Welcome
Several participants are unable to attend today, including Advisory Council members Paulette Bradley and Christine Mason, and Interagency team members Irv Possin, DOC; Carla Wright, DNR; Jennifer Heaton, DATCP. Heidi Zoerb represented Molly Jahn from UW CALS.
Attendees:
Tricia Bross – Luna Circle Farm
Harriet Behar – MOSES
Kevin Shelly – Nutrient and Pest Management Program– UW Ext/CALS
Jim Munsch- Deer Run Farm
Amanda Smith – Organic Valley
Jerry McGeorge – Organic Valley
Bob Wills - -Cedar Grove Cheese
Pat Murphy - NRCS
Russ Raeder - FSA
Jed Colquhoun – UW Ext/CALS
Dave Engel – dairy farmer
Rich Lange – Lange Farms
Don Jaworski – WTCS
Laura Paine – DATCP
Erin Silva – UW CALS
Margaret Bert-Mittelstadt - Outpost Natural Foods Cooperative
Bonnie Wideman – Midwest Organic Services Assn.
Heidi Sworb – Deans Office/CALS

Agenda review: No additional agenda items were identified

Minutes approval: Harriet Behar moved – Dave Engel seconded – unanimous approval

Filling the Mike Hansen seat on the council and electing a new co-chair
Advisory Council Farmer representative and council co-chair resigned with regrets over the summer. DATCP advised the Council to go back to the original nominee list from last year and consider the next three highest scoring farmer nominees to fill his seat. Potentials are Jim Goodman, organic dairy and beef producer from Wonewoc; Jerri Cook, organic dairy producer from Rib Lake; Michael Taft, organic beef producer from Osseo.
Discussion of the candidates: Discussion included: desire to have northern part of state represented; interest in having an additional dairy producer; representation of direct marketing sector; certification connection. Council decided to decide by vote, with only the council members voting. The first vote ended with a tie between Jim Goodman and Jerri Cook. A second vote left Jim Goodman as the first choice.

 ACTION: Laura will contact Jim and determine whether he is still interested in serving. If not we will invite Jerri Cook. If she is unable to serve, we will invite Michael Taft.

The Council selected Jerry McGeorge as the new co-chair.

Organic Advisory Council Logo ideas
Laura presented 3 possible logo ideas developed by DATCP's graphic designer Laurie Lawrence and asked for discussion:

- Role of council is advisory directly to DATCP and indirectly advisory, as well as collaborative to the other state, university and federal agencies represented

Logo-specific discussion
- General approval of the 3 leaf logo (5-3 vote), with large leaf with an outline of the state as a second choice.

Suggestions for modifications included:
- Incorporate color brown
- Use bright, primary colors (especially change the green to primary)
- Add the word “advisory” to reflect the state agency affiliation and to extend existing identity
- Don’t need map of state
- Consider including other symbol(s) to reflect livestock – clover and corn possibly
- Consider wheel of cheese

 ACTION: Laura will ask Laurie Lawrence of DATCP to redraft with these recommendations and bring back to the Council.

Reports from Summer Workgroups

Organic Report Update – Erin Silva
Biennial organic report is part of the task force recommendations. CIAS and DATCP are working on a joint report to cover 2006 and 2007. Plan is for report to be released at Upper Midwest Organic Conference.

- Focus will be on organic dairying and grazing.
- Will have summary of UW research programs and DATCP programs
- Want council members involved in grazing to write some “perspective” pieces.
- Want to include info on the flooding issues.
- Will put in photos and info on the council.
- Will ask the advisory council to write a preface/exec summary for report.
Issue - data collection: The USDA Economic Research Service collects data on organic farming, but because a limited number of farms are used as the sample, the acreage of individual farms can cause the acreage and farm numbers to fluctuate from year to year, presenting an inaccurate picture of what's happening in organic agriculture. For this report we will need to rely on this data. Laura is preparing a survey of growers to collect data to replace the ERS data for future reports.

Also looking at creating an organic directory and want to gather this info via survey.

Suggestions for ways to collect data in addition to surveying:
- Ask the 12 or 13 certifier agencies in the state for data on acreage.
- Generate economic data by using acreage and sales - amount paid to a certifying agency is generally based on sales.
- Economic impact – need to apply the multiplier impact - contact UW ag specialists
- Suggestion of tying into the US census ag survey, which is due Feb 1st
- Commodity associations such as WI Corn Growers and WI Soybean Growers may have helpful info
- Be sure don’t double count producers and processors levels
- Providing info needs to be voluntary
- If you use NOP lists there could be distortion – processor lists include contract processors
- Suggestion to include info on conservation and market stabilization programs be included probably in appendix.

Consumer education group – Margaret Bert Mittlestadt
Difficulty getting members together over the summer.

ACTION: A subset of the group will to start working and then report back to the members that are not available. Group agreed and will share further info by email.

Mentoring – Harriet Behar
County agents want to see this done regionally rather than county by county. Also suggested do focus groups and if have speakers, make them research-based. Key is to have structure that is focused and productive to keep people engaged. Erin will discuss at the UW-ext meeting. May try to have multiple counties work together. Will look at breaking it up by different crop types.

MOSES has 2 new projects of interest: (1) A feed project to increase organic feed production in the driftless area. (2) A mentoring project where the mentors can be paid. There will be 9 mentors and 18 “mentees” – is a pilot project and will be collecting a lot of data on the process. Mentees have to pay $200 to participate for a year. The mentees will be beginning organic farmers - could be brand new farmer or could be transitioning.

MOSES also got funding for promotion and media work. Also has been working with UW River Falls on developing a college level sustainable farming curriculum – suggested Margaret get together with Faye Jones on this.
Legal Framework – Margaret /Laura
Discussed the role of the advisory council – currently this group is an Ad Hoc advisory council. Suggestion that the council may want to be created as a standing advisory council (continues for more than 3 year – the general limit on ad hoc councils. Discussion points:

- Could advise the department as they update rules on related topics – such as ag resource mgmt.
- Department will be starting to work on budget initiatives for 08-10 budget – could come up with recommendations for initiatives that could feed into that budget.
- Need to address the communications issue. Depending on liaisons with the various agencies to communicate info to the council. Need to discuss and formalize roles.
- Need to determine how to better integrate the council with the ag board and other decision-makers.
- At MOSES get a lot of questions on a variety of things relating to organic because there isn’t a clearinghouse of info on this topic.

Suggestions re: DATCP
- Get the Advisory Council on the Ag board agenda (possibly when biennial report is completed)
- Brief Sec Nilsestuen and he can pass info on to ag board
- Have an OAC member attend ag board and have them speak during the public comment period.
- Council may have a role in getting the word out on a variety of projects to benefit organic agriculture.

Two different places to interact – (1) work on the front end to have impact on rules, policies; (2) on organic issues that are of interest generally, role in providing input to the secretary, board, etc.

**ACTION:** Communications committee and legal framework committee work together and come up with recommendations to bring back to the council.

Farm Bill Recommendations Letter
Committee developed a letter last spring that was signed by the Secretary and sent to USDA Secretary Johanns and our congressional delegation.

Agency Reports

FSA - Russ Raeder
Distributed info on disaster assistance programs, including livestock indemnity program which does cost-sharing for livestock producers with losses due to natural disaster. The recent flood losses are not included in this because occurred after Feb 28, 2007 cut-off. They will be included in another program.
Also rolling out a crop disaster program for 2005 and 2006 for crops planted prior to Feb 28 2007, including forages and perennial crops. Dairy disaster assistance program that may role out in Dec or Jan. It appears it will be applied based on state rolling herd averages, but details are not known yet. Payments for livestock indemnity program are waiting for the CFR regs to be published.

Question about multiple planting period issue – Need to have separate production period records. So far is only in Vernon County - decision currently goes through county committees so suggestion that growers work with their local committees to get planting periods established.

There is an emergency conservation program signup in 4 counties to cost share to remove debris from the flooding. Even if you're not in the 4 counties, you should signup anyway because if the program is ultimately approved in that county they cannot approve assistance for work that is done prior to the application.

**August Flood Impacts on Organic Farmers**

- Update on the situation from some of the affected farmers
- Recommendations from the OAC on how agencies can help
- Planning for development of written summary and recommendations to be submitted to Secretary Nilsestuen and Governor Doyle

Guests: Richard DeWilde – Harmony Valley and Josh Engel – Driftless Organics

Harmony Valley - estimates losses were $800,000. The CSA members are absorbing about $250,000 in the losses and have been very supportive. Plus they have sent in $50,000 in donations. If they are able to get some insurance coverage it will only total $115,000. Leaves about $400,000 loss.

Driftless Organics – hardest hit area was in cover crops – a considerable loss - $200,000 loss for produce and $60-70,000 in machinery loss and rehabilitation of packing shed. Now trying to harvest with a limited set up.

Impact of flooding on long-term markets – CSA is very supportive. Dealing direct with farmers markets and coops which have been very supportive. So no real concern in terms of long-term market loss.

**Discussion of issues related to flooding**

- Because of possibility of contaminants growers cannot sell vegetables from fields that have been flooded even if they are in good condition and appear undamaged. Increases losses significantly.
- Definition of flood waters - overflowing of a field by water outside of the growers control and is likely to have caused contamination.
- Discussion about confusion over guidelines and lack of knowledge of guidelines about what could and could not be sold.
• Issues of long-term contamination of soil– time of year helps because there was very little pesticide application on conventional farms in August.
• Discussion of continuing organic certification on flooded areas due to possible soil contamination - Laura called a few other certifiers (besides MOSA) and didn’t get any sense that this would be a problem.

Residue testing:
• Bonnie indicated they would be doing residue testing and in Minnesota the state will be part-funding this because it is very expensive. Will be working with the state to determine if there are any spill events or other contaminant events that make it a larger concern. Certifier bears these costs unless state is willing to help. In the declared disaster areas only identified 6 vegetable growers that had flooding.
• With residue testing - concern that we may have situations where there is detected pesticide contamination which may have nothing to do with the flooding (historic use unrelated to grower). Nonetheless there could then be a perception that now there is pesticide contamination, resulting in negative impact on that grower’s reputation.
• Question whether there is a need for this unless there is an event such as a spill.
• Needs to be on a case by case basis. Also concern about what are you going to test for, how many tests should be done.
• Comment that there is very little concern by the consumers on this – out of thousands of customers, only a few have raised this.
• DATCP’s pesticide investigation team has offered to help with this.
• Consumers have not raised this issue in part because there is a level of trust in the organic community and its practices. The idea of testing is a pro-active effort to ensure consumers. We are not well-served by advising to do no testing.

Council Report on Flooding

The suggestion was made that the council put together a report on this event – widespread loss - range of loss of income from a few % up to 60% or more.

Discussion on what we learned from the flooding incident– impact of flooding on food safety and quality and what needs improving in communications of FDA regs:
• Certifiers played an important role in informing growers about issues.
• Need communication channel between FDA and growers
• Conventional and non-organic farmers didn’t get the info – how do we improve getting the word out.
• People who are buying at wholesale and farmers markets should be a part of this communication.
• There is was a post-harvest handling workshop at the WI Fresh Market Vegetable Growers Conference (WFMVGC) which included this last year.
• This coming year, the WFMVGC is combined with the Feb direct marketing conference and there is no opportunity for input on their conference agenda.
• This report should include need for educational program.
• FDA regs impact everyone – should identify a process for getting this info out – should look into this in USDA
• Could be put into UWX newsletter.
• FSA crop insurance focuses on loss of crop – these losses are much broader – loss of topsoil, streambank degradation; gravel deposits, etc. Damage issue also has to be looked at.
• NRCS – will have to consider what ways funding can be directed to assist with this.
• Why farmers don’t always report their losses – farm culture, others have it worse; why fill out the paperwork if no money available.

Summary: Assistance/Recommendations Report
• What happened and scope: estimates of damage, number of farms impacted, including livestock farmers that had to replace fences, etc.
• FSA and FEMA had some attempt to have people report.
• Risk management - farmers say too much paperwork but many growers don’t carry insurance and this is a problem – they aren’t managing their risk.
• Technical assistance to help with managing risk and addressing one time problem - NRCS, DNR, FSA
• Information on contamination would have been useful ahead of time. FDA issue is important
• More communication with other certifiers
• Certifier registration program – provide a list of all their farms, with info on types of crops, acres, etc. – Could be voluntary at first – should it be law? Minnesota and Michigan both require it – Michigan charges a fee, Minnesota does not.
• Could identify numbers of farmers who went out of business to quantify impact
• Support the establishment of a crop disaster program for this flooding event – similar to the FSA drought assistance program that Russ reported on. The NAP program isn’t very effective – AgriLite was an effort to privatize insurance – doesn’t work well for the vegetable growers because premiums are too high. Need to talk to local county committees for FSA to determine if there is any chance of developing a program like this.
• Make changes to NAP – uses yields averaged over several years, but doesn’t use organic prices. Also pricing is an issue - $300 to get into the program regardless of size of farm. Record keeping is burdensome.
• Certifiers – need uniformity on decision-making re: residue testing – need communication and criteria – look for state support for testing costs – also cost-share program for certification fees
• Other emergency situations: what are the lessons of what has happened in this event which could be useful in other emergency situations. Organic producers are already doing a lot of the tracking that helps in emergency situations.

ACTION: Recommendation that we put this together and share it in the context of the federal budget and Farm Bill with Secretary, legislators. Laura will summarize this report on the flood and will email it out for comments with a deadline.