



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

2009 Healthy Farms and Rural Advantage Conference February 13th and 14th Mid-Town Holiday Inn, Grand Island

November 2008
Number 119

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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.

"This year's Healthy Farm and Rural Advantage conference has much to offer farmers looking to diversify their operations, acreage owners wanting to produce extra income and teens looking for money-making projects that they can do on their farm....."

Feast or Famine: A Fork in the Road and the Crucial Farmer - Consumer Connection. Our keynote speaker, Melinda Hemmelgarn, M.S., R.D. is a clinical dietitian, "investigative nutritionist" and award-winning journalist. Recipient of a W.K. Kellogg Food and Society Policy Fellowship award that allowed her to connect the dots between food, health, and agriculture. Her work has appeared in assorted national publications, health magazines, and websites such as Touch the Soil, Organic Valley and Rodale. In 2007, she received an Award of Excellence from the ADA's Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Practice Group. Melinda's columns are posted on the Food and Society Policy Fellows website:

www.foodandsocietyfellows.org/fellows.cfm?id=80361

Her current project with her photographer husband is a 2009 fund-raising calendar for their local Farmers' Market entitled "Farm Hands: A Tribute to the hands that feed us".

Look forward to several workshops devoted to **Holistic Management™** on Saturday. Topics will include an introduction to Holistic Management™, monitoring the ecosystems, planning for profit, and grazing principles. If you want to make changes in your farming operation, improve your family's quality of life and income, and meet the new demands of farming sustainably - Holistic Management™ is for you.

Other workshops: Marion Ellis, **Nebraska Beekeeping**; Larry Martin, **Nebraska Nut Growers Association**; Dr. Jim Hruskoci, **Aronia Berry Production**, Larry Stanislav **Organic Row Crop Production**; Tom Tomas, **Organic Vegetable Gardening**; Jill Gifford, **UNL Food Processing Center**; Stephen Vantassel, **Keep Wildlife from Damaging Crops, Beginning Farmer Program**; **2008 Farm Bill: Agri/ecco-tourism, Healthy Farm Index.** Go to <http://www.nebsusag.org/> for more information about our conference.

Members - don't forget to help donate items for our annual fundraisers, the Silent and Live Auctions. If you have something to pledge, contact **Michael Braunstein at 402-639-2760 or mikeb2687@aol.com**

SOMETHING NEW THIS YEAR! PROMOTE YOUR FARM/BUSINESS WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC ON SATURDAY - FEBRUARY 14TH

The exhibit area at the Holiday Inn will be open to the public so attendees can stop by and visit with farmers and see the variety of local foods being produced in Nebraska, stop in with questions for master gardeners and see what alternative livestock, seeds, products are available. So be sure to reserve your space soon.

Contact **Gary Lesoing, UNL Extension Educator - SARE Coordinator at (402) 274-4755**, for more information. To register, sponsor or reserve an exhibit space: <http://www.nebsusag.org/> For those that prefer to register by mail look for our brochure to arrive in the mail by January.

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Bike Deliveries a Green Solution for NFC's Urban Food Distribution

By: Trilety Wade

Part I

Erratic gas prices, peak oil, carbon footprints - environmental and natural resource issues of the day require creative, grass-roots solutions. Eating locally provides an active solution to many environmental issues from water quality to biodiversity. The Nebraska Food Co-operative provides consumers and producers with a conduit to eating and growing locally. However, the transportation of local food to local consumers, if done in an inefficient manner, can actually increase carbon emissions and fuel usage. In an effort to "green up" one component of the food distribution system, the Nebraska Food Co-operative is planning on launching a bike delivery system for NFC consumers in Midtown Omaha.

The bike delivery system is the brainchild of Libby Broekemeier (Vice Chair of the Nebraska Food Co-op) and James Hermeson (volunteer and avid bicyclist). After the initial idea was discussed a query was sent to NFC members residing in the Midtown Omaha area asking if they would be interested in, for a small fee, having their monthly NFC order delivered by bicycle. The response was positive and the bike delivery discussions were put into action with a subsequent, practice run conducted on 03 July 2008.

The remainder of the summer has been devoted to researching other bike delivery systems in the country. Specifically, a great deal of information was gathered from the Austin, TX *Meals on Wheels* program which launched a meal-bike delivery system in August 2008 after one year of planning and receipt of a corporate sponsorship. The time parameter for delivering meals is one hour



and volunteer cyclists are outfitted with safety vests and maps. Many CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture) in the country have implemented bike delivery systems as well.

The initial phases of the Co-op's bike delivery system will be directed towards NFC members in the Midtown area of the City of Omaha. Having food delivered by bike rather than driving to the Jane's Health Market delivery point in Benson will reduce fuel usage and emissions, encourage exercise and physical health, and increase social interaction among NFC members/volunteers.

This winter season NFC volunteers will continue to research the successes and pitfalls of other bike delivery systems while also working to clearly establish the safety and logistic parameters. If you pick up your NFC order at the Jane's destination in Omaha, you will likely see James Hermeson with a map of the delivery area and his bicycle and trailer/cooler. Make sure to take a look at the map to see if you are on the bike delivery route and talk to James and Libby about their great idea.

Stay tuned for Part II when we provide specific details and a launch date for the Nebraska Food Co-operative's bike delivery route.



INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
PANHANDLE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION CENTER

NEWS RELEASE - for immediate release Nov. 10, 2008. Contact: Karen DeBoer, 308-254-4455
Sustainable Crops and Livestock Systems Workshop set for Dec. 6

“Keeping Agriculture Viable for the Next Generation” is the theme of the sustainable Crops and Livestock Systems Conference, scheduled for Dec. 6 at Sidney.

The workshop will take place at Western Nebraska Community College, 371 S. College Drive, from 8:45 a.m. until 3:45 p.m. It is sponsored by the University of Nebraska, Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society (NSAS) and Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA) NE Chapter No. 2.

Advance registration is requested by Dec. 1. The registration fee is \$25. Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) credits have been applied for. Lunch will be served. For registration and information about the conference or exhibitor booths, contact Extension Educator Karen DeBoer at the UNL Extension Office, P.O. Box 356, 920 Jackson St., Sidney, NE 69162. Phone: 308-254-4455 or 866-865-1703; Email: kdeboer1@unl.edu. To download a brochure and registration form, go to <http://www.ckb.unl.edu>.

Ag producers and personnel from the University of Wyoming, South Dakota State University, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln will describe how producers can use cover crops and crop rotations to improve soil fertility and feed livestock; transition their operations to organic production using EQIP (the Environmental Quality Incentive Program); apply for SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) farmer-rancher grants to perform on-farm research, marketing or demonstration projects; diversity farm and ranch operations; and involve the family in an agri-tourism venture.

Keynote speaker Jim Krall of the University of Wyoming will speak about research conducted at UW aimed at understanding the potential of “Ley” system agriculture, in which annual forages are rotated with winter wheat, replacing at least part of the traditional 14-month fallow period. At noon, Gary Lesoing, Extension Educator, Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Coordinator, will talk about SARE Farmer-Rancher Grants and how to apply for them. Topics of concurrent sessions will include:

Dryland Crop Rotations and Forages for the High Plains: John Rickertsen, Research Agronomist, South Dakota State University, West River Ag Center, Rapid City, will discuss findings from his long term rotation study, research with annual forages and swath grazing. Drew Lyon, University of Nebraska, Dryland Cropping Systems Specialist, Scottsbluff, will respond to Rickertsen’s presentation and put it into context for the Panhandle.

Organic Farming Basics and Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) Cost Share: Dennis Demmel, Organic Farmer, Ogallala will discuss crop rotations, cover crops, weed control, fertility, record keeping, marketing, as well as, EQIP cost share and more.

The New 100-Beef Cow Ownership Program: Weldon Sleight, Dean, Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, will discuss a new program that is a partnership between the USDA Farm Service Agency, the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, the Nebraska Cattlemen, and the Nebraska Farm Bureau and is designed to return NCTA graduates to ranches and rural communities with 100 cows.

Agritourism and Family: Sue Anne Switzer, Calamus Outfitters, will talk about how her family took their fourth-generation cattle operation and developed an agritourism business. She will describe how they used the assets of the ranch’s natural beauty to provide recreational activities for people to enjoy such as hunting, bird watching, horseback riding, and river adventures. Sue Anne will also discuss the changes her family had to make in their operation; including the economics, marketing and the challenges they faced.

Bringing a Family Member into the Farm or Ranch Operation: A panel of young farmers and ranchers will share their experiences of how they returned to the family farm or ranch operation.

Western Nebraska Grape Production: From the vineyard to the Winery: Jim Schild, Extension Educator, Scotts Bluff County, and Allen Gall, Prairie Vine Vineyards, will discuss how grapes can be grown in our challenging Nebraska climate.

NEWS RELEASE FROM IANR NEWS SERVICE, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

— Second ‘Farm Beginnings’ Class Set for This Fall
Oct. 10, 2008

LINCOLN, Neb. — “Farm Beginnings,” a program mostly taught by farmers that focuses on small, alternative farms that produce value-added products, will begin Nov. 22 in Syracuse.

The class will be taught in 10 sessions and is similar to a college course, said Gary Lesoing, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension educator in Nemaha County.

“If you or someone you know would like to become involved in this type of farming, this may be what you are looking for,” Lesoing said. “If you don’t have the land or the resources to farm conventionally, this will provide you with some ideas and encouragement for developing a farm.”

The first two classes involve goal setting and whole farm planning. They use a holistic management approach, Lesoing said.

Class participants also will tour successful farms that are practicing alternative farming practices. These may include an organic grain producer, a vegetable producer or someone that directly markets meat, he said.

The third and fourth sessions deal with financial management and assessing and developing a financial plan for your own enterprise and planning for profit.

The fifth session discusses building a business plan and financial options for getting started.

The sixth and seventh sessions focus on marketing, and the keys for successful marketing and developing a marketing plan. Different producers will share the different ways they are marketing their products.

The final three sessions will involve tying everything together that was learned throughout the class and presenting an individual plan. There also will be discussion on preparing for and securing funding from local banks and also information on available resources. The final class also discusses working with a mentor. This includes discussions on effective communication, generational diversity and conflict resolution.

“There are a few producers in southeast Nebraska and the surrounding region that have these types of operations and are making a living doing it,” Lesoing said. “Others are doing these things to supplement their income or as a second career.”

He said there are few farmers producing organic corn and soybeans. Many smaller cities in southeast Nebraska have Farmers’ Markets, and there are also large and very successful ones in Lincoln, Omaha and St. Joseph, Mo. Kansas City has several farmers’ markets, with one selling just organic produce, he said.

Several restaurants in the urban areas of Nebraska and surrounding states also are very interested in serving locally produced food, while the UNL Food Service also is purchasing as much produce and meat locally as is available.

“Farm Beginnings” was initiated in the mid 1990s by the Land Stewardship Project of Minnesota. A U.S. Department of Agriculture Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant brought the program to Nebraska, Missouri and Illinois in 2005.

The initial class held in Syracuse in 2005-2006, had 12 different ag businesses from across Nebraska complete the program.

While not geared for conventional farmers, conventional farmers could incorporate some of the principles of the program or develop part of their operation in this manner, Lesoing said.

For information about “Farm Beginnings” or other questions on alternative agriculture systems, contact Lesoing at the Nemaha County Extension Office, 1824 N St. in Auburn, at (402) 274-4755, glesoing2@unl.edu.

#

10/10/08-SAK Source: Gary Lesoing, extension educator,
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**NSAS Healthy Farms and UNL Rural
Advantage Conference**
Friday - February 13th, Grand Island, NE
Nebraska Sustainable Ag Society Board
members would like to invite all our long-
time and new members to bring their
‘Sweethearts’ and family along to the “All
Nebraska Dinner” where you will experience
great food, good company and can join in on
the Live Auction for fun!



OCIA News

Organic Crop Improvement Association, Nebraska Chapter #1 Newsletter

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A Truly Independent Seed Company

Liz Sarno

Fall is my favorite time of year. I look forward to harvest and reaping the rewards of our efforts through the spring and summer months anticipating the yields from our crops. The days are still warm enough to enjoy but cool enough to work outdoors. I look up to a sky that is so blue watching wispy white clouds float by; I am walking up and down the corn rows selecting ears of corn. I feel so fortunate to feel the warm sun, crisp fresh air on my face and hear the birds chirping. I am enjoying a part of my farming operation that makes me feel like I am taking part in an ancient harvest ceremony. I have for the past five years selected my own open-pollinated corn seed stock. It is the exact seed I want for my farm, to feed my animals and to sell to my poultry customers. It is a corn variety I selected for my farm.

When I say that I feel this is an ancient ceremony, people have been selecting corn for thousands of years. Native Americans started selecting maize/corn from a wild grass "Teosinte" originating from southern Mexico some 7,000 years ago. They collected and cultivated plants that would feed their people. With thousands of years of selection Native Americans gradually increased crop yields and quality. As I am walking in the rows inspecting each plant, I continue the tradition of selection for my environment and needs. I open the husks like wrappings around a Christmas present peeking inside at the brilliant colors; amazed at the beautiful variety of golden yellows, oranges and deep reds. I evaluate the entire corn plant and have started to appreciate what works for my farm. I look at what type of field conditions the plant is in to evaluate size of ear, shape of kernels. I consider factors such as resistance to disease and pests, stalk strength, ears that have turned down, ear height on the stalk for combining purposes and taste - not for me but my turkeys love this colorful corn.

This year we planted the open-pollinated and hybrids at 22,000 population in our test plots but increased the open-pollinated population to 28,000 for the field strips. For us the open-pollinated corn has yielded less than hybrid corn. For the last four year's open-pollinated corn has averaged about 70% of the yield to the hybrid varieties. Another concern is cross-pollination with traits I do not want in my corn like GMOs, this is hard to avoid, but we try by planting our corn in a secluded part of the farm that is surrounded by trees. We are learning how to work with open-pollinated corn, for example we should harvest earlier. It is ready in 90 days but we wait until the soybeans are harvested and then go to corn. Some benefits of saving seed are costs; I do not have to buy seed corn yearly and I am responsible for improving my selections for the next year. But what I like best is that by selecting my own corn seed, I feel connected to the crops we plant and the land. I feel self-reliant; my future to plant another crop is being preserved with this seed.

Another positive quality I noticed is good emergence with our open-pollinated corn. We farm in twenty-row strips and have one strip devoted to on-farm testing. We planted 10 varieties of corn and the open-pollinated was one of the varieties we tested. To plant our test strips we used a four row planter putting one variety in two boxes on one side of the planter and the other variety on the other side. When we reach the end of the strip we clean out the boxes and plant the next two varieties etc. We check emergence by placing a 13' 9" long - 2" diameter plastic pipe alongside our 38" spaced rows (note: length of a single row to equal 1/1000 of an acre, to calculate seed needs check Blue Rivers Hybrids: <http://www.blueriverorgseed.com/seed-needs.asp>) we selected a random spot on the first row to make our count. We try to keep in a straight line across the field as we move over the rows to the next variety.

Depending on how much time you have you can flag an area and observe emergence for a couple of weeks, every other day. Beside emergence you can observe other traits you may be interested in like vigor, plant health. If you can only spend a day checking emergence then check several locations around the field.



Larry Stanislav taking plant counts on field variety test strips at four weeks

In western New York; there is a nationwide organization of seed producers "Green Haven Open Pollinated Seed Group": <http://www.openpollinated.com/saving.htm> that offer good advice about open pollinated corn seed they suggest **do a varietal cross of two open pollinated corn varieties** with a four row planter. Put variety A in the two outside planting box and put variety B in the inside two planting box and plant back and forth. Pull the tassels on variety A. The grain produced from Variety B plants are still variety B. The grain produced from variety A plants will be a successful cross. Then make your selections. They recommend you select and save at **least two hundred ears of corn from a population for your seed stock.**

The Michael Fields Agricultural Institute demonstrates the Open-Pollination Process:

http://www.michaelfieldsagainst.org/programs/crops/corn_pollination.html Michael Fields Researchers are developing breeding lines that are visually selected for high carotenoid content. Their interest in carotenoids is due to the antioxidants and vitamins and corn is a primary source of carotenoids for poultry. We agree that is why we select for color we have observed that the more colorful the corn the better poultry and livestock like it. Over the years we have had several poultry growers asking for open-pollinated corn because of the quality and recently had some interest from grass-finish cattle farmers wanting to plant it for grazing.

We hand harvest our open-pollinated seed stock by picking the ears we want to keep, taking off the husks and storing them in open wire racks in a small bin. Sometimes we have placed the racks on top of our bin corn when we are running air through the bin to help keep condition. When it comes time to plant you can easily shell the corn in a short time with a simple hand Sheller which costs \$8.00 or a for larger volumes you can use a hand-crank Sheller for about \$200.00 we found our hand Sheller at Lehman's <http://www.lehmans.com/>

If you are striving to be more sustainable in your farming operation, what could be a more truly independent seed company than yourself. For us, the couple of acres we grow gives us a chance to experiment by developing a corn variety for our farm, we supply a few poultry growers with an ingredient they feel has better quality than hybrids and gives us a sense of security that we will have seed to plant next year. You may want to try an acre or two of open-pollinated corn for seed production or grazing; I think you won't be disappointed.

There are several companies that carry open-pollinated field and sweet corn; here are a few sources for field corn:

ATTRA Organic Seed Suppliers Search: http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/altseed_search.php? Organic seed source for agronomy and horticultural crops where you can find open-pollinated, vegetable, flower, and herb seeds.

OCIA under product search "corn" you can find who is planting open-pollinated corn http://www.ocia.org/prod_query/index.php

Tiensvold Farms - Rushville, Nebraska. Contact Mark Tiensvold: 308-327-3135 or email: mtiensvold@bbcwb.net

Albert Lea Seed House carries open-pollinated corn: <http://www.alseed.com/> or phone: 1-800-352-5247

BURBACH COUNTRYSIDE DAIRY

By Linda Wuebben, Norfolk Daily News

"I believe milk lovers deserve glass," said Dale Burbach. "Our milk in glass bottles - 'It just tastes better.'" It's his slogan for his new milk bottling business - Burbach Countryside Dairy.

Burbach and wife Lisa felt so strongly about the improved quality of milk in glass bottles, they decided to build a bottling plant on their dairy farm southeast of Hartington.

"I researched the idea for four years and went online - accumulated ideas," Burbach said. The couple even did a taste test in their own refrigerator. Milk stored in a glass bottle kept fresh for four weeks and they tasted it just to be sure.

For the last eighteen months they searched for just the right equipment. Finally in May they connected with a dairy farmer in Wisconsin who was getting out of the bottling business and had his equipment for sale.

But the equipment needed some reworking to accommodate glass bottles so it was shipped to Maryland where it was refitted. The Maryland expert also hooked the couple up with a bottle-washing unit. It was September before the white liquid was actually bottled by the Burbachs.

"For the last four months, I've been telling everyone who asked, we would be up and running in two weeks," Burbach said with a grin. "We just had no idea of everything involved in setting up a bottling plant. We are the only on-the-farm glass bottler that our state inspector knows of." Six weeks ago it finally became a reality.

Last year they subcontracted with area businesses to build their dairy store and bottling plant. It is a 90' X 50' steel building adjacent to their free-stall milking operation. Currently they milk and maintain a dairy herd of about 120 Holsteins. His right hand herdsman is John Dickes. Two other part-timers work with them as well - Ron Waker and Wes Wortmann.

Wortmann is a Briar Cliff College student and suggested his marketing class become involved and help the Burbachs to spread the word. Before the students started their marketing process, the couple brought their product to the class and had the students participate in a taste test. The students couldn't believe the enhanced flavor of bottled milk compared to milk in plastic bottles.

"Our biggest hurdle right now is getting people to try it," said Burbach. "Once they try it, they're hooked." He receives emails daily from customers who insist they would drive to another town to find the product now they have tasted it.

Placing the product on dairy shelves is not easy. It took a lot of personal contact with dairy managers in the region and road miles convincing different food markets to sell it. The Burbachs started with one store in Yankton, So. Dak., and three in Sioux City, IA. They stocked the shelves with 56 gallons of their different varieties. They bottle skim, 1 percent, 2 percent, whole, chocolate and cream.

When at first the milk didn't move off the shelf, the couple went into the stores and gave away samples - bottles. Or in some stores like the Yankton HyVee, the price was discounted at first to get people to buy it. Dairy manager Mike Rockne was hesitant to raise the price to the level the Burbachs wanted to see it sell at. In a few days, he called the Burbachs and said, "They cleaned me out. Bring me some more."

"When we were handing out samples, one lady asked me if this was whipping cream," Burbach said. "I told her it was REAL cream and she could whip it or whatever she wanted to do with it." Stores never seem to have enough cream on hand. Its sales are outstanding.

A liquor store/gas mart owner in Hartington recommends customers drink the milk with a morning donut. He went through three cases the first day.

A dairy manager in an Omaha store told the couple he had been in the grocery business since he was 18 and he was excited by the way this new product was being received.

"He said this is the kind of stuff that excites him now and not many new products get this reaction anymore," Burbach said. "It's the flavor that keeps them coming back."

Shelf space is still hard to come by. The Burbachs stock the designated shelf area themselves and have two delivery trucks to haul the bottles. Sometimes the trips to stores in Omaha make for a long day. They may leave home at 2 p.m. and not return until 4 a.m.

In another Omaha store they shared a four-foot shelf stand at the end of an aisle with another private farm orientated bottler - only he bottled in plastic. The next time they went back, the manager told them they outsold the other guy hands down and they got the whole shelf space for Burbach Countryside Dairy. Sales have doubled in the short time they have been bottling.

The Burbachs sell their milk to Dairy Farmers of America who have been very cooperative with the family in their early and unpredictable days of business.

Burbach could bottle as many as 600 gallons of milk/hour but has not had to bottle that kind of volume yet. They are still learning all the techniques of running the equipment but if they get 250 gallons bottled, Burbach said they are cooking.

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It is a very labor-intensive production. Burbach estimates if they were to bottle 600 gallons at one time, it would take four workers ten hours. It takes a man and a half to run the bottle washer. Then another man works the machine which fills the bottles and watches the caps. Two people unload the finished product, inspect the bottles and wipe them clean. Then they are carted into the cooler, ready for delivery.

Before that process even begins, the cream is separated from the milk. Then the processed milk is homogenized to keep the remaining cream from separating from the milk in the bottles. Finally it is pasteurized and heated to kill bacteria. Each of these processes takes another hour each.

The Burbachs have seven children: Felicia, married with a daughter Hannah; Jeffrey - 17; Nicholas - 15; Deacon - 10; Luke - 9; Anna - 7; and Sara - 3. Jeffrey and Nicholas were 11 and 9 when the family started the milking operation in 1999. There will be enough work for them if they come back someday to work in the family dairy business.

The couple hopes to have a store on the farm. The cooler has glass showcase doors and are just waiting for the product to be displayed on shelves. Maybe someday all the Burbach milk will be in glass bottles - at least, that's what they dream of.

Burbach's main selling points include:

- Glass bottles preserve the fresh taste, keep the milk colder and extend the shelf life.
- Unlike paper cartons or plastic jugs, glass imparts no foreign odor or flavor.
- The milk is produced and processed on the Burbach family farm which guarantees the best quality product possible.
- Burbach milk will be on the shelf within 24-36 hours of being produced.
- It is also produced without the use of artificial hormones.
- The glass bottles are environmentally friendly and returnable for deposit.



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by Family Farmers

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does matter!

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CERTIFIED ORGANIC

Local Cheese Producer Wins Big in Chicago

By Jackie Barnhardt and Elizabeth Wolf, Open Harvest Cooperative Grocery

Congratulations to Krista Dittman for winning second prize in its class for her soft, creamy Quark at the American Cheese Society's 25th Anniversary conference in Chicago in July. This prestigious contest featured 181 producers from 30 states and 3 Canadian provinces entering 1,149 cheeses and dairy products in 94 classes.

Open Harvest celebrated Krista's victory at "A Quarky Affair" on September 13 in Lincoln. Krista offered delectable samples and recipes inspired by Quark. The co-op has been selling quark since the Dittmans' began offering it for sale. Quark is a freshly made, light, whipped cheese. While it is better known in Europe, thanks to Krista and her family and friends, Quark's versatility in cooking and baking are becoming known around these parts. Look for Quark recipes at www.openharvest.coop.

Krista and her husband, Doug, consider themselves stewards of their 230-acre certified organic dairy farm, located 15 miles north of Lincoln in Raymond. "We're committed to preserving the land and creating farmstead products that are healthy and wholesome, free of chemicals, antibiotics, or hormones. We take pride in knowing that our products are made with sustainable methods, and with very little impact on the environment," Krista says.

The on-farm cheese plant, attached to the milking facility, is cooperatively owned and managed through a partnership with ShadowBrook Farm's Dutch Girl Creamery, located in Denton. Along with Quark, Krista produces Gouda, Camembert, mozzarella, and seasonal selections. Cheeses are available at Open Harvest in the cheese case.

Organic Wheat Conference

"Add Another Valuable Cash Crop to Your Organic Rotation"
Saturday, January 10, 2009, Noon to 4:30 PM - Agricultural Research Development Center, Mead, NE

- UNL Organic Wheat Breeder, Richard Little, will share results from the 2008 Organic Wheat Variety Trials and the first year results.
- Organic Farmer Panel discussion on cultural practices, weed control, varieties used, crop rotations, storage, and marketing.
- Organic Grain Buyer panel will talk about markets opportunities, quality issues and contracts.

Lunch will be sponsored by OCIA Nebraska Chapter #1 and feature foods from local artisan, Bread Baker's.

For more information, contact Pat at 402-584-3837 to register for the conference and reserve lunch. \$20.00 per person includes lunch.

“How I Spent My Summer Vacation”

by Beginning Farmer, Annie Berical

I've reached a mid-point in my first attempt at raising hogs on pasture, and I thought I'd offer my experiences and misadventures up as a lesson in what one should and shouldn't do when first starting down the road toward custom feeding pigs.

I bought eight 50 lb. Red Wattle hogs from Travis Dunnekacke in mid July, and at that time, I knew next to nothing about pigs. This was the first group of pigs I'd even raised. Heck, I'd never even had occasion to be around pigs until they arrived at my place one afternoon ready to be taken care of. But, armed with a couple of books and some advice from my sage, eighty-year-old grandfather who'd raised Spotted Poland Chinas in his youth, I was going to do it the hard way, well, at least the unconventional way: on pasture.

I started with minimal equipment: a metal trough, a rubber water tub, a role of Premier One electric netting, and a calf hutch. The Red Wattles arrived at the end of a hot July day after a long ride in the back of a pickup truck from Iowa. I took it as a good omen that they still had the energy to run and explore their small paddock after a day in full sun. Red Wattles, I've learned, are a fine breed for raising outdoors with Spartan accoutrements. They withstand the elements well, they don't sunburn, and they adapt quickly to pasture life. The young pigs began to eat grass as soon as they were helped out of the truck. My first victory was choosing the right breed of pig.

I had it in my head that I'd raise custom fed pigs; I read a lot of “The Stockman Grass Farmer,” and I've learned from that publication that in order to create demand for your product, it's smart to provide something unique. I had access to all the whey I could use from the small artisan cheese facility at Branched Oak Farm just two miles down the road. I had a hunch that the combination of pasture, fresh air, and organic whey and skim milk would keep the pigs plenty healthy. Whey contains a small amount of protein, but it is of excellent quality. So far, so good. I started asking around about what people wanted in a custom pig because I wanted what I was offering to be special. There were quite a few potential customers who thought a pig raised without corn or soybeans would be just that. I decided to market the pigs as pastured, no corn, no soybean, whey fed pigs, and they sold via direct marketing to Branched Oak Farm customers and co-workers by the end of August. Initially, I was able to buy organic barley and alfalfa pellets from Grain Place Foods in Marquette, which gave me a ration containing 17% protein. I've learned that above all, the correct amount and quality of protein in a pig's diet is critical to their steady growth and health. A 17% protein ration is probably on the low side if we consider most commercial rations and my pastures were low on high quality legumes which might have boosted the total protein the pigs

were getting each day. The alfalfa pellets were probably an adequate substitute for other conventional, higher protein ration additives like soybean meal, but I soon learned that my picky pigs just would not eat them. I even tried sweetening the pot with molasses, but to no avail. Soon enough, the supply of inexpensive barley screenings from Grain Place dried up (they ground them and fed them to their own pigs—go figure!) and I had to search for them via farmers in the local organic community and found a reliable source in Tom Knopik for a good price.

I tried to find fish meal to add protein to the pigs' diets, but found that impossible. There wasn't a feed mill around that carried the stuff, and part of me was grateful. The thought of handling fish meal every morning before breakfast wasn't at all appetizing. But, I still had a dilemma on my hands: what would I feed these pigs that would provide them with the stuff they needed to grow at an acceptable pace? My solution was to continue feeding them 40 pounds of barley and 25 gallons of whey every day. Not the most creative solution in the world, I admit, but I had to use what I could get easily. I noticed that a lot of that barley got excreted virtually whole to rejuvenate my pastures. That was both positive and negative. On the one hand, I had barley grass coming up everywhere and would easily get a second rotation off my pasture, but on the other hand, in its whole form, the pigs couldn't fully digest the grain. If I had it to do over again, I'd get the barley lightly ground or rolled into a more digestible form. I believe I fed far more than I might have had I not made this mistake. The extra cost of processing would no doubt have been made up in saved feed.

The pigs still grew and remained healthy and vigorous, and I was still going to be able to provide my customers what I'd promised: pigs fattened on an unconventional diet. But, I must admit, their growth has been slow and often frustrating. I'd hoped to have a 250 pound pig by the first week in December, their scheduled slaughter date, but I can see that isn't going to happen. I've learned you can't feed pigs on an unconventional diet and expect them to reach market weight in the conventional amount of time. I'm confident, though, that the final product will be excellent, though there will be less of it to sell, which will certainly be harmful to my bottom line. The lesson here is that it's smart to have a diet worked out ahead of time. I think I'd try a diet with, perhaps, 10% soybeans next time, and I bet I would reach the goals I had originally set for myself in the timeframe allotted.

When pasturing pigs, it's important, obviously, to move them frequently in order to provide the requisite nutrition and parasite control. Pigs can make quick work of your pastures, especially in wet weather. I was limited by two things: I had no perimeter fencing, and three rolls of Premier One netting 182 feet long (one for the pigs, one for the sheep, and one kept free to move the next group of animals in the rotation).

Continued on page 10

That meant I was limited to a paddock size of roughly 2000 square feet (45 x 45). Really, this is a decent size, and the pigs are moved every Wednesday and Sunday afternoon, giving them 3 and a half days on a paddock. Generally speaking, the pigs don't tear this size paddock up too terribly, and if it happens to rain and they really massacre it, I keep some organic seed on hand to replant when I move them to their new digs. This has been a huge boon to me. My pastures were mostly blue grass, brome, and fescue. Next year, I'll have added rye, red clover, and alfalfa to the mix, improving the forage for the sheep I graze ahead of the pigs and for future groups of pigs. The most important consideration in your rotation (aside from giving the pigs adequate room) is having equipment and housing that is sufficiently portable. The metal troughs are a bit on the cumbersome side, but plastic troughs would be too easily overturned by pigs rooting or jockeying for position. The calf hutch is a hassle to drag around. An A-frame house on skids would be ideal, and there are many plans for such housing available in books on pigs and livestock housing. For the most part, the pigs drink whey exclusively in a trough with their grain, so a small rubber water tub is good enough to toss into the next paddock. Nothing too elaborate is required where water is concerned except a good and ready source. Pigs appreciate a drink, and on scorching afternoons, it does wonders for their mood. It's important to note that with pigs, body temperature affects food consumption and weight gain. It's best to keep them as cool in summer and as warm in winter as possible.

When moving pastured pigs, it's important that your pigs are sufficiently tame. When you have no perimeter fencing and a very tempting stand of trees with an inviting pond therein like I do, tame pigs are a necessity. Also, whey helps a lot. Its value as a tasty treat is immeasurable. I think if you poured whey on concrete pigs would eat it. They love the stuff. To move the pigs to a new paddock, I just grab a bucket of whey and call, "pig, pig, pig" in my best cutesy voice, and they come a-runnin'. Of course, my trusty corgi, Flash, is there bringing up the rear, nipping the hams of any stragglers. Never underestimate the value of a good herding dog—especially one that's short-legged and on the level, so to speak, with your hogs. Flash is a real ham herding, pork punching, bacon biter. Overall, though, I must say that the disposition and docility of the Red Wattles is excellent. They tamed down quickly, and they're good animals to be around, if you like to make friends with your food. There are really important advantages to being buddies with your pigs, the first being that you will quickly be able to diagnose any abnormal behavior or mood shifts that might be your first clue that you've got a sick pig. It's important to spend a lot of time observing them every day, and in my case, it was imperative, since I wasn't really acquainted with what normal behavior for a pig looked like.

Be aware, though, that pigs are easily distracted while being moved to fresh surroundings. On a few occasions, I enlisted my partner, Ben, to help with the pig moving. This always

turned bad, and fast. Something about the way he smelled or looked just seemed to make them take off in all directions. They weren't scared, just distracted by him enough to ignore my calls and the goods I was offering. I'd suggest keeping the person in charge of moving the pigs consistent. If your pigs are tame to you, that's no demonstration of how they'll react to John Q. Public.

All things considered, my experiences as a novice swineherd were good ones. I learned a few things that will help me next time. Here's a short list:

- 1) Know what you're going to feed and that it's going to get you to your goals in the time frame you've set for yourself. Once you've chosen your feed, make sure you'll have a reliable and consistent source.
- 2) Have your equipment sorted out; know what you're going to use for shade and shelter and that it's portable enough not to be a hassle.
- 3) Have your slaughter dates set up months ahead of time. It gives you a goal to shoot for, and if you're slaughtering in late fall or winter, it's important to remember that deer carcasses usually have priority over your hogs this time of year.
- 4) Keep extra seed on hand; you might as well take the opportunity to reseed your pastures after the pigs have vacated a paddock.
- 5) Keep your pigs tame so that you can doctor them if necessary and move them without too much effort.
- 6) Have your feeders set up so that you can pour feed through or over the fence. Once the pigs reach a certain size, it's no fun to try and get in amongst them with food; that's a good way to spend a lot of time doing laundry.
- 7) Don't skimp on feed. Just because pigs can eat garbage doesn't necessarily mean they should; you'll take out what you put in.

To anyone who hasn't tried, I'd recommend raising a few pigs at least once. They really aren't hard animals to raise, and seem to stay relatively healthy without much hassle. Also, pigs can make a lot of meat quickly on a small frame. Plus, they're just darn interesting, and it's always fun to try your hand at something new. Sit back next summer and watch yours get more delicious by the day!



University of Nebraska-Lincoln University Dining Service/University Housing - GFL Special Meal Schedule

**Cather-Pound-Neihardt and East Campus Union Café
2008-2009**

Cather/Pound/Neihardt Dining Service

November 20, 2008 (Thursday) - GFL Thanksgiving Dinner
December 10, 2008 (Wednesday) - GFL Holiday Dinner
January 29, 2009 (Thursday) - GFL Hawaiian Luau Lunch
February 26, 2009 (Thursday) - GFL South of The Border
Dinner
March 26, 2009 (Thursday) - GFL Farmer's Breakfast
April 23, 2009 (Thursday) - GFL BBQ Dinner

East Campus Union Café

December 3, 2008 (Wednesday) - GFL Candyland Dinner
January 21, 2009 (Wednesday) - GFL Soup Supper
February 18, 2009 (Wednesday) - GFL Breakfast for Dinner
March 25, 2009 (Wednesday) - GFL Brunza Madness
April 15, 2009 (Wednesday) - GFL Breakfast for Dinner
Revisited
The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is an equal opportunity
educator and employer with a comprehensive plan for
diversity.

No-till cover crop - SARE Grant Awarded

Brian and Keith Berns, Providence Farms of Bladen, Nebraska,
received the SARE Grant. Follow their on-farm research on-
line <http://www.notillcovercrops.com/> Learn about cover crop
mixtures, moisture being used by cover crops and grazing
potential of cover crops. Lots of pictures and discussion.

OCIA R & E Micro Grant Monies Still Available for Organic or Transitioning Farmers and Processors

Are you interested in adding a new crop to your rotation?
Perhaps, you would like to experiment with a green manure
or cover crop. Maybe you grow vegetables and would like to
test the disease resistance of a different variety. Is there is
a marketing technique you would like to explore?

If you can think of a project that may benefit your organic or
transitioning operation, please consider applying for an OCIA
Research and Education, Inc, (OCIA R&E) Micro Grant. OCIA
R&E continues to accept and approve grant proposals aimed
at supporting organic research and education. Projects are
funded on a first come, first served basis, so submit an
application.

We can assist you with filling out the grant application.
Contact either Stephanie Newman at snewman@ocia.org or
postal mail to 1340 N. Cotner Blvd., Lincoln, NE 68505; or
Liz Sarno, (C: 402-309-0944) UNL Organic Educator for help.
All applications and questions should be emailed to Stephanie
Newman at snewman@ocia.org, postal mailed to 1340 N.
Cotner Blvd. Lincoln, NE 68505 or faxed to 402-477-4325.

Grant information and documents can be found on the OCIA
R&E web site at [http://www.ocia.org/ocia%20rne/
index.html](http://www.ocia.org/ocia%20rne/index.html).

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Thank you for your support!

Please clip and return to: NSAS, PO Box 736, Hartington, NE 68739.
Please make checks payable to the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society

Upcoming Events

Organic Wheat Conference - "Add Another Valuable Cash Crop to Your Organic Rotation"

Saturday, January 10, 2009, Noon to 4:30 PM - Agricultural Research Development Center, Mead, NE. Contact Pat at 402-584-3837 to reserve lunch and Liz Sarno at 402-309-4944 for more information.

2009 Midwest Organic Conference & Trade Show

January 21-22, 2009, Adam's Mark Hotel, Indianapolis, IN 4624

Organic Crop Improvement Association, International

February 7-9, 2009, Downtown Holiday Inn, Lincoln, NE Contact Angie Tuninck, at 402-477-2323 for further details and a registration form.

Classifieds

For Sale: 1st, 2nd and 3rd cutting OCIA certified organic hay. Contact: **Gerald Humlicek** at: 402-480-2001 or 402-666-2200.

For Sale: John Deere 4400 combine, 1976 with a 329 diesel engine, low hours, 213 flex head goes with it. Call or email, 402-254-2372.

NSAS Seeks New Executive Director

Applications are now being taken for the position of Executive Director of the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society. NSAS is a 501-C-3 non-profit, membership based organization with a mission to "promote agriculture and food systems that build healthy land, people, communities and quality of life, for present and future generations".

Applicants should have experience in Agriculture and Rural Development with a Bachelor's degree in related field(s). Minimum 20 hours per week expandable to full time with benefits. Salary range of between \$13 and \$20 an hour, based on qualifications.

Responsibilities will include community outreach; membership and program development; organizing annual conference, workshops and other events; grant and funding acquisition; fiscal oversight and budget management; working with BOD and staff.

Preferred that individual is location in Eastern Nebraska, work from home and is computer literate and has email connectivity. Some compensated travel will be required. Email cover letter and resume to ED@nebsusag.org by December 1, 2008.

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