

FARMER TO FARMER DIRECTORY
AND CONFERENCE

Final Report
December 11, 1995

SECTION I

General Information



1. **Project Number:** LNE 91-29 ; LNE 94-41
Funding Period: March, 1992- December 31, 1994

2. **Project Title:** Farmer to Farmer Directory and Conference

3. **Project Coordinator:** Dr. Eric Sideman
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4. **Type of Report:** Final

5. **Date of Report:** December 11, 1995

6. **Reporting Period:** December 1994 to December 1995

7. **Major Participants:** No change

8. **Cooperators:** No change

9. **Project Status:** Continuation

10. **State of Expenditures:** (Reporting Period December 1994 - December 1995)

<u>Non-Personal Services</u>	<u>SARE Funding</u>
Printing	\$1,855
Distribution	\$900
Other services	\$235
TOTAL	\$3,000

SECTION II

FINAL REPORT

1. Objectives

- (1) Create a directory of farmers who have implemented LISA systems, to include brief description of each farm and of LISA practices and their effectiveness.
- (2) Conduct an annual regional farmer conference to share information on practices, transition strategies, economics, etc.
- (3) Develop support materials so that the directory and conference can serve as a model for other states.

2. Abstract

Surveys of conventional farmers have identified the lack of useful information as the major impediment to adoption of sustainable practices. Furthermore, farmers seeking information have difficulty in obtaining it from traditional sources such as Extension Educators or farm chemical and feed dealers. Surveys of farmers already using sustainable practices indicate that they have relied on other farmers for guidance. The conclusion is that the major barrier to conversion is identification and contact with enough successful growers.

The aim of the Directory is to augment the exchange of information by facilitating more contact between farmers. The directory includes short descriptions of individual sustainable practices or whole farm systems. Sustainable practices were identified by the major participants and cooperators. The project coordinator has worked with the farmers and major participants to write short descriptions of the practices. The descriptions have been incorporated into the Directory.

The indexes help users locate specific information. The Directory is indexed by county and by significant practices.

In order to further facilitate exchange between farmers at different stages of adoption of sustainable practices we have developed and sponsored annual farmer to farmer conferences. The heart of the conferences have been direct farmer to farmer exchange of information in addition to lectures and workshops. This SARE grant helped support the early conferences in 1992 and 1993. In November of 1994 and 1995 we held conferences that were nearly self supporting. Furthermore, we have now brought in the Extension as cosponsors of the conference, which widens the audience.

3. Results to date

Objective 1: Create a directory of farmers

The project coordinator and major participants identified approximately 250 farms across the state of Maine. The farms were identified as having a particular noteworthy practices or whole farm systems that illustrate low input sustainable agriculture. The farmers were sent a letter describing the project and telling them who suggested that they be included in the directory. A form was enclosed requesting a description of the practice. Those who did not respond received a second letter. From those who did not respond to the second letter the project coordinator worked with the major participants to identify growers that were critical and needed a special effort to assure inclusion. These growers were contacted by phone or in-person visits. In the end we were able to get 70 of the approximately 250 initially selected farmers to reply.

Each response included a description of the noteworthy practice or request from the farmer for a visit by the project coordinator to see the farm workings and work up a description together. During the duration of the project, the project coordinator and some of the major participants visited 58 of the 70 farms finally selected for the directory. The project coordinator edited and either wrote or modified the descriptions of each farm. The descriptions are brief and serve as a means of farmers identifying other farmers of interest. The goal of the directory is to initiate contact among farmers. It is not intended to be a how-to manual.

Sustainable practices that have been documented include:

1. excellent mechanical weed control with state-of -the -art cultivating equipment such as Lily springtines, Budding basket weeders, Budding finger weeders, Swedish tines and home-made equipment. Frequently these are mounted on specialized tractors designed for cultivation.
2. Crop rotations that frequently include the use of green manures, cover crops, and living mulches. Specific rotations are designed to 1) add nutrients to the system by the use of legumes in crop rotations, 2) recycle nutrients within the farm system by

the use of cover crops between cash crops, 3) prevent the loss of nutrients (that can end up as contamination in ground and surface water) by the use of catch crops, 4) control weeds, and 5) condition soil.

3. erosion control by cover cropping and strip cropping.

4. pest management including IPM and non-chemical insect and disease management.

5. manure management to conserve nutrients and prevent the pollution of ground and surface water.

6. marketing innovations.

Objective 2: Conduct annual regional farmer conference

MOFGA has sponsored six annual Farmer to Farmer Conferences. This year the conference was held November 4th and 5th at Atlantic Oaks in Bar Harbor Maine (brochure enclosed). The format that we developed works very well and receives outstanding reviews from the conference participants. Some past conference participants have taken home ideas from our format and are using them in planning their conferences. For example, the 1995 Sustainable Agriculture In-Service Training for New England Extension held in Waterville Valley followed a very similar format. Members of that planning committee who have attended the MOFGA Farmer to Farmer Conference repeatedly referred to it as a model.

The format we developed enhances interaction between farmers. Each topic is covered in a split session. The first part is a lecture type presentation with questions and answers addressed to the presenter. The follow-up part of the session is an equal amount of time spent in a circle discussion of the topic where the presenter is specifically asked to play an equal role with the other participants. The facilitators work to get all the farmers to share their ideas descriptions of their practices.

Last year we invited Cooperative Extension to cosponsor the conference. Together we can offer an opportunity to share information on sustainable agriculture to a wider audience

The SARE grant helped us get this annual event off the ground in its early years. The first two conferences were partially funded by this SARE grant. This year and last year registration fees came very close to making the conference self supporting. In all ways it is a great success.

Objective 3: Develop support materials so that the Directory can serve as a model for other states.

We have been approached by many other organizations for advice on developing a similar directory. We will develop a packet of information and sample copies to be distributed to interested farmer organizations as soon as they are available. The directory is being printed this week.

4. Potential Contribution

As described in the original grant proposal, the Directory potentially will impact all aspects of agriculture including production, environmental protection, and profitability. The Directory will facilitate transfer of farm-proven practices from farmer to farmer.

5. Farmer Adoption

Since the 1950's, the technology delivery system has led farmers into dependence on highly energy-intensive and resource inefficient farm practices. Non-traditional farmers in the past 20 years have side-stepped traditional sources of technology and have experimented on their own farms. Most farmers have relied on other farmers for additional information. The Directory will enhance the most acceptable means of technology transfer (farmer to farmer) and consequently is likely

to lead to a high level of adoption of sustainable practices.

6. Producer Involvement

Each year just shy of one hundred growers participate in the Farmer to Farmer conference. Farmers also participated actively in the development of the directory.