bill Wilcke: 1.) Recently Beth Nelson (as State Coordinator for the NCR-SARE PDP program) convened a State Advisory meeting last week to discuss organic and other sustainable ag issues. The group meeting principally involved Extension personnel.
2.) Bill mentioned the Minnesota Organic Conference and Trade Show program is out, and expressed kudos to MDA and Meg.

Meg Moynihan: 1.) Meg said kudos for should go to Mary Hanks and others.
2.) Meg was at the Iowa Organic Conference held a couple weeks ago, and presented on the farmer Risk Management efforts.
3.) On December 5th Meg presented at a meeting of Commercial Pesticide Applicators. This was the first in a series of five meetings dealing with drift and other issues organic producers and conventional producers should consider.
4.) The Organic Conference and Trade Show is January 18-19, 2008. There is a need for session hosts. Contact Meg if interested.
5.) MDA is 'swamped' with cost-share applications. (Not a bad thing.)
6.) MDA is working on the next 'Minnesota Organic Directory.'
7.) Meg mentioned a lawsuit involving labeling milk organic aimed at Target. There was a short article in the business section of the 12/6/07 Pioneer Press.

Mary Jo Forbord: 1.) The SFA annual conference is Saturday, February 2nd at Gustavus Adolphus in St. Peters. It will focus on 'Local Foods – the Next Steps.' Directors for the 5 Sustainers groups will give presentations.
2.) SFA has completed the umbrella brochure for the "Organic Dairy 101" training which will take place in four regions: Jan. 17th in St. Cloud; February 5th in Marshall; March 25th in Rochester, March 27th in MacIntosh. The target audience is ag professionals. Funding is through the NCR-SARE PDP.
3.) The Mid-West Dairy Expo was in St. Cloud on 12/5/07. Mary Jo expressed it was an 'interesting meeting'

with respect to the R-BGH / BST issue, and how industry (Monsanto) is positioning itself.

Paul Porter: 1.) Was in Maine earlier in the week to discuss canola/sunflower production at a conference on small-scale biofuels and alternative crops. There is some concern in that region about the fate of some organic dairies due to high feed costs.
2.) Mentioned that he and Bud Markhart visited with personnel at the Landscape Arboretum in mid-November about the possibility establishing an organic production farm at the “Red Barn” site. A Masters of Agriculture – Horticulture student is developing a business plan / model for the Arboretum’s consideration.

Helene Murray: 1.) Extension has hired a consulting firm to evaluate animal agriculture and how Extension should position itself. Helene is on a committee advising that firm – she represents the organic / sustainable interests. In that regard there will be a meeting of interested organic / sustainable folks with a member of that firm on December 20th from 3:00 to 4:30. Contact Helene for more information or if interested in attending.
2.) That same consulting firm will also be conducting a review of ‘plant agriculture’ (as opposed to ‘animal agriculture’) later next spring. Stay tuned.

Gigi DiGiacomo: 1.) Gigi and Bud met with Twin Cities Coop Managers who expressed interest in extended vegetable sales throughout more of the year. There will be another meeting in Jan.
2.) Regarding that issue, Gigi will meet with Carl Ford (economist) to discuss high-tunnel economics.
3.) The MDA survey results are in, and Gigi will be working with Jane G. in analyzing the responses.
4.) The Grocery Store Surveys data are back and are beginning to be analyzed. 21 chains and 69 independent grocery stores participated in the survey.

Bud Markhart: 1.) Provided more detail on the organic discussions with the Landscape Arboretum and also the Twin Cities Coop Managers. Meg brought up the MDA has a loan program with only a 3% interest rate as a possibility for those producers interested in high-tunnels.
2.) Mentioned a recent tour of the campus greenhouses with high school students from Forest Lake. The students were ‘wow-cooled’ with the release of Lady Bug beetles to control aphids. It sparked interest.

NEXT CALL: FEBRUARY 7th, 2008 (We will skip January)

HOST AND SCRIBE FOR THAT CALL: BUD MARKHART AND HELENE MURRAY

See earlier postings at: <http://www.sfa-mn.org/organicnet/index.html>

That's all folks!