Wisconsin Organic Advisory Council Meeting
10 am to 3 pm
Wednesday, February 27, 2008
UW West Madison Research Station
8502 Mineral Point Road

FINAL MINUTES

Council Attendees: Stephen Walker (for Bonnie Wideman), Margaret Bert-Mittelstadt, Tricia Bross, Jerry McGeorge, Harriet Behar, Tim Zander (for Paulette Bradley), Christine Mason, Robert Wills, Dave Engel. Absent: Jerri Cook


10:00 Welcome
Agenda review
Minutes approval : accepted as presented. Harriet Behar moved and Bob Wills seconded.

10:05 Agency reports:
Jennifer & Laura:
   Seed: Local preemption was removed from seed legislation. It will not be introduced this legislative session either way. Jennifer’s only caution was that local preemption could be reintroduced back in during the legislative process. Christine Mason asked about follow-up in regards to having an organic voice on the seed advisory committee. The first draft was created by an ad-hoc committee that has since dissolved. Statutory changes must come before a rule committee is formed. If it does become a rule advisory committee there will certainly be an organic voice there.

   Jerry McGeorge: Good news that preemption was taken out. Should we as a council have some type of communication that we are very pleased that the preemption was removed? Laura does not feel it would be appropriate to go to the legislature at this time. Jerry said that perhaps this would be a task that could be handled by the Government and Legal sub-committee. Harriet is wondering if this would also be an opportunity to showcase our involvement to the public. Jennifer believes that it would be very appropriate to thank the secretary of Ag and the DATCP and reiterate our message at this point. Laura and our DATCP liaisons will keep us updated on this subject.

   Carla Wright: We have an opportunity here to prepare some statements and position papers. You can assume that the other side of the issue will be lobbying to have preemption back into the law. Government committee should start working on the issues and the language. Take the time
now as it will happen sooner than we all think. Administrative Rule process, which is run by DATCP, would also provide opportunity for input.

Jennifer Heaton: Wisconsin seed laws right now are archaic, so there does need to be change. It is up to the organic community to be at the table and have a voice.

Kevin Shelley: American Seed Trade Association does have the redrafting of seed laws as a national priority. Preemption is part of their national agenda.

Bob Wills: If it is an ASTA national agenda, perhaps we should contact other state organic advisory councils.

Jerry McGeorge: Perhaps Laura could pass along this topic at her monthly NASOP (National Association of State Organic Programs) conference call.

Nutrient Management Planning: Jennifer Heaton – Amrhein:
A big chunk of money was allocated for Nutrient Management planning in the last budget. It has been assigned to the counties. The monies would definitely be available to organic growers. It is mandatory to have a nutrient management plan in 2008, although there is no enforcement unless cost-sharing has been offered. People should go to their local land conservation offices to ask about funds. Basically, the money will be available until it is gone.

Kevin Shelley: “Funding” has been interpreted as $28 per acre for the first four years (@ $7 / year) and then after 4 years a grower is on their own. He is sure that it will vary by county, but the county Land Conservation Department may have particular target areas in mind.

Jennifer Heaton: There is 6 million dollars per year on-going, after the first two years at 3 million each.

Kevin Shelley: It would be nice if we could incorporate the 590 plan into our organic plan. It would make a lot of sense and could work hand in hand with certification. Soil conservation is not being reviewed to the degree that it could be at this point.

Carla Wright: Will see if the DNR could assign some resources to helping to manage this efficiency possibility (coordinating 590 to organic inspection).

Laura: Perhaps we could create a sub-committee between someone from Carla’s office, Kevin Shelley, and a certifier to look at this more in-depth.

See Laura’s bullet points:
- Dairy workshops well-attended at 20 and 16 so far. Mostly vets
- Vegetable Risk Management workshop organized March 11th in Richland Center
- 3 Grant Programs are open right now: Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative: they are currently reviewing research proposals. AD Grant Program: looking for development of value-added products (closing date March 13); Buy Local / Buy Wisconsin Grant to develop local food systems.
- Laura attended the National Association of State Organic Programs
Carla Wright / DNR:
Included in packet is a list of issues that the DNR and DATCP are collaborating and working cooperatively upon. Carla would be happy to address any of the bullet points on this list at future meetings (if we give her heads up ahead of time).

Irv Possin: Department of Commerce
Not a lot of changes, but with increase in milk price there is increased interest in dairy. In Wisconsin, there are many different sizes of “start-up” dairies. The Dairy 2020 initiative encourages farmers to come up with a business plan first. There is no issue with lack of money for this program as far as early planning grants are concerned. One change that took place July 1 is that commerce is no longer doing the processing. It is now being done by WEN (Wisconsin Entrepreneurial Network)—this is made up of University Tech schools and other agencies that do consulting within the state. It is run through UW Extension business center. Each person or entity can use the Dairy 2020 plan once in their life. For instance, a conventional dairy converting to organic is definitely eligible to receive this grant money to help defer the cost of writing a business plan. There is a web-site where you can find further information: www.WENPORTAL.org. Everything for this program is done on-line from application to money disbursement. The reimbursement available is 75% up to $3,000.

Milk Volume Production Program: Irv also oversees this program. It is currently out of funding, so they are looking towards county revolving door funds until July 1st. This program helps farmers that have acceptable cash flow, but low equity. This project will not fund a farmer that has over 45% equity in their farm as they are not interested in competing with banks. They are here to help a farmer in their unique situations get their business off the ground.

Tax Credit for Milk Processors: Only for non-cooperative milk processors. It is not for growers nor is it for cooperatives. Cooperatives are not eligible because they do not pay tax. There will be a program in the coming legislative session for cooperatives... (Perry Brown: it passed the house last night.)
Robert Wills: It is a nice program to have, but it is a cumbersome program paperwork wise, and the processor does not know at the front side what the financial pay off will be. In terms of both planning and investment in time, there is no way to know if there will be any pay off up front.

Mentoring: Harriet Behar
MOSES did get funding. There are 11 mentors and 18 mentees and it is very encouraging at this point. Harriet will report back to the group how the year goes.

Spring Training: Part of the grant is focused on building organic networks. The first focus will be in the Mississippi watershed region of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa and will hopefully build some long-standing networks between states.

Kevin Shelley: UW – CALS / UWEX
Not much to add beyond what is in his report. Kevin did bring results of the corn and soybean trials in the state. There is more and more UW involvement at the Organic Conference every year, and he is encouraged about that. Kevin actively helped Christine with the CCA credits administered at the Organic Conference. It is a cumbersome job for MOSES, so Kevin is willing to help. It is important to encourage as many organic options for CEUs as possible. 83 credits were applied for, which is a really impressive number.

Harriet is wondering if it is possible within the CCA society to create a guide where organic people
could go to hire a CCA that is aware of organic regulations for their nutrient management plan. Christine wondered if this could possibly be a training opportunity for MOSES, similar to the way train the trainer was conducted.

**Don Jaworski: Wisconsin Technical College System**

They made application for the integrated organic education program. They will hear a response by April. The application asked for approximately $560,000. This Projective Narrative can be viewed in its entirety in the “Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) CFDA #10.303. This would be an 8 credit program with a certificate for the people that participate in it. If it passes, they will create an advisory committee as well as a champion to head up the program.

Laura: Education committee will have a general discussion on educational issues: How we support the technical college system right down to a girl scout Brownie troop. If people want more information on organic, there should be vehicles to get this information to various age groups.

Harriet: Does feel that it is critical to help children know where a carrot comes from!

**10:30 Reports from work groups**

**Report from Educational Committee:** Margaret Bert-Mittelstadt

*January 25th* Tricia, Paulette, and Margaret met and regrouped themselves and discussed what they would like to accomplish. They discussed 4 main topics:

1. Determine the purpose of the committee
2. Who is our audience?
   a. State gov/legislative
   b. Consumers
   c. Farmers/Producers/Buyers
3. What is provided by this committee? This depends on what vehicles are available to us and the budget and political constraints that we are operating within. Activities could include, but are not limited to:
   a. What we took along to the Organic Conference
   b. Basic Organic Fact Sheet
   c. Setting the Rules straight
   d. Minutes and Meetings available to the public that is interested
4. Determine “Next Steps”

Next steps: If we want to go through the web-site route:

- Who is the web-site manager
- Who decides the content of the web-site
- How often is the web-site updated
- Feed back from the council and the team are necessary to proceed.

Style Guidelines are necessary.

Develop an initial contact place. If people want more information, whom do we send them to? The group consensus on this question was that perhaps this web-site should be a vehicle to more information versus to a personal contact. For example, where to go for a list of CSAs, ATTRA’s web-site, an organic fact sheet, and so on.

What other places or organizations can we link to?
Robert Wills: We are dancing around one of the issues that this committee is about. We do have limited resources. Our capacity is limited and our capacity is probably limited to referring people to other places.

Laura: If we can generate the desired content, Laura can create the links. She also has the ability to put specific projects into the proposal process. We can do small projects if we get them to Laura by late May.

Jerry McGeorge: Do we have access to the greater bureaucracy of DATCP?

Laura: DATCP does have an organic section on their web-site, but it is a cumbersome site and it may be hard to find organic information. Laura currently has our web-site through CAIS. We pay them a small fee to have their web-master update our site.

Jerry: We can keep this as simple or as complicated as we want. This is to a large degree up to Laura as she is aware of the limited resources that we are working with.

Dave Engel: We should all start to lay out the associations and contacts that we are already aware of so that this web-site can become a useful tool.

Perry Brown: Content is easy to change and we can start there. Complete redesign can be complicated and costly. Perhaps we should focus on what we can get on the web as it is right now.

Margaret: The committee will meet again in March.

Government and Legal Affairs: Christine Mason

This subcommittee had a very productive conference call on January 3rd. During this conference call (and resulting e-mail correspondence), the following progress was made:

- The Interface / Communications with State Government and Legal Framework committees will combine their efforts and the resulting subcommittee will officially be: Government and Legal Affairs committee. This committee will be chaired by Christine Mason and includes: Jerry McGeorge, Paulette Bradley, Harriet Behar, Jennifer Heaton, Molly Jahn, Dave Engel, and Margaret Bert-Mittlestadt.

- Discussion was held on moving the council from ad hoc to a more formalized standing council status. This would make the council more visible to the Ag Board and the change would also assure more permanence, as an ad hoc council is typically short term (3 years or less). A statutory board is a level above the statutory advisory council (and two levels above a standing advisory council). A board has policy setting authority (such as the Ag Board). This could be a long-term goal for the council, but for now the group will work on becoming a standing advisory council. Laura and Perry did meet with Secretary Nilsestuen and his staff, and they are very willing to consider the OAC’s request to become a standing council to the Ag Board.

- Memorandum of Understanding: On the conference call, we decided an MOU would formalize the relationship and commitment from agencies to participate in the OAC. We agreed to use the Minnesota MOU as a template for ours. Laura showed Minnesota’s version to the secretary and his staff. They did not like Minnesota’s and would prefer to redraft a Wisconsin version on a more concise format. Laura and Perry explained to the OAC that we have strong participation from the agencies right now, and since that is the
case, they do not feel that we need a formal MOU. Dave Engel voiced that he does think it is important. Jerry McGeorge agreed that at this time we do have good participation, but wonders what happens if that is not the case in the future. The use of an MOU may help ensure continued participation. Perry Brown: An open-ended MOU is typically used when there are concrete issues to resolve. They tend to list specific responsibility versus participation. Carla Wright and Robert Wills agree that it is probably not necessary at this time. The original task force list that went to the governor does specifically site what participation is expected on the OAC.

- We will establish a structure for communicating with Secretary Nilsestuen and the Ag Board. Our goal is to create opportunities for communication with community leaders and the public. Perry agreed that it would be a good idea to keep the Secretary and Board updated at least quarterly. He explained that the May or June Department of Ag board meeting will probably be held in the Spring Green Area and they would like suggestions of nice, organic farms in the area. They would tour farms one day and the next day representatives of the OAC could present the Organic Agriculture in Wisconsin Report, Highlight our new logo and mission statement, and present bullet points of key activities. Christine: The Government and Legal affairs committee will meet prior to this meeting to create an organized / preferred topic list and make the most of this opportunity.

- The committee would like to do two “announcements” or press releases in the next few months. One would be a reintroduction of council members and activities we were involved in this past year. The other would be about the Organic Agriculture in Wisconsin publication. Immediate topics for the first press release: Introduction of council / logo, council agenda, mission statement, flood report.

- The committee worked together to draft the mission statement that will be voted on later during this OAC general meeting.

- Carla Wright: Perhaps the OAC could draft a report for the joint DATCP / DNR meeting. Perry: The next meeting is not until September. A report for the meeting is a good idea, but I encourage at least quarterly updates before that point in the year.

Organic Ag in Wisconsin Report: An Update from Laura
Lot of work with CIAS with cooperation from Laura and Erin. There have been comments that a lot of the emphasis is on Dairy. Tricia stated that there is not so much concern with the contents versus the title on the cover itself: “Organic Dairy Production” It does look from the cover that nothing else is covered, even though many things are covered while Dairy is emphasized.

Robert Wills: We are asking to be set up as a permanent committee. It kind of raises some issues about organics and its role in the entire sustainability thing. It is defined at a National level and they are definitions that we have all bought into. These definitions are not perfect and they do not cover many of the issues that consumers feel that they cover. Are there ways that we can have a more local / state voice? We have people in CIAS that bristle at the idea of organic necessarily meaning sustainable. I can see where organics can lose its voice as the focus is more on the sustainable issues. I wonder if applying for permanent status as an organic advisory board ignores these issues. Are we aligning ourselves too closely with national policy that many of us probably do not agree with? If we are an “organic” council, are we limited to discussing only what is legally described as organic?

Laura: “Are you asking if we are positioning ourselves properly?”

Harriet: “You are concerned that if the legal definition of “organic” changes to we have to buy in to that philosophy?”

Robert: “Are we limiting ourselves to “organic” even if it goes off on some weird course?”

Harriet: Hopefully this board would give us some influence in the future to determine which way organic goes in this state. The mission statement of the council does not get to the true meaning of organic itself.

Robert: I just don’t want our focus to be too narrow.

Laura: We have actually already run into this with the flood impact reports. The report did not focus only on organic vegetable operations.

Robert: I am trying to have us be prepared. If we ask to be a standing committee, are we prepared to go to the ag board and ask for permanency?

Jennifer H: Just because you go to the board this year does not mean that you can not go back to the board and redefine yourselves in the future.

Tim Zander: Perhaps OAC is our opportunity to make “organic” in this state what we want the definition to mean.

11:30 Mission Statement development. We will discuss the following draft developed by the Government and Legal Affairs Committee:

_The Wisconsin Organic Advisory Council brings together public and private resources to promote Wisconsin’s national leadership position in Organic Agriculture. By advising the Secretary of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection and other agriculture agencies on critical organic issues, the council supports organic production, processing, and purchasing opportunities for Wisconsin farmers, processors, and consumers._

Carla: It should say “organization” versus agricultural agencies. It should say “Wisconsin” before Secretary of Agriculture “By advising the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection…” It is the proper title for the department.

There is discussion about “advocate or support” versus promote.

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Voted “Passed” by Robert Wills and seconded by Jerry McGeorge.

12:00 Lunch and continued discussion

12:45 Motion to approve a slate of candidates to recommend to Secretary Nilsestuen for the four positions needing appointment.
• Harriet: Everyone agreed to renew their positions? Yes, but Bob expressed his concern that we have spent an inordinate amount of time with start up while neglecting very pertinent issues to organic that are on the surface right now. There are many issues that we should have input on at both the national and state level. Bob hopes that we can get to the meat of advising on the critical topics.

Harriet does think that we could have a collective voice that would be heard at the NOSB.

Laura: If the original 4 people have agreed to serve another 3 year term, then should we put it to a vote?
Dave Engel suggested that it be passed by unanimous ballot with all four names on the slate instead of voting one by one. This was done. Verbal vote was unanimous for the slate of four members who wish to renew their membership on the advisory council.

1:15 Update on Report on August Flood Impacts on Organic Farmers

Laura sent a draft of the executive summary to everyone and she brought the final version to share with the council today. The deadline for signing up for crop insurance is March 15th, so by the end of this week there will be a press release organized on this topic so that there is focus on the report before the March 15th deadline.

Carla Wright: What is the purpose of this report? It outlines issues, but does it outline recommendations?

Laura: The term "recommendations" was vetoed by the Department of Ag. It was internally somewhat controversial.

Irv: Can we expand on controversial?

Perry: The government is somewhat sensitive to the fact that in many of these cases, what we would like to see done are things that the department has no control over. So the use of the word “recommend” implies overstepping their legal parameters. In this case, they can suggest or encourage but not recommend.

Harriet: We would have better chances of creating change with DATCP’s approval and comfort than we would have without it, so I do not see a problem with using the word encourage versus recommend.

Laura: We have made some progress in addressing some of the inadequacies of the program with the FSA. They are working with Richard DeWilde on planting dates and a history of prices in this region.

Perry: An alternative is the AGR-Lite program, but it is very expensive to use. There were 4 vegetable / fruit producers that participated in the state last year and they were all 4 apple growers. It requires very high layout of money up front, which is hard for most growers.

Irv Possin: We should make sure that we give Ben Brancel a head’s up on the study before the press release goes out. Laura reassured him that they have been communicating with the department and they have been very cooperative with these issues.
Harriet: We have all had about 6 weeks to review this. Does anyone have any issues?
Margaret: Under food safety issues, is there a reason why we have to state specific companies, or could we more generalize?
Laura: Laura will edit that section to be more general. One area that she will follow-up on is discussing with UW and Extension if they would be willing to give some GAP training.

Perry: There is one GAP inspector for the entire state.

1:45 Continuation of discussion of OAC initiatives and priorities

Harriet Behar: Spoke with Maury Wills from the Department of Iowa Organic Program.
In Iowa, there have been a lot of issues with drift due in particular to soybean aphid pressure and the heavy spraying done for that pest. They would like to set up a registry of sensitive areas, including bees and organic acres. Perhaps a registry of sensitive areas would also help with pipeline planning, etc. if we could create one in Wisconsin.

In Iowa, they are going to produce a sign to mount flat on top of a post, face up in the field with a standard symbol (standard to multiple states) so that aerial custom applicators have another clear symbol to avoid these sensitive areas. They are also working with the aerial applicators to give them plat maps that are colored in with sensitive areas so that they could see on a county or township basis areas that they should avoid.

If there is a registry and a field is signed and a letter of agreement…every level of effort on the part of the organic grower would be further evidence if non-compliance and off-site spraying become an issue.

Carla Wright: Government agencies also spray for pests such as Gypsy moth. This gets passed down to the county level. You have to be careful with the perception of “spraying.” It isn’t all bad and it is not all unapproved. We have to keep this in mind. Harriet agrees as she has been called many times when an organic grower may just be spraying molasses or fish emulsion.

Robert Wills: All pesticide applicators have to have training and licensing. If someone is regularly in non-compliance, could you take their license away?

Perry Brown: Creating a registry of sensitive areas is not a distribution issue. Organic farmers do not tend to share information to the government so it is more so a collection issue. We could tell you where the farm headquarters are in the state, but we could not tell you where the fields are.

Harriet Behar: It could be a matter of marketing. I bet if we show the benefit we could have 80% buy in within 3 years.

Kevin Shelley: Doesn’t the homeowner registry already do this? If someone is going to apply next to your yard, you have to be notified.

Continuation of Priority Discussion:

Carla: Could we go around the room and have everyone give two sentences of their most pertinent issues?
Laura: We have already identified a lot of issues.

Jerry: I don’t think that this portion of the meeting should always be left towards the end.

Laura will move it up in the agenda at the next advisory meeting. We need to flesh things out to written proposals and budget objectives. We need to create a cohesive plan to move forward.

This is another issue of how an organic registry could be utilized. This could be publicized through media (MOSES newsletter, MOSA newsletter, etc), Country Today, Agri-View, CSA newsletters, etc.

Perry: By law, if an organic registry were formed it would be a public list. Would there be some advantage to giving this list to all certified applicators in this state? Here is a list of the growers, we don’t know where their fields are, but you can contact them if you would like more information.

Robert Wills: Robert has a list of concerns that could be brought up at future meetings. One issue is that all of my farms have different times when their certifications renew. Some of them are Amish and hard to get a hold of. Robert thinks it would be helpful to have some type of notification to the buyers when a farmer is certified or uncertified. Group consensus is that right now it is the responsibility of the producer and the processor. The certifying agency is not aware of whom their farms are selling to. This could be part of what we bring up in front of the NOSB.

Issues identified in flood report.

Keep up with the seed bill.

Tim Zander: His largest issue is with protecting organic integrity. Oversight of organic integrity at the NOP level.

Trisha Bross: Smaller growers saying they are organic when they are not certified and they are not following most of the rules. Laura: There is a new publication that ATTRA put out assessing if small produce growers are following the rules.

Margaret Bert-Mittelstadt: Oversight of organic integrity is her key issue.

Irv Possin: Registry of organic acres. It used to be that bee keepers had to be notified if people were spraying close to the hive.

Don Jaworski: GMO products – educate the consumer.

Robert Wills: Most of his issues are due to oversight at the NOP level. How many things are done in secret? There is a lack of open meetings and public participation at the NOP level. Why is so much done behind closed doors? Who would like to participate on the NOP transparency sub-committee???. Christine will send out an e-mail asking all OAC members.

Jerry McGeorge: I would like to figure out ways to communicate and cooperate with other states that have groups like this. We got great suggestions from Jim, some of which gave us concrete action steps. It would be great to know if Illinois or Iowa or Minnesota sees an issue so we can keep our eye on it as well. When the chorus of voices gets louder, you will see action.
The other issue that Jerry is worried about is money. We need to put some time and energy into thinking about budgeting and pushing for Laura getting a little more money. The registry and many of our ideas cost money. Laura: one success story there can be the buy local initiative. It was a coalition of groups that came together for success. The grazing lands initiative is another example. Christine: this is another reason for quarterly updates to the Dept of Ag. In politics, we will have more success if we can show action steps and give specific examples of accomplishments. I also think it is likely that a committee that can show pertinent activity is most successful in receiving funding.

Jerry McGeorge: Does anyone have comprehensive knowledge of what states have an organic council? Is there any resource where we could go to find out? Department of Ag web-sites?

Steve Walker: I know this organic farmer down the road, but I am not going to tell you who he is? What do you do with anonymous public tips? Harriet: one of the dangers is that they could be out there spraying an approved substance. Jerry: If you have a complaint, there are formal steps that you can take.

Christine: GMO crop / cross contamination.

Robert Wills: Monsanto is on the move trying to get labeling laws passed state by state. They are fighting using the USDA / FDA standing that you can not label anything that you can not prove: rBHG, organic, GMO free, Kosher, etc.

2:30/2:45 Public comments.
Margaret had a request from the folks that produced “Renewing the Country Side” (Lisa Kivrist.) They would like to present a copy of the book to everyone in the state legislature. They have a grant that would allow them to do this, and she is wondering the proper steps to doing something like that.

Perry: It is public information and they are absolutely welcome to mail every legislator a copy. Their addresses are public domain. It would be very difficult to come in contact with each person individually to hand them one. That would be more cumbersome. There is nothing stopping them from coming to the capital, but chances are they would probably only see an aide if they tried that way. There is a lot of cross-over in committees, and so that may not work either. The best bet is the US Mail, so that is what Margaret will relay to them.

Next Meeting: April 2nd.

Don Jaworski made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Trisha Bross seconded.

3:07 Adjourn

Subcommittee to draft a letter about transparency to Rod N.