Just Picked

Newsletter of the
Upper Midwest Organic Tree Fruit Network

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Welcome to our first newsletter!

Greetings! You are reading the *first* newsletter of this new, informal network, the Upper Midwest Organic Tree Fruit Growers Network.

This newsletter will discuss the "who, what, when, where, how and why" of the Network, discuss key certification issues, and pull together information on events and research of interest to upper Midwest orchardists. Again this is a network and you are invited to contribute to future editions. There will be three more by October.

Who, What, When, Where, How and Why's of the Network:

This Network was started on Feb. 27, 2004, at the last Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference held in La Crosse, Wisconsin. A few of us (Maury Wills, David and Perry-O Sliwa, all of Iowa, and myself) hosted a meeting open to all those interested in organic tree fruits during a Conference lunch break. Twenty people came from the states of Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota.

At that meeting we each described briefly our current involvement in orcharding, the needs we experienced as growers, and the resources available to meet those needs. The lively exchange that day on managing plum curculio, the potential use of small livestock in orchards and more had to be stifled so we could decide how to continue such good discussions before our meeting time was up. The value of a list-serv became evident as well as that of field days.

We decided not to become a formal organization with membership, at least for now. Rather, having no funds at the time, we would start a bit more appropriately with a list-serv, field days that any of us would volunteer to host, and a volunteer for each field day who would write it up for our list-serv or "The Organic Broadcaster", which is MOSES' newsletter, or both.

A list-serv was set-up for free on Yahoo Groups. To join, please email deirdreb@mindspring.com

The field days would be simple so that no one feared to host one. They would be publicized by the list-serv. Attendees would BYO food and refreshments. The idea was to make it cheap and easy.

Faye Rogers of Turkey Ridge announced that they were already planning two field days in March and April. Harry Hoch of Hoch Orchard near La Crescent, MN, agreed to host one in May. And he certainly did.

Yet more than that happened. As MOSES knew of our need for resources, they provided $600 toward a field day in Wisconsin using funds they had from the Risk Manage-

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ment Agency of the USDA. Keith Kozub of White Pine Orchard hosted that field day on June 23 near River Falls, Wisconsin.

The Center for Integrated Agriculture Systems at UW-Madison also provided sponsorship of the May and June field days by providing the Minnesota IPM Manual and accompanying Field ID Guide, originally produced by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. Harry Hoch is also one of the authors of IPM Manual and Guide.

I sent out a press release announcing *both* field days, with only ten days before the Hoch Orchard Field Day in May. Surprisingly, eighteen people attended. A second press release for the June field day was never issued because the field day was filling so fast. It reached its limit while emails and calls were still coming in. Apparently, information on organic tree fruit growing is in demand.

For a write-up on the Hoch Field Day, please see the Organic Broadcaster, July-August, 2004 issue. It is also on MOSES' website at www.mosesorganic.org. Perhaps a future edition of this newsletter will have a write up on the White Pine Orchard field day.

Watch for more field days to come thanks to funding via MOSES again from the Risk Management Agency (RMA) of the USDA and continued provision of the Minnesota IPM Manual and Field ID Guide from the UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems. This new funding is for four field days, four issues of this newsletter, and a web page on MOSES' website. All of this must be completed by September 30, 2005.

The need for a hard copy newsletter was raised at the June field day. While we have funding we will do it. Otherwise we have the Internet.

So you are invited to communicate. Please contribute not only your ideas for content but actual content. Some suggestions already received follow:

- Readers share their experiences in tackling different problems on their orchards
- Volunteers write up the field days and submit for the newsletter
- Condense list-serv discussions per topic and include in the newsletter
- Feature an organic orchardist per issue.

Please send your ideas and contributions to me using any of the contact information below. (While I have provided articles for a newsletter and managed as an editor, I have never organized a newsletter myself, so please bear with me and feel free to help out.)

Meanwhile the rest of this first newsletter includes important news on the upcoming Organic University and Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference programs on organic apple production, as well as an article on organic certification for orchardists, and news and what's happening of interest to upper Midwest growers. ó

--Deirdre Birmingham

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Basic Organic Certification Issues for Fruit Tree Growers

by Harriet Behar

Organic certification is required for any person who wishes to label their product as organic and sells more than $5000 per year in gross sales of organic products. This applies to total sales at *all* venues, including farmers' markets and farm stands as well as retail stores. If you sell less than a total of $5000 per year and want to use the word *organic* to describe your production, you still need to follow the organic law, but you are not required to be certified.

Prohibited substances cannot be applied to land growing organic crops for 36 months previous to the harvest of the organic crop. Prohibited substances are all synthetics unless they appear on the approved National List. Natural products are allowed, unless they are specifically prohibited on the National List. To say this again, since it is confusing, the organic law has a National List of approved synthetic and prohibited natural products. If a product is synthetic and it does NOT appear on the list or if it is natural and it IS on the list, then it is not allowed.

When buying brand name products or blended products, it is important to know *all* of the ingredients, since not all inerts or secondary ingredients are allowed under the organic law. Check with a certification agency before using a product to make sure it is okay or see if the company has chosen to list their product as approved for organic production on the OMRI (Organic Materials Review Institute) website, www.omri.org. For instance, there is a listing as follows: *Oils, horticultural—narrow range oils as dormant, suffocating, and summer oils*, are allowed under synthetic for crop production, but be careful that they do not contain any other ingredients such as fungicides or insecticides. This includes all products used for pest or disease control as well as soil fertility products.

Use of raw manure in the orchard should be carefully monitored and may need to be applied more than 120 days before the harvest of your crop, depending if the fruit is low hanging enough where the rain could splash onto the fruit from the ground.

Organic fruit growers should have a plan to improve soil and tree health as well as have a preventative pest control strategy in place which would include monitoring for insects, pheromone traps, and physical controls before approved materials would be used.

For organic fruit growing strategies, check out ATTRA, www.attra.org , and MOSES www.mosesorganic.org (715-712-3153). *ó*

Harriet Behar has been an organic inspector since 1991 as well as an organic vegetable and herb grower in Wisconsin. She was asked to write on issues that orchardists new to certification might encounter. She will also speak briefly at the Organic University program on Organic Apple Production. She is a also presenter for the "Organic Agriculture 101" Program of the Organic University.

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WHAT TO WATCH FOR IN 2005

First and foremost is the ***Organic University*** *course titled* ***"Introduction to Organic Apple Production"*** *to be held Thursday,* ***February 24, 2005****, in La Crosse, WI, from 10 AM to 5:30 PM.*

The program will cover selecting rootstocks and cultivars, orchard layout, building and maintaining soil health, managing major insect and disease pests, and orchard floor management. The primary presenters will be Bob Johnson, formerly of Turkey Ridge Organic Orchard, and Harry Hoch of Hoch Orchard in La Crescent, MN, as well as a panel of other experienced growers.

Bob Johnson has been growing tree fruits for 30 years. Nineteen years ago he started pioneering the production and marketing of organic tree fruits in Wisconsin. Bob is the former manager and then owner of Turkey Ridge Organic Orchard in Gays Mills, Wisconsin. He provides consulting services for orchards in the upper Midwest.

Harry Hoch owns and manages 20 acres of apples with over 5000 dwarf and semi-dwarf trees planted in the last seven years as well as six acres of the original standard-size trees planted by his father in the 1940s and 50s. His family also rents another 12 acres, giving them almost 40 acres total of apple trees.

Each O.U. participant receives a Resource Manual on Organic Apple Production (available only to those attending the O.U.), and an organic breakfast and lunch.

Attendance is limited to 50. Please get a registration form at www.mosesorganic.org, cathy@mosesorganic.org or 715-772-3153. Registration cost is $135.

The ***Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference Trade Show*** and **MOSES Book Store** opens at 5 PM the day of the Organic University. Participants in the Organic University each receive a 20% discount on all books available at the MOSES Book Store. Michael Phillips' The Apple Grower, A Guide for the Organic Orchardist is highly recommended. If enough people attend the Organic University, we hope to have another course next year and invite Mr. Phillips as the instructor.

The **Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference** takes place on the following two days, **February 25 and 26**. A workshop session of 1.5 hr will be given on Friday afternoon, Feb. 25, by Bob Johnson and Harry Hoch, who are described earlier in the Organic University program announcement.

Those interested in the **Upper Midwest Organic Tree Fruit Network** are called to meet during the lunch break at 1:00 Friday, February 25, at the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference. The room number will be listed in the Conference Program. Eat quickly or bring your lunch to the meeting.

Four field days for 2005 will be announced in late February at the Organic University and the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference. While the field days will be in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, attendees from all states are welcome. Registration will be required and honored on a first-come, first-serve basis. A modest registration fee will cover meal and other incidental costs not covered by grant funds.

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HAPPENINGS AMONG NETWORK MEMBERS

While there is no formal membership, I lack for a word other than member at this point. One idea for this newsletter is that each issue feature an organic orchard. This could be in conjunction with an organic field day, either in preparation for it or in response to it. For starters while we organize those field days, I will pick on me.

I am not yet an organic orchardist, but an aspiring one. My husband and I purchased 166 acres two years ago in a dairy- producing area of southern Wisconsin. We just moved to it in October. Since we wanted to start an orchard for making "traditional cider" I asked around as to events and groups on organic tree fruits. Finding that not much was going on, I started working with others to get something going. I had run a nonprofit in Georgia that promoted sustainable and organic farming and gardening. So with that experience among others in adult education and agriculture, I thought I could contribute.

While we have over a hundred old and wild trees on our land, we have also started a nursery for the 200 trees we grafted this year with more to follow. The grafts consist of French, English and North American "traditional" cider varieties. We have broken ground for the orchard and have completed two years of cover cropping the rows. Soil tests show it to be silty loam, high in phosphorus and adequate in supply of other major nutrients.

Our plans for organic orcharding are to produce apples we would use in making traditional cider. By "traditional" I mean the cider that was enjoyed widely in the U.S. before the Temperance Movement. This was freshly squeezed juice from apples that was then fermented in a process similar to wine. In other words, cider with a kick.

Cider used to be the most common beverage in the U.S in our country's earlier years. Somehow after Prohibition, while many other alcohol-containing beverages made a comeback, cider did not. This was for complicated reasons that I won't go into here. If you go to Europe and order cider you will get the *real* thing, not the fresh squeezed juice of apples. In fact, fresh-squeezed apple juice was only later called *cider* in the U.S. with the help of the Prohibitionists. If you haven't yet, read Michael Pollan's chapter, "The Apple", in his book The Botany of Desire. You'll learn that Johnny Appleseed was not about Mom and Apple Pie.

Making cider is like making wine, but the alcohol content of cider is usually around five to six per cent alcohol. Most wines are nine to twelve per cent alcohol. We just enjoyed an organic MacIntosh cider produced by West County Cider of Massachusetts that was only 3% alcohol. That is one reason I avoid calling it "hard" cider, as it just seems inappropriate. Hard liquor is of much higher alcohol content.

We would rather do a value-added product with our apples in part because of the difficulty to produce #1 quality apples organically in the Midwest, or west of the Rockies for that matter. My husband and I are committed to growing our tree fruits in the most ecologically minded way we can. That is what we hope organic methods can help us do.

While I may sound gung-ho about cider, I am first conducting a feasibility study and business plan on it, before running headlong down a potentially slippery slope. A Value-Added Producer Grant from the USDA has enabled my husband and I to

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NEWS

THE BETSY LYDON SLOW FOOD ARK USA AWARD GOES TO MICHAEL PHILLIPS, ORGANIC ORCHARDIST

Betsy Lydon devoted herself to sustaining small-scale food producers by encouraging local, seasonal eating and an appreciation for diversified farming. She helped found Mothers and Others for a Livable Planet, shortly after the 'Alar apple scare' of 1989, and served on the board of directors of the Organic Farming Research Foundation. In celebration of the life and work of this wonderful woman and mother, the first annual "Betsy Lydon Slow Food Ark USA Award" has been presented to Michael Phillips, author of *The Apple Grower: A Guide for the Organic Orchardist* , in recognition of his lifelong journey with the organic apple.

"The real question in all this," said Michael in accepting the 2004 award at a dinner ceremony in New York City, "is how community-based orchards can succeed everywhere. Betsy would be pleased to know that because of the consciousness she helped spark, the fruits of small growers using ecological methods are being sought out. Artisanal ciders and freshly-picked apples that reflect regional heritage have become niche local markets, and to that I can only lift up my cup high and give three cheers!"

Michael Phillips is based in the northern White Mountains of New Hampshire. While Michael's passion is apple orcharding, he grows a wide array of vegetables and medicinal herbs as well with his wife Nancy and daughter Gracie. Two-and-a-half acres of young trees supplies a community of shareholders with both dessert and juice fruit. You can learn far more at the Phillips' web site at www.HerbsAndApples.com

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RESOURCES

Did you know that the **Organic Farming Research Foundation** (OFRF) has funded 16 research projects specifically on organic apple production? One of those projects was completed by Paul Whitaker, a member of this network, for his dissertation research under UW-Madison Prof. Dan Mahr. The Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems at UW-Madison has printed Research Briefing #71 on their research titled "Beneficial insect habitat in an apple orchard—effects on pests." (It is on the web at www.cias.wisc.edu).

OFRF has also funded five grants on stone fruit, particularly peaches, five grants general to tree fruit production, one on pears, and a new one just awarded on cherry production. The one on cherries involves ecological soil management that may have use beyond cherry orchards.

If you do not already and would like to receive the "Information Bulletin" of OFRF, in which the findings of OFRF-funded research projects are provided as well as other interesting articles, email them at research@ofrf.org or call 831-426-6606. Past issues of the Information Bulletin as well as the full research reports of selected projects are on their website at www.ofrf.org. There is also other information of use to the organic grower.

Also on the website of the Organic Farming Research Foundation you can search a database called **www.OrganicAgInfo.org**. The database includes information from farmers as well as scientists and engineers.

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Michigan State University received a grant to create a web-based information source for organic farmers. In addition to Michigan, the land-grant universities at Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa are involved. This source is a web-based newsletter at http://www.ipm.msu.edu/new-ag.htm. The newsletter includes information on organic fruit management from which the following information was pulled:
Ohio State University's Dr. Mike Ellis and graduate student Mizuho Nita host a web site that offers several resources for organic fruit growers. At: http://www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/fruitpathology/ viewers will find recommendations for growing strawberries, blueberries, raspberries/blackberries, and grapes. The same site also covers organic apple production for Ohio.

Ohio State University has a 22-page "Disease Management Guidelines for Organic Apple Production in Ohio" by plant pathologist Michael Ellis. Find it on the web at: http://www.caf.wvu.edu/kearnerysville/organic-apple.html. Fact Sheets from Ohio State University Extension are also available on "Fire Blight of Apples, Crabapples and Pears" and "Scab of Apple Crabapple." Find them respectively at http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/3000/3002.html and http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/3000/3003.html

Michael Phillips, author of "The Apple Grower" described earlier has a website on which he posts updates to his book. His website is www.herbsandapples.com. Under "apples", look for his "**Cutting Edge of Organic Orcharding**" page. There you will find: "Seasonal Checklist for the Home Orchardist", "An Intelligent Paradigm", "Holistic Disease Management", "The Kaolin Clay Strategy for Orchards", and "Apple Grower Links." ó

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take a short-course on cider making by an expert from the UK, a country where they consume lots of cider. It also enabled me to visit cideries in New York, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts to learn more specifics about the business. I also visited with Michael Phillips, author of The Apple Grower, A Guide for the Organic Orchardist. With all this information gathered, I must complete my study and plan before the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference.

I have heard criticism about the heavy use of copper and sulfur in some orchards. Rather than criticize I would encourage that more research be done to avoid heavy uses of these elements. While naturally occurring and used before the advent of synthetic chemicals, heavy use of copper and sulfur may have negative consequences for other aspects when looking at the whole orchard picture. The other factors might include soil health, beneficial insects and farm worker safety. Organic agriculture is about balance, and finding it is a never-ending mission. ó

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including regular updates on growing organic apples. A completely revised edition of Michael's book *The Apple Grower* will be published by Chelsea Green later this summer. His current edition will be available at the MOSES Book Store at its 2005 Conference in La Crosse, WI Feb 24-26. ó

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Research at Michigan State University

Michigan State University (MSU) is the first certified organic apple orchard in Michigan to be planned and planted for organic apple production. A five-acre, high-density apple orchard was planted in 2000 at the MSU Clarksville Experiment Station. The orchard was certified organic in 2003. Over 25 researchers, educators and farmers have been involved in a multi-disciplinary effort to test and develop best in class methods of organic apple production for the upper Midwest and to share this information among growers, the university, and the organic community. The project is supported by the USDA, commercial input suppliers, Project GREEEN, Gerber, and apple industry organizations.

The high-density plantings were on the following cultivar and rootstock combinations: Goldrush and Buckeye Gala on M.9 NAKB 337, Pacific Gala on M.9 NAKB 337, M.9 RN 29, and Supporter 4, and "Smoothie" Golden Delicious on G.16.

The project is looking at ecological principles in building soil health, in managing the ground floor, insects and diseases, as well as yield and tree growth, organic certification, and importantly the economics and marketing of certified organic apples.

The research also involves documenting the dynamics of the soil food web in relation to the transitioning process, use of recommendations from a certain soil testing and consulting service in their soil management decision-making, and understanding the vertical distribution of the soil organisms associated with the site. In particular they are looking at organic matter mineralization, soil food-web structure, carbon nitrogen budgets, and nematode community structure.

Managing ground cover is being improved through studying mulches, the use of soybeans, the use legumes to feed the trees, buckwheat, propane flaming and the "Swiss Sandwich" method as well as rootstock and variety trials.

Scab control is being studied through the use of a scab resistant variety (Goldrush), sulfur, lime-sulfur, and copper, Serenade (a commercial product), and compost tea.

Insect pest management strategies focus on the sustainable use and application of amendments and pesticidal materials that are restricted to a smaller, more targeted range of insects. These are used at lower rates to help preserve essential natural predator populations. Specifically they are looking at plum curculio monitoring and control, kaolin clay, Pyganic for plum curculio and leafrollers, Bt, neem, a new organic compound to control apple maggot, disrupting the matings of oriental fruit moth, leafrollers, and codling moth with pheromones; a virus for codling moth, biological control, and strips of diverse plantings to attract natural enemies of insect pests.

Preliminary results are becoming available. Yields are moderate with excellent quality and moderate pack-out. Predator populations that had been building for rosie apple aphids decimated their colonies with damage at less than 0.5%. The soils work reveals the need to improve the soil's fungal profile. The project will start making recommendations, although continued funding will be critical to do so. The project has benefited from signifi-

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cant grower involvement and through its emphasis on ecological diversity and the soil as the starting point.

MSU will provide this Newsletter with information on their 2005 field days. A self-guided interpretive tour is available to the public. Stay tuned!

Research at Iowa State University

Prof. Mark Gleason, a plant pathologist at Iowa State University, is heading up a new project titled "Developing and implementing a web-based risk management system for organic apple growers in the eastern U.S." The project involves not only ISU, but also West Virginia University and North Carolina State University. According to Prof. Gleason, "the project will develop risk management tools for organic producers that compare organic and conventional production risks, including marketing risks; and develop risk management tools to assist producers in reducing the impact of multiple-year losses." More specifically the project will: 1) Compare yield, fruit quality, and multiple-year risks of organic vs. conventional apple disease and insect pest management in Iowa, North Carolina, and West Virginia using field and post-harvest experiments. 2) Compare marketing risks of organic *vs.* conventional apple management based on: a) estimated production costs and returns from pest-management experiments, b) consumer willingness to buy blemished but otherwise high-quality organic fruit, and, c) alternative markets for salvaging culled organic fruit for value-added products.

This project is a three-year project funded by the Risk Management Agency of the USDA. They have one season's worth of data, which they are analyzing. Prof. Gleason is optimistic that their consumer study might show that consumers are willing to accept some level of sooty blotch impact on apples. Prof. Gleason hopes that this project will be the start of a long-term organic apple study. He invites our Network to attend a field day he will be organizing at the orchard research plots in Iowa. This Newsletter and our Organic Tree Fruits List-serv will announce that field day.

Research Starting at University of Wisconsin-Madison

The Peninsular Research Station of UW-Madison is starting this year a research orchard for organic tart cherries and apples. The orchard will take about two years to establish and will be 1 to 1.5 acres in size. They will be certifying the orchard. The orchard will comprise primarily dwarf rootstocks with moderate tree density. Professors Dick Weidman and Matt Stasiak are heading up the work.

World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms– U.S.A. WWOOF-USA is a non-profit organization linking volunteers with organic farmers to promote and educational exchange and build a global community conscious of ecological farming practices. If you are interested in more information or becoming a host (or a volunteer), please visit WWOOF-USA at www.wwoofusa.org or email info@wwoofusa.org or contact Jessica Miller at 831-338-1897.

Don't Forget: you can join or un-join the Network's list-serv at anytime. Do not worry that the list-serv is too active, as lately the opposite is the case. For information, please email the list-serv moderator at deirdreb@mindspring.com

Plan to Attend the

Organic University

and

Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference

February 24-26 2005

La Crosse WI Convention Center

Workshops featuring Organic Apple Production
And many other topics of interest!

For more information

www.mosesorganic.org

Or 715-772-3153

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