



Down to Earth: Reports from the field

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

Greetings from the ISFOP East Central Region staff! Another Missouri winter is upon us. The dormant, cold season provides time for reflection upon last year's production and planning for the approaching spring. We at the ISFOP are taking stock of 2010's successes. In our second full year of the Outreach Program, we are actively working with 60 regional farmers on a variety of rural and urban projects. From recent Thanksgiving turkey raising success to orchard maintenance, assisting with the submission of Sustainable Agriculture Research Education (SARE) Program grants and helping design a rotational grazing system, we are answering farmers' questions and increasing yields. To this end, we are staying up to date on small farm production innovations. November saw Janet and Miranda attending the Small Farm Trade Show in Columbia, Missouri, where they gained practical information on moveable high tunnels, berries, alternative crops and more. In December, David attended the Missouri Livestock Symposium in Kirksville, Missouri, where he added to his already extensive knowledge of profitable beef production. This fall we also gained a new Farm Outreach Worker (FOW), Joyce Eckstein, based in Washington and Jefferson counties. Her bovine dairy experience nicely rounds out our knowledgeable crew. And, our East Central Region team is now fully assembled and ready to work with you.

Have you thought of trying a new farm enterprise in 2011? As you brainstorm innovative endeavors, ISFOP will provide researched-based, relevant information to help plan your course of action. Throughout these winter months we will be happy to meet at your farm, in regional Grow Your Farm classes, or association meetings. We look forward to hearing from you soon.



In The Spotlight: Sassafras Valley Farm



Sassafras Valley Farm is located near Morrison, Missouri. It has been a family farm for 23 years, and is now the home of Connie Cunningham and 400 pastured geese. Cunningham, a former landscape designer from Chicago, moved to Missouri four years ago to assist her mother. Decisions had to be made about how to put the farm to work. How to derive an income from rolling hills nestled in a deep valley was complicated. Cunningham and her siblings agreed to partner on some type of venture that would make the best use of the 80-acre farm. Several options were discussed but one thought kept coming back. "We always had a goose for Christmas. They were hard to find, a high end product, so we decided they would be a perfect fit for what we wanted to do," she says. The family's education in goose farming began. "The first year we raised 32 Embden and Toulouse geese as a trial. Last year we had 200 and this year 400. It is a niche market but the demand is there. People have fond memories of a Christmas goose." Marketed largely through the farm's website <http://www.sassafrassvalleyfarm.com/> and Local Harvest www.localharvest.org, orders started pouring in and continued in November and December. "We have some geese available all year, but the holidays are definitely the peak season," Cunningham said. "People call or email from all across the country. There is a new interest and emphasis and a real value placed on grass fed operations because customers are willing to pay more when they know how their food is raised." Connie keeps one group as her permanent farm flock, which are her favorites with special names.

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The 18th National Small Farm Trade Show and Conference was held November 4-6, in Columbia, Missouri. Organizer Ron Macher, of *Small Farm Today* stated, "We had about one thousand people come through the doors. This event has become known as a great place to network and many return each year." This event is sponsored annually by the Missouri Department of Agriculture (MDA), the National Center for Appropriate Technology-National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (NCAT-ATTRA), Truman State University, US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Sustainable Agriculture Research Education (SARE) Program and Lincoln University Cooperative Extension (LUCE).

Those in attendance enjoyed visiting the vendors' booths, which included a selection of handmade items including hand-spun yarns, pottery pieces and jewelry. Shoppers could take home jams, jellies, handmade soaps, sorghum from Sandhill Farm, Thunder Muffins from

Persimmon Hill Farm and other delectables. "The vendors are a great resource for conference participants," states Macher. "They travel and pick up information to share with folks that come through their booths." Speakers from across the US included the very popular Joel Salatin, a noted author and speaker. Salatin entertained the crowd with his firsthand accounts of sustainable farming. Salatin is a proponent of pasture raised livestock. Livestock was a popular topic, with Greg Judy presenting on grass fed, pasture based operations. Macher reported that Joel Salatin and Greg Judy spoke to capacity crowds at each of their seminars. Additional presenters included: Kelly Klober, author and nationally known *Small Farm Today* columnist; Dr. Rob Meyers of the Jefferson Institute; Jim Long, author and expert on herbs; Steve Salt, writer for *Small Farm Today*; Joanie Straub of the USDA and Missouri Department of Agriculture; Dr. Mary Hendrickson, representing the Beginning Farmer Pro-

gram; Mike Bollinger from Four Season Tools; Dr. Sanjun Gu and Dr. Jaime Pinero of LUCE and other noted experts offered informative seminars throughout the weekend.

Audience members particularly enjoyed the presentations of the recipients of the SARE Youth Grants. Topics ranged from beneficial bees, heritage turkey breeds, multi species grazing and other subjects of interest to the conference participants. If the future of our country rests in the hands of these bright and capable young people, then we should be in good shape. Each presented on a professional level, adding the honesty and humor only youth can bring.

The National Small Farm Trade Show and Conference remains a favorite event. Mark your calendars for next year and enjoy a slice of Americana right in your own backyard. Check the *Small Farm Today* website for information: www.smallfarmtoday.com

Edamame: A soybean by another name!

One of the joys of being a Small FOW is the opportunity to learn new things each day. For some, edamame is an established food source, for others it is a new source of protein. Well known in Asia, it has been a major dietary component for over 2,000 years. We know this vegetable as the soybean. However, there are slight variations that make this conventional crop appealing as a snack or vegetable dish. The name edamame translates to "beans on branches."

For those who grow soybeans as a row crop each year, it is an established fact that the moisture content plays a key role on the quality of the finished product. Beans in storage will mold if the moisture content is too high at harvest. However, the soybean selected for edamame production is actually picked while still green. The pods are harvested, boiled in salt water and eaten by popping them out of the pod.

There are specific varieties that lend

themselves to soybean production for use as edamame. Some favorites are MidorivGiant, Mojo Green, Lanco, Bellesoy and Korean Black. Each variety is known for specific attributes such as disease resistance, temperate zones and productivity. In addition to edamame, these versatile legumes can also be used as tofu or processed for soy milk. And, reportedly, soybeans are easy to grow for the home gardener or small producer.

David Fairchild, noted horticulturist and plant explorer with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), introduced edamame to the US in 1902 after delighting in its flavor and texture while traveling in Japan. He grew it and served it to prominent guests in Washington D.C. Although edamame did not catch on as a snack food as quickly as he had hoped, research has been going on for 75 years, flourishing in the 1930s and 1940s due to a protein shortage. Interest spiked again in the 1970s, concurrent with the growing interest in organic agriculture.

The focus of the Rodale Research Center was on edamame quality and adaptability, while Cornell University conducted basic agronomic research, according to the National Garden Bureau.

NOTE: In our next issue of Reports from the Field will be an interview with a Missouri producer who has found her niche in the production of edamame. When this innovative farmer first enjoyed this vegetable it was found to be in short supply. So, the old adage 'find a need and fill it' has become her mantra.



Image from www.seapointsfarm.com

Sustainable Farming: Winter Cover Cropping

by David Price

Over the past decade, there has been a great deal of discussion throughout the croplands related to the practice of sustainability. Sustainability is defined simply as the capacity to endure, and the concept can be applied to social, economic and environmental systems. As farming incorporates all three of these systems, it is no surprise that sustainability has become a buzz word throughout the agricultural world.

When considering sustainability in agriculture, very few practices have as much potential positive impact as the application of cover cropping. A cover crop is any crop grown to provide soil cover for the purpose of preventing soil erosion by wind and water on bare cropland. In addition to this, there are other benefits too. Cover crops, if leguminous, will fix nitrogen in the soil.

Both leguminous and non-leguminous plants will help suppress weeds and diminish the potential of pest and disease outbreaks. Furthermore, some cover crops also have the ability to loosen and aerate the soil, while others are planted primarily to reduce nutrient leaching after the cash crop has been harvested.

Winter cover crops can be planted in the late summer or early fall to provide soil cover throughout the non-growing season.

Often a leguminous plant like clover or vetch is planted as a cover crop for the advantage of fixing nitrogen in the soil. Cover crops like these are often seeded by drilling the seed into, or broadcasting the seed onto, a field after harvest. Cover crops are not meant to be harvested like cash crops, but rather they are planted to protect and amend the soil for the benefit of the cash crop that follows it. Before the planting of a cash crop in the spring, cover crops can either be incorporated into a field through tillage or killed chemically. The chemically killed cover crop is left on the field as no-till mulch. If the cover crop is tilled under, it acts as a 'green' manure. Both practices are done for the purpose of making nitrogen available to the developing cash crop.



Cover crops at work in a high tunnel

Between cash crop cycles, cover crops provide a habitat for beneficial insects that will prey on pest insects, thus reducing the potential for pest damage to the following cash crop. If the cover crops are left on the field as no-till mulch, they will

continue to provide habitat to beneficial insects well into the growing season. Also, if not plowed under, the residue from the cover crops will continue to

shade the ground and thus reduce opportunities for weeds to germinate.

In summary, we can see how the practice of cover-cropping fulfills the concept of sustainability. Socially, cover crops are helpful because they safeguard the health of the farmer, his family and the surrounding community by reducing the amount of chemicals needed and the amount of runoff into local streams and waterways. Economically, cover crops have the potential to cut fertilizer costs, reduce the need for herbicides and pesticides, and improve yields by enhancing soil health. Finally, cover crops are environmentally beneficial because they prevent soil erosion, conserve soil moisture and protect water quality.

Sources:

Cover Crop Use in Crop and Livestock Systems (a SARE sponsored workshop) hosted by University of Missouri Extension on October 14-15, 2010.

Clark, Andy. *Managing Cover Crops Profitably*. Third Edition. College Park, MD: SARE, Jun. 2007.

Overview of Cover Crops and Green Manures by Preston Sullivan, ATTRA. <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/covercrop.html>

Sassafras Valley (cont'd from page 1)

There is Goostave, Gigi, Geezer, Beauty, Beast and several others. All have their distinct personalities. Cunningham explains, "Goostave is the patriarch of the group. Geese are very social animals. They have their own language and they communicate. They make specific sounds when they see me coming. They have other sounds when they see Max, the Great Pyrenees guard dog."

With the pasture-based program, geese are rotated through a series of paddocks. The geese are relocated once every three days, ensuring a fresh supply of grass. Corn is fed as a part of their daily ration. The geese are obviously healthy and well cared for. To see them coming through the field in their entirety, a group of four

hundred is indeed an impressive sight. Cunningham works from sunup to sunset as the primary workforce of the operation. "Chicago seems a very long way away," she states. She has adapted to the rural lifestyle and found beauty in the day-to-day routines of a farmer.

She has worked closely with Mark Brandt from University of Missouri at Columbia (MU) Extension. She says, "Mark was fascinated by my project and took a real interest in helping me become established. National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has also played a key role and has assisted with fencing and water sources." Janet Hurst of LUCE is Cunningham's FOW. Hirsch says, "She is always thinking. She has worked very hard to do what she does. It is a true passion." Plans are to expand again next year as the supply is not yet meeting the demand. Six

hundred young geese, known as goslings, will arrive in early spring. Smoked goose, goose eggs and other value-added products will be added to the selection available from the farm. Cunningham is working with the

Osage County Regional Cuisines group to promote the unique foods of the region. "This area has so much to offer. There are hidden treasures here."



About our Program...

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 East Central Regional ISFOP Farm Outreach Workers:

- **David Price:** Lincoln and St. Charles Counties

PriceD@LincolnU.edu
(636) 358-7097

- **Janet Hurst:** Franklin and Warren Counties

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(660) 216-1749

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- **Miranda Duschack:** St. Louis County and City

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(314) 406-4744

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Publications are available upon request. Contact Pamela Donner, Media Center Coordinator at: DonnerPJ@LincolnU.edu

Meet ISFOP Staff Member: Miranda Duschack



Miranda Duschack

In October the ISFOP happily welcomed Ms. Miranda Duschack as the new Small Farm Specialist in East Central Missouri. Duschack is based out of St. Louis,

where she serves as both the ISFOP area coordinator and St. Louis city and county FOW. Duschack comes to LUCE with a dual emphasis BA in Sustainable Agriculture and Sociology from Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington (2003), and has seven consecutive years of production agriculture on small farms, in vegetable gardens and orchards. Her past projects include working at a goat dairy crafting artisan cheese, slaughtering home grown turkeys for Thanksgiving sale and maintaining an 80-acre Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Iowa Tallgrass Prairie.

Duschack is from rural Township of Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, where her family has lived since the 1870s.

Duschack was inspired to practice sustainable agriculture by encounters on her aunt and uncle's dairy farm, in her parent's large gardens and with the family's beekeeping hobby business. She says, "My father kept bees for 13 years. At his peak, he had 11 hives. My earliest memory of my father is of him suited up to work with the bees."

Miranda's formal education relocated her from the Midwest and service projects brought her back. In April 2010 she moved to Old North St. Louis, where she is an active member of Carl Kabat Catholic Worker House and New Roots Urban Farm where she tends the honeybees and gardens for the CSA.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

February

1- Mar 22: Grow Your Farm Program (one evening class per week). Warrenton, Missouri. Call (636) 456-3444.

4-7: Midwest Grape & Wine Conference, St. Charles, MO.
www.midwestgrapeandwineconference.com

5: Goat and Sheep Conference, Jefferson City, Missouri. Call (573) 751-2539

10-12: 2011 Missouri Organic Association Conference. Springfield, Missouri.
<http://www.missouriorganic.org/Events/MOAAAnnualConference.aspx>

21-23: Agritourism-Small Fruit and Vegetable Conference, Springfield, MO. <http://mtngrv.missouristate.edu/commercial/conference.htm>