

SPRING VALLEY, WI -- A new initiative to link experienced organic farmer mentors with traditional farmers transitioning to organic production has been launched by the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES).

This one-year pilot program will team successful organic farmers to transitioning farmers in dairy, fresh produce and field crops. MOSES is now seeking nine organic farmer-mentors and 18 farmers interested in transitioning to organic production.

The program has a strong educational component that includes participation in the Organic Farming Conference and the Organic University. Both events are sponsored by MOSES and will be held in LaCrosse, WI, beginning February 21, 2008.

The mentored farmers also will be encouraged to participate in field days, pasture walks and other organic farming educational events in their area. The program is for producers in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa.

Faye Jones, MOSES Executive Director, said the new program builds on a strong tradition of information sharing by organic producers. "The information spread farmer-to-farmer in the 1960s and 1970s helped overcome the lack of information available from traditional sources," Jones said.

The new MOSES initiative is patterned after a successful California pilot program that provides as many as 25 organic farmer mentors in five production areas.

Coordinating this program is Harriet Behar, a long-time Wisconsin-based organic inspector who directs the MOSES Outreach Program. "Experienced organic farmers relate their long-term success to their own mentoring by an organic farmer when they were getting started," Behar said.

Farmers interested in serving as mentors, or being mentored, should contact Behar via the toll-free Farmer Transition Hotline at 888-551-4769 or via e-mail at harriet@mosesorganic.org. Information also is available from the MOSES office in Spring Valley, WI, at 715-772-3153.

Both mentors and farmers wishing to be mentored will find a form to complete on the MOSES website (www.mosesorganic.org) that describes their experience and/or farming operation designed to aid MOSES in matching up mentors with transitioning farmers.

Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services (MOSES) based in Spring Valley, WI, is not-for-profit education-outreach organization working to advance sustainable and organic agriculture.