Wisconsin Organic Advisory Council Meeting
10 am to 3 pm
Wednesday, April 25th, 2007
UW West Madison Research Station
8502 Mineral Point Road

10:15 am    Welcome
Agenda Review
Attendance:

Wisconsin Organic Interagency Team: Present: Pat Murphy (NRCS), Russ Raeder (FSA), Kevin Shelley (UWEX), Jed Colquhoun (UWEX), Carla Wright, Irv Possin (WIDOC), Jennifer Heaton-Amrhein (DATCP), Linda Merriman Hitchman (PM) (DATCP), Laura Paine (DATCP), Erin Silva (UW), Will Hughes (WDATCP).

Minutes Reviewed and approved with one amendment to the labeling of organic inputs.

Advisory Council Terms:
- We must establish terms for each of our members during this meeting in order to comply with DATCP's advisory council procedures. Terms for WDATCP advisory council membership are approved by the Agriculture Board at their April meeting and all terms will run April to April.
- Suggested terms were reviewed and accepted by the Organic Council. The following chart that illustrates which board member will rotate off the board over the next three terms. At the point where new people replace existing members, all terms will be three year terms in length:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term Length</th>
<th>Organic Farmers</th>
<th>Organic Businesses</th>
<th>Non-Profit, Consumer, Certification Representatives</th>
<th>At Large</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Year</td>
<td>Tricia Bross</td>
<td>Bob Wills</td>
<td>Harriet Behar</td>
<td>Christine Mason</td>
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<td>Two Years</td>
<td>Mike Hansen</td>
<td>Jerry McGeorge</td>
<td>Bonnie Wideman</td>
<td>Dave Engel</td>
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<td>Three Years</td>
<td>Rich Lange</td>
<td>Paulette Bradley</td>
<td>Margaret Bert-Mittelstadt</td>
<td>Jim Munsch</td>
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Overview of the Minnesota Organic Agriculture Program:
Presented by Jim Riddle, Organic Agriculture Coordinator
University of Minnesota – SW Research / Outreach Center

- The Wisconsin Advisory Council is extremely grateful to Jim for taking the time and effort to speak to our members. Jim’s organic history includes: organic grower, organic inspections, inspection training, USDA National Organic Standards Board, Organic Outreach Coordinator, supervising 120 acres of certified organic acres in Lamberton since the early 1990’s
- Mr. Riddle brought helpful hand outs as well as copies of his slide presentation, which are attached to these meeting minutes and available for review. Below are some brief bullet points from his presentation.
- The 2006 “The Status of Organic Agriculture in Minnesota: A Report to the Legislature” is available on the...
• Minnesota has had an organic statute since 1985.
• The Minnesota task force is authorized in statute. The Wisconsin Task force is not. Having the task force in statute does help to transcend political transitions and give more permanence to the task force. In Minnesota, every task force expires until it is officially reauthorized. Every task force member then serves for the entire term, and the terms are not revolving. Their terms are currently 6 years.
• The Minnesota Advisory Task Force in Minnesota has been defined by statute since 1990. It states that:
  o The Commissioner shall appoint…(so it is not optional): 3 organic farmers, 2 wholesalers, 1 certifier, 2 processors, 1 extension, 1 university, 1 non-profit, 1 USDA, 1 consumer, and 1 at-large
  o The Task Force will “Advise the commissioner on policies and practices to improve organic agriculture in MN”
  o The Task Force will collaborate with Commissioner on status report to the Legislature
  o The Task Force must meet at least twice per year
  o The Task Force expires after 6 years, unless re-authorized

• Minnesota Advisory Task Force Activities:
  o Assist with organic status report
  o Identify barriers & opportunities
  o Help establish legislative priorities
  o Provide input on Federal issues (NOP policies, NOSB recs, Farm Bill ideas, etc)
  o Suggest items for producer surveys
  o Provide input on pending issues (pipeline mitigation plan, etc)
  o Help at MN Organic Conference
• Minnesota task force adopted first organic certification cost-share program in the country in 1998 and they re-established their organic task force at that time.
• In Minnesota, the average organic farm is 324 acres and the average conventional farm is 360 acres, so there is not much difference (from 2 acres to 3,000+)
• Cost share 2/3 of certification cost up to $200, but there is only $35,000 available, so it is first come, first serve. A cost share has been in place in the state since 1998.
• Some years they have been able to utilize some federal dollars, but both funds do run out of money.
• There is going to be an effort to organize the “exempt” organic people (those selling less than $5,000). This will keep them in the loop and hopefully educate them in regards to organic issues such as manure handling to keep the organic produce offered to the public safe.
• Minnesota has a very rich organic web-site that is worth checking out.
• Organic producers in Minn can enroll in farm business management classes and they are reimbursed 80% of class fees. Presently there are 80 producers enrolled in this program.
• Minn has an active mentoring program with mentoring farms and farmers. These are experienced organic farmers that are voluntarily helping fellow growers with organic questions by accepting phone calls and e-mails. This is being sponsored by the University and the Department cooperatively. Currently, there are no set criteria to be a mentor, but Jim believes that it would be good to have some criteria in place.

Kevin Shelley asked what Jim thought would be our most proactive place to start. Jim thought:
• Farm Business Management Classes: They help the farmer; they also help to show that organic is profitable to legislatures. They help educate the economic educators and teachers in the state to organic viability. They also give you a great base of economic data that can be shared with legislature and banking institutions.

Items that the Wisconsin Council feels should be followed up on from Jim’s discussion include:

• Jim Munsch: The importance of having a legal basis for this council seems important. Our states are so alike in so many ways, and perhaps we have opportunity for Government Collaboration.
• Kevin Shelley: We have something good started with the mentoring and we could use MN to help us further our mentoring efforts as a model. He also likes the idea of Farm Business Classes. (Tricia Bross: There were ag innovation classes offered by Michael Fields in East Troy this past winter)
• Paulette Bradley: Presently, there is a minimum class size of 10. Could this minimum be lowered in the beginning if we are able to offer Farm Business Classes.
• Irv Possin: I think that the State Statute is pretty important. The Farm Business Management aspect is also important. He likes the idea of collaboration between the states.
• Jennifer Heaton-Amrhein: Sustainable Agricultural Demonstration grants intrigue Jennifer. We used to have one in Wisconsin and we no longer do. WI DATCP’s Ag Resource Management Division does provide resources that could be utilized by organic farmers (ie: soybean aphid management, pesticide drift, etc) are issues that the WDATCP can help us follow up on as it exists in Wisc. right now. DATCP has an investigative staff that will work with organic farmers on pesticide drift issues.
• Margaret Bert-Mittelstadt: Collaboration on nutrition and food safety. These issues are important in the consumer’s mind. We need to understand what our charge is. Once Minnesota understood their charge, they were very effective and we could use directives wisely to advocate for organic in Wisconsin.
• David Engel: Advocacy. What steps can we take as an advisory group? There should be communication going from this council to wherever it is appropriate or useful. An organic web-site could address many of these issues: Food safety, nutrition, farm business management. Should we have a link to the Minnesota site?
• Carla Wright: Voluntary directory of farms that are organically certified as well as exempt. The Minnesota annual report is absolutely awesome. The State Department of Ag in MN has taken some strong positions in organic, and since we are neighbors we should support MN through participation at the state level. For example, pursue partnership between both Department of Ags for influencing farm bills.
• Will Hughes: Use this council as an opportunity to bring organic issues to the governor and legislature’s attention. We need to really educate people on both organic and local foods. The impression is that local food may not be as “safe” and we should work to change that opinion. Legislative ag committees should hold a hearing to just educate legislature as to where the state of organics is at the moment.
• Jed Colquhoun: The Directory of Minnesota farms is amazing. There are often potential buyers, but they do not know where the supply could come from. To have those together in one place is absolutely critical to developing value-added marketing. He gets at least 5 calls a week asking where organic produce could be purchased. So, a directory would be outstanding. There is lack of infra-structure at UW. There is support out there, but it has not been organized. A formal report that shows how large this movement is becoming could be the incentive to organize. We need to keep pushing so that we do not get lost.
• Jim Munsch: I think that a directory of organic buyers is just as important. You need to get some stable funding. Grants come and go, but steady funding is the key.
• Paulette Bradley: I think that the legislative part is the most important. We need to start pressuring for more $$$ both at the University as well as for on-farm research.
• Bob Wills: Information is important. Information sharing for people that are already within the organic community is useful. I think that we should push really hard on some of these policy things that are having big impacts. Mutual recognition of certifiers is crucial. If government is unwilling to put pressure on certifiers, perhaps the other certifiers need to stop recognizing them. (Dave Engel: "That is against the rules.") Bob, "Then consumer’s and buyers need to put pressure on the certifiers and producers that are not following the rules.
• Jerry McGeorge: Clarify what this council can and can not do vis a vis the secretary. I would like the council to generate interest politically, but as an advisory council to the Secretary of Agriculture, how much can we do? I think that there would be many benefits to collaborating with MN. It would be good if we could get to the place where we are recognized and we could be seen as a group that people could look to for informed information and opinions. Everyone should contact their legislators and let them know about this council.
• Tricia Bross: We need to look past just dairy and potatoes in Wisconsin.
• Bonnie Wideman: Mentoring hotline, Farmer Directory, and Farmer’s information exchange are all very doable things that we could get started on soon.
• Harriet Behar: Legal framework, mentoring directories, working with the Governor and the Secretary of Ag. Build a stronger relationship with them so that they can speak to our points on national issues. Perhaps we can work with MN to improve consumer education on organics and also improving our [organic] processing infrastructure.
• Erin Silva: Regional, multi-state networking to get more regional force. Perhaps there could be a regional call quarterly to keep collaboration going.
• Christine Mason: Keep some focus on the consumer’s perspective of Wisconsin Organic Production because they are ultimately what will drive organic need.
• Dave Engel: A registry of certification agencies in the state should be established. Michigan and Minnesota both require that the certification agencies report that they are doing certification business in the state. The statute authorizes Minnesota to be able to do this. Some states charge to operate in their state (California is $2,000 for instance). Minnesota requires registration, but charges $0.
• Russ Raeder: Farm Business Management classes are a very good idea. There is data that exists in regards to markets, but not enough to easily support organic loans. The existing data base does not record how much business is conducted for organic versus conventional agriculture. (Laura Paine: Perhaps the biannual report could report on this topic.)
**Russ Raeder (FSA):** This past month we have been waiting for farm bill programs to be passed. As far as programs are concerned: non-insured producer numbers are about the same to slightly lower. Farm loan program going well. All dollars appropriated to states were pulled back nationally and Wisconsin has been getting their share of the money. DCP loan program sign up was extended. Crop reporting deadline is coming up July 15th. Secretary Johanns has announced that there would be no official CRP sign up in 2007 and 2008. This does not mean that there are not exceptions for highly critical areas.

Question from Harriet Behar: “Do you know how many acres of CRP are expected to come out of the program?” Russ, “630,000 acres currently enrolled in CRP and 180,000 will expire fall of 2007 (October 1). Nationally, about 25% of CRP acres will expire. Very little land is ‘marginal pasture land’ along streams, so the vast majority of this land was cropped at one time [and could be cropped again].”

**University of Wisconsin Updates: Kevin Shelley:**

Report is available and attached.

Getting underway with field studies, primarily at the Arlington farm. Cooperating with Eileen Cullen and the entomology department to learn how insects respond through organic transition and then organic rotation. Interested in organic soil fertility and how crop nutrition practices effect harmful insects as well as beneficials. Looking at the addition of Calcium and how improving the base saturation levels will affect soil fertility as well as insects. Comparing these hi-cal lime fields to conventional organic fertilizer supplied through manure and alfalfa.

Organic corn hybrid and variety trials: conducted by Joe Lauer and interim soybean agronomist. New soybean agronomist will begin August 1st. Typically, they have about 15 varieties supplied each year for the variety trials. Corn trials will expand this year into a multi-state effort. It is more challenging to find people to participate in the SB variety trials, so they are including non-organically produced seed in that trial (Iowa public varieties, food-grade varieties, etc).

**Erin Silva:** Web-site: Wisconsin organic web-site should be live May 1st. It will be cooperation between the University of WDATCP. It will be a good place to find out about future field days, organic activities, etc.

Please see Erin’s update on UW update sheet. She is trying to create an annual organic field day at Arlington.

**GAP certification:** Good Agricultural Practices. Certain buyers are requiring this certification. Whole Foods, Home Grown Wisconsin are two examples of places that are requiring GAP certification. This could be a good framework to highlight organic food safety.

CIAS has been responsible for the last 2 organic reports. It will fall on Erin to do the next report in 2007. Erin is hoping to have a very thorough report for the next issue. She wants to highlight the economic impact of organic agriculture in this state.

Erin is looking into how other states require and organize the registration of certifying agencies.

**Jed Colquhoun:** Processing Crops – Jed would like to study the feasibility of processed organic crops (soil fertility management, disease resistant seed, etc); primarily sweet corn and snap beans. The ultimate goal would be to reopen an abandoned plant or convert a current plant that is struggling for organic processing. We either figure out how to do it, or it will be imported.

At the college level, UW takes a lot of hits for not having a dedicated organic program, but Jed feels that this is changing. Organic systems research institute will look at long-term approaches with organic farming and he feels that they are making tremendous progress with this project. The project has tremendous interest, but it has been put on the back burner due to federal budget constraints. A bi-annual report would be a tremendous tool to show the need for such an institute.

**Carla Wright: DNR**
The Wisconsin DNR supports organic agriculture, but in no specific way. There is a $280,000 grant that will focus on environment and agriculture. They are interested in organic management, but no specifics are available.

**Irv Possin: WI DOC**
The administration of the Dairy 2020 initiative will be transferred to WIN. DOC will handle funding, but all administration will be transferred. An organic producer can ask for an early planning grant through WIN, just like any other business entrepreneur. Gary Wagner is a consultant and former FCS officer. He is an associate of MBA (Midwest Bio Ag), so he can do business plans. He would be the best option in the state at the time.
Laura Paine: WDATCP
Blue sheet list of members has been updated.
Value-Added Dairy Initiative has a specific category for organic and grazing farms. $7,500 maximum grant are for planning and financial analysis. Please see Laura’s yellow update sheet for details.
Grants are possible for organic production and processing. Approximately $70,000 has been awarded to date.

Harriet Behar and Erin Silva: Mentoring Program Progress
- 6 extension agents in 6 counties have been identified as possible people to help in the mentoring network. 4 of 5 that have gotten back to Harriet have said yes. Rose in Kenosha/Racine said no as she does not feel she has adequate organic operators to pull from.
- The 4 counties interested include:
  - Iowa county (Dairy)
  - Price County (Dairy)
  - St Croix (Horticulture, veggies, fruits)
  - Ashland / Bayfield (already had some organic plans and field day planned for July, so they are in!)

-In looking at Grazing networks as an example, we found that they are all over the place and they are all different. Some have a farmer-advisory council that make suggestions to the extension agent. Some extension agents just do it on their own. Some meet monthly, some meet quarterly, some meet whenever there is something to talk about. Harriet and Erin are looking at the most successful grazing networks and they are trying to model an organic network based on this information.
- Harriet Behar: “We may blend in direct marketing into the organic mentoring program in the counties where this is critical, such as next to the twin cities.”

MOSES is willing to help and attend some field days.

Jim Munsch: “Organics” cuts across many areas of agriculture. This will be the challenge. Organic dairy is already fairly organized through CROPP. With vegetables, perhaps the established farmers could help the new farmers for $50 per hour or something like that. For instance, Jim’s extension agent is not interested in grazing, so Jim does all of the pasture walks himself. There is a lot already going on that we may be able to piggy back on, such as a pasture walk that could be partially geared towards organic.

Erin: We are trying to figure out where existing resources are. We really want this to be a bottom-up organization where the growers feel ownership. There are resources in Dane county, for example, so part of the challenge is trying to network within some of the networks that already exist.

Harriet: There is hope that at some point in the future there could be some compensation for the mentor. There needs to be a lot of time for hands-on and discussion at the planned field days, and our mentors may emerge from these field-day situations. We are hoping to start small and get a feel from the few meetings that are organized this summer as to what people are looking for.

Jim: For a person beginning in organics to pay a mentor, it is a drop in the bucket compared to the pricey mistakes that could be made getting started.

Erin: An advisory committee should direct which farm may be interested in hosting the event, what the theme should be, etc, but we will be starting with the extension agents from the participating county.

Margaret: There should be a type of a kit for each extension agent. A list that they can choose from: this, this, and this would be of interest in this county. This could be a good stepping point for guidance.

Erin: There is some professional development grant money that may be able to get used to set up this type of “kit.”

Jim: Parker has a program that is highly successful. It is half teaching, and then farmers are brought in to share their practical knowledge. Harriet will call Parker and see what is working for them to get ideas.

Harriet & Laura: We want these initial meetings to have a production emphasis. We are hoping to use them as a starting point to get new ideas. All 4 regions have experienced producers and novice producers, which is why these counties were chosen.
**Jed:** He has had success getting a bus and going farm to farm and getting practical knowledge that way. This gets people excited and interested.

**Harriet:** If any one has ideas, please contact Harriet or Erin. They would like to find a good title, something other than “Organic Network”. Something catchy, something that expresses that this will be farmer to farmer and interpersonal.

**Linda Merriman Hitchman: Consumer Education Project**

Linda shared a summary of consumer data on organic purchasing. There was discussion on what would be a good starting place in regards to consumer research? A high-level survey showing who is buying, why they are buying, what are the benefits that they perceive? A little bit about their buying habits? The purchasing experience itself?

**Laura:** Consumer education was one of the top priorities identified by the original Organic Task Force, but we need to ‘flesh out’ what this Council will do and/or recommend to the agencies as ‘action items’ on this priority. What I would like to recommend is that for this group as an advisory council, one of the most valuable things that could happen would be if we could go through our priorities and really do an in-depth evaluation of what we can do about each priority one at a time. What are the critical issues, what role could the individual agencies play. Come up with a summary to give to the agencies or people that could help with the goals. We really need to narrow down what we are trying to accomplish and what the best way to accomplish them is. I recommend that we need to set aside an hour or two at each meeting to start looking at each individual priority and come up with specific action steps that can be summarized and acted upon.

**Harriet:** How often are we meeting?

**Laura:** Can we go to a quarterly approach?

**Harriet:** Summer is tough if you pick a nice day.

**Margaret:** Could there be a group conference call? There could be an agenda mailed out electronically and then everyone can talk about it.

- The group consensus is that conference calls are a good idea during the hectic summer months. The conference call would not be in replacement of an entire meeting, they would be used more for more specific agenda items.

**Carla Wright:** There should be a work plan that shows what we hope to accomplish each quarter. Something that we would be able to share with the secretary so he can share specific goals with people when it comes time for budgeting, etc.

**Robert Wills:** You could accomplish the problem of the big group on a conference call if you establish sub-committees or task forces that focus on specific issues.

**Jerry McGeorge:** I agree that there should be sub-committees. Look at the most concrete thing that was accomplished today – the mentoring network, and that progress was made through a sub-committee.

**Will Hughes:** It is very important that you make at least two or three specific requests as a council for the upcoming farm bill and that has to be done very soon. What if we got the senate ag committee to have an update meeting on organic. What would we want that update meeting to look like?

**Jim Munsch:** Laura, what is your mechanism of reporting the workings of this group to the Sec of Ag?

**Will:** A monthly report to the secretary. Government is like a wheel barrow. If you want something done, you have to push it. If you come up with ideas that can be acted upon, come up with some specific ideas and we will get a meeting with Rod Nilsestuen if it is something that he can help act upon.

**Laura Paine:** Let’s pick some priorities and make some sub-committees. Then, these sub-committees can meet through out the summer and have specific action steps for the rest of the group in the fall.

The council adjourned at 3 pm. Subcommittees will meet over the summer, facilitated by Laura Paine. We will schedule a fall meeting of the full Council.