



**Down to Earth:
Reports from the field**

Innovative Small Farmers' Outreach Program (ISFOP): East Central Region

USDA Programs Benefit Small Farmers

By K.B. Paul ISFOP Program Director

ISFOP clients know by now that, as Extension personnel, we offer research-based information, education and training, and that we have no funds to provide any loans or grants. However, we do tell them about other programs that offer loans, grants and technical assistance to qualified small farmers. For example, various agencies of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have programs and resources available for the benefit of small farmers.

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) in Missouri offers financial and technical assistance to small farmers for implementing conservation practices to enhance agricultural productivity and improve the management of resources on their farms. In general, the NRCS-sponsored conservation programs are intended to address resource concerns such as soil erosion, soil, water and air quality, plant and livestock health, and wildlife habitat. Specific programs that may be of interest to small producers are the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the EQIP-Organic Initiative (EQIP-OI), EQIP High Tunnel Initiative and the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP). Additional information on these programs is available at <http://www.mo.nrcs.usda.gov>. Producers can also locate their local USDA Service Center from <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers the Non-insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) which provides financial aid to producers of non-insurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory or natural disasters prevent planting of a crop. Producers apply for coverage at their local county office and pay a service fee. Limited resource producers (based on agency criteria) may request a waiver of the service fees. FSA has direct and guaranteed loans available to farmers for purchasing real estate and financing operating expenses. Targeted funds are set aside for beginning farmers and socially disadvantaged producers. Producers must meet eligibility requirements, including the inability to obtain commercial credit. Cold storage for fruits and vegetables is available through the Farm Storage Facility Loan program. For more information on these programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov, click on 'Newsroom' then 'Fact Sheets' under 'Related Topics' or visit your local FSA county office.

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In the Spotlight: De Soto Farmers' Market

By Joyce Rainwater

If you drive through De Soto, Missouri, on Saturday mornings you will notice numerous signs directing you to the farmers' market. After parking, you will see a world of people and products then be overwhelmed by a sense of community feelings. De Soto Farmers' Market was started in 2009 by 'Get Healthy De Soto' and is currently open for the third year. It is a local nonprofit that focuses on getting the community healthy by providing access to fresh, locally grown produce. What started as a small project for the community has grown into a large attraction. People come to the market to socialize with their neighbors, and to purchase locally grown produce, freshly baked breads, locally grown beef and poultry, honey, sorghum molasses, maple syrup and hand-



Friends of the De Soto Farmers' Market gather by the new shed

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REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING DUE DATES:
Farmer/Rancher Grant Proposal: December 2, 2011
Youth/Youth Edu. Grant Proposals: January 12, 2011

WWOOF: World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms

By Janet Hurst

The internet is a well-known tool, linking people together across physical, cultural and social meridians. Did you know you could also find farm help online?

When Rhonda Fischer decided to look for someone to assist her on her Missouri ranch, she turned to an internet-based service called WWOOF, World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. Little did she know that Serena Cochrane in Texas was looking for an opportunity to work on a Missouri farm. The two met through the WWOOF web site, talked a few times on the phone and made the decision to enter into a work-share agreement. Cochrane moved to the Lost Spur Ranch last fall and the two women have become fast friends, coworkers and conquerors.

It's amazing to see what these two petite women have been able to accomplish in a relatively short period of time. Cochrane has carpentry skills, and she is a perfect fit for Fischer's vision of her ranch. Since arriving, Cochrane has done indoor remodeling, built chicken tractors, and now the two are working together to create a bunkhouse bed and breakfast. Fischer has years of horticulture experience and so Cochrane learned from a master. "We have so much in common. Serena has been a godsend to me. I am spoiled now and no one else will ever compare. It was meant for us to meet," says Fischer. Without the WWOOF program it is doubtful that meeting would ever have come about.

According to the WWOOF guidelines, the volunteer is expected to work four hours per day in exchange for room and board. The host provides a living space and food in return. The program offers volunteers the opportunity to work their way across the country, staying for only a few days or in some cases, as with Fischer and Cochrane, a long term agreement is reached and the WWOOFer becomes a part of the farming operation.

Cochrane was living in Texas and only wanted to come to Missouri on a trial basis. She read various reviews from other volunteers online. Some had great experiences with the organizations, others not so much. Serena states that there is a risk, and she recommends that the host and volunteer have several conversations and come to an understanding of expectations, on both parts, before a move is made. Fischer and Cochrane agreed to a three-week trial period. At the end of the three weeks, they reviewed their experiences and found their arrangement to be mutually satisfying. Six months later, they continue to work side-by-

side. Cochrane is gaining experience on an organic farm, and Fischer has newly constructed facilities, not to mention a lifelong friend. She says, "Serena is the only one that can fill these boots!"

Fischer and Cochrane stress that communication is key to their success. Cochrane notes, "When you are getting paid, you work for money; when you do this kind of work you have to want to be at a farm and contribute. I like the ideas that Rhonda has, and I thought that I could make a lasting contribution to her farm." Of course, when working with people, there are many personalities, work styles and expectations to manage. Some exchanges are not as fruitful as the one between Fischer and Cochrane. In fact, Fischer had another volunteer come on a trial basis and she left after only three days. Cochrane advises, "If you volunteer, do your best work. Make the farm your own. Take a sincere interest and full advantage of the opportunity to learn." For Fischer, sharing her vision, having a partner to share the work load, and a sounding board—someone to bounce ideas off of—has proved to be invaluable.

Just around the bend, in Morrison, Missouri, Connie Cunningham was faced with a similar situation. Too much work to handle for a one-woman operation. She too turned to the WWOOF web site. Cunningham has had several WWOOFers come and go over the past three years. Her last two volunteers will always stand out in her mind. Andreas Mozaaotta and Moreo Rivera just finished college and decided they would provide themselves a summer of academic detox and WWOOF their way across the country before getting serious about job hunting. The team, lifelong friends, drove from New York and made their way to Cunningham's winding road and into Sassafras Valley Farm. "We knew we were in the right place – we saw 300 geese! We thought, this is for real!" While both young men grew up in a rural environment in New York state, the back roads of Missouri proved to be a bit more isolated than what they were accustomed to.

Rivera introduced himself and Mozaaotta via a profile on the WWOOF web site. Cunningham was interested in the pair and wrote seeking more information. She laughs now about the formality of their introduc-



Rhonda Fischer on her Missouri farm with WWOOFer Serena Cochrane

tory letter. At any rate, all three decided to enter an agreement for three weeks, the amount of time Rivera and Mozaaotta had to give. Rivera, who trained to be an architect, and Mozaaotta, a writer with an interest in food, soon learned about feeding geese, life in rural Missouri and all that is involved with keeping a working farm alive. Their major project was painting Cunningham's outbuildings. Of course, the two had never painted in their life! Mozaaotta exclaimed, "Connie's buildings are really tall, too!" The two persevered and got the job done. They added laughter, lightness and new stories to the farm's history before leaving with their car packed with their chosen sustenance food, couscous. "We wanted something inexpensive to eat and easy to cook, so we have a 50-pound bag of it in the car." Rivera planned the entire route, their budget and itinerary on Microsoft® Excel spreadsheets. "We are even getting a little better mileage than we thought, so our budget will allow us to go a little further. We are pretty simple men—we don't need much." The pair is on their way to their next destination in Montana. "It's been great. The people are so friendly here and we learned about braunschwager and bratwurst! We'd never had a moon pie!"

WOOOFing opportunities are available in over 30 countries, from Canada to India and beyond. Through the web site www.woof.org you may view classified advertisements from hosts and volunteers, jobs, properties for sale or rent, etc. There is a small annual fee associated with the membership (\$5-\$50 for a host and \$30 for a volunteer). The program began in 1971 in the United Kingdom and has been gaining members since then. For more information refer to the web site.

PASTURED POULTRY IS GROWING IN POPULARITY

By: David Price

With the resurgence of farmers' markets over the last decade, there has been momentum on the part of the producers selling there to diversify their product line. Customers, used to the convenience of 'big box' discount stores where they can get all of their shopping done, naturally gravitate to the market stand that has a variety of products (i.e., meats, cheeses, fruits and vegetables). The farmer that does it all attracts large crowds and develops a loyalty with local buyers. By doing so, they can be in a position to make a fair living off the land and prospectively avoid the necessity of a town job.

Chicken is becoming a staple amongst U.S. households and is projected to overtake beef as the number one consumed meat later this decade. Consequently, demand for chicken is on the rise, especially the ones produced to serve a niche market. For these reasons, small farmers all across Missouri are adding a pastured poultry component to their existing farming enterprise.

Pastured poultry, as opposed to conventionally grown birds, is in growing demand among consumers who desire to eat foods that are naturally produced by local farmers. Compared to other farming enterprises (i.e., beef, dairy, pork, etc.), a pastured poultry enterprise is less expensive to start and maintain because it requires lower overhead and fewer inputs than a system that supports larger animals. For this reason, pastured poultry enterprises are usually among the first considered by beginning farmers who want to get involved in meat production. Furthermore, adding a pastured poultry component is a relatively

easy thing to do for farmers who are already raising beef, lamb or goat on their farm. If the farmer has a grazing system in place to manage their animals and pastures, then it is easy and inexpensive to incorporate a pastured poultry component to the mix. Chickens (or turkeys) can work into a leader/follower grazing pattern, usually following the larger animals in a pasture rotation.

Chris Davis is a small farmer who has historically grown and direct marketed eggs, pork and beef from his 13-acre farm in Hawk Point, Missouri. Davis, like many other small farmers, has recently elected to add a pastured poultry component to his farm. Currently, he is on track to produce and direct market 600 Cornish cross chickens in 2011. He has constructed several chicken tractors, each of which has a carrying capacity of 100 broilers. He moves the portable pens once daily to a fresh swath of green forages. While on pasture, each flock of birds is supplemented with a commercially-produced feed ration, accessible to the birds by feeders that hang from the rafters of the chicken tractor. They are hydrated from a gravity-fed watering system that Davis developed, which utilizes five-gallon buckets, a water hose and PVC piping fitted with multiple watering nipples.



Chris Davis near his chicken tractor

It takes approximately seven weeks to grow the chicken to harvest weight (about 4 pounds dressed). The chicks are in a brooder for approximately three weeks, then transferred to the chicken tractor where they are raised until culled. On the day reserved for butchering, you'll find Davis accompanied by friends and family members each positioned at their designated station along the disassembly line. The processing line boasts killing cones, a scalding, gas-powered plucker, stainless steel tables, cutlery and coolers. Customers reserving ahead of time are notified in advance of the butchering day and pick up their orders at the farm shortly after harvest.

Davis says that his pastured chicken is in high demand and that marketing is easy. He boasts that once a customer has eaten his chicken, they will most certainly be back, most likely with some friends. And when they return, they often inquire about his other products and purchase some of those as well.

Davis estimates that his return on investment for the pastured poultry business is 100 percent, which is another reason he is so enthusiastic about his farm's newest enterprise. His goal is to double his production numbers in 2012, and plans to add pastured Thanksgiving turkeys to the mix next season.

USDA Programs...

(cont'd from page 1)

North Central Region (NCR) Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, funded through USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), accomplishes its goals by offering a variety of grants to individuals and organizations. Of importance to ISFOP clients are the Farmer Rancher Grant Program, and the Youth and Youth Educator Grant programs. Please contact the Farm Outreach Worker (FOW) in your county for additional information. To learn about other grant opportunities from USDA, please stop by any of its offices in your area.

De Soto Farmers' Market ... (continued from page 1)

made craft items. In the off season, workshops are offered to the community by both Lincoln University Cooperative Extension (LUCE) and MU Extension. When the market started, a decision was made to provide a local market to small farmers in the area so that all products are from a 50-mile radius. During this season, De Soto Farmers' Market grew to include fresh, locally raised beef and poultry products. This is one of many success stories that the farmers' market has because when the community asks for products, local small producers and farmers see the opportunity and see if they can fulfill the need. Special events such as 'Tomato Fest' and, new this year, 'Celebrate Their Heritage' bring

artisans that practice art forms such as basket weaving, loom weaving and soap making. The market has even invited a Civil War re-enactment group. Each year they also have a 'Meet Me at the Market' event to kick off the new season. All of these events allow the market vendors to show off their products to even more in the community. This group of vendors and community-minded individuals have helped other farmers' markets to get a start as well, by offering advice along with practical knowledge. De Soto Farmers' Market truly believes in the need for fresh local food to feed a healthy community.

For more information, visit their blog at: <http://buyfreshlocal.blogspot.com/>.

ISFOP

If you are a small farmer and need information, please contact an ISFOP Farm Outreach Worker (FOW). FOWs live and work in your community. They can provide information on ways to better manage your resources, reduce expense and increase income. They can also provide information on other programs and resources that may increase your income and the overall quality of life for your family.

You are eligible to participate if:

- ☑ Your family lives on a farm, rural or urban.
- ☑ Farm products or income from the farm are necessary for you to live where you do.
- ☑ Your family provides the management and most of the labor for your farm.
- ☑ Your total annual family income is less than \$50,000.

How to Contact

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THE IPM CORNER: Brown Marmorated Stink Bug: A New Invasive Pest

By Dr. Jaime Piñero, LUCE Integrated Pest Management state specialist

The brown marmorated stink bug (*Halyomorpha halys*) has been detected in some Midwestern states. This invasive stink bug is native to China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan, and was introduced into the US in 1996. It can cause devastating dam-

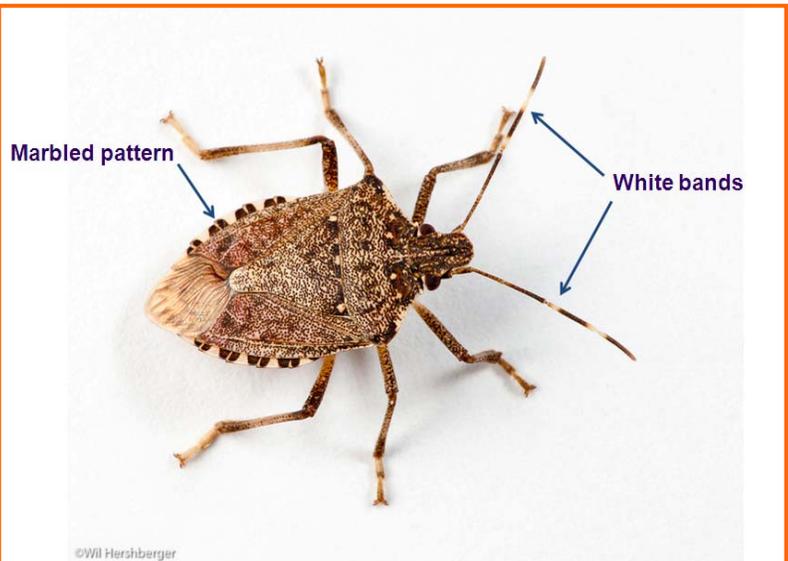
age to many crops, including tree and small fruit, vegetables, row crops, vineyards, etc. For example, in 2010 severe crop injury was reported in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia. Currently, it is found in 31 states including Iowa, Michigan and Wisconsin. Its presence in Illinois and Missouri is unknown.

Its additional status as a nuisance pest makes the brown marmorated stink bug different than other plant-feeding stink bug species. **The adults enter homes and other buildings in the autumn seeking sheltered sites to spend the winter.** The adults fly to these overwintering sites in mid September, and the peak flight activity is from **late September until early October.** The bugs are harmless to humans and pets as they do not bite, but they can become a nuisance when they congregate in large numbers outside and inside buildings. In extreme cases, hundreds can invade a home. When disturbed, the bugs produce a characteristic pungent, acrid odor that many people find offensive.

The adult brown marmorated stink bug has the typical shield shape of other stink bugs. They are approximately 15 mm (5/8 inch) long and 8 mm (3/8 inch) wide. The upper side of the body is mottled shades of brown and gray, and is covered with dense puncture marks, as shown in the image below. The word marmorated refers to its marble-like coloration. The adults of the brown marmorated stink bug can be distinguished from other species of stink bugs by the alternating dark and light bands on the last two segments of the antennae. The edges of the abdomen also have alternating light and dark banding.

If you happen to see a brown marmorated stink bug in your area, please contact the Missouri Department of Agriculture by contacting Collin Wamsley, State Entomologist at (573) 751-5505 Collin.Wamsley@mda.mo.gov, or Dr. Jaime Piñero at PineroJ@LincolnU.edu

If you are able to capture a specimen, please place it in any type of container such as a plastic medicine bottle or a film canister and put this in a freezer for at least 24 hours before submitting the sample. Digital pictures will also be useful.



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