

2007
April



UW — EXTENSION — LANGLADE COUNTY

Langlade Ag-Letter

Program reflections

The winter's education meetings have come to an end, and I'm left thinking about "what did we really learn."

As one of 30 attending the Dairy Road Show perhaps you learned that many high producing dairy cows have shorter duration of visible heats if any at all, and are more likely to have twins. Those cows with twins should have an earlier dry off because they are more likely to calve early and these cows will benefit from a higher plane of nutrition (good transition diet.)

If you were one of the 35 attending the Extreme Makeover Parlor Edition workshop you may have learned that nearly any stall barn can be converted to a "low cost" milking parlor, and that such a milking parlor can free you up to make time for other areas of your life.

Perhaps you were one of the dozen participants in the Nutrient Management Planning Workshops that learned how to use SNAP Plus to manage starter fertilizer rates and bank soil phosphorus and potassium over several years of a rotation, effectively planning the use of legume and manure credits. Even a poor alfalfa plow down will contribute 90 lbs of the current 105-115 lbs needed for corn at the current corn price to nitrogen price ratio.

And maybe you are one of over 60 4-H youth who has participated in a Market Animal Quality Assurance training and gained understanding of livestock feeds, animal identification and management tools.

But then again, you might have been amongst 27 people renewing their Pesticide Applicator License at our local training/testing sessions that learned about the requirements for posting restricted use pesticides at field entrances and washing your hands before you eat and before "nature calls."

You may have been one of well over 40 different producers who came to learn from our Organic Discussion Group series. You may have learned about stimulating rumen bacteria to better utilize cellulose by removing counterproductive feed ingredients. Or perhaps you simply

better understand the opportunities and risks of organic production.

You may have learned something from one of several farm calls on dairy modernization or mini-tours that I conduct with dairymen by appointment.

Perhaps you were one of the dozens of folks that called and sought information for their farms and businesses by calling our office; about weeds in dry hay, identifying indoor insects, selecting corn varieties, or performing feed storage calculations.

You may know one of the 14 Master Gardeners who received 12 or more 3 hour training sessions this Winter who are forming a new community service association. They'll be the first to tell you how to divide perennials, fertilize lawns, and care for fruit trees.

You may have been one of hundreds attending a conference such as the WPVGA— UW Extension Grower Education Conference, or Grassworks Grazing Conference, or one of thousands attending the Midwest Organic Farming Conference.

Or, like myself, perhaps you learned to look at your farm and business differently following a short vacation!

Dates to Remember:

April 11—

Organic Discussion Group
11 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

One last winter meeting will be on organic cropping practices, area planting intentions and farmer needs. No RSVP necessary, bring \$5 for lunch. Extension Office (Resource Center)

April 24—

Master Gardener General Meeting
5 pm corner of 1st and Lincoln Streets in Antigo. Planning meeting for the landscape design of the new Habitat for Humanity home site.

April 26—

Langlade County Dairy Promotion
Committee Meeting 10 a.m. Langlade
County Resource Center.

El Compañero: a “Dairy Partner” for your Employees... and You.

The Dairy Partner/ El Compañero is a dairy employee newsletter, but it's for your business to benefit. The publication is in both English and Spanish. For 2007, the 6 bimonthly editions will be distributed to the east side of the state of WI and available on-line to everyone else.

After having contacted various counties Fond du Lac agriculture agent, Paul Dyck, and Outagamie agriculture Agent, Zen Miller created and printed about 1100 copies which will cover about 500 farms. Many of these farms are

larger in size and my estimate is that they will represent 40-60% of the cows in these counties.

“This is a unique publication. I am not aware of another publication that targets employees specifically and tries to meet their needs,” said Paul Dyck. “Through this publication, we hope to have some great one time teaching opportunities for employees.”

Like most people in general, employees have the need to have information given to them continually and even repetitively. Most farm operators have been given

information to them repeatedly over a number of years. The Dairy Partner's goal is give information to employees over an extended period of time so as to provide new knowledge to them and reinforce the knowledge they already have.

There is a charge to receive the glossy newsletter mailed to your farm office, but the Langlade County Extension office will send interested farms a free copy as new issues become available. If you wish to continue receiving the Dairy Partner please contact Sally Hull at our office 627-6236.

Wisconsin Farmers' Health Cooperative Enters Marketplace

“Affordable, quality health insurance” is the claim of a new statewide health insurance cooperative offered to farmers and agribusinesses. An initiative led by the Wisconsin Federation of Cooperatives (WFC) was to strengthen Wisconsin's agriculture industry through a health insurance designed to meet farmer's needs.

The Farmers' Health Cooperative of Wisconsin (FHCW) has been created under the “Co-op Care” law crafted by WFC to help farmers and small employers gain leverage in the health insurance market. While Co-op Care has spurred a handful of small employer cooperatives in various stages of development around the state, FHCW will be the first of its kind dedicated to serving Wisconsin farmers and agribusiness.

“FHCW is an innovative health care plan written by farmers for farmers and will provide health insurance designed to address the needs and wants of farmers and other agribusinesses at an affordable price,” said Bill Oemichen, WFC president and CEO. “The quality of the insurance plans offered through the cooperative is comparable to

those currently available only to larger businesses. Members will benefit from a choice of six products, the freedom to choose their own doctors and hospitals, first dollar coverage of preventive care and a comprehensive benefit package most farmers can't access today.”

The cooperative is contracting with Aetna, one of the nation's leading diversified health care benefits companies, to underwrite the insurance for cooperative members. “We've had a lot of interest from other insurance companies, but Aetna really surpassed the others in their willingness to address the needs specific to Wisconsin agriculture,” Oemichen said. “Instead of trying to make us fit into their idea of what insurance should look like, they worked with us to design products that fit this industry.”

“Support for the agricultural community is consistent with Aetna's commitment to expand access to health care for all Americans,” said David Corkum, Aetna Region Head for National Accounts. “One important way to

ensure the continued vitality of the family farm is to protect its health and wealth. Maintaining adequate health coverage can prevent unexpected medical expenses from leading to catastrophic loss.” Oemichen said Aetna has a unique understanding of the agriculture industry thanks to its partnership with Agri-Services Agency (ASA), an insurance management company owned by Dairylea Cooperative that currently provides health and workers compensation insurance to 70,000 farmers and agribusinesses across the U.S. WFC credits ASA with bringing Aetna to the table in Wisconsin.

According to Oemichen, ASA will manage the administrative responsibilities of the health insurance purchasing cooperative and considers this one of the cooperative's most valuable assets. “They have over 30 years of experience meeting the insurance needs of farmers, with a stellar reputation for customer service.”

Like other cooperatives, FHCW will be owned and governed by its farmer and agribusiness members, which means they will be directly

...insurance continued

involved in the financial and benefit decisions made by the cooperative.

Oemichen pointed out that most health care plans offered in the state do not provide coverage for injuries sustained while working, a practice that has proven devastating for a number of farmers who found out too late their coverage was lacking. "Most of our small family farms aren't required to purchase workers

compensation coverage, and producers falsely believe their health insurance will cover these claims if they're hurt," Oemichen said. "Coverage through the Farmers' Health Cooperative is designed to meet this and many other needs unique to farming."

New Glarus dairy farmer Dan Truttman agreed. "I'd say it's a pretty good deal for farmers and their

families...it'll be a great way to keep a lid on costs and get better coverage for themselves."

Farmers and businesses serving agriculture are invited to contact the Farmers Health Cooperative of Wisconsin for more information by calling **1-800-539-9370** or by contacting its website at

www.farmershealthcooperative.com

UW Extension Hosts Grazing Schools Across Wisconsin

Madison – Farmers interested in switching to rotational grazing or just starting out in grazing should plan to attend one of the Wisconsin Grazing Schools which will be held around the state over the next several months.

The Wisconsin Grazing Schools are designed to teach producers, educators and agency staff the basics of management-intensive grazing with a hands-on approach.

The two-day workshops will provide opportunities for in-depth discussions and field exercises covering both agronomic and livestock topics related to grazing and dairy and livestock production on pastures. Topics include pasture species selection and management, fencing and watering systems, animal health on pasture, animal nutrition, pasture improvement techniques and economics of pasturing systems. Producers will have the opportunity to network with producers already using Management Intensive Grazing (MIG) as well as University and USDA-NRCS experts in grazing.

Management intensive grazing (MIG) is based on four key factors:

- meeting the nutrient requirements of the grazing animal;
- optimizing forage yield,

quality, and persistence;

- environmental stewardship;
- integrating knowledge and technology into a practical and profitable management system.

Cost for the school is \$75 per person, which includes reference materials and meals during the school. A second person from the same farm can register for \$35. Dates, locations and registration deadlines are:

- May 15-16 in River Falls. Registration deadline – May 7. June 26-27 in East Troy. Registration deadline – June 18. July 24-25 in

Neillsville. Registration deadline – July 16. A fourth workshop will be held in Ashland at a date yet to be determined.

For a brochure and registration information, contact Dennis Cosgrove, UW-River Falls, 410 S. Third Street, River Falls, WI 54022 (715) 425-3345 or by email at dennis.r.cosgrove@uwrf.edu. The brochure can also be downloaded from www.uwrf.edu/grazing <<http://www.uwrf.edu/grazing>> under upcoming events.

Something to Ponder about Farm Economics

Finding Food in Farm Country Report (2001, revised 2003)

Findings in Southeast Minnesota by Ken Meter, Crossroads Resource Center

- The Region's farmers sold \$912 million of farm commodities on average each year during 1997 - 2003. However, they spent \$996 million, on average, to produce these crops. Net loss is \$84 million *per year*. The region has lost money producing food commodities for seven years straight, 1997-2003.
- Federal subsidies average \$98 million each year, but farmers must earn another \$68 million each year to cover the costs of farming.
- Moreover, the region spends about \$500 million each year purchasing farm inputs from outside the region, and another \$500 million buying food from outside the region (out of \$670 million spent for food). This means the region ships out as much money, producing and buying food, as the entire value of all commodities produced!

USDA Energy Grant Funding Available



Langlade County

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Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Program Federal Register Announcement - USDA published a notice announcing it is accepting applications for fiscal year (FY) 2007 to purchase renewable energy systems and make energy efficiency improvements for agriculture producers and rural small businesses in eligible rural areas. Funding will be available in the form of grants, guaranteed loans, and combined guaranteed loans and grant applications. For FY 2007 there is approximately \$11.4 million in funding for competitive grants and \$176.5 million in authority for guaranteed loans. Loan guarantees cover up to 50 percent of a project's cost, not to exceed \$10 million. Grants are available for up to 25 percent of a project's cost, not to exceed \$250,000 for energy efficiency improvements and \$500,000 for renew-

able energy systems. Applications for grants must be completed and submitted to the appropriate USDA Rural Development state office postmarked no later than May 18. The deadline for submitting loan applications as well as for loan and grant combinations is July 2. For more information, refer to the announcement in the March 22 Federal Register or contact the WI Rural Development office.

Application Forms are available through Alex Crockford at the Extension Office. Please call 715-627-6313. For further information about the program contact info follows:

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