



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

Healthy Foods, Healthy Farms, Healthy People

John Ikerd

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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.

Americas are the most obese people in the world. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, adult obesity has increased by 60% within the past twenty years. Trends for childhood obesity are even worse, having *doubled* for children and *tripled* for adolescents during the same time. One-third of American adults are now considered severely overweight or obese. Obesity is closely linked with other health problems, particularly diabetes and heart disease, and ranks second only to tobacco smoking as a cause of adult death. Americans are the most overfed yet undernourished people in the world.

The epidemic of obesity is obviously related to the American diet. It might be easy to blame these maladies on the sedentary but high-stress American lifestyle, which probably is a significant casual factor. But an even more important cause might be the lack of essential nutrients in many of today's foods. A growing number of scientific studies are finding significant declines in the nutritional value of our foods. And dramatic drops in nutrient density have occurred during a period when American farms were under pressure to specialize, mechanize, get bigger - to produce more food cheaper.

Meanwhile the evidence continues to grow that cheap food is abundant in calories but deficient in nutrients. For example, problems of obesity and diabetes are more common among people with lower incomes who logically tend to seek foods providing the cheapest source of energy - meaning the most calories for the fewest dollars. Because of time constraints, many such people also rely heavily on highly processed and ready-to-eat foods, including "fast foods." On such diets, people can easily end up eating far more calories than they need without getting enough nutrition to meet the minimum requirements of a healthy diet.

One prominent academic study compared nutrient levels in 43 garden crops in 1999 with levels documented in benchmark nutrient studies conducted by USDA in 1950. The scientists found declines in median concentrations of six important nutrients: protein -6%, calcium -16%, phosphorus -9%, iron -15%, riboflavin -38%, and vitamin C -2%. While these essential nutrients may be lacking in most foods today, they may be found in abundance in foods grown naturally and organically on healthy, productive soils. A 1993 study comparing conventional foods with organic foods, found that organically grown apples, potatoes, pears, wheat, and sweet corn, purchased over a two-year period, averaged 63% higher in calcium, 73% higher in iron, 118% higher in magnesium, 91% higher in phosphorus, 125% higher in potassium, and 60% higher in zinc than conventional foods purchased at the same times.

Other studies establish clear links between declining nutrient density and the industrialization of American agriculture. One such study found that yield-enhancing technologies - fertilizers, pesticides, plant density, and irrigation - reduce the nutrient content of field crops by amounts generally consistent with declines in nutrient density over the past 50-years and nutrient differences between conventional and organic crops. These results should come as no surprise to anyone

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402.525.7794

healthyfarms@gmail.com

Jill Wubben, Bookkeeper/Membership

402.254.2289

jwubben@nebsusag.org

www.nebsusag.org

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who understands that industrial agriculture profits primarily from *quantity* factors: acres farmed, head produced, yields per acre, rates of gain, and the cost efficiency of large-scale production. Quality factors affecting prices typically are incidental to profits and often related to cosmetic appearance rather than nutrition. The profits are in producing *quantity*, not *quality*.

The food processing and distribution industry also must share the blame. The corporations that market our foods are concerned about profits - not diet or health. In fact, the managers of the multinational corporations that currently control the American food system have a legal fiduciary responsibility to maximize returns to their stockholders. They have no social or ethical commitment to protecting public health and instead do only those things required by law. Current laws are clearly inadequate to protect the public from diet related illnesses, as is evident in current trends in the diets and health of Americans.

Food industry marketers know that humans have a natural taste preference, probably a genetic predisposition, for foods that are high in fat and sugar. Preferences essential for the survival and health of our primitive ancestors may threaten our health today. Regardless, it's easier to market foods that are higher in calories, particularly when those foods are cheaper to produce. The primary sources of those cheap calories are plants and animals from farms using modern yield-enhancing technologies and thus lacking in nutrient density and encouraging over consumption while enhancing food industry profits. Some logical health consequences of such diets are obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

The food security of our nation depends on keeping farmland in the trusted care of family farmers who are committed to maintaining the fertility and productivity of the land while producing safe and nutritious foods for all. Rather than subsidizing the industrialization of agriculture and promoting cheap food, public policies should be refocused on sustaining our smaller, independent family farmers, people who are personally committed to producing good food for their families, their neighbors, and providing food security for their nation. Our food may cost a bit more and we may consumer a bit less, but only then, will Americans be well nourished and well fed.

John Ikerd, Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Economics, University of Missouri, Columbia will give a capstone lecture for the conference on Saturday, February 6th. John was raised on a small dairy farm in southwest Missouri and received his BS, MS, and Ph.D. degrees in agricultural economics from the University of Missouri. He worked in private industry for a time and spent thirty years in various professorial positions at North Carolina State University, Oklahoma State University, University of Georgia, and the University of Missouri before retiring in early 2000. Since retiring, he spends most of his time writing and speaking on issues related to sustainability with an emphasis on economics and agriculture. Ikerd is author of Sustainable Capitalism, A Return to Common Sense, Small Farms are Real Farms, and Crisis and Opportunity: Sustainability in American Agriculture.

Sources:

For studies of health benefits of natural and organic foods, see *The Organic Center*, <http://www.organic-center.org/>

W. M. Jarrell and R. B. Beverly, "The Dilution Effect in Plant Nutrient Studies," *Advances in Agronomy*, 34:197-224, 1981.

Plan to attend the

Rural Advantage/ Healthy Farms Conference

the annual conference of the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society

February 5-6, 2010

in Lincoln, NE at the Haymarket Holiday Inn!!!

*Congressman Jeff Fortenberry will be the keynote speaker.
The capstone session will be by John Ikerd.*

We will also have our annual All-Nebraska Foods Dinner and Live Auction, with all the funds raised going towards the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society (NSAS) and their efforts!! We encourage the entire family to attend as there are youth workshops offered at each session. Other sessions presenters include Kevin Fulton; Dr. Marion Ellis, beekeeping; Jill Gifford, Food Processing Center at UNL; Dr. Bill Weida on Economics of Sustainable Agriculture; Paul Rohrbaugh on Family Farming; Hops production; wildcrafting; organics; and many more! There are family rates available as well as scholarships and youth pricing.

**To register go to, <http://go.unl.edu/healthyfarmsconference>
For more information, contact William at
healthyfarms@gmail.com or 402.525.7794**

The Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society's mission is to promote agriculture and food systems that build healthy lands, people, communities and quality of life for present and future generations! For more information, please visit HealthyFarms.org.



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The YSEC!

Youth Scholarship Essay Contest: What does Sustainable Agriculture mean to me?

This essay contest was created to promote sustainable agriculture and NSAS among our youth. Essays ranged from 200 to 400 words. We received several entries and below are a few. Scholarships for the annual conference in February will be awarded to the top essays, and will appear in subsequent NSAS newsletters and be accessible on the website.

Participants included a short bio about themselves. Reviewers included current NSAS members, board and staff. The criteria and guidelines for the essay contest were:

- What does your ideal family farm look like?
- Personal definition of Sustainable Agriculture.
- Why it is important to you?
- Why it is important to your family's farm.

The essays should reflect the principles and values of NSAS which can be accessed via the website at www.nebsusag.org

Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society Essay Contest

by Mackenzie Thomas Haszard

What does true sustainable agriculture mean to us? My family practices sustainable forms of agriculture, using natural methods not the latest "sustaining innovation." Being caretakers of the land, we do not want to ruin it by mono-cropping GMO's, then soaking them with pernicious poisonous chemical fertilizers and insect killers. We fertilize our land with cow droppings, kelp, compost, and leaves. In essence, we strive to grow plants naturally, "giving back to the land" from last year's crops, and mixing our own potting soil using lots of rich organic matter. Being sustainable in growing is the only smart way to preserve natural resources.

Companion planting is especially economical, preventing disease and harmful insect and bacterial infestations; we plant our radishes with our cucumbers to avoid striped cucumber beetles from foraging on our produce. Faithfully, our carrots surround our tomatoes, icicle radishes dot our zucchini, onions guard our lettuce beds to avert nibbling from rabbits, and many other companions we do plant to both save space and produce. To gather the greatest amount of fruits and vegetables from our plots, we also plant intensively. While we grow beans, cucumbers, and melons vertically, we grow mostly in garden-style beds instead of in long space-wasting rows. Trying to extend our inventory of the plants and varieties we grow is somewhat like a complicated puzzle. We hope to try growing asparagus and Jerusalem artichoke in the near future. Instead of mono-cropping in rows, we grow bio-diversely, creating a bug balance, so that we will not have an over-infestation of insect pests. We try to balance bad bug invasions by intensive companion planting and encouraging the good bugs.

Sustainable agriculture means to grow and raise without the use of poisonous and toxic chemicals or feed, it means to reuse organic matter in our garden plot. As "carrots love tomatoes," we should "love" to sustain the earth for future generations to grow. Recycling our waste products from produce into rich compost, followed by growing nutrient-rich plants makes us more independent. Although my family lives in the heart of bustling Lincoln, we use the least amount of land possible to raise as much food, intensively. Long live the Sustainable Agriculture Society!

Short Autobiography:

My name is Mackenzie Thomas Haszard and I am 13 years old. I have lived in Lincoln with my brother, twin sisters, and my parents for my whole life. Enthusiastically, I look forward to the growing season each year, I love planting flowers, vegetables, and herbs. I have exhibited and won at the county and state fairs for cut flowers.

Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Essay

By Spenser Haszard

What does Sustainable Agriculture mean? This question I ponder by first opening my eyes and ears to the surroundings. Letting the weeds whisper the soil needs. Watching for bad bugs & beneficial bees or dreaded disease. Secondly, I nourish the soil so the soil can nourish the plants. I reuse garden-reaped resources whenever possible. Next, I strive to grow diversely. Companion planting wards off dangerous insects. It keeps things in balance. It makes strong plants. It makes sense.

Why is this important? I know that healthy growing practices grow healthy people. A well-rounded farm helps to achieve this goal. Rotating my garden crops help to naturally control weeds, bugs, and disease. Additionally, growing in intensive crop beds increases the yield potential. I dutifully make use of what is available to me; this gives future generations the ability to do the same without compromising their welfare. Following these guidelines, one can maintain homeostasis while keeping the earth healthy and happy.

For now, my family grows intensively in our micro plot. Even though we reside in the city, my family lives the country life. We strive to grow things properly. While we have a minute amount of space, we make the best application of it. From tomatoes, to beans, to strawberries we grow. Adding kelp & compost & cow manure to our soil, we make it more fertile. The squirrels and other animals live in paradise; they believe that this is the best food around. Their favorite pastime is playing King of the Compost. Clearly, we may live in the city but we can still sustainably produce intense harvests in our micro plot.

About Spenser Haszard

Lincoln, NE

My name is Spenser Haszard. I have lived in Nebraska my whole life. About seven years ago, my family began looking into the organic/natural path. Each year, I actively assist my family in raising our fresh produce. I have taken the Family Herbalist course in a desire to become more responsible for my own health. I am interested in meteorology and I am a trained storm spotter.



*2009 Rural Advantage/Healthy Farms Conference
George Meyers, Melinda Hemmelgarn, Donald Vetter*



*Tom Tomas
Teaching Youth and Adults about organics
2009 Rural Advantage/Healthy Farms Conference*

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www.nebraskasheepgoat.org/

Foundation Organic Seeds, LLC

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Nebraska Wildlife Federation

www.nebraskawildlife.org/

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Nebraska Environmental Action Coalition

www.neac.us/

The Green Prairie Foundation for Sustainability

www.thelaststraw.org/GPFS/index.html

Open Harvest

www.openharvest.coop/

Buy Fresh Buy Local Nebraska

www.buylocalnebraska.org

Nebraska Food Cooperative

www.nebraskafood.org

Community CROPS

www.communitycrops.org

Grain Place Foods

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Midwest Organic Services Association

www.mosaorganic.org/

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Nebraska NRCS

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Nebraska NCR-SARE*

www.sare.org/ncrsare/ne.htm

UNL Organic Working Group*

<http://organic.unl.edu/>

The Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society*

www.healthyfarms.org

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Northeast Nebraska RC&D

www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov/partnerships/rcd/northeast_rcd.html

Nebraska Farmers Union

www.nebraskafarmersunion.org/

Holistic Management International

www.holisticmanagement.org

Upcoming Events

Rural Advantage/Healthy Farms Conference: February 5-6, 2010, Lincoln

February 5-6-2010 at the Holiday Inn-Downtown in Lincoln, NE. Deadline for early bird registration rate and family rates is January 29th. The conference is headlined by Congressman Jeff Fortenberry with a capstone luncheon by John Ikerd. Several sessions are being lead by NSAS members including Kevin Fulton, Paul Rohrbaugh, Dave Welsch, and Kevin and Charuth Loth to name a few. There is a full slate of youth programming as well so bring the entire family. To register, visit: <http://go.unl.edu/healthyfarmsconference>. For exhibitorship and sponsorships email William at: healthyfarms@gmail.com

2nd Nebraska Wine, Beer and Cheese Reception

On February 5th at 4:30 p.m. prior to the annual live auction for the Rural Advantage/Healthy Farms conference come and try Nebraska's finest wines, beers and cheeses. Best of all, it's FREE! The wine has been provided by the Nebraska Winery and Grape Growers Association, and beer donations from Spilker Ales and Lucky Bucket Brewing Company and the cheese from Benjamin Gotschall! This event will be located in a hospitality suite located near the auction site. There is a free-will donation to cover the cost of the room.

Triggertown to perform

Lincoln's own "old-timey country band," as described by the Lincoln Journal Stars Kent Wolgamott. They will perform Friday night during the All-Nebraska dinner and NSAS Live Auction. Tickets for the All-Nebraska Dinner are \$35/adult and \$12/youth. The ticket includes the NSAS Live Auction and Triggertown. All of the proceeds from the NSAS Live Auction go to support the work of NSAS!

Available:

Around 15 jersey bullcalves, for sale, and if they're picked up within 3 days of birth, they will be \$50 each. They are certified organic and with a guarantee that they will get colostrum.

Will begin calving April 1 and end mid-May.

Contact Doug Dittman at branchedoakfarm@gmail.com or 402-783-2124.

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