

MINNESOTA ORGANIC ADVISORY TASK FORCE
MEETING MINUTES
JULY 15, 2011

APPROVED 11-14/11/MM

Members present: Karen Couné Alex Dubish, Bradley Heins, Jackie Hoch, Robert King, Mary McCallum, Michelle Menken, Wesley Moechnig, Elia Romano, Leonard Russo, Anthony Schiller

Members absent:, Paul Sobocinski, Emily Zweber

Agency and University Representatives Present: Mary Hanks (MDA), John Byrnes (OATF Staff) Meg Moynihan (OATF Staff)

Members of the Public: Robin Martinek, Tammy Hinman, Harry Hoch

Chair Hoch convened the meeting slightly after 10:00 a.m.

I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

II. TOUR

Hoch and her husband/business partner Harry Hoch led members on a tour of several of the farm's orchards.

III. REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES

Motion to approve minutes of 1/13/11 with addition that Rob King was present: King.
Second: Schiller. Motion passed

Motion to approve minutes of 4/1/11: Schiller. Second: Coune. Motion passed.

IV. OATF PURPOSE AND GOALS

Chair Hoch reviewed the task force's charge: to present a range perspectives on organic issues and give feedback to Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) and University of Minnesota (U of MN) in and advisory capacity. Moynihan provided some background history of the OATF and Byrnes explained how the OATF was expanded during the 2008 legislative session to include the U of MN.

V. SECTOR UPDATES

Hoch (Farmer) reported the apple crop looks good this year. Store demand for their product is higher than last year. She attended the National Organic Standards Board meeting in Seattle, where the sunset date of streptomycin for control of fire blight in apples was extended to 2014. (This issue had been discussed at the April 2011 OATF meeting and a recommendation made to the Commissioner of Agriculture to support extending the sunset date.) Educating organic growers

about other forms of fire blight management will be the apple community's next steps. Field days and an advanced winter apple grower seminar are planned. One Michigan researcher is heading a task force to discuss how to address the issue in Northern climates.

Heins (Extension) is in charge of U of MN organic dairy research and extension. He has been convening group meetings with organic dairy producers to glean research and extension ideas. As a new member of the U of MN Dairy Team, he is encouraging that team to engage in activities that involve organic. One of 13 Extension field days will be held next Monday at the Mueller organic dairy near Melrose. Heins reported Organic Valley and Horizon are both seeking more producers. Demand for organic dairy is growing. The high price of grain crops is a concern and is influencing some research directions.

Couné – (Public) recently joined boards of Lakewinds Natural Foods cooperative and Slow Food MN Twin Cities. She noted that national and local media coverage of local, organic and sustainable is pervasive. She commented that the business sector is taking note of sustainable farming sector job creation. Couné noted continuing consumer confusion around the terms “local”, “sustainable” and “organic”. She observed that many consumers use these terms interchangeably. She cited an *Organic Processing* magazine article reporting nearly ¾ of families buy organic at least occasionally, chiefly for health reasons and 31% families buying are more organic now than a year ago; they are reducing spending in other areas b/4 cutting organic spending.

Russo (Retailer) described his enterprise, which manufactures, as well as retails, food in a Saint Paul restaurant and market. Russo wants to see more State efforts to improve promote the local food industry in general, and to assist sustainable growers and organic producers. He cited challenges including educating the public and lack of distribution systems. Russo also serves on Ramsey County's Food and Nutrition Commission to get healthful, whole foods served in schools.

Dubish (USDA) distributed a handout regarding a claims settlement program for Hispanic and Women farmers who experienced discrimination in farm loans and credit. He asked members to share information about this program with others. It is a top priority right now within USDA per the Secretary of Agriculture.

Schiller (Processors) reported that crops coming along nicely after a late start. Prices are skyrocketing. And there are concerns they will get out of hand and lead to loss of meat and egg producers as happened several years ago. There will be fewer products available this year because a number of farmers have quit organic.

Menken (Certifiers) – Reported weather-related problems stress for fruits and vegetables farmers in the Twin Cities area. A lot of CSAs aren't even distributing yet due to the late spring. Field crops may be catching up, but fruit and vegetable farmers are still feeling stress. Menken also reported growing numbers of certified operations across the board. All certifiers are looking for reviewers and staff people (not inspectors). She posited that some of this pressure may have to do with growth of dairy and/or turnover within agencies. She noted that the NOP under Miles McEvoy – appears to be trying to get uniformity. The Q&A section was pulled from the NOP website because

of inconsistencies, for example. There is also a new NOP policy handbook. Accredited Certifiers Association has a member blog for sharing information – everybody is trying to be more consistent.

There is a comment period open for nonorganic seed issues now. Minnesota Crop Improvement Association is interested in seeing that sector stay strong.

Mary McCallum (Public). Described her work leading community education/engagement efforts on environmental and food topics. She also works in schools on projects to reduce waste and toxicity.

Wes Moechnig (Organic Farmer) – reported excellent demand for dairy products. Processors are cautiously brining on new producers and even offering incentives to get more milk from existing producers. Economics are of concern – production costs are rising for all dairy (organic and nonorganic). Feed prices in particular are rising quickly and presenting particular challenge to transitioning dairies, which are likely to rely on purchased feed. Moechnig also commented on “pushback” from the non-organic dairy sector. He said he is contacted by many people who request raw milk as well. Implementing the pasture rule continues to be a challenge because of recordkeeping requirements.

Elia Romano (Processor) – Reported the organic commodity prices have risen sharply and he has heard of corn selling for \$12-13 /bushel. Spring was busy and drawn out by cold, wet weather which necessitated delayed and repeat planting. Corn stands were poor because soils were too cool and too moist, promoting lots fungal diseases. No buckwheat seed is even available for late planting. SG got in late but looks good. Growers are now over the hump on row crops and small grains. It has been a decent forage year if you can find window to cut. He commented that milk and grain buyers are exerting pressure to encourage farmers to use organic seed and penalize them if they don't, but a surprising amount of untreated conventional seed gets planted. The Organic Material Review Institute has a seed database, but there are some problems with it.

Robert King (University of Minnesota Faculty) is in the first year of a project on the economics of organic transition that will involve farm records, profiles, and farm business planning. Nineteen farmers are enrolled so far. Another big U of MN project on organic soybean research and promotion (Jim Orf, Craig Sheaffer) was just funded. King is also involved with a project related to “Ag of the Middle” – farms too big for direct marketing and too small for commodity production. The project includes case studies on innovative supply chains The U's student organic farm is doing well on new site and there is tremendous student interest.

VI. UMN/MSDA BRIEFING

Byrnes distributed a handout summarizing activities food and agriculture research at the University of Minnesota and a report on House subcommittee Farm Bill appropriation. Many programs that provide significant funding for University research are zeroed out or cut significantly in that proposal, which is cause for concern. Dean Durgan is very involved in the land grant professional associations, which are working to secure or restore these funds.

Moynihan distributed a handout summarizing key organic activities at the MDA, which include organic farm directories, certification cost share, farm business management scholarships for organic growers, "Do Not Spray" signs, a listserv, the Minnesota Organic Conference, a Minnesota Grown Organic marketing logo, consumer education videos, and other efforts.

VII. PRIORITIES/STRUCTURE.

Moynihan reviewed existing OATF subcommittees: Transition, Crop Insurance, and Consumer Education. Hoch encouraged members to consider continuing, dissolving and forming new committees that will generate recommendations the OATF can make to the MDA and U of MN.

After some discussion, members decided to discontinue the Transition and Crop Insurance subcommittees. The Consumer Education subcommittee will continue. Members are Couné (chair), Russo, McCallum, Hoch, and Zweber (who was not present but will be invited to participate).

Hoch encouraged members to continue thinking about other important issues that would merit formation of a subcommittee committee.

Hoch introduced Tammy Hinman, a guest from the ATTRA organization who will be participating in a field day at the farm.

VIII. NATIONAL POLICY ISSUES

Members reviewed Farm Bill titles and generated a number of recommendations (see attachment)

King moved to form a subcommittee on national policy issues. Russo seconded. Motion passed. Members will be King, Dubish, Hoch and Sobocinski (who was not present but will be invited to participate and chair). Byrnes and Moynihan will both staff the committee. Farm Bill discussion will continue via e-mail using the "respond to all" option.

IX. HOUSEKEEPING

Next meeting will be held Monday, November 14 at Russo's Heartland restaurant in Saint Paul.

Robin Martinek, who will retire shortly from the NRCS, offered a farewell to members and said she enjoyed her time on the OATF. She will be looking for volunteer opportunities and encouraged members to call on her.

Motion to adjourn: Schiller Second: McCallum

Recorded by John Byrnes, Meg Moynihan

Key University of Minnesota activities involving Organic Agriculture

Cropping system research at the Southwest Research and Outreach Center in Lamberton, MN, including: 120 acres of certified organic land with several research projects including:

- The Long-term Variable Input Crop Management Systems trial initiated in 1989
- Three - 30 x 48 foot newly constructed high tunnel hoop houses designed for advanced extended season organic vegetable production
- Several studies funded by USDA and CERES on advanced organic production practices including alternatives to corn and soybean, Canada thistle control, sweet sorghum, brassica and winter rye cover crops, weed control in flax, spring and winter peas, lentils, alfalfa mulch, dry beans, alfalfa management. (Some of these also involve farm cooperators.)

Organic dairy and crop research at West Central Research and Outreach Center in Morris, including 164 acres of certified organic cropland, 32 acres in transition to organic production, 356 acres of certified organic pasture, 91 certified organic dairy cattle (genetic composition is 40% Holstein and 60% crossbreds consisting of Holstein, Jersey, Swedish Red, and Normande), and 110 conventional dairy cattle on the same site.

Student Organic Farm on the St. Paul Campus includes three acres of organically certified or in-transition land in the heart of the St Paul campus field plots. One third is used for graduate research, one sixth for undergraduate research projects and the remainder for student administered fruit and vegetable production. The farm contains two high tunnels. One is currently used to investigate raspberry production. The second is used for early and late season vegetable production. <http://sof.cfans.umn.edu/>

Organic Farm Business Management program in cooperation with Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the Minnesota State College and University system, with online access to financial performance data at <http://www.finbin.umn.edu/>.

Tools for Managing Pest and Environmental Risks in Organic Crops is an online publication that consolidated organic research results on reducing production risks for crops that include cultural practices, variety selection, and management of pests and diseases. <http://www.organicriskmanagement.umn.edu/>

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) brings together the diverse interests of the agricultural community with interests from across the University in a cooperative effort to develop and promote sustainable agriculture in Minnesota and beyond. MISA helps sponsor the Minnesota Organic Network, a list serve that fosters communication on matters related to organic agriculture. <http://www.misa.umn.edu/>

The University of Minnesota is a signatory to a memorandum of agreement with state and federal agencies to cooperate and share information related to organic agriculture.

Note: More information is available on a website highlighting organic activities

<http://swroc.cfans.umn.edu/OrganicEcology/>



Plans to revise in 2011

MDA Organic Activity and Engagement

Certification Cost Share



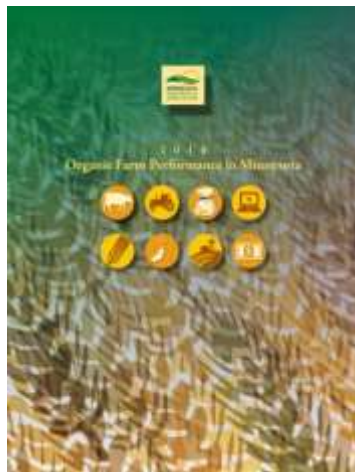
62% farmer, 35% handler participation, 2010. Available again in 2011. \$400K (USDA)



Free, metal, popular. 5/farm. Greatly envied by Win and others.



Several years old. Must be MG member AND certified. Only ~12 using. Opportunity.



FBM scholarships for organic producers since 2006. Unique data. Federal funds ending.



Public comment

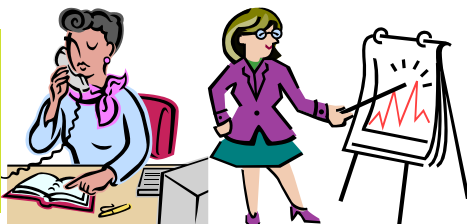


Organic Network Listserv - 183 members. Facilitates interaction.

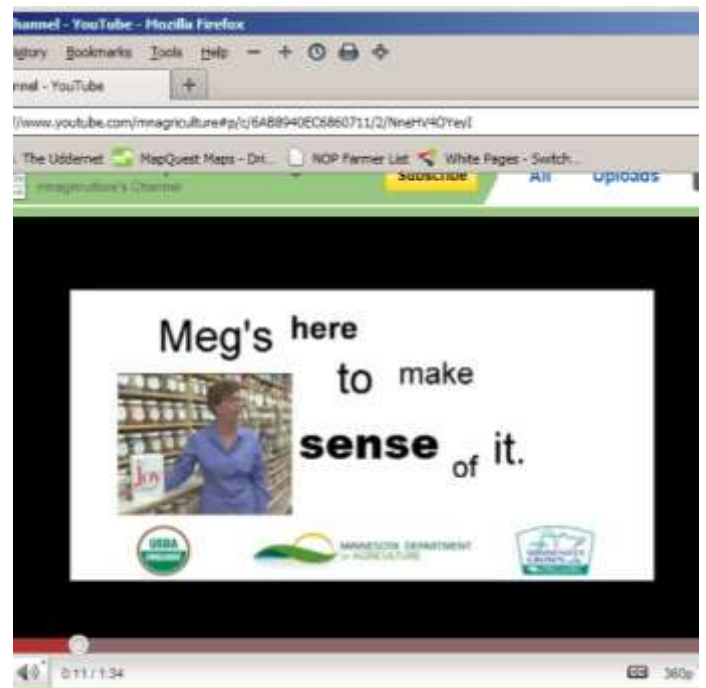


Minnesota Organic Conference
January 13-14, 2012

Credible Information Source



Meg serves on BOD for
Organic Farming Research Foundation
Organic Field School at Gardens of Eagan
Formerly NASOP – still engaged



YouTube Consumer Video Series - OATF committee priority

**Minnesota Organic Advisory Task Force input to the MDA on 2012 Farm Bill Issues,
July 2012**

<p>Title I, Commodities: Basically, income support to farmers in the form of direct and counter-cyclical payments, marketing loans, government dairy purchases, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce or limit direct producer (commodity) payments [to save \$ and ↓ land prices] • eliminate restrictions on fruit and vegetables 	<p>Title II, Conservation: Environmental stewardship of farmlands and improved management practices through land retirement and working lands programs, among other programs geared to farmland conservation, preservation, and resource protection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fund working lands conservation programs (incl CSP, EQIP) • support special provisions for beginning (including immigrant) farmers • cement existing organic provisions into place
<p>Title III, Agricultural Trade and Food Aid:</p>	<p>Title IV, Nutrition: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (Food Stamps), School meals and community food security programs (Farmers Market Nutrition Programs), locally produced foods, Child and Adult care food programs, and other food distribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eliminate barriers to including organic food in nutrition programs • improve availability/access to organic for low income populations and in schools
<p>Title V, Farm Credit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer programs advantageous to beginning farmers 	<p>Title VI, Rural Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue Value-added Producer Grants • Offer financial assistance for non-farm food/ag value added businesses (e.g. rural enterprises that are not necessarily farm-based)
<p>Title VII, Research: Research—Agricultural and food research, Extension funding, Research on pollinators, organic agriculture, rural development, etc</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund this title, period, because it includes Ag and Food research, on pollinators, organic ag, rural dev., Extension, etc. • Fund dedicated organic research on production, marketing, economics, food safety, etc. (e.g., OREI, Organic Transitions Program) • Fund Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program • Fund SARE • Fund ATTRA 	<p>Title VIII, Forestry</p> <p>None</p>

Title IX, Energy	Title X, Horticulture and Organic Agriculture: Horticulture/Organic—Specialty Crop Block grants, Farmers Market Promotion Program, National Organic Program, cost share programs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer grants and loans for research and adoption of on-farm alternative energy production • Offer grants and loans for research and adoption of on-farm energy conservation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Ensure that both programs fit scale producers, perhaps through a cap on funds or specific language</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) program • Fund USDA's National Organic Program (NOP), including organic certification cost share • Fund NOP for studies that will contribute to better decisions on organic standards • Fund Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)
Title XI, Livestock: Livestock—Livestock health, Inspection of Meat and poultry	Title XII, Crop Insurance and Disaster Assistance: Crop Insurance—Disaster and emergency assistance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implement and enforce current proposed GIPSA rule [it provides fair livestock market reforms -- ensure organic producers have access to markets, price discovery and transparency] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fund research and pilot programs to improve insurance products available to organic farmers • Reform rules regarding organic price elections
Title XIII, Commodity Futures	Title XIV, Miscellaneous: Other types of programs and assistance not covered in other bill titles, including provisions to assist limited-resource and socially disadvantaged farmers, and agricultural security, among others.
None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • institute nationwide program to increase organic producer enrollment in Farm Business Management. programs • Fund programs that help beginning (including immigrant) and immigrant farmers • Offer programs that encourage and support urban agriculture
Title XV, Trade and Tax Provisions	
Offer Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) to organic producers experiencing competition from imports.	
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