

Spring 2006 Issue

PAGE

- 2 Network Meeting
- 4 Michael Phillips at Conference
- 5 June 20th Field Day
- 6 Network Field Days
- 7 What Have You Read?
- 8 Announcements
- 9 Advisory Council
- 9 The NetEx
- 10 Network Questionnaire
- 11 Organic and Ecology

Just Picked

Newsletter of the
Upper Midwest Organic
Tree Fruit Network

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Finally, spring is here! The winter months were active ones, however, for the Network, which I recap in this issue. Our list-serv has been active without overloading one's inbox. In fact, Faye Jones of MOSES wondered if we should start collecting and organizing the information being shared for possible publication. If you are not yet on the list-serv and wish to join, just send me your email address in the body of an email. One can join and unjoin at anytime.

As the season launches us into our orchards, this issue launches us into activities in the field, the first being April 22! Also listed are other events you may wish to attend. Anyone in this Network can host an informal field day, orchard walk, workday, or whatever you want to call it. You can announce it on the list-serv or ask me to do it for you. So while we list activities here, let's say that this is just the start.

This newsletter also describes a major activity of the Network—bringing Michael Phillips, author of [The Apple Grower](#), to the 2006 Organic University and the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference. Also reported is the Network's meeting held during the Conference.

This Network is as good as we make it. We were formed two years ago for the purposes of sharing information and encouraging research to improve the organic production and marketing of tree fruits. However, you want to join in and contribute to that effort is up to you. I propose that we start this year an Advisory Council for the Network. See inside for more information.

Let me know your thoughts on the Council, on our activities and direction, and on "Just Picked" itself. Send in ideas or actual articles. While I've written this newsletter, I hope future issues have your contributions. Enjoy spring!

--Deirdre Birmingham

Network Meeting at the 2006 Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference

The Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference is where we were hatched two years ago at an interest group meeting during a Conference lunch break in La Crosse, Wisconsin. And that is when we continue to meet. We know not everyone can be there, but it is an opportunity unlike any others for us to meet and discuss the Network itself.

At the 2006 meeting I recapped the activities of 2005 and repeat those here.

ó We held four field days for over 100 participants, with two of those field days being sold out. Thanks to Jim and Barb Lindemann of Gardens of Goodness, the Hoch family of Hoch Orchard and Gardens, Jamie Bjornsen and Bob Johnson of Countryside Orchard, and Keith Kozub of White Pine Orchard for hosting us. Largely due to the initiative of the hosts, we had five land-grant university researchers participate: Patty McManus, plant pathologist at UW-Madison; Emily Hoover, horticulturalist, University of Minnesota, Mark Whalon, entomologist at Michigan State University; Mark Gleason, plant pathologist at Iowa State University, and Brian Smith, horticulturalist at UW-River Falls. Additional financial support from UW's Center for Integrated Agriculture Systems, namely Michelle Miller, and Minnesota's IPM Program, namely Jeanne Ciborowski, made Harry Hoch's idea of bringing in Mark Whalon come to fruition. Jim Lindemann also brought in his county extension agent, the Community Action Coalition, staff from his state representative's office and a disabled workforce agency to expose growers to other resources, such as grants and business development support. Jim also wanted these parties to be more aware and informed of the needs of organic tree fruit growers and entrepreneurs.

ó Besides having field days, Network members used remaining travel funds from the Risk Management Agency of the USDA in early September to visit Mark Whalon's research team at the organic apple research orchard at Clarksville Horticultural Experiment Station of MSU and to visit Network participant, Jim Koan of Al-Mar Orchard. This trip was strongly about research, whether by farmer or researcher. It also gave us an opportunity while traveling to discuss direction for the Network.

ó While I initially committed to do four issues of "Just Picked," five issues were published, all of which are available on our website. We expanded our offering of the newsletter electronically.

ó Research and reference pages were developed for our website. The goal is to be a one-stop shopping reference site for all information related to producing tree fruits organically in the Upper Midwest. As you see additional information please let me know so that it can be added.

ó We discussed at our meeting that the funding from the Risk Management Agency that made these activities above possible ends September 30. MOSES is including us in their next proposal to the RMA and I have been and continue to look for additional funding sources. We discussed two major thoughts. One is making the Network a membership organization and having a subscription to Just Picked. The other is that whether or not we have funding, our information sharing can continue via our list-serv and by anyone offering to host an informal orchard walk or field day, however it is structured or named. The host would have minimal preparation and everyone could bring their own lunch. While funding helps us do more, it is not necessary for us to continue communicating.

ó I also started collecting information at the Organic University and the Network Meeting on our orchard characteristics. There were two main purposes. One is funding. Most funders want to know that the activities they are funding are achieving specified objectives and making an impact. Others question if this Network is just a bunch of hobbyist growers or if we are primarily commercial growers. So we need baseline information in terms of what size and types of orchards we have. We certainly welcome those who are just starting. That includes me and is how I got into this role. Importantly, more people are getting interested because we are getting out the information that has been rather hidden on organic orcharding and we are pushing the envelope on generating new and better information.

ó Michael Phillips reported on other Networks in the US of which he is familiar if not directly

involved. The Northeast Organic Farming Association, better known as NOFA, launched focus groups in the early 90s, one being on apples. Northeastern apple growers continue to meet annually in March for two days in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts. They are a diverse mix, not all of whom call themselves organic or would qualify to do so. What characterizes the group is open-mindedness. They each share something they worked on and researched to improve their orcharding. The group sharing accelerates the learning curve, particularly when it comes to nuance and understanding biological subtleties. In Maine, the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association and Fedco (the seed and input supplier) teamed up last year to offer a five-part organic orcharding series for \$175 per person. These all-day classes are held at key points in the growing season in working orchards throughout Maine. Michael teaches at one or two meetings in the series each year. Orchardists intrigued by biodynamic methods come together on more or less a biennial schedule in northern California, often under the tutelage of Hugh Williams from Threshold Farm in New York.

Michael was pleased to see this Network and has joined the list-serv. John Aue asked him for his ideas and guidelines in shaping grower research projects. Michael later emailed our list-serv with the following: "I've made some time these past weeks to finally assemble the Research Pages on my web site. These 7 pages turned out pretty cool and can really serve the cause of grower-initiated research in a meaningful way. Hopefully we'll all continue to be inspired to keep on learning and keep on sharing." Michael's Research Pages are at <http://www.herbsandapples.com/orchard/research.php> and are linked to our Network webpage.

ó Vijai Pandian of UW-Extension for Bayfield County (in way northern WI) offered that UW's Eco-Apple Network is starting a blog that growers in the Eco-Apple Newtorks around the state can join. To get more information, contact Vijai at 715-373-6104 x253 or vijai.pandian@ces.uwex.edu.

Since time limited our discussion, I asked those with remaining comments or questions to write them down and give them to me. The technical questions I reserve for list-serv discussions, newsletter articles, and field days. I quote others here:

- Need a system of scion wood exchange by mail and/or physical meeting.
- Possible group purchase of rootstock. Could be distributed at organic conference.
- Charge for field days, yearly membership to receive newsletter/list-serv. Grants – rural development, value-added grants create ways to use grants. Education grants under agro-forestry, environmental, etc.
- An on-farm microscope will allow one to determine % ascospore release.
- We need to look into advertising in the newsletter to help fund the letter.
- Software for economic establishment of orchards.
- Research Brainstorm Idea? Thinking about my son, a college student—biology major who will need to do a senior research project in a couple of years. Could our group serve as a contact point for students who want a research experience to connect with growers who have research ideas? Students could bring their academic research process knowledge, help figure out how to set up the experiment, and put in their time to do record-keeping that often gets lost in rush of farm work.

Many good ideas! I looked into the question of advertising in "Just Picked," which I address separately in this issue. I already submitted a grant application to SARE that addresses the economics of establishing an orchard, which we did not get but will try again next year. I am pursuing other sources of funding and always appreciate ideas on that. Any of the other ideas above, I ask for volunteers to step up, particularly to organize scion wood exchanges or rootstocks orders. ó

Michael Phillips Visit a Success!

Both Michael Phillips' Organic University and Conference sessions on organic apple production were sell-outs. Registration for the OU had to be shut off at 60 growers. About 210 people packed the room for his Conference session titled "The Organic Orchard in Context." A comfort for many, whether they attended his sessions or not, was the book. Michael is the author of The Apple Grower: A Guide for the Organic Orchardist, which he updated and published in November 2005. Faye Jones, Executive Director of MOSES, was particularly interested to see the evaluations on Michael's OU course, as bringing him was a special request of the Network. Her response: "I have never seen such high evaluations of an OU course before." Both his conference sessions also received very high evaluation ratings and strongly positive comments.

While we can't repeat the course here, and there is his book and website, I share a few highlights and responses from attendees to the OU.

Some attendees found that the topics were not quite what they expected. Michael spent more time on the soil than they were used to at tree fruit grower meetings. We all know that in organic production good growing is dependent on good quality soil. But somehow in organic orcharding the focus shifts more to managing insect pests and diseases. Michael corrected that by discussing forest-edge ecology, the habitat native to tree species. He discussed how to build up a fungal dominated community of soil microorganisms borrowing from the soil foodweb work of Elaine Ingham. Another emphasis was building the plant's natural immune system. Michael did not give prescriptive information, shunning the "allopathic" approach. But rather he emphasized holistic thinking about the orchard and each aspect of it. He also encouraged us to "think like a root," to "vision the root living in its soil environment."

He started head-on with labels. Up on the screen went the words "organic," "biodynamic," "integrated pest management," "beyond organic," "sustainable," "open-minded growing," "low-spray," "certified common sense," and more. Michael is not so concerned about what we call ourselves or whose certification we bear. With his emphasis on integrating orchards into a diversified farm to serve localized communities near you, labels and certifications become less important. He was not knocking any of them. He just

asked that we be open-minded and learn from each other, no matter what we call our orchard management or whether we use some synthetics or not. Hey! That is the Network's function—to learn from each other. Our minds must be open to do this.

Attendees commented on what they liked most:

"The incredible depth yet accessible knowledge of the presenter – but even more, HIS EXPERIENCE!" (Many commented on his years of practical experience and depth of knowledge.)

"[his] focus on biodynamic systems"

"the open-minded knowledge that the presenter came with"

"the down to earth, get along with everyone and everything approach." (Several commented on this)

"I've been tending our orchard organically. This course reaffirmed many of our current practices and opened the door to some new ideas."

"A true expert farmer as the instructor"

"... very entertaining. Wassail ceremony was fun."

Several liked most his "holistic approach."

"...the camaraderie of the group."

"...provided lots of knowledge about growing for tree health."

"Even though I am only one year into my orchard, Michael presented basic material I could understand."

"knows how to communicate"

"...companion plants and plant medicines for apples"

"...presented ideas which make me think a bit differently about orcharding than I have previously. For example, thinking about fruit trees in context of trees generally and the environment of trees, i.e., the forest and that the forest is a fungal-based system vs. a bacterial based system, therefore influencing management to enhance that fungal base."

"Encouragement to think outside the box."

"hard to decide!" (what I liked most!)

Several asked for the course again, or a two-day or multi-day course. Another asked for a workshop on organic orchard soil fertility systems.

In the end, however, the real test of Michael's visit is up to us. We are the ones to use what we learned to improve and more widely adopt organic orcharding in the Upper Midwest. Toward that end, our website links to Michaels' so that the open-minded learning can continue: <http://www.HerbsAndApples.com>. ó

June 20th Field Day at Carpenter Nature Center

Mark your calendars now for a June 20th field day hosted by John McPherson, orchard manager at the Carpenter St. Croix Valley Nature Center near Hastings in southeastern Minnesota. The field day will be from 10 AM to 3 PM. Advance registration (form enclosed) is required by June 13. Lunch will be provided.

Thomas and Edna Carpenter first planted the orchard in the early 40s. Since then 2000 apple trees were planted in 1988 all on Mark rootstock. John has been managing the orchard since 1999. Even before graduating with his B.S. degree in Horticulture from the University of Minnesota in 1980, he has always worked in horticulture, both fruit trees and ornamentals.



John McPherson

As the trees on Mark rootstock have been petering out, John has been replacing them with M-26 and is now moving to Bud-9. So far he has replaced 900 trees. He will discuss their soil preparation methods involving green manures. Older varieties that are less in demand by consumers are being replaced with the newer and more popular Honeycrisp and Zestar. Other varieties include Paula Red, Chestnut Crab, Sweet Sixteen, McIntosh, Haralson, Cortland, Honey Gold, Fireside, Connell Red, Regent, and Keepsake. All the apples are sold on-site, fresh to the public. Their niche is to sell high-quality fruit to consumers concerned about the environment. They also educate thousands of school children each fall on their environmental management practices. For the last four years, the Food Alliance Midwest has certified them.

The orchard benefits from 10-foot tall deer exclusion fence around 11 acres. Within that acreage John also manages two acres of pumpkins, corn, winter squash, and fall raspberries.

The young trees are mulched with wood chips, which he was pleased to hear Michael Phillips discuss. They collect the June drops, hand thin apples in June, and collect windfalls as part of their sanitation practices. John would like your ideas on organically ap-

proved thinning materials as he finds hand thinning to be a major labor bottleneck. For codling moth, mating disruption is used in late June. Apple maggots are trapped out in July and August. They have some problem with plum curculio but no problem to date with fire blight. "Knock on wood," John said, "especially with those M-26s rootstocks now." He is rethinking his scab control program when hear-

ing Michael Phillips say that he uses only three to four sulfur sprays annually as part of his control practices. This caught John's attention. He knew that organic orchards usually applied 12 to 20 sprays depending on location and weather. John was concerned about the environmental impacts of that much sulfur. The Nature Center investigated and found that that much sulfur was more environmentally negative than one to two sprays of Captan. Their

overriding concern is the environment, rather than qualifying for certification programs. John is considering a reduced sulfur approach this year based on what he learned from Michael Phillips. The Center's orchard is unusual in that all their sprays are done by the first week of June whereas other orchards in the area are spraying into September.

I asked John what other reflections he had on Michael Phillips' Organic University course. He was impressed with "all the time Michael spent on the soil and building up the soil's fungal community." He was also impressed how Michael spoke from 20 years of experience. He "spoke from trial and error, from real hands-on experience. His knowledge was deep, even heartfelt and intuitive."

We might also get John to talk about his two-week experience in 2003 in Kosovo. He volunteered as orchard specialist to help families improve their commercial orchards.

Our activities are always for the purpose of sharing information to improve our organic production and marketing of tree fruits. So no host is inviting us because they have all the answers. We start with and accept wherever each of us is at. Since we are learning together, the host is as likely to ask you questions

Continued on page 10

Network Field Days

While any member can informally host others at their orchard, the Network is organizing four field days in 2006.

April 22, Earth Day, is appropriate for a Tree Planting Day! This will be a Demonstration (and optional Work) Day starting at 10 AM at my farm near Mineral Point in southern Wisconsin. How appropriate on Earth Day to have Bob Johnson, a Midwest pioneer in organic orcharding, and Jamie Bjornsen of Countryside Orchard both coming to teach us about tree planting. I have about 600 trees to dig out of the nursery and plant for the first time. Bring your gloves and shovel. Bob will want to make sure you understand his finer points of tree planting with a bit of practice! Jamie will tell you about her first tree planting and why she called Bob to come to her rescue. I can tell from our conversations that there are many finer points. Lots of practice will be allowed and encouraged. Bob and Jamie will cover the following:

- Soil prep before planting
- Orchard layout
- Rootstocks are in order of numbers: Bud-9, M-7 EMLA, M-26, and Bud-118 with traditional cider varieties meaning most are for fermentation, not eating. Pears are perry pears on Bartlett rootstocks.
- Transplanting of trees from my nursery. Most were grafted last year, some in 2004.
- Tree selection (including what to discard)
- Care of transplants and root dips
- Planting hole size and shape
- Appropriate distances, training, and pruning systems
- Graft union height
- Staking
- Many fine points that Bob feels you should know.
- And the mistakes I have made to date! More to be made if I did not have Bob and Jamie coming. I'll be serving lunch and more for however late we go! Let me know if you will be coming and how many are coming with you. Feel free to stay or leave whenever you wish. I'll send directions. There is no charge.

June 20, Tuesday, we will be at The Carpenter St. Croix Valley Nature Center straddling the Mississippi River near Hastings, in southeastern Minnesota. See the article on the Center's orchard in this issue and use the enclosed form to register. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture's IPM program has just offered to again support our MN field day by providing speaker travel funds. To be announced!

August 2, Wednesday, David and Perry-O Sliwa of Sliwa Meadow Orchard will host a field day near Decorah, Iowa. While David also grows apples, he will focus this field day on his plums and pears, and the energy-creating farm and house they homesteaded 25 years ago. David has integrated fruit trees with their plantings of vegetables, small fruits, and flowers. He also keeps bees. This year they will be downscaling their vegetable production and focusing more on their fruit and berry production and value-added products. We'll feature this orchard in our July issue of "Just Picked" and call for registrations then.

September 13, Wednesday, Leslie Cooperband and Wes Jarrell of Prairie Fruits Farm in Champaign, Illinois will show us their tree fruits, diverse small fruits, poultry, dairy goat and farmstead cheese-making operations. They are the first licensed, farmstead cheese operation in Illinois. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Agroecology Program is footing the bill for much of this field day and is graciously allowing us to co-sponsor it. See last year's 3rd issue of Just Picked, which featured Prairie Fruits Farm. Registration information will be in the July issue of Just Picked.

I hope that you will consider inviting people over for an informal gathering. July is wide open! Others want to meet with area growers over a monthly breakfast. Use the list-serv to announce whatever you'd like to make happen. Let me know if I can assist. ó

What Did You Read Lately?

While listening to my husband chuckle at what he thought was a ludicrous suggestion in a book on Blue Orchard Bees he recently purchased, I thought that our Network should exchange thoughts on what books and information sources we've found helpful and not so helpful in our quest to improve our organic production and marketing of high quality fruit. We are all busy people. The Reference page on our website is chock full of informational items. So many of us struggle with which book, magazine, website, etc., to pursue. Sometimes advice from others can steer you to the sources most appropriate for your needs. Please write a paragraph or full-blown review on what you've found helpful, or maybe not. Also feel free to comment on part of a publication rather than the whole thing.

I queried the list-serve as to what they read this winter and had little response. Yet I know this is an inquisitive group and not one without opinions. So we'll start small and hopefully build from here.

"How to Manage the Blue Orchard Bee" by Jordi Bosch & William Kemp, 'reviewed' by John Biondi.

I purchased this book at the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference out of an interest in understanding and encouraging a variety of pollinators in our orchard. The book seemed to be the only title on Blue Orchard Bees (BOB) in the vast array of books at the conference. Although there was some basic information on BOB in the book, the book was clearly not written for small to moderate-sized orchard operations or for areas already housing the BOB. It is a very technical book focused on how to move BOB from one area where they are native to another where they are not and introducing them into a commercial orchard. Much technical detail is focused on how to get the bees to hatch at the precise time that a particular orchard would come into bloom. (Moving bees from Utah to California seemed to be the prime example of this process). For a large commercial orchard not currently possessing native pollinators, this might be written at an appropriate

technical level. The use of long-term temperature controlled environments and even X-ray equipment (!) is discussed in detail. If, however, you are simply looking to encourage BOB that already inhabit your area, this is not the book. This book is an excellent academic and technical publication that will help facilitate commercially moving BOB around the country and timing their emergence to specific localities. But if you are not moving bees on a large scale this isn't the right book. If anyone does know of a more straightforward book for simply understanding and encouraging BOB that are already present, please let me know! 608-967-2362; jbiondi@lucigen.com

"I have read a book. It was published last century by Ben Watson, **"Cider: Hard and Sweet."** I would have thought that everyone has already read this except me. I like the book well enough but I do miss Annie Proulx's "Cider Making, Using & Enjoying Sweet And Hard Cider." I lent it to a friend and have not got it back! Watson's book is a good one for travel and if one travels to the right places could do some sampling along the way using the book as a guide. (I like the cover pages doubling as bookmarks.) Dan Kelly, Blue Heron Orchard, Missouri.

Does **"The Field Guide to Antique Farm Tractors"** count ? :) Tom Goetzman, West Salem, WI. You can email Tom for further discussion via the list-serv at organicreefruits@yahoo.com or via me. Antique tractors are often small and may fit the bill for an orchard tractor. (DB)

Good idea to have a column on this topic. I haven't read anything relevant recently, but found the following website: <http://www.fruitadvisor.info/> Of course, Michael Pollan's section on **Apples in Botany of Desire** is required reading, for those that haven't seen it yet...Paul Whitaker, Wausau, WI.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ó **Organic Tree Fruit Producers Involved in Research will meet in Michigan** on April 21 from 9:30am-Noon at the Sail Inn in Benzonia (Rt 31 and 115). Over the past five to six years, growers and researchers have been gathering to discuss organic tree fruit research. This year they will discuss 2005 research into PC controls of bait and kill, population suppression strategies, biological control with Mycrotrol O and nematodes along with plans for 2006. They will also discuss apple scab and cherry leafspot control. While these will be the “main events”, other topics will be addressed. Contact Mark Whalon if you wish to attend or need more information at 517-353-9425 or whalon@msu.edu.

ó **Antique Apple Tree Pruning Workshop**, May 5, Port Oneida, Michigan. The workshop will focus on bringing neglected apple trees back into production and maintaining their health. The course will include 1) how to identify and properly remove dead materials from abandoned trees; 2) proper pruning of the canopy for optimum maintenance and apple production; 3) maintaining tree health; 4) how to maintain ground cover under the tree; 5) watering and care of the tree; and 6) equipment safety. Participants receive hands-on training of all techniques taught by experts from three County offices. The Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lake Shore is hosting this annual event along with the Leelanau Conservation District, MSU Northwest Michigan Horticultural Station, and the County Extension Master Gardener Program.

The event is from 1:00 – 4:30 p.m. There is no cost to participate. Tools and handouts will be provided. Participants should wear sturdy shoes and gloves. In case of rain, the event will be rescheduled to May 8th at the same time and location. Participants should meet at the Port Oneida Schoolhouse on Port Oneida Road 4 miles north of Glen Arbor on M-22. Interested parties should register in advance by contacting the park historical architect, Kimberly Mann (231) 326-5135 ext. 501 or email: kimberly_mann@nps.gov

ó MOSES is planning its **2007 Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference**. If you have ideas, please let them know at info@mosesorganic.org or 715-772-3153 now! Watch the list-serv in July for an opportunity to vote on a menu of conference topics. They also appreciate speaker suggestions, but need them by mid-June. We have had sessions on organic apple production at the last two conferences and Organic Universities only because people have asked for it.

ó Bill Wright, Network participant, and UW-Extension Brown County Community Garden Coordinator has applied for an **Emerging Ag Markets grant** to get funds to market organically grown apples in Wisconsin. He plans to make this happen with and through the Network. Thank you, Bill! A field day on marketing strategies would be planned and a brochure on the benefits of locally grown, organic apples developed. Our website would post the brochure in a downloadable format and results posted of the marketing strategies discussed at the field day. The application has been approved for funding and should be funded if Congress provides sufficient funds in their 2007 agricultural appropriations.

ó Mark your 2007 calendars for the **5th Biennial Organic Tree Fruit Research Symposium** March 4-6 hosted by Michigan State University. The Network will play a communications role in preparation for the Symposium. A theme of “Production, Marketing and Consumer Relations” has been suggested. Tours to the Clarksville Research Station and to a local grower with a developed marketing strategy are envisioned. Registration will be approximately \$150.

ó While our **SARE Farmer Grant proposal** received a favorable evaluation it was not funded. We will try again next year. The proposed is titled “Creating a financial recordkeeping tool by tracking representative organic apple orchards in the Upper Midwest.”ó

Network Advisory Council

What do you think about forming an advisory body for the Network? While I serve as Coordinator, an advisory group would give direction and help carve out our future. We are not a formal, legal entity, such as a nonprofit corporation, and thus, are not required to have by-laws and a board of directors. But perhaps since the Network is growing and seems to have significant potential, we might wish to help ensure growth and the direction of that growth by having leaders in organic tree fruit production in our region provide guidance and oversight.

In our first year of RMA funding, I did ask four people to meet by phone to plan the field days. This ad-hoc group performed its task diligently. Since the field days were to be in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, there was at least one grower from each of those states. I wish to thank them: Harry Hoch (MN), Keith Kozub (WI), David Sliwa (IA), and Maury Wills (IA).

I would think an advisory group would largely meet by phone, particularly in the winter months to evaluate past activities, plan upcoming activities, and think long-range. We could seek for a body that represents the major states of the Upper Midwest and from which most of our participants come.

How to select advisors, needs some thought. I would certainly encourage growers to volunteer. Perhaps we seek five or six growers, each one from a different state. I could draft an advisory council job description, which this group could revise and agree to.

While we have no current funding for this group, we could raise funds to pay for a few conference calls per year. In addition, the group could try meeting in person at the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference or other conferences to which most of its members were already attending. They would serve, as nonprofit boards of directors do, without compensation for their time or expertise. But perhaps they could receive a few perks, such as no charge to attend field days.

Let me know what you think.

The NetEx

A new feature, the Network Exchange, or NetEx for short, is being tested in this issue. I need your feedback. Jamie Bjornsen and Bob Johnson suggested at our Network meeting that we solicit advertising in "Just Picked" to help fund it. I raised this idea with Faye Jones and Jody Padgham of MOSES, who have lots of experience with this. We discussed the advantages and disadvantages. I later discussed with Jamie and Bob. What we thought might best serve and fit with the Network is not advertising per se, which often involves graphics, but something similar to a free Classifieds section. The purpose is to allow Network participants to exchange information on services or things to share, buy, or sell. It would not be for product or input advertising. For now, knowledge-based services provided by participants would be allowed. Examples of how to use NetEx: exchange or share scion wood, group purchases of rootstock, orchard consulting or pest scouting services, you want to buy orchard or processing equipment, you are hosting a work day, you are giving a seminar (such as grafting or pruning), or other ways to help us improve our organic production and marketing of tree fruits, except for product advertising. Is this too complicated? Does it meet a need? Again, Give me your feedback. Here is a test case.

B & J Consulting

Eco-system organics of fruit trees.
Setup * Maintenance* Conversions
Bob Johnson 608-624-3777
Jamie Bjornsen 563-538-4546

Network Lending Library

Interested? Contact Jim Lindemann
608-838-8206, jlf0102@yahoo.com

Network Questionnaire

I sent a questionnaire last November to a sample of those who attended one or more of our field days in 2005. The purpose of the questionnaire was to ask them what they learned and had implemented in their orchards as a result of the field days and/or "Just Picked." I also asked on what they would like more information as well as any additional ideas they have for Network activities in 2006. I share responses to the latter two questions. Let me or the list-serv know if you resonate with any of these. Moreover, please share any information or ideas you have for making them happen.

More information on:

"How to organically reduce the codling moth infestation."

"Hard cider varieties and production."

"How to build a good fence to keep out deer"

"Pruning and training systems. Pro's and con's of woodchip mulch in tree row."

"Farm evaluation of unusual and antique apple varieties in Upper Midwest."

"Any feedback on prunus fruit grown in our region."

"We need, as a very high priority, a resource library that provides access to information on cultivar selection, processing, current research on pest and disease management, marketing, and sources of supplies. POMONA, the NAFEX fruit folks' publication, has had such a resource for a long time. It is very helpful. Designating someone to maintain such a valuable asset for our group would be a significant help to all."

"Establish a database of resources: people, information, publications, events, suppliers, similar to the very useful MOSES document but web sited and focused on the various specialties, for example tree and small fruit."

"Describing different orchard pests."

"Composting, apple scab, plum curculio"

Additional thoughts or ideas:

"Organize informal workshops – pruning winter, pruning summer, bench grafting, budding, etc. Potluck, post event online and in newsletter. More of a social event."

"I found the two field days I attended (Hoch and Jamie/Bob) to be valuable and look forward to more next summer – when you are at my stage any information is potentially useful."

"I enjoy the meetings..."

"Sorry I am missed the trip to Michigan. Hope there are more like that in '06."

"Improving alliances between organic academic staff and us. Facilitating contact, sharing information – what we are doing should merit some inquiry as a base for research."

"Significantly better access to research data."

"Develop a Q & A forum so that we can find authoritative answers to organic growing questions on a timely basis."

"How about a collaborative grant development workshop? It appears that groups stand a better chance than individuals. Involving U faculty who want to be our allies, would benefit both."

"We'd like to sponsor a session on technology in organic management. We have talked with several manufacturers who are eager to talk with growers. Our goal is to have a system operating by next spring for garden and orchard."

"Roostocks, grafting, plum curculio control."

From page 5.. Carpenter Nature Center

Bring the whole family on June 20th. The Nature Center will be a destination in and of itself. The Center is 425 diverse acres on a bluff above the confluence of the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers and straddles both its Wisconsin and Minnesota sides. There are hiking trails, beach



access and the Interpretive Center among other activities viewable on their website at <http://carpenternaturecenter.org/>

NOTE: At press time, we received a generous offer from Jeanne Ciborowski of Minnesota Department of Agriculture's IPM Program to sponsor a speaker for this field day. So watch the list-serv, our website, or give me a call for how this evolves.

New Study Confirms The Ecological Virtues Of Organic Farming

March 7, 2006. Stanford University. Organic farming has long been touted as an environmentally friendly alternative to conventional agriculture. A new study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) provides strong evidence to support that claim.

Writing in the March 6 online edition of PNAS, Stanford University graduate student Sasha B. Kramer and her colleagues found that fertilizing apple trees with synthetic chemicals produced more adverse environmental effects than feeding them with organic manure or alfalfa. "The intensification of agricultural production over the past 60 years and the subsequent increase in global nitrogen inputs have resulted in substantial nitrogen pollution and ecological damage," Kramer and her colleagues write. "The primary source of nitrogen pollution comes from nitrogen-based agricultural fertilizers, whose use is forecasted to double or almost triple by 2050."

Nitrogen compounds from fertilizer can enter the atmosphere and contribute to global warming, adds Harold A. Mooney, the Paul S. Achilles Professor of

Environmental Biology at Stanford and co-author of the study. "This study shows that the use of organic versus chemical fertilizers can play a role in reducing these adverse effects."

Nitrogen treatments

The PNAS study was conducted in an established apple orchard on a 4-acre site in the Yakima Valley of central Washington, one of the premiere apple-growing regions in the United States.

During the yearlong experiment, organically grown trees were fed either composted chicken manure or alfalfa meal, while conventionally raised plants were given calcium nitrate, a synthetic fertilizer widely used by commercial apple growers. Trees raised using an integrated system (which combines organic and conventional agricultural techniques) were given a blend of equal parts chicken manure and calcium nitrate. Each tree was fertilized twice, in October and May, and given the same amount of nitrogen at both feedings no matter what the source--alfalfa, chicken manure, calcium nitrate or the manure/calcium nitrate blend.

continued on back page

Upper Midwest Organic Tree Fruit Growers Network Field Day
at Carpenter St. Croix Valley Nature Center June 20, 2006

REGISTRATION FORM – due by June 13

Your name(s): _____

Farm Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City/Town: _____ State and Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Registration fee is \$15.00 to cover refreshments and materials.

of people _____ x \$15.00 = total _____

Mail this form and check payable to MOSES by June 13 to: Deirdre Birmingham, Organic Tree Fruit Growers Network; 7258 Kelly Rd, Mineral Point, WI 53565

Field day will be from 10 to 3, rain or shine. Registration will be confirmed and directions provided.

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.

Groundwater contamination

One goal of the PNAS experiment was to compare how much excess nitrogen leached into the soil using the four fertilizer treatments--one conventional, two organic (manure and alfalfa) and one integrated. When applied to the soil, nitrogen fertilizers release or break down into nitrates--chemical compounds that plants need to build proteins. However, excess nitrates can percolate through the soil and contaminate surface and groundwater supplies. According to the PNAS study, nearly one of 10 domestic wells in the United States sampled between 1993 and 2000 had nitrate concentrations that exceeded the EPA's drinking water standards.

"We measured nitrate leaching over an entire year and found that it was 4.4 to 5.6 times higher in the conventional treatment than in the two organic treatments, with the integrated treatment in between," says John B. Reganold, Regents Professor of Soil Science at Washington State University and co-author of the study.

Nitrogen gas emissions

The research team also compared the amount of ni-

trogen gas that was released into the atmosphere by the four treatments. Air samples collected in the orchard after the fall and spring fertilizations revealed that organic and integrated soils emitted larger quantities of an environmentally benign gas called dinitrogen (N_2), than soils treated with conventional synthetic fertilizer. One explanation for this disparity is that the organic and integrated soils contained active concentrations of denitrifying bacteria--naturally occurring microbes that convert excess nitrates in the soil into N_2 gas. However, denitrifier microbial communities were much smaller and far less active and efficient in conventionally treated soils.

The research team also measured emissions of nitrous oxide (N_2O)--a potent greenhouse gas that's 300 times more effective at heating the atmosphere than carbon dioxide gas, the leading cause of global warming. The results showed that nitrous oxide emissions were similar among the four treatments. "These results demonstrate that organic and integrated fertilization practices support more active and efficient denitrifier microbial communities, which may shift some of the potential nitrate leaching losses in the soil into harmless dinitrogen gas losses in the atmosphere."

The Upper Midwest Organic Tree Fruit Growers Network was started in 2004 for the purpose of sharing information and encouraging research to improve organic tree fruit production and marketing in the Upper Midwest. The Network is supported by the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services (MOSES) and the Risk Management Agency of the USDA in addition to other event sponsors. This newsletter is produced by MOSES, layout by Jody Padgham.

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