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July-August 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 via the gopher path:

IANRVM.UNL.EDU

IANR Information

Sustainable Agriculture

Note: The electronic version is not sent to individual e-mail addresses. To be added to the "hard copy" newsletter mailing list (not sent to overseas addresses), 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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CENTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS HOLDS ANNUAL MEETING

Reform of the property tax system, future of the pork industry, and options for the 1995 farm bill were key workshop topics at the annual meeting of the Center for Rural Affairs (CRA) on August 5. Senator George Coordsen (Nebraska Legislature Revenue Committee) said that the Nebraska property tax approach to school finance was under assault from all directions, and that the legislature was open to a wide range of options. Jim Griess of the Nebraska State Education Association and Stan Dobrovlny, representing the views of ranchers and property owners, agreed that the current system placed a disproportionate burden on land owners, and that a more creative approach was needed to share the costs of education. Marty Strange of the CRA said it was up to Nebraskans to decide what type of quality education we want for the future, and then to design a systems and financial support structure to make it happen. This will be a big issue in the next several years.

A series of 15 ~teach-ins~ was held on topics such as pastured poultry and organic certification. Social topics included community organization, rural housing, educating for policy involvement, dealing with bankers, and immigrants and race relations. Natural resource issues such as groundwater challenges, public power districts, and prairie restoration were covered in other discussions. There was an ~earlybird special discussion~ lead by Marty Strange on corporate farming in Nebraska and how different interest groups could best make their cases to legislators and the general public. David Hansen received a plaque and thanks for his work as chair of the CRA board for the past three years. Approximately 150 people attended the event, held this year in the Seward Civic Center through the arrangements of CSAS Advisory Committee member Verlon (Tony) Vrana.

CRA mission: ~We are committed to building sustainable rural communities consistent with social and economic justice, stewardship of the natural environment and broad distribution of wealth. We work to advance our vision of rural America through research, education, advocacy, organizing, and leadership development.~ Contact: CRA, POB 106, Walthill, NE 68067; 402-846-5428; fax -5420.

Submitted by Charles Francis

SARE/ACE PREPROPOSALS DUE SEPT. 15

The Administrative Council for the North Central Region (NCR) Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program has issued its 1996 Call for Preproposals for research, education and demonstration projects. Priority areas for SARE/ACE (Agriculture in Concert with the Environment) preproposals are:

- Sustainable Livestock Systems
- Networking
- Developing Markets
- Sustainable Agriculture Curriculum
- Alternative Weed Management
- Emerging Issues
- Environmentally Sensitive Areas
- Environmentally Sound Practices

In FY-95 the average grant was for \$73,015 over two years. For more information or an application packet, contact the NCR SARE Program office, 402-472-7081.

If you wish to submit a proposal for an interdisciplinary project through the CSAS, contact Charles Francis or Pam Murray. We can offer assistance with conceptualization, putting together a project team, proposal development and project administration.

REGIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM AWARDS MINIGRANTS

The North Central Sustainable Agriculture Training Program (NCSATP) has awarded minigrants to programs in six midwestern states. The minigrants cover expenses for speakers for in-state sustainable agriculture training and special topic tours. These activities were identified in the NCSATP grant and were also given high priority by participants in the Everyone a Teacher, Everyone a Learner workshops (see March/April CSAS newsletter).

The speakers for in-state sustainable agriculture training will provide expertise to handle specific topics in the implementation of state strategic plans. Experts will also share ideas and resources from other programs. The special topic training tours will emphasize the site specific nature of sustainable agriculture practices as well as the broad applicability of principles. They will also teach future trainers how to conduct lively and informative field trips.

The following universities and organizations received minigrants:

- U. of Illinois and Illinois Sustainable Agriculture Network--presentation on Defining Sustainable Agriculture for National Training Program;
- Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance--presentation on Virtual Food: The Disappearance of Agriculture;
- U. of Missouri and Lincoln U.--presentation on Soil Quality and Soil Health; tours on organic produce farm and diversified cash grain farm;
- U. of Nebraska--Tour of grazing maize;

- North Dakota State U. and South Dakota State U.--presentation on Social and Economic Areas of Sustainable Agriculture;
- The Ohio State U.--presentations on Extension's Role in Sustainable Agriculture and Using Case Studies to Help Farm Families Make Decisions; tours on two sustainable farms.

Evaluations and recommendations from the training activities will be shared throughout the region. For more information, call Heidi Carter at 402-472-0917. Source of funding for regional training projects in sustainable agriculture is the USDA SARE Program.

Submitted by Heidi Carter

REDUCED HERBICIDE WEED CONTROL

Recent research has led to development of a reduced-rate herbicide and cultivation combination that cuts chemical use and costs in half compared with conventional full-rate treatment. That is a \$1,200 to \$1,400 savings on 200 acres of soybeans.

Our work with reduced rates has focused on broadleaf weed management in conventional till soybeans; grasses are controlled with a conventional soil applied or postemergence program. Antagonism problems have resulted in reduced grass control when we have attempted reduced rate programs combining grass and broadleaf herbicides in a single treatment.

A reduced rate program depends on application of herbicides when weeds are small and easily controlled. A single cultivation two weeks after treatment is part of the program. Growth stage of the weed is a more reliable indication for treatment timing than days after planting or days after emergence. Success depends on 1) match of herbicide treatment with target weeds, 2) correct timing, and 3) high quality application. A mismatch of herbicide treatment and weed species can result in serious weed problems.

One advantage of the reduced rate program is a widening of the "treatment window" for postemergence treatments with application rates adjusted accordingly. The risk of adverse weather can be readily managed utilizing the reduced rate early application program. If circumstances prevent a planned early application, the producer can simply revert to a standard application. When very few weeds are present, cultivation can replace the chemical application.

If reduced rate treatments are to be successful, it is critical that the herbicide(s) selected be highly effective on the target weeds. Reducing the rate of a herbicide that is only marginally effective on a weed is not likely to provide acceptable control. It is important to note that the user, not the manufacturer, assumes all responsibility for performance. Label rates have a safety margin built in to assure consistent performance over a range in application conditions. With reduced rates this safety margin is "used up." There is little room for error in timing or application quality.

For more information about this research, contact Alex Martin, Dept. of Agronomy, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE 68583-0910, 402-472-1527, e-mail: agro151@unlvm.unl.edu.

INTERESTED IN BIOFUELS?

The Biofuels Feedstock Development Program in the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) publishes a free newsletter titled Energy Crops Forum. For more information contact the editor, Anne Ehrenshaft, 615-576-5132, e-mail: are@ornl.gov. Anne can also send you a bibliography of materials published by the BFDP since it began in 1978.

DOE's Biofuels System Division operates the Biofuels Information Network, which it describes as a jumping off point on the Internet. Texts of DOE publications, BFDP-sponsored reports, and Energy Crops Forum, are available. There are also links to Internet sites containing additional information about energy, environment, agriculture, natural resources, and U.S. government.

Address is: <http://www.esd.ornl.gov/BFDP/BFDPMOSAIC/binmenu.html>

CAST REPORT SUMMARIZES CRP SURVEY

A background document released by the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST) in July summarizes Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) policy literature and a survey of key special interest groups regarding their preferences for a future CRP. The purpose of this report is to make CRP evaluation easier by placing literature and preference information in a single document.

Literature Survey Findings

- * Participants are pleased with the program because it provides income stability, decreases the need for credit, and in some instances allows for early retirement.
- * The CRP has decreased cropland erosion, improved water quality, and increased land values and wildlife benefits.
- * Negative effects include some noxious weed problems and business fluctuations in some agriculturally dependent communities.
- * The cost of the program is estimated at \$1.8 billion a year, or close to \$19 billion over the life of the program.
- * Studies found that the program could have been more cost-effective if the bid process had been more competitive and if more environmentally sensitive lands had been enrolled.
- * The USDA states that CRP benefits have exceeded its costs. Other studies show benefits ranging only from \$6 billion to \$13.4 billion, far short of its \$19 billion cost.
- * Cost-efficiency criteria such as the estimated \$8.4 billion savings in

commodity program outlays are likely to be considered in the complete CRP analysis.

Interest Group Survey Results

Sixteen of the 18 surveyed interest groups listed six aspects of the CRP that could be modified:

- * enrollment size,
- * targeting options,
- * targeting tools,
- * easement and contract usage,
- * economic land use options, and
- * delegation of control.

The positions of the 16 representatives are as follows:

- * All support a CRP renewal.
- * Groups recommend different levels of acreage enrollment.
- * All favor multiple targeting.
- * All favor use of contracts while some support a mixture of short- and long-term retirement options.
- * A majority favors economic land use options, of which haying and grazing is the most controversial.
- * All support more localized control of the program.

Three options exist: renewal, termination, or modification.

CRP Renewal

- * Over 65% of the CRP acres would remain under contract.
- * Erosion control, water quality, and wildlife benefits would increase.
- * The need for corn- and soybean-supply controls would be eliminated.
- * Wheat and corn prices would be higher if all contracts expired.
- * Annual program expenditure would range from \$2.25 billion to \$2.6 billion.

CRP Termination

- * Over 60% of the acreage would return to production.
- * The government would save nearly \$2 billion a year.
- * Some agriculturally dependent communities would rebound from economic hardship.
- * Large increases in cropped acreage over a brief period would increase production and decrease prices and income.
- * Environmental benefits of the CRP would be decreased or eliminated.

CRP Modification

The literature review, surveys of interest groups, and political posturing indicate that a modified program will be likely.

Literature and Survey Conclusions

- * If a modified program is developed during the 1995 Farm Bill proceedings, it will be less costly due to decreased acreage enrollment, will contain more effective eligibility criteria, and will decrease rental rates when there are allowable economic uses.
- * The program will address a number of environmental issues and will target program lands according to specific productivity and environmental benefit criteria.
- * The CRP will most likely succeed if design, implementation, and control are shared at national and local levels.
- * Supporters of a modified CRP will be recipients of environmental benefits, participants whose land qualifies for the program, and policymakers with constituents capturing CRP benefits.
- * Opponents of a leaner, more cost-effective CRP are producers who no longer qualify for the program, individuals who want to decrease government involvement in agriculture, and taxpayers who are forced to continue to pay the cost of the CRP when they do not think that the program is worthwhile.

Source: "The Conservation Reserve: A Survey of Research and Interest Groups" (see Resources).

Editor's Note: CAST has a World Wide Web site that includes summaries of publications (including "Sustainable Agriculture and the 1995 Farm Bill," published in April), full text of issue papers, and links to scientific, agricultural, and public policy Internet sites. The address is: <http://www.netins.net/showcase/cast/>

NEW SAN COORDINATOR

Andy Clark has replaced Gabriel Hegyes as the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) Coordinator. Andy's graduate work at the U. of Maryland focused on cover crop management. He received his M.S. in 1988 and his Ph.D. in 1993.

SAN offers an e-mail group (now with over 700 participants), national directory of expertise (a revised version to be available this fall electronically and in print), an annotated bibliography of educational materials useful to farmers, and much more. For details, contact this newsletter editor or Andy.

SAN is a cooperative effort of university, government, business and non-profit organizations dedicated to the exchange of scientific and practical information on sustainable agricultural systems. It is supported by the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program. As a decentralized network, the points of contact are many. To provide overall coordination and a central point of contact, SAN has an office hosted by the Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC) of the National Agricultural Library.

Sustainable Agriculture Network
 c/o AFSIC, Room 304
 National Agricultural Library
 Agriculture Research Service
 10301 Baltimore Boulevard

Beltsville, MD 20705-2351
Internet: san@nalusda.gov
Telephone: 301/504-6425
FAX: 301/504-6409

USDA OFFICE OF SUSTAINABLE AG PROGRAMS HAS TWO JOB OPENINGS

Associate Director of this national program is located in Washington, DC and pays \$55,000 to \$64,000. M.S. degree required, Ph.D. desired. Deadline is September 15.

Communications Specialist is a new position that works with four regional communications specialists and the Sustainable Ag Network (SAN) coordinator. The position is offered through the U. of Maryland and pays \$28,000 to \$37,000. B.S. or B.A. required. Deadline is August 31.

Contact for both positions: Dr. Robert Myers, Director, Office of Sustainable Agriculture Programs, 202-720-5623.

AG RESOURCE CONSERVATION ACT

Senators Richard Lugar (R-IN) and Patrick Leahy (D-VT) have introduced the Agricultural Resource Conservation Act (S. 854), which will form the framework for the Senate Farm Bill Conservation Title. The bill, which is supported by the Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture and the Wallace Institute, would consolidate existing conservation programs into a single, streamlined program, and extend the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) as a long-term protection program using long-term agreements and permanent easements. It would increase the cost-effectiveness of the CRP by focusing on the most environmentally sensitive land and encouraging partial field enrollments, such as filterstrips, contour grass strips, wellhead protection zones, and shelterbelts. It would also give priority to sustainable production, rather than wholesale land retirement, by merging cost share and incentive programs to encourage various conservation practices. The Senate Agriculture Committee is expected to take up the Lugar-Leahy bill in September.

Source: Alternative Agriculture News, August 1995.

LISTSERV ON LAND USE AND OTHER RESOURCES

A new unmoderated listserv provides a forum for dissemination and discussion of information on: rights in, access to, and use of land and other resources; sustainable development, poverty, and income distribution; and related laws and institutions. To subscribe, send message:

subscribe tenure

to:

listserv@relay.doit.wisc.edu
Contact is Steve Smith, e-mail: owner-tenure@relay.doit.wisc.edu

E-mail NETWORK FOR ECOLOGICAL AGRICULTURE

This network is intended for academics, researchers, educationalists and others working in the field of ecological (organic/biological) agriculture, to provide a forum for discussion of ideas, identification of potential collaborators, and exchange of news, conference information and publication details. To subscribe, send message:

join ecol-agric
to:
listserv@relay.doit.wisc.edu
or www address:
<http://www.mailbase.ac.uk>
Contact is Nic Lampkin, e-mail: nhl@aber.ac.uk

WEED ELECTRONIC DISCUSSION GROUP

To subscribe to a weed ecology/biology discussion group out of Iowa State U. called WeedNet, send a message including your full e-mail address to:
jdekker@iastate.edu

FAREWELL MICHELE

Michele Strickler, who has been an integral part of the CSAS team for nearly three years, has accepted a new position in the UNL Department of Human Resources. This is the last newsletter she will design. Her computer and organizational skills will be sorely missed, as will her ready smile and enthusiasm.

RESOURCES

The Conservation Reserve: A Survey of Research and Interest Groups. (See CAST article this issue.) \$12.00 + \$3.00 s&h; individual and student members of CAST may request a free copy (include \$3.00 s&h). CAST, 4420 West Lincoln Way, Ames, IA 50014-3447, 515-292-2125, e-mail: cast@netins.net.

Institutional and Policy Factors in Pest Management Reforms: Changes to Unlearn, Relearn, and Restructure. No charge. Reviews characteristics of Green Revolution-style technology transfer and rural development, and argues that these approaches are seriously flawed in terms of addressing farmers' needs and promoting sustainable agriculture. World Resources Institute, 1709 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20006, 202-638-6300.

The Soul of Soil: A Guide to Ecological Soil Management. \$16.95 + \$4 s&h. Practical "how-to" gives farmers useful guidelines for making management decisions based on ecological principles, with minimal reliance on "off-farm" fertilizers. Authors describe use of green manures, crop rotations, on-farm composting, mineral fertilizers, collecting soil samples, using on-farm tests that measure soil structure, water-holding capacity, and fertility, and more. agAccess, P.O. Box 2008, Davis, CA 95616, e-mail: agaccess @davis.com.

Hog Wash: Factory Farm Giveaways in Clean Water Proposals. \$5 + \$1.45 s&h. NRDC Publications Department, 40 West 20th St., New York, NY 10011.

Animal Agriculture: Information on Waste Management and Water Quality Issues. No charge. U.S. General Accounting Office, PO Box 6015, Gaithersburg, MD 20884-6015, 202-512-6000.

DID YOU KNOW...

Rachel Carson, author of Silent Spring (1962), was a co-founder of The Nature Conservancy.

Funding for USDA sustainable ag programs totalled \$12.2 million in 1995.

Each federal dollar appropriated for research and extension leverages 4-5 state, local and private dollars; the annual rate of return on the overall investment in research and extension is 30-50%.

USDA says farmers earned on average \$4,750 in farm income last year--equivalent to a full-time worker earning \$2.28/hr without health care or vacation benefits.

Organic Market Overview says the U.S. organic industry grew more than 22% in 1994, reaching sales of \$2.3 billion.

Monsanto Co., has acquired just less than half interest in Calgene Inc., the biotech firm known for its genetically engineered Flavr Savr tomato.

COMING EVENTS

Contact CSAS office for more information:

Sep. 7 -- PFI Thompson Field Day, Boone, IA

Sep. 9 -- Festival of Color, theme is water quality, Ithaca, NE

Sep. 16-17 -- Forestry Field Days, Plattsmouth, NE

Oct. 7-8 -- The Politics of Sustainable Agriculture, Eugene, OR

Oct. 10-11 -- The Next Generation of Legal, Regulatory and Marketing Issues

Facing the Organic Products Industry, Oakland, CA
Oct. 18 -- Annual Groundwater Symp., Lincoln, NE
Oct. 19-23 -- Helping Small Towns Survive, Jackson Hole, WY
Oct. 22-25 -- New Crops: New Opportunities, New Technologies, Indianapolis, IN
Nov. 6-8 -- Linkages among Farming Systems and Communities, North American Symposium, AFSRE, Ames, IA
Nov. 12-14 -- Community Supported Agriculture Conference, San Francisco, CA
Nov. 16-17 -- Environmental Enhancement through Agriculture, Boston, MA
Nov. 30-Dec. 2 -- Celebrating 25 Years of Eco-Agriculture, St. Louis, MO
Dec. 12-15 -- National Agricultural Ecosystem Mgt Conference, New Orleans, LA



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