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July 1996

## Center for Sustainable Agricultural Systems Newsletter, July/ August 1996

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# Center for Sustainable Agricultural Systems Newsletter

July-August 1996

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## Sharing Leadership in Sustainable Ag Education

What are the characteristics of an exceptional leader you have known personally? This question was one of many discussed at two *Shared Leadership, Shared Responsibility* workshops, funded by the North Central Sustainable Agriculture Training Program (SARE-Chapter 3).

Broad coalitions have been formed to conduct sustainable agriculture education. These coalitions depend on small groups, task forces and *ad hoc* teams to accomplish the work. Leaders of these groups have requested ideas on how to build partnerships.

"The leadership session made me realize that I have a real responsibility to fellow team members, not just to completing the task."

*Nebraska Extension Educator*

This year Extension educators from throughout the 12-state region shared their experiences in setting up state sustainable agriculture training projects. Participants asked the presenters questions on the design and implementation of programs, as well as the challenges they faced and lessons learned. Other topics covered at the workshops were:

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- Approaches to Whole Farm Planning
- PLANETOR Version 2.0
- Holistic Resource Management
- Financial Analysis for Sustainable Agriculture
- Implications of the 1996 Farm Bill on Sustainable Agriculture
- Entrepreneurship and Marketing Products from Sustainable Agriculture Systems

The Walworth County Lakeland Agricultural Complex (Wisconsin) and Carrington Research Extension Center (North Dakota) were chosen as the sites for this summer's workshops because of their agricultural programs and high

involvement with the farming community. The Wisconsin Integrated Cropping Systems Trial compares the production, profitability, and environmental impact of six different cropping systems that range from high to low levels of purchased inputs and crop diversity. The complex was the site of heated debate in 1995 when county board supervisors introduced a resolution to sell the farm's assets and rent the land. However, a group of supporters joined forces and saved the farm and its educational activities.

The Carrington Center has been the focal point of North Dakota's effort on application of sustainable agriculture in the field. Current research includes irrigated and dryland crop production, groundwater quality, beef cattle integration with crop production, and indoor recirculating aquaculture systems. The center is also an integral part of the community, which is an important region for grower-owned processing and marketing businesses. Participants toured the sites and interacted with local farmers. In total, 116 people from 11 states attended the workshops.

Lest the reader be left with the impression of all work and no play, there were activities that fell into the education-entertainment category. In Wisconsin the group watched *Rural Voices*, which combined theater, music, and the spirit of a turn-of-the-century Chautauqua to portray modern farm life in the Midwest. In North Dakota small groups learned about teamwork when they were given newspapers to wad, masking tape, and string and told to build a Tower of Nonbabble that was as tall as possible and self-supporting (sustainable) without uttering a word to each other.

"I found it stimulating to interact with people from a wide variety of backgrounds."

*Ohio Extension Specialist*

Future regional plans include condensing the resource notebook into a manual for wider distribution. The theme for the 1997 workshops is *Linking People with the Land*, and three workshops will be held in Kansas, Ohio, and Minnesota. Contact Heidi Carter at the CSAS office for more information on the North Central Sustainable Agriculture Training Program.

*Submitted by Heidi Carter and Charles Francis*

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## **What Is Community Supported Agriculture?**

Community supported agriculture (sometimes called community shared agriculture) is an approach to food production and marketing that brings producers and consumers together for common benefit. Generally there is a contract for one growing season where the farmer agrees to supply a basket of

vegetable products each week for a fixed subscription fee for the entire season. Some producers deliver these to the customer or to a common pick-up point, while others distribute the baskets from the farm. Many CSAs are certified organic production systems, although some use conventional pesticides and fertilizers. Depending on what vegetables or other products are provided, a membership or subscription may cost from \$200 to \$500 per season. Some CSAs provide half shares for single or elderly people who only require half as much produce.

Buying a membership in a CSA involves the consumer in the total food production and distribution system. Although there is guarantee of fresh produce, often produced without chemicals, there is no assurance that a given vegetable will be available in a given week, depending on weather and how many consumers share the harvest. The customer may get more vegetables for the same investment as compared to shopping in the market, or may get fewer if the season is a difficult one for growing. In either case, the consumer is participating in the food production system, investing in the field process and reaping the benefits through fresh, local produce. For more information we suggest the following references (contact for current prices):

Rowley, Tamsyn, and Chris Beeman. 1994. *Our Field: A Manual for Community Shared Agriculture*. CSA Resource Centre, c/o MVCA, Box 127, Wroxeter, Ontario, N0G 2X0, Canada.

Groh, Truagher, and Steven McFadden. 1990. *Farms of Tomorrow: Community Supported Farms. Farm Supported Communities*. Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association, Inc., Box 550, Kimberton, Pennsylvania 19442.

U. of California. 1995. *Making the Connection: the CSA Handbook for Producers*. UC Coop. Extension, Attn: CSA Handbook, 11477 E. Ave., Auburn, CA 95603, (916) 889-7385.

Van En, R. *Basic Formula to Create Community Supported Agriculture*. CSA Indian Line Rd., RR#3, Box 85, Great Barrington, MA 02130.

*Submitted by Charles Francis*

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## **Organic Food Sales Climb**

Organic food product sales continue to grow rapidly in the U.S., according to a recent article in *Alternative Agriculture News* (July 1996). The article cites more organic food producers and expansion by retailers among the reasons for increased sales. Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA) chapters in Nebraska reflect this trend.

Sales in the U.S. are greater than \$2 billion for the second year in a row (Natural Foods Merchandiser, June 1996). According to this report, sales have increased more than 20% each year for the last six years due primarily to a wider consumer base, more acreage in organic crops, and greater acceptance by mainstream customers. In addition to small, beginning enterprises, there is interest in organic certification and sales by larger family and corporate farms.

A recent survey by the Organic Farming Research Foundation shows that organic farmers rely on a range of marketing outlets, including direct onfarm sales, farmers' markets, community supported agriculture, grower cooperatives, retail stores, restaurants and wholesale distributors. The majority of survey respondents stated that lack of information about organic production (71%) and uncooperative or uninformed extension agents (59%) were significant barriers to production when they began organic farming. According to the survey, organic farmers are most interested in research regarding the relationship of growing practices to crop quality and nutrition, the relationship of crop rotations to fertility and pest management, and consumer demand for organic. (See Resources to order report.) A new group focused on production and marketing of specialty crops was recently formed in eastern Nebraska. Keith and Jo Lutnes (1210 3rd St, Columbus, NE 68601, 402-562-8711) are currently coordinating this group that is among the sponsors of the August 24th field tour (see accompanying article). Several vendors at the Lincoln Farmers' Market are certified organic producers, and others advertise their production practices as "pesticide free." The August 24 field day will provide an opportunity for consumers and potential organic producers to learn more about this important and growing market.

*Submitted by Charles Francis*

#### **Did You Know...**

The U.S. exported \$1.1 billion worth of fresh vegetables last year, up 17% from 1994.

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### **Why Shop At Farmers Markets?**

Laurie Hodges in the UNL Horticulture Department provides this list of benefits from shopping at farmers markets:

*Freshness and quality.* Often harvested just hours before the grower leaves home, this freshness is evident in appearance, flavor and nutrient content.

*Variety.* Available are a wide variety of produce, herbs, fresh flowers and organically grown crops.

*Availability.* Farmers' market produce is often available sooner than that from home gardens due to practices used by professionals that lead to early maturity.

*Price.* With no "middleman" the price is often less than retail outlets, and prices for "seconds" can be negotiated.

*Variable quantities.* Customers wishing to take advantage of the height of the season by canning or freezing their purchases can arrange for larger amounts at reduced prices.

*Social effects.* Customers enjoy talking with growers about their operations.

*Local benefit.* Dollars are kept in the local community.

A booklet describing Nebraska farmers markets and roadside stands by region is available from the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, Promotion and Development Division, 1-800-422-6692 or 402-471-4876.

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### **Reminder: Specialty Food Products Field Day**

While the format and title have changed slightly from the article in our May-June newsletter, the focus remains the production and marketing of fruits, vegetables and other food products for the August 24 field day in Lincoln and the surrounding area.

The day will begin at 8 a.m. at the Farmers' Market in Lincoln (8th & Q) where vendors will visit with the group about their operations. At 10 a.m. the program will move to the Lancaster County Extension Office where participants will interact with producers and university specialists. At noon there will be a bring-your-own lunch supplemented with donations from Farmers' Market vendors. After lunch participants will travel in their own vehicles to Martell, Firth, Crete, and Beatrice to see farms that produce goat cheese, organic and conventional fruits and vegetables, and organic herbs. There is no cost for the program, nor is registration required. For more information contact the CSAS office.

#### **Did You Know...**

According to an article in *The Furrow* (Spring 1996), there are now 500 community supported agriculture programs in North America.

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### **Congress Passes Food Quality Protection Act**

A pesticide reform bill could become the first major environmental bill enacted into law this year. The bill passed the House on July 23 and the Senate the following day. The President is expected to sign the legislation. The Food Quality Protection Act (H.R. 1627) would amend the nation's two major pesticide laws: the Federal Insecticide Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA), which governs

the registration of pesticides with EPA, and the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act (FFDCA), which directs EPA in setting pesticide safety levels in foods. In summary, the bill revises the Delaney clause, which bans carcinogenic pesticide residue in processed foods, and requires EPA to set a uniform pesticide tolerance for raw and processed foods that is "safe," which the bill defines as a "reasonable certainty of no harm." The bill also includes provisions requiring EPA to consider special risk factors for children when setting tolerances and distribute more consumer information on pesticides.

Calling the bill a victory for farmers and consumers, Secretary Glickman said the bill resolves the long standing problems posed by the Delaney clause, provides enhanced protection for infants and children, and includes common sense regulatory reform. "Farmers would benefit in two major ways from enactment of this legislation. The bill also offers incentives to provide growers, particularly minor crop producers, with new pest management tools. And, by strengthening pesticide laws, the bill would also positively impact consumers' confidence in the safety of the foods they purchase for their families," Glickman stated.

Sources: *EPA Legislative Update*, 7/26/96; USDA news release, 7/23/96

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## **I**ntegrated **F**arm

### **Composting: the process and economics**

For the past four years composting of livestock manure from the beef feedlot, dairy and sheep units at the UNL Agricultural Research and Development Center has been an integral part of the Integrated Farm. Previously manure was treated as a waste and applied on fields closest to the units, but after considerable research on the advantages and disadvantages of composting, it was decided to use it as the method of waste management on the Integrated Farm.

While composting requires additional land for a compost site, labor, time, specialized equipment and careful management, it has many advantages. Composting reduces fly and odor problems associated with stockpiled and land applied manure, stabilizes nitrogen which provides flexibility for land application, reduces volume of manure hauled to the field, and kills weed seeds and pathogens.

Beef feedlot and sheep manure is hauled directly to the compost site in spring and early summer from the pens and placed in windrows where it is turned for aeration an average of four times before the composting process is complete.

Dairy manure is hauled to the site each day and stored in an earthen holding pit until it can be mixed with residue. The dairy manure is generally very wet (80-90% moisture) and requires the addition of a drier bulking material before it can be composted. Waste residues such as spoiled silage, old hay, straw, haylage, and

feedstuffs are hauled to the compost site where they are mixed with the dairy manure in a spreader, placed in windrows, and turned an average of ten times. The composting process requires 4-6 weeks for the beef manure and 8-12 weeks for dairy manure, depending upon moisture content.

At the Integrated Farm we are producing approximately 3000 tons of compost annually from the livestock units. Equipment needed for composting on this scale includes a large pay loader, pull-type compost turner, and compost spreader. Costs for turning the compost, hauling it to the field, and spreading the compost range from \$3.50/ton to \$6.00/ton for composted beef feedlot manure. Costs for composted dairy manure are generally \$2.00/ton higher due to the mixing of the manure with residue and extra turning required. In 1995, nutrient content of composted feedlot manure was 11.1 lbs N/ton and 12.3 lbs P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/ton, while composted dairy manure averaged 12.75 lbs N/ton and 20.8 lbs P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/ton. Based on current fertilizer prices, the value of beef and dairy compost would be \$5.09 and \$7.61/ton, respectively.

Currently compost is being used as a phosphorus source on fields that test low for that chemical, particularly under irrigation and for alfalfa production. This is reducing the amount of purchased phosphorus on the farm.

*Submitted by Gary Lesoing*

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**Did You Know...**

An exhibit at Mount Vernon shows how George Washington experimented with crop rotation, organic fertilizers, soil amendments, and a dung repository, which may have been one of the country's first dedicated composting facilities.

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**Call for Papers on Wind Erosion**

Wind Erosion: An International Symposium/Workshop Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the USDA's Wind Erosion Research at Kansas State University will be held June 3-5, 1997 in Manhattan. Scientists, engineers and conservationists are invited to present papers and/or attend sessions related to the occurrence, measurement, and prediction and control of wind erosion and related processes and consequences. Submit abstracts by December 31 to: sym@weru.ksu.edu or symposium abstracts, c/o USDA, ARS Wind Erosion, Throckmorton Hall, KSU, Manhattan, KS 66506. More information and an Intent to Participate Form (due by September 30) is available at URL <http://www.weru.ksu.edu>.

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**Plan for a New Sustainable Farm Publication**

*The New Farm* was a practical agricultural magazine from Rodale Institute that ceased publication last year. A group of interested people is working toward

establishing an information resource on practical farming and policy evaluation for those involved in sustainable agriculture. The group includes an editorial director from Rodale and others who are well experienced in this publishing environment. With support from the Wallace Genetic Foundation and the Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture, the coordinators of the Committee for Sustainable Farm Publishing are assembling a mailing list of potential subscribers for the replacement publication. This committee is anxious to have names and addresses of people who are interested in the publication. If you want to be on this list, send your name and address to: Christopher Shirley, 609 S. Front Street, Allentown, PA 18103, 610-791-9683, e-mail: cdshirley@aol.com.

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## RESOURCES

*Preliminary Results of the 1995 National Organic Farmers' Survey.* April 1996. \$10. Organic Farming Research Foundation, PO Box 440, Santa Cruz, CA 95061, 408-4266606, research@ofrf.org.

*Monitoring Sustainable Agriculture with Conventional Financial Data.* \$7 (MN add 6.5% sales tax). In this 30page publication, Dick Levins presents four indicators to evaluate the sustainability of farming operations. Using farm records or tax reports, farmers can transfer numbers to work sheets provided in the book, and thus evaluate their sustainability. Land Stewardship Project, 2200 4th St., White Bear Lake, MN 55110, 612-6530618.

*Weeds: Control Without Poisons,* 1996. \$20 + \$2 s&h. Describes weed and soil ecology and provides information for identifying many North American weed species. Stresses that careful weed identification can provide important information about soil, plant health and water availability, and discusses how this information can enable farmers to improve crops and control weeds without relying on herbicides. Acres, U.S.A., PO Box 8800, Metairie, LA, 70011, 504-8892100 or 1-800-3555313.

*Vegetable Farmers and Their Weed Control Machines* (75-min video). \$10 (payable to UVM Extension). Nine farmers demonstrate various cultivation implements. Highly recommended by our UNL vegetable specialist. UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture, 590 Main St., Burlington, VT 05405-0059.

*1996 National Organic Directory.* \$34.95 + \$6 s&h (CA add \$2.75 sales tax). Community Alliance with Family Farmers, PO Box 464, Davis, CA 95617, 916-756-8518 or 1-800-852-3832.

*Agroecology in Action,* 1996 (Video). \$15. Teaches agroecological principles through interviews with several Latin American agroecological farmers. Miguel Altieri, 1050 San Pablo Avenue, Albany, CA 94706, 5106429802, agroeco@nature.berkeley.edu.

*Ecologically Based Pest Management: New Solutions for a New Century*, 1996. \$53.95. National Research Council. Discusses health, environmental and consumer concerns about conventional chemicalintensive agriculture, and describes framework for knowledgeintensive, ecologically based pest management system. Recommends integrating range of cultural and physical strategies in order to improve whole farm system, rather than approaching soil, pest, water and other issues separately. Discusses ways to facilitate timely flow of information to farmers, pest control workers and extension agents, and suggests ways to improve regulatory oversight of new pest control measures. National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20418, 18006246242.

*1996 Center Progress Report*. Free. Leopold Center details 15 of its recent research and education projects. Leopold Center, 209 Curtiss Hall, Iowa State U., Ames, IA 50011, 515-294-3711, leocenter@iastate.edu.

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### **Funding Opportunities: SARE and NRI**

The Administrative Council for the North Central Region (NCR) Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program has issued its 1997 Call for Preproposals for research and education/demonstration projects. Priority areas are:

- Emerging Issues
- Integration and Diversification of Farming Systems
- Sustainable Livestock Systems
- Networking
- Food Systems
- Environmentally Sensitive Land and Water Resources
- Environmentally Sound Management Practices

The deadline is September 13. For more information or an application packet, contact the NCR SARE Program office, 4024727081.

Deadlines have been announced for the next round of funding for the USDA National Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program. Of particular interest to readers of this newsletter are the categories of Forest/Range/Crop/Aquatic Ecosystems and Weed Science (Nov. 15), Assessing Pest Control Strategies (Jan. 15), and Agricultural Systems (Feb. 15). More information is available at the URL <http://www.reeusda.gov/new/nri/nricgp.htm>.

UNL faculty wishing to pursue the possibility of submission of an interdisciplinary proposal to SARE or NRI through the CSAS should contact either Charles Francis or Pam Murray. We can offer assistance with

conceptualization, putting together a project team, proposal development and project administration.

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### **Upcoming Integrated System Planning Workshops**

The pilot workshop for training Nebraska Cooperative Extension and Natural Resources Conservation Service employees in sustainable agriculture took place in Lincoln in February and March 1996. Based on feedback, the planning committee has revised the workshop and will offer it at the research and extension centers as follows: South Central, Oct. 8-9; Panhandle, Oct. 21-22; West Central, Oct. 29-30; Northeast, Nov. 13-14. For more information contact Victoria Mundy, coordinator of these events, 402-254-2289, e-mail: ceruaf01@nol.org.

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### **Coming Events**

Contact CSAS office for more information:

- Aug. 24  
Specialty Food Products Field Day, Lincoln, NE
- Sep. 5-6  
The Groundwater Foundation's Fall Symposium, Boston, MA
- Sep. 7  
Festival of Color (featuring native plants and grasses), Ithaca, NE
- Sep. 10-13  
National Small Farm Conference, Nashville, TN
- Sep. 15-19  
7th National Bioenergy Conference, Nashville, TN
- Sept. 18-21  
The EcoAgroForestry Century Conference, Dermott, AR
- Oct. 2-3  
Community Food Systems: Sustaining Farms and People in the Emerging Economy, Davis, CA
- Oct. 7-11  
International Conference on Ecological Engineering, Beijing
- Oct. 20-21  
Groundwater Foundation annual water festival workshop, Nebraska City, NE
- Nov. 1-2  
Profit from Diversity, Small Farm Trade Show & Seminars, Columbia, MO
- Nov. 3-8  
American Society of Agronomy Annual Meeting, Indianapolis, IN
- Nov. 11-16  
14th International Symposium on Sustainable Farming Systems, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- Nov. 13-15

## Composting Council's Seventh Annual Conference, Arlington, VA

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The Center for Sustainable Agricultural Systems bimonthly newsletter is currently available free in hard copy to U.S. addresses, and electronically via: SANET, PENPages, and the internal IANRNEWS. Current and back issues, along with other sustainable agriculture information is also available on the Internet:

<http://www.ianr.unl.edu/ianr/csas/>

For comments or questions, or to be added to the mailing list for hard copy, contact the editor at the masthead address, or e-mail [csas001@unlvm.unl.edu](mailto:csas001@unlvm.unl.edu).

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