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The NSAS Newsletter is a bimonthly publication of Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, a private, non-profit organization. Our mission is to promote agriculture & food systems that build healthy land, people, communities & quality of life, for present & future generations. The purpose of this newsletter is to inform its readers about sustainable agriculture issues, resources & activities. Members receive this newsletter as a benefit.

Staff Changes in Store for NSAS

by Ruth Chantry

Elaine Cranford has resigned from her position as Executive Director (a very part-time position). Cranford will remain involved with NSAS as time permits, primarily through her position at UNL-Nebraska Cooperative Development Center, which currently provides oversight for the Buy Fresh, Buy Local Nebraska Chapter coordinator and program. As this newsletter is being written, Cranford is underway on a second short mission trip to Peru over Christmas and the New Year. She and husband Matthew have had an increased interest in mission work since their last trip to Peru in June 2007. They are hoping to increase the frequency and length of their mission trips. Cranford was previously on the board for NSAS and also was an active volunteer for several years prior to her board position. Her final day with NSAS was December 21, 2007.

Completely coincidentally I have resigned my position as outreach coordinator. I have been coordinator for a bit over three years and have had a great time, especially because of all the people I have met and worked with. It has become clear to me that I am too busy keeping up with farm and family to do the job as well as I would like and bring to NSAS what it needs for outreach. My final day in the position is December 29, 2007. Sincere and heartfelt thanks to folks for stepping up to the plate so many times to make events, fundraisers and much more happen while I was in this position. For the very near future, I plan on continuing on the Buy Fresh, Buy Local Nebraska Chapter Advisory Committee.

Plans are being made for an interim coordinator and additionally for work to begin on capacity building while the board looks at next steps for staffing and strategic planning. Jill Wubben continues her bookkeeper/membership position. Wubben has been with NSAS for 13 years. If you need assistance, Liz Sarno, board president through February, or Wubben can assist you.

NSAS is still doing great things! The annual healthy farms conference is coming up and the brochure will be out soon and mailed to NSAS membership, and linked from www.nebsusag.org as soon as it is available. See more information on page 2 of this newsletter. The auction fundraisers at the conference promise to be as good as ever. The February 1 live auction will be the "entertainment" just after the all-Nebraska banquet. Don't miss out! Buy Fresh Buy Local Nebraska looks towards the next season with Billene Nemecek as coordinator. This is strong state-wide chapter with potential for all sorts of events and promotion in YOUR neck of the woods. 2008 member forms are also linked from the NSAS website and are inserted in this newsletter. Additionally, plans are being made for the next Farm Beginnings class to be held, starting Fall 2008. Watch the NSAS website and newsletter for new developments.



OCIA News

Organic Crop Improvement Association, Nebraska Chapter #1 Newsletter

O.C.I.A. NE #1 Board of Directors

Larry Stanislav, President
Prague, NE
402.663.4649

Mike Ostry, Vice President
Bruno, NE
402.543.2110

Ken Thiltges, Secretary
Rulo, NE
402.245.5460

Randy Fendrich, Treasurer
Linwood, NE
402.543.2102

Jerry Lahners
Hebron, NE
402.356.2023

Marvin Lange
Fordyce, NE
402.357.2150

Gail Lockard
Lincoln, NE
402.477.2128

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Caleb Mosel, Page, NE
John Quinn, External, Lincoln, NE

Crop Improvement Committee
Larry Stanislav, Chair
Tami Highstreet
Gail Lockard
Kim Mosel, Page, NE

Tami Highstreet, Program Director
2766 E street
Lincoln, NE 68510
402.474.0113
tamih_events@yahoo.com

OCIA NEWS contact:
Liz Sarno
2351 Road 43, Box 116
Linwood, NE 68036
402.543.2217
organicu2@windstream.net

OCIA Research and Education
Stephanie Newman
Executive Director
OCIA Research and Education, Inc.
Ph:402.477.2323
Fax: 402.477.4325
E-mail: snewman@ocia.org
Web: www.ocia.org/ocia_rne/index.htm

Bird Conservation on Nebraska's Farmland

by John Quinn

As an agricultural state, much of Nebraska's landscape is devoted to farmland. In addition to the diversity of crops, this remarkable landscape is home to over 400 species of birds throughout the year (www.nebraskabirdingtrails.com/). North America's grassland birds, inhabitants of many agriculture landscapes, have experienced steep region-wide declines over the past decades. Many of the species you may see in your fields each year are at risk. Agricultural practices today affect 70% of all threatened bird species.

Because of the loss of native prairie, sustainable and organic farms are an essential refuge for our resident grassland bird species. The diverse resources available on sustainable farms will be an essential component in the recovery of grassland birds. Research has suggested a number of simple management practices that can increase avian biodiversity in agroecosystems. In your fields, increased weed and insect presence in farm fields provides food and cover to birds; reduction or elimination of pesticides improves the quality of habitat; and the timing of harvest can provide the extra few days young birds need to leave the nest. On your farm, the maintenance of non-crop areas (buffer strips, riparian areas, shelterbelts) provides important habitat as does including a diverse crop rotation; and mixed livestock/crop farming can provide an alternate income source and increase habitat. The proximity and abundance of quality habitat near the farm is important. Encouraging your neighbors and other landowners to consider conservation in their land management plan will go a long way towards helping Nebraska's birds.

Two ongoing projects at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln are looking at how we can optimize bird foraging, nesting, and migration habitat on Nebraska farms. The first project was developed with input from a local farmer who suggested that bird-friendly certification for farms might add a market advantage for direct sales (as currently with bird-friendly coffee), give birds a boost, and enhance the image of farms overall (an interest noted for USDA grants) by having some percentage certified bird friendly. The first stage of development for this project is nearing completion. A questionnaire was sent out to see whether Nebraska farmers might be interested in this idea and to learn their opinions. Early results suggest that the majority of people were somewhat or very interested in a bird friendly farm program. It is interesting to note that NSAS members showed a greater interest than the general Nebraska farming population.

Our second project, the Healthy Farm Index (<http://organic.unl.edu/hfi.shtml>) is seeking to document the diversity of benefits organic farms provide to the local community, economy, and environment by building on the idea that a healthy farm optimizes more than the production of food, fiber, and fuel.

One component of the Healthy Farm Index is the conservation of biodiversity, in particular birds. By enhancing native and planned biodiversity in the fields, farms, and surrounding landscape, farmers will be better able to recognize, utilize, and potentially be rewarded for the ecosystem services that sustainable farm management practices provide. We recently completed our first round of bird surveys.

-- continued page 5

Grow Your Own Nitrogen Utilizing Cover Crops Workshop Offered

Learn to reduce costly inputs and learn how to "Grow Your Own Nitrogen," produce organic matter and build your farm's soil health with discussion of sustainable agriculture with applications for organic systems. Learn about effects of flaming on weeds and crops and hear results of UNL's Healthy Farm Index.

Workshop is January 12, 2008 from 1:00 PM - 4:30 PM at Hardin Hall Auditorium, UNL East Campus, Lincoln, NE (Northeast corner of 33rd & Holdrege Sts.).

Dr. Jeremy W. Singer, Ph.D., will focus on the use of annual and perennial cover crops for nutrient cycling, biological control, and weed suppression. He will also address current use of cover crops in the Corn Belt and factors associated with their use, and USDA-ARS work on annual winter cover crops, self-seeding annual winter cover crops and perennial cover crops. Dr. Singer is from the USDA-ARS, National Soil Tilth Laboratory in Ames, IA.

Results of 2007 Flaming Project at Haskell Ag Lab: Santiago Ulloa, UNL graduate student, will present his research on crop and weed tolerance to broadcast flaming, including his evaluation of dose response for propane on several major weeds and field crops in Nebraska.

Healthy Farm Index: John Quinn, UNL graduate student, will discuss avian, vegetation, and insect diversity collected at 19 organic farms within Nebraska's four agroecozones. Find out how the Healthy Farm Index will help you evaluate your farm's economic and ecological health.

To register: Contact Pat at 402.584.3837. Cost: \$15 per person. Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) Credits Applied For. Sponsored by Nebraska Organic Crop Improvement Association & UNL Organic Farming Systems.

Additional OCIA Events:

OCIA NE #1 annual membership meeting will begin at 9 AM with 8:30 AM registration prior to the *Grow Your Own Nitrogen Workshop* (see above). Lunch will be served at noon, followed by the workshop.

OCIA International AGMM (annual general membership meeting) will be held in Huatulco, Mexico February 28 - March 1, 2008. It celebrates the 20th anniversary of OCIA International and the 15th anniversary of OCIA Mexico!

Bird Conservation:

continued from page 4

For the Healthy Farm Index, we are also collecting relevant insect and vegetation measures, which function as food and habitat resources for birds. Twenty organic farms were visited during the summer of 2007. Over 100 species were seen on these farms. A few highlights include loggerhead shrike, long-billed curlew, bell's vireo, grasshopper sparrow, sedge wren, burrowing owl, and lark bunting. As more results become available, we will share them in the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society newsletter.

For more information about the integration of farming and bird conservation or to participate in our research, visit our website at www.organic.unl.edu. Other valuable online resources are Sustainable Arable Farming For an Improved Environment (www.saffie.info/) or Wild Farm Alliance (www.wildfarmalliance.org/).

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Jim Peterson Retires from Extension Education

James M. Peterson retired at the end of December 2007 after 31 years as an Extension Educator with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, located in Washington County. Peterson has a Masters of Science degree from the University of Nebraska in Soil Science. In 2000, Peterson initiated an ambitious small farm focused program effort in southeast Nebraska. His passion for working with small farm operators led him to develop a team of educators and specialists to work on sustainable agricultural issues and value added opportunities for producers. Jim is an outstanding teacher and his skills in working with people have helped him develop very effective networks to promote sustainable agricultural programs.

Over the past seven years under Peterson's leadership, this Sustainable Ag working group has put together a number of programs including the annual Rural Advantage Conference, held jointly the past four years with Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society's Healthy Farms Conference. The 2007 Rural Advantage Conference focused on alternative agriculture enterprises, alternative energy sources and healthy foods. Approximately 190 people participated in the conference which also featured an All-Nebraska Dinner. Results of the 2006 conference indicated 50% of the participants felt the information presented would increase profitability and help them diversify and expand markets.

For the past four years Peterson has been working with a group known as the Alternative Growers Group. One of the projects was to develop a *Harvest Moon Festival* held at a local Christmas tree farm. The festival showcased different enterprises found in the region. Over 500 people, including many families attend this year. Each fall Peterson also hosts a *Summer Time in the Country Tour* which features stops at sites where producers are working on value added or diversified product ideas. Hundreds of individuals have participated in these tours to learn more about sustainable and value added agriculture.

Peterson and the advisory group also distribute several thousands of dollars in SARE Farmer/Rancher grants. They also work on an educational program for the Nebraska Food Cooperative, a Sheep and Goat Professional Improvement Workshop, a Sustainable Farming and Grazing Tour and a Multi-State Organic Conference.

Peterson has been a board member for Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society since 2004. His first term he served in an ex-officio capacity. He is now in his second term and holds a voting seat, and is in the position of Secretary. Peterson was also recipient of the 2006 NSAS Agriculture Educator Award.

Pork Heritage Breeds: continued from page 3

RC: I'm curious, did you take the Farm Beginnings course when it was offered in SE Nebraska?

TD: No. I have taken a number of beginning farm classes over the years with the REAP program and gone to many niche pork meetings over the years.

RC: Any observations or advice to other beginning or specialty pork producers that you would like to share?

TD: I would say pork would be a good option for a small acreage. You don't need very much land vs. beef. Your turn-over in money should be pretty rapid; if you buy feeder pigs in the spring, by Christmas time you get your money back. For the pounds of meat you produce it is less labor than broilers. I would encourage someone that is just starting out to get at least 6 pigs you would be able to take in about 2 ton of feed from the local feed mill and get delivery.

RC: Anything else you'd like to add?

TD: I'm guaranteeing 100 days minimum from butcher no antibiotics, on soil, no animal by-products. Also, if you are selling pork to someone that doesn't think there is a difference in meat quality, and to get a higher price for a product that really wows them from the first bite, I think these pigs do that. Berkshire is juicier and easier to cook; Red Wattle is more tender and leaner.

RC: Thanks Travis and good luck in your new venture!

Resources:

- Travis Dunekacke at 402.335.0197
- For information on breeds & meat quality, www.heritagebreedsusa.com
- Travis suggests on-line searches via Yahoo: type in "breeds of swine."
- Richard Ness, Extension Educator focusing on Alternative Swine Production and Niche Marketing. 402.370.4061
- REAP program through the Center for Rural Affairs at www.cfra.org.

www.nebsusag.org

Resources

Wisconsin Edition of Renewing the Countryside Released: Find it at <http://renewingthecountryside.org/content/category/10/77/68/>. *Renewing the Countryside* has released a publication on Wisconsin, showcasing thirty-nine creative, hard-working people, organizations and businesses that represent energetic, innovative visions for Wisconsin's countryside. Project partners were Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service (MOSES), The Northern Center for Community and Economic Development, and Renewing the Countryside. The book is the latest in a series of photographically rich publications for specific states that feature case studies of people and organizations renewing the countryside through sustainable and innovative initiatives, businesses and projects.

Farmers' Markets Today: The Business Journal for Direct-To-Customer Marketers: Newer publication out of Cedar Falls, IA, published 10 times per year. Free in print or PDF form to qualified farmers; other subscription rates to non-qualified others. For more information, telephone: 319.277.3599 or visit www.farmersmarketstoday.com.

Beyond Organic: What's Really At Stake: Keynote address by Fred Kirschenmann at the Organic Summit in Boulder, CO on June 21, 2007. Full remarks are available in audio on Organic Farming Research Foundation's website at www.ofrf.org. Kirschenmann currently serves as Distinguished Fellow for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University as well as overseeing management of his family's 3500 acre certified organic farm in south central North Dakota, as well as holding an appointment in the ISU Department of Religion and Philosophy.

A new on-line community, www.TodaysHomesteading.com. is available.

Classifieds

Help Wanted: Grass Based Seasonal Dairy looking for 1-2 people to assist with farm work & other duties. Home, utilities, milk & salary provided. Interns accepted or longer term/yeararound employment possible. Located in Nebraska. Call 402.338.555/ fax 402.338.5555 or e-mail at Wetz@three riverwb.net. Green Pasture Products, David Wetzel. Visit www.greenpasture.org.

Purebred Berkshire, Red Wattle & Tamworth Feeder Pigs for Sale: Available April - July 2008. All three breeds are ideally suited for direct marketing. Travis Dunekacke, Elk Creek, NE 402.335.0197.

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Upcoming Events

January 12, 2008, 1:00 PM - 4:30 PM: Grow Your Own Nitrogen Utilizing Cover Crops Workshop:

This is an opportunity to reduce costly inputs and learn how to "Grow Your Own Nitrogen," produce organic matter and build your farm's soil health with discussion of sustainable agriculture with applications for organic systems. Learn about effects of flaming on weeds and crops and hear results of UNL's Healthy Farm Index. Workshop cost is \$15. Open to the public. To be held at Hardin Hall Auditorium, UNL East Campus, Lincoln, NE. (Corner of 33rd & Holdrege Sts.). For more info and to register, call Pat at 402.584.3837. Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) Credits Applied For. Sponsored by NE Organic Crop Improvement Association & UNL - Organic Farming Systems. For complete agenda & information, see page 4 of this newsletter.

February 1 & 2, 2008: NSAS Annual Healthy Farms/Rural Advantage Conference: Save the date and don't miss out. To be held at Metro Community College in Omaha. Visit www.nebsusag.org often for up-to-date information.

February 5 & 6, 2008: Governor's Workshop on Agri-Tourism: The 2008 Governor's Agri/Eco-Tourism Workshop is set for February 5 & 6, 2008 in North Platte at the Sandhills Convention Center. For more information, visit www.VisitNebraska.org or contact Karen Kollars at karenk@VisitNebraska.org. See page 2 of this newsletter for an additional exhibitor event & opportunity on February 5!

February 8 & 9, 2008: Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society's 29th Annual Winter Conference, held at Seven Seas in Mandan, ND. John Doran, Professor Emeritus at the University of Nebraska and Fred L. Kirschenmann, Distinguished Fellow for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University will be the keynote speakers. Workshops will feature something for everyone including information on livestock, landscaping, estate planning, pesticides, organic no-till, local foods, junk yard wars for kids, plus more. Organic and locally grown meals available. For more information contact NPSAS at 701.883.4304 or visit www.npsas.org.

February 14 & 15, 2008: Organic Seed Growers Conference in Salem, OR. Organic farmers, plant breeders, researchers, and seed industry professionals will gather for the 5th Biennial Organic Seed Growers Conference hosted by Organic Seed Alliance (OSA) with partnership from Oregon State University and Washington State University. This largest meeting of seed professionals in the United States. Get more information at www.seedalliance.org.

February 27, 2007: MarketPlace: Opening Doors to Success 2008: Second annual small business event at the New World Inn in Columbus, NE. Tracks are being shaped for entrepreneurs with ideas for start-up businesses, established businesses, agricultural businesses, youth businesses, and a special track for Hispanic entrepreneurs with sessions conducted in Spanish. Includes sessions covering a host of technology topics, ideas for entrepreneurial communities, and practical rural policy perspectives. For more information, visit www.cfra.org or call Joy Marshall at 402.614.5558.

Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society
P.O. Box 736
Hartington, NE 68739
402.254.2289

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