



Sustainable Farmer

**May/June
2010**

ON THE COVER

Charuth Loth of Shadowbrook Farms near Lincoln opens a packet of herbs as she prepares to finish her latest batch of chevre (soft goat cheese) at the Farmstead First on-farm cheesemaking facility she co-owns with Branched Oak Farm near Raymond. Read more in the next newsletter where Farmstead First will be featured.

FEATURES

- 4** Nebraska Prairie Harvest Moving Forward
- 4** New Database Available for Organic Growers and Farmers with Pesticide Sensitive Crops
- 5** Feature on North Star Neighbors
- 10** Multi-Species Grazing Improves Cattle Pastures

REGULARS

- 2** Director's Note
- 3** NSAS News
- 4** Thank You!
- 8** OCIA News





Healthy Kids, Healthy Farms



Lincoln children visited Branched Oak Farm near Raymond recently to learn where food really comes from. Learn more on page 3.



Executive Director | William Powers
Membership Coordinator | Jill Wubben

NSAS Editor | Rita Brhel
OCIA Editor | Tami Highstreet

Board of Directors

President | Joe Mazour
Producer, Deweese

Vice President | Jim Peterson
Retired Extension educator, Blair

Treasurer | Jo Lowe
Rural development specialist, Lincoln

Secretary | Rita Brhel
Producer, Fairfield

Robert Bernt
Producer, Spalding

Kevin Fulton
Producer, Litchfield

Gary Lesoing
Nebraska SARE coordinator, Auburn

Brian O'Malley
Chef, Omaha

Ben Schole
Producer, Hooper

Ralph Tate
Producer, Papillion

Scott Willet
Great Plains RC&D coordinator, David City

Roger Wilson
Farm budget analyst, Lincoln

Dr. Charles Wortman
Soil scientist, Lincoln

Advisory Members

Laura Demmel
Producer, Grant

Alexandra McClanahan
Journalist, Neligh

NSAS News

Director's Note:

The Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society is hosting several exciting projects this summer:

- Using the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Youth Educator Grant we received, we held the second part of our **Healthy Kids, Healthy Farms** project (the first part was the essay contest during the 2010 Healthy Farms Conference), during which we brought a group of children from Lincoln out to Branched Oak Farm near Raymond. The kids participated in a pasture walk, butter-making, egg races, milking, and more. The third part of this project will be taking the kids to the Havelock Farmers Market to finish following the food from farm to market.
- The **Beginning Farmer Support Group**, which welcomes any and all who are or would like to be farming, meets once a month for coffee to discuss farming and to receive support from one another on the joys and challenges of sustainable farming. We've been hearing a lot of good feedback about this project. One local television news station even aired a story on the project. Our next meeting is July 17 for the "Greenhands Young Farmer Mixer." More details are on page 3.
- The **2011 Healthy Farms Conference** is February 18-19 in Columbus. Be sure to save the date! This will be our 35th anniversary, and we have big plans for the conference.
- We have received another grant to do a variety **NSAS Farm Tours**. The first tour will be held at Kevin Fulton's operation near Litchfield in August. We will pass along more details as they are made available. Kevin will do a second tour also in September, so be on the lookout for more details and times.

~ **William Powers, NSAS executive director**

P.S. Contact us anytime at healthyfarms@gmail.com or 402-525-7794 for more information or to share ideas on ways NSAS can educate and support farmers and sustainable agriculture.

Get Involved

- **Newsletter Articles** - Write an article about your perspective on sustainable agriculture, or how you practice sustainable ag on your farm. Contact rita.brhel@gmail.com or 402-841-8734.
- **Farm Tours** - Interested producers can promote their event for free, and recruit NSAS staff and Board members to help. Contact healthyfarms@gmail.com or 402-525-7794.

Stay Connected

- **Facebook:** www.facebook.com/NebraskaSustainableAgricultureSociety.
- **Twitter:** <http://twitter.com/nesustainableag>.
- **Weekly Events E-newsletter** - Subscribe by sending your contact information to healthyfarms@gmail.com or 402-525-7794.
- **Listserv** - Connect with NSAS members by joining for only \$45 a year. Learn more at www.healthyfarms.org.

Events

UNL Organic Winter Wheat Variety Field Days—June 23 & 24

The Field Day at the South Central Ag Lab near Clay Center will be Wednesday, June 23, and at the Haskell Ag Lab near Concord on Thursday, June 24. The twilight tours will start at 5 p.m.

This is an excellent opportunity for organic producers to examine the various winter wheat cultivars grown on certified organic farm ground and as part of a corn-soybean-alfalfa crop rotation. Wheat varieties developed for conventional production often do not perform well in organic production systems. This project examines breeding new wheat cultivars specifically for organic systems with an emphasis on disease and pest resistance, response to organic fertilizers, and end-use quality. For more information, contact esarno2@unl.edu or 402-309-0944, or go to the <http://organic.unl.edu/> and click on "Events."

Greenhands Farmers Mixer— July 17

Calling all farmers of the greater Nebraska Area! Or any farmers! Whether you're rural or urban, in a backyard or on a college campus, in your 10th year or your 1st, come meet like-minded folks at the Darby Springs Farm on Saturday, July 17, from 5-8 pm. (Rain Date July 24, same time, same place!)

Network, exchange ideas, and generally widen your community rhizome network! In addition to a roundtable, we're going to have presentations by a local farmers on poultry, on building an A-Frame mobile hen house, and rotational grazing, a pasture walk, and more. Feast on treats grown on nearby soils, make new friends, and catch up with old ones. Then we'll head down to the Pit for a little hootenanny! A bonfire, dance, and fun with the beautiful outdoors as our stage and our conversation, the entertainment.

We are providing some ride-share connecting services for this event, so if you're carless or are willing to fit a few more people in your biodiesel crustmobile, drop a line to farmbeginningsnebraska@gmail.com. The Darby Springs Farm is located at 414 County Road 15 in Ceresco. Please RSVP to the same e-mail address.

Nebraska Prairie Harvest moving forward

By Ted Thieman

On Tuesday evening, March 30, a real nice spring day in Wolbach, about 30 interested and interesting people gathered to network and listen to an idea overview. They were brought together by Jim Knopik of Fullerton and Kevin Fulton of Litchfield, direct marketers and organic farmers.

Knopik opened the meeting with a summary of where we're at now in his view and where we might be going, in terms of alternative agriculture, food production, and marketing. He sees a lot of changes coming in consumer attitudes about food and the way food is produced -- changes that represent opportunity for a more sustainable system and healthy rural communities.

Knopik introduced Lori Fischer, coordinator and Director for the Nebraska Environmental Action Coalition (NEAC), who did a presentation about NEAC's primary project at this time: the design and construction of a mobile meat processing unit (MMPU) called Nebraska Prairie Harvest. This project involves everything from the ground up, including a stainless steel truck trailer complete with slaughter facilities, byproduct handling, and hanging cooler space for cattle, hogs, sheep or goats. It will have USDA and DEQ approval and a HAACP plan and be designed for on-farm slaughter of animals up to the "hanging half carcass" stage. The "cut and wrap" or processing stage, which is not yet

part of this project, was discussed with the audience extensively which begins the process of gathering ideas for how that might be implemented.

Roy Guisinger, with the Nebraska Food Coop, presented the other end of the spectrum: a new cooperative, direct-marketing food distribution system. The Nebraska Food Coop is an internet-managed connection between producer and consumer. Producers make what they have available known by listing it on the internet and consumers place orders accordingly. The program automatically adds to or deducts from inventory as products are added or ordered. Producers then deliver ordered products to the Nebraska Food Coop for distribution to consumers at prearranged pickup and drop-off points. Guisinger reported that business is growing, and the coop is looking forward to expanding its service territory.

Next, Fulton spoke about the realities and possibilities for alternative systems and the concept of "stacking enterprises." He emphasized the importance of widespread ownership in rural areas. He said, in recent years, that agriculture has seen a lot of consolidation of ownership, which has resulted in rural people moving to the cities and livestock being moved to "concentration camps." Reductions in labor have decimated our rural economy in favor of huge equipment that is capital-intensive and crop production that requires overwhelming amounts of very expensive and unsustainable petroleum-based energy and

chemical inputs. And rural land and communities are suffering greatly. Fulton is a living example of a better way in terms of healthy food and healthy rural communities. He wasn't suggesting that we go back to "40 acres and a mule," rather that, through wise use of technology and working with natural processes instead of against them, our farmers, our communities, and our irreplaceable land can be used in a sustainable way for our benefit and the good of many generations to come.

Knopik closed the presentation part of the meeting, saying, "Concentration in the market place has displaced small farmers and businesses in our rural communities. Now, because of consumer demand for higher quality and locally grown food, there is a need for more producers, more local food processing businesses, delivery services, and other infrastructure. We are here to share ideas and look for ways forward."

A lot of questions and constructive comments were generated by the attendees, and a lot of networking took place after the meeting. Change has to start somewhere and, as it has always been with significant movements, real change comes from the people, from the bottom up. Knopik said that he and Fulton would appreciate any ideas or thoughts to further the cause for a truly sustainable future for agriculture, for food production, for marketing, and for strong rural communities. To contact Knopik, call 308-536-2023 or 308-550-0288. For Fulton, call 308-446-2520 or 308-390-4449.

New Database Available for Organic Growers and Farmers with Pesticide Sensitive Crops

By Liz Sarno

You may have received a letter from the Nebraska Department of Agriculture informing you about a Pesticide Sensitive Crop Locator, an online database and map service that identifies operations that have pesticide sensitive crops such as fruits, vegetables, grapes, honey, tree/flower nurseries, and organic crops. To view the Pesticide Sensitive Crop Locator Map, go to www.agr.ne.gov/division/bpi/pes/psci.htm and click on "Growers of Commercial Pesticide Crops."

The idea for this database map is to help

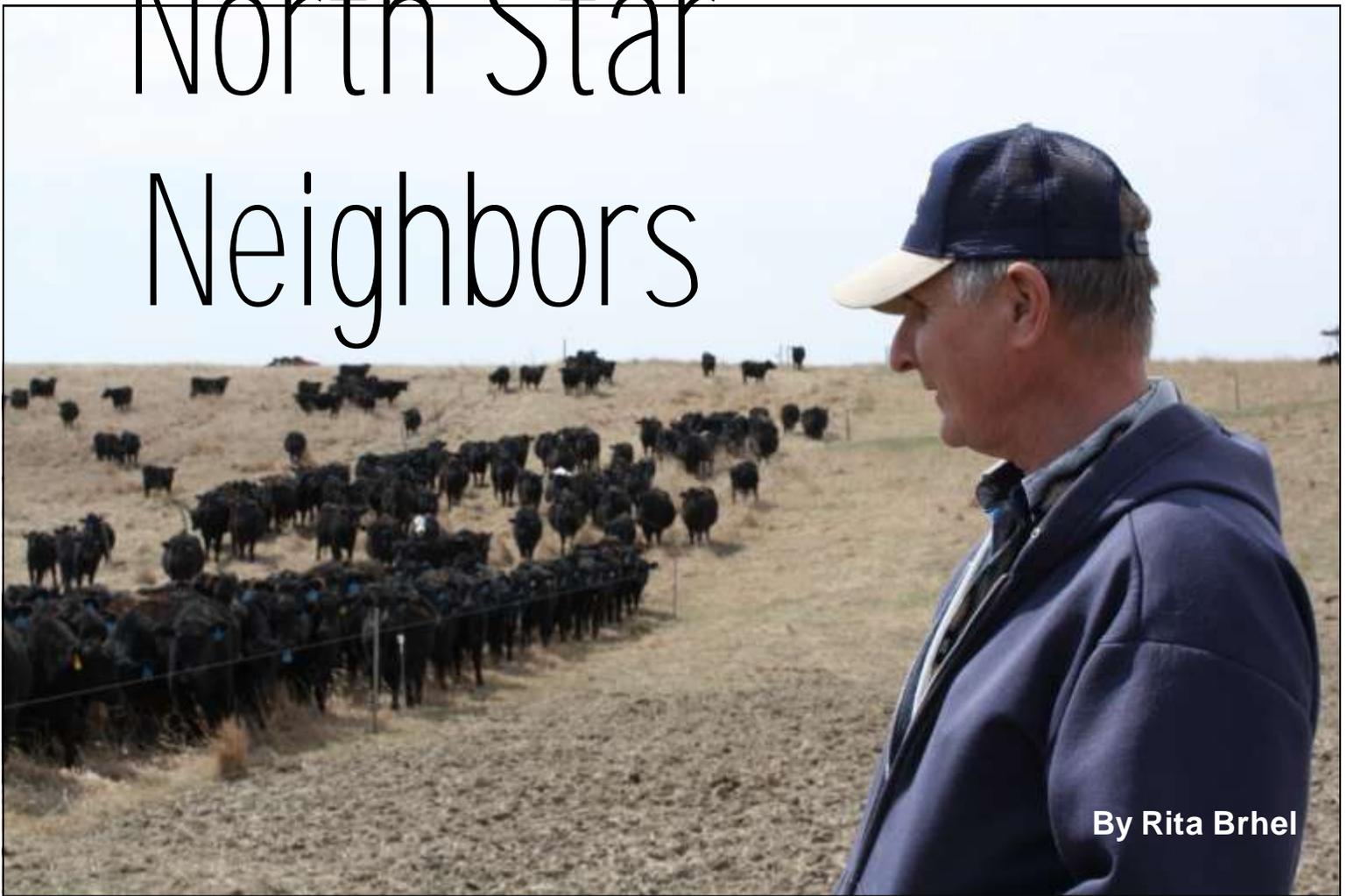
pesticide applicators to determine if any sensitive crops are near a planned pesticide application site and adjust their procedures accordingly. Keep in mind that this is another tool to help applicators recognize that you are farming certified organic ground. When you send out your "Spray Notice" letter to pesticide applicators or neighbors, you can let them know that you have registered your farm ground on this map. You still need to post your land with "No Spray" signs and continue to inform people that you operate certified organic farm ground and that they need to take care when spraying. Good verbal communication with neighbors and applicators is

still essential.

I encourage you to register your farm locations at this website so pesticide applicators can access information for their area. Remember this service is only as good as the information contained there, so new information should be updated as soon as possible.

Registration is voluntary. To register, go to <http://snr12b.unl.edu/SensitiveCrop/index.php>. After creating a username and password and logging on, information needed is your business/farm name (if you have one), section, township, range, range direction, latitude and longitude (if you use GPS), county, crop type, crop location, and acres.

North Star Neighbors



By Rita Brhel

Crossing into Nance County was like entering another country. The mile sections were replaced with meandering roads that slanted and curved with the topography, without regard to true north or south. There no longer was field after field of corn rows waiting for pre-planting farmwork, but instead rolling hills of pastureland studded with grazing cows and their calves. The big town on the map, Fullerton, was a spattering of houses and a Main Street with hollow-looking storefronts.

This is ranch country. Here, every man wears a cowboy hat and drives a

pickup truck. Here, the grazing cow-calf herd is the only kind of production agriculture that is “sensible.”

But tucked in those hills, near a spot of ground that was once the town of North Star, is a ranch like no other – North Star Neighbors, a cooperatively owned organic beef, hog, and poultry farm that defies most preconceived notions about what ranching should be, sustainable farming can be, and most of all, what the family farm is all about.

“I think 100 cows is too big,” said Jim Knopik, referring to the 100 Beef Cow Ownership Advantage Program at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis, where he recently vis-

ited with the Dean about creating a sustainable farming program for students. “I’d like to see farms able to raise families with 20 head, but it’s hard to get there when you’re not thinking that way. Once we started adding value to the production, it was a lot easier to understand.”

The Turning Point: The origin of North Star Neighbors was a conventional farm owned by Knopik’s father. Knopik joined the family operation, which also included his brothers, shortly after his wedding – renting the house next door until he and his wife, Carolyn, were able to purchase the farm in 1978.

“We were the biggest farmers west of

.....
“I’d like to see farms able to raise families with 20 head of cattle.”
.....

Fullerton at that time,” Knopik said, and they continued to farm conventionally, with no plans to change, until about 12 years ago.

At that time, the county was in an uproar about a 500,000-head swine operation that wanted to move in. Knopik joined his neighbors in efforts to keep the operation out.

“In doing so, we got closer to a lot of families involved in the fight and realized that what we were accusing the [big hog producers] of – we were doing ourselves,” he said. “When I was a kid, there was a farm on every quarter here. Now, every farm here used to be nine of those farms.” The Knopik farm was no exception, having bought up several farms as it was expanding.

It was a turning point for Knopik, one that would completely change the course of his farm and his life.

“And we started going back to a more sustainable way of farming,” he said.

In the Beginning: The North Star Neighbors cooperative began in 1998 with seven families producing chickens.

“It was a way to get our feet wet,” Knopik said. By 2000, their cooperative became a legal entity. They then added hogs and cattle to the mix.

For the first seven years, they mainly sold products through farmers markets: “Every Saturday, we had trailers going to Grand Island, Lincoln, and Omaha. The one for Omaha had to leave by 2:30 in the morning,” Carolyn said. But the cost of fuel to drive to these farmers markets, the closest being an hour away, ate into their profits, and “we realized that was not sustainable either,” Knopik said.

They had also put items in several stores in Lincoln, and sales were good – as long as someone was there giving samples. Otherwise, North Star’s products didn’t move because, without a taste test, the only thing selling them was the price – another marketing option proving unsustainable.

By this time, North Star Neighbors had accumulated nearly 1,000 names of customers, so instead of driving to farmers markets, they began a biweekly delivery system.

“That really went pretty well,” Knopik said. Instead of having three members of their coop on the road every week,

6 they were able to spread their

workload to one driver, one in marketing, and one answering phone calls.

Then, the price of fuel shot up.

“We just didn’t feel we could compete because the cost of production had to go up so much to cover the cost of fuel, so we added a \$7 delivery charge to our customers’ orders,” Knopik said. “It didn’t phase them one bit.”

But the price of fuel continued increasing and North Star made the decision to go to monthly deliveries.

“Our customers are wonderful,” Carolyn said. “They understood.”

Today, North Star makes 40-70 deliveries a month. The average roundtrip is 425 miles, and the farthest delivery point is Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Customers Make the Cooperative Work: North Star Neighbors enjoys great loyalty from its customers, but that’s not something that just happens without planning and work, Knopik said.

“We treat our customers as joint owners of the farm,” he said. “Our customers got us where we are at, anyway.”

North Star asks for input from the customers before making a change and treats them like family, inviting them to the farm and getting to know them as friends. And the customers reciprocate. Carolyn told about how customers would send coffee home with her husband to keep him awake on the road, and how they would call the farm late at night to make sure he got home okay if the road conditions were poor.

An example of how North Star Neighbors worked with its customers is when Knopik was considering taking his cattle off mineral, a supplement that is usually thought of as routine in cattle production.

“We were communicating with our customers about their health problems,” Knopik said. “Someone would have a food allergy or sensitivity that was traced back to what the calves ate. This was years before science even began looking at this possibility. This was 15, 20 years ago. We were long accused of making unsubstantiated claims that research is now showing to be true.”

North Star Neighbors made the final decision to eliminate the mineral when Mad Cow disease was of particular concern, especially since one of the common components at the time was tied to the

pathogen behind this human health worry. At the same time, Knopik had four cows die from choking on turnips, and in talking with other producers, it was suspected that the cows had overdosed on the dicalcium phosphate component of the mineral.

Taking away the mineral was a leap of faith, but one that has paid off. Carolyn noted how the cattle have seemed gentler ever since, but what is more important is the effect on their customers: “Some said their child can eat beef again when he could never eat beef before.”

Soon after, North Star also took out hormones, feed additives, and antibiotics. The result has been happier customers – and, surprisingly, healthier animals.

“We have come to believe that stress is the cause of most sickness,” Knopik said, so if a producer is able to reduce the stress on the animal, which includes not feeding additives that are unnaturally compatible to the animal’s system, he can avoid many of the illnesses conventional producers deal with.

Changes in the Works:

“Another production change in the works, based on joint interest from the cooperative’s customers and producers, is moving toward grass-finishing for the beef operation. Grass-finished beef is known for its nutritional benefits, and with the high cost of feed, it’s good for the producer, too.

North Star Neighbors has been mob grazing for a year and a half, and is estimating needing another year and a half until the cooperative can convert fully to grass finishing. So far, mob grazing has allowed North Star Neighbors to graze up to eight months out of the year and increase the number of head by 25 percent. Knopik and his son, Tom, currently have 200 cows, plus their calves, 75 yearlings, and 50 yearling heifers – and have plans to increase the herd by another 10 percent. The majority of their 1,600-plus acres is pasture, and more cropland is being converted.

“Mob grazing worked so well last year that we didn’t even use 320 acres,” Knopik said. “It’s more about feeding the land than it is about feeding the cows.”

The goal is to get to year-round grazing, something that he estimates will take another three to five years. Currently, the four months that their herd doesn’t graze

.....
“If you’re working hard, why shouldn’t you be entitled to live like the rest of average society does?”
.....

here, they graze rented corn stalks.

“All the farmers around here think mob grazing is too much work. It does take a lot of work to get there, the point of being able to do this, with fencing and making sure the water is where it needs to be,” Knopik said. “What they don’t realize is that instead of eight herds, they’re only running one and it takes a half hour to move them is all. We can also eliminate having to haul them everywhere; they can be moved from one field to the next without using fossil fuels.”

There are some less apparent benefits, as well: “They are easy to keep in, too, because everyday, they’re in a new place, so it’s like candy to them,” Knopik said. “And they eat weeds and brush: in fact, the longer they mob graze, the more we find they actually prefer weeds – they’re higher in protein than grass. Long-time mob grazers worry about how to keep their weeds!”

Shared Passion Drives the Cooperative: The number-one tip that Knopik can offer about making a cooperative successful is to find producers who share the same passion and philosophies about farming and life.

“You have to have people who believe in the same things you believe in,” he said. “We can’t have people going off in different directions.”

Planning is good, but the focus is what’s more important: “Everybody believes you have to have a business plan and feasibility studies, and I suppose, but we’ve changed so much that if we had stuck to a business plan, we would’ve missed a lot of opportunities,” Knopik said. “Every year, we change our plan and adjust. If we had relied on all our

customers coming to the farm, we couldn’t have survived as a business. If we had stayed at the farmers markets, we would’ve burned out.”

“The most important thing is to develop a mission statement and goals,” he added. “You can go outside the straight line, but you always have to come back.”

Nebraska Food Coop: North Star Neighbors is also a pick-up point for the Nebraska Food Coop, an Internet-based marketplace that bears a lot of resemblance to the North Star Neighbors business model. In fact, Knopik is a co-founder of this innovative virtual cooperative that has since been replicated in other states.

The Nebraska Food Coop shares the same philosophy as North Star Neighbors, as an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable network of producers and consumers. The volunteer-run cooperative consists of a web-based marketplace, www.nebraskafood.org, where member consumers can buy products from member producers. The producers then work together to deliver their products to specified pick-up points.

The Nebraska Food Coop is more than providing a place for consumers to purchase local foods and for producers to sell their products locally. It’s about creating a viable local food infrastructure. Knopik said the infrastructure is expanding – the delivery system now includes the eastern third of the state and an additional hub is being established in Kearney, and processors are being added to the mix such as a mobile meat processing unit that will be built in about three weeks – as is the product diversity.

“People can be more independent,” Knopik said. “They don’t all have to be organic or raise broilers or sell meat. They don’t all have to be a certain size producer. I’d like to get to the point where the little, old lady down the street can sell a couple quarts of strawberries and be profitable.”

One goal is that the Nebraska Food Coop will get to the point of sustaining itself, giving up volunteer hours – that any point, whether the delivery or the processing part, can grow enough for someone to make a business out of it.

“For example, we need a packaging facility now, so there’s a job available,” Knopik said. “We [Nebraska Food Coop] don’t want to own everything. That’s getting too close to vertical integration. We want to open avenues for new marketers and new businesses.”

The Next Generation: This year, two of Knopik’s grand-daughters and a grandson are starting their own egg business, utilizing the Nebraska Food Coop. Another grandson is trying out eco-tourism by renting out camping units in the pasture.

“It’s such a good learning process for them to learn how to market their stuff,” Knopik said. “I think that’s why we [the agricultural industry in general] lose so many farmers – because they’ve lost the knowledge and means of how to market.”

The cooperative model brings this back into production agriculture, and while it’s a challenge for many producers, marketing is what makes the profession viable and sustainable.

“If you’re working hard, why shouldn’t you be entitled to live like the average of society does?” Knopik asked.





OCIA News

Organic Crop Improvement Association, Nebraska Chapter #1 Newsletter

OCIA NE #1 Board of Directors

Larry Stanislav, President
Prague, NE
402.663.4649

Mike Ostry, Vice President
Bruno, NE
402.543.2110

Ken Thiltges, Secretary
Rulo, NE
402.245.5480

Gail Lockard, Treasurer
Lincoln, NE
402.477.2128

Jerry Lahners
Hebron, NE
402.356.2023

Marvin Lange
Fordyce, NE
402.357.2150

Terry Mosel
Page, NE
402.357.5321

Certification Committee
Tami Highstreet, Coordinator
Mike Ostry, Chair, Bruno, NE
Michel Mason, Hickman, NE
Terry Mosel, Page, NE

Crop Improvement Committee
Tami Highstreet, Coordinator
Larry Stanislav, Chair, Linwood, NE
Randy Fendrich, Linwood, NE
Gail Lockard, Lincoln, NE

Tami Highstreet, Chapter Administrator
2766 E Street
Lincoln, NE 68510
402.474.0113
tamih_events@yahoo.com

OCIA News contact:
Liz Sarno, UNL Extension Educator
Organic Project Coordinator
Email: www.esamo2@unl.edu
Cell: 402-309-0944

OCIA Research and Education, Inc
Angela Tunink, Executive Director
1340 N. Cotner Blvd.
Lincoln, NE 68505
402-477-2323, Ext. 320
Email: atunink@ocia.org
Web: <http://www.ocia.org/RE>

President's Cancer Panel: Organic foods reduce environmental risks

Organic Trade Association (OTA) hails panel for empowering consumers with ways to reduce their cancer risk

Contact: Barbara Haumann, 413-376-1220

GREENFIELD, Mass. (May 6, 2010)-- The President's Cancer Panel Report released today exhorts consumers to choose food grown without pesticides or chemical fertilizers, antibiotics, and growth hormones to help decrease their exposure to environmental chemicals that can increase their risk of contracting cancer. Organic products avoid the use of these chemicals.

"Exposure to pesticides can be decreased by choosing, to the extent possible, food grown without pesticides or chemical fertilizers... Similarly, exposure to antibiotics, growth hormones, and toxic run-off from livestock feed lots can be minimized by eating free-range meat raised without these medications, according to the landmark report, "Reducing Environmental Cancer Risk: What We Can Do Now," submitted to President Obama by Dr. LaSalle Leffall, Jr., an oncologist and professor of surgery at Howard University, and Dr. Margaret L. Kripke, and immunologist at the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

"Organic production and processing is the only system that uses certification and inspection to verify that these chemicals are not used on the farm all the way to our dinner tables," said Christine Bushway, Executive Director of the Organic Trade Association (OTA).

Organic production is based on a system of farming without the use of toxic and persistent pesticides (herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides) and synthetic fertilizers. Organically produced foods also must be produced without the use of antibiotics, synthetic hormones, genetic engineering and other excluded practices, sewage sludge, or irradiation. Organic foods are minimally processed without artificial ingredients, preservatives, or irradiation to maintain the integrity of the food. In addition, animal confinement in feedlots is prohibited.

"Consumers should know that organic foods have the least chemicals applied in their production and the least residues in the final products. Thus, those seeking to minimize their exposure to these chemicals and follow the recommendations of the President's Cancer Panel, can look for the USDA Organic label wherever they shop," said Bushway.

"The American people--even before they are born--are bombarded continually with myriad combinations of these dangerous exposures," the panel wrote in a letter to President Obama. It added, "The Panel urges you most strongly to use the power of your office to remove the carcinogens and other toxins from our food, water, and air that needlessly increase health care costs, cripple our Nation's productivity, and devastate American lives."

It added, "Many known or suspected carcinogens first identified through studies of industrial and agricultural occupational exposures have since found their way into soil, air, water and numerous consumer product... Some of these chemicals have been found in maternal blood, placental tissue, and breast milk samples from pregnant women and mothers who recently gave birth. Thus, chemical contaminants are being passed on to the next generation, both prenatally and during breastfeeding."

"OTA is gratified to see a prestigious scientific panel recognize what the organic farmers and the organic community have realized about the environmental health and organic agriculture for decades, and we applaud them for taking on this critical issue," Bushway added.

Organic vs. Natural Is There a Difference?

You bet! AHUGE difference!

Although the terms "natural" and "organic" are often used interchangeably they are actually very different.

The FDA does not regulate claims of "all natural." According to Webster's new world dictionary, the word "natural" means; "produced or existing in nature; not artificial." By that definition, anything derived from plants, animals or elements found on planet Earth could earn the "all natural" label.

In the food industry today, there is no official definition of "all natural." There is no requirement for food companies to list chemical contaminants found in their food.

A food labeled "all natural" can contain:

- pesticides
- herbicides
- toxic heavy metals
- trace amounts of PCBs
- toxic fluoride
- hidden MSG
- high-temperature cooking by-products
- and, other non-natural substances

The USDA does regulate organic products, and farmers and manufacturers are inspected by a qualified certifying organization charged with ensuring they follow the rules.

Organic meat and milk come from animals whose bodies and food are never treated with pesticides, herbicides, antibiotics or hormones. Animals must have access to exercise and sunlight, and time to graze in pasture rather than feedlots. Feed must be organic with no genetic modifications or animal byproducts.

Produce must be grown on a farm that for at least three years has used no synthetic herbicides, pesticides or fertilizers and has not planted any genetically modified seeds, used fertilizers derived from sewage sludge or treated seeds with irradiation.

The production of organic foods helps to honor the balance of nature through "old fashioned" farming methods. Conventional pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, antibiotics and growth hormones are never used on organic farms. Instead, they use renewable resources and focus on soil and water conservation to help preserve the environment for future generations.

Organic farming is regulated by the USDA according to strict quality standards for growing and handling. Look for the USDA seal which ensures the product is 95-100% organic.

The REAL secret to being a smart, skeptical consumer is to read the ingredients label and ignore the health claims on the front of the package.

Bender Receives "Outstanding Organic Farmer" Award

Jim Bender was recognized at the Chapter Annual Meeting and received the "Outstanding Organic Farmer" award.

Jim has been farming his operation since 1975 and been certified organic since 1990. "I am most proud of our disciplined conservative crop rotation, intricate mutually reinforcing relationship between crops and livestock, season long approach to weed control in row crops, and overall success with soil conservation," Jim says.

Bender's pride in his workforce especially keeps him organic. "We've hired a lot of young people from the local community," he said. As their interest grows in his farming techniques, Bender is also helping to preserve the future of agriculture in the area.

.....

Plan to Attend the 2011 OCIA Annual General Membership Meeting

Join us at the Nebraska City Lied Lodge during the week of February 9-11, 2011. Details will be forthcoming.

The evening sessions will feature top-notch presentators speaking on issues pertinent to sustainable and/or organic farmers and consumers that choose to buy and eat local foods.

We will be sourcing local, organic meats. If you will have pork, beef or poultry available, please contact Tami at 402-474-0113.

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.

OCIA Nebraska #1
Tami K. Highstreet
2766 E Street, Lincoln, NE 68510
402-474-0113
tami_events@yahoo.com
www.ocia.org

Address Service Requested

Multi-Species Grazing Improves Cattle Pastures

By Rita Brhel

By and large, a pasture is used for either cattle or sheep, not both. But combining the two species yields more feed for the cows – and more money for the producer.

“When we look at common managed grazing systems, most are grazed by just one species of livestock, that being primarily cattle. When we look at naturally regulated ecosystems, they’re going to have multiple species,” said Brian Faris, a meat goat and sheep specialist with Kansas State University.

Single-species cattle grazing is favored because only grazing one species is significantly less complicated, management-wise, than grazing multiple species together. But single-species grazing is also the reason for a drop in quality pastures and rangeland, Faris said. Cattle eat primarily grass, disturbing the ecosystem and leading to an increased weed population in the pasture.

Grazing sheep or goats with cattle

can restore the natural balance of grass and forbs. Sheep graze both grass and forbs but primarily the latter, and goats browse shrubs such as red cedar. Sheep and goats are also more likely than cattle to graze slopes.

“Ideally, you would want to match the amount of each species of animal to what forage is available,” Faris said. For example, a weedy pasture would have a higher number of sheep-to-cow ratio than a pasture that was mostly grass, and goats would be added in if there was a portion of the pasture overgrown with brush.

The result is a pasture able to grow more feed for cattle, while also producing another livestock species for market, without added input.

“One ewe [or doe] can be added for each cow without affecting cattle performance,” Faris said. In fact, cow-calf production increases by an average 24% by adding sheep to the grazing system. “Grazing pressure decreases and production increases if two species

are put together, rather than just adding more head of the same species.”

In addition, internal parasite problems are lessened in both cattle and sheep or goats, as the parasites are species-specific.

There are challenges: Sheep and goats require fencing modifications, such as a multi-strand electric fence; sheep cannot eat the same mineral as cattle; and a cattle producer would need to educate himself about the small ruminant industry, including available marketing options. Another major hurdle is predator control for sheep and goats, which often require the addition of a guardian animal to the flock such as a dog, llama, or donkey.

To overcome these challenges, Faris recommended that cattle producers who do not want to get into the sheep or goat business to partner with a producer who already is. This may be fee-based or a trade-off on services: providing pasture to the sheep, while improving the grass-forb ratio for the cattle.