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Center for Sustainable Agricultural Systems

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

January-February, 2000 Newsletter

Small Businesses Are Backbone of Communities

The following article by Metta Winter is condensed from: *Agriculture and Life Sciences News*, December 1999, published by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Cornell University.

Big businesses that dominate a town's economy don't have the community's interests at heart. For communities to thrive, they need locally owned businesses, including farms. Rural sociologist Tom Lyson holds up his U.S. Department of Commerce badge and says that it's his ticket to the inner sanctum of the Census Bureau. Lyson is the first sociologist to get into Census Bureau data files for the purpose of showing that communities dependent on big business interests are less well off-economically and in every other way--than those built on small locally owned businesses.

"When the economy of a community is dominated by one large plant or nationally owned business, it has a dampening effect on organizational life, which means less investment in the well-being of the community over the long haul," explains Lyson, citing an observation that was made in testimony before Congress at the end of World War II.

As Lyson tells the story, Congress didn't listen to the sociologists of the day, awarded munitions contracts to big businesses, and the military-industrial complex was born. As long as the United States dominated the world economy, businesses could afford to enter into a tacit social contract with labor unions. As a result, towns in the industrial heartland thrived. "But when the economies of Europe, Japan, and southeast Asia became strong competitors, American corporations reacted by becoming lean and mean--they moved out and left these communities to die," Lyson points out.

That doesn't happen to communities that have a strong, independent, merchant class of small businesses and family-owned farms. Small business owners are committed to their communities; they might be fiscally conservative but won't let the schools or the roads go to pot. What's more, locally owned businesses spawn a rich associational life. Kiwanis clubs, bowling leagues, hospital auxiliaries, church youth groups, and choral societies all

contribute to better social outcomes such as less crime, fewer out-of-wedlock births, and better health.

"But if you're working for Kodak, you are thinking about where you'll be transferred next. So your allegiance is to the corporation not to the community," Lyson says.

The theory of civic community says that agriculture should be more than producing low-cost food and making a profit. Agriculture and food are inextricably linked to the community and to the environment as well. "And if the food costs a little more, then I'll pay more for it," he adds, "because there is value in having farms out there, value in keeping people employed in agriculture."

Lyson has put the theory of civic community into action as director of Farming Alternatives: Cornell's Agriculture and Development and Diversification Program. The program is a \$250,000-a-year think tank that promotes community agricultural development through sophisticated direct marketing of locally grown, value-added products--what's known as the New Agriculture. Examples include fresh fruit and vegetable stands at travel plazas on the New York State Thruway, farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture (CSAs), restaurants featuring New York State--grown produce and wines, and agritourism operations such as U-pick pumpkin farms featuring hay rides and homemade pies.

Lyson contends that in the Northeast we've paid a lot of attention to industrial, mass production agriculture by increasing yields, increasing milk output, making farms bigger, and making farmers into managers. But if this is all we rely on, we'll get beaten by global-scale processors from California, Florida, Texas, and Mexico. Lyson says that instead of putting all its economic eggs in one basket, New York should be simultaneously focusing on bringing production and consumption closer together.

New York State imports an estimated 85 percent of its food and that percentage would be closer to 95 were it not for milk. "New York City is at the center of the biggest consumer market in the world, stretching from Boston to Washington, and we've hardly begun to exploit it," Lyson says. "Why should the food eaten in Manhattan come from California, when a lot of it could be grown next door in the Hudson Valley?"

By developing unique, regionally identified products and cultivating local and regional markets, the potential is unlimited. Lyson points to cheese as an example. "The biggest economic multiplier is with a cheese plant," he says, explaining that in the manufacture of cheese, every dollar rotates back six times through the community (to the farmer, the veterinarian, the feed seller, the milk hauler, etc.). "So we need to think creatively about cheese just like we did with the wine industry. Because of the Farm Family Winery Act of 1975, there are more than 100 wineries in the state now. Why don't we do this with cheese plants and have a wine and cheese trail?"

In the long run, Farming Alternatives establishes an agriculture that will be food for communities and the environment. Lyson points out, "The New Agriculture isn't an act of

resistance to industrialized agriculture; rather it's an opportunity for a small, local, consumer-driven food system that disappeared a century ago to come back and exist with it side by side."

Editor's Note: Tom Lyson was co-editor with Richard Olson of the book, *Under the Blade*, featured in several recent CSAS Newsletters.

Nebraska's Future Agriculture: Multiple Functions of Rural Landscapes

[This is the first in a series of articles on projections about the future of our most important industry. They present alternative views of the future, as we respond to growing concerns about how food is produced and agriculture's impact on rural Nebraska. These ideas from faculty will help guide the design of relevant research and education programs in the university.]

Landscapes Yield Food

Nebraskans recognize agriculture as a key activity in the rural landscape. Food, fiber, and raw materials for other processes are what we associate with farming and ranching. Agriculture and food were integral to the Native American cultures on the Plains landscapes, and continue to be the foundation of our state's economy. Although only 3% of the population is involved in production, about 25% of employment depends directly on agriculture. Five crops--corn, soybeans, wheat, grain sorghum, and alfalfa--occupy 95% of the cultivated acres in the state. Our major cash income derives from adding value to these commodities and to grasslands with beef cattle, swine, dairy cattle, and poultry. Agriculture is the backbone of our economy, both for local consumption and export in the U.S. and abroad.

Although we are recognized as a part of the "Great American Breadbasket," Nebraskans import about 70% of all the food we consume. Our agricultural landscapes and climate are capable of producing many types of crops that make up today's varied diet. Vegetables, fruits, and nuts are produced on a small scale, but what we see in the farmers' markets are an indication of a great potential to diversify our systems and do an "import substitution" with locally grown food. Dozens of these staple and varied foods can be produced in season, and using such technologies as greenhouses can greatly extend the crop growing potentials. Raising livestock and poultry primarily on pasture and crop residues can provide valuable protein sources, while adding value to grains through local processing can create more profits for farmers and communities. These are among the options for an energy-efficient future that depends more on local food systems. They also represent an innovative use of landscapes for food production.

Ecosystem Services from Landscapes

Most Nebraskans are less familiar with all the services that rural areas provide. Rain and snow are collected across the state, stored in crop and pasture land, and released to streams and aquifers. The quality of this water depends on how we farm and graze the land. Farming can affect air quality by using perennial crops and minimum tillage, and by keeping agricultural chemicals within the bounds of the field where they are applied. Non-chemical practices and cover crops through most of the year contribute to both water and air quality. Capture of carbon from the atmosphere is another key function of crop and pasture acres. Growing concern about carbon dioxide increases in the atmosphere may lead to farmers receiving "carbon credits" for systems that maximize the intake of carbon by plants and fix this element in the soil. When farmlands are urbanized through development of malls, roads, and large houses or commercial buildings, many of these services are lost or greatly reduced. We all recognize the need to maintain essential ecosystem functions.

Landscape Habitats--a Good Place to Live

Contributing to Nebraska's quality of life are many rural sites that are desirable places to work and live. More than 70% of farms have one person working off the farm, and more than 40% have two people working elsewhere, yet these families continue to farm and live on the land for many reasons--not all of which are economic. With growth of the electronic age, life on farms and in smaller communities has the advantages of knowing neighbors and participating in local activities while maintaining close connection to the wider society. The increase in demand for small acreages during the past two decades clearly demonstrates a desire by many to live in a rural landscape. At the same time, this development is a serious concern because of the loss of farmland and rapid inflation of land prices. The rural landscape provides habitat for wildlife and non-crop plants, especially when non-farmed areas are designed to promote migration routes for animals and diversity of plants. Human benefits derive from hunting, fishing, and recreation in these same rural landscapes.

Rural/Urban Interface

The potentials for developing woody perennial "buffer zones" between farming and urban communities were described in the July-August, 1998 CSAS newsletter. A defined boundary that promotes positive communication through personal relationships between rural and urban residents could increase support of agricultural issues. Commercial activities such as CSAs, U-pick produce, farm stands, and direct delivery of food could result from design of an interface that encourages inter-dependency rather than separation. Nebraskans involved in agriculture must find ways to promote the value of food production and rural landscapes in the minds of urban dwellers if we are to generate support for legislation favorable to our sector.

These are all reasons for maintaining healthy rural landscapes, and for recognizing the multiple functions of these critical areas of our state.

Submitted by Charles Francis

Conference to Promote Sustainable Food Systems

The Cascade Harvest Coalition, Washington State Department of Agriculture, and Washington State University Cooperative Extension announce a conference to promote the development of healthy sustainable food systems. "Farm-To-Table: Growing Healthy Foodsheds and Community," March 24-26, 2000 in Olympia, will explore the many connections between the food we eat and the health of our local farms, culture and communities.

Interactive discussion between the culinary community, policy makers, farmers, marketers, consumers and health professionals will include topics on the impact of a globalized food system on consumers, farmers, and communities; linkages between chefs and farmers; biodiversity on the farm; environmental nutrition and the health benefits of eating locally produced food; grassroots and public programs to preserve farmland.

Invited speakers include: Joan Dye Gussow, Nutritionist and Professor Emeritus of Nutrition Education, member of the National Organic Standards Board, and author of *Chicken Little, Tomato Sauce and Agriculture: Who Will Produce Tomorrow's Food?* (1992); Fred Kirschenmann, farmer, activist, and author of *Can Organic Agriculture Feed the World . . . And Is That the Right Question?*; Wes Jackson, founder of The Land Institute and author of *New Roots for Agriculture*; Michael Ableman, farmer and author of *From the Good Earth*; Jack Kloppenburg, Professor of Rural Sociology and author of the essay, "Coming into the Foodshed"; and Buck Levin, Professor of Nutrition and author of *Environmental Nutrition: Understanding the Link Between Environment, Food Quality and Disease*.

Contact: Curtis Beus, WSU Cooperative Extension, PO Box 863, Port Angeles, WA 98362-0149, 360-417-2279, beusc@wsu.edu.

2000 NSAS Meeting Features Salatin

Healthy Farms, Healthy Families, Healthy Communities is the theme of the 2000 conference of the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society. If you want to bring fun and profits back into farming, then you need to attend this event on February 26 at the Leadership Center in Aurora. Virginia farmer Joel Salatin will present the keynote address: Yes, You Can Farm...And Love It! Joel will inspire the audience with sustainable, profitable production and marketing strategies that can help family farms thrive. Workshop topics will include value-added processing, cooperative marketing, organic gardening, soil fertility, and crop rotations.

The preregistration deadline is February 18. For more information, call 402-254-2289.

UNL Centers Offer Entrepreneurial Assistance

The Food Processing Center's two-phase Entrepreneur Assistance Program helps potential food entrepreneurs. The first phase, From Product to Profit, assists entrepreneurs through all steps of developing a food manufacturing business. The nationally recognized one-day seminar addresses many marketing, business and technical issues including product development, food safety, market selection, regulatory issues and agencies, product pricing, legal issues, and packaging and promotional strategies. It helps participants decide if they want to develop a food manufacturing business. Remaining dates for 2000 seminars are March 17, April 29, June 14, August 15 and October 16. During the second phase, Start-Up Services and Consultation, participants receive confidential, individualized, step-by-step assistance with product development, business development and product introduction into the marketplace. Contact: Arlis Burney, UNL Food Processing Center, 143 Filley Hall, Lincoln, NE 68583-0928, 402-472-8930, aburney1@unl.edu, <http://foodsci.unl.edu/fpc/market/ent.htm>.

The Center for Rural Revitalization has added a new course to its Nebraska Edge Program. "Tilling the Soil of Opportunity" is a 10-session course designed to assist farmers, ranchers and gardeners who want to direct market an agricultural product. Participants explore the different distribution channels needed to get their products to market such as farmers markets, CSAs, delivery routes, Internet sales, mail orders, and grocery store chains. During the course, participants can explore niche markets such as organic, sustainable and value-added products. Instructors also assist participants in analyzing their costs of production and learning how to cash flow the operation. Contact: Marilyn Schlake, UNL Center for Rural Revitalization, 58 Filley Hall, Lincoln, NE 68583-0947, 402-472-4138, mschlake1@unl.edu, <http://www.ianr.unl.edu/nebraskaedge/>.

NCR SARE Announces Availability of Producer Grants

The USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program in the North Central Region will award its ninth round of innovative producer grants in 2000. Farmers and ranchers can apply for \$5,000 to \$15,000 to conduct research or education/demonstration projects that further the goals of sustainable agriculture.

Applications are available February 1, 2000, and due April 28. Up to \$5,000 are available for individual producers and up to \$15,000 for groups of three or more producers investigating any sustainable practice or concept. Part of the grant funds will be earmarked for special marketing and agroforestry projects in cooperation with the National Agroforestry Center and the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service.

Nearly 280 producer projects in 12 NCR states have been awarded at a total of more than \$1.3 million since 1992. Projects cover topics such as reducing off-farm inputs, testing technologies, improving water quality, educating young people or consumers about agriculture, managing weeds and pests, recycling wastes and creating viable markets for sustainable products, among a host of other issues. Results from previously funded producer grant projects are available in print and electronic forms. Call the North Central SARE office at 402-472-7081 for a list of funded producer grants and copies of producer reports, or go to www.sare.org, the national SARE program website, and link to Funded projects to search an online database of project abstracts from producers, researchers and educators.

Producers must reside in the 12-state North Central Region: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin. Funding decisions will be made in late-June 2000. Funds will be available in mid-fall for the 2001 crop production season. Call 402-472-7081, fax 402-472-0280 or send e-mail to ncrsare@unl.edu for an application. You can also find the application at www.sare.org/ncrsare on February 1. Contact Ken Schneider, Producer Grant Program Coordinator, 402-472-0809, kschneider1@unl.edu.

USDA Invests \$180 Million in Rural America, Agricultural Research

On January 10 Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman unveiled plans for \$180 million in new USDA investments in projects aimed at boosting the rural economy, promoting agricultural research, and developing new agricultural products and practices for the future. Glickman awarded \$60 million in Fund for Rural America research and economic development grants. The remaining \$120 million will be distributed through a competitive grant process under the Secretary's new Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems. Later this year USDA will request proposals for these priorities: agricultural genomics and biotechnology risk assessment; food safety and the role of nutrition in health; new uses for agricultural products, including biomass fuel sources; natural resources management, pest management and precision agriculture; and farm efficiency and profitability, with an emphasis on small- and mid-sized family farms. The needs of small- and medium-sized producers will be a priority.

Source: USDA press release. Full release at <http://www.usda.gov/news/releases/2000/01/0007>.

New Wallace Center Created at Winrock International

The Institute for Alternative Agriculture has become the Henry A. Wallace Center for Agricultural & Environmental Policy at Winrock International. Founded in 1983 and

named after the former Secretary of Agriculture and U.S. Vice President during the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, the Wallace Institute has been instrumental in defining alternative agriculture in the United States. Winrock International is a private, nonprofit organization that works with people around the world to increase economic opportunity, sustain natural resources, and protect the environment.

As a voice for alternative agriculture in Washington, DC, the Wallace Institute has provided leadership, policy research, scientific analysis, and information for the sustainable agriculture movement. It has influenced national agricultural policy and worked with government agencies, educational and research institutions, producer groups, farmers, scientists, advocates, and other organizations that provide research, education, and information services.

Kate Clancy, director of the Wallace Institute's Agriculture Policy Project, is the new director of the Wallace Center. Former Executive Director Garth Youngberg will continue to assist the Center on a part-time basis. Wallace Institute Board Chair, Dr. Cornelia Butler Flora, has been elected to Winrock International's Board of Directors. The Wallace Center will relocate to Arlington, Virginia by mid-spring. The 10- member staff will continue its ongoing projects and participate in the development of new programs at Winrock.

The Wallace Center will maintain its policy analysis programs and will continue to publish *Alternative Agriculture News*, a monthly newsletter covering policy and scientific developments and activities in the alternative agriculture community, and the quarterly *American Journal of Alternative Agriculture*, a peer-reviewed, scientific journal on alternative agriculture.

Source: *Alternative Agriculture News*, January 2000.

Farmland Loss Accelerates

Data from the USDA's 1997 National Resources Inventory (released in early December) show that nationally nearly 16 million acres of forest, cropland, and open space were converted to urban and other uses from 1992 to 1997. The average rate for those five years--3.2 million acres per year--is more than twice the rate of 1.4 million acres a year recorded from 1982 to 1992. The new data show that the loss of farmland is no longer centered predominantly around major metropolitan areas, but is affecting growing numbers of small- and mid-sized cities in virtually every part of the country. Texas and Pennsylvania had the biggest development rate increases, followed by Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, California, Tennessee and Michigan.

Source: Sustainability Digest (No. 11), an electronic newsletter of the Berea College Sustainability and Environmental Studies Program, Dr. Richard Olson, editor.

Editor's Note: For Secretary Glickman's comments regarding the NRI data and his call to renew the national commitment to preserving private land, see <http://www.usda.gov/news/releases/1999/12/0478>. For the NRI report, see <http://www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/NRI/1997/>.

Glickman Appoints Committee on Small Farms

On December 6, 1999 Secretary Glickman named 19 members to serve on the USDA Advisory Committee on Small Farms. The committee, authorized for two years, will review USDA programs and strategies to implement small farm policy and advise the Secretary on approaches to improve the department programs. Jesse Harness from the National Commission on Small Farms is chair of the committee. He is director of special programs and associate extension administrator of Alcorn State University.

Resources

The Radio and Television News Directors Foundation has published a Journalist's Resource Guide, *Covering Urban Sprawl: Rethinking the American Dream*, to help reporters cover these stories. It provides an overview of trends, causes, and consequences of sprawl, and possible alternatives to current growth patterns. See <http://www.rtndf.org/shop/sprawl/index.html>.

EPA has published a report on progress in implementing the Food Quality Protection Act of 1996, detailing actions to eliminate or reduce the use of pesticides on foods commonly eaten by children, and register new, safer pesticides. "Implementing the Food Quality Protection Act: Progress Report" is available at <http://www.epa.gov/oppfead1/fqpa/fqpareport.pdf>, or call 703-305-5017.

Reap New Profits: Marketing Strategies for Farmers and Ranchers. Free. New 20-page bulletin from USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) offers practical tips on how to get started in alternative marketing, with numerous examples of people using such strategies in the field. Describes how to start farmers markets, establish pick-your-own operations and farm stands, begin entertainment farming, open a community supported agriculture farm, join or start a cooperative, sell to restaurants or through mail order and the Internet. The bulletin describes ways to direct-market meat and process and add value to farm products. Call 301-504-6422, e-mail aadeyemi@nal.usda.gov, or print from <http://www.sare.org/san/market99/index.htm>.

Expanding the Organic Food and Agriculture System in the U.S.'s Upper Midwest: Strategies and Lessons of a Pilot Project. \$10. South Dakota State University, Economics Department, Brookings, SD 57005-0895, 605-688-4141.

Sustainable Agriculture: Definitions and Terms. Free. This Special Reference Brief was updated in September 1999. National Agricultural Library Rm. 304, 10301 Baltimore Ave., Beltsville, MD 20705-2351, 301-504-6422, afsic@nal.usda.gov, <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/afspub.htm>.

Codex Alimentarius. This FAO/WHO international organic standards document is online at www.fao.org/es/esn/codex.

Put Your Ideas to the Test: How to Conduct Research on Your Farm or Ranch. Available online at <http://www.sare.org/san/htdocs/pubs/> or from Valerie Berton, SARE Communications Specialist, 301-405-3186, vberton@wam.umd.edu.

Information on the recent FDA hearings on biotechnology can be found at the Ag BioTech InfoNet Web site, <http://www.biotech-info.net/policy.html>.

In the November-December 1998 CSAS Newsletter you read about an on-farm assessment tool called Pesticide Decision Tool (PDT), which facilitates the adoption of environmental impact assessment in the selection and management of pesticides in arable crop production. Now check out the new Web site for this program at <http://www.iatp.org/pesticide/>. PDT consists of a set of documents and associated software, both of which can be downloaded over the Internet.

Coming Events

Contact CSAS office for more information.

2000

Feb. 26 - Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society Healthy Farms Conference & Annual Meeting, Aurora, NE

Feb. 28-Mar. 2 - International Plant Resistance to Insects Workshop, Fort Collins, CO, <http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/bspm/Meetings/ipri.html>

Mar. 7-9 - Farming and Ranching for Profit, Stewardship, and Community Conference, Portland, OR, <http://wsare.usu.edu/2000/>

Mar. 13-16 - Conference on Land Stewardship in the 21st Century: The Contributions of Watershed Management, Tucson, AZ, <http://www.srn.arizona.edu/2000conf/landconf.html>

Mar. 24-26 - Farm-To-Table: Growing Healthy Foodsheds and Community, Olympia, WA

Mar. 27-29 - Soil, Food and People: A Biointensive Model for the New Century, Davis, CA, <http://www.universityextension.ucdavis.edu/biointensive/>

For additional events, see:

http://www.sare.org/wreg/view_notice_adm.pl

<http://www.agnic.org/mtg/>

Did You Know...

In the U.S. more than 80% of seed varieties sold a century ago are no longer available.

Genetically modified food has been banned from the staff cafeteria at Monsanto's UK headquarters by the company's own caterer, Monsanto confirmed in a statement issued 12/21/99. Granada Food Services, whose customers include Monsanto's High Wycombe office near London, recently told clients it would not supply food containing genetically modified soya or maize due to customer concerns.

This document is online at:

<http://www.ianr.unl.edu/ianr/csas/newsletr/janfeb00.htm>