Wisconsin Organic Advisory Council Meeting
10 am to 3 pm
Wednesday, April 2, 2008
UW West Madison Research Station
8502 Mineral Point Road

DRAFT MINUTES

10:00 Welcome

Present: Council Members Tricia Bross, Rich Lange, Harriet Behar, Margaret Bert-Mittelstadt, Bonnie Wideman, David Engel, Christine Mason, and Jim Munsch
Interagency Team members Pat Murphy, Russ Raeder, Carla Wright, Irv Possin, Jennifer Heaton, Don Jaworski, Laura Paine, Erin Silva, and Perry Brown

Guest: Scott Trautman (afternoon only)

Agenda review

Addition: Jerri Cook has resigned as our third farmer representative on the council. Laura just received the letter from her on 3/31/08. The council needs to discuss a replacement for her. This will be added to the agenda right after lunch.

Minutes approval

The minutes, which had been previously circulated via email, were reviewed. Discussion was held regarding the wording of the council’s mission statement. There was confusion what the final consensus was on the phrase “By advising the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection and other agricultural organizations…” The council voted to strike the word “agricultural”.

Other change: on page 2, the second statement by Kevin Shelley should read “county Land Conservation Departments” rather than “county agents”.

Motion to approve the minutes as amended. Tricia moved/Don seconded. Motion passed.

Laura will make the changes to the minutes, as well as to the mission statement, and will update the Advisory Council website accordingly.

Discussion of OAC Initiatives and Priorities.

Laura presented a proposed re-organization of the Organic Task Force Priorities for growing Organic Agriculture in Wisconsin. The original task force ordered their priorities chronologically, numbering them based on the order that, at the time, was a logical stepwise process for completing the tasks. The re-organization groups the tasks into similar topic areas and/or similar activities, although there will be some overlap among priorities. The council agreed that the reorganization makes sense for today’s situation and will make it easier to organize and accomplish the tasks set out.
Suggested Re-Organization of Organic Task Force Priorities into related topics and activities

1) Consumer issues (Priority #1)
   • Consumer Education

2) Organic Integrity Issues
   • Contamination of organic crops by GMOs (Priority #5).
   • Integrity of organic products, inappropriate use of the organic label (Priority #5).

3) Production education/technical assistance for farmers
   • Enhance the capacity of Universities and Colleges to provide training in organic agriculture and processing (Priority #2).
   • Enhance communication and networking capacity among organic farmers and with transitioning farmers (Priority #4).
   • Education for transitioning and established organic farmers (Priority #5).
   • Confusion among farmers with regard to which materials are allowed for use in organic production (Priority #6).

4) Marketing education/technical assistance for farmers
   • Need for expertise in marketing among organic farmers, processors, and handlers (Priority #6).
   • Improve access to marketing opportunities for small organic farmers (Priority #2).

5) Processor education, technical assistance, and capacity building:
   • Accessibility of information regarding organic certification for processors and handlers (Priority #6).
   • Address regulatory barriers to small-scale and specialty processing businesses (Priority #3).
   • Increase small scale processing capacity in Wisconsin (Priority #3).

The council discussed what the original task force meant by some of the issues. Dave Engel, Carla Wright, and Perry Brown were involved in the original discussions and shared some of their recollections.

Dave said that the last bullet under #3, ‘confusion among farmers with regard to which materials are allowed for use in organic production’ was related to growers who think they are managing organically and perhaps even tell customers they are, but are using prohibited products. Tricia observed that this is fairly common among vegetable growers at farmers markets who, for example, do not use certified organic potting soil to start their plants.

A related issue associated with this is the farms that feel that they are exempt because they fall below the $5000 threshold below which certification is not required. Bonnie reminded the council that these farms are required to follow the organic standard, have an organic system plan, do all the record keeping and are potentially subject to audit, if they wish to use the organic seal and call their products organic.

The council agreed that this topic should be moved from the production education category and placed in the organic integrity category. The subject of organic integrity may end up within the
purview of several different committees, but the council felt that this particular topic is a consumer protection issue primarily and should be handled by the consumer education committee. The following suggestions were made for addressing the issue:

- Develop an educational campaign to alert farmers market managers, certified organic sellers, and consumers about the problem. This would probably involve developing separate fact sheets for farmers, market managers, and consumers.
- Develop a program by which certified organic growers could obtain a sign or logo identifying them as certified organic. They would be given a supply of the consumer fact sheet to give out to their customers.
- Delivery: The logo could be made available to certifiers and distributed to the farms that they certify.
- An educational/marketing program would be developed to encourage farmers to use the logo.
- The OAC could write a letter to farmers market managers announcing the program and providing them with the fact sheets (DATCP maintains a list of farmers markets in WI).
- Engage DATCP’s Consumer Protection Division for assistance/support.

Other discussion on the Task Force Priorities:
Another change suggested was moving the reference to processing training for farmers from ‘Production Education’ to the marketing and processing subject headings.

Discussion was held on how best to tackle these newly grouped issues. The council decided to utilize the existing committees for some of the areas and establish new committees to handle the rest of them. We already have a consumer education committee and that will continue and probably tackle some of the organic integrity issues too.

It was decided that the current Mentoring committee would become a new Farmer Education committee and incorporate broader education issues such as working with the University and the Technical College system to expand their capacity (original Priority #2).

The marketing and processing priorities have not been dealt with much to date by the council. There was discussion regarding what the original task force envisioned in this area. Jim suggested that meat processing capacity in the state is fairly significant and asked if the shortage alluded to in the Priority list is specific to certified organic facilities.

Perry shared that he thought that we probably do have fairly adequate meat processing capacity for everything but poultry and that a number of new and existing plants are certifying organic to meet the growing demand. He said that there remains a need for poultry processing capacity and the state is working on a tax credit/incentive package to help foster growth in this area.

Laura suggested that it could be left up to this committee to determine whether some of the issues identified by the original task force have been address in the intervening time. The committee can prioritize the topics within that category and determine where they should focus their energy.

Several of these committees will probably be considering developing publications under the title of ‘the WI organic Advisory Council’. Perry and Jenni reiterated that the council serves under the
auspices of DATCP, so any publication, letter--any sort of written document--must be reviewed by DATCP staff before it is published or released.

The following is a list of our new committee structure. It was suggested that we adopt a practice of having committees do their work between council meetings and reserve a space during each meeting for committees to report (written reports similar to the agency reports would be appreciated too).

**Existing committees:**

**Government Relations and Legal Affairs Committee**  
Jerry McGeorge, Paulette Bradley, Christine Mason (Chair), Harriet Behar, Jenni Heaton, Molly Jahn, Dave Engel, Margaret Bert Mittlestadt, Laura

**Biennial Report Committee**  
Erin Silva (Chair), Laura Paine, Tricia Bross, Bonnie Wideman, Jim Munsch  
*(there was no discussion about this committee at the meeting, but we’re assuming that it will continue)*

**Consumer Education Committee**  
Margaret Bert Mittlestadt (Chair), Bob Wills, Tricia Bross, Paulette Bradley, Bonnie Wideman, Linda Merriman Hitchman

**Modified committees:**

**Farmer Education Committee**  
Kevin Shelley (Chair), Harriet Behar, Erin Silva, Jed Colquhoun, Pat Murphy, Don Jaworski, and Rich Lange

**New Committees:**

**National Organic Issues committee**  
Bonnie, Bob, Harriet, Paulette and Dave. No chair has been designated that I’m aware of.

This committee will address NOP issues and other national issues that impact organic farms, such as the farm bill. This group will be responsible for communicating with other state Organic Advisory Councils. One issue that we discussed at the February 27th OAC meeting that this group should undertake is drafting a letter encouraging more transparency on the part of NOP.

**Supply Chain Infrastructure Committee**  
Erin, Laura (Chair), Bonnie, Irv, Margaret, Jim. It was suggested that Jerry and Bob would be appropriate members of this committee as well. Laura was asked to invite them.

This committee is to cover marketing, market development, and processing capacity development. There was discussion as to whether these topics should be taken on by more than one committee because they are very broad.
Jim pointed out that working with farmers to access markets and learn how to market is probably very different from helping expand the processing capacity in the state.

Jed stated that some of what was seen as a hurdle in 2004 when these priorities were set is being overcome via consumer demand. For example, the vegetable processors in the state are processing as much organic product as they can sell. When the demand grows, he feels that they will expand their capacity as needed. This is another area where the committee can decide what, if anything needs to be done, once the issues are identified.

Laura stated that she gets quite a few calls from companies wishing to certify organic. It was suggested that this is an educational issue that certifiers should be able to address. Dave and Bonnie pointed out that certifiers are not allowed to provide advice/education directly. Laura pointed out that, in addition to this hurdle, many processors and handlers do not even know where to start to get information.

Suggestions to help this committee get started included having Corey Kincaid, a large scale vegetable farm that has some organic acres, come and speak about the challenges of scaling up production to meet the needs of the market. Other resource people would be Gary Zimmer and the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute.

**Planning/Set dates for future meetings**

The council will move toward establishing a quarterly meeting schedule. Wednesdays seem to work well for everyone.

We will have a meeting in July. Most participants thought that July 9th or the 23rd would work for them, but Laura will send out these dates and get a consensus from everyone, including those who weren’t present.

The group discussed meeting outside of Madison. Options discussed included Standard Process, Organic Valley (associated with the Kickapoo Fair), Michael Fields, or associated with the UW Arlington Organic Field Day. The Arlington Field Day is late in August, and we felt that this was too late in the season. Some people felt they’d be too busy with the Kickapoo Fair to also attend this meeting. The group favored Michael Fields or Standard Process.

Jim suggested that wherever the group meets, we could focus the meeting on topics associated with the events/groups. For example, if we met at Michael Fields, we could ask them to share the work they’re doing developing local markets for organic products.

The Fall meeting will be in October (Laura will send out dates).

**12:00** Lunch and continued discussion

**12:45** Communicating with other State Organic Advisory Councils

This was a topic that Laura and Jerry were working on. The Council is interested in establishing relationships with other state organic advisory councils for purposes of improving communication and possible cooperative efforts. Laura reported that they’d made some initial inquiries and there
appear to be about 20 state organic advisory councils in the US. They’ll continue working on compiling contact information and background on how they function for a future meeting.

**Replacing Jerri Cook.**
Jerri Cook has submitted a letter of resignation, citing lack of time as her reason for being unable to continue participating. Laura passed around the list of nominees from the original nomination process in Fall, 2006, but suggested that the council not limit themselves to this list if there are other individuals they wish to consider. The council discussed potential criteria for selecting a new farmer member, including geographical location (getting someone to represent the northern part of the state), someone in field crops, a woman, etc. The council decided that the most important criterion was having someone representing the northern part of the state.

The council generated a list of potential candidates: Mike Taft (beef, Eau Claire), Mark Kopecky (dairy, Price County), Jim Greenberg (dairy, Marathon County), Brian Igl (potatoes, Langlade County), Wayne or Kay Craig (dairy, poultry, Calumet County), Chris Malek (vegetables?, Portage County), Blaine Tornow (type of farm???, Wausau).

Other suggestions included Nic Zimmer (Iowa County) and Tim Zander (Columbia County). These suggestions were set aside because of the council’s desire to have northern Wisconsin better represented.

Laura was asked to contact each of the nominees, send them the original nomination form that we used with the original nominations, with a cover letter inviting them to submit an application.

We will compile the applications and send them out to the council, have them review them, then have a conference call to make a recommendation. Those who are unable to participate can call Laura and express their opinions.

Bonnie asked if there should be some preliminary discussion regarding what we know of these candidates, but it was decided that the group should hold further discussion until we know whether the candidates are interested in the role and we have their background information in front of us.

Once the council has made a decision, the recommendation will be forwarded to the Secretary’s office with the other nominations.

Perry informed the council that the issue of changing the Organic Advisory Council from an ad hoc committee to a standing committee is not going to be dealt with at the Ag Board’s May 14th meeting as previously planned. The Ag Board will be dealing with other standing committees and councils at their June meeting and it was decided that the Organic Advisory Council could be addressed then. This will involve the Ag Board voting to make the Organic Advisory Council a standing council, then they will appoint a slate of members, which will include our current members, members that were up for reappointment to full terms (Tricia, Bob, Christine, and Harriet), plus the replacement for Jerri Cook.

**Reports from work groups**

**Government Relations and Legal Affairs committee**
Christine shared with the council the work of the Legal Affairs committee.
Presentation to the Ag Board in May
Plans are in place for a presentation by the council to the Ag Board on May 14th. Jerry and Harriet will represent the Council at the June Ag Board meeting. Laura will introduce them. Other OAC members are welcome to participate. They will talk about the Organic Report, give some organic statistics, and detail other accomplishments of the council. Christine has created a power point template with the OAC logo for this presentation and for future presentations by council members.

Newsletter/communication
The committee has developed a newsletter template and the first issue has been developed. It will be completed by the end of April and sent to the Ag Board in their May packet.

Newsletter comments: Jim pointed out that we need to make the map and the statistics match. Laura will take the statistics off the map. It would be a big job for the DATCP GIS staff to update the map at this point, so taking the numbers off is probably our best option.

Discussion was held as to what we will use the newsletter for. It is intended to go to the Secretary’s office and the Ag Board, but several agency representatives expressed interest in making it available to their staffs and there may be other groups and individuals who would be interested in seeing it. Laura will send out the final copy to all Council members and Interagency team members. It will be posted on our website: http://www.cias.wisc.edu/organic_farming/.

The newsletter will be published on a quarterly basis after this.

Seed Law thank you letter
Harriet, Jerry, and Laura drafted a letter thanking Secretary Nilsestuen and the Division of Agricultural Resource Management for their willingness to remove the local pre-emption clause from the draft seed law that is being developed. It will be mailed to Secretary Nilselstuen and copied to Kathy Pielsticker, division administrator of ARM.

Interacting with DATCP’s Livestock Council.
Perry reported that the DATCP ad hoc livestock council is interested in communicating with the Organic Advisory Council, in fact, they have had some resignations and are interested in having one of the seats filled by an organic livestock producer. Jim Munsch has been asked to and has agreed to be nominated to the council.

Consumer Education Committee
Margaret Bert Mittelstadt reported on the activities of this committee.

The Consumer education committee has been reviewing the two organic websites: the DATCP site and the one that Laura and Erin developed with CIAS. The committee is going to be working on developing more materials and adding to them. After discussion about the difficulty in finding things on the DATCP website, it was decided that the committee would focus on enhancing the CIAS website. They will work with Laura to get materials put up as they develop them.

Agency reports

USDA Farm Service Agency
Russ Raeder shared a report on FSA activities, including an update on the new Farm Bill and organic initiatives that may be included. There has been no action on the new farm bill to date, so it is unclear when it will be passed.

He also talked about the disaster program that they’re running for drought and flood impacted farmers in the state in 2006-2007.

A new CRP program will be introduced starting in June or July. It will focus on wildlife habitat enhancement for endangered species. Certain areas of the state will be targeted. Russ passed around handouts on each of the target areas and species.

Both Russ and Pat Murphy from NRCS expressed concern about how many acres of CRP are being taken out of the program to be put into commodity production. The high price of grain due to demand for biofuels has made this an attractive alternative for some farmers. There was discussion about the degree to which input costs have risen along with commodity prices and how these farmers may not come out as much ahead as it looks today.

Jim Munsch made the comment that in Vernon County organic producers are competing heavily and driving up rental rates and/or land prices, especially organic field crops. Organic grain prices are very high due to shortages.

DATCP and FSA have signed an MOU to waive certain fees (up to $10,000) that are required for beginning farmers to obtain loans for startup. The program is open to all beginning farmers, no matter what they produce.

USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service
Pat Murphy talked about the new SAFE CRP program and how NRCS will be working with FSA to develop specifications for the wildlife habitat management. The SAFE CRP targets habitat improvement for specific wildlife species that are declining or Threatened or Endangered.

He talked about the new “requirement management practices: that CRP ‘disturb’ CRP cover at the midpoint of the contract to increase habitat diversity. One treatment option for the cool season cover (alfalfa/brome) is a spray of roundup and interseeding which could cause expiring CRP ground to be less attractive to organic producers. Organic friendly options include disking and interseeding for cool season or burning for warm seasons. Pat is responsible for developing guidance for exemptions based on CRP rules.

The Conservation Security Program has approved a sign up for the Milwaukee River watershed. This will be the last year of the program. The CSP program in it's current form is not in either versions of the new farm bill.

The first round of cost-share contract development for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program is completed for Wisconsin. All funds have been allocated. After the rest of the states have done their allocations, Wisconsin has the opportunity to request any remaining funds. Wisconsin had more applications than we had cost-share funds available.
Budget update: NRCS is in the seventh month of their fiscal year and they still don’t have a final budget. Pat said that their planning is on a month by month basis and discussed the difficulty of effectively carrying out their programs.

UW report: CALS and Extension.
Erin explained to the group that UW, as part of a Midwestern land-grant university team, has been awarded a grant from the USDA-Integrated Organic Program to conduct research on no-till organic corn and soybean systems. The four-year project totaling more than $800,000 will begin this fall.

Organic research at UW Ag Research stations.
Organic research projects at the Arlington Research Station are on-going and preparations are being made for the 2008 growing season. Several acres of research land will begin the transition toward organic certification at the Hancock Agricultural Research Station. Plans are underway for the next organic field day in August at the Arlington Research Station as well as for other organic workshops in partnership with WI SARE.

A much updated and expanded 120 page Extension biological control manual has just been printed.

A peer-reviewed article describing the results of a comparison between organic and conventional agronomic systems has recently been published by Posner et. al.: “Organic and Conventional Production Systems in the Wisconsin Integrated Cropping Systems Trials: I. Productivity 1990–2002.” Agron J 2008 100:4 253–260. Laura has a PDF copy of this paper that she can email to those interested in it.

Kevin Shelley and Laura have contacted the planners for the January 2009 Wisconsin Fertilizer Aglime and Pest Management Conference with a proposal for including a session on organic crop production at the conference. This is in response to discussions by the OAC of providing educational opportunities for professional crop consultants with possible and growing interest in working with organic farms, and vice-versa. The planning committee will take up our request this summer. Jed pointed out that he is on the planning committee and will work on getting that done.

Jim mentioned that Organic Valley has begun a program to increase organic grain and feed production. He recently talked to Lowell Rhinehart who is heading up that effort at OV. Lowell has an organic transition demonstration plot that he oversees at OV’s Distribution center at Cashton. Laura, Kevin and Eileen Cullen, a UW Entomologist who’s doing organic research, visited the site last summer.

Jed Colquhoun mentioned the DATCP ADD program grant that he and A.J. Bussan received to research large scale organic vegetable production. They have also received additional funds for the project through a National Research Institute grant and a Midwest Food processors grant for a total of $550,000.

Jim made the suggestion that the university is making great strides on the agronomic and horticultural front, but needs to move forward on livestock and dairy fronts. This is a topic that the new Producer Education committee might want to investigate.

Department of Commerce
Irv passed around a handout on the Dairy 2020 early planning grant program, which provides funding for business planning to farmers.

Irv said that there was still money in the Milk Volume Production (MVP) program that helps dairy farmers buy cows to expand their herds. They can also use the program to buy cows for a new startup.

Rural Economic Development funds are available for farms other than dairy farms. This is their only program that doesn't focus on dairy. The downside of this program is that only 50% of its total funds can be used for agriculture. The rest must be used for non-ag business development in rural areas.

Commerce has been given jurisdiction over the renewable energy funding that was put into the state budget last fall. Irv didn’t know how the funds were to be used.

**Technical College System**
Don Jaworski announced that they have tentatively received approval of their $450,000 education grant that they applied for with a letter of support from the council. This project will involve hiring a faculty position at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College to oversee the program which will include technical college classes as well as professional development training for extension agents, technical college faculty, university and high school level faculty.

**DATCP**
**Agricultural Resource Management Division Report**
Jenni reported on the Agrichemical Management Bureau's groundwater survey report which will be released in May and presented at the May ATCP Board meeting. Based on the results of the Atrazine reuse study, the department concluded that renewed atrazine use in Atrazine Prohibition Areas would likely lead to exceedences of the enforcement standard (ES). No Atrazine Prohibition Areas will be repealed at this time.

Jenni also reported that county requests for 2009 nutrient management (NM) cost-sharing money are due April 15. Farmers interested in NM cost-sharing for 2009 should contact their county land conservation department ASAP. Jenni suggested that the council could have someone come and talk about nutrient management planning at the next meeting if we wanted to know more about the program.

**Agricultural Development Division Report**
Laura reported on her Organic Dairy Workshops. The final SARE funded organic dairy workshop was held on March 13 in Loyal. We had 34 participants, including 25 veterinarians. For the three workshops, we had 70 total participants, including 47 veterinarians. Other participants included UW Extension agents and nutritionists and feed dealers.

The other educational program she helped organize was a Risk Management for Vegetable Growers workshop. Eleven vegetable growers attended the March 11th workshop.

Laura and Erin got the Organic Directory Project off the ground by sending out questionnaires to the 918 certified organic farms on our NOP list in early March. Just over 200 completed forms have been returned and Laura and DATCP staff are beginning to enter them into an Access
database. They are considering a followup mailing or information campaign of some sort to get more people to sign up.

**2:30 Public comments.**
Scott Trautman, an organic farmer from Stoughton, requested some time with the council to share his experiences teaching a new organic agriculture course through MATC this winter. He had a prepared power point presentation that outlined his views on where organic farming education should go in the state. Laura has a copy of the power point and will share it with those who are interested in viewing it.

Scott has strong opinions on organic agriculture and what the organic agriculture community needs to do to foster growth but his presentation was very broad. At the end of his presentation, Bonnie asked what, specifically, he’d like to see the Organic Advisory Council do. Here is a summary of what seem to be his issues: he’s interested in building attendance in his class from the 6 students he had this year to 40 students in next year’s class. He sees this happening through coordinated efforts involving MOSES, as well as MOSA and other certifiers. He’d like to coordinate his marketing effort with MOSES, funnel their seminar and workshop participants into tech college classes, and encourage existing organic farmers to go back for ‘continuing education’ through the tech college system. He suggested that MOSA and other certifiers share names of people who have requested information as target participants in the classes. Scott would like joint QUALITY curriculum development among technical colleges and establishment of a “Quality speaker network” for classes. Scott expressed the opinion that the University has not been responsive enough to the needs of organic farmers.

Scott suggested that it would be effective to identify and study progressive, successful farmers and determine what impact these people have had on the area around them. He pointed out that a study of the economic and social impact of Vernon County organic farms (highest number of organic farms of any county in the country) might allow us to determine the factors that lead to higher levels of adoption of organic practices.

Jed expressed interest in reviewing the curriculum that Scott developed for his MATC class. Laura suggested that there may be opportunities for Scott to contribute to the newly formed farmer education committee. It was left that the council would review his suggestions and get back to him if/when compatible activities were developed.

The Council adjourned at 3:00 pm.