

100 Types of Organic Vegetables on 400 Responsibly Managed Acres

July 2008
Number 118

In This Issue

Sustainable Agriculture in New Farm Bill.....	3
Update on Noble Blade Experiment.....	4
Land Management Workshop.....	4
UNL Organic Farm Tour.....	6
Wind Power in Nebraska.....	7
Organic Farming Initiative.....	8
Conservation Reserve Program Decision.....	11
Events.....	12

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.

Courtesy of American Farmland Trust: <http://www.farmland.org/default.asp>

2008 Steward of the Land Nash Huber of Nash's Organic Produce

American Farmland Trust is proud to recognize Nash Huber of Nash's Organic Produce as our 2008 Steward of the Land. The award recognizes Huber for his leadership in protecting agricultural land, local food and the environment. He is the first Washington state farmer to receive the award, which honors the memory of Peggy McGrath Rockefeller, an avid farmer and conservationist who helped found American Farmland Trust.

Huber manages over 350 acres in the Dungeness River Valley on the Olympic Peninsula using environmentally sustainable farming practices. Nash's Organic Produce is known throughout the Northwest for its quality organic food. The farm is situated in a unique microclimate that allows Nash and his team to produce food year-round, which they sell directly to the public at Nash's farm store, local restaurants, five farmers' markets, and through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program.



Huber and his wife Patty McManus are important advocates for the preservation of farmland, and they are recognized throughout the West Coast for their leadership. Huber's participation has been central to a variety of efforts to both raise public awareness about the issue and to actively protect agricultural land in Clallam County, which has lost 75 percent of its prime farmland to residential development in the last 50 years.

Nash's Organic Produce: Leaders in Conservation and Healthy Food

Nash Huber has created a training ground for future farmers who are growing healthy food, supporting their local economy, protecting the environment and providing wildlife and salmon habitat.

- Nash's Organic Produce **protects water quality** by participating in public campaigns for water protection and by creating vegetated buffers near creeks, rivers and ponds. The farm is certified "salmon safe" and has participated in Washington's Pioneers in Conservation grants program, which funds projects that protect salmon habitat on agricultural land.
- Land managed by the farm **provides migratory waterfowl habitat for dozens of types of birds**. Grasses and trees have been planted to ensure quality habitat for wildlife.

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The NSAS Newsletter is published six times a year. We welcome articles, letters and other contributions. Articles appearing in this newsletter may be reproduced with permission; please credit the authors and the NSAS newsletter. *Newsletter submission deadlines are the 15th of even-numbered months.* Inquiries pertaining to the content of this newsletter should be addressed to:

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- The farm uses a **chemical-free pest control management program to deal with insects naturally** and without harm to the environment. And the farm has an extensive composting program that nourishes the soil using natural byproducts from dairy farms, fish processing plants and the farm's vegetable packing operations.

- Huber has helped to **save hundreds of acres of local farmland** and important wildlife habitat through his work with the PCC Farmland Trust, the North Olympic Land Trust, Clallam Citizens for Food Security and Friends of the Fields, of which Huber was a founding member.

Commentary - Liz Sarno: I had the opportunity to meet Nash and visit his farm in the breath-taking beautiful Dungeness River Valley on Washington's Olympic Peninsula because my sister and her husband work for Nash. Nash has the distinction of being the **first organic, vegetable farmer** in Washington State to receive this award. However, when I visited the farm I saw a bigger picture developing on Nash Huber's farm. Nash's farm has generated a sustainable farm community around it that I think is worth adopting here in Nebraska.

Anyone with a large market garden knows how much labor and care goes into producing quality produce. Four hundred acres would be daunting except Nash in his wisdom doesn't try to do it alone or with temporary help instead he has invited and hired over the years a group of young, energetic, enthusiastic employees who are passionate about what they are contributing to the farming operation. They have bought into the concept of this organic farm and are not just laborers or mangers, but caretakers for this special piece of fertile ground. These employees care for the living soil, manage the produce store, educate their consumers about eating local and healthy foods, run a catering service featuring their organic produce, work in the machine and equipment repair shop, harvest and pack the produce for farmer's markets and wholesale, develop special projects and host events to highlight the positive aspects of biodiversity their farm provides to the community. Besides producing organic vegetables, Nash has developed partnerships with other producers to raise pasture hogs and chickens on his farm. The pork and chicken help diversify products available in their on-farm store and, the livestock provides a good field rotation for the farm ground.

Emulating a farm system such as Nash's can help revitalize and rejuvenate our dwindling rural communities. His diversified operation employees many people and gives them an opportunity to expand their talents and contribute to the community. Their spirit of community and social activism has continued to attract people who support, believe and promote a philosophy of ecologically sustainable farming. What more is that they have a rural community that has a healthy attitude toward improving and creating opportunities that support many people's dreams and entrepreneurial ventures. What I saw on the farm was the cooperation of like-minded people accomplishing many diversified projects. People that work for Nash are healthy and energetic because they have the time to take off and nourish their souls and bodies. Nebraskans could benefit from adopting Nash's model of cooperative community farms because it is a great example of how to spread the economic risks, share the work load and create rural social reform. Visit Nash's Organic Produce: <http://www.nashsorganicproduce.com/>

Sustainable Agriculture in the New Farm Bill

By Corinne Kolm, NSAS Treasurer

Although far from a panacea for the problems of our food system, the new Farm Bill provides expanded support for sustainable agriculture in several key areas. "While rule-writing and appropriations will now determine exactly how the Farm Bill will impact Nebraskan farmers, important critical language was included in the farm bill that focuses on conservation," said Steve Chick, the State Conservationist for Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Nebraska. "The Secretary of Agriculture has now been directed to assure adequate technical service for organics, specialty crops and precision agriculture... (and) the Farm Bill will provide greater support for beginning, socially disadvantaged and resource limited farmers."

Support for Beginning, Socially Disadvantaged and Resource Limited Farmers:

- Eligible farmers will receive at least 25% over the base cost-share assistance rate for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), up to 90% of their total cost. Eligible farmers may also receive up to 30% of their cost share in advance for materials or contracting.
- The federal government will provide loan guarantees and assistance with contracts for eligible farmers.
- Certain competitive grant programs (such as the Value-Added Agriculture Market Development Program Grant) will designate 10% of the overall budget specifically for eligible farmers.

Support for Organic Agriculture:

- Mandatory funding for organic research projects increased five-fold over the last Farm Bill.
- Organic certification cost-share funding was increased to up to 22 million dollars from 5 million in the 2002 Farm Bill. A maximum of \$750/year is available to help cover the costs of organic certification (up to 75% of certification costs).
- The EQIP program added new language that will specifically provide support for farmers in transition to organic production.

Support for Conservation:

- Increases spending on conservation programs by nearly eight billion dollars.
- The Conservation Security Program will be increased by an additional 13 million acres. The program will be

expanded to all watersheds and will be managed at the state level.

- Adds an additional 1.22 million acres to the Grassland Reserve Program.

Support for Local Foods:

- Representative Jeff Fortenberry was successful in increasing support for local foods in the new Farm Bill. His efforts led an amendment to the National School Lunch Act that encourages institutions to purchase locally grown and raised agricultural products to the maximum extent practicable and appropriate. According to Fortenberry's spokesman, Josh Moening, the provision "allows schools and certain other government institutions to use a geographic preference for locally grown and locally raised products when purchasing food. This should be a positive development in increasing opportunities for local producers to market their products."

While this farm bill did not go as far as many hoped to improve conservation and sustainability, these are only a few of the opportunities in the Farm Bill for farmers interested in sustainable agriculture. Keep an eye out in future newsletters for more information about available programs. Also visit www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov/ for NRCS information.

Special thanks to Steve Chick for taking the time to discuss the Farm Bill and to Representative Fortenberry for his efforts to include local foods in the Farm Bill and for ensuring that the Value-Added Producer Grants Program focuses on small and mid-size farms!



Classifieds

DeBruce Grain Inc. is looking for Non GMO Soybeans (**Opportunity for Transitional Soybeans**). We will pay premiums for soybeans that test negative for GM. (99.5% pure). Depending on the location of the soybeans, the premium range: \$0.50 to \$1.00 per bushel picked up on the farm. Producers can send samples after harvest so we can check for GMOs. For more details contact: **Dale Broekemeier, DeBruce Grain Inc. 308-548-2600 or 888-548-2600 email: dbroekemeier@debruce.com**

Update on the Noble Blade Experiment

By Larry Stanislav

The Noble Blade has turned out to be a very interesting experiment, in fact I don't consider its use an experiment anymore, and it is going to be a mainstay in my tillage operations. I found it to be very effective. Nothing escapes its cutting edge and I like the type of soil tillage it does.

I was looking for something to do a shallow but effective tillage job. It does. I found I could set the blade for a 1" to 2" depth and I could really move along easily at 5 to 6 mph using my 140 horse tractor at $\frac{3}{4}$ throttles in a higher gear. Then for a second pass I'd set the blade slightly deeper and still cruise along. All the time the weeds are undercut and the soil is lifted and somewhat tumbled and crumbled. So I found I could get effective tillage, cover more acres quickly with less fuel consumption.

I found two items I was not completely satisfied with. I have a weed treader mounted on the rear of the blade and I did not feel it was as aggressive as I wanted, but this is a used piece of equipment and it appears to be well worn. The other item was that I left a shallow valley behind each blade so my field was not completely level. Maybe a more aggressive weed treader or a harrow of some type might help there.

I have to admit I was hesitant to use the blade early in the season. I should have gone out and tilled my corn and soybean acres but I thought it was too wet and too early, but I did try some passes to experiment. I should have kept going. The results down the road showed I would have had better weed control.

Some of my fields got too grassy and weedy so that I got out the disk and field cultivator to work them up. I believe now that the blade would have kept them in check with its shallow and effective tillage.



Here is probably the bigger reason I am really pleased with the blade. With the rainy season we had I was having difficulty getting my crops planted. The corn was in and I only had 25% of my soybeans planted. Finally in desperation I took the blade into my barely dry fields and undercut everything only once and then planted. I wanted the soybeans in the ground and growing. I feel the blade let me till and plant where other tools wouldn't have worked or caused soil problems. Some of my neighbors were still waiting to plant while I was able to get my crop in.

So I tried the Noble Blade originally to preserve moisture because of the dry years we had been having but I found for the small investment (Noble Blades used can run \$500 to \$4,000 depending on the condition) I was able to plant timely and control weeds with the wet conditions we are experiencing. It is another tool I would recommend organic farmers to have at their disposal. You never know what conditions you will have to face in the field so the more options you have to control weeds the better.

Land Management Workshop

Land owners, farm managers, producers, crop professionals, bankers, financial professionals, and investors should attend this workshop.

Information will be presented on trends in the land markets, land values, cash rental rate, and the land value outlook.

Topics will include land owner and tenant relationships and the flexible lease provision. Attendees will leave the event with a solid understanding of sizing-up land markets, flexible cash rent provisions, and the ability to present them in future land contracts.

Attendees will receive bound materials with current land values, land rents, and land specific data vital to the operation of today's farm or ranch.

The cost of this workshop is \$5.00 which covers materials and handouts. To register for this event, please contact your nearest extension office.

Norfolk	August 20	1-4 pm	370-4040
Ainsworth	August 21	2-5 pm	387-2213
Springview	August 21	7-10 pm	387-2213
O'Neill	August 22	10am-1pm	336-2760
Aurora	August 25	1-4 pm	694-6174
Weeping Water	August 26	1-4 pm	267-2205
Lexington	August 27	1-4 pm	324-5501



OCIA News

Organic Crop Improvement Association, Nebraska Chapter #1 Newsletter

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What to Expect When Being Inspected for Organic Certification

Liz Sarno, Alex Moreno, Stephanie Newman

Some general rules for your inspection day. It is the farmer's responsibility to have their paperwork out, organized and ready for the inspector to review.

- ✓ Recent, updated maps of all parcels/fields, organic and non-organic showing field identification, note if organic, in transition, or conventional status, buffers and adjoining land use.
- ✓ Overview map showing all fields in relation to one another. This can be obtained from your Farm Service Agency (FSA).
- ✓ Field history sheets with your crop rotations, pastures for livestock including number of acres, rates and dates of input applications.
- ✓ Documentation for fields owned or you have rented for less than three years and farmer has not been in control of the land requested for certification for NOP, 36 months prior to harvest of the crop.
- ✓ Water tests: only applicable when water is used to wash/rinse products requested for certification.
- ✓ Soil and/or plant tissue tests: only if applying micronutrients.
- ✓ Input product labels and/or list of ingredients required for all off-farm inputs.
- ✓ Seed information: invoices, seed tags, non-GMO affidavits, delivery orders, labels of inoculants. Green manure and cover crop seed information should be included. If saving your own stock seed, bin or wagon records of input and output and reason why you are saving the seeds (for feed or planting for crop).
- ✓ Labels for farm products sold as organic (bulk or retail).
- ✓ Sample of the record-keeping documents: bin records, sales invoices, Bill of Lading (BOL), scale tickets, spray letter notification, equipment clean-out records— this is especially important when the same equipment is used to harvest both crops from buffers and other non-organic fields and organic fields.
- ✓ Livestock and pasture records, if applicable.

- ✓ If you are using off-farm manure, you need a statement specifying its composition (manure, crop residues, straw/bedding, etc.), and that no prohibited substances have been applied to it (odor suppressant, weed killer, insecticide, etc.).
- ✓ Documents from previous or dual certification application, if applicable.

Prior to your inspection, confirm that your inspector is approved for all certification programs NOP, EU, Japanese Agriculture Standards (JAS), etc. and types of certification (farm, processing, etc) that you are requesting.

If you have a certified processing facility on-farm or nearby, request an approved inspector who will inspect both farm and processing facility at the same time.

Farmers being inspected should keep track of inspection time and if the inspector is going overtime he/she needs to explain why this is so. It should not be due to the farmer's unpreparedness. Farmers have rights before the inspector leaves their farm. The inspector must inform, verbally and in writing, the farmer of what he/she is reporting. At the end of the inspection the farmer should understand the contents of any papers that they are being requested to sign as the farmer's signature is legally binding.

Inspectors must record the time when they start and finish the inspection. The inspector must verbalize when the inspection is starting, when it finishes and length of time their visit took.

After the inspection report is completed and sent to the certifying agency, a certification specialist reviews your Organic System Plan, the inspection report, and all supporting materials. Following the review, a letter is sent with the organic certificate that may or may not include requirements pertaining to your operation.

To protect the integrity of the organic system, buyers should obtain a current copy of your certificate and, if required by the certifier, a transaction certificate. This ensures to the buyer the product he/she is buying is in good organic standing.



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UNL Organic Farm Tour

"Add Cover Crops in Your Rotation "

August 23rd - Saturday 10:00 am to noon

UNL Agricultural Research and Development Center, Mead, NE

Field tour of cover crops planted following organic winter wheat harvest, discussion on various cover crops that work for Eastern Nebraska, methods and equipment for weed control and cultural practices. John Quinn, UNL graduate student will give an update on the Healthy Farm Index the assessment tool being developed to help evaluate a farm's ecological and economic health. Richard Little, Organic Wheat Breeding Specialist and Coordinator, will provide update on organic winter wheat variety trial yields and agronomic data. Preliminary results from the study of wheat canopy cover and nitrogen top dressing experiments will be discussed.

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

For more information: Liz Sarno, Organic Project Coordinator, (402) 326-8777, esarno2@unl.edu

Organic Crop Improvement Association Nebraska Chapter #1

OCIA is accredited by the USDA NOP, ISO-65, IFOAM, CAQ, JAS and the Costa Rican Ministry of Agriculture for the MAG program. The Organic Crop Improvement Association was established in 1985. It is a non-profit international association of organic farmers, processors, traders, and manufacturers who have joined forces to promote partnerships, provide information to help growers improve crops and soil, build environmental stewardship, and provide certification services.

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Wind Power CBED Model and How it is Applied in Nebraska

John Hay, Extension Educator

There are a lot of topics about Nebraska Wind Power that are very complicated. I wanted to write and explain the CBED model and how it applies in Nebraska.

Background: Wind Energy Production Tax Credit (PTC) is available based on the output of electricity from a utility scale wind turbines for the first 10 years of the project. Publicly owned utilities do not qualify to receive this tax credit. This is one reason States surrounding Nebraska have seen a much faster build-up of wind projects than Nebraska. The PTC is set to expire in December of 2008 and there is speculation that it will be extended. Nebraska wanted a way to have wind developers come into Nebraska and qualify for the PTC.

Community Based Energy Development (CBED) is a model which came out of Minnesota where it was used to build many wind turbines and farms around the state. The CBED model became official in Nebraska with the passage of LB 629 in 2007. A project set up with CBED guidelines could be built in Nebraska and still be considered public power.

LB 629 says: A CBED Project must:

- Have more than 2 turbines
- Be owned by qualified owners (Nebraska Residents)
- No one qualified owner can own more than 15% of the project
- At least 33% of the power purchase agreement payments flow to the qualified owners [over the lifetime of the project]
- Each project must have a letter of support from the county board (or tribal council) where the project will be located
- The project developer must give land owners where a turbine will be located the opportunity to invest in the project

A CBED project works generally like this:

Qualified owners invest and own a small percent of the project maybe 2%. They enter into an agreement with an Equity partner (large multinational company that makes lots of money and is looking for ways to reduce their tax load) who owns 98% of the project (equity partner does not have to be a Nebraska company). During the first ten years of the project the Equity partner gets all PTC credits and 98% of

revenue. At ten years the structure flips with the qualified owners get 98% ownership and revenue and the equity partner 2% (expected life of the turbine about 20 years).

Although the C stands for Community, the qualified ownership can be from any NE resident or company across the state. There are currently only three ways a utility scale wind turbine can be built in Nebraska:

- Public utility ownership (Ainsworth, Lincoln, Valley, Kimball)
- CBED (Crofton, Bloomfield)
- Tribal ownership (no projects currently)

More information contact:

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NSAS Health Farms and UNL Rural Advantage Conference

February 13th and 14th, 2009

Midtown Holiday Inn

2503 S. Locust, Grand Island, NE 1-308-384-1330

- **Healthy Farms and Rural Advantage** provides survival skills for today's farm family
- **Holistic Management** make decisions to improve your farm's income and get off the financial treadmill
- **Gain income from your farm/acreage** as the demand for local foods increase so does the need for vegetable and fruit production learn how to cash in
- **Youth Projects** that can make your kids money on your farm/acreage and help pay for college

Other Topics: Farm Beginnings Program, Wine-Making, Bee-Keeping, Organic Production "Cover Crops and Cultural Practices", Fruit and Nut Production

Join the fun at Friday Night's All-Nebraskan Dinner and Live Auction

For more information contact Gary Lesoing at 402- 274-4755

Organic Farming Initiative

Responding to increased interest in organic farming, the Northeast Nebraska Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Council partnered with eight other areas in the state to sponsor a 3-year, statewide education program to help farmers and ranchers transition to organic production. The Organic Farming Statewide project is partially funded through a grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust. The Trust is funded by proceeds of the Nebraska Lottery and private donations and has awarded more than \$126 million to conservation projects in Nebraska since 1994.

Spurred by the Organic Transition Incentive offered by the Nebraska Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and fueled by premium prices (normally double that of commodity grains), many Nebraska farmers and ranchers want to learn more about organic production. But, because organic management requires a systems change rather than a practice adjustment, the organic “unknowns” are keeping some farmers from tackling the transition. This project is designed to provide the needed information at the local RC&D level from experienced local organic farmers, supported by three organic farming technicians. Farm tours, information meetings, and statewide gatherings will provide farmers the knowledge base and social environment needed to decide if their operation is suited for organic farming.

The nine RC&D's in the project include: Northeast Nebraska RC&D, Nebraska Loess Hills RC&D, PrairieLand RC&D, Nebraska Great Plains RC&D, Five Rivers RC&D, Trailblazer RC&D, South Central Nebraska RC&D, Panhandle RC&D, and Loup Basin RC&D.

“We recognize the growth of organic farming practices in the state and could see a need for an education program to support this type of agriculture,” says Jan Jorgensen, Northeast Nebraska RC&D Coordinator.

To learn more about the program, contact Loup Basin RC&D at 308-728-3393 or email clayton.jons@ne.usda.gov. For more information about RC&D visit http://www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov/partnerships/rcd/index_rcd.html.

Or, for more information or to request a training session in your region, contact your local RC&D: <http://www.nercd.com/> or Martin Kleinschmit, 402-254-6893, email: martink@cfra.org.

Source:

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Joe Mazour's Trip to Argentina

In November 2007, I went to Argentina on a stockman Grass Farmer grazing conference. I was there for 10 days. It was spring time there so I saw green grass and corn that was about 4 inches tall. I flew into Buenos Aires which is the capital. They said there was around 12-13 million people that lived in Buenos Aires. The latitude in Buenos Aires is the equivalent of Tulsa, Oklahoma. There were grazers from all over the USA that went to the conference. Argentina is 1 hour ahead of Eastern time. This was hard to get use to. People in Argentina like the night life. They eat around midnight every night and usually drink wine or beer with their meals.

They have the best rotation (4-5 years pasture and then the regular corn/ beans/ wheat/ oats rotation). Their rotation is the main thing I wanted to learn about. The thing I saw there that's really scary is the takeover of Monsanto and the use of Roundup on crops. We talked to some ranchers there and they wanted to know what we thought about that. Everybody in our group told them that they were against it because we have seen what it has done here.

They are also introducing feedlots to feed the corn back to the calves so they can grow faster. They showed us a study that said in 2007, 52% of calves were in feedlots and in the future it would be 62%. Before that, there were no feedlots. The number of acres in grass was 31% in 2007, and in the future it will be 11%. This is what is scary to me because it sounds just like what has happened here in the past and is still happening today.

We did see a lot of great things there and the people were all friendly and wanted to learn from us. We learned the most from people who have done things the longest and find out the problems they have so you don't have to make the same mistakes. They have the people there to teach us the kind of thing we want to know, but if it keeps going the way it is, that will all be lost. It was a great learning opportunity for me and it was fun to go there. I hope to go back sometime. I have a lot of new friends that I would not have met had I never went and that is priceless.



Wheat Breeding Research

UNL is researching aspects of including wheat crops and small grains cover crops in organic rotations at its three field locations to be certified organic this year and one location certified in 2007 (Sidney). At the three eastern and central Nebraska locations, (Mead, Concord and Clay Center,) small grains are not normally part of the conventional rotation, but are useful to provide a break in disease and insect pressure between row crops. At current prices, and with the huge demand for organic wheat, a successful wheat crop can also be lucrative. Hessco, with an elevator facility at Hastings Nebraska, is trying to source a million bushels of organic wheat for the breakfast cereal market, at prices well above the current high price for conventional wheat.

Richard Little, with 10 years of relevant experience at SDSU, joined UNL's wheat breeding team this year to coordinate breeding of wheat varieties for organic environments under a four-year USDA grant. Wheat diseases in eastern Nebraska, including fusarium head blight (also known as "scab" which produces a toxin called "DON" that should be tested for in 2008), leaf rust, common bunt and leaf spotting diseases (septoria and tan spot) are a challenge for the producer, and will be a focus of the breeding program. The breeding program will also focus on wheat quality, including antioxidants, dietary fiber and excellent gluten quality in low protein lines.

Little is also coordinating research at the four sites to examine ways to increase wheat quality with minimal additional nitrogen inputs, and to integrate and study cover crops for rotations that include wheat. Results of the experiments and breeding nurseries will be reported at various meetings, field days and in the annual Small Grains Breeding report (due in early 2009) at <http://agronomy.unl.edu/grain/report.htm> . Preliminary results for organic state variety tests are already accessible at <http://varietytest.unl.edu/winterwheat/2008.html> .

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What Farm Beginnings Has Meant To Me

By Ralph Tate

My wife and I were in the first Farm Beginnings class offered in Nebraska in the fall of 2005. I found it to be an excellent way for someone such as myself, with no farm background, to understand the planning, scheduling, budgeting, and marketing aspects of farming. Although we didn't discuss the mechanics of farming, since there was a diverse group of people in the class who were focusing on different enterprises, we did get an excellent number of guest speakers who shared their activities and operations so we got to understand a broad spectrum of experiences.

The elements of the program that were most meaningful to me included farm visits, when we went to local farms to understand what they were doing, how they were doing it, the issues they were dealing with, and their future plans. In addition, the class introduced us to a great group of people. We became more involved with the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, attended their conferences, made connections with beekeeping and organic farming, and in general, have been able to connect with people all over the state who share a common interest in land stewardship and sustainable agriculture.

For anyone who has a desire to improve the quality of their lives while at the same time improving the quality of the land around them, I would strongly encourage them to take the Farm Beginnings class. They will be glad they did.

For more information on Farm Beginnings contact:

Gary Lesoing, Nebraska SARE Coordinator
University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension, Nemaha County
(402) 274-4755

*The cost is \$500, with a \$200 rebate following completion of the Farm Beginnings class.

Renewable Energy Fair

Location: Cedar County Fairgrounds
September 18, 2008 - 9:00 am to 4:00 pm

Want to do something about energy, but not sure what? Come to the Renewable Energy Fair at Cedar County Fairgrounds--we have something for everyone.

- Learn about small and utility-scale wind turbines
- Observe bio-diesel being made
- Listen to discussion on hybrid and electric cars
- Learn about USDA programs on energy efficiency and renewable energy systems
- Gain the concepts of home-built solar heaters and energy conservation programs and practices

Contact: Martin Kleinschmit, Center For Rural Affairs for more informaton. 402-254-6893

STATEMENT OF SECRETARY ED SCHAFFER DISCUSSES CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM DECISION

Washington, D.C. July 29, 2008

“We have just completed a very thorough review of whether we should allow the early release of acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) without penalty to land owners.

After carefully considering recent crop reports and weather conditions, the price trends we are seeing in grain markets and the likelihood of increasing land for crop production, we have decided not to allow the penalty-free release of CRP land at this time.

Despite the damage and disruption caused by the very severe floods that hit the Midwest last month, the indications so far are that the impact on this year’s corn and soybean crops will be less than was originally feared.

The markets have been reacting favorably to the good growing weather we have been experiencing in recent weeks and encouraging reports on crop conditions. Cash prices for corn are down 25 percent – and for soybeans, 14 percent from their record highs last month.

Even with the damage and delays in planting caused by the floods, this year’s corn crop is on track to be the second largest on record with an anticipated harvest of almost 79 million acres.

The strength of the commitment America’s farmers have made to meeting the nation’s need for corn for food, feed and fuel use has reassured the markets that there will be an adequate supply available this year.

The recent easing in prices is helpful to the livestock industry and will allow current CRP contract holders to make informed decisions about whether they want to take an early exit from the program.

Another factor we considered is the simple reality that under the provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill, and the terms of existing CRP contracts, total acreage in the program is going to drop without any action by USDA.

In the 2008 Farm Bill, Congress lowered the cap on the total number of acres allowed in the CRP program from 39.2 million acres to 32 million acres.

As a result, the 34.7 million acres now enrolled in the program will have to shrink.

And looking out over the next few years, we have 1.1 million CRP acres scheduled to expire on September 30th of this year, and that number jumps to 3.8 million acres on September 30th, 2009 and then 4.4 million acres on September 30th, 2010.

So, large blocks of land will be available for other uses – if land owners chose to pursue them.

Owners, of course, also have the option of taking their acres out of the program early in exchange for returning all payments they have received plus interest and a penalty.

This spring, the number of acres being withdrawn early – with financial benefits being repaid – was running more than 50 percent higher than last year. So where this option makes economic sense to contract holders-they clearly are willing to use it.

The action we took in May to allow haying and foraging on up to 24 million CRP acres this year-after the primary nesting season ends-provided contract holders with another choice for managing their lands and feeding livestock.

We believe the decision that we are announcing today strikes the best possible balance between supporting programs that protect our natural resources and meeting the nation’s need for grain production. “

Pasture Walk Tour

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), UNL Cooperative Extension Service, and the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District (LENRD), have worked together and planned an informational tour of different grazing systems for you to take a walk on. We have scheduled a Pasture Walk Tour for Thursday Aug 21, 2008. The program is scheduled to begin at 3:30 p.m. in Pierce County. The Lower Elkhorn NRD will be providing beverages and snacks at each location and supper following the last stop at the Plainview Park. The program will conclude approximately by 8:00 p.m. at the last site in Pierce County. An agenda is enclosed.

Dana Larsen (NRCS State Range Management Specialist), Wayne Ohnesorg & Terry Gompert, (Extension Educators), Scott Wessel (Nebraska Game & Parks), Chad Schomberg, Animal Nutritionist, Brad Prauner, Territory Manager for Gallagher and other NRCS personnel will help answer your grazing management questions, minerals & animal nutrition, proper installation & other tips to get the most from your electric fence.

So come out and take a walk on some rotational grazing systems, bring your questions, grazing ideas and enjoy an evening of site seeing and information. If you have any questions please give me a call. We hope to see you there!

Sincerely,

Joyce Reichs
Soil Conservation Technician
NRCS
402-329-4996

The Niche Pork Learning Group

Anyone raising pigs for a niche market, whether that be a niche pork company or for direct sales, is invited to participate in a Learning Group that meets the last Wednesday of selected months. The initial kick off of the group was held in February and March, with niche pork farmers from three states meeting in-person to share ideas. The next meeting scheduled will be a tele-conference on the last Wednesday of July. The main topic for that meeting is dealing with heat stress. This is not a closed group, new participants are welcomed.

The simple basis behind the Learning Group is the belief that niche pork farmers have a wealth of knowledge and experience and very few occasions to share and swap ideas with other farmers.

Years ago Allan Nation, editor of the Stockman Grass Farmer magazine, reported about the six critical components, all of which had to be in place to create technological change (think successfully raising pigs without antibiotics or farrowing crates.)

1. Hardware: The tools needed must be available.
2. Software: The knowledge of how the tools work must be available.
3. Communication Pipeline: There must be a way to easily and quickly transfer new knowledge about the technology. (Think newsletters, magazines, the internet, etc.)

4. Hardware Exchange: There must be a way for the end user to see and “test drive” the latest tools in the technology.
5. Services: There must be consultants and specialists available to provide unique knowledge on a la carte basis.
6. NETWORK: There must be a communications network among the technology practioners (farmers) to prevent them from making the same mistakes, to quickly pass along anecdotal success stories and breakthroughs in the technology. This allows the technology to move forward much more quickly.

The Niche Pork Learning Group is based on the highly successful Grazing Management Groups that are fairly common with grass based dairy farmers in other States. Some of these farmer groups have been meeting monthly for over 10 years.

If you want further information on the group, and/or want to be included in the mailing for the next meeting, contact, Richard Ness, Extension Educator, Norfolk, NE at: 402-370-4061 or, rness3@unl.edu.

Support Sustainable Agriculture in Nebraska

Join NSAS Today!

Name _____
 Address _____
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 Phone _____

- \$25 Student \$45 Family/Individual \$60 Sustainer \$100 Steward \$250 Benefactor \$100 Business

Total Enclosed _____ Check here to be added to the NSAS listserv _____
 Check here to receive e-mail notification of newsletter _____ or hardcopy _____

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

August 9, 2008, 9:00 AM: North Star Neighbors Tour: Hayrack rides, pasture walks, displays and demonstrations. Coffee and rolls available in the morning and lunch will be served at 12:00 noon. RSVP's appreciated. Contact: Jim Knopik at 1-877-617-2333. Directions: From Fullerton, NE., go west on Highway 22 nine miles to the North Star sign or North 180th Ave. Go north 12 mi. They are the first place on the east side of the road.

August 24, 2008, 1:00 PM - 5:00 PM: Self-Guided Southeast Nebraska Protein Tour: Visit all of these high-quality livestock producers on the same afternoon!

"Niche Pork Paradise": TD Niche Pork focuses exclusively on full flavored pork products. Six breeds of purebred hogs (Berkshire, Chester White, Hereford, Poland China, Red Wattle, Tamworth) are finished outdoors on the farm. Order your custom processed 1/2 or whole hog early and pick it up the day of the tour. For more information, contact: Travis Dunekacke at 402-335-0197. 62550 724 Road Elk Creek - Directions: From Jct. of Hwys. 62 and 624 Ave., 1/2 mi. east of Elk Creek. 2 3/4 mi north on 624 Ave. and 1 1/2 mi. east on 724 Road. From Tecumseh, 3 mi east on Hwy. 136 to 624 Ave. (Elk Creek Road), 4 mi south on 624 Ave., 1 1/2 mi east on 724 Road.

"Pawnee Pride Meats": Pawnee Pride Meats focuses on the food chain. They start by feeding the soil through managed, multi-species grazing, hay feeding on pasture, and the elimination of artificial fertilizers and pesticides. This strategy produces abundant and diverse perennial grasses and legumes that are consumed by our grass-only beef, pastured poultry and pasture pork. Virgin native pasture plays a major role in the development of our beef. Meat is available on the farm, and is delivered to a neighborhood near you. Contact Paul Rohrbaugh at 402-869-2396 or pawneepridemeats@alltel.net for more information. Directions: From the west edge of Steinauer, go north 1/2 mi, west 1 mi, and north 1/4 mi.

"Bluff Valley Farm": Bluff Valley Farm is a family farm owned and operated by the Ken and Mary Grace Thiltges Family. The farm specializes in production of naturally-raised meats, using no added hormones or antibiotics. Products include beef, lamb, and pastured poultry. Rotational grazed is used with lamb and poultry. Organically-grown hay and non-GMO grains are used in the operation. Products are sold at the Lincoln Haymarket Farmers' Market, the Nebraska Food Cooperative, in some natural food stores and directly to the consumer. For more information: phone (402) 245-5460. Directions from Falls City, Nebraska are 4 mi. east on Hwy. 159, then 5 mi. north on 656 Ave., and east 3 and one fourth miles on 711 Rd.

November 6-8, 2008: 16th National Small Farm Trade Show & Conference: Boone County Fairgrounds, Columbia, Missouri. 50+ talks, 150+ exhibitors, a poultry exhibition, and demos. The stock dog clinic will be held on Wednesday, November 5, 2008. For more information, visit www.smallfarmtoday.com or call 1-800-633-2535 to register.

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