

Just Picked

Newsletter of the
Upper Midwest Organic
Tree Fruit Network

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**Welcome to our second
newsletter!**

Greetings!
You are reading the second
newsletter of the Upper
Midwest Organic Tree Fruit
Growers Network.

Network News

The Network Meets

The Network held a meeting on February 25 at the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference (UMOFC) in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The meeting was open to all interested in growing tree fruits organically. Participants learned how the Network was started, activities planned for 2005, and discussed future directions. Last year the Network was launched at a similar interest group meeting during the 2004 Conference. The meeting doubled in attendance this year, from 20 to 40. Each attendee briefly described his or her interest or business in organic tree fruits. Quite a diverse group attended, from those considering adding tree fruits to their mix of organically produced fruits and vegetables to those already in full-scale production.

The following is a listing of the ideas, needs, and suggestions discussed:

Group orders for rootstocks and trees. Those interested in submitting one order that would benefit several growers could use the Network's list-serv to find others and work out arrangements. One consideration was finding people in geographical proximity to one another, or those all coming to an event or meeting spot, such as the UMOFC, at which they could divvy up an or-

der. [Editor's note: The Conference could also provide an opportunity for scion wood exchange, particularly that of scab-resistance or other disease-resistant varieties.]

Information needed on disease-resistant rootstocks and cultivars. The Network's web page has a list of resources, which includes information on disease varieties, particularly for scab.

Information needed on new products that are becoming available commercially and are approved for use in organic orchards. Maury Wills offered to provide information since he already collects this in his position as chair of the organic program at the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.

Fruit processing facilities needed, particularly certified organic ones. Turkey Ridge Organic Orchard near Gays Mills, WI, has started the Upper Midwest Organic Fruit Growers Cooperative, which has a certified organic juice press and is setting up other facilities. Co-op President, Faye Rogers is happy to share more information. Contact her fayerogers2000@yahoo.com or 608-735-4660.

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A project of the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service
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WHAT'S COMING UP?

The Network is hosting three field days in 2005, with a fourth yet to be announced. If you wish to host a field day, or know of someone who might, please contact the Editor.

Please use the registration form on page seven to register for the field days. Registration will be taken on a first-come, first-serve basis. Attendance is limited. Payment is required to secure your spot as we expect each field day to fill.

Network Field Days:

- May 4** Gardens of Goodness, McFarland, WI, Hosts: James and Barbara Lindemann
- June 21** Hoch Orchard, La Crescent MN. Hosts: Harry Hoch and family
Guest: Mark Whalon, Ph.D., Michigan State University
Additional Sponsor: Minnesota Department of Agriculture, IPM Program
- July 15** Countryside Orchard, Lansing IA.
Hosts: Jamie Bjornsen, owner; Bob Johnson, orchard consultant.

Other Events:

June 22 - UW's Peninsular Research Station, IPM Field Day, with Mark Whalon, Ph.D., Michigan State University, "Orchard Ecological Assessment" Sponsored by the Wisconsin Apple Growers Association and the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems' Eco-Apple Project of UW-Madison. Check www.waga.org for more information.

June 6-8, 2005, 3rd National Organic Tree Fruit Research Symposium, Chelan, WA The WSU Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources in collaboration with the Washington Organic Tree Fruit Growers Association, the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission, and the Institute for Rural Innovation and Stewardship, present this event. Researchers and orchardists from across the country working on organic tree fruit production will share their experiences and results. A tour, speakers, and poster session are planned. <http://csanr.wsu.edu/Organic/OrganicTreeFruitResearch05.htm> ó

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Orchard slide presentations. To learn from one another, an all day winter meeting was suggested where participants would bring slides of their orchard and describe their practices and businesses. Comments collected from the recent Apple course at the OU pointed out the value of hearing of others' experiences in organic orcharding.

Use of chickens and guinea fowl to help control insect pests. Information on this was requested. Jim Koan's research of Al-Mar Orchard in Michigan using guinea fowl was mentioned. Jim has completed year one of a three-year project funded by the Organic Farming Research Foundation. Turkey Ridge Organic Orchard near Gays Mills, Wisconsin, is experimenting with sheep and pigs, as well as chickens in the orchard.

The future direction of the Network. We discussed staying informal, as we are now, or incorporating and charging a membership fee, as well as potential steps in between these two options. We'll keep our current status for the year, enjoy RMA funding via MOSES for the Network, look for continued or new funding, and re-evaluate our position at the Network meeting next winter. The list-serv and people volunteering to host a field day can still happen without outside funding. ó

Featured Orchards

Each issue of the newsletter will feature at least one orchard that is organic or moving in that direction. In this issue orchards hosting upcoming field days are featured. This will help you decide which field days to attend.

Gardens of Goodness, McFarland, Wisconsin, May 4 field day

Barbara and James Lindemann, owner-operators of Gardens of Goodness, will be our field day hosts on Wednesday, May 4. The Lindemanns started their five-acre orchard and garden 16 years ago in McFarland, just outside of Madison. They are growing select fruit and vegetables for family, relatives, and friends seeking high quality, IPM, or organically grown food. They are embarking on a three-year plan to commercially produce and sell jelly and sweet cider direct to their customers.

Gardens of Goodness sits astride a glacial riverbed overlooking Lake Waubesa. They have been diligently building the organic matter content of their clayey soil. Over an acre is devoted to a wide variety of 120 fruit trees, with the oldest nearing sixteen years. They have concentrated on antique apples and several experimental varieties, as well as a mix of pears, peaches, cherries, and a quince. They add a few trees each year. Their aim is to develop a mix excellent for sweet cider, preserves, and cooking. However, such diversity brings management challenges. With so many individual trees blooming and ripening at different times, with different susceptibilities and resistances to varying diseases, intensive management focused more on individuals than rows or blocks of trees is required.

This year they are making a significant change in their pest management strategies by introducing data management software from National Instruments for measuring climatic parameters. This software

will enable them to use climate sensors from Shiva Systems to monitor a range of micro-climate conditions. This system also serves to monitor and regulate environmental conditions in their greenhouse. Eventually it can be programmed to automatically water plants and adjust temperature controls. Data collected by the sensors is accumulated over time and is displayed in an easy to read format. As a result, the Lindemanns will have accurate and localized real-time data to use in managing diseases and insect pests.

They are excited about the potential of sharing this technology with other orchardists. They believe it holds significant potential in helping to reduce uses of highly toxic agri-chemicals, and eventually help them become a successful organic orchard. Jim is quite interested in not only sharing information and technologies but in cooperatively pooling labor, equipment, purchasing inputs, and marketing.

Hoch Orchard, La Crescent, Minnesota, June 21 field day

Hoch Orchard is small family farm located just west of La Crescent, Minnesota, across the river from La Crosse, Wisconsin. Harry and his wife, Jackie, farm with their two teen-age daughters. The orchard's first trees were planted in the mid 1940's by Harry's father, of which a handful remain. The orchard today comprises primarily 6000 young trees planted in the last six years on about 20 acres. These

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new trees are mostly high-density plantings with over 50 apple varieties on dwarfing rootstock.

The Hochs also have about 100 young plum trees, a few apricots, cherries, pears, and some peach trees. The peach trees are an experiment that Harry hopes will pay off. The key is finding a growing method that will help the tender peach trees survive our harsh winters. There is nothing quite like a tree-ripened peach.

The Hochs also have about two acres of wine grapes, a small amount of berries and vegetables, and nurseries to produce fruit trees. They also raise some poultry and are integrating weeder geese in the berry beds and nurseries to help control weeds. Last season they raised heritage chickens and this year they are trying heritage turkeys. Those of you at the Hoch field day last May feasted on those wonderful birds and garden-fresh asparagus.

The Hochs sell their products through farmers' markets in the La Crosse area, to natural food stores, and to wholesale buyers.

Harry had one block certified organic in the mid-1990s but did not find customers at farmers' markets then accepting of these apples. He continues to practice intensive insect and disease monitoring and prevention. He is now transitioning a block of trees to organic, which he expects to certify in 2006.

Harry has an Associate's degree in Horticulture, a B.S. degree in Integrated Pest Management and an M.S. degree in Technical Communications and Sustainable Agriculture. He did his Bachelor's thesis on apple scab disease. While getting his B.S. and M.S. degrees from the University of Minnesota, he worked for their Horticultural Research Cen-

ter as a Research Plot Coordinator. Harry has consulted for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Integrated Pest Management Program. He is a co-author of their Integrated Pest Management Manual for Minnesota Apple Orchards and their Field ID Guide. Both publications will be made available by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture at the Hoch field day on June 21.

At the field day, Harry will show his intensive pest prevention and monitoring programs. He will focus on how predictive modeling of pests can be used in an organic or low-input system. He will show his use of traps and weather monitoring along with computer-based modeling systems to predict the best time to control insect pests and diseases. We will look at plum curculio, codling moth, apple scab, and fire blight. The focus will be on optimum timing of control options for best results.

Harry went to the Orchard IPM School offered by Michigan State University last February. The program ended with a half-day session devoted to research on Functional Orchard Ecology. This is a multi-disciplinary project that focuses on the whole orchard as an ecosystem. He invited one of the presenters, Professor Mark Whalon, of MSU to come to his field day (on June 21) and do an ecological assessment. Professor Whalon has accepted that invitation and will show how different species of mites tell a story about the orchard's history and ecological balance. Harry's initiative on this matter exemplifies the cutting-edge thinking he brings to managing his orchards.

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Countryside Orchard, Lansing, Iowa, July 15

The site of our third field day will be in the most northeast corner of Iowa at Countryside Orchard, owned by Jamie Bjornsen, a native of Lansing. Jamie got smart, while smoothing out a few hiccups in planting her first trees and brought in Bob Johnson, a pioneer in Midwest organic orcharding with over 30 years experience in managing orchards. Bob is working with Jamie to develop a model small-scale organic orchard using an eco-system approach.

Jamie's apple orchard integrates aesthetically with the overall landscaping of her farm and home, as well as her production of cherries, raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, squash, pumpkins, sheep, and more. Jamie not only sells fresh fruits at her on-farm store called "The Apple Shed", but sells jams and jellies made in her commercial kitchen from her own fruits. She is not only carrying on the tradition of her mother in making jellies, jams, pies, cakes, and fudge, but involves her mother to this day.

Jamie, a professional photographer, started the orchard and garden projects in 1998 with her husband, who is now deceased. Their motivation was the pretty red apples they had purchased from a grocery store that lacked in flavor. Within a few months, they had planted their first trees. The tagline for her business is "the little orchard big on taste."

With Bob's help, she now has about 200 trees on two acres. Approximately one hundred trees are of conventional varieties on M-7 rootstock. Another 100 trees or so are on dwarfing rootstocks of Bud-9, M-9, and M-26. A section of these are with scab-resistant varieties. Some dwarfs are trained on an espalier system. As part of their eco-system approach, they are using flowering, native plants to attract beneficial insects as

well as birds to help control insect pests.

Bob is also experimenting with newer pest-control products for the organic orchard such as kaolin clay, as well as older methods, such as sulfur for scab and bagging individual fruits while on the tree. At the field day you will be able to compare the organic management of conventional varieties with the organic management of scab-resistant varieties on differing rootstocks. Bob will also do a pruning demonstration. Jamie plans to certify the orchard in the next year or two. She hopes this small orchard will encourage others to integrate tree fruits into their landscaping and market gardening.

Because Jamie's husband was in the restaurant and catering business, she insists on doing the food in addition to hosting a field day. Mom will help. She'll include her farm-fresh products, producing a lunch you won't want to miss! ò

Organic *University*

For the first time, a day-long course on organic apple production was held at the MOSES Organic University on Feb 24th in La Crosse, WI. The class was well attended by forty participants who enjoyed the knowledge of four speakers and one moderator. A workshop on organic apple production following the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference drew 52 attendees. Evaluation ratings were very high. Hats off to Harry Hoch and Bob Johnson as the main presenters, as well as Harriet Behar, who spoke on organic certification, and Maury Wills, who spoke on new products, marketing considerations, and getting started. Several participants noted the need for an advanced course, which MOSES is taking under active consideration!

If you have ideas for next year's Conference or Organic University, now is the time to let MOSES know. The program is set by July. Call them at 715-772-3153 or info@mosesorganic.org.

Organic Tree Fruit Workshop, Michigan State University

- by Nikki Rothwell, District Fruit IPM Educator

The third annual Organic Tree Fruit Update was held in Benzonia, Michigan on March 14, 2005. What has become an annual meeting started with seven growers in 2003 and grew to 19 last year. This year over 45 fruit growers, consultants, and Michigan State University (MSU) extension specialists and educators participated.

The morning began with a discussion on the economics of organic farming by Dr. David Conner from the Center for Agriculture, Recreation, and Resource Studies (CARRS) program at MSU. He was followed by Chet Kendell, a grower from Utah, and a graduate student in the CARRS Department. Mr. Kendell presented real-life information about his 10-acre organic farm of sweet cherries and peaches. Workshop participants had many questions about his farming practices and methods.

Controlling cherry leaf spot with copper was discussed, based on a study by Dr. George Sundin of MSU's Department of Plant Pathology. Dr. Sundin is looking to manage resistance of cherry leaf spot. The use of copper as a control is relevant for organic cherry growers. Future research will study a year-long copper program to control this cherry disease.

Dr. George Bird, Dept. of Entomology, MSU presented a short, but informative bit on 'what's in your soil?' He stressed the importance of organic matter, especially when a grower is managing an orchard organically. He gave a nice breakdown of the soil organisms, reminding us of their significant role in a healthy orchard.

Drs. Larry Gut and Dave Epstein, Dept. of Entomology, MSU, reviewed alternative controls for codling moth, such as pheromone disruption and granulosis virus. In their research of these products, they found that they provided adequate control for this orchard pest. They also gave the audience a glimpse into where their research program is going in terms of organic control of orchard insect pests.

Andrea Biasi-Coombs, Dept. of Entomology, MSU, added to the discussion by presenting data collected in Utah where they used entomopathogenic nematodes to control plum curculio.

Dr. Mark Whalon, Dept. of Entomology, MSU, gave an overview of the on-going organic project at the Clarksville Research Station in Clarksville, MI. His focus in the project has centered on plum curculio control. Plum curculio is the pest most culpable in preventing growers from growing cherries and apples organically.

Jim Koan, an apple grower from southeastern Michigan, introduced work from New Zealand on thinning apples organically. Mr. Koan added his experience with thinning to the presentation, which was well-received by participants.

The meeting ended with two group discussions. The first was moderated by Dr. Jim Bingen, CARRS, MSU. The conversation revolved around the perceptions of moving to organic farming. Since Dr. Bingen has a grant to investigate this topic, he wanted to hear how the organic community in Michigan viewed his tactics and strategy. The second discussion discussed the trials and tribulations of organic tree fruit farming. This open discussion and strong audience participation elicited specific organic control tactics as well as the successes of the past year.

2005 Field Days
Upper Midwest Organic Tree Fruit Growers Network
REGISTRATION FORM

Please mark how many individuals from you farm plan to attend each of the following field days:

attending

	May 4 Gardens of Goodness, near Madison, WI
	June 21 Hoch Orchard, La Crescent, MN
	July 15 Countryside Orchard, Lansing IA
	<u>Total count</u>

Your name(s): 1.	
2.	
3.	
Farm Name:	
Street Address:	
City/Town:	Zip:
Phone:	Email:

Each workshop costs \$15.00 per person to cover refreshments and materials.

Total count x \$15.00 = amount due \$ _____

Please make a check out to MOSES and include with this form.

Mail this form and payment at least one week before the field day to:

Deirdre Birmingham, Organic Tree Fruit Grower Network, 7258 Kelly Rd, Mineral Point, WI 53565

Field days will be from 10 AM to 3 PM, rain or shine.

Registration will be confirmed by email with directions to the field days.

May 4 Gardens of Goodness, near Madison, WI, James and Barbara Lindemann

June 21: Hoch Orchard, La Crescent MN. Hosts: Harry Hoch and family

Guest: Mark Whalon, Ph.D., Michigan State University, "Orchard Ecological Assessment"

Additional Sponsor: Minnesota Department of Agriculture, IPM Program

July 15 Countryside Orchard, Lansing IA. Hosts: Jamie Bjornsen, owner; Bob Johnson, orchard consultant.

All interested in more ecological approaches to tree fruit production are welcome.
No host claims to have all the answers. They are simply sharing what they are learning.

Any questions, contact Deirdre at deirdeb@mindspring.com or 608-967-2362.

*For more information on the Upper Midwest Organic Tree Fruit Growers,
visit our webpage at <http://www.mosesorganic.org/treefruit/intro.htm>*

Useful Resources

Fruit Crop Ecology and Management; E-2759, soft-bound with 104 pages. \$16 plus shipping. <http://www.imp.msu.edu/PubsOrder.htm>. “This book explores growing fruit [both tree fruits and small fruits] within a complex web that connects soil, plants, animals, humans, landscapes, and the atmosphere. Readers will learn how these factors interact in an environment where it is impossible to change one aspect of a farming system with affecting others.” “The authors present fundamental knowledge rather than specific recommendations, anticipating readers will seek additional references for details....”

The **Network’s web page** found at www.mosesorganic.org is a valuable resource. One section is titled “Resources.” Under the Resources section is a comprehensive listing of many items that you can find from ATTRA, other web-based resources, or via mail order. Many of these items were included in the Resource Manual provided to participants of the Organic University course on Organic Apple Production.

**Don’t Forget: you can join or un-join the Network’s list-serv at anytime.
For information, please email the list-serv moderator at
deirdreb@mindspring.com**

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