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July 1993

## Center for Sustainable Agricultural Systems Newsletter, July/August 1993

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## July-August 1993 CSAS Newsletter

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Center for Sustainable Agricultural Systems 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. This electronic version of the Center's bimonthly newsletter is published 10-14 days before those on our mailing list receive their hard copy. At this time there is no charge for being on our newsletter mailing list. To be added to the list, or for questions or comments, contact the newsletter editor, Pam Murray, Administrative Coordinator, Center for Sustainable Agricultural Systems, 221 Keim Hall, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68583-0949, phone - (402) 472-2056, fax - (402) 472-7904, email - CSAS001@UNLVM.EDU.

### CONTENTS:

PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE AG ADVISORY COUNCIL VISITS  
NEBRASKA  
PROPOSED NORTH CENTRAL INSTITUTE FOR AGROECOLOGY  
CALL FOR LISA/ACE PREPROPOSALS  
REPORT CALLS FOR ACTION ON PESTICIDES  
MIDWEST FLOODING INCREASES SOIL EROSION  
STATUS OF FEDERAL PROGRAMS  
NEW AGENCY FORMED IN INTERIOR DEPARTMENT  
EARTHBOUND PROJECT AT STATE FAIR  
REFERENCES  
COMING EVENTS  
DID YOU KNOW?

### PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In June President Clinton announced formation of the 25-member Council on Sustainable Development, with representatives from industry and government (including Cabinet members), as well as environmental, labor, and civil rights organizations to develop bold new approaches to integrate economic and environmental policies. The Council's primary goals are to: develop specific policy recommendations for a national strategy for sustainable development; respond to the recommendations in Agenda 21, the comprehensive international policy declaration nations of the world agreed to at the Earth Summit as a pledge to global environmental action; sponsor demonstration projects that test the viability of the Council's recommendations and that encourage comprehensive approaches; establish links with other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) within and outside the U.S.; recognize outstanding sustainable development achievements through an annual Presidential award; and, educate the public about sustainable development. The Council will develop strategies in sustainable agriculture and land use, efficient energy and transportation systems, environmental justice, eco-efficient manufacturing, environmental education and setting environmental

priorities.

According to a report submitted by Isaac Kaufman, Intern with the World Sustainable Agriculture Association (WSAA), sustainable agriculture got very little attention at the Council's first meeting July

20. Around lunchtime John Sawhill, President of The Nature Conservancy, pointed out that agriculture is an explicit sector to be addressed in the process toward a sustainable economy; Council co-chair Jonathan Lash, President of World Resources Institute, agreed. Later in the day discussion revolved around working toward sustainability through incentives and disincentives. The presence of business and industry was strongly felt in this regard. Again, sustainable agriculture was not specifically mentioned, but the relevance

is obvious: an overhaul of the methods by which tax incentives (in the case of agriculture--farm subsidies) are given and taken away is a vital

element in creating a sustainable economy. When the floor was opened to the 150-member audience, Linda Elswick, Associate Director of the WSAA Washington office, asked for cooperation between the Council and NGOs, and offered the support of WSAA. The Council's next meeting is scheduled for October 18.

Following the July 20 meeting an ad hoc group was formed to monitor the Council's activities and promote a sustainable agriculture agenda. The group is recommending that Secretary Espy be asked to create a new position, the Assistant to the Secretary for Sustainable Development. The position would coordinate all USDA activities related to sustainable development, serve as Executive Director of the National Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Council, function as a focal point for USDA responses to Agenda 21, and be detailed to the President's Council on Sustainable Development. Last year the General Accounting Office identified USDA's coordination and management problems related to sustainable agriculture, and this recommendation is designed to resolve these problems. The group encourages those interested to write a letter supporting this position to

Secretary Espy. For more information, contact Linda Elswick, (202) 347-0637, email: wsaadc@cdp.apc.org.

#### NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE AG ADVISORY COUNCIL VISITS NEBRASKA

The first meeting of the National Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Council (NSAAC) was held in Omaha, Nebraska June 9-11. On June 10 a bus tour took the group to the Rosmann farm in Iowa, and then on to the Ag Research and Development Center near Mead, Nebraska. Here they learned about the research being conducted as part of the overall Integrated Farm project (see May-June newsletter article on Integrated Farm). During the balance of the meeting elected chairman Jim Horne of the Kerr Center signed a policy statement on sustainable agriculture drafted by the Council, which was then submitted to Secretary Espy. For more information about the NSAAC, contact George Bird, Director of USDA's SARE Program, (202) 401-4640.

## PROPOSED NORTH CENTRAL INSTITUTE FOR AGROECOLOGY

As part of a LISA grant for developing a curriculum in sustainable agriculture, UNL's Jim King and Chuck Francis have convened three workshops over the past three months in Lincoln and Ames. At the July meeting, faculty and farmers in the North Central Region developed a proposal for a regional educational institute to focus on agroecology and sustainable systems. The draft report is currently being revised for consideration by funding agencies and foundations.

We propose a major in agroecology that is both classroom and experiential, taught by a regional faculty made up of academics, farmers, and agribusiness specialists. Students will come together on one campus for class work, and spend substantial time on farms or in industry as part of the educational plan. At least one course or seminar in agroecosystems will be included each semester. There are summer internships that will intensify experience with on-farm research, crop scouting, and other ag related learning. The program will conclude with a senior thesis or other comparable project.

Additional options within this institute are a major or minor in sustainable systems at each of the 12 universities, access to the summer intern program, and availability of individual courses through satellite.

Kellogg Foundation and Northwest Area Foundation have provided additional funding for planning. If you wish to become involved or simply learn more about the proposed institute, contact our office.

Submitted by Charles Francis

## CALL FOR LISA/ACE PREPROPOSALS

September 10 is the deadline for preproposals for LISA and ACE grants. Level of funding for the North Central Region is expected to be similar to last year's \$1,000,000 for LISA and \$350,000 for ACE projects. To receive an application packet which contains priority areas

for this year, contact Steven Waller, 207 Ag Hall, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68583-0701, (402) 472-7081. If you are interested in working with our Center on a preproposal for an interdisciplinary LISA/ACE project, contact our office.

## REPORT CALLS FOR ACTION ON PESTICIDES

Editor's Note: One of agriculture's largest challenges is how to deal with emerging public concern about pesticides: substituting other inputs? educating about relative risk? learning more about health hazards? fine-tuning critical contaminant levels? This is a central issue

in sustainable agriculture today. The following is an excerpt of an article filed by the Pesticide Action Network Updates Service (PANUPS), a pesticide-related news service posted weekly by the Pesticide Action Network North America Regional Center (PANNA RC), 116 New Montgomery Street, #810, San Francisco, CA 94105, (415) 541-9140.

\* \* \*

A report released on June 21 by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) (see References) highlights serious problems with pesticide use in the U.S., and calls for an overhaul of federal regulations and support

for pesticide use reduction and sustainable agriculture as solutions. In

conjunction with the report release, a broad coalition of groups endorsed a "Pesticide Reform Agenda" to change the way pesticides are used and regulated in the United States. Findings of NRDC's report, *After Silent Spring: The Unsolved Problems of Pesticide Use in the United States*, include:

-- Since 1964, conventional pesticide use in the U.S. has almost doubled; total pesticide use now exceeds two billion pounds -- eight pounds for person in the U.S.

-- Of 107 pesticides known to cause cancer, 83 are still in use in the U.S., 71 of them on U.S. food crops.

-- One of every ten public water supply wells in the U.S. contains residues of at least one pesticide, and over 440,000 rural private wells contain pesticides.

-- In the past 30 years, the number of insect and mite species resistant to pesticides has increased from 137 to 447.

The report provides a detailed critique of federal pesticide regulations, including case studies of 10 hazardous pesticides. NRDC argues that there is vast potential to reduce pesticide use, citing impressive examples from the U.S. and other countries. A study published by NRDC in 1991 found that "pesticide use could be reduced in nine major U.S. crops by 25 to 80 percent using currently available practices including Integrated Pest Management (IPM), biological control, and crop rotations." The final chapter of the report recommends specific federal initiatives to promote pesticide use reduction and sustainable agriculture, including a national policy committing the U.S. to these goals. The coalition, which includes twelve environmental, consumer, and labor groups, makes the following recommendations:

-- Phase out the food uses of the most dangerous pesticides over a specific time period.

-- Adopt a uniform statutory health-based standard for all pesticides in all foods.

-- Encourage the development and demonstration of, and transition to alternatives to risky pesticides through targeted research.

-- Streamline and strengthen EPA's pesticide program, improve EPA's enforcement authority for Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA), and protect the public and farm workers

from risky pesticides.

#### MIDWEST FLOODING INCREASES SOIL EROSION

Jim Jensen at Iowa State University said some fields are experiencing erosion four times greater than the "tolerable" level. In addition, the floods are washing farm chemical and animal wastes into streams and rivers. While no-till farming has helped to ebb the erosion, there is concern that farmers may use more chemicals next spring in an attempt to replenish their soil. Kevin Coyle of American Rivers recommended allowing flood waters to take over some farm land and compensate farmers. Bret Hulsey of the Sierra Club recommended changing the scope of flood insurance programs to focus on moving people and buildings out of areas that frequently flood, saying that the best investment for the American people is to convert these low-lying areas to farm land, wildlife preserves or green spaces.

Primary Sources: Scott McMurray, "Midwest Deluge Thwarts Efforts to Protect Soil," WALL STREET JOURNAL, July 20, 1993; Charles Abbott, "Give River More Room, Conservationists Say," REUTER, July 15, 1993.

Secondary Source: "Sustainable Agriculture News Bulletin," July 23, 1993, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Minneapolis.

#### STATUS OF FEDERAL PROGRAMS

The following is excerpted from a USDA-Economic Research Service report titled "Agricultural Resources Situation and Outlook Summary," released in May.

\* \* \*

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), after 12 sign-up periods in 8 years, has temporarily retired from production over 36 million acres of highly erodible and other sensitive cropland, 90 percent of the program's goal. But the CRP's future is linked to potentially limited Federal funding for maintaining or expanding the enrolled acreage beyond the current contracts. As the initial 10-year CRP contracts begin expiring in late 1995, farmers can bring that land back into production.

Under the conservation compliance provisions of the 1985 farm bill, approved conservation plans have been fully applied on about 86 million acres of highly erodible cropland (HEL), 58 percent of the total HEL determinations to date. Another 55 million HEL acres have Soil Conservation Service-approved plans that are in the process of implementation and certification. However, farmers have not requested or accepted conservation plans on 7 million HEL acres, making these farmers ineligible for USDA program benefits. Farmers who do not fully implement an approved plan by January 1, 1995, will lose eligibility for USDA program benefits. So far over 1,500 farms have been found in violation of either the sodbuster or swampbuster provisions and have been denied benefits exceeding \$11 million.

Crop residue management (CRM) is the conservation practice called for on 75 percent of the planned HEL acres. Conservation tillage, a form of CRM, was practiced on 89 million acres in 1992 and could exceed

100 million acres in 1993. No-till, the most rapidly growing conservation tillage practice, was used on 28 million acres in 1992 and could reach 37 million in 1993.

The Wetlands Reserve Program has been implemented on a pilot basis in nine states. Farmers' bids to enter land into the program were five times the 50,000 acres accepted, indicating strong producer interest. The President's budget for fiscal year 1994 includes funding for 450,000 acres, with another 500,000 acres proposed for fiscal 1995.

Other recent USDA programs are targeting water quality and food safety concerns. The Water Quality Incentive Projects now number 106 nationwide and the Integrated Farm Management Program has an enrollment totaling nearly 100,000 acres in 32 States. Also, a program begun in 1990, USDA's Water Quality Initiative, has promoted the adoption of improved practices at the farm level in over 200 locations nationwide. The program is also developing or evaluating production systems for improving water quality and gathering new data on pesticide and fertilizer use. Beginning May 10, 1993, applicators of restricted-use pesticides must maintain pesticide product records by field.

#### NEW AGENCY FORMED IN INTERIOR DEPARTMENT

The National Biological Survey, created by Secretary Bruce Babbitt, is an independent bureau within the Department of the Interior that will coordinate long-term analyses and inventories of the nation's biological resources. The bureau will start operating on October 1, 1993, with about \$180 million in funding and a staff of 1,600 scientists and support personnel. President Clinton has said the biological survey would "help us protect endangered species, and just as importantly . . .

help the agricultural and biotechnical industries of our country identify new sources of food, fiber and medication." However, the formation of the agency has met with some criticism from organizations concerned about the potential for weakening or severing the links between research scientists and resource managers, and disrupting relationships with state offices and universities.

#### EARTHBOUND PROJECT AT STATE FAIR

A new celebration of Nebraska's quality of natural resources~water, land, air and living wildlife resources~will be a highlight of this year's Nebraska State Fair which begins Labor Day Weekend. "Earthbound" ties together agriculture, energy and the environment. Nebraska Governor Ben Nelson said "Earthbound will give Nebraskans in agriculture and other businesses an opportunity to showcase their efforts to protect and preserve the bountiful resources we all enjoy."

The event is a joint project between the Nebraska State Fair, Keep Nebraska Beautiful, University of Nebraska's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and the State Departments of Agriculture, Economic Development, Energy and Environmental Quality.

Commercial and nonprofit organizations plan exhibits demonstrating environmentally friendly products and practices. Fair-goers will see new products made from Nebraska commodities, such as packing peanuts made from 95% corn starch that dissolve in water, and "hydrosorb," a corn starch-based powder that gels when mixed with a liquid, making it a potential solution to cleaning up chemical spills and other threats to our groundwater. The event includes a stage featuring entertainment and educational programs, an energy park complete with benches and flower pots made from recycled plastic, and a display of alternative fuel vehicles.

Source: Nebraska Development News, May 1993, Nebraska Dept. of Econ. Dev.

#### REFERENCES

Two New Sustainable Systems Papers -- The first two submissions to our new Sustainable Systems Paper Series are now available: (1) "An Integrated Crop/Livestock Farm for Eastern Nebraska" by Gary Lesoing and Terry Klopfenstein; (2) "Impact of Sustainable Agriculture Programs on U.S. Land Grant Universities" by Francis et al. Copies of these and the sustainable ag book list (see below) will be sent to those maintaining the Sustainable Ag Resource Notebooks previously distributed to Extension and other interested personnel at UNL. Others may contact our office to receive copies of the papers or book list.

Sustainable Ag Book List -- List of 75 book titles/authors purchased over the past year by our Center for inclusion in the university library system. While by no means exhaustive, this is a good starter list for those wishing to add library resources.

SARE Reports Available -- This year's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) reports summarizing regional projects are now available. Contact George Bird at the national SARE Program office in D.C. (202) 401-4640, or your regional office: North Central (402) 472-2973, Northeast (802) 656-2530, Western (510) 987-0029, Southern (504) 388-1766.

Vernon Ruttan Paper -- We recently became aware of an excellent paper by Vernon Ruttan of the University of Minnesota titled "Sustainable Growth in Agricultural Production: Into the 21st Century." The paper, which was prepared for the USDA Outlook Conference last December, discusses biological and technical constraints on crop and animal production, resource and environmental constraints on sustainable growth, and health constraints on agricultural development. Contact our office for a copy.

USDA-ERS Report -- The June 28 Situation & Outlook Summary report, "Industrial Uses of Agricultural Materials," says recent scientific advances are reducing the costs of producing and processing renewable resources into industrial products, making agriculturally based products more competitive. The scientific gains, along with federal and state environmental regulations, and growing consumer preference for "green" products, are increasing the industrial demand for agricultural materials. Some analysts expect that over the next



three years the amount of plant matter used in industrial materials, excluding paper and natural rubber, could increase by over five million tons, almost double that of 1990. For a copy of the full report which discusses everything from ethanol for fuel to kenaf for packing materials, contact the ERS, (202) 720-5505.

New Organic Book -- Increasing Organic Agriculture at the Local Level: A Manual for Consumers, Grocers, Farmers & Policy Makers, by Maren Hansen and others with the Santa Barbara County Safe Food Project, addresses issues pertinent to every sector of society involved in food production and sales. A well-documented chapter on pesticides provides a compelling argument for organic agriculture and a chapter on consumer education outlines how community activists can get the message out. Available for \$16 (plus 7.75% tax for CA orders) and \$2 s&h from the Gildea Resource Center, 930 Miramonte Drive, Santa Barbara, CA 93109, (805) 963-0583.

Pesticide Pubs -- (1) "After Silent Spring: The Unsolved Problems of Pesticide Use in the United States," \$7.50 + \$1.45 s&h, from Natural Resources Defense Council, 71 Stevenson St., San Francisco, CA 94105, (415) 777-0220 (see highlights elsewhere in this newsletter); (2)

Pesticides in the Diets of Infants and Children, \$47.95 + \$4 s&h, from National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Ave., NW, Box 285, Washington, DC 20055, 1-800-624-6242; (3) "Pesticides in Children's Food," \$15 + \$3 s&h, from Environmental Working Group, 1718 Connecticut Ave., NW, #600, Washington, DC 20009, (202) 667-6982.

Recommended -- Two publications have recently been brought to our attention by faculty: (1) Natural Enemies of Vegetable Insect Pests by Michael Hoffmann and Anne Frodsham, Cornell Cooperative Extension, \$22.50, order from Resource Center, 7 Business/Technology Park, Cornell U., Ithaca, NY 14850, (607) 255-2080; (2) Intensive Grazing Management: Forage, Animals, Men, Profits by Smith, Leung and Love, \$29.95 + \$1.50 s&h from Kingsberry Communications, Box 1988, Woodinville, WA 98072.

#### COMING EVENTS

Contact our office for more information:

Aug. 20 -- Amaranth Opportunities Meeting, Iowa State U., Ames.

Sep. 30-Oct. 1 -- Applied Research and Education in Sustainable Agriculture: What Have We Learned? An interdisciplinary workshop for scientists and educators who work with sus. ag. practices and practitioners, Indianapolis.

Sep. 9 -- Thompson On-Farm Research Field Day, Boone, Iowa.

Oct. 12-16 -- 13th annual Association for Farming Systems Research/Extension Symposium, Gainesville.

Oct. 15 -- 1993 World Food Day teleconference, "Seeds of Conflict: Biodiversity and Food Security."

DID YOU KNOW?

The new University of Nebraska's Ag Research and Development Center headquarters building will be constructed of mostly renewable resources, recycled products and materials sensitive to the environment.

A recent study by Public Voice for Food and Health Policy determined that the volume of pesticides used in agricultural production in the U.S. rose 125% from 1986 to 1991.

A study by the Center for Resource Economics says the EPA has evaluated less than 1% of 19,000 pesticides in two decades.

Sales of organic produce have quadrupled over the past decade and organic suppliers hold a 3% share of the national produce market.

A survey conducted by the University of Wisconsin's Rural Development Institute identifies three major forces that will shape agriculture: environmental concerns, vertical integration of farms, and movement of political clout from agricultural interests to urban consumers.

Pennsylvania's governor recently signed legislation requiring many of the state's farmers to develop nutrient management plans.

An FAO study estimates that due to deforestation, overgrazing and other destructive farming practices, an area the size of Alaska may lose most of its agricultural value in 20 years.

Germany and Denmark recently implemented aid schemes where farmers are compensated for the income they lose while switching over to chemical-free production.

Mikhail Gorbachev now heads the newly-created Green Cross, which is the environmental version of the Red Cross headquartered in The Hague, Netherlands.

I'm now available on PENpages and the SAN electronic meeting group on Internet!



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