

Changing Technologies and Changing Values

Update from the New England Sustainable Agriculture Training Project

Activities are Underway for 1996

Since the *Changing Technologies and Changing Values* conference, many programs and activities involving collaborative efforts among Extension, NRCS, FSA and state agency personnel and farmers have been initiated or enhanced. These activities range from study circles to farm tours and participatory research. This newsletter serves to update conference participants on the activities that have occurred in their state and the region.

The New England Sustainable Agriculture Training Project continues into 1996 with tours, fact sheets, and a two-day training.

Farm Tours

On May 22, the first of two farm tours took place in "western" New England. The purpose of the tours is to allow agency folks to see just some of the innovative techniques farmers are using in New England to sustain their farms.

Twenty-four people from extension, NRCS, FSA and a non-profit attended the tour. They visited the Sheep Dairy Center, in Westminster, Vermont, where David and Cindy Major milk about 200 sheep using a seasonal, pasture-based system. Last year they produced 7,500 pounds of gourmet Vermont Shepard cheese. To meet the demand of their product and expand this local agricultural opportunity, they have started a center which trains other

farmers in sheep dairying.

Another stop was the Franklin Farm, in Guilford, VT. The Franklins run a hillside dairy farm that has been making the transition to a pasture-based system over the past few years. They are members of a local farmer support group that meets regularly to share information and participate in pasture walks.

At the Walker Farm, owned by Jack and Karen Manix, in Dummerston, VT, tour participants saw unusual bedding plants, greenhouse tomatoes, and organic vegetables. The farm is home to one of the area's premiere farm stands that sells local products, plus plants from their new small nursery center. The farm's progressive production techniques and management style attract and retain excellent local help.

The last stop was the Food Bank Farm, operated by Michael Docter and Linda Hildebrandt, in Hadley, MA. The 60-acre farm was purchased through a partnership of the Western MA Food Bank, state agencies and private funds. Since 1992, it has produced more than 270 thousand pounds of produce for the food bank. The farm also runs a large CSA with over 400 shareholders.

On August 6, the second farm tour will be held in the seacoast region of New Hampshire and Southern Maine. The tour will be an interesting mix of livestock, fruit and vegetable farms. For more information on the tour, contact your state coordinator (see page 8).

Fact Sheets

During 1996 and 1997, the New England project will develop a series of five fact sheets per year that have significance for the New England region. Commodity-specific extension specialists throughout New England will be invited to participate and to work with both research and producer groups to integrate sustainable agriculture concepts into their educational programs and materials. The groups will analyze current materials and then develop new publications that focus on integrated approaches to farming, emphasizing maximum use of on-farm resources.

Participatory Training Conference

A two-day training workshop in participatory education and research methods will be held in November 1996. The purpose of the training is to empower Extension and USDA agency personnel to work cooperatively with farmers in addressing the problems and concerns expressed by the agricultural community. The target audience will be Extension and USDA agency personnel from the 6 New England states. Farmers will participate as "expert" panel members, perhaps as one of a team presenting successful models of participatory approaches. For specific information on this workshop, contact your state coordinator. ☛

Connecticut

by Roy Jeffrey and Tom Morris

State Survey about Sustainable Agriculture

To better ascertain attitudes about sustainable agriculture by producers, agency personnel and faculty at the University of Connecticut (UCONN), a comprehensive survey was scheduled for late winter 1996. Modeled upon a similar approach used by Cooperative Extension at The Ohio State University, the attempt is to survey a representative sample of full- and part-time farmers across the state, along with appropriate personnel from agricultural and environmental agencies in Connecticut, as well as faculty at UCONN. Results from the survey will be used to develop and focus future educational thrusts in the sustainable agriculture area.

Statewide Meeting of Sustainable Ag Committee

A meeting of the statewide committee on sustainable agriculture was held on October 23, 1995. Fourteen people attended representing NRCS, Connecticut Soil and Water Conservation Districts, USDA CFSA, Farm Bureau, CES and the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in New Haven.

The formal part of the program consisted of five short presentations.

The topics and speakers were:

- "The Economic Status of Connecticut Agriculture" by Robert Leonard,

Professor of Agriculture Economics, UCONN.

- "Agricultural Tourism" by Norman Bender, Extension Educator, CES.

- "Is There a Need for a Survey of the Connecticut Agricultural Community's Perceptions on Sustainable Agriculture" by Bethanie Hooker, Graduate Student, UCONN.

- "Participatory Research" by Tom Morris, Extension Specialist, UCONN.

- "Results of the Waterville Valley Conference Survey" by Roy Jeffrey, Extension Educator, CES.

The informal or discussion part of the program resulted in the following observations:

- There was interest and support for education about participatory research techniques and for a participatory research project in Connecticut.

- Information gained from a survey of the agricultural community about their perceptions of sustainable agriculture would be useful.

- The planning committee wants to have a strong sustainable agriculture program in Connecticut, but they want CES to define the agenda and to organize activities in sustainable agriculture.

Education Program in Participatory Research

Plans are underway to conduct a participatory research project during the 1996 growing season that will use a SARE Chapter 3 grant to educate agency staff in Connecticut about participatory research techniques and to have a small participatory program with farmers. A core group of investigators from Cooperative

Extension, Jude Boucher and Lorraine Los, plan to focus on the vegetable and fruit industries during the initial year. Staff are being assisted in development of program participation techniques by Cathy Roth from the University of Massachusetts.

A half-day education program for agency people occurred in February, and the committee plans to involve 2 to 3 farmers in a participatory research project in 1996.

Agriculture and Resource Sector Economic Report

Support was given to printing "Connecticut Agriculture and Resources 2000," a major report from the Department of Agriculture and Resource Economics at UCONN. The report summarized the status and outlook for key agricultural and resource sectors within Connecticut over the next 5-10 years. The economic contribution of these sectors to the total employment and output of the state is also analyzed.

Program Leadership

Organizationally, leadership for Connecticut's program is now being provided by Tom Morris, agronomist in the Plant Sciences Dept. at UCONN. Dr. Morris, who brings a rich history of national and international involvement in various aspects of sustainable agriculture, has identified statewide discussion of sustainable agriculture principles and practices and implementation of participatory research programs as important components of the Connecticut program. ☞

Maine

by Tim Griffin

Below are descriptions of events and activities in Maine that have either begun as a result of the New England Sustainable Agriculture Training Project or were significantly improved because of it.

Study Circle in Androscoggin Valley

A group of dairy farmers in Androscoggin county began working on an Integrated Crop Management (ICM) project several years ago, funded by the US-EPA. As part of this project, an all-day educational program was held in November 1994, focusing on the basic concepts of nutrient management and testing; this program raised many questions among farmers. Following the Chapter 3 study circle training (December 1994), producers from this group, along with extension, SWCD, and NRCS began to meet regularly.

These meetings had several broad goals: 1) to identify critical issues in nutrient management; 2) to clarify remaining questions on nutrient management and testing; 3) where possible, to provide research data to answer specific questions; and, 4) to develop a strategy for addressing remaining questions on participating farms. Information was collected from several farms intensively during the summer of 1995. This study circle continued to meet during winter to evaluate preliminary data from 1995, and will develop a strategy to test nutrient management options in 1996.

Agricultural Trade Show: Integrating Crop & Livestock Production

In September 1994, a group of leading farmers identified areas of interest in sustainable agriculture: the value of farmer-based organizations to generate and share information, and options for integrating crop and livestock production. A program was developed for the Agricultural Trade Show in January 1995 to address these interests. Speakers included: a local dairy farmer and potato farmers, two extension faculty, and Ron Rosmann of Practical Farmers of Iowa. Examples of dairy-potato integration were presented by farmers, while other options were presented by Extension. Ron Rosmann used his farm as an example of an integrated production system. He also discussed the Practical Farmers of Iowa, and the emphasis on On-Farm Research to generate reliable information. This program, combined with the study circle training and discussions at Waterville Valley, has had several important impacts in Maine. The following are some examples.

Southern Aroostook County Research Group

A group of farmers from southern Aroostook county, along with extension and SWCD, began meeting as a result of the Ag Trade Show and Waterville Valley. This group identified several areas of production where information was lacking. Subsequently, they planned and implemented on-farm research trials on: soil amendments for potato production, flax versus barley in

rotation, control strategies for Colorado Potato Beetle using Admire[®] insecticide, and rotation and manure in potato production systems. The information from these trials were evaluated during the winter.

Integrating Dairy and Livestock Production: A Discussion

Several areas in Maine have dairy and potato production in close proximity. There are a number of dairy and potato farms that have land-swapping arrangements; these have generated considerable interest in the state. Both industries recognize shortcomings with current production systems (declining organic matter and lack of rotation in potato production, inadequate land base for efficient manure use in dairy). Both also recognize the potential advantages for increasing the integration between these industries.

Farmers in central Maine have met four times since February 1995, to discuss this concept. The potential advantages and disadvantages were communicated more clearly, along with the reasons that such arrangements are of interest. Several on-farm research projects and small farmer meetings have occurred, to answer some specific agronomic questions.

On-farm Research in Maine

On-farm research (or participatory research) has been a focal point in Maine. This activity has been stimulated by some of the activities described above, by interest from farmers in answering questions on a local level, and by having resources available from SARE for such things as sample
(Maine continued on page 8.)

Massachusetts

by Cathy Roth and Stephen Herbert

Massachusetts has been involved in strategic planning for the sustainability of agriculture through the combined efforts of many diverse groups. This has involved farmers and their organizations: NOFA-MA; CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture), a coalition of Pioneer Valley groups and institutions; New England Small Farms Institute; Massachusetts Dept. of Food and Agriculture; USDA Agencies; University of Massachusetts Extension; and others. The conference added a stimulus which resulted in a renewed commitment to furthering the goals of sustainability and to more participatory learning processes. In keeping with this planning and with the influence of the conference, Massachusetts is involved in the following activities.

Local Food System Demonstration Project

Berkshire County, Massachusetts was chosen as one of six sites in the nation to improve the local food system. One focus of the project is the use of study action groups to examine the current situation, identify leverage points for change and improvement, and take appropriate action. Over 1,000 community members will be involved in these efforts over a two-year period. The results of the project and of the use of participatory processes will be distributed nation wide together with the results from demonstration sites in CA, NY, PA, TX and WV. Funding is

provided by the Kellogg Foundation through the Minnesota Food Association.

Two Massachusetts farmers who attended the conference, Don Kelly and Robyn Van En, are co-leaders of the study action group on local agriculture. Other study action group topics include economics and finance, waste management, food distribution, and food history and culture. One action that has already resulted from this project is the formation of a Berkshire Growers' Co-op under the leadership of Don Kelly and seven local vegetable farmers.

Regional Cooperation

University of Massachusetts Extension, as a direct outgrowth of the conference, has participated with other states in presenting training sessions on participatory approaches to technology transfer.

CISA Conducts Holistic Resource Management (HRM) Training

The dairy action group of CISA identified HRM as one of the needed areas to assist farmers with decision making processes. The team of HRM presenters, Willie Gibson, University of Vermont Extension System, and Ed Martsof, a registered HRM educator from the HRM center in Arkansas, conducted a two-day workshop for Pioneer Valley farmers. The dairy action group is one of several such groups in the CISA project. Vicki

Van Zee, who attended the Waterville conference, provides over-all coordination to the CISA project which makes extensive use of action groups developed around community and sustainable agriculture issues and priorities. Participants from the conference provided impetus for the HRM training and continue to be involved in these and related programs.

Another CISA group, the "tomato group," has brought together tomato growers to work as a participatory research group to solve production and marketing problems. Group activities include on-farm and winter meetings to identify needs and exchange information. Other activities are taste testing events for the public, and in potential new markets such as with restaurant chefs.

Mark Your Calendars!

Don't forget to mark your calendars for the NE Sustainable Agriculture Training Project Farm Tour, scheduled for Tuesday, August 6, 1996. The tour will include farms in the seacoast region of New Hampshire and Maine.

Another upcoming event of which to take note is the two-day training coming up this November. The focus of workshop will be participatory education and research methods.

For both events, contact your state coordinator (listed on page 8) for more details.

New Hampshire

by Bill Zweigbaum

Use of Study Circles/Focus Groups Throughout NH

Over thirty study circles convened around the state of New Hampshire as a part of a statewide extension initiative to gather input from citizens of the state regarding priority areas in local communities and suggestions for ways that Cooperative Extension can address these needs. A minimum of three groups met in each of the state's ten counties. The action statements from the various groups were summarized and the information was used to develop a new four-year plan of work that has five major emphasis areas for agricultural resources staff. The major areas of emphasis include the following.

- Agricultural Marketing
- Public Understanding of Agriculture in New Hampshire
- Economic Development through Agricultural Business
- Consumer Education Regarding Home Environment
- Sustainable Agriculture

University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension will also be developing a multi-disciplinary statewide initiative known as "Strengthening New Hampshire Communities." This program will involve staff from all subject matter areas and will consist of three component programs:

1. Strengthening Community Decision-Making
2. Building Human Capacity for the Workforce
3. Ecologically Sound Economic Development

The study circle training that was taught by way of example at Waterville Valley served as a strong basis for extension personnel to conduct these local needs assessments and the process helped develop programs that focus on the areas which were of greatest importance and specify particular areas of future program priorities.

New Hampshire Caucus Meets Again

All participants who attended the Waterville Valley Conference and a group of other interested parties were invited to meet over the summer to refine the suggestions and priorities set in the state caucus meetings in Waterville Valley. The group worked out a vision statement for sustainable agriculture in New Hampshire and formulated an action plan for short-term projects.

A public education interactive learning experience was developed and a narrated slide show/video was produced by this group and featured at the 1996 Farm & Forest Exposition held in Manchester, NH in January. The FARMO (Forestry & Agriculture Rural Marketing Opportunities) game was played by over 500 participants with over 250 people playing to the maximum level (a one and a half hour to two hour commitment). The *New Hampshire Agriculture and Forestry Today* slide show runs approximately twelve minutes and highlights these industries and their importance to the rural character of our state. The show is also being produced in a video version for use with smaller audiences.

Whole Farm / Whole Watershed Planning for Sustainable Ag

A grant produced as a joint effort of UNH Cooperative Extension and NH Natural Resources Conservation Service to train staff members of both agencies in a systems approach to working with farmer/landowner clientele hosted a session on February 22, 1996 which featured Marty Strange from the Center for Rural Affairs in Walthill, Nebraska and Doug Karlen from the National Soil Tilth Laboratory in Ames, Iowa. Sixty participants had the opportunity to hear presentations by both speakers and participate in study circles following the presentations. Following the program, participants gathered in seven groups around the state of New Hampshire to examine a case farm and use the FOCS (Field Office Computing System) in local offices. The participants looked at the plans from the cultural, economic, social and environmental perspectives that were discussed at the February session and began to develop a list of ideas that could be used to correct weaknesses identified during the case farm study process. The group reconvened on April 4, 1996 in Concord to New Hampshire to share what they learned with one another and to develop a checklist that may help agency personnel make changes to the farm plans, provide supplemental information for the plans or referrals that might help the landowner/land user better appreciate the whole farm/whole watershed concept and put into action a positive response to agency recommendations. ☛

Rhode Island

by Will Reynolds

RI Center for Commercial Agriculture is Established

Rhode Island went into the March training conference, *Changing Technologies and Changing Values*, in the midst of establishing the Rhode Island Center for Commercial Agriculture. Our "Ag Center" is envisioned to be the location for most of the interaction between the University of Rhode Island's Cooperative Extension and the farming community, a true partnership that welcomes not only Extension and farmers but all state and federal agencies promoting agriculture in the state. The March conference provided a significant boost to this effort by bringing together a variety of farmers interested in the Ag Center along with major participants from Extension, FSA, and NRCS to discuss action steps for Rhode Island in the state caucus time periods. These conversations not only made apparent the benefits of a "big tent" organization for RI agriculturists, but the discussions of action steps led to several programs that illuminate both the philosophy behind, and the rewards of, such an enterprise.

Study Circle on Agricultural Priorities

The state caucuses at the conference were too short and too few to develop a comprehensive agenda for Rhode Island agriculture, but they did make apparent

the need for developing such an agenda. To this end, we instituted a series of discussions--essentially a "study circle"--with farmers and agriculture professionals on the needs of RI agriculture. The study circle involved about fifteen individuals and lasted from December of 1995 to April of 1996, producing a document of needs and setting goals for improving farming conditions in the state. These goals were as ambitious as re-establishing a Department of Agriculture separate from our present Department of Environmental Management (a primarily regulatory agency), to a more modest proposal to establish an annual farm "open house" where volunteer farms would welcome the public on a Saturday in August, increasing public awareness of, and support for, Rhode Island's farms.

Seminar Series on Holistic Management

Ideas raised in the workshops on "Improved Decision Making through Whole Farm Analysis" and "Quality of Life" led to a seminar series, *A Holistic Approach to Sustainable Agriculture*, presented to faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. Funded by a grant from the Northeast SARE Program for Extension training in Sustainable Agriculture, the seminars included several speakers well known to practitioners of sustainable agriculture: John Ikerd on "Industrial versus Sustainable Agriculture," Willie Lockertz on "Agricultural Research: What We've Done Wrong," John Gerber on "On-Farm Research," Bob Miller on "The Past and Future of Sustainable Agriculture," and Bill

Murphy on "Intensive Pasture Management." Prominent New England specialists like Vern Grubinger, Frank Mangan and Jude Boucher addressed additional topics like "Quality of Life," "Cover Crops and their Influence on Pests and Nutrients," and "IPM: One Size Does Not Fit All." This series was very well received; so much so that the Chair of the Department co-sponsoring the seminars is seeking to develop some of the themes in future seminar offerings.

Joint CES/NRCS Initiative on Pasture Management

The Rhode Island Center for Commercial Agriculture (RICCA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service are formulating a joint initiative on pasture management that will investigate the possibilities of establishing a small-scale animal production program to compliment work underway promoting management intensive pasture for more traditional farms. This initiative seeks to create, or find access to, the infrastructure necessary for producing and marketing traditional and alternative animal products.

Niche Market Analysis

At RICCA, we have already completed some work toward assisting farmers in assessing the demand for various niche markets. A marketing specialist working with the *(Rhode Island continued on page 8.)*

Vermont

by Kate Duesterberg and Vern Grubinger

Vermont Hosts Northeast Ext Sustainable Ag Tour

The Northeast Extension Sustainable Agriculture specialists gathered in Vermont for their October consortium meeting. The meeting was preceded by a day of farm tours, hosted by the Northeast Extension Consortium and the UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Participants, representing eight northeastern states, got the chance to visit four farmers in Chittenden County, Vermont all of whom stood out as innovators and leaders in sustainable agriculture practices. The goal of the tour was to highlight examples of farmers who had developed their own sustainable systems and for those farmers to share their experiences with extension specialists.

The group visited the Intervale Community Farm in Burlington to learn about three of their projects: their "ground breaking" work in composting technologies; Green City Farm which markets organic produce to the regional hospital and local restaurants; and the Community Supported Agriculture Farm. Next, was a highly successful rotational grazing farm, featuring mixed Jerseys, Holsteins, AND a healthy profit margin. Participants saw an integrated vegetable farm using low-input, sustainable practices, with good examples of cover crops and rotations. The last stop on the tour was an apple orchard growing ecologically-grown apples. At each of the farms, participants were able to talk to the

producers about both production and marketing techniques. That evening, dinner was followed a talk by well-known sustainable agriculture advocate Marty Strange, co-director of the Center for Rural Affairs in Walthill, Nebraska.

Tour participants felt the opportunity to visit with these innovative entrepreneurs was extremely informative and helpful as they thought about methods of technology transfer in their own work. As is often the case with farm tours, many realized that interactions between farmers and agency people, and opportunities to observe innovative farm practices first hand can be valuable learning tools. Often, these participatory learning methods can be as useful, or even more so, to farmers as research-generated information.

Networking for Sustainable Livestock Production

In Vermont, a number of different agencies have teamed up to form a network whose purpose is to promote grass-based livestock production. The Vermont Pasturelands Network is a good example of Extension and other agencies working directly with farmers to facilitate co-learning opportunities--a concept that was discussed frequently at the conference at Waterville Valley.

Participants in the network include UVM Extension, the Center for Sustainable Agriculture, NRCS, the Vermont Department of Agriculture, non-profit organizations, and commercial farmers. The network meetings allow an exchange of information and coordination of activities. Members also keep updated

on what each agency is doing to support grazing in the state.

In April, the network organized a grazing conference that attracted nearly 200 people from Vermont and New York. In addition, the network organizes monthly pasture walks throughout the growing season.

This group was formed to help expand the work that was begun by UVM Professor Bill Murphy who pioneered much of the rotational grazing research and outreach that was done in this region. His Pasture Management Outreach Program was a model for participatory learning approaches. As an outgrowth of this program, the Vermont Pasturelands Network can serve as a model for interagency and farmer cooperative learning as well.

Sustainable Ag Seminar Series

During the spring 1996 semester, UVM sponsored the *Linking Research, Education and Communities Seminar Series*, funded through the SARE Chapter 3 program. One seminar per month was held on a topic which in some way described the connections between agricultural research, farmers, and communities. Featured speakers included Ann Ingerson (study circle leader at the WV conference) and Bruce Kaufman from Sterling College; Fred Magdoff, Northeast regional director, SARE Program; Cathy Roth (study circle trainer for the WV conference) from UMASS; Bob Townsend, UVM Extension System; and Molly Anderson from Tufts.

The seminars were well attended by faculty, staff, and students, and provided opportunities for generating new ideas of how to promote sustainability in Vermont's agricultural system. ☪

State Contacts of NE Project

We welcome your feedback and suggestions for fact sheet topics, innovative farms to include on tours, and thought-provoking speakers or subjects for seminars and conferences. The following list includes state contacts of the New England Extension Training Project. Feel free to contact them or project coordinator, Kate Duesterberg, with your ideas.

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(Maine continued from page 3.)

analysis. Conducting research in this way involves farmers, educators, and agencies as partners, in answering sometimes difficult questions. Currently there are about 30 on-farm research projects around the state, addressing pest management, nutrient use and management, crop rotation, and soil amendments to improve soil quality. These trials are based on specific questions from cooperating farmers, rather than generic questions from extension or elsewhere. For this reason, the farmers are committed to these projects. ☺

(Rhode Island continued from page 6.)

Ag Center has completed an analysis of the market for various herb crops. This analysis, however, has value beyond the limits of one type of crop. Through extensive interviews with people who actually do the buying of various kinds of fresh produce, a picture emerges both of what characteristic buyers require of produce and why some produce is found to be unacceptable. There are even several comments on how buyers like to be approached and what puts them off. The report serves as a valuable document of dos and don'ts for anyone looking to sell to either wholesalers or retailers. ☺