Agroecologists focus on soil health to improve production

By Kent Soilberg

Agroecologist—a farmer who applies ecological processes to agricultural production.

For most of the past seven decades, agriculture and conservation have been segregated disciplines. This segregation has, at times, created tremendous tensions. We have viewed agriculture as simply a system of chemical inputs for commodity crop production where the soil just holds the plant in place. Many have viewed conservation as keeping human intervention out and “allowing nature to take its course.”

As the science of ecology developed, uncovering the interconnectedness of life on the planet, some (including myself) began to question if the only way to produce food came with a high environmental cost. Can food production and the greater benefits of ecological services (nutrient cycling, maintaining or enhancing water quality, habitat for fish and wildlife, etc.) co-exist, even on the same parcel of land?

Parallel to this, some conservationists began to recognize that for plant communities to remain healthy, there needed to be occasional disturbance. We have learned that land used under the context of conservation may also exhibit negative environmental impacts.

Recent focus and research around the concept of soil health has not only reinforced the need for a moderate to high level of phosphorus in our soils, but has provided additional support that occasional ecosystem disturbance follows by rest is critical for maintaining the long-term vitality of native plant communities and ecosystem functions.

Can we have productive agriculture as well as provide an array of ecological services? I would answer with a resounding YES! I will, however, temper that response with the caveat that we will not be entirely recreating native landscapes and plant communities in the process of moving toward a more ecologically based agricultural system. The current buzz about soil health provides the framework in which we can move agriculture to a new “normal.”

What is soil health? Soil health is about the ability of soil to function. Properly functioning soil has the ability to cycle nutrients, and capture and store water. We have clear documentation that most of our agricultural soils are highly impaired in their ability to function correctly. For example, many soils in row crop regions contain moderate to high levels of phosphorus, a vital plant nutrient. Yet, these phosphorus reserves are not readily available for plant growth because the biological mechanisms that make the nutrient available for plant growth have been disrupted or destroyed by industrial agricultural practices.

Water infiltration demonstrations have shown how many of our continuously cropped soils can no longer infiltrate even 1/4 inch of rainfall per hour. Erosion, despite lessons from the Dust Bowl, is a public safety issue in the form of traffic accidents due to low visibility from blowing soils.

Some are trying to define soil health as cover crops, no-till, precision fertilizer placement or the elimination of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. While these are tools a producer can use to improve soil health, they are not “soil health.”

To Farmer as Agroecologist on page 6

Accountability, environment, health among top reasons for choosing organic foods

By Melinda Hemmelgarn, M.S., R.D.

“To be interested in food but not in food production is clearly absurd.”

~ Wendell Berry

As a Registered Dietitian, I’m frequently asked about the value of the organic label. Are organic foods really worth the higher price at the checkout?

Are they more nutritious? What about safety?

I advise consumers to make a wise investment in organic food, and explain why below. I encourage farmers to share these reasons with consumers— you can email info@mosesorganic.org to request a copy of this article as a single-sheet handout aimed at consumers. Also, see the end of this article for ideas on how you, as farmers, can impact consumers’ food choices. But, first, here are the reasons I recommend choosing organic.

Trust

I want to believe the farmers at my local market who say their produce is “chemical free” or grown without pesticides. But I’ve been lied to. The truth is, few people enjoy interrogating farmers about their farming practices. By being certified, farmers make it easy for the consumer to purchase food with a legal set of standards, including: no genetically engineered seeds or genetically modified organisms (GMOs); no synthetic fertilizers; no sewage sludge; no irradiation; no growth hormones and no antibiotics. Most synthetic pesticides are prohibited, and only a limited number of pesticides are approved for use in organic systems.

Accountability

Our food dollars are votes for the kind of food system we want to see flourish. By purchasing organic food, we support those farmers who go through the rigors of organic certification. When farmers become certified they send a message to our government leaders who must take note of the growing numbers backed by consumer demand. If farmers aren’t certified, they’re not counted.

Safety

The topic of “food safety” often focuses on cooking and storage temperatures, or preparation methods. While it’s true that harmful bacteria in improperly handled food can lead to serious foodborne illnesses, so can pesticide drift and residues. Because pesticide residues are rarely present on organic food, it makes sense to protect our family’s health with the organic choice. Organic farming methods also benefit farm workers and their family members because they’re not exposed to toxic chemicals in the field.

Pollinator Protection

Because organic farming systems promote biodiversity, and don’t rely on the routine use of pesticides, choosing organic food helps protect pollinators, such as bees and other insects that are critical to food production and agricultural resilience.

To Choose Organic on page 8
From the Executive Director

As a nonprofit organization, MOSES is responsible not only to its board of directors but also to society at large for delivering a public good—educating farmers about organic and sustainable farming practices, which ultimately impact all of us in the food we eat and the condition of our shared environment.

MOSES provides tangible and intangible goods to society by engaging the conversation around healthy and diverse food and farming practices, and by bringing people together to solve problems in ways that business and government cannot. As part of this work, MOSES puts on events such as field days, which many of you attended this summer. Some of these events are supported by sponsor and admission fees, but these don’t cover all the associated costs. To meet our operating budget, MOSES, as with any nonprofit, must fundraise. Many of you have been making donations to MOSES for years, which is both a testimony to your commitment and our relevance in this work. Thank you so very much for recognizing our past and fostering future impact.

For Fiscal Year 2018, which has just begun here, we’ve embarked on an ambitious fundraising plan. Our goal is to raise $150,000 in donations from individuals and businesses by Aug. 31, 2018—more than double what we’ve raised in the past. We promise not to be shy about asking for this support. You will likely hear more about our fundraising efforts than you have in the past, and may be reminded more often about donating. Fundraising letters can be annoying—we get that. We don’t want ours to annoy you; we simply want to invite everyone who has interest in our work to be involved. Sometimes that letter in your mailbox is the reminder you need to write the check you had intended all along to write. If that’s the case for you, you should consider becoming a MOSES Sustainer and making recurring gifts annually or monthly. The form at mosesorganic.org/donate makes it easy to choose this option—then you’ll only hear from us through this publication and periodic updates to let you know how things are going.

I mentioned earlier how, as a nonprofit, MOSES is accountable to our society at large. Our board of directors plays a critical role in representing our society at large. Eleven dedicated board members from all aspects of food and farming (including a consumer advocate and a majority of the board as certified organic farmers) commit several days a year to keeping MOSES in the center of its mission and vision on behalf of our entire society. It’s an important job, all of which makes it harder to say goodbye to two of our longtime board members whose terms are ending in November: Melinda Hemmelgarn and Carmen Fernholz.

Melinda is an outspoken advocate for organic food and farmers, as you can see when you read her piece on the cover of this issue. She has served as the consumer advocate on the board since 2009, reminding the rest of the board how its decisions affect not just farmers, but also the people who buy and eat the food they raise or grow. We’ve asked Melinda to come back to the 2018 MOSES Conference as a keynote speaker to talk to our whole community about how and why consumers value organic and sustainable farming practices. We’re looking forward to her inspiring presentation.

Carmen is the definition of an organic farmer. Certified organic since 1974, Carmen is a “farmer emeritus” throughout the farming community. His contributions go well beyond his farm gate, and well beyond MOSES, where he has served as a board member since 2011. Carmen serves on a number of boards and works with several other organizations making food and farming better for all.

We’ve been fortunate to have both Carmen and Melinda on the board, and to have access to their wisdom and passion for organic and sustainable farming. If you see them out in the community, please join us in thanking them for their service.

—John Mesko, MOSES Executive Director
Should we achieve organic integrity through flexibility or consistency?

By Harriet Behar

Organic integrity means something a little different to each individual. For farmers it means building soil, growing crops, and preventing contamination within an organic system of production. For brokers, distributors and stores it means tracking organic certificates and having an audit trail that guarantees organic through the full chain of custody. For consumers, it means food and fiber that was grown without pesticides using tools and practices that improve our natural resources for now and into the future. Underlying all of these beliefs, is the understanding that there will be consistency between all types of operations, and everything carrying the USDA organic seal meets specific standards.

As organic producers know, it takes quite a bit of management and monetary commitment to become organic and maintain organic certification. It is important to our community that everyone is following the same rules. Allowing some to carry the organic seal without spending the same time or dollars as their fellow organic farmers encourages a race to the bottom. In order to stay competitive in the marketplace, operators are pushed to only meet the minimum requirements. This result in lessened consumer confidence in the organic label, as organic producers who embrace the spirit as well as the letter of the law advertise they are “better than” others who do not. Witness the confusion in the marketplace about organic eggs—do all organic chickens have a chance to scratch in the soil under the sun?

On a recent National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) webinar on hydroponics, there was concern the National Organic Program (NOP) allows this type of production without having standards addressing this unique system. While all organic certifiers who choose to certify hydroponic operations review the inputs used, various other aspects are not consistently overseen among certifiers. Other organic certification agencies have chosen not to certify hydroponic operations at all.

During the webinar, there was discussion that flexibility of the NOP was useful in the marketplace, allowing a variety of systems to carry the organic label even without consistent standards.

Flexibility can allow certifiers to approve unique systems of production by reviewing only a very narrow aspect of what they are doing, and ignoring everything else. There is a belief by some that the organic label is strengthened when there are more organically labeled products in the marketplace. For those of us who complete 20+ pages of an organic system plan that describes our weed management, crop rotation, natural resource protection, enhancement of biodiversity and much more in great detail, it’s disconcerting to allow a system of production using the same organic application with most of it marked “not applicable.” Many of the “not applicable” sections of a hydroponics operation’s organic system plan are areas covered by organic standards, but many of the methods used within hydroponics are not. In order for organic operators to feel confident their fellow organic operators are equal to their efforts, we must have consistency in what is allowed. The rules should cover all aspects of the organic production, no matter what system is being certified.

We must have consistency in what is allowed. The rules should cover all aspects of the organic production, no matter what system is being certified.

At this time, hydroponically produced crops are not the only areas where the organic label is affixed to a product category without a national standard governing that use. Personal care products, mushrooms, pet foods, honey and bee products are examples where there is no national organic standard. For some of these, the NOP has allowed organic certification, even though various certifiers have differing standards. Consumers are not aware that one type of “organic honey” could originate from hives that are managed completely differently than a neighboring jar on the retail shelf of “organic honey.” The NOSB has done its work on many of these areas, providing the NOP proposals for regulatory changes to our organic standard. These proposals have languished within the government for many years, even as the demand for these organic products has increased.

A recent article in the Washington Post exposing the inconsistency of the various production methods of organic milk (some cows must be on pasture, some may be allowed to be confined), chipped away at consumer trust in the organic label. The fraud of imported non-organic grains being sold as organic and fed to organic livestock also put a black mark on the USDA organic seal.

Organic certification is a process-based system, and we must not let producers, buyers and consumers doubt the organic label has meaning. It is critically important that the organic label remain authentic, and not be compromised by certifiers using inconsistent definitions.

Many of us believe in organic because of our commitment to the health of all living things on this planet and the hope organic represents for the future of agriculture. The integrity of the vast majority of organic producers is beyond question. In my work as an organic inspector and for the past 11 years as a MOSES organic educator, I have had the honor of learning from organic crop and livestock producers as well as processors. I know they deserve to have a label that reflects their commitment and passion, and one that should not be watered down or discounted through inconsistency.

I have resigned my position from MOSES, and this is my last Inside Organics column. I have enjoyed sharing my thoughts and thank you for your kind words over the years. I am not retiring and will remain active in the organic community, just with a different business card. Blessings to you all.

~ Harriet Behar
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“Tm hoping to convert some of my land into pasture. What should I consider in the process? ”
Answer by Lauren Langworthy

As you plan your new pasture, remember that fallow land is not necessarily going to be good pasture land. Just because it’s covered in grass doesn’t mean it’s a productive pasture capable of meeting your livestock’s nutritional needs. Just as you would with any other field, you’ll need to work on your soil and forage crops. The pasture you plant will need enough nutritional density to support livestock health.

Start with a soil test. Many producers don’t think to test pasture soil. However, these test results can inform your decisions and drastically improve your pasture’s success. To unlock the soil’s wealth of resources, you need a balanced pH. If the soil is too acidic or basic, many minerals and nutrients will become unavailable to grazing livestock. After the soil’s pH has been addressed, you can begin to work on the other parts of soil health.

If your land has been fallow for some time, it may be suffering from many different issues: soil deficiencies, too much thatch, invasive or persistent species that need management, or soil deficiencies, too much thatch, invasive or persistent species that need management, or a lack of palatable and nutritionally dense species. Invite expertise from other graziers and experts. You might just need to do some clipping and inter-seeding to gain a production pasture. However, fields in really bad shape might require that you turn the soil to incorporate organic matter and get a fresh start with a new planting. It might even be worthwhile to plan a year of cover cropping to manage deficiencies or problem species (like continually clipping a sorghum-sudangrass crop to manage a thistle problem).

Land previously used for production may have been tested and managed better for crops. Focus on making sure that the soil is ready and work with someone to select the best pasture species for your soil, climate, management, and livestock. With the “clean slate” of a productive field, your pasture planting could be just about anything. Having a second (or third) opinion about which species might best suit your situation can be very valuable. Mixing grasses, legumes, and forbs can add resilience and create palatable options for different livestock species.

When it comes to selecting and purchasing seed, connect with local pasture-based organizations. Groups like Pheasants Forever and US Fish & Wildlife regularly work with private landowners to connect them with local resources supporting grassland development. Resource Conservation and Development (RCD), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and even local seed houses can help you connect with experts to select the right plants for your needs. It’s important to consider your soil type, what varieties are best suited to the local climate, management plans, livestock species, and grazing density.

There may also be programs available to cost-share seed used to convert land into permanent pasture. Many of these programs will require a signed contract, but they can be valuable resources if you’re already planning to graze.

In creating a new pasture, you’ll have some big decisions to make about infrastructure. There are many different options available for fencing and setting up watering systems. Your plan will depend on your livestock species, management plans, and budget.

Irrigation systems can be as simple as plastic tubing, a few fittings, and a float valve if the field has proximity to a well, and the system’s pressure won’t be overtaxed. However, if water sources are distant or the demands will be higher, the design might take more creativity. Year-round management in a cold climate also requires careful planning. Look at several different systems to develop one suited to your operation.

Consider how your fencing will affect your management of the livestock and the land. You might want to have one large pasture or several smaller paddocks. Make sure that permanent fences and gate placements don’t become problematic over time. Think about your water sources, the number of management groups you’ll have, what fence materials are best, and how your fencing might affect your options in years of drought or heavy rainfall.

You might want to start with mobile fencing or semi-permanent options while you gain a better understanding of what your grazing enterprise will look like. As with planting, financial support may be available for fencing infrastructure. Reimbursements and grazing plans may be available to you through NRCS and County Conservation offices with a grazing contract.

There are a lot of organizations that want to see graziers succeed. Grants, equipment loans, operating loans, cost shares, and expert support are available to help you create your new pasture. Contact your local FSA office about operating loans, NRCS about their EQIP and CSP programs, County Conservation, and local grazing organizations like RCD about species selection and management plans.
Interseeding cover crops in cash crops shows promise

By Erin Silva

Cover crops have long been recognized in organic agriculture for their many benefits, including reducing the risk of erosion, building soil organic matter, and fostering soil ecology and biology. However, in upper Midwestern organic grain rotations, finding windows to establish cover crops between cash crop phases can be difficult, limiting cover crop choices.

Increasingly, farmers are looking to interseed cover crops into cash crops. This promising management alternative lets farmers use a more diverse selection of cover crops in their cash crop rotations than would otherwise be possible in the short growing season remaining after the cash crop harvest. While more work needs to be done to finesse this practice for organic systems, some general guidelines can increase the success of cover crop establishment without interfering with cultivation or causing unintended competition with the cash crop.

Cover Crops into Corn

Successful interseeding relies on understanding the relationship between cover crop and corn crop growth and management. The ideal management for interseeding cover crops into established organic corn likely varies a bit from region to region and farm to farm, depending on climate, soil type, and equipment resources. The competitiveness of the corn crop, heat units, and the tilth and water-holding capacity of the soil may each impact cover crop establishment and related fall and spring competition from the cover crop.

Interseeding cover crops in an organic system requires a balance between maintaining effective weed management and providing the environment that will allow the cover crop to germinate and establish. Unfortunately, the perfect conditions for cover crop seed germination—adequate soil moisture and sunlight reaching the soil surface—also promote weed seeds to germinate.

In conventional systems, interseeding cover crops into standing corn has shown to be most consistently successful when performed at approximately the V5-V7 stage. This is near same time as the last row cultivation of corn, or just prior. This past year (2017), the organic corn on our research plots in southern Wisconsin reached this stage approximately the first week of July. With good soil moisture and warm soil temperatures, the cover crop seed will be able to take advantage of the last few days that the sunlight can penetrate through the corn canopy and germinate. Interseeding at the V5-V7 stage of corn also aligns with the latter end of the critical weed-free period for corn, which lessens the risk of negative competition from the cover crop.

Different equipment can successfully be used to plant cover crops. Modified drills can be made or purchased; depending on row spacing of corn, drill units are removed to limit seeding to the width between corn rows, allowing the drill to pass over the 8’ high corn without damage.

Another way interseeding is often accomplished is by broadcasting using an air seeder or seed spinner mounted on the back of a cultivator. Higher cover crop seeding rates must be used when broadcasting versus using modified drills. Additionally, the risk of poor establishment is greater when broadcasting, as cover crop seed germination is dependent on adequate rainfall close to the time of seeding.

Species Selection

When choosing a cover crop for interseeding into corn, look for types that are easy to establish, can tolerate (and germinate in) dry soil conditions and low light conditions. Several grass and legume cover crops fit this description, including annual ryegrass, cereal rye, red clover, crimson clover, and forage radish—which are all somewhat drought- and shade-tolerant, and relatively easy to establish. These can be planted either singly or in a mixture.

If you prefer a grass cover crop, cereal rye and annual ryegrasses are good choices, both addressing different management needs. Annual ryegrasses typically winterkill in the upper Midwest, facilitating spring management on soils that are colder and slower to dry out in the spring. Cereal rye, however, is a winter annual that will survive the winter and regrow in the spring. This crop can very effectively protect the soil from erosion and add additional spring biomass. Annual ryegrass can be seeded at 15 to 20 pounds per acre as a single species or 10-15 pounds per acre in a mix with clover. Cereal rye can be planted at approximately 2 – 2.5 bu/ac alone, and 1.5 bu/ac in a mixture.

Of the clovers, medium red clover has been most consistently successful, as it is fairly shade-tolerant, has good winter hardiness, puts on a lot of biomass (leading to some spring nitrogen credit), and costs a bit less than other clover seed. Plant medium red clover at 10-12 pounds per acre as a single species, and about half that as a component of a mix. Crimson clover is another option, potentially putting on more biomass in the short growing season remaining after the cash crop harvest.

Cereal rye grows between the corn rows at the University of Wisconsin-Arlington Research Station. Researchers used a modified drill to interseed the three rows of rye between corn rows. Photo by Erin Silva

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Farmer as Agroecologist — from page 1

There is a broad spectrum of how an individual producer can move an operation toward soil health. It begins with a set of principles that may be implemented across all agricultural regions regardless of the size of the farm. These principles include: 1) keep the soil covered; 2) keep a living root in the soil; 3) minimize soil disturbance; 4) promote plant diversity; and, 5) integrate livestock. The goal of these principles is to create a home or habitat suitable for supporting health and active soil microbial populations by mimicking natural systems. It is only through active and healthy soil biology that we can create good soil aggregate structure to capture and store water, and cycle nutrients. Let’s explore each principle further.

Keep Soil Covered

In nature, bare soil is the exception. Yet many of our agricultural soils remain uncovered over half the year. Coverings protect the soil from movement (erosion). Covered soil also provides a thermal barrier to moderate temperature extremes. Soil microbes, like humans, prefer a fairly narrow band of temperatures. Soil biological activity slows with temperatures below 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Microbes are stressed when soil temperatures begin to rise above 90 degrees. On a hot summer day, exposed soil temperatures can exceed 120 degrees. Soil temperatures under cover can run 20 - 30 degrees cooler. Soil may be covered with living plants, crop residues and/or mulch.

Keep Living Root in Soil

Most biological activity in the soil occurs at or near the soil surface, and in association with a living root. Living plants exude sugars through photosynthesis. The sugars feed the microbes, which in turn aid the plant in obtaining water and nutrients. Many of our agricultural soils only have a living root about 1/3 of the entire year while the primary cash crop is growing. Cover crops, whether annuals or perennials, can help fill the gaps. Relay or double cropping is possible while the primary cash crop is growing. Cover crops, whether annuals or perennials, can help fill the gaps. Relay or double cropping is possible while the primary cash crop is growing. Cover crops, whether annuals or perennials, can help fill the gaps. Relay or double cropping is possible while the primary cash crop is growing. Cover crops, whether annuals or perennials, can help fill the gaps.

Promote Plant Diversity

Monocultures do not exist in nature. Diversity in plant species promotes diversity in the microbial populations. Diverse microbial communities aid in suppression of many pest species. Many soil microbial species have associations with specific plant species. Most notably are the mycorrhizal fungi-plant associations. Mycorrhizal fungi-plant associations create the opportunity for plants to access soil phosphorous reserves. They also expand the ability of plants to access additional water and nutrient reserves in the soil through fungal hyphae. Fungal hyphae appear to resemble fine roots, but in reality form a network of fungal strands that greatly expand the reach of an individual plant’s root system. Hyphae also serve as a communications network between plants, providing a symbiotic relationship to deal with stress.

Integrate Livestock

Animals are associated with every ecosystem on the planet. Livestock have been identified as the missing link in soil health. Science has yet to replicate in a jug or bag what comes out the back end of a cow. Farmers have long understood the value of manure application for crop production. However, there is value to soil microbes not only from direct deposit of urine and manure, but also the disruption from short-duration grazing activity and high density hoof action. Adequate recovery periods following the disturbance are critical to successful livestock integration. Recent data suggests that livestock integration, in combination with crop diversity and no-till over a number of years can increase plant available N, P and K, and soil carbon deposition 4 - 5 times greater than operations that only utilize no-till and/or have a broad crop rotation that includes cover crops.

Producers across agricultural regions, regardless of the size of the operation, have developed a variety of creative means to integrate livestock into their production model including “chicken tractors,” “egg-mobiles,” temporary runs, portable energized fencing and netting, adaptive high stock density grazing, and movable pens. Cover crops and perennials can provide a bridge to bring livestock into cropping systems. We can also use managed livestock disturbance to rehabilitate native plant communities where agricultural production is not the primary goal.

There is ample evidence that an agricultural production model focusing on soil health can be not only productive, but profitable. This model is not just for small-acreage farms. Both organic and non-organic producers running operations from several hundred to over 10,000 acres across Minnesota, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Kansas, Virginia, Georgia, South Carolina, Mississippi, and other states are reporting the successes with a production model focused on soil health.

When we move from viewing soils as simply a medium to support the roots of our cash crops to a living ecosystem, the farmer becomes an agroecologist. Opportunities abound to implement soil health into existing agricultural operations. By adhering to the basic tenets of soil health, we create not only habitat for soil microbes, we also provide a host of ecosystem services including clean water, pollinator habitat, grassland bird habitat, carbon cycling, as well as nutrient dense food.

Kent Solberg lives and farms in Central Minnesota and currently serves as the Livestock and Grazing Specialist for the Sustainable Farming Association. He holds a bachelor's and master's degree in wildlife biology.
Mentor program gives farmer confidence to raise pastured pigs

By Hailey Melander

The MOSES Farmer-to-Farmer Mentoring Program has proven to be more than just impactful at the farm level for Dayna Burtness, who owns Nettle Valley Farm in Spring Grove, Minn., with her husband, Nick. "My confidence, my peace of mind, and my quality of life have just really improved knowing that my mentor Eric [Kreidermacher] is only a phone call away," Burtness said.

"I was totally a suburban kid. I hadn't even mowed a lawn until I was 19 and worked on my first farm," Burtness said. She interned at a farm while she was in college, and "totally fell in love with it." She started a student-run garden and, after graduating college, managed several market gardens in the Twin Cities.

Her mentor had quite a different start in the farming industry. "I grew up on a conventional confinement hog farm," Kreidermacher said. "Now my wife, Ann, and I have two organic farms. They raise heritage Red Wattle hogs on pasture and in Swedish-style deep bedding. They also have heritage cattle that are completely on pasture.

"My wife is the one who spearheaded the idea of us organic farming back in the early 2000s," he explained. "We were starting to make a personal lifestyle change that focused on healthy food and healthy soils. My farms weren't big enough to farm conventionally, and going organic really gave us the opportunity to farm again." He currently has 400 acres, and raises hundreds of hogs and cattle under the family farm name Pork & Plants.

Over a decade after first getting her hands dirty, Burtness now owns 67 acres and raises pastured pork on a smaller scale than Kreidermacher. This is her second time participating in the MOSES Farmer-to-Farmer Mentoring Program; her first time she was mentored as a vegetable farmer. The experience has been "fantastic from the get-go," she said, although she had healthy reservations at first.

"I hoped that he would take me seriously," Burtness said, noting that she has experienced a great deal of what she calls "benevolent sexism" as a woman farmer. "When I was getting farm insurance, a guy that I was talking to called my business plan 'cute' and 'amusing.'" she said. "It's been a theme. It's annoying, and it really takes the wind out of your sails."

In addition, Burtness feared that the disparity in size between their two farm operations might make the mentorship difficult. "I'm super small scale – this year we're only finishing 25 pigs – so I was worried when Harriet [the MOSES organic specialist who runs the program] matched me with Kreidermacher, because I knew his operation is very, very large for a pastured pork producer," Burtness explained. "Plus his pigs aren't on pasture all the time."

Ultimately, however, the difference in size has been beneficial, she added.

"Some of the infrastructure that works on his scale can be scaled down and still be applicable to mine," she said. She feeds her pigs certified organic feed that is corn-, soy-, and fishmeal-free, and struggled with her pigs wasting it. Fortunately, Kreidermacher had a feeding system in place that would work equally well on Burtness's smaller scale. "He helped me think through [the issue], and we actually did a joint purchase of feeders to save on shipping," she said. The feeders were delivered to Kreidermacher, and since Burtness doesn't have a loading dock, he drove them to her farm.

Burtness's herd struggled with some health problems in the cool, wet spring. Kreidermacher was available to help with those as well. "He's seen everything; he's been doing this for so long," Burtness said. He even brought down supplements to help Burtness with the health problems the pigs were having. "He made it very clear he would take calls day and night if anything was going on. He's the best!" she exclaimed.

Kreidermacher and Burtness share what she calls a "holistically minded" approach to animal welfare. He offered advice for using minerals, supplements, and apple cider vinegar to help Burtness stabilize and maintain her herd's health.

The 25-head herd that Burtness currently raises spends all of its time on pasture, which is ideal for her farm where only 2 of its 67 acres are tillable.

Despite feeling the typical uncertainty of a relative newcomer to raising livestock, Burtness has a deep-rooted passion for her heritage-breed pigs and for raising them organically (though uncertified) on pasture. "Everything that I've read and experienced in my life has led me to believe that organic is totally the way of the future. It's the best for your bottom line; it's the best way to farm for your health; and, it's the best tasting food. It hasn't occurred to me to try other methods," she said.

Even though she is strongly in favor of growing and consuming organic food, her pigs are not certified organic. She has no current plans to pursue certification. Pastured pigs are better suited to her farm's topography, she explained. She personally finds this approach ideal for pig welfare.

"I think when we look at our food system as a whole, one of the ways that pigs play a valuable..."
Antibiotic Preservation

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, antibiotic resistance ranks among the top global public health concerns. Resistance is due in large part to unnecessary use of these drugs in livestock to improve their efficiency. Organic farmers help preserve and protect the effectiveness of our precious antibiotics because these drugs aren’t allowed in organic farming systems. Increasing numbers of consumers are rightfully looking for antibiotic-free meat and dairy products. The organic label gives us that guarantee.

Nutrition

A growing body of evidence shows that foods produced using organic methods provide higher levels of beneficial nutrients—such as antioxidants in produce and omega-3 fatty acids in meat and dairy—and less harmful contaminants, including pesticide residues and cadmium.

Climate

The food at the end of our forks has a tremendous impact on global climate change. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations recommends organic farming practices, because they help sequester carbon, use less fossil fuel, and can help mitigate global warming.

Soil Health

The microbes in healthy soil are intimately connected and related to the microbes in the human gut, where the bulk of our “microbiome” resides. By protecting and supporting the biodiversity of organisms in the soil, organic farmers help protect the health of our entire ecosystem, including the organisms that live in our gut. Microbial communities connect agriculture, nutrition, medicine and life on our planet.

Water Quality

The Minneapolis Star Tribune’s report titled: “In Farm Country, tainted water is just the way it is,” raised red flags about toxic agricultural practices. Water is our most essential nutrient, and contaminated water supplies harm public health and destroy the quality of our lives. Organic farming methods help protect our shared watersheds and all who live downstream.

Our Future

When Robert Shimek, Executive Director of the White Earth Land Recovery Project in northern Minnesota, took the stage at Beyond Pesticide’s annual Forum in Minneapolis last spring, he reminded us to ask “how are the children?” when assessing the success or failure of society.

Today’s children are increasingly facing illnesses that have a connection to our food and farming systems. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics reports an increasing rate of children born with neuro-developmental disabilities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that about one in six, or 15%, of U.S. children aged 3 through 17 years have one or more developmental disabilities, and Sesame Street’s new character with autism confirms that we are witnessing a “new normal.”

Children’s cancer rates are on the rise, too, as well as allergies, and birth defects—all of which may be due in part, to exposure to environmental toxins related to agricultural chemicals.

Shimek explained that children living on the White Earth Reservation are regularly exposed to drift from pesticides sprayed on potatoes grown for McDonald’s restaurants by the R.D. Offutt company. Potatoes grown in his region are sprayed every five to six days with the fungicide chlorothalonil. The impact? Children in the region suffer higher rates of autism, and 18-21 percent qualify for special education programs, compared to the Minnesota state average of 15 percent.

Dr. Phil Landrigan, dean of global health at Mt. Sinai Medical School, reports that, “Until this year, most herbicides in the Midwest were sprayed during a six-week window, but now the heavy herbicide spray season will last at least four months, placing more children at heightened risk.”

Mothers should not have to worry about toxins passed along to their infants during pregnancy, through breastmilk, or in community parks, schools, or their family’s food and water.

In Starbuck, Minn., registered dietitian and organic farmer Mary Jo Forbord fears neighboring sprays on non-organic commodity crops will harm her family’s health, livestock, and fruit orchard, named after her deceased son, Joran.

Her farm produces nourishing foods recommended by dietitians to reduce the risk of chronic disease. Last year she created a short film about her farm, food philosophy and life, including her husband’s exposure to chemical fertilizer drift and resulting illness, confirming the imperative to produce food sustainably—without poison.

Growing numbers of spray drift incidents threaten organic farmers’ livelihoods, health, and consumers’ access to quality food. Yet in a recent New York Times article, Monsanto estimated that by 2025, it will have corn seed able to withstand five different pesticide sprays. However, make note: none are adequately tested individually for safety, let alone in combination.

It is imperative that we look to our food and farming systems as keys to restoring planetary and public health.

To Choose Organic on page 14

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Melinda Hemmelgarn introduces a speaker at the 2017 MOSES Organic Farming Conference. She will be a keynote speaker at MOSES 2018.

Photo by Laurie Schneider

A Fond Farewell

This November, I will have reached my “term limits” on the MOSES board as your “consumer advocate.” In that role, I have been your ambassador, actively promoting the virtues of sustainable organic farming, and the integrity of the men and women who go the extra mile to produce nourishing food, while protecting the earth for present and future generations.

As I say farewell, I offer my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the MOSES staff and organic farmers I’ve had the good fortune to befriended. You’ve been among my smartest teachers, and I appreciate your wise insights. Thank you for welcoming me to your farms, patiently answering endless questions, and explaining the challenges and rewards of organic farming. You have better enabled me to help consumers connect the dots between food, health and agriculture.

You’ve shown me that the best farmers are keen observers, systems thinkers, and practitioners of true preventive health care. That the answer to weeds and pests is not a chemical in a bottle, but natural biodiversity and soil stewardship. I’ve learned that we are stronger together, and you’ve given me hope for a better world.

I promise to continue to sing your praises, and advocate for organic food and agro-ecological farming practices, well beyond my board term. I will contact my state and national representatives to support organic research funding and earth-friendly farming practices. And I will continue to thank you, personally and publicly for producing food with integrity and transparency.

– Melinda Hemmelgarn, M.S., R.D.
Consider location, layout, materials, more when designing efficient pack shed
By Jason Grimm

As produce growers, we are deep into the season; fall crops are planted, and harvest is a daily task. At this time of year, your pack shed’s layout can be an asset or an everyday burden to get a crop clean, packed, and ready for our customers. The pack-shed design is just as important as laying out our farms’ fields, field roads, headlands, and annual crop plans. Good pack-shed design takes into consideration flow of product, surfaces, and material handling.

Location, Location, Location
Before building or setting up a washing and packing area it is important to consider having this space centrally located along a consistent route of travel. Be sure you have access to potable water and possibly electricity. If you have a cooler or refrigerator, consider putting it near or inside your pack shed to reduce transporting clean produce to another location on your farm.

Having a designated area for washing and packing means you do not need to set it up before each washing and packing session. It is important to have a designated area that is always set up to reduce the chance we might skip a step.

Barns, garages, machine sheds, and other structures on the farm all can make great pack sheds. Before you consider repurposing your old barns, it is important to assess the previous uses into the cooler. Be sure that doorways are wide enough so you won’t bump and bruise your fingers or elbows.

To make cleanup faster, and maybe even enjoyable, think through how you’ll manage water in your packing area—you’ll be using a lot of water to wash produce and clean your workspace. You might pour a concrete floor and install drains, or simply capture water and allow it to drain. For walls, use dairy board and other melamine-type surfaces as well. For walls, use dairy board and other melamine-type boards from your local hardware store. These white boards brighten up the space. You can also hose them down quickly.

Easy-Care Surfaces

Pack-shed flooring should be concrete or some type of decking that allows you to move product with pallet jacks, a dolly, or some type of cart to save your back. Make a point to never carry just one box to the walk-in cooler, but instead as many will fit on the cart! Install ramps in the space and even into the cooler. Be sure that doorways are wide enough so you won’t bump and bruise your fingers or elbows.

To make cleanup faster, and maybe even enjoyable, think through how you’ll manage water in your packing space—you’ll be using a lot of water to wash produce and clean your workspace. You might pour a concrete floor and install drains, or simply capture water in some type of container before pumping or discharging it out of your packing area.

For walls, use dairy board and other melamine-type boards from your local hardware store. These white boards brighten up the space. You can also hose them down quickly.

Another surface in your pack shed to pay close attention to are your harvest and packing containers. I cannot stress the benefits of food-grade containers. Many farmers still are using Rubbermaid or similar brand containers to harvest, store, and deliver product. Food-grade plastics are much denser and do not gouge as easily. Gouges provide places for harmful bacteria and other pathogens to grow and contaminate product.

Surfaces also may include tools and gloves. Use color-coding to distinguish uses, such as green brushes to clean produce, red brushes to clean the floor and other dirty jobs. If you use reusable gloves for washing produce, allow them to air dry between uses after cleaning them with soap and water.

Stations

As you design the flow of your pack shed, consider what type of crops you are growing and the different processes to clean and pack those crops. Some crops, such as kale, lettuce, or greens, will probably be dunked into a series of tubs to wash and sanitize them before packing them in their final box or container. For root crops, you will either be using washing equipment or a spray table to rinse all the soil off the crop before final packing. Ideally, you would organize your pack shed so that you have stations set up for each of the groups of crops that are washed similarly.

Another station that should always be kept separate is a handwashing station. Install a sink or set up a jug of water with a spigot for staff to wash their hands. Be sure you have soap and single-use towels with your handwashing station as well.

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Select right meat processor for best finish of your specialty meat product

By John Masko

This article refers to meat processing regulations, which vary by state. Check with the authority in your state regarding these regulations.

While most vegetable producers harvest and sell their product without any further processing, most meat producers must engage with another business in order to sell their product to retailers, restaurants, or consumers. The buying experience and the final product that ends up in the customer’s freezer is influenced as much by the processor as the farmer. A strong partnership between the farmer and the processor is essential for success.

I’ve been raising and selling 100 percent grass-fed and pastured meat products directly to consumers for the past 11 years. During that time, my family and I have worked with six different meat processors, often helping them understand the unique needs of direct marketers. Along the way, we’ve learned how important the relationship between farmer and processor really is, and how to maximize that relationship to everyone’s benefit. These are some of the tips we’ve collected in the process.

Levels of Processors

If you’re raising organic livestock to be sold as a certified organic product, you’ll need to select a certified organic meat processor or inscribe your local processor to become certified. To find a certified meat processor, search the Midwest Organic Resources Directory at mosesorganic.org/organic-resource-directories.

If organic certification isn’t the priority, you need to consider where you will sell your product, and select a processor that has the required inspection level for that purpose. Inspection requirements vary by state, so you need to check with the agency in your state that regulates the slaughter and sale of meat. In most locations, you’ll have three options for inspection level: custom, state, and USDA.

The first level, often referred to as “custom,” or “custom-exempt” is the most basic. These processors are inspected regularly, but not daily. There’s “custom-exempt,” which is also the most basic. These processors are inspected in one to be sold in another.

Some states have reciprocity agreements with neighboring states, allowing meat that is state-inspected in one state to be sold in another. For example, in Minnesota, a beef animal can be sold to up to four people, a hog or sheep to up to two people under custom inspection.

Most states offer a “state-inspected” level of processing. At these processors, inspectors are available to inspect and approve meat, which generally allows meat processed at these plants to be sold at retail (grocery, co-op, or farmers market) or to a restaurant, in addition to directly to consumers.

Some smaller processors may not be able to have a state inspector present every day. This will impact your scheduling considerably. In addition to considering your own work schedule and the availability of capacity at the processor, you’ll also need to make sure there is an inspector on site on the day you’ll be bringing animals. Bear in mind these inspectors are employees of the state (or in some cases, the USDA), and are not employed by the processor. Make sure the processor and inspector are good at communicating with each other. If you’ve had your lamb harvest and subsequent meat deliveries scheduled for six months and, on processing day, the inspector isn’t on site due to a miscommunication between inspector and processor—and you don’t find out until you’re ready to unload—you have a major problem (been there).

If you are selling meat across state lines, you’ll want to find a USDA-inspected processing plant. Some states have reciprocity agreements with neighboring states, allowing meat that is state-inspected in one state to be sold in another.

USDA-inspected facilities are generally going to have a USDA inspector on site each day of slaughter. For the bigger processors, this could be five days a week. For smaller processors, it may only be one day a week. If you plan to sell meat in several states, or plan to ship meat, you’ll definitely want a USDA-inspected processor.

A final note on inspection: each level of inspection generally will vary in the price you’ll have to pay, with custom being the least expensive. If you know you will sell quarters and halves of beef only within your state, then a custom processor would be fine, and probably less expensive.

Facility Size, Location

Large processors often have more options available to producers. Some may have the ability to do more for you to facilitate your customer relationships. On the other hand, a smaller processor may be more accommodating and flexible, and can get to know you and your preferences more easily.

How far are you willing to haul your animals to slaughter? Long trailer rides, of course, increase costs in terms of time and fuel, but also can stress animals, particularly in winter, affecting meat quality.

Packaging

What kind of packaging options are available? What do your customers expect? What is consistent with your farm’s “brand?” Do you want your meat in plastic vacuum-sealed packaging, or would you be comfortable with paper wrapping?

What about the ground product? Many processors offer plastic bags, which are great for frozen product, but may have some labeling limitations, which brings me to my next point.

How do you want your meat labelled? Many processors routinely put their own label on each package of meat. State- and USDA-inspected meat is required to identify the processor and include the inspection “bug” (small round sticker) on each package. Your marketing plan will help you determine your brand and how you want to represent your product.

When we started selling our meat, my wife, Lisa, designed a logo with our farm name that we wanted attached to each package of meat. We found some processors were unwilling or unable to use our label on the meat. With one, we offered to pay them more for this extra step, and suddenly they were happy to do it! As our business became more established, and most of our business was from repeat customers, we decided to save some money and dropped the label.

Another labelling question you may want to
Meat Processing — from previous page

ask is how the individual cut of meat is identified. Let’s assume you are packaging for retail sale by individual cut, and you are willing to pay for it. You could supply the processor a per cut price list, and most larger processors would be able to produce a label very similar to what your customers might find in a grocery store, complete with a nicely printed “T-Bone Steak” or other cut identity, a weight, a price per pound, and total price for the package. This presents a very professional look to your product, but is also considerably more expensive.

Product Delivery

Are you going to be picking up your meat yourself or having your customers pick it up? This question has many ripple effects. If you are charging a premium price (and you should) for your grass-fed or certified organic product, you will probably want to be the face the customer associates with your product, and should arrange pickup or delivery through you. This prevents the processor from becoming your competitor for meat sales. Many processors have a retail meat case of their own. Some will purchase from local farms (or more likely) from large-scale meat wholesale houses and offer bulk or by-the-cut product. You want to make sure they don’t have a chance to offer their “product” to your customers at a much lower price—even if your customers understand the extra value they get with your custom-raised meat.

If you plan to pick up your meat and deliver it yourself, you’ll want to make sure the purchase, pickup and loading process fits your expectations. At pickup, many processors will bring the meat out of the deep freeze in wire trays and then transfer that product into cardboard boxes for you to take. Some processors have nice boxes of all the same size with or without their label. Others will use whatever boxes they have on hand. In many cases, particularly with those processors who have their own retail meat case, those boxes “on hand” will be boxes they got when they purchased boxed meat for resale. These boxes may be labeled with the label of mega slaughterhouse/meat wholesaler, such as JBS or Casco. You may want to consider how showing up to your customer with your certified organic, 100 percent grass-fed beef in a JBS box will look.

Additionally, will you have help boxing up your meat? Or will you have to handle meat at “roll” yourself? What kind of work space is available to you or your customers? Will you have the equipment and help you may need, order accuracy, and food safety.

Livestock Handling

As mentioned earlier, stress can greatly affect meat quality. You’ll certainly want to become familiar with the handling facilities and most importantly, the handlers who’ll be helping you unload your animals. Animals don’t like loud, unfamiliar sounds, or rough handling. Are they handled carefully? Are they handled with the hand of the handler. Are they handled with respect? Are they handled with respect for the animal and the handler? Are they handled by someone who has experience handling similar animals?

While unloading, will your animals be able to see or hear other animals being handled and/or killed? Do the handlers understand basic livestock handling, such as: Don’t yell at, kick, or shock the animals. Rather, use the animals’ own curiosities and propensities to get them off the trailer and into the plant.

What is the method of killing the animal? Are they stunned mechanically or electrically? How quickly are the animals then bled? Conscientious consumers will certainly ask about this. You should know every detail, and proceed cautiously with a processor who won’t at least explain it to you or at best let you on the kill floor during processing.

There is widespread agreement within the chef community that the most influential factor in meat tenderness and overall quality is not breed, size, age, or gender of the animal, but rather how long the carcass was allowed to hang in dry aging. Most processors will use a standard 7-10 days and anything less should be avoided. However, if you are able to secure the services of a processor who will allow you to hang the meat 21 days or more, you will have access to a different type of customer, one who understands—and will pay for—the resulting quality of meat.

Since most processors use a “first in, first out” approach regarding the cooler space, changing the length of time a carcass remains in the cooler will cause disruption to the processing schedule. You’d want to be assured the processor is able to make this change, keep your carcasses properly identified, and be able to cut your carcasses on the promised day. You should expect to pay a premium for this level of service. If you aren’t asked for more money to do this, you’ve found a true partner.

Processor as Partner

Ultimately, the relationship with your processor is a relationship with individuals. You should ask who you’ll be dealing with when you call to schedule processing appointments and who will be taking your cut-up instructions. Sit down with these people and make sure you can understand each other. Particularly, you’ll want to know ahead of time exactly what cut-up information is needed, and in what form it can be taken. To avoid confusion and costly errors, I recommend using an email instruction, once you’re sure the other person refers to the same animal. You also don’t want this person to understand your business enough to be able to suggest better, more efficient cuts to maximize your yield.

Finally, in building a good business partnership, the way you engage with your processor is just as important as how they engage with you. Your business will benefit greatly if the processor is eager to take your animals rather than constantly wondering what you are doing and why they agreed to process your livestock. Are your animals relatively clean when you bring them in, or are they covered in manure because they were over-crowded and stressed on the trailer ride? Are your animals of top quality? Everyone wants to work with the best, and processors want to be associated with the best farmers, regardless of size. When you bring an animal in for slaughter, do you ever hear, “That’s a nice hog”? You should.

Do you keep your appointments? Processors vary in their ability to be flexible if you cancel at the last minute. You may need to change aspects of your business to make sure you can show up on time, every time. Are your checks good? Do you pay on time? Are you willing to pay more for extra service, or change orders? Understanding how your decisions impact your processor will go a long way to help them understand how their decisions or mistakes affect you.

Your goal should be to have such a strong relationship with your processor that when it is time to request special treatment, lodge a complaint, or squeeze an emergency slaughter date into a crowded schedule, the processor will be ready and willing to accommodate you. Everyone benefits from you and your processor having this good relationship, including your customers, who will be able to get their orders on time, correct, and of the highest quality.

John Mesko and his family own Lighthouse Farm in Minnesota. He is the executive director of MOSES.
Interseeding Corn — from page 5

fall; the trade-off is that it is a bit less wither-hardy. Crimson clover should be seeded a couple of lbs/acre greater than red clover.

Forage radish has also been successfully used as an interseeding cover crop. Rates of about 8 lbs/acre could be used, or a lighter rate (3 to 5 lbs/acre) in combination with a grass. Don’t expect the same degree of fall growth, however, as compared to an August-seeded radish cover crop. Even with lesser growth, however, the plants do produce some biomass and bio-drilling taproots. Radish can be a good option to further add diversity to your cover crop mix.

Impact of Harvest

Typically, interseeding works best with corn grown for silage, since that is removed earlier in the fall, allowing a longer window for the cover crop to put on additional growth. While driving over the field may do some damage to the cover crop, it usually will quickly recover and, within two weeks with good growing conditions, will look none the worse for the wear. More risk of damage exists if wet soil conditions are present at harvest, leading to compaction by the equipment and inhibiting cover crop recovery.

Maintaining the cover crop while harvesting corn for grain can be a bit more challenging, not only due to the shorter window for enhanced cover crop growth, but due to corn stover covering the cover crop. To mitigate this risk, combinations could be operated a bit higher to avoid shredding the stalks, while still harvesting the grain. Avoid mowing the corn stalks after harvest as this could smother the cover crop with corn stover. Leaving a high stubble in the field (versus mowing shorter) can also reduce the amount of stover on top of the cover crop. The amount of cover crop biomass accumulation in the fall will ultimately depend on a number of factors, including cover crop species, success of cover crop establishment, harvest dates, soil fertility, soil moisture/rainfall, and heat units accumulated in the fall.

UW-Arlington Organic Research Plots

This past season, we tried interseeding our organic silage corn after last cultivation for the first time. We selected three cover crops (cereal rye, forage radish, and red clover), each planted on its own. We used a modified drill spanning four corn rows to plant cover crops between rows.

This past season, we tried interseeding our organic silage corn after last cultivation for the first time. We selected three cover crops (cereal rye, forage radish, and red clover), each planted on its own. We used a modified drill that spanned four 30-inch corn rows to plant the three inside row widths between the corn with three rows of cover crop spaced 7.5 inches apart.

We managed the corn as we typically would: applying manure the previous fall, planting corn in late May at 32,000 plants per acre, time weeding within 24 hours of planting, time weeding or rotary hoeing 2-3 times depending on soil condition, and then row cultivating, first with narrow and then with wider sweeps. At the V5-V6 stage, just after last cultivation on July 1, we drilled the cover crops. Cover crop seedling rates were 10 lbs/acre red clover, 8 lbs/acre radish, and 3 bu/acre cereal rye. (We chose to bump the seeding rate higher to assess the feasibility of integrating the strategy into no-till soybeans with rolled rye.)

While we still haven’t harvested the silage, the cover crops established well under the corn canopy with no detrimental impacts on weed management. We will collect yield data at harvest, and measure cover crop growth the following spring. Stay tuned for more research updates as we continue with the study!

General Tips:

1. Don’t set expectations too high—be conservative. As with many aspects of the organic system, cover crops are a biological management tool, and their performance will vary from year to year depending on soil and weather conditions.

2. Choose cover crops that best align with your goals. Do you want to add carbon/organic matter back to the soil? Protect the soil from erosion during the winter? Have a late fall crop for grazing? Add fertility for the following cash crop rotation phase? Knowing what you want to accomplish will help you decide which cover crop or cover crop mixture best fits your desired cropping system needs.

3. Have a plan for spring management. If you choose a cover crop that will overwinter, how will you manage it the following spring? Will it interfere with field activities and management of the cover crop? Remember, cover crops should be incorporated approximately 17 days prior to cash crop planting to avoid issues with seed corn maggots laying eggs on the decaying residue and impacting cash crop germination. (See Insect IPM in Organic Field Crops: Seedcorn Maggot, learningstore.uwex.edu/Assets/pdfs/A3872-01.pdf). Additionally, some cover crops, such as cereal rye, can begin growing and put on a lot of biomass quickly in the spring, making timely incorporation critical.

4. If trying this (or any new technique) for the first time, limit the planting to an area of the field that is representative of the overall conditions. Replicate these blocks three times in the field, while keeping all other management the same. Then, monitor yield and quality to ensure there are not any unintended effects.

5. Don’t be afraid to ask questions and learn more from land-grant university organic research programs, organic education organizations, and other farmers.

Erin Silva is an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. She leads the Organic and Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension program.

Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Arlington Research Station use a modified drill spanning four corn rows to plant cover crops between rows. Photo by Erin Silva
Event helps food producers introduce products to buyers, consumers

By Kelli Boylen

The annual Feast! Local Foods Marketplace in Rochester, Minn., provides an opportunity for regional food entrepreneurs to build their business by meeting buyers, consumers, and technical assistance providers. The award-winning food event hosts over 100 exhibitors that use locally grown ingredients when possible and operate at or near a distribution-ready scale. These vendors show, sample, and sell their artisan food products to wholesale buyers during the Friday tradeshow and to consumers during the Saturday festival. Last year more than 1,700 people attended.

Sno Pac attended the very first Feast event in 2014. “We wanted to make more people aware that we are a local company,” said President Peter Gengler. The company has exhibited at the event every year, and plans to attend again this year.

“We created relationships with other manufacturers that we do business with, and it’s fun to let consumers know who we are and where they can find us,” Gengler said. He also noted they really enjoy meeting customers face to face.

Four generations of the Gengler family have owned and operated Sno Pac Foods in Caledonia, Minn. Established in the early 1900s, the business started with ice harvesting, and later as a place to rent freezer space. More than 70 years ago, Lance Gengler purchased a farm and started raising berries and vegetables, which he processed and froze at his plant.

The family has always farmed organically, using sustainable practices along with good crop rotation and soil conservation practices to sustain the land. Demand for their fruits and vegetables grew, even before the organic food movement caught on. Today, the Gengler family continues to grow and package produce in the same tradition. Crops grown by Sno Pac are certified organic, their packages bear the USDA Organic seal as proof. In addition to freezing and packaging their own vegetables, they bring in vegetables from other farms and pack them into co-op bags.

At Feast 2014, Gengler said he ran into 8-10 buyers that Sno Pac already does business with, including some of the other exhibitors at the event. “I walked around talking to other vendors, so I was able to talk to several who purchase ingredients from us. That was valuable for maintaining relationships, and we did talk about some additional items that they weren’t purchasing from us.”

After that first event, he heard from his broker who received a new order from a retail grocery as a result of talking with Gengler at Feast. Attending Feast helped Sno Pac make connections with other regional business that now use its frozen berries and vegetables in their products. Sno Pac sells to soup makers, jam and snack makers and even pet food manufacturers.

“The Feast Local Foods show in Rochester is one of the most entertaining, lively and informative trade shows in our area,” Gengler said. “Whether you like organic fruits and vegetables or craft beers, coffee and hot sauce, this show provides something for almost everyone. We hope to see you this year!”

Ferndale Farm Market is another Feast exhibitor that has been at the event every year. John and Erica Peterson, the third generation on the Peterson family farm near Cannon Falls, Minn., continue to grow free-range turkeys virtually the same way John’s grandfather did nearly 80 years ago.

“We take tremendous pride in our land, our turkeys, our staff, and the knowledge that people are nourished by our products each day,” John Peterson said. “We let all our Ferndale turkeys grow naturally, without the use of antibiotics or artificial growth promotants, and they enjoy constant access to a diet of grains, vitamins, and minerals from a local feed mill. We don’t think there’s any substitute for excellent care and husbandry, and we take pride in creating an environment that maintains turkey health without medications.”

Their family operation was established in 1939 by John’s grandparents, Dale and Fern Peterson, which is where the name “Ferndale” originated. Peterson said his grandfather’s first love was hatching turkeys, and when the second generation took over they began growing birds to maturity instead of selling young chicks.

When John and Erica took over the business in 2008, they wanted to sell directly to customers and retailers, creating a transparent supply chain so people would know where their turkeys were from. They created an on-farm store and started processing Ferndale turkeys naturally, without additives, at a USDA-inspected facility.

At first they had to balance supply and demand, but they soon had their farm at maximum capacity and needed to explore ways to grow in harmony with their strict standards. Now the Petersons partner with other area farms to grow some birds, according to Ferndale protocols. Ferndale owns the birds from start to finish, and produces about 160,000 turkeys a year, which he said sounds like a lot, but really is a modestly sized family farm in relation to Minnesota’s turkey industry, which produces 45 million birds a year.

Ferndale also partners with more than 70 other local producers, from pork farmers to pasta makers. “Our goal is to reconnect shoppers with a premier selection of sustainable and artisanal foods,” Peterson said. “As shopkeepers, we are excited to continually seek out other local farmers and craft food producers that share our values and vision for preserving one-of-a-kind local flavors from independent folks.”

One of the ways they have found vendors for their store is attending the Feast! Local Foods Marketplace. They attended the first year because they “absolutely wanted to be there” to meet other local food growers and makers. They wanted to increase the number of local products they carried in the store and to increase awareness of their own products. They found the event fruitful on both accounts. Peterson said they keep coming back not just to meet new food partners, but also to strengthen the relationships they already have by seeing folks face to face.

Peterson noted it is easy to feel alone when working in agriculture, with the long hours and rural locations, but events like Feast help local food growers and makers to come together and share stories of success and challenges. “It’s amazing how many food producers there are in our own backyard, and at Feast they all come together under one roof. It is a great local food event that showcases all the terrific things happening in our area. We are continually impressed with Feast.”

Learn more about exhibiting at Feast at www.local-feast.org/exhibitors_2017.

Kelli Boylen is a freelance writer who lives in Iowa.
Mentorship — from page 7

role is that they can eat so many different things that are still healthy for them but might not be certified organic. They can turn it into really high-quality meat while on pasture. That doesn’t always work with organic certification,” she said.

Kreidermacher also has his own reasons for not certifying his animals. “The animals we don’t certify organic; the land and crops we do,” he said. Kreidermacher and Burtness both deal in a local, direct market; they have personal relationships with their customers, who are able to visit the farms and don’t feel the need for certification.

“If I was going wholesale and beyond the local market, I would need that paperwork to make my product stand out in the marketplace,” Kreidermacher said. “I raise organically, and everything is consumed internally, so it’s a closed-loop system.”

Animal welfare was a concern of Burtness’s before beginning the MOSES mentorship program. So she was pleased to find Kreidermacher shares the same mentality. “He just really, really cares about his animals, and really cares about the health of his land, and his family,” Burtness said. “I can’t say enough good things about him.”

Burtness still has some time left in the MOSES Farmer-to-Farmer Mentoring Program, and hopes to continue her relationship with Kreidermacher as she slowly grows her farm in the coming years.

“We started with 3 [pigs], then 10, and this year we’re doing 25. So, even though we’re still very small-scale we are growing,” she said. “In the next five years, we’ll increase the number of pigs we’ll finish on the farm, and then, in the next decade, we’ll consider whether we’ll want to move to a full farrow to finish. When I was a vegetable farmer I definitely grew a little too fast, and that led to health problems and burnout, and this time around I’m trying to take it very, very slowly.”

Kreidermacher mirrored Burtness’s sentiment. “[The mentorship] is never going to stop,” he said with a laugh. “We’ll always stay in contact. We’re so alike in philosophies. And, she’s got a knowledge base that I want to tap, because she’s certified in permaculture. So I want to pick her brain.”

“I really want to make sure that we advance and help this next generation,” she said, expressing the sentiment behind the MOSES mentorship program. “The new farmers are our future, and we need to make sure that we help them as much as possible.”

Halley Melander is on the MOSES communications team.

Choose Organic — from page 8

Tips for Farmers to Educate Consumers

Clearly, we have great challenges ahead of us: increasing pesticides and related drift, the poisoning of our water, loss of biodiversity and functioning antibiotics, climate change, and the quality of our children’s future.

This summer, I noted that the heat index outside my air-conditioned office in Columbia, Mo., was 111 degrees. Even my heavily mulched native plants looked desperately dehydrated. Japanese beetles overtook my friend’s peach orchard several years in a row. And as I write this, Houston, Texas is dealing with the deluge from Hurricane Harvey. Storms are becoming more frequent, violent, and damaging. Weather is less predictable, and once-native diseases, insects, plants, and animals are crossing historical borders.

The good news is a growing number of consumers recognize the far-reaching benefits of organic food and farming. Sales continue to grow, but we need more U.S. farmers to step up to the plate and convert to organic production.

To increase relevancy and the likelihood of publication, tie your op-ed to national recognition days, such as National Farmers Market Week.

Help readers understand how organic farming works on your farm, and nourishes your community sustainably. Look for research to back up your opinion and observations. The Union of Concerned Scientists’ blog is a good place to start: blog.ucsusa.org/science-blogger/organic-agriculture-is-key-to-helping-feed-the-world-sustainably.

2. Create a podcast, offer to be a guest on Food Sleuth Radio. I invite you to tune in on Thursday evenings at 5 p.m. at kopn.org, or peruse the archives at KOPN or Public Radio exchange: www.prx.org/series/52432-food-sleuth-radio.

3. Offer to give a talk about organic farming at local clubs, schools and community organizations. Most consumers don’t understand what organic agriculture entails—you’re the experts who can teach us.

4. Use social media strategically. Amplify your words with photos and video; it has never been easier. This blog post can help you create content and connect with consumers: https://university.upstartfarmers.com/blog/ tips-tricks-and-tools-for-using-social-media.

5. Cross-pollinate. Attend social, professional and political events with all who care about good food and a clean environment. Invite the unfarmed to your farms so they can witness and taste “good” food. It’s especially important to reach out to elected officials at local, state and national levels. Let them know the policies that help or hinder your farming operation.

Please stay in touch. If you’re not already listening to Food Sleuth Radio, I invite you to tune in on Thursday evenings at 5 p.m. at kopn.org, or peruse the archives at KOPN or Public Radio exchange: www.prx.org/series/52432-food-sleuth-radio.

Melinda Hemmelgarn, M.S., R.D., a.k.a. the “Food Sleuth,” is an award-winning registered dietitian, writer, and nationally syndicated radio host based in Columbia, Mo. She has served on the MOSES board since 2009; she joined the Beyond Pesticides board in 2016. Reach Melinda at foodsleuth@gmail.com.
Farming decisions, insurance claims, organic inspection easier with well-kept records

By Harriet Behar

While recordkeeping is not among the top 10 best things about farming, keeping good records can provide significant benefits to farmers and ranchers. Having a historical perspective of the planting dates for each field, correlated with information on various crop yields, is invaluable in planning crop rotations from year to year. Tracking fertilizers and soil nutrient amendments and the crop rotation changes the inputs over time, pinpointing which inputs offer the most bang for the buck. When you have your own records, you know how late you can plant a specific crop and still get acceptable yields. You also have the information you need to develop different crop rotations by soil type and location on the farm, and can choose when to harvest a crop, such as taking corn silage instead of letting the corn grow to maturity.

Organic certification requires good records so the organic inspector can verify that you are doing acceptable activities—those records represent a functioning organic system on your farm. Organic farming relies on good management rather than synthetic inputs.

Good records serve as an economic safety net if things do not go as planned. If a prohibited pesticide drifts to your field from a neighboring farm, utility crew, or aerial sprayer, your records can prove that the crop rotation and the organic crop sales could have been closed up the holes they may have in their recordkeeping system.

Whole Farm Revenue Protection crop insurance relies heavily on the information on the Schedule F of your federal tax return. The recordkeeping workbook has templates for tracking that information as well, making your yearly tax filings much easier to do, whether you do them yourself or hire a tax preparer complete your annual tax return. The recordkeeping workbook provides significant benefits to farmers and ranchers. Having a historical perspective of the planting dates for each field, correlated with information on various crop yields, is invaluable in planning crop rotations from year to year.

By a third party recognized by the U.S. government, they are “audited” and verified on an annual basis by a third party recognized by the U.S. government. In planning crop rotations from year to year, long-term storage of specialty crops. This record notes fields where crops were grown, and provides a running inventory to help with sales and future planning.

Whole Farm Revenue Protection will cover economic losses due to lower market prices seasonally or annually. You can submit the completed sales record form from the workbook to show your crop insurance agent your historic sales figures. You can also use this completed form for your annual organic inspection to show your record of sales into the organic marketplace.

Lastly, if you plan to apply for a farm operating loan in addition to crop insurance, there is a spreadsheet to track an individual crop’s expense and income over a five-year period. This can help with long-term enterprise planning, especially on diverse operations where choices are made each year regarding how many acres of each crop should be grown. This planning workbook helps determine the net income per acre, which is useful when applying for crop insurance as well.

Having your documentation forms handy so you fill them in routinely will make them valuable assets for your farm. This new recordkeeping workbook gives you everything you need to keep track of your farming activities.

Harriet Behar has a certified organic farm in Wisconsin, and serves on the National Organic Standards Board.

Recordkeeping Workbook

Both the book and individual forms are available under the Publications tab on the MOSES website: moesesorganic.org.

Request a printed workbook by calling the MOSES office at 715-778-5772.

Forms in the workbook:

- Field Locations
- Crop Rotation and Input History by Field
- Five Year Individual Field Activity Log
- Supplemental Organic Integrity Documents
- Storage Record
- Sales Record
- Estimated and Actual Individual Crop Income and Expense
- Income Worksheet for Schedule F
- Expense Worksheet for Schedule F
Basic Water Considerations for Pack Sheds

Post-harvest handling water uses include:

- Washing hands
- Washing knives, other tools, and surfaces food contacts
- Dunk tanks out in the field during transport to the pack shed
- Dunk tanks in the pack shed
- Spray tables

Water for all of these uses must be potable (approved for human consumption). Well or municipal sources must be tested. Springs, streams, rain barrels, and cisterns aren’t approved sources of drinking water.

Testing Water

- Test for no detectable E. coli in 100 milliliters of water using approved sampling techniques.
- Lab must receive water sample within 48 hours of taking sample—may need to hand deliver if post office or other courier cannot deliver within this timeframe.
- May need to determine a baseline with 4 water tests the first year and 1 annual after that.

Contamination Prevention

- Washing procedure can have multiple steps, with the first one removing most of the dirt, a second deeper cleaning, and a final tank with a sanitizer approved for human food contact (e.g., chlorine, peroxyacetic acid or hydrogen peroxide) in the correct concentration to destroy illness-causing pathogens. Can also consider final rinse with drinking water on a sanitized spray table.
- Dropped produce must go through entire cleaning process or be discarded.
- Putting a tub that had been on the ground or out in the field on the spray table means the spray table needs to be re-sanitized.
- Use clean/sanitized gloves when washing, not gloves used out in the field.
- Dunk tank water and final sanitized dunk tank should be monitored and changed frequently.

Storage

It is important to consider where produce will be stored when it comes from the field. Keep it off the ground and away from produce that is already clean. Consider where you will keep clean, new packing containers such as boxes, bags, clamshells, twist ties, etc. Keep these new packing materials away from water, off the floor and away from pests, and covered so that they do not collect dust.

Lastly, while designing and thinking about your washing and packing space, visit other farms to see their sheds. You may search online for videos of packing sheds, too. The USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Good Handling Practices audit checklist is worth reviewing even if you don’t plan to pursue GAP Certification. The checklist can serve as a great reminder of best food safety practices. The checklist is online as a PDF here: bit.ly/GAPchecklist; part 3 beginning on page 14 covers packing houses.

Jason Grimm is Food Systems Director for Iowa Valley Resource Conservation & Development (RCAD). He owns Grimm Family Farm in North English, Iowa.

He will present a workshop on Finding and Accessing Markets at the New Farmer U, Nov. 10-12, 2017 in Montour, Iowa.

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http://csa.localharvest.org

Pack Shed — from page 9

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New online course helps farmers master finances

By Jody Padgham

At the end of your farm production season, do you see the balance in your checkbook and feel the urge to buy something—a new truck, a manure spreader, a hoophouse, or a few springing heifers—rather than give your hard-earned cash to the taxman? Be better prepared to resist that urge and learn to make sound financial decisions by taking a new 16-week online class based on the popular MOSES book, Fearless Farm Finances. This new course is jointly produced by MOSES and Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) under a USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program grant.

The course uses NWTC’s Blackboard software system to give participants access to a combination of PowerPoint presentations, video clips, readings, worksheets, quizzes, and case studies to understand the basic concepts of farm financial management. Valerie Duntoin-Adamski, Sustainable Food and Ag Systems educator at NWTC, will grade and return coursework, and moderate an online discussion board to support participants.

Participants will stay together on the same topic each week (though doing the work as it fits into individual schedules) to ensure that everyone gets the most out of the experience. Modules are expected to take about 2 hours each week, including reading, online viewing, and writing.

While the course is designed to be comfortable for those with no background in farm finances, even those with experience in their farm’s management will gain from the sessions. Participants will dig into standard financial statements essential for loans and many other uses, and cover ratios and profitability, which are valuable topics for even the experienced farm manager.

By the end of the course, you will learn how to:

• Set goals for a farm or food related small business
• Collect basic financial data
• Choose a recordkeeping system
• Summarize bookkeeping program functions
• Create and use a balance sheet, income statement, and statement of cash flows
• Use ratios to assess business status and profitability
• Use financial analysis to assess potential new purchases
• Use enterprise analysis and partial budgets appropriately
• Assess markets
• Set prices
• Plan and monitor cash flow
• Evaluate organization of labor and management
• Explore funding for your farm business
• Plan for transfer or exit

The course begins Oct. 23, 2017. New modules will be posted at the beginning of successive weeks, with time off for holidays. The final module will be posted the week of Feb. 25, 2018.

Participants can take the course for college credit or as a non-credit class. Non-credit students may register online at mosesorganic.org/fearless-farm-finances. The non-credit course fee is $150, with $50 refunded upon course completion and the submission of an evaluation. Students must already own or purchase the book Fearless Farm Finances ($19.95 + S&H at mosesorganic.net). All non-credit completers will receive a Certificate of Completion.

Participants who take the course for college credit must develop a business plan during the course. To register for the credited course, call 920-498-5444 or 888-385-6982.

There are a limited number of positions for this course. Registration closes Oct. 17, 2017.

Opportunities with MOSES

We’re creating opportunities to involve more of our community in the work we’re doing. If you’re passionate and knowledgeable about organic and sustainable farming practices and want to be part of the MOSES team, let us know! These paid opportunities include presentations on farming topics, writing about your area of expertise, and answering questions from other farmers. Work can range from 10 to 20 hours/month. We’re looking for farmers and ag professionals who have expertise in row crops, vegetables, livestock, dairy, and soil health. We’re also looking for people who have experience writing grants. Interested? Send your resume and letter of introduction by Oct. 5, 2017 to hr@mosesorganic.org. Want to talk about these opportunities first? Call John at 715-778-5775.

Organic Transition Workshop

MOSES will host an all-day workshop Wednesday, Nov. 8 in St. Louis for crop and livestock farmers who are interested in learning about organic transition. This workshop is at the Hyatt Regency St. Louis at the Arch following the Organic and Non-GMO Forum. Save $60 by registering before Sept. 30—early bird price is $90.

Food Safety Workshop

MOSES will present a workshop to help vegetable growers meet the new rules laid out in the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), especially the Produce Safety and Preventive Controls for Human Food rules. Workshops are Nov. 10, 2017 in Montour, Iowa and Dec. 8, 2017 in Streator, Illinois. Cost to attend is $50. Seats are limited. Register online at mosesorganic.org/food-safety-workshop or call 715-778-5775.

Farm Finances Workshop

Gain control of your farm finances by taking a workshop based on the book Fearless Farm Finances, published by MOSES. Dr. Craig Chase, Iowa State University, and Paul Dietmann, Compeer Financial, two of the book’s authors, will teach this workshop on basic farm financial management. Dates are Nov. 10, 2017 in Montour, Iowa and Dec. 8, 2017 in Streator, Illinois. Workshop cost is $50 and includes a copy of Fearless Farm Finances. Seats are limited. Register online at mosesorganic.org/fearless-farm-finances-workshop or call 715-778-5775.

New Farmer U

Farmers in their first five years can jumpstart their operations with a weekend conference Nov. 10-12 in Montour, Iowa, or Dec. 8-10 in Streator, Illinois. These events offer 90-minute workshops on farming topics, a panel presentation with experienced farmers, plus resource tables with services to help beginning farmers. Cost for the training, lodging, and meals is just $125, with a $25 discount for farm partners. New Farmer U participants can take the food safety or farm finance workshop (see previous briefs) for just $25 in conjunction with their New Farmer U weekend. Register at NewFarmerU.org.

Recordkeeping Webinar

Learn how to streamline your farm’s recordkeeping system for crop insurance reporting and organic certification in a new on-demand webinar at mosesorganic.org/webinars.

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GROWING TOGETHER
The Organic & Non-GMO Forum: Oilseeds & Grains at the Crossroads is Nov. 6-7, 2017 in Madison, Wis. Sessions cover the latest information regarding opportunities for producers while addressing processors’ production needs. Tickets & Grains at the Crossroads are $799. Producers with 5,000 or more acres, use code “ORGFARMER” to register at $499. “MOSES” to register for $650; smaller-scale farm operators with less than 5,000 acres are $799. Producers with 5,000 or more acres, use code “ORGFARMER” to register at $499.

Organic Certification Cost Share

Certified producers and handlers can apply for reimbursement for certification-related expenses they incurred from Oct. 1, 2016 through the end of September 2017. Payments will be up to 75 percent of certification costs with a maximum of $750 per category of certification. Cost share applications are available nationwide through local FSA offices. Producers in Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin can access Organic Certification Cost Share through their state departments of ag in addition to FSA offices. Check with your preferred vendor to ensure that funds are still available in your state.

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Eversman 240 mts 20’ rototiller. Excellent shape. $7500. Row runner cultivator has lillipution seed cutters and a good condition, stored inside. 319-559-0373 NE Iowa.

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Looking to relocate with long term management. Open to ideas, Chaz at 715-441-0362 or thebehfarm@gmail.com.

**FORAGES**


Certified Organic Alfalfa. 2017 crop year. 1st cutting 3x3x6.5 large squares, 2nd cutting 3x3x8 & 3x4x8 large squares. Oats, wrapped and dry. Biogas. 100% dry. 529 per bale. Will have 3rd crop of 5x5 rounds and 3x3 squares available in September. Toledo, MN. 507-589-4250. 2017 OEEA Certified Organic Alfalfa and Alfalfa/Orchard Grass in 3x3 squares. 120-200+ RFQ, 2016 hay bales available at discounted price. Northeast Nebraska. Josh (402)336-8130.

For Sale: 2017 Organic Hay. 3x3x8 large squares of dry hay. 3x3x6.5 large squares baleage. MOSA certified. Wonewoc, WI. Transportation available. 608-553-1136.

For Sale: 2017 Organic Wheat or Barley Straw. MOSA certified. 3x3x8 large square bales. Wonewoc, WI. Transportation available. 608-553-1136.

**GRAINS**

For Sale Transitional Rye Seed $17.00 per bushel. Dale Stahl. 605-680-2608.


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Tackling the Challenges of Transitioning to Organic at the Organic & Non-GMO Forum

Find details and event links online: moseso.org/community

Webinar: Non-Ruminant Organic Livestock on Pasture
October 3 | 1 - 2 p.m. | Online
USDA - NRCS

Grazing River Country: Larson Pasture Walk
October 26 | Free | 10 a.m. - Noon | Colfax, Wis.
Contact Dept: 715-590-2130

Grazier Gathering
October 31 – Nov. 7 | Free | Cold Spring, Minn.
Bonnie Haugen, Minnesota education coordinator for the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship: 507-447-7770

WFAN Conference
November 2-4 | $155 | St. Louis, Mo.
Field tours, on-site intensives, workshops, keynotes, special 20th anniversary presentations, and a locally sourced lunch.
Women Food and Agriculture Network: 515-460-2477

Hands Tools and Implements for Small Vegetable Farms
November 3 | Free | 1 - 2 p.m. | Iowa City, Iowa
Practical Farmers of Iowa: 515-232-5661

Organic & Non-GMO Forum
November 6-7 | $499 - 650 | St. Louis, Mo.

Webinar: Compliance Strategies— Pest Management for Organic Processors
November 7 | Free | 12 - 1 p.m. | Online
Oregon Tilth

Organic Transition for Commercial-Scale Farmers
November 8 | $180 - $260 | 4 - 5 p.m. | $99 - $150 | St. Louis, Mo.
Farmers and ag professionals explain organic certification and the process to transition to organic production.
MOSÉS: 715-778-5775

Cottage Food Producer Advanced Food Safety Training
November 9 | $185 | 1 - 4 p.m. | Little Falls, Minn.
By attending this session, you will meet the training requirement to register as a Minnesota cottage food producer with annual sales over $5000 per year.
Suzanne Dresens: 203-204-6007

Fearless Farm Finances Workshop
November 10 | $50 | Montour, Iowa
Practical financial training based on the book Fearless Farm Finances, published by MOSÉS. MOSÉS: 715-778-5775

Food Safety Workshop
November 10 | $50 | Montour, Iowa
Training for vegetable growers to meet new FSMA rules.
MOSÉS: 715-778-5775

New Farmer U
November 10 - 12 | $125 | Montour, Iowa
Conference geared to farmers in their first five years features workshops, panel presentation, and exhibits with resources.
MOSÉS: 715-778-5775

Field Day: Quality of Life
November 10-12 | $200 | 3 - 7 p.m. | Lena, Ill.
Artic Organic Learning Center: 815-389-8455

Japan Organic Farming Workshop
December 8 | $50 | St. Louis, Mo.
Practical financial training based on the book Fearless Farm Finances, published by MOSÉS. MOSÉS: 715-778-5775

Food Safety Workshop
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Webinar: Integrated Pest Management Updates
September 26 | Free | 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. | Holt, Mich.
Women’s Environmental Institute: 651-583-0705

Webinar: Non-Ruminant Organic Livestock on Pasture
October 3 | 1 - 2 p.m. | Online
USDA - NRCS

Wisconsin Cover Crops Conference
October 4 | 9:30 a.m. - 4 p.m. | Jackson, Wis.
LUW Extension-Steyerton: 920-459-5900

Open-Pollinated Corn Field Day
October 6 | Free | 1 - 3 p.m. | Lewiston, Minn.
Stan Smith: 507-523-2874

Wisconsin Solar Tour
October 7 | 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. | Saint Paul, Minn.
Tour energy-efficient and sustainable homes and businesses. Midwest Renewable Energy Association: 715-592-6595

Fallon Fiber Festival
October 7 | 8 - 11 a.m. | Fallon, Minn.
Sustainable Farming Association: 844-922-5773

Cover Crops Farm Tour
October 9 | 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. | Spring Green, Wis.
See cover crop practices for produce, grain, and dairy.
MOSÉS: 715-778-5775

Webinar: Interseeding, Precision Planting and Management of Cover Crops in Corn & Soybean Rotation
October 9 | Free | 1 - 3 p.m. | Online
USDA webinar with Greg Roth, Ph.D, Penn State University

Webinar: Practical Carbon Solutions
October 10 | Free | 1:30 - 9 p.m. | Online
Carbon farming solutions through a biodynamic lens.

Wisconsin Organic Farming Conference
October 11 | Free | 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m. | Madison, Wis.
By attending this session, you will meet the training requirement to register as a Minnesota cottage food producer with annual sales over $5000 per year.
Suzanne Dresens: 203-204-6007

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History and Health Situations Related to GMOs
October 14 | $12 | 8:30 a.m. - 9 p.m. | St. Cloud, Minn.
Dr. Don Huber explains the history, health impacts, and long-term effects of GMOs. www.cornerstonehealthteam.com

Field Day: Farm Business Transitions
October 16 | 8:30 - 2:30 p.m. | Gysldeville, Ill.
Upper Midwest CRAFT Field day by Angelic Organics Learning Center: 815-389-8455

Looking Back at the First Year of Farming with Experienced Eyes
October 16 | 8:30 - 2:30 p.m. | Hancock, Iowa
Learn from other beginning farmers, Practical Farmers of Iowa: 515-232-5661

Fall Beekeeping: Winterizing Hives
October 22 | 1:30 - 9 p.m. | North Branch, Minn.
Women’s Environmental Institute: 651-583-0705

2017 Food Access Summit
October 24 - 25 | 350-385 | Duluth, Minn.
James: 651-214-1948

(serializers)