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January-February 1995 CSAS Newsletter

The Center for Sustainable Agricultural Systems (CSAS) in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) is an interdisciplinary center formed in 1991 for the purpose of bringing together people and resources to promote an agriculture that is efficient, competitive, profitable, environmentally and socially sustainable for the indefinite future. Electronic versions of the CSAS bimonthly newsletter are sent to SANET, PENPages, and the internal IANRNEWS 10-14 days before those on our mailing list receive their hard copy. They are also available along with other sustainable ag information on the gopher: IANRVM.UNL.EDU. (Note: The electronic version is not sent to individual e-mail addresses.) To be added to the "hard copy" newsletter mailing list, or for questions or comments, contact the newsletter editor, Pam Murray, Coordinator, Center for Sustainable Agricultural Systems, 221 Keim Hall, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE 68583-0949, 402-472-2056, fax -4104, e-mail: csas001@unlvm.unl.edu.

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IMPACT GROUPS ARE FORMING ACROSS NEBRASKA

Several groups across the state have already applied to the IMPACT project for sustainable agriculture activities and research/demonstration projects. This is a collaborative effort involving the Center for Rural Affairs, the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society and UNL, and is funded in part by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation under its Integrated Farming Systems Initiative (see May-June CSAS newsletter). Additional support is provided by the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program.

The applications we have received reflect the diverse needs of Nebraska producers and other community members who want to live and farm sustainably. Farmers in eastern Nebraska are interested in learning more about the impact of managed grazing along streambanks on water quality and the riparian ecosystem. Farmers in central Nebraska are interested in using bees to make sweet clover cover crops profitable in fallow years. Rural women's groups in western and eastern Nebraska are forming to learn more about marketing, long-term financial planning, value-added agriculture, child care, and sustainability issues directly affecting their families and communities. Groups can receive up to $3,500 to support their activities. If you and your fellow sustainable-minded neighbors have an idea you want to pursue, call the IMPACT office, 402-254-2289, for an application or for help in applying. Applications for the next round of funding are due March 31, 1995. SOURCE: Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society newsletter, Winter 1995.

MAY 1 IS DEADLINE FOR SARE PRODUCER GRANTS

For the fourth year in a row the North Central Region (NCR) SARE Program will again sponsor its Implementing Sustainable Agriculture Producer Grant Program. Individual or group grants of up to $5,000 will be awarded on a competitive basis to producers in the twelve-state region, which includes Nebraska. In the first three years, 87 grants were awarded for demonstration and on-farm research projects, including rotational grazing, field trials, farmer networks, alternative crops, composting, equipment modifications, and biocontrol measures. All projects are required to include a means for disseminating information through a field day, publication or workshop.

Funding decisions will be made in late July 1995, with funds available in mid-fall. Application packets are available from the NCR SARE Program, 13A Activities Bldg., University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE 68583-0840, 402-472-7081.

CORPORATE FARMING EXPANDS

Rising input costs and low market prices have forced many producers, both large and small, to link up with processing and marketing companies under contractual agreements. This year over 99% of the nation's poultry growers are farming under contract with a handful of processors. Under these agreements, producers are required to pay for building equipment, land and labor costs. The processing and marketing companies provide the animals, feed, medicine and most importantly, the management directions turning once independent farmers into factory workers on their own land earning close to minimum wage. Similar trends are already emerging in the pork, beef and vegetable sectors. SOURCE: Farm Aid News, Dec. 15, 1994, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

IMPORTANT SUSTAINABLE AG SUPPORTER DIES

Ken Taylor, founder of the Minnesota Food Association, passed away January 6. His contributions will long be felt in the

sustainable agriculture community, and his humor, wisdom and foresight will be greatly missed in the North Central Region SARE Administrative Council, on which he served since its inception. Ken worked to insure that the producer and consumer were never forgotten or minimized, as the direction of this regional USDA program was developed. His keen insight into their worlds and his knack for finding the similarities rather than the differences in the goals of sustainable agriculture organizations contributed to creating a regional program that constantly reevaluated itself in terms of the ultimate benefit to the producer and consumer as well as the researcher and educator.

An article in the Minneapolis Star-Tribune mentioned Taylor's work to unite farmers, coop managers, food shelf operators, University of Minnesota officials and food company executives that eventually led to the University's Sustainable Agriculture Institute and urban gardening projects. Submitted by Steven Waller

REGIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM IS OFF AND RUNNING

In our July-August 1994 newsletter you read about a grant received by the CSAS for training Extension agents and other agricultural professionals in sustainable agriculture techniques and systems. The grant is from the North Central Region Sustainable Research and Education (SARE) Program.

The first workshop of the North Central Sustainable Agriculture Training Program (NCSATP) was held in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, January 4-6. Seventy-six people from the region's twelve states helped plan the new program. The group included farmers, members of nonprofit organizations, federal agency personnel, and Extension administrators, specialists and educators. These participants indicated in a pre-workshop survey the three most frequent questions they hear: What is sustainable agriculture? Is it profitable/economically feasible? Is it organic farming?

Two main themes surfaced during discussions: sustainable agriculture must be viewed in a framework of social, economic, and environmental factors; and training must be inclusive, in terms of trainers and audience. Participants assembled several topics and teaching methods for a train-the-trainer workshop. Identified focus areas included:

- Community connections and enhancing involvement;
- On-farm tours;
- Facilitation skills;
- Team building activities;
- Participatory learning methods, such as case studies and focus groups;
- Evaluation techniques; and
- Integrative approaches, such as Holistic Resource Management.

The highlight of the meeting was the listening session in which farmers discussed their opinions and experiences regarding Extension and sustainable agriculture. Many people commented that

the session was a powerful tool for bringing new perspectives into a workshop, and said they would incorporate the idea into their training programs.

The NCSATP is planning two train-the-trainer workshops in March and April. Contact Heidi Carter at the CSAS office for more information. Submitted by Heidi Carter

ON-FARM MANURE CALIBRATION PROGRAM

The UNL Water Center has funded an on-farm manure calibration program for eastern Nebraska. The goal of the program is to calibrate manure spreaders on producers' farms, take soil and manure samples, and plan a farm-wide manure application program. The program has the capacity to weigh manure spreaders conveniently on the farm with portable wheel scales that allow quick calibration. We are planning three field demonstrations this spring. Anyone interested in this program can contact Charles Shapiro, NEREC, Box 111, Concord, NE 68728, 402-584-2803, email: nerc006.unlvm.unl.edu. Submitted by Charles Shapiro

CALLS FOR PAPERS

Three 1995 conferences have issued calls for papers:
Oct. 7-8, Eugene, OR. "The Politics of Sustainable Agriculture." Department of Political Science at the University of Oregon invites interested scholars and activists to submit a short prospectus on their research, which may include but is not limited to work in the following areas: U.S. and/or comparative agricultural policy; international agricultural development; economic globalization, free trade, and farm self-sufficiency; agricultural ethics and agrarian reform movements; technology and the implication of agricultural modernization; agriculture and intellectual property rights; agriculture and new social movements. Featured speakers at this interdisciplinary conference will be Wes Jackson, Angus Wright, Patricia Allen, and Peter Rosset. Peer-reviewed proceedings featuring the outstanding papers presented at the conference will be published. Submit prospectus by April 15 to Stuart Shulman, Dept. of Political Science, U. of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-1284, email: stu@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

Nov. 6-8, Ames, IA. "Linkages among Farming Systems and Communities." Assoc. for Farming Systems Research-Extension (AFSRE) invites posters, panels and papers that feature advances in farming systems research and extension, including: on-farm monitoring of soil and water quality, biodiversity, profitability, and quality of life; relationship of farming systems and communities; linking farming systems to food systems. Abstracts and proposals should be sent by August 1 to Cornelia Flora, 317 East Hall, Iowa State U. Ames, IA 50011-1070, 515-294-8321.

Nov. 16-17, Boston, MA. "Environmental Enhancement through Agriculture." Organizers-Center for Agriculture, Food and Environment at Tufts U., American Farmland Trust, and Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture-invite papers on both

general strategies and specific examples of positive agriculture-environment interactions. They may be descriptive, practice-oriented, theoretical or empirical. Three copies of a 150-250 word abstract should be sent by April 14 to William Lockeretz, School of Nutrition, Tufts U., Medford, MA 02155, 617-627-3223.

SEMINAR ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dr. John Zimmerman, a preeminent ornithological scholar from Kansas State University, will present two seminars at the East Campus Union: March 9, 4:00, "Cheyenne Bottoms: Wetland in Jeopardy;" March 10, 10:00, "The Effects of Fire and Grazing on the Avian Community of the Tallgrass Prairie."

Dr. Robert L. Thayer, landscape architect from U.C. Davis, will deliver a Hyde Memorial Lecture on "Technology, Nature and Sustainability," April 13, 4:00-5:00 at the Sheldon Art Gallery. On April 14, 4:00-5:00 he will present "The Bioregenerative Landscape" at the East Campus Union. Dr. Thayer's areas of expertise include landscape architecture dealing with new town developments and the siting of wind energy farms, and the environmental benefits of low water input landscapes.

CRAFTING SUSTAINABLE FARM PROGRAMS NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE

Overall, the most serious consequence of the GATT Final Act for U.S. producers is its impact on the U.S. farm movement toward economic, environmental and social sustainability. There are a number of specific provisions within the agreement that work against current efforts to encourage farmers to farm in more environmentally sustainable ways. First, in Annex 2 of the GATT text, local, state or federal governments are specifically prohibited from providing economic incentives to encourage farmers to adopt environmentally sound production techniques.

Second, the lower farm prices and lower farm income resulting from GATT will make it much more difficult for farmers to move toward more sustainable practices. Lower farm prices have traditionally resulted in:

- increased land under cultivation;
- cultivated land farmed with more chemical intensity to increase yields;
- organic producers encounter more difficulty in market;
- agricultural land is more rapidly converted to industrial and commercial uses;
- families owning their land are forced out and replaced by absentee/corporate owners; and
- diversified livestock producers are replaced by large-scale feedlots.

Third, the GATT Final Act specifically allows for the replacement of domestic farm programs with GATT-legal "decoupled" government payments. Family farmers have traditionally opposed this type of farm subsidy which they call "welfare payments." Past and current decoupling proposals in the U.S. call for a 30% cut in CCC loan rates and the elimination of set-asides and other supply

management-type programs.

The National Farmers Union and National Family Farm Coalition are working with Citizens Trade Campaign to monitor the impacts of GATT on family farmers, rural economies, the environment, food prices and food quality. These groups will continue working with Congress and the Administration to create viable economic and environmental opportunities through the 1995 farm bill and in drafting yearly budget acts, and by pressuring GATT members when they reconvene in five years to revisit agriculture provisions. SOURCE: Farm Aid News, Dec. 6, 1994. The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

A BETTER ROW TO HOE

The Northwest Area Foundation has released a report summarizing the findings of its six-year, $4.5 million study to evaluate the impact of a shift toward sustainable agriculture on the economy, environment, and rural communities in the eight-state region served by the Foundation. According to the Executive Summary of "A Better Row to Hoe," Key findings were:

- Sustainable agriculture is a modern, emerging, and highly adaptable management technology. It relies on sound management and intensive, often site-specific information.
- Sustainable agriculture has real and measurable environmental benefits, including reduced toxins in soil and water, less erosion, enhanced wildlife habitat, and lower energy use.
- Sustainable agriculture can be economically competitive with conventional agriculture, as evidenced by the performance of the best sustainable farmers. However, to become the technology of choice for most farmers, the management systems and technology required of sustainable agriculture must be further developed, refined, and taught.
- Current public policies, especially federal commodity programs, discourage the adoption of sustainable agriculture.
- Sustainable agriculture can provide new farming and business opportunities for people in rural communities, but local business infrastructure must respond to the different production and market needs of sustainable farmers.
- It may be even easier to start a farm with sustainable practices than to convert one that is heavily invested in conventional practices and technologies. Many beginning farmers may find sustainable agriculture attractive because it depends more on skilled labor and management and less on capital resources. Major policy recommendations are:
- Federal farm commodity programs should be reformed to reward environmental performance, remove penalties for converting to sustainable agriculture, and end the discrimination against sustainable farmers (who have fewer acres in subsidized crops because they have planted soil-conserving crops instead).
- Greater emphasis should be placed on sustainable agriculture in research and education programs to strengthen the technology base of sustainable agriculture.
- A comprehensive rural development policy will help

sustainable agriculture by developing the business infrastructure to support sustainable farming and by providing off

- farm income opportunities that many farmers--both sustainable and conventional--need. At the same time, rural development will benefit from the new farm and business opportunities fostered by sustainable agriculture.
- Private lenders and public credit programs should increase access to capital and accompanying management assistance programs for beginning farmers who practice sustainable agriculture. (See Resources to order.)

NEW ROTATIONAL GRAZING LISTSERVER

There is a new listserver for people interested in management-intensive rotational grazing and seasonal dairying. GRAZE-L is a joint project of Taranaki Polytechnic in New Zealand and the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems at the University of Wisconsin. To subscribe, send the message SUBSCRIBE GRAZE-L to the following address: listserv@taranaki.ac.nz. For more information, contact Michele Gale-Sinex: gale-sinex@ae.agecon.wisc.edu.

OUTSTANDING CSAS SECRETARY

We're pleased to announce that Michele Strickler, CSAS secretary since August 1992, is the January recipient of the Outstanding Employee Award at the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. She is extremely capable, efficient, and enthusiastic, and we are fortunate to have her on our team. Congratulations, Michele, and thanks!

POSTER MATERIALS AVAILABLE: SUSTAINING PROFITABLE AGRICULTURE

A set of poster materials highlighting Cooperative Extension agricultural programs is available for checkout by Extension staff. These materials, designed to fit on a Downing display board (supplied by borrower), are flexible so all or part of the set can be used to highlight what may be of interest to a specific audience.

Cooperative Extension has four priority initiatives that have the common theme of sustainability and profitability. This display highlights the main goals, objectives and activities of the Promote Sustainable Agricultural Systems, Integrated Crop Management, Conservation Reserve Program, and Integrated Resource Management programs. Included in the display are pictures relevant to each initiative. Contact the CSAS office to borrow the display. Submitted by Charles Shapiro

OECD POST DOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS AND WORKSHOPS

Funding for post-doctoral fellowships or sponsorship of workshops are available for the topic of "Biological Resource Management for Sustainable Agricultural Systems, 1995-1999."

Sponsored by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), these activities can be focused on one of

four themes:

- safe exploitation of micro-organisms in plant/soil systems
- quality of animal production
- utilization and ecology of new organisms
- surface and ground water quality and agricultural practices

Deadline for submitting proposals is March 10, 1995; decisions on funding will be made during the same month, and the arrangements for the activity completed during 1995. For further information, contact Jim Schepers, Univ. of Nebraska, 402-472-1513, email: jscheper@unlinfo. unl.edu

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION CONTACT

For questions regarding organic certification, contact: Dave Welsch, Certification Coordinator, OCIA NE #1, Rt 2, Box 63, Milford, NE 68405, 402-826-5361.

RESOURCES

"Small Farm Handbook," $20 + $2.90 s&h payable to UC Regents, ANR Publications, U. of California, 6701 San Pablo Ave., Oakland, CA 94608-1239, 510-642-2431. Brochure says 38 authors--researchers, farm advisors, small farm specialists, and farmers--have combined their expertise to produce 12 chapters: requirements for successful farming, the basics, finances, marketing, selling your product, enterprise ideas, growing crops, raising animals, postharvest handling of perishable crops, alternative agriculture, labor management, keeping the family farm healthy. Includes worksheets and resource/reference lists.

"Pesticide Information Notebook," 2nd edition, $23, Cornell Resource Center, Attention: Pesticides, 7 Business and Technology Park, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14850. Contains 139 pesticide information profiles describing the health and environmental effects of specific pesticides and 17 toxicology information briefs offering short descriptions covering pesticide-related issues such as carcinogenicity, ecological effects, and epidemiology.

"A Better Row to Hoe," (executive summary and full report), free, Communications Dept., Northwest Area Foundation, 332 Minnesota St., #E-1201, St. Paul, MN 55101-1373. Also available is "Planting the Future," a book to be published by Iowa State University Press which reports on this research. Request order form from the Foundation.

"Lean, Mean and Green," $7.50, Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture, 9200 Edmonston Rd., #117, Greenbelt, MD 20770, 301-331-8777. Report discusses a new environmentally-based approach to farm income support called a Green Support Program.

"Strategies for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development: New Directions for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 1994," Dr. Mohamed S. Zehni, Interdepartmental Working Group on Environment and Sustainable Development, Food and Agriculture

Organization, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy; fax: 396 5225-5731; email: mohamed.zehni@fao.org. Outlines strategies to achieve sustainable agriculture and rural development (SARD) focusing on the issues and areas of action connected with SARD that are highlighted in UNCED's Agenda 21.

"Thompson On-Farm Research, with Wallace Institute, 1994 Report," $10, Thompson On-Farm Research, 2035 190th St., Boone, IA 50036-7423, 515-432-1560. Describes in detail successes and failures in crop and livestock trials being conducted at the Thompson Farm in Boone, Iowa.

Earthworm pubs: "Worms Eat My Garbage," by Mary Appelhoff, c. 1982, $8.95, Flowerfield Enterprises, 10332 Shaver Rd., Kalamazoo, MI 49002, 616-327-0108; describes the world of worms, the materials needed for your vermiculture project, and continuously informs readers about the earthworms' relationship with soil quality. Worm Digest, quarterly newsletter about worms and worm composting, $4.50/yr., Worm Digest, Box 544, Eugene, OR 97440-9998. The following are available from Shields Publications, POB 669, Eagle River, WI 54521, 715-479-4810: "Raising Earthworms for Profit" by Earl Shields, 1994, $7, for those interested in raising earthworms to be sold as bait or to be used in making vermicompost, this is a comprehensive guide which details each step involved in creating either a small- or large-scale earthworm-raising enterprise; "Earthworm Buyer's Guide 1994-95," $5, provides a listing of earthworm hatcheries in the USA and Canada; "Raising the African Night Crawler or Tropical Giant Worm," by Charlie Morgan, 1970, $5, provides specific information on bins, bedding, feeds and feeding, harvesting, packing and shipping, and selling the nightcrawlers.

"Organic Market News," $65/yr., Farmer's Information Network, POB 2067, Santa Clara, CA 95055-2067, 408-247-6778. Contains comprehensive wholesale price report for over 120 varieties of organically grown fresh fruit, herbs, and vegetables 21 times per year; will be developing a new monthly price report on organic beans and grains.

"GreenWorld's Almanac & Directory of Environmental Organizations, 1994," $29.95, GreenWorld Environmental Publications Co., 253 A 26th Street, Suite 306, Santa Monica, CA 90402, 310-815-8867. Reference guide lists North American organizations working on environmental issues including atmosphere, global warming, ecosystem protection, biodiversity, population, forest conservation, land use, water conservation, wildlife, pesticides, pollution, transportation, and waste management.

DID YOU KNOW...

Regarding farm income:

- A USDA report shows that 65% of U.S. crop subsidies goes to 17% of farmers. Since these payments are a sizable part of small farm income, the loss of the payments due to federal budget cuts may affect small farms more than large ones. The biggest impact of cuts would be in the Corn Belt and the northern Plains, which together get half of federal outlays.

- The highest percentage of earning from agriculture of any county in the U.S. occurs in Wheeler County, Nebraska. Nebraska counties also placed second through sixth in the national list and had five other counties in the top 25.
- USDA estimates farm income in 1995 will be $2 billion or more lower than income in 1994.
- The UNL Bureau of Business Research forecasts that net farm proprietors' income will show a drop for 1994 of 7.5% from a year earlier. In 1995, the Bureau expects that net farm income will recover to near 1993 levels and continue to improve in 1996.
- The USDA reports that the index of prices received by farmers from 1982 to 1993 rose only 7.5% while input costs rose over 23%.
- Nationwide, 90% of all farm operator households rely on off-farm sources to supplement their farm income.
- The "Kiplinger Agriculture Letter" notes that on average small farmers, with gross annual sales of less than $50,000, lose money on their farms.
- Family farmers continue being forced from their land at a rate of 32,500 each year, or 600 farm families each week.

A Minnesota company is converting soy flour and recycled newspapers into a substitute for hardwood. By 1997 they hope to be turning more than one million bushels of soybeans into the construction material they call Environ.

A new wheat-based kitty litter has been patented and is now being produced for the $700 million-a-year industry. It contains enzymes that make sewage break down faster, plus the wheat neutralizes the ammonia smell.

The National Public Policy Education Committee surveyed 10,000 farmers in 15 states regarding USDA's missions. Forty-one percent of respondents want all federal commodity programs to be gradually phased out, while about a third want to keep present programs, with the youngest, oldest and largest farmers most supportive of the status quo.

Since 1986, introductions of organic food products have increased by 400% and organic beverages by 1,450%.

In December Karl Stauber, former vice president of the Northwest Area Foundation and long-time supporter of sustainable agriculture, was appointed Acting Deputy Under Secretary of Agriculture for Research, Education and Economics.

The potential exists for hog wastes to be routinely used as fertilizer for Paulownia trees which can then be harvested for timber in 12 years or less.

A recent poll of Iowa farm families shows 75% of farmwomen almost always maintain the family's business records, 60% work off-farm full- and part-time to help support their family, and 60% perform field work while caring for their children and performing other farm chores.

The 1992 Census of Agriculture shows the average age of Nebraska farmers has increased to almost 51.

Senate leadership has a "Top 10" list of regulations to be changed or eliminated. At the top is the Endangered Species Act. Others include regulations stemming from the Clean Water Act, the Delaney clause, and rules involving use of wetlands in agricultural areas.

The ten-time, corn-growing champion from Illinois credits his success (300+ acres in 1994) to his 200 buffalo who fertilize his fields in return for corn on their menu.

COMING EVENTS

Contact CSAS office for more information:

- Feb. 28-Mar. 1 -- 1995 Platte River Basin Ecosystem Symposium; Kearney, NE.
- Mar. 3 -- Leopold Center annual conference; Ames, IA.
- Mar. 17-18 -- Entrepreneurial Opportunities in Agriculture: The Art of Marketing; Kearney, NE.
- Apr. 6 -- Trade, Development, and the Environment: Global Issues and Global Policies. Presentation to be given by Jessica Tuchman Mathews, Washington Post columnist, at 3:30 in the Lied Center, Lincoln, NE.
- May 8-10 -- Planning for a Sustainable Future: The Case of the North American Great Plains; Lincoln, NE. (See Sep-Oct CSAS newsletter for details.)
- June 11-14 -- Sustainable Aquaculture, '95; Honolulu.

"We need to live off of nature's interest rather than nature's capital." Wes Jackson

Home

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