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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.

## Staff Changes in Store for NSAS

by Ruth Chantry

Elaine Cranford has resigned from her position as Executive Director (a very part-time position). Cranford will remain involved with NSAS as time permits, primarily through her position at UNL-Nebraska Cooperative Development Center, which currently provides oversight for the Buy Fresh, Buy Local Nebraska Chapter coordinator and program. As this newsletter is being written, Cranford is underway on a second short mission trip to Peru over Christmas and the New Year. She and husband Matthew have had an increased interest in mission work since their last trip to Peru in June 2007. They are hoping to increase the frequency and length of their mission trips. Cranford was previously on the board for NSAS and also was an active volunteer for several years prior to her board position. Her final day with NSAS was December 21, 2007.

Completely coincidentally I have resigned my position as outreach coordinator. I have been coordinator for a bit over three years and have had a great time, especially because of all the people I have met and worked with. It has become clear to me that I am too busy keeping up with farm and family to do the job as well as I would like and bring to NSAS what it needs for outreach. My final day in the position is December 29, 2007. Sincere and heartfelt thanks to folks for stepping up to the plate so many times to make events, fundraisers and much more happen while I was in this position. For the very near future, I plan on continuing on the Buy Fresh, Buy Local Nebraska Chapter Advisory Committee.

Plans are being made for an interim coordinator and additionally for work to begin on capacity building while the board looks at next steps for staffing and strategic planning. Jill Wubben continues her bookkeeper/membership position. Wubben has been with NSAS for 13 years. If you need assistance, Liz Sarno, board president through February, or Wubben can assist you.

**NSAS is still doing great things!** The annual healthy farms conference is coming up and the brochure will be out soon and mailed to NSAS membership, and linked from [www.nebsusag.org](http://www.nebsusag.org) as soon as it is available. See more information on page 2 of this newsletter. The auction fundraisers at the conference promise to be as good as ever. The February 1 live auction will be the "entertainment" just after the all-Nebraska banquet. Don't miss out! Buy Fresh Buy Local Nebraska looks towards the next season with Billene Nemec as coordinator. This is strong state-wide chapter with potential for all sorts of events and promotion in YOUR neck of the woods. 2008 member forms are also linked from the NSAS website and are inserted in this newsletter. Additionally, plans are being made for the next Farm Beginnings class to be held, starting Fall 2008. Watch the NSAS website and newsletter for new developments.

## NSAS Board & Staff

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## NSAS News You Can Use:

**Corinne Kolm, New NSAS Board Member:** NSAS Board of Directors appointed Corinne Kolm in December 2007 to fill one of two vacancies. Kolm is the former Buy Fresh, Buy Local Nebraska coordinator, and brings with her a farming background from her youth as well as a background in Biology (her BS) and studies in Norway in Agro-Ecology. She is a certification specialist with One-Cert Organic Certification in Lincoln. Kolm has jumped in for running the auction fundraisers on-site at the Annual Conference. Welcome Corinne!

**Conference News: New this Year! Register for the NSAS Conference on-line!** You can register for the Annual Healthy Farms/Rural Advantage conference on-line at <http://cariregistration.unl.edu/showgroups.awp>. On-line registration will be available after January 2, 2008. You will see sub-groups available for registrations...look under Environment & Agriculture. Visit [www.nebsusag.org](http://www.nebsusag.org) for up-to-date information and detailed links.

**Additional Details 2008 Conference:** Dates are February 1 & 2, 2008. Registration: \$70 before January 25, \$80 after January 25. \$45 single day: \$35 Students (primary-college). Preschool and under are free. Friday evening All-Nebraska Dinner is \$25 per person. Tracks are Small Farm Production, Acquiring/Preparing Food, Common Sense Conservation, Food and Health Connection and a Youth Program.

**Key Note (Friday):** Rob Marqusee, Woodbury County, Iowa's Director of Rural Economic Development. Woodbury County made history by offering tax incentives to farmers who switch from conventional to organic farming. County Supervisors voted to provide property tax rebates for those converting to organic. In all, Woodbury County's Organic Conversion Policy will grant \$50,000 a year for five years to those farmers that participate in the program.

**Cap Note (Saturday):** Dr. Vincent Amanor-Boadu, Agribusiness Strategy expert. Vincent identifies trends and helps you position yourself to take advantage of them. He has a broad perspective of agriculture and is passionate about its opportunities. His research focuses on strategies for enhancing competitive advantages of groups using innovation, supply chains, and change management.

## *Taste of Nebraska Agri-Tourism Soon*

The third Governor's Agri/Eco-Tourism Workshop will be February 5 & 6, 2008 in North Platte, NE, at the Sandhills Convention Center. New to the workshop this year is a Tuesday evening networking event called "Taste of Nebraska Agri-tourism" from 5:30 PM to 8:00 PM. This is a chance to showcase your homemade / homegrown products, sample Nebraska made products including beers and wine, visit with possible partners to cross-market your goods, and enjoy an evening with folk and jazz artist Terri Jo Dodson.

The event will be set up similar to a farmer's market. There is no cost to participate; however it is requested that you provide samples of your products for attendees to taste. You are welcome to sell your packaged products, except for wine and beer. Each vendor will have a chance to give an "elevator speech" regarding their business or products. If you are interested in having space to showcase your Nebraska made/grown products during "Taste of NE Agri-Tourism" networking event contact Karen Kollars, Agritourism Development in Sidney, NE at 308.249.3220 or e-mail [karenk@VisitNebraska.org](mailto:karenk@VisitNebraska.org). To learn more about the Governor's Agri/Eco-Tourism Workshop: visit [www.VisitNebraska.org/industry](http://www.VisitNebraska.org/industry) to view agenda, information and to register.

## Beginning Farmer Works With Heritage & Pure Breeds: An Interview with Travis Dunekacke

by Ruth Chantry

I interviewed Travis Dunekacke in late November 2007, literally just after he had taken his load of hogs to the locker to be butchered. Find additional resource information at the end of the interview.

**Ruth Chantry (RC):** How long have you been farming?

**Travis Dunekacke (TD):** I grew up on a farm, both sides of my family farm. I grew up around grain, hay, and cow/calf farms. Ever since I've been out of high school and college, I've been in ag part or full-time. Up until September 2007 I worked in large scale swine industry. I was also in 4-H.

**RC:** Do you have an ag-related degree.

**TD:** I have a BS in psychology from Peru State.

**RC:** What kind of hogs did you work with in 4-H.

**TD:** Something cross bred from the neighbors.

**RC:** Where is your farm located?

**TD:** In the SE corner of Johnson County...on family land.

**RC:** What all are you producing now?

**TD:** In 2008 I will have purebred Berkshire, Red Wattle and Tamworth hogs. I'll start with feeder pigs in the spring and have hogs available for butcher from August - December 2008. I'll have feeder pigs in April - July 2008 for sale. I'm looking to have hogs finished off before winter because of my current feeding facilities and watering capability. I'm also going to feed some hogs out for others; if someone doesn't have the time, facilities or land, it's an option for others to try this out with me. These breeds winter over well though. Early winter is a good time to butcher and finish though if you are just starting out. Hogs do well in the fall too once the hot weather wears off.

**RC:** You've mentioned several heritage breeds of hogs. Could you tell me the criteria for being considered a heritage breed?

**TD:** Certain hogs, for one reason or another, fell out of favor after WWII. Berkshires, for example, fell out of favor then as production transitioned from lard to meat. They have great meat quality but didn't have production traits that were being sought. In the 50's Berkshires were winning taste contests. We're going full circle now. The Berkshire genetics are better now too - they've advanced a lot in the last fifteen years. Red Wattle is interesting too - it's always been a lean hog, suited more towards an outdoor system. People didn't like them because they weren't fat enough; it's very lean for an outdoor pig and was on the verge of extinction in the 50's. A guy found some in the forest in Texas. It's still a lean variety. Red wattle meat is leaner than the Berkshire, a

finer grain and makes excellent ham. Ham is by far the best part of the Red Wattle. Berkshire is more marbled juicy pork. Red Wattle takes more skill to cook. Tamworth is considered the ideal pastured pig. They have more of the wild hog look to them and are coveted for roasting the whole hog. Tamworths fell out of favor post-WWII because they didn't do well in confined situations. They aren't as heavily muscled and defined. Tamworth is considered the best bacon hog in the world, and the hams would also be excellent.

**RC:** Could you explain the difference between heritage breeds and purebreds...I suppose heritage breeds are purebred, but not the other way around?

**TD:** These are purebred to insure meat quality, to minimize the variations to from pig-to-pig and year-to-year. I would have a more productive pig if I crossed but want to keep the meat quality. I think modern white breeds - Yorkshire, Chester White and Landrace - and basically all white breeds but have been developed for their maternal traits. I've told people if you want to, cross-breed a white breed with a heritage breed, because the heritage breeds haven't been selected for litter size and other maternal traits. These heritage breed have been selected for meat quality and have terminal traits.

**RC:** How did you choose the breeds that you did?

**TD:** All three have excellent meat qualities, are easy to raise in a lower input system, and are available within a reasonable distance of SE Nebraska.

**RC:** Where do you market your hogs and meat?

**TD:** For feeder pigs I am going to market to people that want to direct market high quality pork within Nebraska. As far as my own meat, I sell halves and wholes. I certainly want to work with people that are doing direct marketing.

**RC:** Do you have plans to add additional breeds?

**TD:** Other breeds are possibilities to bring to this area. The problem is they are a long distance away to find the genetics...from Iowa on East and from I-70 in Missouri on South there are more of these breeds available. In other areas of the country, you can find all sorts of breeds; there are very few in the western Corn Belt. Large Black is one that is gaining some popularity, Gloucestershire Old Spot, Mule Foot are some other ones that are difficult to find within a reasonable distance and are very expensive. Some people don't want to sell them either; they are breeding them more for themselves and not sure how to make them available.

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# OCIA News

Organic Crop Improvement Association, Nebraska Chapter #1 Newsletter

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## Bird Conservation on Nebraska's Farmland

by John Quinn

As an agricultural state, much of Nebraska's landscape is devoted to farmland. In addition to the diversity of crops, this remarkable landscape is home to over 400 species of birds throughout the year ([www.nebraskabirdingtrails.com/](http://www.nebraskabirdingtrails.com/)). North America's grassland birds, inhabitants of many agriculture landscapes, have experienced steep region-wide declines over the past decades. Many of the species you may see in your fields each year are at risk. Agricultural practices today affect 70% of all threatened bird species.

Because of the loss of native prairie, sustainable and organic farms are an essential refuge for our resident grassland bird species. The diverse resources available on sustainable farms will be an essential component in the recovery of grassland birds. Research has suggested a number of simple management practices that can increase avian biodiversity in agroecosystems. In your fields, increased weed and insect presence in farm fields provides food and cover to birds; reduction or elimination of pesticides improves the quality of habitat; and the timing of harvest can provide the extra few days young birds need to leave the nest. On your farm, the maintenance of non-crop areas (buffer strips, riparian areas, shelterbelts) provides important habitat as does including a diverse crop rotation; and mixed livestock/crop farming can provide an alternate income source and increase habitat. The proximity and abundance of quality habitat near the farm is important. Encouraging your neighbors and other landowners to consider conservation in their land management plan will go a long way towards helping Nebraska's birds.

Two ongoing projects at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln are looking at how we can optimize bird foraging, nesting, and migration habitat on Nebraska farms. The first project was developed with input from a local farmer who suggested that bird-friendly certification for farms might add a market advantage for direct sales (as currently with bird-friendly coffee), give birds a boost, and enhance the image of farms overall (an interest noted for USDA grants) by having some percentage certified bird friendly. The first stage of development for this project is nearing completion. A questionnaire was sent out to see whether Nebraska farmers might be interested in this idea and to learn their opinions. Early results suggest that the majority of people were somewhat or very interested in a bird friendly farm program. It is interesting to note that NSAS members showed a greater interest than the general Nebraska farming population.

Our second project, the Healthy Farm Index (<http://organic.unl.edu/hfi.shtml>) is seeking to document the diversity of benefits organic farms provide to the local community, economy, and environment by building on the idea that a healthy farm optimizes more than the production of food, fiber, and fuel.

One component of the Healthy Farm Index is the conservation of biodiversity, in particular birds. By enhancing native and planned biodiversity in the fields, farms, and surrounding landscape, farmers will be better able to recognize, utilize, and potentially be rewarded for the ecosystem services that sustainable farm management practices provide. We recently completed our first round of bird surveys.

-- 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.

## Additional OCIA Events:

OCIA NE #1 annual membership meeting will begin at 9 AM with 8:30 AM registration prior to the *Grow Your Own Nitrogen Workshop* (see above). Lunch will be served at noon, followed by the workshop.

OCIA International AGMM (annual general membership meeting) will be held in Huatulco, Mexico February 28 - March 1, 2008. It celebrates the 20th anniversary of OCIA International and the 15th anniversary of OCIA Mexico!

## Bird Conservation:

continued from page 4

For the Healthy Farm Index, we are also collecting relevant insect and vegetation measures, which function as food and habitat resources for birds. Twenty organic farms were visited during the summer of 2007. Over 100 species were seen on these farms. A few highlights include loggerhead shrike, long-billed curlew, bell's vireo, grasshopper sparrow, sedge wren, burrowing owl, and lark bunting. As more results become available, we will share them in the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society newsletter.

For more information about the integration of farming and bird conservation or to participate in our research, visit our website at [www.organic.unl.edu](http://www.organic.unl.edu). Other valuable online resources are Sustainable Arable Farming For an Improved Environment ([www.saffie.info/](http://www.saffie.info/)) or Wild Farm Alliance ([www.wildfarmalliance.org/](http://www.wildfarmalliance.org/)).

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## Jim Peterson Retires from Extension Education

James M. Peterson retired at the end of December 2007 after 31 years as an Extension Educator with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, located in Washington County. Peterson has a Masters of Science degree from the University of Nebraska in Soil Science. In 2000, Peterson initiated an ambitious small farm focused program effort in southeast Nebraska. His passion for working with small farm operators led him to develop a team of educators and specialists to work on sustainable agricultural issues and value added opportunities for producers. Jim is an outstanding teacher and his skills in working with people have helped him develop very effective networks to promote sustainable agricultural programs.

Over the past seven years under Peterson's leadership, this Sustainable Ag working group has put together a number of programs including the annual Rural Advantage Conference, held jointly the past four years with Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society's Healthy Farms Conference. The 2007 Rural Advantage Conference focused on alternative agriculture enterprises, alternative energy sources and healthy foods. Approximately 190 people participated in the conference which also featured an All-Nebraska Dinner. Results of the 2006 conference indicated 50% of the participants felt the information presented would increase profitability and help them diversify and expand markets.

For the past four years Peterson has been working with a group known as the Alternative Growers Group. One of the projects was to develop a *Harvest Moon Festival* held at a local Christmas tree farm. The festival showcased different enterprises found in the region. Over 500 people, including many families attend this year. Each fall Peterson also hosts a *Summer Time in the Country Tour* which features stops at sites where producers are working on value added or diversified product ideas. Hundreds of individuals have participated in these tours to learn more about sustainable and value added agriculture.

Peterson and the advisory group also distribute several thousands of dollars in SARE Farmer/Rancher grants. They also work on an educational program for the Nebraska Food Cooperative, a Sheep and Goat Professional Improvement Workshop, a Sustainable Farming and Grazing Tour and a Multi-State Organic Conference.

Peterson has been a board member for Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society since 2004. His first term he served in an ex-officio capacity. He is now in his second term and holds a voting seat, and is in the position of Secretary. Peterson was also recipient of the 2006 NSAS Agriculture Educator Award.

## Pork Heritage Breeds: continued from page 3

RC: I'm curious, did you take the Farm Beginnings course when it was offered in SE Nebraska?

TD: No. I have taken a number of beginning farm classes over the years with the REAP program and gone to many niche pork meetings over the years.

RC: Any observations or advice to other beginning or specialty pork producers that you would like to share?

TD: I would say pork would be a good option for a small acreage. You don't need very much land vs. beef. Your turn-over in money should be pretty rapid; if you buy feeder pigs in the spring, by Christmas time you get your money back. For the pounds of meat you produce it is less labor than broilers. I would encourage someone that is just starting out to get at least 6 pigs you would be able to take in about 2 ton of feed from the local feed mill and get delivery.

RC: Anything else you'd like to add?

TD: I'm guaranteeing 100 days minimum from butcher no antibiotics, on soil, no animal by-products. Also, if you are selling pork to someone that doesn't think there is a difference in meat quality, and to get a higher price for a product that really wows them from the first bite, I think these pigs do that. Berkshire is juicier and easier to cook; Red Wattle is more tender and leaner.

RC: Thanks Travis and good luck in your new venture!

### Resources:

- Travis Dunekacke at 402.335.0197
- For information on breeds & meat quality, [www.heritagebreedsusa.com](http://www.heritagebreedsusa.com)
- Travis suggests on-line searches via Yahoo: type in "breeds of swine."
- Richard Ness, Extension Educator focusing on Alternative Swine Production and Niche Marketing. 402.370.4061
- REAP program through the Center for Rural Affairs at [www.cfra.org](http://www.cfra.org).

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[www.nebsusag.org](http://www.nebsusag.org)

## Resources

**Wisconsin Edition of Renewing the Countryside Released:** Find it at <http://renewingthecountryside.org/content/category/10/77/68/>. *Renewing the Countryside* has released a publication on Wisconsin, showcasing thirty-nine creative, hard-working people, organizations and businesses that represent energetic, innovative visions for Wisconsin's countryside. Project partners were Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service (MOSES), The Northern Center for Community and Economic Development, and Renewing the Countryside. The book is the latest in a series of photographically rich publications for specific states that feature case studies of people and organizations renewing the countryside through sustainable and innovative initiatives, businesses and projects.

**Farmers' Markets Today: The Business Journal for Direct-To-Customer Marketers:** Newer publication out of Cedar Falls, IA, published 10 times per year. Free in print or PDF form to qualified farmers; other subscription rates to non-qualified others. For more information, telephone: 319.277.3599 or visit [www.farmersmarketstoday.com](http://www.farmersmarketstoday.com).

***Beyond Organic: What's Really At Stake:*** Keynote address by Fred Kirschenmann at the Organic Summit in Boulder, CO on June 21, 2007. Full remarks are available in audio on Organic Farming Research Foundation's website at [www.ofrf.org](http://www.ofrf.org). Kirschenmann currently serves as Distinguished Fellow for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University as well as overseeing management of his family's 3500 acre certified organic farm in south central North Dakota, as well as holding an appointment in the ISU Department of Religion and Philosophy.

A new on-line community, [www.TodaysHomesteading.com](http://www.TodaysHomesteading.com). is available.

## Classifieds

**Help Wanted:** Grass Based Seasonal Dairy looking for 1-2 people to assist with farm work & other duties. Home, utilities, milk & salary provided. Interns accepted or longer term/yeararound employment possible. Located in Nebraska. Call 402.338.555/ fax 402.338.5555 or e-mail at [Wetz@threeriverwb.net](mailto:Wetz@threeriverwb.net). Green Pasture Products, David Wetzel. Visit [www.greenpasture.org](http://www.greenpasture.org).

**Purebred Berkshire, Red Wattle & Tamworth Feeder Pigs for Sale:** Available April - July 2008. All three breeds are ideally suited for direct marketing. Travis Dunekacke, Elk Creek, NE 402.335.0197.

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## Upcoming Events

**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. 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 info and to register, call Pat at 402.584.3837. Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) Credits Applied For. Sponsored by NE Organic Crop Improvement Association & UNL - Organic Farming Systems. For complete agenda & information, see page 4 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](http://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](http://www.VisitNebraska.org) or contact Karen Kollars at [karenk@VisitNebraska.org](mailto:karenk@VisitNebraska.org). See page 2 of this newsletter for an additional exhibitor event & opportunity on February 5!

**February 8 & 9, 2008: Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society's 29th Annual Winter Conference,** held at Seven Seas in Mandan, ND. John Doran, Professor Emeritus at the University of Nebraska and Fred L. Kirschenmann, Distinguished Fellow for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University will be the keynote speakers. Workshops will feature something for everyone including information on livestock, landscaping, estate planning, pesticides, organic no-till, local foods, junk yard wars for kids, plus more. Organic and locally grown meals available. For more information contact NPSAS at 701.883.4304 or visit [www.npsas.org](http://www.npsas.org).

**February 14 & 15, 2008: Organic Seed Growers Conference** in Salem, OR. Organic farmers, plant breeders, researchers, and seed industry professionals will gather for the 5th Biennial Organic Seed Growers Conference hosted by Organic Seed Alliance (OSA) with partnership from Oregon State University and Washington State University. This largest meeting of seed professionals in the United States. Get more information at [www.seedalliance.org](http://www.seedalliance.org).

**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](http://www.cfra.org) or call Joy Marshall at 402.614.5558.

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