



"Building healthy land, people, communities and quality of life, for present and future generations."

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The NSAS Newsletter is a bimonthly publication of Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, a private, non-profit organization. Our mission is to promote agriculture & food systems that build healthy land, people, communities & quality of life, for present & future generations. The purpose of this newsletter is to inform its readers about sustainable agriculture issues, resources & activities. Members receive this newsletter as a benefit.

Healthcare via Sustainable/Healthy/Local Foods!

At a recent congressional hearing on healthcare held in Lincoln, a predominant theme was necessity of lifestyle changes. One of the panelists that testified for Congressman Jeff Fortenberry and Congressman Joe Baca was Pam Edwards, registered dietician and director of UNL dining services. A major point she made was that healthy local food systems could and would reverse the trend in childhood obesity, decrease the soaring number of diabetic children in the United States, as well as create healthier individuals overall. Pam Edwards coordinates the surging "Good, Fresh, Local" program at UNL, and I have seen first hand the growth in the program. The last one we attended in April had twice as many students (and other attendees, as they are open to the public) as the previous in March! It is incredibly popular, and not just because the food is that much healthier for you; "It just tastes better" as said one attendee in April.

A recent study showed in the 1970's the average American household spent 17-20% of their income on food and 9-11% on healthcare. In 2005 these numbers had reversed and the obesity epidemic had taken hold of our country. We may pay a little more for healthy, local foods, but the reduction in health care costs and improved quality of life, in the long run far outweighs it. In Nebraska alone, 27% of the population is overweight. Another disturbing trend is in the cost of healthcare for children. In 2000, it cost \$185,000 to treat adults as a result of poor nutrition from K-12 grade school. These numbers have doubled since then.

Those of us fortunate to have the choice to buy local, healthy foods should do so. But, at a recent panel discussion of the movie "Food, INC" an important question was posed about food deserts where grocery stores and fresh produce are scarce. The example was of an area in East Omaha, but the same is happening throughout towns across rural Nebraska. My suggestions are to support your local groceries and ask more of them. Ask for local products. Start a farmer's market. As they stated in the movie, you can vote "3 times a day with your food dollars." As demand increases, so too will the products sourced from sustainable food channels.

A major reason for this health care crisis, I believe, is the lack of access (and sometimes willingness) to buy healthy, sustainable, and local foods. I believe proper healthcare comes from making a choice. A choice to eat healthy, sustainable, local foods will result in a healthier lifestyle, not just for you and your family, but also your community. It is absolutely vital in today's world to frequent your markets, support your local businesses, ask for local products, to grow some of your own food when you can, and to know where and how your food was raised. Talk with your neighbors, your farmers, and work as a community to make healthy lifestyle decisions for everyone!

By William Powers, Executive Director

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The Great White Rat

By Stephen Van Tassel, UNL Extension Educator

The phone rings and just as I finish my greeting, the caller implores me to remove a white rat that is sitting on her fence. "It won't move!", she says. "It just sits there with his rat-like tail and his mouth open." Smiling, I informed the caller that the animal is really a frightened opossum who will leave the area when all the commotion dies down.

While this story may seem humorous to those familiar with opossums, let me assure you that this type of call is not very rare. The opossum's quiet nature and nocturnal lifestyle ensure it doesn't get the attention of the more familiar raccoon.

Opossums are cat-sized, four-legged marsupials with gray hair and a white rat-like tail. They mate twice a year with the females raising an average of seven young per litter. Young are carried in a pouch until they mature enough to ride on mom's back. Opossums can be found in eastern Nebraska and along water ways.



Opossums respond to danger in three different ways. First, they will run away if given the opportunity. However if they feel too exposed, they may just decide to sit, open their mouth and menacingly bear their fifty teeth. Hissing often accompanies this behavior which sometimes includes a smelly green discharge that exhibits a skunk-like smell. Thankfully, opossums, unlike skunks, don't spray. Finally, they may choose to lay down and play dead.

Whenever these chance encounters occur, simply have everyone back away, including children and pets, to give the opossum room and time to run away. Standing there will only make the opossum continue his behavior and raise the risk of someone getting hurt. Opossums are not known to be aggressive but like any wild animal, they will bite if provoked.

Sometimes opossums cause problems by their eating habits. Opossums will eat almost anything. But they will happily dine on pet food, bird seed, grapes, garbage and some vegetables. It is always advisable to feed and water your pets inside a secure room. Sweeping up bird seed or utilizing seed recapturing feeders will also help to reduce the likelihood of negative interactions with wildlife. Gardens can be protected with fencing coupled with electric wires to stop climbing.

Continued on page 5

Press Releases

OBAMA ADMINISTRATION BEGINS NAMING STATE DIRECTORS FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

WASHINGTON, June 29, 2009 - The Obama Administration today began naming individuals who will serve as State Director for Rural Development at the USDA.

"These individuals will be important advocates on behalf of rural communities in states throughout the country and help administer the valuable programs and services provided by the USDA that can enhance their economic success," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

Maxine Moul: Moul is the Coordinator of EndowNebraska, a nonprofit that works to build permanent endowments of Nebraska nonprofits by utilizing charitable tax credits. Previously, she served as President of the Nebraska Community Foundation, a statewide 501(c)(3) that helped distribute more than \$76 million for community and economic development in Nebraska. Prior to her work there, Moul was Lt. Governor of Nebraska under then Governor Ben Nelson and later served as the Director of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. From 1969-1990, she worked in journalism starting as a reporter and later became a publisher, owner and CEO of a newspaper publishing company that she founded with her husband. Moul is active on a variety of civic organizations that focus on rural issues and is currently one of two Nebraska advisors to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. She is a journalism graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Mentors/Volunteers/Internships

Interested in being a mentor for a transitioning, beginning or young farmer? Need volunteers to assist with farm activities? Perhaps an intern? NSAS has received several inquiries from aspiring farmers and individuals interested in sustainable and organic farming. If you would be interested in being a mentor, or using volunteers or hosting an intern, please contact NSAS today!

Greg Waples, 402-210-5121

Looking for full-time mentoring/internship
24 years old, born and raised in Omaha
Degree in IT from UNO, has studied various subjects (Stockman Grass Farmer, Acres USA)
Interested in MIG and free range chickens primarily

Roger and Sharon Kappelman, 402-886-2768

P O Box 7, Phillips, NE 68865 Email: rskap@charter.net
Interested in obtaining organic farming employment. Flexible in considering any diversified area. Willing to relocate. Lifelong background in ranch and farm work, dairying, and animal husbandry. Experienced with many types of farm equipment. 18 years of pivot irrigation experience. Large machinery operation experience. CDL license for 32 years. Extensive electrical knowledge. Can provide references.

AGRICULTURE SECRETARY VILSACK ANNOUNCES AVAILABILITY OF \$760 MILLION IN DIRECT LOANS TO FARMERS AND PRODUCERS

Provides Resources for Approved but Previously Unfunded Loans Through Supplemental Appropriations Act

WEST SALEM, Wis., July 16, 2009 - Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that \$760 million from the Supplemental Appropriations Act signed by President Obama is available for approved but previously unfunded USDA direct farm ownership and operating loans throughout the country. Vilsack made this national announcement today at the Obama Administration's 'Rural Tour' Community Forum in Wisconsin.

"President Obama provided a welcome boost to rural economies around the country when he signed the Supplemental Appropriations Act, because it has critical funds that will enable local producers to access necessary capital," said Vilsack. "USDA will deliver these loans to producers as quickly as possible to meet the capital needs of farmers and ranchers."

USDA has already provided \$400 million to state offices for direct operating loans. These funds will clear a \$150 million backlog of loans, which had already been approved for 2,200 family farmers. It will also provide additional funds for new loan applications.

USDA has made the remaining \$360 million available for direct farm ownership loans to be distributed directly by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA). There are currently 1,800 family farmers with approved but unfunded loans for \$322 million. FSA makes direct farm loans with government funds. The agency services these loans and provides direct loan customers with individual financial planning and expertise so they have a better chance for success.

Producers can use Direct Farm Ownership loans to buy farmland, construct or repair buildings and other fixtures, and promote soil and water conservation. Operating Loans may be used to purchase items such as livestock, farm equipment, feed, seed, fuel, farm chemicals, insurance, and other operating expenses. Operating Loans can also be used to pay for minor improvements to buildings, costs associated with land and water development, family subsistence, and to refinance debts under certain conditions. The maximum amount for either type of loan is \$300,000.

Producers interested in applying for direct loans or other FSA products should visit their local FSA county offices. For more information, visit www.fsa.usda.gov.

“Local Food from Local Farms.” Revisited. By Congressman Jeff Fortenberry

Have you ever heard of “slow food?” How about a “convivium?” Do you consider yourself an “eater?”

Not commonplace in most everyday conversations, these intriguing terms were introduced to me and about 140 others who gathered back in 2007 at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s East Campus to explore the benefits and opportunities of local foods systems in Nebraska. My office, in conjunction with the University, sponsored the educational conference entitled “Local Food from Local Farms.”

The gathering reflected the rapid emergence of local foods markets across the country, and demonstrated Americans’ growing interest in where their food is coming from and who is producing it. As a member of the House Agriculture Committee, I find this trend encouraging. Local foods systems build new markets for producers, provide nutritious food options for families and individuals, and grow local economies. In doing so, they create interconnectedness between farmers and families, urban and rural communities, and people and agriculture. Farmers markets, such as those found in communities across Nebraska, are a great example.

During the course of 15 conference presentations, farmers, economic development leaders, and others heard about a variety of efforts to reconnect food producers and consumers. The director of rural economic development in Woodbury County, Iowa, outlined his county’s efforts to build a vibrant regional economy based on local food production, with a goal of making local purchases at least ten percent of food sales in Woodbury County. Part of this work includes the area’s trade marking of local foods under the “Sioux City Sue” label. As a result, restaurants and retail stores are readily, and successfully, featuring local products.

A presentation was given on “Slow Food,” an organization of individuals who form local chapters called “convivia” to promote food that is high in quality and taste and consistent with cultural and regional traditions. Another presenter, an extension professor at the University of Missouri, said Americans should not simply consider themselves “consumers” of food products, but rather “eaters” who are connected to agriculture, farmers, and the land in a meaningful way.

In addition, the conference featured University leaders who spoke about ongoing efforts to develop local foods, from the “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” marketing program in southeast Nebraska to the assistance for food entrepreneurs offered by the University’s Food Processing Center and Nebraska Rural Initiative. Area producers also shared stories of the challenges and rewards of making local foods work as a business model.

Our lunch, provided by the University’s “Good, Fresh, Local” dining program, featured locally grown foods from local producers. From the goat cheese on our fresh salads to the natural chicken breast entree, the experience was a delicious, nutritious example of how Nebraska benefits from local foods. Not surprisingly, “Good, Fresh, Local” has become a wildly popular program among students on campus.

As part of my work in Washington, I was involved in the crafting of the 2007 House Farm Bill. It is a huge piece of legislation with many moving parts. The bill makes progress in promoting agricultural entrepreneurship, and it strengthens local foods programs. It contains a provision I introduced to help school districts offer children locally grown food.

Empowering school districts to purchase food from local producers is another way to help develop local foods systems, and it is good public policy. School children benefit when school lunches provide them with opportunities to develop healthy eating habits. School districts benefit when presented with additional options for school menus. Producers benefit when increased demand for locally grown produce creates new market opportunities.

Through its Value-Added Producer Grant program, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers assistance to entrepreneurial agriculture producers. I sponsored language in the House-approved Farm Bill that helps target support from this program to smaller and medium-size farmers who are taking on the risks of food entrepreneurship and other innovative agricultural projects.

Federal policy can help the development of local foods economies, creating a meaningful connection between farmers and families and strengthening sustainable agriculture.

If you are interested in some of the information presented at the local foods conference, please visit my website at <http://fortenberry.house.gov/>.

Sincerely,

Congressman Jeff Fortenberry

Great White Rat continued from page 2

Opossums can be excluded from structures by keeping them in good repair and trench screening porches and crawl spaces. Window wells and trash cans should also be properly covered to prevent opossums from becoming entrapped. Never secure an opening unless one is absolutely certain it is not being used as a den. Trapping an animal behind your repair can result in more damage as the animal struggles to escape.

Horse owners need to control opossums quickly as they are the definitive carrier of the protozoan that causes a degenerative neurological disease in horses called, Equine Protozoal Myeloencephalitis. Infected opossums will shed the cysts in their feces, which can contaminate water, hay and other food stuffs. Horses become infected upon eating contaminated food.

Now that you know more about the opossum, you will be able to see this unique mammal not as a great white rat but as an interesting member of Nebraskan wildlife.

Resources for further information:

Consult your local University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Educator or the resources listed below:

- Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management
- The Wildlife Damage Handbook: Opossums
- Nebraska Game & Parks Commission: Opossum

Equine Protozoal Encephalitis

- Purdue University's Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory
- Michigan State University's College of Veterinary Medicine-EPM Newsletter

Congressman Fortenberry to Speak at Healthy Farms Conference

The Congressman is currently scheduled to be our keynote at the annual Healthy Farms Conference, which will be held **February 5-6, 2010, at the Holiday Inn in the Haymarket, Lincoln, NE.** With sessions by Marion Ellis-Beekeeping, Jill Gifford-Food Processing, Chef Judy A La Carte, and many more. A lunch presentation by John Ikerd. There will also be a youth program featuring farmer Bill Hawkins! More details to follow. Email: healthyfarms@gmail.com for donation items, sponsorship request, media request or other information and rates!

Buy Fresh Buy Local Nebraska An update!

"Encourages the purchase and enjoyment of locally produced food."

Buy Fresh Buy Local Nebraska has several exciting events and opportunities coming up. The screening of Food Inc. film will be in August. The opening night will be August 21 with a reception featuring local food at 5:30 and the film at 7:00. On Sunday August 23 there will be a panel discussion following the 1:00 pm screening. You are cordially invited to come and discuss your thoughts about the movie.



In August BFBLN will again be at the Nebraska State Fair! BFBLN will have a booth again this year. There is space available for BFBLN members to have brochures, flyers, postcards promoting your business and farms. You can be at the booth so you can introduce yourself to fair goers and tell them your story. Please email Billene at, bnemec2@unl.edu for further information and let her know when you would like to be at the booth. If you want your information displayed please mail it to Billene by August 24 - last year we handed out over 800 directories and stacks of member information!

Mark your calendars!!! **September is Buy Fresh Buy Local Month!** Every Tuesday in September, BFBLN sponsors a movie at the Mary Reipma Ross Theatre on the campus of the UNL. Visit buylocalnebraska.org for complete details. Are you planning a farm tour, holding a special event in your community that features local food and local food producers that you would like BFBLN to help promote? Contact us today. Billene Nemec, Coordinator, Buy Fresh Buy Local Nebraska, bnemec2@unl.edu or 402-472-5273

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OCIA News

Organic Crop Improvement Association, Nebraska Chapter #1 Newsletter

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UNL Offers Working Organic Farm Tours August 20

LINCOLN, Neb. - University of Nebraska-Lincoln Working Organic Farm Tours August 20 near Mead and Abie will offer the latest updates and research information about the project.

The tour begins at 10:30 a.m. at the Forestry Research Area at UNL's Agricultural Research and Development Center near Mead.

Richard Little, UNL organic wheat breeding specialist, will offer updates and will review the 2009 winter wheat varieties. UNL graduate student, Santiago Ulloa, will demonstrate the flamer and discuss his research results using a flamer to control weeds and John Quinn, UNL graduate student, will discuss the Healthy Farm Index and the data he's collected on various organic farms across the state. Liz Sarno, UNL Organic Project Coordinator, will talk about upcoming organic research projects.

The afternoon session will start at Larry Stanislav's farm near Abie for lunch and organic farm tours. Stanislav, a certified organic farmer, will share his 30 years of experimenting with various crop rotations, including: hybrid and open pollinated corn, soybeans, spring wheat and cover crops/green manures. Participants also will review various field equipment for mechanical weed control in organic crops; discuss cultural practices, benefits of strip cropping and record-keeping for organic production and inspection.

The next stop will be Randy Fendrich's farm, also near Abie. Fendrich has been farming organically for 13 years. He will talk about his crop rotation of corn, soybeans, alfalfa and the economics and benefits of his fertility program. He also will discuss his partnership with UNL's on-farm soil erosion research project and using an experimental flamer to control weeds.

To make a reservation for lunch, call Pat at 402-584-3837. Lunch is sponsored by the Nebraska Great Plains Resource Conservation and Development.

To get to the Forestry Research Area, start out on Highway 77 north of Lincoln toward Wahoo. Turn east on Highway 66 and travel seven miles to the top of the hill, just past the August N. Christenson Research and Education Building at the ARDC. The entrance to the Forestry Research Area is on the left next to a row of trees. Take the farm road north one-half mile to the buildings on the left. If coming from the north via Mea, take Road 10 south to Highway 66, turn west and go one-half mile to the gravel farm road on the right. Enter and go one-half mile north to buildings in the center of the section.

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Source: Liz Sarno, extension education, organic project coordinator, 402-309-0944, esarno2@unl.edu

Writer: Sandi Alswager Karstens, IANR News Service, 402-472-3030,

Organic Equivalency Agreement Signed Between the US and Canada

On June 18th, at the All Things Organic trade show and conference in Chicago, the first organic equivalency agreement was signed between the US and Canada. This means that US producers who want to market into Canada do not have to dual certify (NOP/COR), and Canadian producers who want to market into the US can do so without applying for NOP certification. There are a few conditions, however.

For Canadian product going into the US--in addition to meeting the COR requirements, they must verify that livestock antibiotics were not used.

For US product going into Canada--in addition to meeting the NOP there are additional conditions:

1. Chilean nitrate -

As of July 1st, Chilean nitrate may not be used in the production of any products going into Canada. A farmer may choose to designate some of his fields "for export to Canada" and prove that Chilean nitrate was not used there, while still using it on fields growing product for the US market. Of course they would also have to keep very good records proving harvest from the separate fields stayed separate--no chance of co-mingling. It was made very clear that the USDA will be taking a hard line on this.

2. Livestock Stocking Rates -

The Canadian standard is very specific in this area. If you plan to market meat, poultry or dairy products into Canada you will need to familiarize yourself with the COR requirements and be able to prove that you are in compliance with them.

3. Hydroponics -

No products of soil-less systems are allowed.

4. Labeling -

The rules in the COR are quite different than NOP's, and must be met for all products going to Canada. Only organic products with organic content of greater than 95% may use the logo. They may use the term "organic", or any of a number of terms listed in the regulation, but **MAY NOT** say 100% organic.

Multi-ingredient products with 70%-95% organic content may have the declaration: "Contains % organic ingredients." The percentage declared must be rounded to the nearest whole number. They may not use the logo.

Multi-ingredient products with less than 70% organic content: organic claims may be identified in the product's ingredient list, they also are not allowed to use the logo.

If the product does not originate in Canada, the words "imported" or "product of xx" must appear in close proximity to the logo. Under the agreement, Canadian product certified to COR may carry the USDA seal in addition to (or even instead of) the Canadian seal. US product certified to NOP may also use the COR logo, assuming it also meets the above conditions. Of course, labels also have to meet other Canadian regulations (eg bilingual, metric), but that is not new.

This is an excerpt from an article written by Debbie Miller, OCIA Canada

Organic Crop Improvement Association Nebraska Chapter #1

OCIA is accredited by the USDA NOP, ISO-65,
IFOAM, CAQ, JAS and the Costa Rican
Ministry of Agriculture for the MAG program.

The Organic Crop Improvement Association was established in 1985. It is a non-profit international association of organic farmers, processors, traders, and manufacturers who have joined forces to promote partnerships, provide information to help growers improve crops and soil, build environmental stewardship, and provide certification services.

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BEE-ing a Beekeeper

By Colleen Melvin

My newest venture is beekeeping. You may be wondering why I even wanted to start beekeeping, and I can't even answer that question because I don't know myself. One day my mom just said "Hey, do you think raising bees would be fun?" My answer, "Yea, it could be my SAE for FFA" was all I had to say before I was in way over my head. Luckily, my sister, Crystal, had invited the family to the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society's "Healthy Farms" conference and there was going to be a session on bee keeping.

The weather was so bad that the speaker who was going to be the teacher couldn't make it. I would have been up a creek if there hadn't been a few experienced beekeepers there to lead in his place. There was also a children's program that I was able to go to as well. Then later that night there was an auction, and on that auction there were three beekeeping items: a Hive Kit, a Package of Bees, and a bee suit. I ended up with two of these, the hive and the bee package. Oh Wow, was I scared. I knew very little and was now going to receive 3 lbs. of live bees and try to transfer them to the hive. Just what I always wanted!!! But I met a very nice person that night that helped to make things more clear to me and reassured me about being a beekeeper. The next day it was time to go home and soon after I got things lined up and setup for the bees.

Once things were ordered I nearly forgot about the bees with all of my school and club work to be finished in early spring. Then the hive came, in lots of little parts that had to be glued, nailed, and painted. Once that was finished I learned how to install the bees once they got here and a few other things that were mailed to me with the hive. Then on April 18 my mom and I drove to Auburn to pick up the bees. Once home I used the release method I learned and it all went just fine. Three days later I set the queen free.

I checked the bees every Sunday for three weeks and then on the 4th week I watched a young bee emerge from its cell. Soon my bees were growing in size, but not as fast as I had hoped. I think that they were late bloomers. I still hope to get some honey this year, but mostly hope that they will make it through the winter to next year. I hope to expand with two new hives to generate plenty of honey to harvest. In the next year I will also have to create a name and a label for the products I will make and sell. The products I hope to market are honey, lip balm, and lotion. I'm also proud to announce that so far I haven't been stung!! Bees are lots of fun and if you are interested I hope that you to will start a hive or two and see why bees are so cool!



Colleen Melvin is going to be a freshman at Medicine Valley High School in Curtis, Ne. She is a member of the Medicine Valley FFA Chapter. Ms. Melvin is currently the Historian of the Medicine Valley FCCLA (Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America) Chapter, and is also the Vice President of the Happy Helpers 4-H Club located in Curtis. She was on Honor Roll in both the 1st and 2nd semesters. Along with all of the clubs she is a part of, Colleen also plays the violin, participates in band, plans to run in Cross Country, Track, and be a statistician for the wrestling team. Currently her college aspirations are to attend the University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

"In the Vault" continued from page 10

Much of Tom's inspiration comes from Chinese and Japanese farming systems. He cites *Farmers of Forty Centuries* by HF King and *One-Straw Revolution* by Mansanobu Fukuoka as favorite titles. He is impressed by how these cultures use and re-use their own resources as much as possible.

"Basically, do only what's necessary," advises Tom. "Always look at what you're doing and ask yourself, 'Why am I disking? Why am I planting and harvesting in this manner?' Constantly ask the question, 'Is this absolutely necessary, and is there an easier, cheaper way of doing it?'"

Tom prefers to farm from the neck up, substituting management strategies for labor whenever possible. "I think that we've given away our ability to know our weeds and our soils. It's gotten to the point where people don't farm fields anymore. They farm farms." "There's other things that I could do that would be more financially rewarding," he adds. "I guess I enjoy the challenge, or I wouldn't do it."

USDA Master Gardeners Available to Help Americans Grow Safe, Healthy Food Throughout the Country USDA Offers Free On-the-Ground Resources for First-Time Growers

WASHINGTON, July 9, 2009 - Looking for some free gardening advice? Has your well-intentioned 'green thumb' resulted in your garden looking a little brown? USDA has a cadre of volunteers who provide free gardening tips and have a wealth of science-based research to answer your questions. Trained by USDA's Cooperative Extension Service, Master Gardeners provide information in all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia. To find a local Master Gardeners, visit www.extension.org/pages/Extension_Master_Gardener.

"Master Gardeners are a valuable resource for people who want to get some tips on gardening and growing their own food from a real expert," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "Growing fruits and vegetables in your own garden not only promotes a healthier lifestyle, but helps communities develop a safe, nutritious and sustainable source of food."

Master Gardeners can help Americans of all abilities to plant, grow and harvest a garden, similar to USDA's 'People's Garden.' Earlier this year, Vilsack launched the 'People's Garden' on USDA property in order to help illustrate the many ways USDA works to provide a sustainable, safe and nutritious food supply as well as protect and preserve the landscape where that food is produced.

The Master Gardener program, which began in 1972 in Washington, is another important example of how people can contribute to promoting healthier food and communities. Since its inception, the program has grown to 94,865 volunteers across the country who give horticulture information to the public through a variety of locally-based programs. Volunteers receive 40 to 80 hours of instruction and, in return, give an equal number of volunteer hours during the next year. As the federal partner in the Cooperative Extension Service, USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) provides funding and national leadership to the program.

"Extension Master Gardener volunteers are more than just members of local garden clubs," said Bill Hoffman, national program leader and Master Gardener contact at CSREES. "They bring to bear the science base of the land-grant university system in service to their communities, through the training and certification they receive as well as the research-based answers they provide."

During 2008, this network of Master Gardeners provided more than 5 million hours of volunteer work in their communities - valued at \$101.4 million. Nearly 80 percent of these 5 million hours take place in metropolitan areas. Additionally, in 2008, more than 16,000 new Master Gardeners joined the program for the first time, infusing the program with new life.

Although each community has its own unique projects, all Master Gardeners present workshops, answer gardening hotlines, work with youth, plant demonstration gardens and teach gardening throughout the country:

In Washington, DC: As director of the Washington Youth Garden at USDA's National Arboretum in Washington, D.C., Kaifa Anderson-Hall, who is a Master Gardener herself, spent hours as a child learning about the relationship between food, health and nutrition at the Washington Youth Garden. Never in her wildest imagination did she see herself on staff with the arboretum years later, passing along the same knowledge and skills to today's youth. Today, Anderson-Hall relies on volunteers, many of them Master Gardeners, to help. Anderson-Hall said there are 15 Master Gardener volunteers who each provide two to three hours of service per week.

"The garden wouldn't be where it is today with out our Master Gardeners," Anderson-Hall said. "There is no way our staff of three could accomplish all we do and be productive. It's incredible - the number of hours the volunteers provide."

Anderson-Hall said the volunteers are extremely committed to the garden - the oldest volunteer, who is 72, has continued to volunteer even as she recovers from back surgery. Master Gardener volunteers maintain the garden, including weeding, planting and redesigns. They also provide hands-on interaction with the students. In Washington, D.C., the Master Gardener program is run through the University of the District of Columbia Cooperative Extension Service.

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"In The Vault"

Creating Sustainable Farming Systems: Rotations Build Soil, Control Pests, and Keep Farming Interesting

Cris Carusi and Martin Kleinschmit

Tom Larson grins as he shows off the Dragonfly, a sleek two passenger plane which he built over the course of several winters. Aviation is his hobby. His knack for craftsmanship shows as he explains how he built his plane from foam, fiberglass, and a Subaru engine. The Dragonfly embodies Tom's conviction that there is more to life than farming.

Tom approaches farming with a similar attitude of craftsmanship. He rotates soybeans, corn, oats with turnips and cattle through his ridge-till strip-cropping system. He adapted most of his own ridge-till equipment from used machinery. His irrigated 160 acre St. Edward farm, which includes 60 acres of row crops and 90 acres of pasture and hay ground, has been in his family for 61 years.

His grandfather and father raised monoculture corn on the farm until the early 1970s. At that time, a neighbor was experimenting with a corn-soybean rotation, and achieving good results. Tom liked what the beans did for the soil, and he saw income potential in the soybean crop. He and his dad decided to give rotations a try. The corn-bean rotation provided the Larsons with good returns and soil benefits. They eventually added oats to the system, to gain diversity.

Tom now rotates his crops in 152-inch wide strips (4x38"). Soybeans, the first crop in this rotation, provide a number of benefits to the system, including pest control, nitrogen for the following year's corn crop, and cash. Rotations prevent insect pest populations from exploding. "Insects are creatures of opportunity," Tom explains. "They will build up in large populations where the environment is right for them. If you keep changing environments on them through rotations, it has been my experience that they do not become a large problem. Anyone who puts in corn after soybeans really should question whether or not they need a soil insecticide."

Corn is the second crop in the rotation. Tom chose to keep corn in the system because of convenience and tradition: "I wanted to raise corn, because that's part of your identity in this area. We're corn growers, and there's a convenient market for it." Tom has seen increased corn yields from his system. With strips four rows wide, the entire corn strip benefits from the "edge effect". Under a conventional cropping pattern, yields in the middle of the field can be lower than around the edges, because of excessive heat buildup and health problems. Tom believes that his four row strips are an optimal size.

The third crop rotated into the system, oats, is planted directly into the corn stubble the following spring. The oats are harvested for grain or straw, depending on the market.

Following oat harvest, Tom re-builds his ridges and broadcasts turnips, to provide fall forage for his cattle.

Crop rotations help control weeds, as tillage operations happen at different times for the various crops. Including oats in the system is particularly valuable, because the mid-summer harvest helps break weed cycles. Tom has had some trouble with early weeds, like shepherd's purse, but controls them with shredding. He believes that weed control is the best argument in favor of ridge-till planting and cultivation.

The oats have improved soil tilth, as their root system builds soil structure. It took about three years for him to observe improvements in his soil, like an exploding earthworm population.

Once he had successfully interrupted weed and insect cycles and improved his soil, Tom's next concern was to provide winter feed for his cattle. He has 60 head of cattle to feed through the winter. Beginning in the fall, when the pastures are dormant, he supports his cattle herd by strip grazing the corn and bean residue, and turnips. The turnips are the most profitable part of his operation, as he can potentially graze 300 head of cattle per acre per day on this crop. Tom figures that he gets 4-5 times more net income per acre from his turnips than from corn. His input costs for the turnips are minimal, and he has no harvesting expenses. The animals do the work for him.

In his lifetime, Tom has moved from a conventional corn monoculture to this diversified system. He quit applying herbicides 6 years ago, and insecticides 10 years ago. He switched from anhydrous to manure fertilizer last year. He is in the process of certifying his fields organic. In the future, he would like to provide extra nitrogen by interseeding a legume into his corn crop.

Tom's system provides him with many quality-of-life benefits as well. Although the system is more labor-intensive than conventional farming, the work is spread out rather than bunched into stressful "crunch periods". Better scheduling leaves him more free time in the day for other things, like his plane. He has noticed more wildlife on his place, which he appreciates.

His wife, Deb, works in town to support the farm, as many farm women do these days. Tom's efforts pay taxes and insurance, and his wife's income keeps food on the table. Good quality of life is more important to the Larsons than making a lot of money. Says Tom, "I'm willing to accept a lower standard of living for an improved quality of life."

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Master Gardener volunteers help support a wide range of programs in the District of Columbia. Family programs teach organic gardening and cooking, including presentations from nutritionists and chefs, so that families can benefit from the food they grow. A *Sprout* program works to connect youth to their environment. *Seed to Supper* is a summer camp where students grow their own food and take it home to their families. The Master Gardeners who volunteer with the camp donate any excess food to the DC Central Kitchen, where the chefs provide a cooking demonstration to camp participants. In 2008, the camp donated 250 pounds of produce to the local food kitchen.

In California: Master Gardeners in California are using their knowledge and training to help combat wildfires. Through the University of California system, Master Gardeners provide resources for homeowners who want to *'fire-proof'* their homes by using less flammable plants, removing combustible materials and properly spacing trees.

In Maryland: The *Grow It, Eat It* program by Master Gardeners in Maryland to help people improve their health and save money by growing fresh vegetables, fruits and herbs, using sustainable agricultural practices.

Classifieds

Non-profit/tax exempt horse rescue. We are starting the rescue in response to the large number of neglected horses in the countryside. Due to a combination of a weak economy and high feed prices, many horse owners have been unable to properly care for their horses. We currently have 37 rescue horses on the place right now. There is plenty of pasture and it keeps raining so feeding them is not an issue at the moment. We are also working on a name. So far *Anoka Horse Rescue* and *Prairie Rose Horse Rescue* are on the table.

If you would like to participate or could offer any ideas, suggestions or assistance, please contact Christopher Marlowe at: marlowepasture@NNTC.net or at: 48412 907 Road, Butte, NE 68722

Poultry Processing: Looking for a poultry processing center where you can process your poultry for legal resale in grocery stores, institutions and farmers' markets within the state? Then schedule to process your poultry at the Nebraska Poultry Growers Nonstock Cooperative near West Point, NE. This is a great way to increase your direct market sales and promote your products. Contact Mark Kvam, General Manager at mkvam@skyww.net or call 402-685-5263 to schedule an appointment and get details on becoming a member of the Coop and support local food production

Certified Organic Alfalfa: Second and third cuttings available soon. Bale to suit you. Delivery can be arranged but prefer you pick up. Call: 402-792-3389.

Request: Need 10 gallons of this year's crop of organic raw unheated honey. Please contact Don Preister of Omaha at donaldpg@msn.com

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 Please make checks payable to the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society

Upcoming Events

**Has your membership for NSAS expired? Please renew today by contacting the NSAS office at:
healthyfarms@gmail.com or by calling William at 402-525-7794**

Peterson Holistic Grazing Event, O'Neill

Mob Grazing Seminar - August 21, 11 am to 5 pm. Courthouse Annex. Ranch Tour & Walk August 22, 8 am to 4 pm at Peterson Ranch, Newport. For information about either, contact UNL Extension in Knox Co at PO Box 45, Center, NE, 68724; knox-county@unl.edu; 402-288-5611. Directions and details will be sent after registration is received.

Save the Date!!!

Sustainability Happy Hour, Lincoln

August 28th beginning at 5:30 pm. Come join the sustainable discussion as Shh...visits the Nebraska State Fair in Lincoln! Stop by the BFBLN/NSAS/NFC booth and demonstration stage to sample locally raised and grown foods! Email William at healthyfarms@gmail.com for more information or visit NSAS on Facebook for complete details.

Time for Lunch, Slow Food Nebraska Eat-In!!

September 7, 2009 at 11:30 am to 1:30 pm. To promote the importance of healthy, nutritious, local foods in our school systems! Visit: showfoodnebraska.org for complete details.

Farmers' Markets in Your Area:

Omaha

Village Point Farmers Market - Sundays
Omaha Farmers Market - Saturdays
Florence Mill Market - Sundays
Bancroft Street - Saturdays
Benson St. Paul Church - Saturdays

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Nebraska City Farmers Market - Fridays
Columbus Farmers Market - Thursdays
Sidney Market - July thru August
Broken Bow - Thursdays
St. Paul - Tuesdays
Pawnee City - Wednesdays
Fairmont - Tuesdays

Throughout Nebraska

Lincoln

Haymarket Farmers Market - Saturdays
Community CROPS - Thursdays
Old Cheney - Sundays
Havelock - Wednesdays
Piedmont Shops - Saturdays

Nemaha County Farmers Market - Saturdays
Blair Farmers Market - Saturdays
Seward Market - Saturdays
Hartington - Fridays
Wayne - Thursdays
Lexington - Saturdays

Want to list the dates for your Farmers' Market, or one in your area? Or want more information about the markets?
Contact NSAS today at: healthyfarms@gmail.com

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