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**NOFA-NY Mentoring Program  
Final Report**  
Submitted to SARE by Kay Magilavy  
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FNE95-100

I. Goals of the Program:

- A. To establish a coherent farmer-to-farmer network which would pair experienced organic growers with those new to farming or those transitioning to organic production.
- B. To develop an outline for incorporating low-input resource management practices into the farm plan.
- C. To directly assist program participants by providing them with:
  - a. Coursework in the elements of low-input resource management
  - b. Guidance on developing these elements into a farm plan specific to their site and cropping practices
  - c. Visits from the mentor farmer to the farm site at two crucial times:
    - (1) Before the growing season, when the farm plan will be written
    - (2) During the growing season, for assessment of the progress of the plan and help in addressing unforeseen problems.

II. Farm update:

- A. January, 1996 - Workshop held to:
  - 1. Introduce all participants to basic precepts of Holistic Resource Management
  - 2. Discuss examples of farm plans

III. Participants/Cooperators:

Participant	Type of Production /Role	Experience Level	Mentor
Bokaer-Smith, John & Jennifer	Vegetable field crops	2nd year certified	Lou Johns & Robin Ostfeld
Denner, Willie & Kenney, Claudia	Vegetable field crops	2nd year certified	Martin & Christa Stiosek
Deppe, Carl & Diana	Vegetable field crops	3rd year certified	Doug & Catherine Bowne
Gormley, Damian	Vegetable field crops	2nd year farming, not certified	Doug Jones

Hoffman, Joel	Dairy, feed crops, possible greenhouse	Many years farming, transitioning to organic	Anne & Eric Nordell
Koch, Paul & Julie	Vegetable field crops	New farmers, not certified	Carol & Bob Stull
McCarty, Stu & Thor, Lynn	Vegetable market garden	3rd year certified	Carol & Bob Stull
Orr, Tish & Ed	Vegetable field crops	New farmers, not certified	Steve Gilman & Sherrie Mickel
Smith, Steve & Barb	Dairy	First year certified, purchased going organic dairy	Kevin Engelbert
Eric Eaker (replaced Damian Gormley)	Vegetable field crops	2nd year transitioning conventional, attempting certification in '97	Doug Jones
Karl North & Elizabeth Henderson	Workshop co-coordinators		
Caleb Williams	Workshop presenter		

IV. Project progress (since '95 annual report):

- A. Conducted orientation workshop
- B. Mentor/participant pairs met at workshop and established season visitation schedule.
- C. All mentors visited participant's farms. Many participants also toured mentor's farm, although visit was not a program requirement. All participants made additional contact, generally by phone, with mentor during season.
- D. Final evaluations completed Nov. '96 through Jan. '97

V. Findings & accomplishments

- A. Among vegetable growers, all participants indicated that they modified their operations and techniques as a result of the interaction with their mentors. Greatest success was seen in pairs where the participants were full-time farmers. In pairs where the participants were gardeners considering transition to full-time production, the most participants were unable to implement a whole-farm approach. There was substantial exchange of technology and technique.

1. Excerpts from evaluation by full-time participants:
  - a. *Helped us to look at the big picture of how our farm works as an economic whole. This resulted in us taking a hard look at where we are going. -- Carl & Diana Deppe*
  - b. *We sort of turned our mentors into our own extension agents and we got a lot of good information from them. -- John & Jen Bokaer-Smith*
  - c. *Martin and Krista offered many suggestions throughout the season, but were particularly helpful in our visioning of scale. It was very useful for us to see areas of crops they could manage and their systems for producing specific quantities of produce. It was difficult for us to have any sense of our own areas of efficiency before having some reference. Martin and Krista are very clear examples of small scale farming that is in control. -- Will Denner & Claudia Kenney*

2. Excerpts from evaluations by market garden or part-time participants:
  - a. *Bob Stull suggested we do a budget for 1997 to try to plan for our growth and to try to figure out why the past two years have been such a drain, both financially and of personal energy. -- Stu McCarty & Lynn Thor*
  - b. *Our time together with Steve & Sherrie was very encouraging. Many ideas and strategies were exchanged and some adopted. We did garden and were somewhat successful. We've nurtured future customers and clients, but whether they're in our future or if we have a future is still cloudy -- Ed Orr & Tish Edwards*

- B. Dairy involvement was less successful. The transitioning farmer who was among the first to contact the program fulfilled none of his commitments as a participant. The mentor farmer pair that did attend the workshop had little interaction through the season. In the assessment of the participants, Steve and Barb Smith, *Perhaps organic dairying in NY does not have the critical mass necessary to provide mentoring. Organic dairymen are too busy trying to recoup the cost of organic production.*

VI. Site information:

- A. None

VII. Economic findings:

- A. Four of the pairs concentrated on marketing issues, focusing on ways to develop economies in aspects of planting and crop handling.
- B. The workshop presenters emphasized the need see financial health as part of the overall sustainability of the farm plan.

VIII. Next steps:

- A. All but one of the mentors indicated a willingness to be involved in a

similar program during the '97 season. All participants felt that an ongoing program of this type would offer important assistance to future organic growers and herdspeople. Consequently, NOFA-NY has obtained funding from the Wallace Genetics Foundation to underwrite the operation of a mentoring program during 1997.

- B. The second program will maintain closer ties to the NOFA-NY Certification Program and will focus on farms that have been in full-time operation for two to three years in order to maximize the benefits mentors can bring to the participants. The one exception to this requirement will be a mentor relationship to be built with the City Gardens/City Farms program in New York City.

IX. Outreach:

- A. An article describing the results of the program will appear in May/June 1997 issue of *Organic Farms, Folks and Food*, the NOFA-NY Newsletter. A copy will be forwarded to the program upon publication.

I would personally like to thank SARE for its funding of this project. Organic farming in New York State will realize benefits from the relationships built within this program, both from improved farm planning models and from the commitment it has generated within experienced farmers to more fully participate in the training of those new to the field.

Okay for final 10%. J. Gardin  
4/4/97