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Research and Teaching Organic Farming in Europe

by Chuck Francis

In the Midwest we often read about the success of organic and ecological farming in Europe. Austria and Switzerland have the highest current rates of production and sales of organic food, somewhere over 10% of total food in the country. Other countries also have active research programs on organic systems, seeking new practices and fine-tuning rotations that will maximize use of internal resources on the farm that can substitute for purchased inputs. For a good overview of current activities, the web site maintained by a cooperative group of research centers is a place to start [<http://www.organic-europe.net/>].

Several key research stations are dedicated to improving organic practices and systems in Europe. Among them, the FiBL (Research Center for Organic Farming) in Switzerland is one of the oldest and best known [see <http://www.fibl.org/english/index.php>]. There is a Witzenhausen campus of the University of Kassel in Germany that is entirely dedicated to research and teaching of organic farming. For over 20 years, organics have been central to the program, although the center was founded in 1898 as a school for study of tropical and sub-tropical agriculture [see <http://www.uni-kassel.de/agrar/?c=63&language=en>]. The DARCOF center in Denmark has a recent and rich history of research on organic systems, and it is currently in the middle of the third cycle of research on systems appropriate for Denmark [see <http://www.darcof.dk/>].

A number of countries have even set national goals to achieve, for example Sweden is striving to have 20% of their food supply organic by the year 2015. In fact the Swedes reportedly have already reached this goal in 2007, although only half of the supply is actually certified organic. The rest is sold in local markets to people who know the farmers, and thus the system "certifies itself" based on local knowledge and trust. For both farmers and consumers this approach seems to work at the local level, although the farmers do not receive the subsidies for conversion to organic that they could collect from EU sources if they were officially certified.

There are other research centers and courses in organic farming in a number of European Universities. At the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, for example, there is a series of three undergraduate courses leading to the BSc degree, while one distance and two resident courses are offered at the MSc level. The latter are conducted each autumn semester under the titles, *Agroecology and Farming Systems* and *Agroecology and Food Systems*. These have been described in a previous NSAS newsletter. The courses continue to attract students from the Nordic region, other countries in Europe, and from developing regions.

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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.

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NSAS News: If You Haven't Heard...

Whole Foods Market Community Support Day: Our total received contribution from the Whole Foods Market Community Support Day (aka 5% day) on September 18, 2007 at the Whole Foods in Omaha was \$2,378.16! We're excited by the response and generous funds allocated towards NSAS, and the money will go towards supporting Farm Beginnings and Buy Fresh, Buy Local Nebraska.

Many thanks to Whole Foods, and thanks to our volunteers that represented NSAS that day: Randy Wattermann, Liz Sarno, and Debbie Hunsberger.

Our new logo from the Minnow Project: Many years, many ideas and much discussion later, we are grateful to the Minnow Project, a Lincoln, NE design studio for working with us and creating the new logo for NSAS. We are pleased to begin using it on our materials and appreciate the Minnow Project's generosity with their time and talents!

Call for Auction Items: Our annual fundraiser auctions are scheduled similarly as previous years; the live auction will be during the February 1, 2008 all-Nebraska Dinner at our Healthy Farms Conference at Metro Community College in Omaha. The Silent Auction will again be an all-day Saturday (February 2) event. These are two successful and fun fundraisers. We ask your support now and later: now in gathering fabulous items, later in joining in on the auction action. Large and small ticket items are hoped for...let Ruth know if you have something, need ideas or an official letter of request to provide to a donor. Thanks!

Use PayPal to Renew or Join NSAS On-line! Strapped for time, want to do your holiday shopping in one fell swoop (what 10 year old wouldn't want a student NSAS membership as a gift?!) or just like the convenience of on-line renewal...visit www.nebsusag.org and click on *Join NSAS*; you'll be headed toward never having a lapsed membership again!

NSAS has a great listserv: E-mail Ruth at rchantry@nebsusag.org to join our NSAS listserv. At this time membership isn't required, but strongly encouraged. It's a great forum for sharing articles of interest, latest news and events or asking "where can I find...?"

Western Conference Returns! Don't miss all the information for the NSAS co-sponsored Western Conference scheduled for December 1, 2007 in Sidney. See page 7 for more information!

Annual Conference Sponsorship/Exhibitor Forms: Look for the information on page 6 and the insert in this newsletter. They are also available on the website at www.nebsusag.org or by contacting Elaine at ecranford@nebsusag.org.

Volunteers Welcome! NSAS has an on-going need for volunteers to help with a variety of tasks. Some activities include representing NSAS at event exhibit tables, the annual conference, and with specific projects such as Buy Fresh, Buy Local Nebraska. Let us know if you want to pitch in. E-mail or call Elaine or Ruth (contact information on sidebar).

Conservation Funds Application Deadline Announced

EQIP now provides assistance to farmers wishing to transition to organic agriculture.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced that December 14, 2007, will be the cutoff date for funding applications in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

In 2007, over \$26 million were committed through EQIP to help Nebraska farmers and ranchers protect natural resources. EQIP is a voluntary conservation program available through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Through EQIP, farmers may receive financial and technical help with conservation practices on agricultural land.

In the past EQIP cost share dollars went primarily to conventional farming practices. This year's sign up has new opportunities for those wanting to convert to organic agriculture.

EQIP will provide an incentive payment ranging from \$30 to \$70 per acre for the conversion from a conventional cropping system to an organic cropping system. The cost share rate is dependent on geographical area and whether the cropland is dryland or irrigated.

There are also cost share dollars available for transition to an organic grazing system. That incentive payment is \$10 per acre. EQIP can also provide cost share dollars to install a planned grazing system, which may include range seeding, cross fence, watering systems and pipeline.

The goal of EQIP dollars is to provide a financial incentive to encourage landowners to protect their natural resources, resulting in cleaner air, water, and more wildlife habitat. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program has become the most widely applied conservation program on private lands with more than 5.9 million acres under contract in Nebraska.

People interested in applying for EQIP should contact their Natural Resources Conservation Service office. For information about EQIP and other conservation opportunities available through NRCS, visit www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov/programs.

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Buy Fresh, Buy Local Nebraska

by Billene Nemec, Initiative Coordinator

Buy Fresh, Buy Local Nebraska expands local markets for growers, increases the consumption of local, healthy food in a variety of venues, helps to diversify the economic base, and promotes the protection of our ecological and scenic resources in Nebraska. There has been a noticeable increase in consumers buying locally grown because it allows them to choose food from farmers they can know and trust. As the consumers begin to build their relationship with the producer, there comes the understanding that buying local protects open space and farmland by keeping local farms economically viable. Buying local keeps their food dollars circulating in their and the producers' communities.

Demand is growing because the consumer, who desires to eat more pleasurably, healthfully and sustainably, is demanding sourcing of local food from the farmer, the restaurant, the institution, the coffee shop and the grocery. Are you a local food producer or thinking about becoming one? Do you know of or sell to an institution, restaurant or grocery that sources, serves or carries at least two fresh locally grown/raised products? Please contact Billene Nemec so they can join as a business supporting this exciting state-wide initiative. Contact information: Billene Nemec, 103 Miller Hall, Lincoln NE 68583-0711 or bnemec2@unl.edu or 402.472.5273. Sponsorships and memberships are now being accepted for for 2008. Visit www.buylocalnebraska.org for more info!

European Organics continued:

What is noteworthy is that the current national goals in a number of countries are not matched by adequate teaching and current research to help the countries reach those goals. Much research and the majority of teaching still centers on conventional, chemical-intensive systems. It is this disconnect that is of great concern to those trying to build courses and curricula to help support national objectives.

Recently, the European Network of Organic Agriculture Teachers (ENOAT) met in Pieve Tesino, a small rural village in north-east Italy, to discuss progress in teaching over the past year. The topic this year was integration of teaching and research in organic farming and food systems. One conclusion was that both programs could benefit by closer integration, although many admitted that this will be difficult to achieve in our conservative university environments. It will be a fun challenge to work with teachers from Italy, Germany, and Norway to bring together the proceedings of this workshop, and it will be published in early 2008 by the Agroecology Program of the University of Tuscia in Viterbo, Italy. There is much we can learn by reaching back toward our roots in Europe to see what they are doing in organic farming, and build on that foundation as we design new systems for the Midwest.



OCIA News

Organic Crop Improvement Association, Nebraska Chapter #1 Newsletter

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First Year of Flaming Project at UNL Haskell Agriculture Lab in Concord

by Santiago Ulloa C.

There is an increased interest in organic production among farmers and industry in the United States. This interest is based on the increasing consumer demand for organic foods. In organic cropping systems weed control ranks as the number one problem that limits crop production. Hand weeding and cultivation are the most popular physical methods for weed control used by organic growers. However, labor cost associated with hand weeding is high, and repeated cultivation increases the chance of soil erosion and could cause the emergence of new flushes of weeds. Propane flaming could be one alternative for weed control in organically grown field crops.

The purpose of flaming is to transfer heat from the flames to the plant leaf increasing the temperature of the plant cells. This increment in temperature causes coagulation of cell proteins and induces cell membrane rupture. After protein coagulation and leaf cell disruption, soil nutrients and water cannot be translocated causing major plant injuries or even plant dead.

In order to optimize use of flaming as a weed control tool, the response of major weed species and crops must be determined. Depending on the desired level of weed control, or tolerable crop injury level, a propane dose could be selected to either control the weed, or reduce its growth thereby offsetting its competitive ability against the crop. Goal of our experiments in 2007 was to develop baseline information on crop and weed tolerance to broadcast flaming. The specific objective was to evaluate dose response for propane on several major weeds and field crops in Nebraska.

A series of field experiments were conducted during summer 2007 to determine the response of crops and weeds to broadcast flaming utilizing different rates of propane. The species evaluated were: maize, sorghum, soybean, sunflower, red clover, alfalfa, barnyardgrass, green foxtail, velvetleaf, field bindweed, waterhemp, morning-glory, venice mallow, kochia, yellow foxtail and red-root pigweed.

Flaming treatments were applied with the flamer mounted on a four-wheeler. The flamer provided open flames using propane as source of combustion. The flamer had 4 burners separated 12 in. away from each other. Burners were located 7in. high from the soil surface and were angled at 30° to the soil. Flaming treatments were applied using a constant speed of about 4 mph. Varying propane pressures included: 0, 10, 30, 50, 70 and 90 psi, respectively. The propane rates applied were 0, 4, 7, 11, 15 and 19 gal/a. Plant response to flaming varied depending on the species and growth stage.

-- continued page 5

Grow Your Own Nitrogen Utilizing Cover Crops Workshop Offered

Learn to reduce costly inputs and learn how to "Grow Your Own Nitrogen," produce organic matter and build your farm's soil health with discussion of sustainable agriculture with applications for organic systems. Learn about effects of flaming on weeds and crops and hear results of UNL's Healthy Farm Index.

Workshop is January 12, 2008 from 1:00 PM - 4:30 PM at Hardin Hall Auditorium, UNL East Campus, Lincoln, NE (Northeast corner of 33rd & Holdrege Sts.).

Dr. Jeremy W. Singer, Ph.D., will focus on the use of annual and perennial cover crops for nutrient cycling, biological control, and weed suppression. He will also address current use of cover crops in the Corn Belt and factors associated with their use, and USDA-ARS work on annual winter cover crops, self-seeding annual winter cover crops and perennial cover crops. Dr. Singer is from the USDA-ARS, National Soil Tilth Laboratory in Ames, IA.

Results of 2007 Flaming Project at Haskell Ag Lab: Santiago Ulloa, UNL graduate student, will present his research on crop and weed tolerance to broadcast flaming, including his evaluation of dose response for propane on several major weeds and field crops in Nebraska.

Healthy Farm Index: John Quinn, UNL graduate student, will discuss avian, vegetation, and insect diversity collected at 19 organic farms within Nebraska's four agroecozones. Find out how the Healthy Farm Index will help you evaluate your farm's economic and ecological health.

To register: Contact Pat at 402.584.3837. Cost: \$15 per person. Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) Credits Applied For.

Sponsored by Nebraska Organic Crop Improvement Association & UNL Organic Farming Systems.

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Flaming Project continued:

Broad-leaf weeds were susceptible to flaming, 11 - 15 gal/a of propane was enough to obtain 90% control in most of the broad-leaf weeds. Grasses were more tolerant than broad-leaf weeds. Propane rate of 19 gal/a was necessary to get 90% control in grasses. Grasses at early stages maintain their growing points below ground for this reason they are able to re-grow after flaming. Maize and sorghum were less susceptible at the very early stages (V2), 11 gal/a of propane produced about 20% damage.

On the contrary, less than 7 gal/a was enough to produce 20% damage in soybean, alfalfa, red clover and sunflower. Our next step would be to find options to control weeds avoiding crop damage. Propane flaming is not an individual practice for weed control, however, it has potential to be used widely in organic agriculture.

For more information contact:

Santiago Ulloa C.

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Haskell Agriculture Laboratory

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2008 NSAS Healthy Farms Conference Sponsorship Packages

Our Annual Healthy Farms Conference will be held in Omaha at Metro Community College on February 1 and 2, 2008. Workshop Tracks will include: Food and Health Connections, Acquiring and Preparing Local Foods, Small Farm Opportunities, Common Sense Conservation, and a Youth Track. Space is limited; return your forms today!

Sustainer Sponsor (\$1000+)

- Name and Logo Recognition in Healthy Farms Conference Materials
- Name and Logo Recognition in NSAS Newsletter
- Name and Logo Recognition on Poster Display at Healthy Farms Conference
- Name Recognition on the NSAS website
- One Exhibit Booth
- Two Complimentary Registrations
- Two Complimentary Nebraska Dinner includes Live Auction
- Quarter-page ad in any four of the bi-monthly NSAS newsletters
- One 2008 Complimentary NSAS Benefactor membership

Supporter Sponsor (\$500-\$999)

- Name and Logo Recognition in Healthy Farms Conference Materials
- Name and Logo Recognition in NSAS Newsletter
- Name and Logo Recognition on Poster Display at Healthy Farms Conference
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- Two Complimentary Registrations
- Quarter-page ad in any three of the six bi-monthly NSAS newsletters
- One 2008 Complimentary NSAS Benefactor membership

Partner Sponsor (\$300-\$499)

- Name Recognition in Healthy Farms Conference Materials
- Name Recognition on Poster Display at Healthy Farms Conference
- Name Recognition in NSAS newsletter
- One Exhibit Booth
- Two Complimentary Registrations
- Quarter-page ad in two of the six bi-monthly NSAS newsletters
- One 2008 Complimentary NSAS Steward Level membership

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- Name Recognition in Healthy Farms Conference Materials
- Name Recognition on Poster Display at Healthy Farms Conference
- Name Recognition in NSAS newsletter
- One Exhibit Booth
- One Complimentary Registration
- Quarter-page ad in one of the six bi-monthly NSAS newsletters
- One 2008 Complimentary NSAS Membership

Scholarship Donor (\$100-\$199)

- Name Recognition on Poster Display at Healthy Farms Conference
- Name Recognition in NSAS Newsletter after Healthy Farms Conference
- One 2008 complimentary NSAS membership
- Scholarship recipients will be informed of the donor and/or organization name

Please see the tan insert sheet for sponsor and exhibitor forms. To be included in conference materials, return form (address on form) by November 30, 2007. Last year, our conference served 225 guests from Nebraska and neighboring states. Join us in supporting sustainable farming and food systems in Nebraska and our region!

Sustainable Crops & Livestock Systems Workshop for High Plains Agriculture: Practices That Work For Western Nebraska

Saturday, December 1, 2007

8:45 AM to 3:45 PM

Western Nebraska Community College, Sidney, NE

8:45 AM - 9:30 AM: Registration

9:30 AM - 10:30 AM: **Sustainable Crops and Livestock Systems for High Plains Agriculture.** Don Tanaka, USDA/ARS Research Soil Scientist. Diversity provides a key to overcoming agricultural and environmental problems and can help to ensure productive and profitable agriculture for the future. Integrating crops and livestock into a system is just one way of adding diversity. Research from the Northern Plains will illustrate a potential method of a system that provides feed to meet the nutritional requirements of dry bred cows during the winter and provide crop diversity for sustainable crop production.

10:45 AM - 11:45 AM Session (two choices):

Workshop 1: G.O.A.T.S = Grazing Operation Attuned To Soils: Michelle and Angela Wendell believe all health begins in the soil. Learn how their goats help control and harvest noxious weeds utilizing the nutrients and returning them to the biological soil. Discuss mob grazing techniques, how to rent the herd and make it pay. **Marketing Goats:** Mel and Doris Uphoff of Elwood will join the discussion to talk about their breeding herd and marketing strategy.

Workshop 2: Tried and True Diversified Operations That Work: Bryce Halstead, Kimball; Alton Lerwick, Lyman will share their knowledge of their diversified cropping operation dryland.

12:00 PM - 1:30 PM: Lunch

1:30 PM - 2:30 PM Session (two choices):

Workshop 1: Opportunities for Using Annual Forages: Aaron Berger, South Panhandle Extension Educator. Learn how annual forages can meet your livestock production goals, be used in your rotation and provide production value for livestock when perennial pastures or crop residues are deficient.

Workshop 2: Capturing Market Diversity -- The Benefits of Crop and Livestock Combinations: Paul A. Burgener, UNL Ag Economics Research Coordinator. The interaction of crops and livestock on the same farm offer a number of agronomic benefits to the system. This workshop will discuss the farm management and marketing benefits of the crop/livestock diversified farm. **Direct marketing:** John and Sarah Fehringer, Direct market meats, will join the discussion.

2:45 PM - 3:45 PM Session (two choices):

Workshop 1: No-till Cropping Systems for Stretching Limited Irrigation Supplies: Gary W. Hergert, UNL Professor of Agronomy-Horticulture. Recurrent droughts have magnified the problems associated with declining ground water in the High Plains Aquifer. Crop irrigation production functions from western Nebraska no-till will be shown. Learn how you can adapt your farm and livestock to manage with less water with new cropping systems and irrigation techniques.

Workshop 2: Organic Transition: What Farmers Need to Know to Transition to Organic Production: Dr. Tom Tomas has over 15 years working with organic certification with Liz Sarno, Organic Project Coordinator and Extension Educator, address first steps in transitioning to organic. **The Reality of the Transition:** Dennis Demmel, organic cropland farmer from Grant, will talk about his transition experience, the EQIP program which helped with transitioning costs, his cultural practices, record-keeping and marketing.

Sponsored by: University of Nebraska, Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society and Organic Crop Improvement Association NE Chapter #2. **Conference fees:** Early Fee: \$20; at the door: \$25. Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) Credits Applied For. For registration and more information about the conference or exhibitor booth information contact: Karen DeBoer, Extension Educator, UNL Extension, 308.254.4455 or Toll-free 866.865.1703 or Email: kdeboer1@unl.edu. Mailing address is: UNL Extension - Cheyenne County, P.O. Box 356, 920 Jackson Street, Sidney, NE 69162.

To download a brochure and registration form go to: www.ckb.unl.edu.

Making the Connection: Farm to Family Continues to Grow

Nutritionists, dieticians, health care professionals and family farmers from three states gathered in September 2007 at Garrity's Prairie Gardens and Hebda Family Produce near Mission Hill, SD, for a local food tour. The meeting was sponsored by Farm to Family Connection, a project aimed at increasing awareness of locally grown food.

Among the farmers presenting were meeting hosts, Dale and Rena Hebda, who operate Garrity's Prairie Gardens, marketing fruits, vegetables, pies, and jams through an on-farm store and farmers markets in Sioux Falls and Sioux City.

Garrity's was originally established by Pat and Jan Garrity 20 years ago. Last season the business was passed on to the Hebda family. Hebda's began producing food when their son began selling his 4-H produce at the local farmers market.

John and Janna Wesselius of Cornucopia at Sioux Center, Iowa discussed their produce farm, utilizing high tunnels and early season produce as a unique offering. They discussed how they came into farming and vegetables and talked about their philosophy in making a living from the family farm.

Patti Bancroft of Vermillion, SD discussed her herb gardens and vegetable marketing challenges and successes. She talked about distribution systems, contracting with farmers for specific needs and some of the hoops that farmers must pass through on their way to organic production.

Jim Knopik of North Star Neighbors, a family farm marketing group from Fullerton, NE, spoke about how several neighbors who all believed in local food and raising food naturally, banded together to establish a home delivery system for farm fresh poultry, beef and pork and his discussion led into the Nebraska Food Cooperative, where food can be ordered online and delivered for pick up in Omaha or Lincoln.

Marvin DeBlauw of Waucapona Farms near Hartington, NE, discussed how he raises and finishes grassfed beef. Marvin talked about his own beliefs, how grassfed systems are environmentally sound and how beef finished on grass and forages is superior in health benefits.

Dean Burbach of Burbach Countryside Dairy at Hartington, NE, shared about the explosion in his milk marketing business. The Burbachs have their milk in grocery and convenience stores in Omaha, Lincoln, Norfolk, Sioux City, Yankton and Sioux Falls and several spots in between. Their milk is antibiotic and hormone free, and is packaged in glass containers, which can be returned. They market whole milk, one percent, two percent, skim, cream, chocolate, strawberry and flavor of the week.

Pat Garrity, founder of Garrity's Prairie Gardens and Executive Director of the Floyd Boulevard Local Foods Market in Sioux City, spoke to the importance of bringing local food into health care institutions. Dieticians and nutrition specialists shared their own obstacles with farmers, discussing distribution, ordering, food storage and availability concerns.

A local food meal was prepared by executive chef Marlin Simpson of Fiona's Firehouse Bistro in Sioux City. Simpson discussed his own efforts to utilize local food in his restaurant and spoke of how to make more of those connections.

The meeting was sponsored by Farm to Family Connection, a local food campaign funded in part by a grant from W. K. Kellogg Foundation and administered by the Northeast Nebraska RC&D. This project helps produce "Farm to Family Connection," a weekly radio show airing Thursdays at 7:45 AM and 5:45 PM on KKYA, 93.1 FM based in Yankton, SD.

There is a companion website, www.farmtofamily.net. The Farm to Family website is sponsored by Avera Sacred Heart Hospital of Yankton, SD. The project is investigating new ways for family farmers to reach out to their customers. A toolkit for use by farm groups, consumer groups and radio stations to develop their own local food campaigns across the country is being developed. For additional information, contact Farm to Family Director Sandy Patton at 402.842.2555 or Assistant Director Curt Arens at 402.388.4798.

Taste of Nebraska Agritourism Networking Opportunity

The 2008 Governor's Agri/Eco-Tourism Workshop is set for February 5 & 6, 2008 in North Platte at the Sandhills Convention Center. New to the workshop this year is the "Taste of Nebraska Agritourism" Networking Event!

Tuesday evening, February 5, 2008, a networking event called "Taste of Nebraska Agritourism" will be held from 5:30 PM to 8:30 PM. Agritourism businesses are invited to showcase products that they sell with intentions to cross-market with others. The event will be set up like a farmer's market. There is no cost to be a part of this, however exhibitors are asked to provide samples of their products for attendees to taste. Exhibitors are welcome to sell products during this time.

If you are interested in being a part of this networking event or wanting more information, please call Karen Kollars, Agritourism Development Consultant at 308.249.3220 or email: karenk@VisitNebraska.org.

Coalition Applauds Final Grassfed Meat Label Standard

Following nearly five years of negotiations, the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) published a much-anticipated final standard (on October 15, 2007) for a new voluntary grassfed livestock marketing claim standard. The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (SAC), along with representatives from family farm, consumer, and conservation groups, has long advocated for a strong grassfed label standard prohibiting any feeding of grain, in conjunction with strict requirements for animal access to pasture or grazing. Consistent with these principles, the standard announced the Federal Register will require livestock whose products are intended to bear the USDA grassfed label be raised on a diet of one hundred percent grass or forage, and given continuous access to pasture during the growing season.

"The new USDA grassfed label standard is a victory for both sustainable livestock producers and consumers," noted Tazuer Smith, Washington Representative for the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. "With the one-hundred percent grass or forage standard in place, the industry that grassfed livestock producers developed through years of commitment to sustainable practices will be protected and strengthened in the marketplace, and consumers will be able to rely on a grassfed label that means what it says," added Smith.

With consumer demand for grassfed meat products experiencing continued dramatic increases, the grassfed label standard has been the subject of sometimes contentious debate since first proposed by USDA in December of 2002. Under the initial standard, large amounts of grain would have been an acceptable dietary component of livestock products marketed as grassfed, and no requirements for livestock access to pasture would have been directly linked to qualifying for the grassfed label. Fearing that a weak standard would jeopardize the reputation of the grassfed industry, SAC formed a coalition designed to bring sustainable farmers and their consumers to the negotiating table. The effort culminated in more than 19,000 public comments criticizing the 2002 proposal, and demanding that USDA do better. "Clearly, USDA heard this message and has responded with a rule that will serve to promote and protect an industry with enormous economic potential for sustainable livestock producers, and assurances for the consumers who are increasingly seeking out their products for health and environmental reasons," said Smith. "We congratulate the agency for being attentive to these concerns and writing a fair final rule."

Compliance with the voluntary grassfed marketing claim will be verified through the AMS process verified program, which farmers seeking to use the label must submit to regular audits. The standard prohibits livestock grain consumption through a definition of "grass or forage" that specifically

USDA Establishes Grassfed Marketing Claim Standard

The U.S. Department of Agriculture issued a voluntary standard for grass (forage) fed marketing claims on October 15, 2007. The standard will be published as a Notice in the Federal Register and is titled the U.S. Standard for Livestock and Meat Marketing Claim, Grass (Forage) Fed Claim for Ruminant Livestock and the Meat Products Derived from Such Livestock.

The grass fed standard states that grass and/or forage shall be the feed source consumed for the lifetime of the ruminant animal, with the exception of milk consumed prior to weaning. The diet shall be derived solely from forage and animals cannot be fed grain or grain by-products and must have continuous access to pasture during growing season.

The proposed standard will establish the minimum requirements for those producers who choose to operate a USDA-verified program involving a grass (forage) fed claim. The standard was published in the Oct. 16, 2007, Federal Register. Copies of the proposal and more information are available by accessing <http://www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/stand/claim.htm>; or from Martin E. O'Connor, AMS Livestock and Seed Programs, Room 2607-S, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-0254; or tel: 202.720.4486.

Coalition Applauds continued:

prohibits the presence of any mature grain. Livestock labeled as grassfed must have "continuous access to pasture" from the average date of a production area's last spring frost to the average date of its first fall frost.

Teri VanDerpol, a grassfed livestock producer based in Minnesota and national co-chair of SAC's Marketing and Rural Development Committee, puts her support behind the new standard, noting "USDA has come a long way in five years from a standard under which any feedlot animal could qualify, to a fairly tight standard that assures consumers who want to purchase grassfed meat that they are getting just that—grassfed. As a farmer who raises and markets grassfed meat, I'm very pleased with the new standard."

The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition represents grassroots farm, rural, and conservation organizations from across the country that advocate for public policies supporting the long-term economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources and rural communities. For more information, visit www.msawg.org

Farmer and Rancher Grants Available Through SARE Program

As a farmer or a group of farmers, do you have an idea that will improve your operation? These ideas have the potential to help farmers from throughout your area. The problem is that ideas usually require money to implement them successfully. There may be a possible solution to help match funds with the most innovative ideas in a twelve-state area.

The North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program is currently accepting applications for their 2007 Farmer/Rancher grant program. The NCR-SARE awards competitive grants to farmers and ranchers for on-farm research, demonstrations and educational projects. By providing funds ranging from \$6,000 per individual grant to \$18,000 for grants awarded to three families or more, NCR-SARE helps facilitate essential on-farm agricultural research and development.

The SARE program is a federally funded program designed to encourage the use of sustainable agriculture methods in today's farming environment. It replaced the Low Input Sustainable Agriculture (LISA) program in the late 1980s and has been instrumental in a wide variety of programs for sustainable agriculture.

Krista Dittman and Charuth Loth, both of rural Lancaster County, Nebraska, used a SARE Farmer/Rancher Grant to help develop an artisan cheese making enterprise in 2004/2005. Through this program they have been able to develop several cheese varieties using both goat and cow milk. These cheeses are successfully sold at farmers markets and directly on-farm. This is just one example of the wide range of projects that NCR-SARE has funded over the years. Other funded topics include pest and disease management, soil conservation, local marketing, public education, waste management, agritourism, crop diversity, and many others.

The NCR-SARE grants are awarded based on the applicants ability to describe how their project will be sustainable in terms of having long-term profitability, being good for the environment, producing healthy foods, being socially responsible and supporting their community.

This year farmers and ranchers throughout the North Central Region will have the opportunity to apply for roughly \$400,000 total grant monies. The 12 states that comprise the North Central Region are Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Grant proposals are due in the NCR-SARE office by December 3, 2007. Application forms and further information including tips on applying for this grant are available at the web site <http://ncr.sare.org/prod.htm>. Application forms are also available by contacting Jim Peterson, Nebraska SARE Coordinator, at the Washington County Extension Office in Blair. at 402.426.9455 or jpetersm@unlnotes.unl.edu.

Joan Benjamin at the University of Nebraska SARE office will also be able to provide application forms and information regarding this program. Contact her at 402.472.0809 or jbenjamin2@unlnotes.unl.edu.

After October 6, 2007, potential applicants a DVD will be available that describes and provides information on applying for these grants. The DVD is locally produced and is a product of a joint effort between the Center for Rural Affairs and the University of Nebraska. Copies will be available at many locations, including each of the University of Nebraska Extension offices throughout the state. Please feel free to give your local Extension Office a call to have the opportunity to view this program.

Resources

Meat Yield Calculator: The University of Vermont has developed this calculator so you can calculate the expected hot carcass weight and final "retail" yield for your beef, sheep, and hogs. You will need the animal's live weight (or an estimate of it), the dressing percentage, and cutting yield. You can also calculate what your customer will pay in total dollars and also in terms of pounds of meat received. You will need to know your slaughter fee, cut and wrap cost, and other fees, such as offal disposal fee. For more information and to download a copy of the spreadsheet, visit: www.uvm.edu/livestock/beef/?Page=meatyield.html

"Practical Weed Science for the Field Scout:" This publication contains 60 pages of information that will help field scouts diagnose herbicide injury problems and identify common weeds and weeds seedlings. It also contains over 150 photographs of the most up-to-date herbicide injury symptoms encountered in today's production systems as well as over 300 photographs of 98 weed species in different stages of growth. Available from the University of Missouri Extension Publications at tel: 800.292.0969 for \$3.00.

New Publication Focuses on Disaster Readiness for Organic Farmers: Published by the The Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. (FLAG) has released a new publication, *Disaster Readiness and Recovery: Legal Considerations for Organic Farmers* (<http://flaginc.org/topics/pubs/arts/OrganicDisaster2007.pdf>) (PDF/1.1MB). The new article focuses on aspects of federal disaster assistance that are of particular relevance for organic farmers. The first part of the article discusses steps that organic farmers may take to reduce the impact of natural disasters that may occur in the future. The second part of the article discusses federal programs that provide assistance to farmers in order to help them recover from natural disaster. The article concludes with information about how natural disaster and disaster recovery may affect farmers' organic certification. This article is a supplement to *Farmers' Guide to Disaster Assistance* (<http://flaginc.org/topics/disaster/index.php>).

Nebraska Food Cooperative: year-round, web-based farmer's market; continues to accept members (consumers and growers) and volunteers. Their mission is to foster a local food community and promote a culture of stewardship by cultivating farmer-consumer relationships, promoting the enjoyment of healthful food, increasing food security through diversity, and enhancing overall rural sustainability. Find them at www.nebraskafood.org or P.O. Box 94691, Lincoln, NE 68509-4691. Telephone: 800.993.2379 or E-mail: info@nebraskafood.org

The Greater Midwest Foodways Alliance: dedicated to celebrating, exploring, and preserving unique food traditions and their cultural contexts in the American Midwest. Find more information at www.greatermidwestfoodways.com.

Support Sustainable Agriculture in Nebraska

Join NSAS Today!

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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

November 3, 2007 at 11 AM: Step It Up For Climate Change Rally: Morrill Hall, UNL City Campus, Lincoln NE. See www.stepitup2007.org for more information or contact katie at joseph.katie@gmail.com.

December 1, 2007: NSAS Western Conference: Sustainable Crops and Livestock Systems for High Plains Agriculture: at Western Nebraska Community College in Sidney, NE. The conference will address integrated crop and livestock systems that work in the Panhandle. Organic certification and direct marketing topics will also be included. For additional information, visit www.nebsusag.org as well as <http://organic.unl.edu/>. See page 7 for additional info.

December 6 - 8, 2007: 2007 Acres USA Conference in Louisville, KY. Visit www.acresusa.com for updates.

January 12, 2008, 1:00 PM - 4:30 PM: Grow Your Own Nitrogen Utilizing Cover Crops Workshop: This is an opportunity to reduce costly inputs and learn how to "Grow Your Own Nitrogen," produce organic matter and build your farm's soil health with discussion of sustainable agriculture with applications for organic systems. Learn about effects of flaming on weeds and crops and hear results of UNL's Healthy Farm Index. Jeremy W. Singer, Ph.D. of the USDA-ARS, National Soil Tilth Laboratory, Ames, IA, will speak. Workshop cost is \$15. Open to the public. To be held at Hardin Hall Auditorium, UNL East Campus, Lincoln, NE. (Corner of 33rd & Holdrege Sts.). For more information and to register, call Pat at 402.584.3837. Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) Credits Applied For. Sponsored by Nebraska Organic Crop Improvement Association & UNL - Organic Farming Systems. For complete agenda & information, see page 5 of this newsletter.

February 1 & 2, 2008: NSAS Annual Healthy Farms/Rural Advantage Conference: Save the date and don't miss out. To be held at Metro Community College in Omaha. Visit www.nebsusag.org often for up-to-date information.

February 5 & 6, 2008: Governor's Workshop on Agri-Tourism: The 2008 Governor's Agri/Eco-Tourism Workshop is set for February 5 & 6, 2008 in North Platte at the Sandhills Convention Center. For more information, visit www.VisitNebraska.org or contact Karen Kollars at karenk@VisitNebraska.org. See page 8 of this newsletter for an additional exhibitor event & opportunity on February 5!

February 27, 2007: MarketPlace: Opening Doors to Success 2008: Second annual small business event at the New World Inn in Columbus, NE. Tracks are being shaped for entrepreneurs with ideas for start-up businesses, established businesses, agricultural businesses, youth businesses, and a special track for Hispanic entrepreneurs with sessions conducted in Spanish. Includes sessions covering a host of technology topics, ideas for entrepreneurial communities, and practical rural policy perspectives. For more information, visit www.cfra.org

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