



# MIFFS MEMO

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## What's Inside . . .

- 1 MIFFS Director's Update
- 2 How Large is Your Ecological Footprint?
- 3 Serving Michigan's Multicultural Agriculture
- 4 Dairy Farmers Revive Old Customs
- 5 2002 Farm Bill Conservation Provisions
- 7 Open Letter from Frederick Kirschenmann,  
Director, Leopold Center  
for Sustainable Agriculture
- 8 Mott Chair Selection Progress
- 9 Entrepreneurial Agriculture Key  
to Saving Farmland
- 10 On-Farm Poultry Processing Facility
- 11 Organic Farming is a Realistic Alternative
- 12 Elk, Deer Farming Information On-line

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## MIFFS Director's Update

Before you get the next MEMO, MIFFS, as an official non-profit organization, will have turned 4 years old. Our purpose -- promoting diverse community efforts fostering and sustaining food and agriculture systems that improve economic, ecological, and social well-being -- is being realized through wide-ranging efforts. MIFFS members, leaders, and partners are making a difference within their lives and their communities.

Our efforts to catalyze a diversity of organizations, institutions, agencies, and individuals in pursuit of a Michigan Food and Ag Products Innovation Center, now known as Michigan Product Agriculture, are moving forward. Join "the Partnership" and become involved in shaping the future of Michigan agriculture. MIFFS' 2501 program in southwestern Michigan is making a difference in the farming operations and lives of several farmers who have taken advantage of the Tilling the Soils of Opportunity series to develop and improve their farm business plans.

MIFFS and its partners are about to embark on a "Buy Local" campaign that will come together later this year and be positioned for implementation next year. The utilization (production, processing, and consumption) of local food will be emphasized. Our partnership with Rural Partners of Michigan is yielding local Farmland Preservation programs for eight counties. They will now be positioned to participate in state funding when it becomes available via PA 262 legislation. The Edible Urban Forest project and our Farm Markets and Cooperatives GREEN project are near completion.

We'll be sharing information on these efforts as well as others at Ag Expo, July 16-18, at MSU. I encourage you to visit Ag Expo to review the latest information and see firsthand many entrepreneurial innovations that will shape the future of Michigan's agriculture. While you are there, visit MIFFS in the Crop and Soils tent. As always I invite you to become part of MIFFS and get involved, help us help you make a difference in your part of the food system and the community you serve. Give us a call or send us an email to let us know your interest as you enjoy the best of Michigan and its food systems this summer.

Tom Guthrie, MIFFS Executive Director

## How Large is Your Ecological Footprint?

*(Tom Paine magazine recently included an article about Sonoma County, California's "ecological footprint." Following are several excerpts from that article, written by Ann Hancock, a sustainability educator who lives in Sonoma County, north of San Francisco.)*

If the whole world lived like Sonoma County, CA, we'd need four more planets, according to a new study comparing the county's consumption with its supply of natural resources. Sonoma County's 460,000 residents each use, on average, the equivalent of 22 acres of land to produce the materials needed to sustain their modern lifestyles, according to the study funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This is first time the EPA has helped a community determine its "ecological footprint," or measure of the land and sea needed to provide people's food, travel, housing, and other consumables.

Sonoma County's footprint was calculated by Redefining Progress, an Oakland-based think tank that focuses on a range of sustainability issues. To measure the county's footprint, they adjusted U.S. government figures using locally derived data. The average resident, for example, lives in a 1,600 square-foot home, drives 7,646 miles annually and uses 2,743 kilowatts of electricity a year. While these figures are actually below the U.S. average, the county's residents each have an ecological footprint of about 22 acres. Average Americans, according to Redefining Progress, each have footprints of 24 acres. In contrast, Europeans and Japanese typically have footprints half the size of Americans.

Sonoma County's numbers are surprising, because this is a rich agricultural region and many residents would like to believe they could live off the fruits of the local biosphere. But the EPA-funded study revealed that the community's consumption exceeds its ecological capacity by about four times. These results shocked many residents.

Some people have reacted by calculating the size of their individual footprint via a quick online quiz. After their results came in and the initial shock and disbelief subsided, a certain competitiveness set in -- call it the "mine's smaller" race. Windsor City Council member

Debbie Fudge experienced this competitiveness when she compared her footprint to that of a local newspaper editor, Barry Dugan. "I was really depressed to find out my Footprint was 19," she said. "I really expected it to be smaller. Barry told me his was 15. Because of this, I made sure to ride my bike to work three days last week, and looked more closely at where my food comes from. Because I live alone and fly for vacations, my number goes up. Barry says he doesn't fly much so maybe that explains the difference."

Fudge thought her local government work supporting compact development and the bicycle coalition should offset her 19-acre footprint, and maybe it should. Individual action, although essential, will never be sufficient to significantly shrink a community's footprint. As Sonoma resident and transportation expert Joel Woodhull noted, "Even when one's life habits are severely adjusted, there is little change in footprint. This is because one's individual power is severely constrained by the built environment."

So what can be done? American communities can reduce their big "eco-feet" to become more like Europeans and the Japanese by enacting some basic change in local planning and zoning laws. Cities and towns can encourage walkable, mixed-use development that minimizes sprawl and the need to drive. They can support public transit and bike lanes, and mandate renewable energy sources for a set proportion of the community's power. Some businesses, governments, and community groups have already begun using the footprint as a tool. For example, two Swiss banks, Union Bancaire Privée and Sarasin Bank, use it to help assess countries' credit-worthiness. The National Assembly for Wales, a newly-formed government, chose the footprint as its key indicator for measuring progress.

Find your ecological footprint at [www.myfootprint.com](http://www.myfootprint.com)

## Serving Michigan's Multicultural Agriculture

MIFFS 2501 project, *Serving Michigan's Multicultural Agriculture*, opened its doors in February 2002 at the MSU Extension Van Buren County office. After receiving funds of \$100,000 three months into the project fiscal year, the project began late but strong. Project Director Barbara Maddox and Project Assistant Barbara Norman were hired and began work on February 11, 2002. The project seeks to support African American and Latino farmers in southwest Michigan.

Working closely with the Southwest Michigan Farmers Cooperative, project activities to date have included:

- \* Pesticide Training at MSU Cooperative extension in Paw Paw, for seven farmers, taught by Larry Swain, MDA, and Mark Longstroth, MSU Extension. One of the farmers, Mr. Ken Lyles, took the exam and passed. He is now certified to apply restricted use pesticides.
- \* Six project participants/producers attended the Michigan Organic Conference in March at MSU. Each producer and the project staff joined MIFFS and attended the MIFFS annual meeting.
- \* Tom Guthrie, MIFFS, and Sandy Penn USDA/NRCS, conducted a SARE proposal-writing workshop on March 20, at MSU Extension, Paw Paw. Thirteen participants/producers participated. They submitted four SARE Producer Grant Program proposals by the March 29 deadline.
- \* Meetings held at The Farm Research Cooperative, Bloomingdale, included participation in the Winter Camp for training future scientists, future youth projects, annual Rodeo fund-raiser, and Dr. Ray's SARE blueberry proposal.
- \* Four member of the Southwest MI Farmers Cooperative attended the Ohio Minority farmers Conference in Wilberforce, Ohio on March 22, where they networked with Tennessee farmers and Tomikia Walker, USDA/NRCS, about diversity crops and marketing
- \* Visits to USDA offices in Paw Paw, included meetings NRCS and Groundwater Stewardship to discuss farmers/landowners who need their help.
- \* Meetings with Victor Garcia, Texas contractor, USDA, and Juan Marinez, MSU, were held to discuss Hispanic Farmers, African American farmers and land demographics.
- \* Twenty limited resource farmers from southwest Michigan participated in the NXLEVEL Guide for Agricultural Entrepreneurs, Tilling the Soil of Opportunity, a ten module course that ran from March 21 through May 30, at Covert Public School who provided classroom space and computers use at no cost to the project.

Submitted by

Tom Guthrie, Executive Director MIFFS

Barbara J. Maddox, Project Director 2501 Project

## Dairy Farmers Revive Old Customs

*(The Great Lakes Radio Consortium provides great stories about innovative farmers and others. This story, by Ed Janus, is from June 3, 2002. Check <http://glrc.org> to read or listen to their stories.)*

If you drive out into our Midwestern countryside these days expecting pastoral scenes of placid cows grazing leisurely on grassy hillsides, you'll be at least 50 years too late. Traditional pastoral herding practices, based on the summertime abundance of self-renewing grasses, have mostly disappeared. It's been replaced by year-round production based on dried feeds grown from intensively worked soils. However, if you were to visit Pleasant Ridge Farm in Dodgeville, Wisconsin or a small number of other farms around the Great Lakes region, you would find a successful and quite modern, revival of pasture-based agriculture. You would also find an incredibly tasty cheese.

Although they own a dairy farm and milk 200 cows, Mike Gingrich and Dan Patenaude really don't farm at all like their neighbors. They're grass farmers and herders. Their cows feed themselves on well-managed, systematically rotated pastures of flavorful summer grass - on farmland that does not know the plow, or soil erosion. So fresh is their grass that their cows convert it into milk that is unusually rich in essential dairy flavors.

As Mike explains, "This rotational grazing was a way that we preferred to run a dairy. It's easier on the soil, it's easier on the animals, and easier on the farmer, I think, too. All of our land is pastureland. We graze our cows all summer long. That is unusual. So they're eating a live plant. Pasture produced milk is sort of like going back in time. You know, a hundred years ago and earlier, all milk was pasture produced."

As traditional dairy farmers, Mike and Dan's labors had been both anonymous and poorly compensated. Their milk was combined with that of hundreds of other farmers and processed into a standardized, personality-free product. But, on the way to proving that herding could be economically viable, they learned that this method of farming also made a real difference in the richness and flavor of their milk. "I had always heard from old-time cheese makers that the best milk for making cheese was the June milk when the cows were on that new pasture. And that's the ideal stage... for both nutrition for the cow and the flavor development of these cheeses coincidentally. That's why, for instance, dairy products from New Zealand will have a stronger dairy flavor because their national milk supply is grass-based. Whereas in the United States, our national milk supply is

stored feeds predominantly, and they're much milder, they don't have these dairy flavors."

Because of their system of rotational grazing that allows them to move the cows from pasture to pasture, their cows are regularly introduced to new and flavorful grass. That means that they have that strong tasting June-like milk from late spring through October. Finding a way to get that milk with its unique qualities directly into the mouths of consumers was the next step for Mike and Dan. They decided that making their own cheese was the answer. So, Mike got his state cheese maker's license, apprenticed in a small road-side cheese factory and became a farmstead cheese maker. "A farmstead cheese comes from the milk from a single farm. It has the potential of having unique and different and interesting flavors that are not available in production cheeses. And that's because the cheese maker is the same person that milks the animals. Because we use only our milk, and we manage our cows so differently than a typical farm, we really get a substantially different milk that we produce, and then of course the cheese that we make is only from that milk."

To make a cheese worthy of their milk, Mike chose a French alpine cheese called Beauford as his model because it too is made from the milk of grass-fed cows that gives it a pronounced but subtle, earthy flavor and color. Pleasant Ridge Reserve cheese, like its French cousin, is cave-aged and turned by hand at least fifty times. And like its French cousin it has something lacking in mass-produced cheeses. It has "terroir" - the flavor of a particular place and the character of the people who make it. Apparently there is a place for "terroir" in America. Last year Pleasant Ridge Reserve was awarded the Best in Show by the American Cheese Society. This year Mike and Dan will sell 2,000 ten-pound wheels of their cheese to top scale restaurants, gourmet cheese retailers and on their Web site, at prices many times what they would get if they just waved goodbye to their milk at their farm gate. And, happily for cheese lovers, Mike and Dan, like a handful of other Great Lakes states farmstead cheese makers have found a way to package some of the splendor from their grass.

*For more information on Uplands Cheese from Pleasant Ridge Farm, see [www.uplandscheese.com](http://www.uplandscheese.com)*

## 2002 Farm Bill Conservation Provisions

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill) represents the single most significant commitment of resources toward conservation on private lands in the Nation's history. The legislation responds to a broad range of emerging natural resource challenges faced by farmers and ranchers, including soil erosion, wetlands, wildlife habitat, and farmland protection. Private landowners will benefit from a portfolio of voluntary assistance, including cost-share, land rental, incentive payments, and technical assistance. The 2002 Farm Bill places a strong emphasis on the conservation of working lands, ensuring that land remain both healthy and productive.

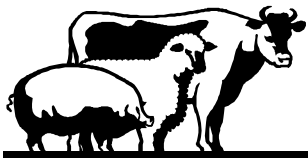
The conservation provisions build upon past conservation gains and respond to the call of farmers and ranchers across the country for additional cost-share resources. The 2002 Farm Bill also ensures greater access to the programs by making more farmers and ranchers eligible for participation.

### *Agriculture Management Assistance (AMA)*

- ♣ Provides additional funding for AMA, in addition to funds provided through the Agriculture Risk Protection Act of 2000

### *Conservation Corridor Program*

- ♣ Requires the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a conservation corridor demonstration program on the Delmarva Peninsula in the states of Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia located on the east side of the Chesapeake Bay



### *Conservation of Private Grazing Land (CPGL)*

- ♣ Provides policy for technical assistance relating to conservation on private grazing lands, and mandates establishment of a separate funding line-item for this purpose.

### *Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)*

- ♣ Reauthorizes the program through 2007
- ♣ Raises authorization for enrollment to an overall acreage cap of 39.2 million acres
- ♣ Expands the Farmable Wetland Pilot Program to become available Nationwide with an aggregate acreage cap of 1 million acres
- ♣ Allows landowners to continue with existing ground cover where practicable and consistent with wildlife reserve benefits of CRP

- ♣ Provides for managed haying (including for biomass) and grazing

### *Conservation Security Program (CSP)*

- ♣ Establishes CSP for fiscal years 2003 through 2007 to reward stewardship and provide an incentive for addressing additional resource concerns on agricultural working lands

### *Desert Terminal Lakes*

- ♣ Provides \$200 million in funds of the Commodity Credit Corporation to be transferred to the Secretary of the Interior to provide water to at-risk natural desert terminal lakes; prohibits the purchase or lease of water rights with the funds.

### *Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)*

- ♣ Reauthorizes the program through 2007 with greater funding resources
- ♣ Eliminates geographic priority areas
- ♣ Allows for expenditure of funds in the first year of the contract
- ♣ Eliminates the cap on large confined livestock operations
- ♣ Provides an overall payment limitation of \$450,000 per producer, regardless of the number of farms or contracts, over the authorized life of the 2002 Farm Bill
- ♣ Specifies contract length, from a minimum of one year beyond completion of the project to a maximum of 10 years
- ♣ Prohibits the process of bidding-down (competitive cost share reduction among program applicants)
- ♣ Allows up to 90 percent cost-share for beginning or limited resource farmers and ranchers
- ♣ Allows the Secretary of Agriculture to use a portion of EQIP funds in each of fiscal years 2003 through 2006 for innovation grants
- ♣ Provides an additional \$50 million in EQIP funding to assist producers in the Klamath Basin

### *Farmland Protection Program (FPP)*

- ♣ Reauthorizes the program through 2007 with greater funding resources
- ♣ Removes the existing acreage limitation, expands the definition of eligible land, and makes agricultural land that contains historic or archaeological resources eligible for enrollment
- ♣ Includes nonprofit organizations as eligible entities for program participation
- ♣ Allows the Secretary of Agriculture to provide grants (through an authorization of appropriations) for use in carrying out farm viability programs

### *Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP)*

- ♣ Authorizes enrollment of up to 2 million acres of restored, improved, or natural grassland, rangeland, and pastureland, including prairie

**Grassroots Sourcewater Protection**

- ♣ Authorizes an annual appropriation for fiscal years 2002 to 2006 to use technical capabilities of each state rural water association that operates a well-head or groundwater protection program

**Great Lakes Basin Program for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control**

- ♣ Authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture, in consultation with the Great Lakes Commission and in cooperation with the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Secretary of the Army, to carry out a program in the Great Lakes basin for soil erosion and sediment control

**Ground and Surface Water Conservation**

- ♣ Provides a special initiative through EQIP for ground and surface water conservation
- ♣ Institutes cost-share payments, incentive payments, and loans to producers to carry out eligible water conservation activities, including irrigation improvements, conversion to less water intensive crops, and dryland farming
- ♣ Resource Conservation and Development Program (RC&D)
- ♣ Provides permanent reauthorization of the program and makes technical and conforming changes to the program

**Small Watershed Rehabilitation**

- ♣ Provides mandatory spending from the Commodity Credit Corporation in addition to existing authorization of appropriations

**Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)**

- ♣ Reauthorizes the program through 2007
- ♣ Increases the overall program acreage cap to 2,275,000 acres
- ♣ Caps annual acreage enrollment at 250,000 acres

**Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)**

- ♣ Provides for up to 15 percent of annual WHIP funds for increased cost-share payments to producers to protect and restore essential plant and animal habitat using agreements with a duration of at least 15 years

**Forestry Title (VIII)**

- ♣ Replaces the Stewardship Incentives Program and the Forestry Incentives Program.
- ♣ Establishes a new Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP) to be carried out through state foresters.

**Energy Title (IX)**

- ♣ Enables the Secretary to make payments to bioenergy producers who purchase agricultural commodities for the purpose of expanding production of biodiesel and fuel grade ethanol.

**Technical Assistance**

Each program includes funding for Commodity Credit Corporation funding for technical assistance.

Provisions for reimbursement to providers of technical assistance rendered by sources other than the NRCS (third party vendors).

**For More Information**

This information has been provided by the Michigan Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Department of Agriculture agency that works hand in-hand with people to conserve natural resources on private land.



**It's Here!**

Get all the info at:

[www.usda.gov/farmbill](http://www.usda.gov/farmbill)

## Open Letter to Iowa's Citizens from Fred Kirschenmann, Director, Leopold Center

*(It's important for MIFFS members and friends to be aware of sustainable agriculture matters in other states. Fred Kirschenmann has visited Michigan many times to share ideas about developing more sustainable food and farming systems.)*

On May 28th, 2002, the Iowa Legislature decided that the work of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture was no longer a priority for Iowa and transferred \$1 million out of the Groundwater Protection Fund that makes our research possible. Ironically, that fund is derived from taxes imposed on farmers by the legislature to conduct research that enables farmers to "identify and reduce negative environmental impacts of agriculture practices" and to develop "emerging alternatives." Without the funds to continue this vital research, the Leopold Center faces a highly uncertain future.

As a North Dakota farmer, I am acquainted with adversity, and I know that sometimes it can bring out the best in all of us. Having made the decision to leave my farm to become part of the challenge to develop a new agriculture in Iowa, I have no intention of giving up without a fight. Tempting though it may be to return to my farm, the Leopold Center's work is too important to abandon, despite the verdict of the current legislature.

Last year's \$250,000 cut in the Center's budget was a warning that the Groundwater Protection Fund was vulnerable. Accordingly, we have made every effort to protect ongoing research so that we would not lose the value of work in progress. We believe that we will succeed in that effort. But we have no guarantees for the future.

[The Leopold Center, established in 1987 and located at Iowa State University, has funded research projects and educational events in nearly all of Iowa's 99 counties. For a list of projects and accomplishments, see the Leopold Center web site at [www.leopold.iastate.edu](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu).]

On a more personal note, it has been a little over two years since I was asked by the search committee to apply for the position of Director of the Leopold Center. The committee wanted at least one qualified farmer in the pool of excellent candidates. At first I thought they just wanted a token farmer so I agreed to submit my application, never thinking that I would have to face the tough decision between starting yet another new career or remaining on my farm. When I was selected as one of the six finalists, I knew I had to start taking that possibility seriously.

I came to Iowa for the interview-still not convinced that I would have to choose between my farm and this new possibility for my life. Then I met group after group of incredible people at Iowa State. I was especially struck by the number of scientists (mostly young) who were passionately dedicated to a different future for agriculture. They were committed to doing research that would make farming more profitable for family farmers, less damaging to the environment, and more conducive to building strong rural communities. These were the same values I held-values that I had been struggling to implement on my own farm in North Dakota.

It was at that point that I became a serious candidate for the position. I knew I didn't want to pass up the opportunity to work with a group of stellar colleagues who shared the same goals to which I was committed.

Since becoming Leopold Center director nearly two years ago, I have traveled all over the state and spoken with hundreds of Iowans-farmers, urban and suburban dwellers, senior citizens and students. We held community "conversations" throughout Iowa and listened to a cross-section of Iowans share their views of the future and failures of Iowa's agriculture. The staff at the Center listened and worked very hard with the people of Iowa to develop a new vision for Iowa agriculture, an agriculture that would enable farmers to produce more value and **retain** that value on the farm while simultaneously restoring the natural resources on which all agriculture depends. The philosophy of the Center's namesake-Aldo Leopold-served as the guiding light for our vision.

We will now put all of our energy into finding alternative support and additional outside funding so that the vital work of this internationally recognized center can continue. We already have received suggestions and offers of support from friends all around the country for which we are enormously grateful. But we will need your help, too.

First, let your voices be heard. Take the time to share your views about food, family farms, and Iowa's natural resources with the elected representatives in your district. Second, become informed about the food you buy. Ask for food that was produced by Iowa farmers who use sound land stewardship practices. Food retailers pay close attention to what their customers want. If just 15 people ask the manager of a supermarket for the same food items during the same week, there is a good likelihood that the retail outlet will make an effort to make it available. Of course, we welcome your suggestions about other ways you can help.

We have realized from the beginning that we could not implement a new future for Iowa's agriculture by ourselves. At best we can be a catalyst to help make it happen. The new vision will only become a reality as Iowans become involved. In the months ahead we will fight for the **opportunity** to implement this new vision, limiting the amount of time we can devote to the programs that can move it forward. But we are determined to stay the course.

The alternative pork program that we launched last September is moving forward and has already assumed momentum of its own. While the \$660,000 foundation grant we helped secure to provide support to farmers producing for new markets is now on hold due to our budget cuts, the foundation has pledged to continue working with us. We will do everything possible to secure the Leopold Center's future so the full grant can be restored.

In the days ahead, we will be guided by the wisdom of those who have preceded us. In recent days I have found the words of Harold Morowitz especially helpful "Conformity is not necessarily a virtue, hard work is almost never a vice, optimism is a moral imperative and a sense of humor helps." I can only add, "Don't ever give up."

Frederick Kirschenmann, Director, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

For more information, contact Fred Kirschenmann or Laura Miller, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture  
(515) 294-3711

## Mott Chair Selection Process



Michigan State University hosted four outstanding candidates interviewing for its C.S. Mott Endowed Chair of Sustainable Agriculture during late April and May, 2002. This Chair will have broad leadership opportunities for sustainable agriculture at MSU.

The position description is available at [www.msue.msu.edu/misanet/Mott.htm](http://www.msue.msu.edu/misanet/Mott.htm) along with each candidate's brief biography and videotapes of their seminars. Each candidate spent two days at MSU, interviewing and meeting with students, farmers, extensionists, researchers, instructors and administrators.

Candidates were Dr. Michael Hamm, Chairperson, Department of Nutritional Sciences, Rutgers University; Dr. Bruce Maxwell, Professor, Land Resources & Environmental Science Department, Montana State University; Dr. Douglas Landis, Professor, Entomology & Insect Ecology & Biological Control, Michigan State University; and Dr. Deborah Letourneau, Professor, Environmental Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz.

A selection announcement is expected later this summer.



## Entrepreneurial Agriculture Key to Saving Farmland

*Michigan can increase farm profits by helping families target consumers*

Guided by the invisible and powerful hand of the free market, a new crop of entrepreneurial farmers in Michigan and other states is tailoring production to meet changing consumer demands. The result not only is more profitable farm families but also safer food and farmland free of pavement and pollution.

Such successes depend on switching from conventional farm and marketing practices and breaking into new consumer markets, say economists. The number of money-making farms also could increase if local and state economic development agencies expanded their

work to include farmers, according to *The New Entrepreneurial Agriculture*, a special report on the promising trend by the Michigan Land Use Institute.

“Agriculture could be a very strong area of growth with more focus on it as a business,” says Jonathan Scott, economic development director for Mecosta County, who worked with entrepreneurial farmers in North Dakota before moving to Michigan. “It’s an entirely new perspective versus raising crops. It’s about selling products, labeling, processing, packaging. That’s what economic developers need to work on; they need to facilitate that.”

*For examples and more information, see the Michigan Land Use Institute’s New Entrepreneurial Agriculture report at <[www.mlui.org](http://www.mlui.org)> or contact Patty Cantrell at 231-882-4723 or <[patty@mlui.org](mailto:patty@mlui.org)>.*

### Michigan’s Advantage

Michigan has a unique competitive advantage in the new entrepreneurial agriculture. The state is second only to California in its broad range of agricultural products from pears to perennial plants. The state’s farmers also sit within 500 miles of half of the populations of both Canada and the United States.

Even more overlooked are the ready markets right at home. Michigan consumers spent \$25.7 billion on groceries and eating out in 2001. Only about 10 percent of that food comes directly from Michigan farmers, according to researchers. Capturing just a tiny fraction more of Michigan’s total food dollars can amount to a lot of money for independent farmers in Michigan who want to stay on their land.

Economic developers can help farms with market research and business development assistance, says Mr. Scott and other development specialists. According to the Institute’s special report, farm families in communities as diverse as Kalkaska, St. Johns, suburban Grand Rapids, and Goetzville in the Upper Peninsula are earning more money through direct sales, processing, and value marketing.

George and Sally Shetler’s two oldest sons, for instance, returned from city jobs to help build the family’s “From Moo to You” milk-bottling business in Kalkaska. The dairy now supports multiple family members in its business of delivering all-natural, non-homogenized milk in glass bottles to independent grocery stores in the area (p. 13).

### New Economic Agenda

“The national trend is that agriculture is going in two different directions,” said Dan Wyant, director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture.

One is toward larger operations that mass-produce commodities under contract with larger companies. The other direction is toward niche and specialty food markets; toward farmers adding value to their crops with their own

processing ventures; and toward locally grown and locally sold agricultural products.

“Michigan is uniquely situated to take advantage of niche, value-added, and local market opportunities,” said Mr. Wyant, whose agency oversees the state’s second-largest industry. “We have a lot of diversity in the things we produce, and we have a lot of agricultural production

where we have a lot of people, unlike some big rural states that don't have a large population base."

Some communities in Michigan recognize the opportunity and put essential business assistance behind their valuable farmers. In Grand Rapids the grassroots Ridge Economic Agricultural Partners group has developed an agritourism guide for the "ridge," a rich fruit-growing area northwest of Grand Rapids. The group also has put area farmers

through a business training course with the Michigan Small Business Development Center.

At the tip of Michigan's mitt, Northern Lakes Economic Alliance Director Tom Johnson says putting agriculture back into economic development is a matter of first realizing the opportunity exists and then making it happen. "When you see consumer demand unfulfilled, you go get it. That's what business is all about," he says

### Movers and Shakers

Like hometown banks or specialty retail stores, farms can succeed despite mega mergers all around them. They, too, can do it by adding value to their products with a friendly face or specialty processing, by finding profitable market niches anyone for goat's milk yogurt? and by finding new ways to consumers, such as selling shares in the next season's harvest.

Newlyweds Terri and Rick Hawbaker and Dawn and Eric Campbell, for example, are two young dairy families in the St. Johns area that now are investing in farmland because they've found a way to make more profit per cow. They're doing it with a low-cost grassland grazing system

that also has set up the families to earn 50 percent more for their milk as certified organic milk producers.

In the eastern Upper Peninsula, Rus and Amy Goetz were able to make a profit in their first year of raising poultry on pasture in movable, outdoor pens for local customers who want chicken free of synthetic hormones.

Rather than take what global markets will pay for raw "commodities" - tankers of milk, bulk grain, or mass-produced meat - Michigan farmers are capitalizing on new marketing opportunities to keep their families and their land in agriculture.

### Small Scale On-Farm Poultry Processing Facility

**PROCESSING FACILITY BUILT.** The new, two-car garage-sized pole building will soon house a small-scale poultry processing facility on Frank and Kay Jones' farm near Durand. For 18 months Frank and Kay (above) have been working with MDA, USDA/FSIS, DEQ, and MSU, various subcontractors, equipment manufacturers and suppliers, domestic and international information providers, organic certification agencies, other on-farm and commercial poultry processors, and customers to develop a safe, legal, and profitable poultry processing facility on their farm. The construction of this building is an important milestone in their quest.

Frank and Kay are cooperators with MIFFS' *Clearing a Path for On-Farm Processing of Pastured Poultry in Michigan* effort. Information gleaned through the development of this model facility is being posted to the MIFFS website (<http://www.msu.edu/~miffs/>) and will be available from MIFFS in a plain-language handbook.

**OPEN HOUSE.** Frank and Kay are planning to share their experience at a facility open house and chicken barbecue this fall. MIFFS members will be invited.

**EQUIPMENT FOR SALE?** Kay and Frank are still looking for several items to equip their facility. Do you have a good, used commercial balance? How about a stainless steel utility or handwash sink? If you would be willing to sell either of these items please contact Kay or Frank at [jonesk@tir.com](mailto:jonesk@tir.com) or 989/288-2421.



## Organic Farming is a Realistic Alternative

By David Suzuki

It's strange how a movement that began with the best of intentions has managed to generate so much animosity. I'm talking about organic farming. But while a few people seem convinced it's a scam, the research continues to suggest otherwise.

Organically grown food is certainly popular. People buy it for any number of reasons: They say it tastes better, they're concerned about the effects of pesticide residue on their families' health, and they believe it is less harmful to the environment. They're willing to pay a premium price for it too.

Because the organic movement is relatively new, there has not been a wealth of scientific data to confirm organic farmers' anecdotal observations that this method produces good yields while maintaining healthier soils and ecosystems.

Such claims are too good to be true, according to some proponents of industrial agriculture. A few years ago, the *Nature of Things* did a program on organic farming. I thought it was a Mom-and-apple pie-type show that everyone would love.

To my amazement, we were inundated with letters of outrage from university agriculture facilities and chemical companies, arguing that conventional monocultures with copious inputs of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides were the only way we could possibly feed our growing human population.

Today, some critics seem genuinely angry at the success of the organic movement. They've written books and published articles in journals saying that organic farmers are starry-eyed idealists who are trying to bring back 19th century farming practices that will reduce yields by four times and thus, if widely adopted, will lead to mass starvation.

But organic farming isn't about turning back the clock; it's about moving forward. It's about smart farming to help maintain healthy ecosystems.

Conventional farming produces high yields, but there are also enormous costs: pollution of groundwater, rivers, lakes, and coastal areas and reduced soil productivity

through nutrient leaching. The use of pesticides and herbicides also kills beneficial nontarget species and poses a health risk to farm workers and potentially to consumers. None of these "external" costs are factored in to the price of conventionally grown crops.

Organic farming seeks to reduce these external costs, and it seems to be working. According to a landmark 21-year study recently published in the journal *Science*, organic farming can produce good yields, save energy, maintain biodiversity, and keep soils healthy.

The study took place on 1.5 hectares in Switzerland using four farming methods and several different crops. Crop yields, on average, were 20 percent lower using organic methods, but they required 56 percent less energy per unit of yield. Organic plots also had 40 percent greater colonization by fungi that help plants absorb nutrients, three times as many earthworms, and twice as many pest-eating spiders.

Some crops fared better under organic systems than did others. Potatoes, for example, produced 38 percent lower yields, but winter wheat was just 10 percent lower. The researchers said, "We conclude that organically manured, legume-based crop rotations utilizing organic fertilizers from the farm itself are a realistic alternative to conventional farming systems."

Other studies have also shown similar results. A comparison study completed last year on apples, for example, found that organic crops can produce yields similar to conventional crops — and they taste better. Another paper published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology* last year found that using organic methods to grow tomatoes can promote biodiversity while maintaining productivity.

It is important to keep in mind that there is much that we don't know about agriculture, and there is likely no ultimate answer to our food production needs. To feed our growing population we have to be open to all ideas, new and old. And we mustn't let the entrenched interests of the commercial agriculture and biotechnology industries dictate the future of our food when less intensive and damaging alternatives are available.

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## Deer, Elk Farming Information On-Line

Privately owned cervidae (deer, elk) are classified as an agricultural enterprise by the Michigan Department of Agriculture. To better serve this promising value-added agriculture industry, MSU Extension Agent Robyn Oliver developed a web site for Privately Owned Cervidae Management. The web site is currently in its infancy stage, but more information for producers and others interested in cervidae farming will be added as time and resources allow. Eighty counties in Michigan have cervidae operations; Genesee County has the most at 48. Check it out at [www.msue.msu.edu/cervidae/](http://www.msue.msu.edu/cervidae/)

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