

# NORTH CENTRAL REGION SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

## FIELD NOTES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NCR-SARE PROGRAM  
WINTER/SPRING 2008



## HENRY BROCKMAN WINS 2008 MADDEN AWARD

An Illinois farmer who values harmony with nature and community has won a national award, The Patrick Madden Award for Sustainable Agriculture in the north central region. Henry Brockman operates an intensive, multi-generational, highly-diverse and sustainable vegetable production in the Mackinaw River Valley of Woodford County, IL.

This \$1,000 award for farmers and ranchers who raise food or fiber in ways that are profitable, good for families and communities, and beneficial to the environment is presented by the USDA's North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) program.

SARE – funded and administered by USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CS-REES) – advances farming systems that are profitable, environmentally sound and good for communities. The North Central Region includes: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Brockman specializes in biodiversity, planting more than 600 varieties of more than 100 distinct vegetable types on his Illinois farm, Henry's Farm. 550 different items were in Henry's Farm's 2007 seed order. His operation provides produce to families in the Bloomington-Peoria area with a CSA, and to families in the Chicago area with a stand at the Evanston Farmers Market.

The organic certification process is something that Brockman values, especially for beginning farmers. "I always encourage other farmers to become certified until they can create a market for themselves like I did. I see certification as a way to substantiate what you're saying about your products," said Brockman.



*Henry Brockman at the Evanston Farmer's Market. -  
Photo by Eliezer T. Margolis*

"I was certified for the first 7 years, until 2000, with Organic Crop Improvement Association. When the USDA

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## MADDEN AWARD....

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took over the certification process, it became a little confusing, and I dropped my certification,” explained Brockman. “After I dropped out, I didn’t get back in to certification because by that point I was already established in my market as an organic farmer, and I was too busy to do all the paperwork. For me, it wasn’t that I didn’t agree with the USDA’s organic standards. It’s still on my to-do list to become certified again.”

Henry’s Farm is a busy and interactive place. Three generations of family can be found working at Henry’s Farm – from Henry’s parents, to his wife and their three children, to assorted brothers and sisters and cousins and nieces and nephews. This is in addition to farm hands, apprentices, and interns. Brockman’s parents, Herman and Marlene Brockman, bought some land in the 1960s and raised their 6 children there, and that land was to become part of what “Henry’s Farm” is today.

“I grew up on a small farm. My parents had about 50 acres, and while my father wasn’t a ‘farmer,’ we raised all of our own organic produce and meats. In my family, it’s a given that you help each other out with the garden and the animals,” said Brockman.

Brockman’s children, ages 13, 14, and 17 are involved on the farm today, just as Brockman was when he was younger. “I think it’s important for kids to be involved in what their parents are doing – it’s good for them physically, and teaches them about responsibility. It gives them an advantage out in the world; it makes it easier for them to adapt to new situations and accept responsibility.”

In Brockman’s 2006 printed piece, *Organic Matters*, Brockman talks about the role of biodiversity in sustainable agriculture: “The goal of my way of farming is not only to enhance the lives of the crops and those who eat them, but to enhance all life, from the lives of the insects, worms, and arthropods of the vegetable field to the lives of the wildlife and domesticated life (that includes us) who inhabit the environment around the field. And on a grander scale . . . [to] enhance the very life of the planet by protecting a piece of it and by not polluting the planet’s water and air.”

*Organic Matters* has been included the curriculum at Illinois Wesleyan University and at Prescott University in Prescott, AZ, and Bon Appétit Management Co. purchased 1,500 copies for educational purposes.

Brockman’s sister, Terra Brockman, who works at Henry’s Farm, had this to say about her brother: “Henry lives each day at the intersection of the natural and the human envi-



*Brockman delivers his acceptance speech at the 2008 SARE New American Farm Conference: Advancing the Frontier of Sustainable Agriculture.*

ronment, and takes very seriously his duty to the complex natural environment and to the next generation. He works each day to conserve and enhance things of immeasurable value: biodiversity, wildlife habitat, water quality, agricultural land, family farms, rural communities, local economies, local food sources, rare plant varieties, and of course our soil, air, water, and open space.”

Brockman was surprised to hear that he had won the Madden Award, and was modest about the honor. “There are so many good farmers making a large impact out there,” said Brockman. “I certainly wasn’t expecting this at all. The truth of the matter is that any success I’ve had in farming and life is due just as much to the help of my extended family as it is to my own efforts.”

The \$1,000 award was presented at the final plenary of SARE’s 20th Anniversary New American Farm conference, held March 25-27, 2008 in Kansas City, MO (see [www.sare.org](http://www.sare.org) for more conference details). Three other Madden winners, each from SARE’s remaining regions -- Southern, Western and Northeast -- also received their awards at the conference.

# FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES WITH SMALL BUSINESS INNOVATION RESEARCH

The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program offers grants to qualified small businesses (including small and medium-sized farms) in support of high quality, innovative research related to important scientific problems and opportunities in agriculture that could lead to significant public benefit if successfully commercialized. The USDA SBIR program has awarded more than 2000 grants since its inception in 1983, allowing hundreds of small businesses to explore their technological potential and profit from the commercialization of their innovative ideas.

SBIR is a three phase program. For FY 2009, the budget is estimated at \$19 million. In Phase I, the grantees normally test the proof of concept within an 8-month grant period and a maximum grant size of \$80,000. Successful Phase I grantees are invited to submit applications for Phase II funding, with grants lasting 24 months and limited to \$350,000. Phase II can lead to the development of a prototype. Phase III is the commercialization phase of the SBIR program and is not funded by the USDA. However, grantees are encouraged to seek Phase III funding from other entities and show commercialization potential at the time of applying for a Phase II grant. Up to one-third of Phase I and one-half of Phase II grant dollars can be used to fund activities by university or government scientists in support of SBIR projects. FY 2009 program solicitations will be posted in early June 2008 with deadlines in early September 2008. You can find the solicitations at <http://www.csrees.usda.gov/funding/sbir/sbir.html>.

The USDA SBIR program in FY 2009 should include 12 broad topic areas. For full details about the USDA SBIR topic areas please see: <http://www.csrees.usda.gov/funding/sbir/sbir.html>. Three of the topic areas - Small And Mid-Sized Farms, Marketing And Trade, and Rural Development - are particularly relevant to small farms and ranching enterprises.

**SMALL AND MID-SIZED FARMS:** Funding will support the development of new information and technologies to improve the viability and profitability of small and mid-size farms and ranches. Emphasis is placed on the development of new agricultural enterprises that focus on plant and animal specialty farm products, and how to market these products; new management tools to enhance the efficiency and profitability of small farms; farming methods appropriately scaled to small farms that are directed at more efficient use of natural resources; and new educational tools to ensure that small farmers have the information they need to operate their farms on a sustainable and profitable basis.

Primary contact: Dr. Charles Cleland;  
phone: (202) 401-6852; email: [ccleland@csrees.usda.gov](mailto:ccleland@csrees.usda.gov).

**MARKETING AND TRADE:** This topic area focuses on innovative marketing strategies to increase sales of raw or processed agricultural, forestry and aquacultural products, including raw or processed commodities, and value-added foods, feed and industrial products derived from them. A wide range of strategies are applicable, including evaluation of the type, size and location of domestic and international market opportunities; strategies to enter new markets or expand sales in current markets; advanced information systems that provide vital information on marketing opportunities for an industry or producers in a state, region or the USA, and development of market-based approaches to reduce or mitigate adverse agri-environmental consequences or to promote positive agri-environmental outcomes while simultaneously preserving economic growth.

Primary contact: Dr. Suresh Sureshwaran; phone: (202) 720-7536; Email: [ssureshwaran@csrees.usda.gov](mailto:ssureshwaran@csrees.usda.gov).

**RURAL DEVELOPMENT:** The primary focuses of this topic area are on the development of new technologies, and on the innovative application of existing technologies to address important problems and opportunities affecting people and institutions in rural America. Since FY 2005, this topic is less centered on agriculture per se, and more on areas of growing importance to rural communities (e.g. enhance the environment, disaster resilience, service delivery, and entrepreneurial and workforce skills) that could provide significant national benefits. Applicants to Rural Development should explicitly discuss the specific rural problem or opportunity that they will examine and how this project will successfully address it.

Primary contact: Dr. Suresh Sureshwaran; phone: (202) 720-7536; Email: [ssureshwaran@csrees.usda.gov](mailto:ssureshwaran@csrees.usda.gov).

Examples of projects previously funded through these 3 topics:

*Small and Mid-sized Farms, 2006: Organic Goldenseal Production for Small Farms:* A production and processing system for the medicinal plant Goldenseal with USDA National Organic Program certification.

*Marketing and Trade, 2006: Quality Verification Program for Family Farms:* A USDA Quality System Verification Program which provides standard operating procedures for all-natural beef and free-range poultry. This project was carried out by Diana Endicott, who received a SARE farmer/rancher grant in 1998 to explore consumer-directed marketing of natural beef, and who later was elected and served on the North Central SARE Administrative Council.

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## NCR-SARE GRAD STUDENT WINS NATIONAL AWARD

“Can a Jewish girl from Brooklyn, NY, have anything to say about the future of agriculture?” asked Ohio farmer Shoshanah Inwood of Columbus. The answer to her question must be a resounding “yes” as Inwood has won the SARE 2008 New Voices Contest.

In support of SARE’s mission to advance sustainable practices and innovations to the whole of American agriculture, SARE’s 2008 New Voices Contest called for written, audio, and or video submissions that articulated new perspectives and illustrated an inspirational and pioneering vision for the advancement of sustainable agriculture over the next 20 years.

Contestants were asked to address the entrant’s vision of how truly sustainable production and marketing systems would improve profitability, stewardship of the land and water, and quality of life for farmers, ranchers and their communities. Applicants were asked to highlight practical strategies for evoking deeply held and/or broadly shared values to advance sustainable agriculture on a wider scale. Inwood presented her contest entry at the closing plenary session at SARE’s 20th Anniversary New American Farm Conference.

“Sustainable agriculture is not black and white, to achieve our goals we have to challenge ourselves to move beyond the ideal types of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ farmers and work in the gray, to welcome farmers who fall along a spectrum of production and marketing practices. We need to make the distinction between the political and economic contexts that lead to the technology treadmill, and the morality of individual farmers as stewards of the land. By understanding the real world constraints producers face, we reconcile why farmers refuse to invest in grazing system, fail to im-



*Shoshanah Inwood - Photo by Martha Nieset.*



*Shoshanah Inwood delivers her award winning contest entry at SARE’s 20th Anniversary New American Farm Conference.*

plement stream set backs, and overuse fertilizers and pesticides,” said Inwood.

“I’ve come to believe that the way a country feeds itself speaks to our values, humanity and the legacy we leave for the next generation... We move forward when we build an agriculture rooted in our shared values of family, community, health and prosperity,” she explained.

In 2000, Inwood co-founded Silver Tale Organic Farm in Lucas, Ohio. She has collaborated on projects with local farmers, Innovative Farmers of Ohio, the Ohio Department of Agriculture and the Central-Ohio Chef Grower Network. Inwood’s dissertation work, examining farm succession at the rural-urban interface, was funded by NCR-SARE (GNC06-070). She served on the Ohio Ecological Food and Farming Association (OEFFA) board for four years.

Inwood’s 2007 annual report for “Sustaining the Family Farm at the Rural Urban Interface: Farm Succession Processes of Alternative Food and Agricultural Enterprises and Traditional Commodity Farmers” (GNC06-070) is available online at the SARE reporting website: <http://www.sare.org/projects/index>.



*Ericka Wright in the garden. – photo by Ennis Walker*

## MISSOURI YOUTH EXPLORE URBAN AGRICULTURE

Youth gardeners have the opportunity to explore urban agriculture in Kansas City, MO at the Troostwood Garden in Kansas City. Located on a corner lot donated for use by Rockhurst University, Troostwood Gardens is in an urban neighborhood.

There, a master gardener, and ten youth work with Ericka Wright's "Urban Agriculture Youth Program," building their urban agriculture skills. They grow produce to sell at the Troostwood Youth Garden Market. Through the help of a 2005 grant from the NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher Grant Program, the Urban Agriculture Youth Program at Troostwood Garden's hopes to influence a change in youths' lifestyle and at the same time improve their nutrition, environment, social and economic practices. Ericka Wright's family started Troostwood Gardens on their property in 2000 as an activity for neighborhood youth.

"In the community I live in, we were the only house in the neighborhood with a swing set, so we had always kids in the yard. Many of the kids had low scores in reading and math," explained Wright. "Most people enjoy eating, whatever level they're at, and we figured we could read a little, eat a little, do a little math, and learn together in the garden with the kids."

At 41 years-old, Wright is disabled from muscular dystrophy, and values a healthful diet. Wright wanted to show children healthful nutrition as part of a healthy lifestyle. "In terms of sustainable agriculture, our project falls in line with community. It brings people together in an outdoor classroom, and makes people aware of sustainable gardening practices in the inner city, saving seeds, and eating healthfully," said Wright.

Youth begin gardening each March and continue working in the garden and at the Troostwood Youth Garden Market until the last vegetables are harvested, typically in late October.

"We've found that the youth developed better self esteem. They saw the fruits of their labor and how their hard work had paid off... They now have knowledge of a garden, what it takes to have and build one, and team work."

## STAPLE FOOD CROPS GROWN LOCALLY

*story by Mat Habrock*

Have you ever stopped to think about where your food comes from? How far did the buckwheat in your pancakes have to travel to get to you? An Ohio resident is hoping that soon you can say "Just down the road."

Brandon Jaeger of Athens, OH has received funding for a sustainable agriculture grant from the NCR-SARE 2007 Farmer Rancher Grant Program. The goal of his grant is to investigate how to grow staple food crops on the Western Allegheny Plateau. Jaeger is concerned not only about where his food comes from, but what it costs to get to him. He notes that "currently, the staple foods of my community's diet come, for the most part, from large scale operations, with poor crop and wildlife diversity, heavy machinery operating on a nonrenewable resource, and minimal, if any, soil maintenance." He is also concerned with how much fossil fuel is burned just to transport food to local areas.

Jaeger's solution is to demonstrate how staple food crops can be grown locally and with sustainable practices. He intends to grow, among others, four staple crops - amaranth, buckwheat, millet, and quinoa. These crops will also fit into the diet of someone who is wheat/gluten intolerant. To make growing staple foods feasible for small farmers with limited resources, Jaeger plans to use permaculture and bio-intensive systems. Both of these systems focus on intensive (low inputs, high yield) practices that rely on renewable resources and self-sustaining ecosystems. Jaeger's overall goal for the project is education. He is using donated land in Athens and Meigs counties to set up example plots that the public can view to learn more about sustainable growing techniques.

"I hope that after seeing it can be done, more people will take on these practices and help to grow food locally," said Jaeger. For more information on the project feel free to contact Jaeger at (740) 590-8240 or [bdjaeger@hotmail.com](mailto:bdjaeger@hotmail.com).



*Brandon Jaeger prepares this site for quinoa trial beds. - Photo by Michelle Ajamian*



*Golightly at the NCR-SARE office in St Paul, MN.*

## NCR-SARE STAFF UPDATES

The North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (NCR-SARE) is pleased to welcome Lori Golightly to their staff. Golightly has been hired as the Principal Office and Administrative Specialist for the program, replacing Lee Duvlea, a temp who had been working in the position. Housed at the University of Minnesota, St Paul campus, Golightly will support the NCR-SARE program administratively, answering questions, sending out correspondence, managing the databases, and supporting other NCR-SARE staff members.

Golightly comes to NCR-SARE from an internship at Hennepin County in the Department of Environmental Services. Before that, she was a database administrator at Land Stewardship Project. Golightly has a BS in Environment and Natural Resources, Policy and Law from the U of M, Twin Cities. She holds a Master of Public Policy from the Humphrey Institute at the University of Minnesota. In the future, Golightly would like to stay in the Sustainable Agriculture/Environmental field, working in the policy area at the local level

## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES...

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*Rural Development, 2007:* E-commerce for Rural Areas Internet promotion of wood products made in rural communities.

*More Examples of SARE/SBIR Linkages:*

-Connecticut dairy farmer Matt Freund received a 2002 SARE farmer grant to test the feasibility of producing plant pots from digested dairy manure. Freund received a Phase II grant from SBIR.

-A SARE Research and Education grant in 2002 went to Missouri Farmers Union to support the study of market opportunities and business models that led to the development of Heritage Acres Foods, which then used an SBIR grant to assess the feasibility of marketing heritage organic pork.

## NCR-SARE FUNDS PLETHORA OF PROJECTS IN 2008

The North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (NCR-SARE) has made public the lists of projects most recently recommended for funding for each of its four main grant programs: Farmer Rancher, Research and Education, Professional Development, and Graduate Student. More than 80 projects were recommended for funding with the most recent awards.

Lists of the projects recently recommended for funding are available at <http://www.sare.org/ncrsare/> or through the NCR-SARE office by mail. NCR-SARE administers these four grant programs, each with specific priorities, audiences, and timelines. The focus for all four NCR-SARE grant programs is on research and education.

Funding considerations are made based on how well the applicant articulates the nature of the research and education components of their sustainable agriculture grant proposals.

NCR-SARE funds roughly 60-80 cutting-edge projects every year in the four grant programs. NCR-SARE's Administrative Council (AC) members decide which projects will receive SARE funds. A collection of farm and non-farm citizens, the AC includes a diverse mix of agricultural stakeholders in the region. Council members hail from regional farms and ranches, the Cooperative Extension Service, universities, and nonprofit organizations.

In addition, regional representatives of the U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and NCR agribusinesses, state agencies, and foundations sit at the table to distribute grant money.

## 2008 SARE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Hundreds of sustainable agriculture enthusiasts assembled in Kansas City for SARE's 20th Anniversary Conference held in March, 2008.

Attendees included farmers, ranchers, teachers, researchers, students, advocates – or simply curious consumers. Nearly 100 posters featured the work of the nation's top pioneers in sustainable agriculture. People tapped into 20 years of groundbreaking SARE-funded research, experience and innovations, and talked about plans for the future of SARE.

Highlights included: several interesting plenary speakers, a photo contest, poster presentations, breakout sessions, and farm tours.

# CSA MARKET RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

*story by Mat Habrock*

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) ventures are relatively new in the United States, and not much is known about designing them for rural areas. That is until now.

With help from a 2007 NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher grant, Michael Hollcraft of New Carlisle, Indiana plans to test develop and test an organic CSA marketing model that is convenient for rural consumers and profitable for farmers.

CSAs allow members of the community to become shareholders in a farming operation in return for fresh produce. This provides fresh local food for the shareholder and helps the farmer cover the upfront production expenses. Shareholders also help share the risks of farming when weather or other difficulties arise.

Hollcraft will use his sustainable agriculture grant to explore the best way to operate an organic CSA in a rural community. He will conduct market research to determine consumer food preferences and price points, which membership options work best, and customers' willingness to use the Internet for membership payments and placing orders.

Hollcraft plans to look at other CSA operations to determine which practices work well, and how he can improve upon them. He also plans to do a literature search to uncover Best Practices for creating a profitable, organic CSA. Hollcraft explains that a Best Practice is a technique or practice that, through experience and research, has been proven to reliably lead to a desired result.

Once the research is done, Hollcraft will put together fact sheets that can be used by other producers who are facing the same marketing problems he faces.

He will also offer to share his expertise on the subject through workshops and Extension events. For more information or to participate in his upcoming CSA Marketing Survey, you should contact Michael Hollcraft at [sundance-farmscsa@live.com](mailto:sundance-farmscsa@live.com) and/or (574) 993-3008.



*Supporters of the CSA market research project - from left: Diane Kuhl, Elsa Littman, Hollcraft with wife Adriana Don-Hollcraft, Jorge Bourzac, and seated on the tractor is Gene Baughman. - photo by Marcy Dailey*

## NCR-SARE EN ESPAÑOL

In order to better reach our spanish speaking audiences, NCR-SARE has developed NCR-SARE En Español online at <http://www.sare.org/ncrsare/espanol.htm>.

Information about bulletins, books, and other spanish-speaking resources can be found on the web page, along with a PowerPoint presentation written in Spanish by Missouri State Co-Coordinator, Debi Kelly.

NCR-SARE: El Servicio Nacional de Subsidio de la Departamento de Agricultura de Estados Unidos (USDA) da a un agricultor.

¿Qué es un subsidio de SARE?

Un subsidio es dinero que una o el Departamento de Agricultura de Estados Unidos (USDA) da a un agricultor. Un agricultor recibe este dinero, después de enviar una solicitud y de que ésta sea aprobada.

La solicitud debe especificar qué es lo que el agricultor hará con el dinero. El dinero no necesita ser devuelto a la organización o al USDA.



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*Photo credits for this issue of Field Notes - Michelle Ajamian, Marcy Dailey, Andrea Godshalk, Linda Hezel, Eliezer T. Margolis, Marie Martin, and Martha Nieset.*

*Guest writer, Mat Habrock, is a student employee of the NCR-SARE office at the University of Nebraska - Lincoln.*



**Farmer Rancher Grant Timeline**

August - Call for Proposals  
 December - Proposals Due  
 March - Authors Notified on Status of Proposal  
 Spring - Funds Available to Recipients  
 August - Call for Proposals  
 December - Proposals Due

**Graduate Student Grant Timeline**

Fall - Call for Proposals  
 January - Proposals Due  
 March - Funding Decisions Made by NCR-SARE  
 Spring - Authors Notified on Status of Proposal  
 Fall - Funds Available to Recipients

**Research and Education Grant Timeline**

April - Call for Pre-Proposals  
 June - Pre-Proposals Due  
 Early Fall - Notification on Status of Pre-Proposal  
 Late Fall - Full Proposals Due  
 March - Funding Decisions Made by NCR-SARE  
 Spring - Authors Notified on Status of Proposal  
 Fall - Funds Available to Recipient

**Professional Development Grant Timeline**

March - Call for Pre-Proposals  
 Late May - Pre-Proposals Due  
 June - Authors Notified on Status of Pre-Proposal  
 Late August - Full Proposals Due  
 November - Funding Decisions Made



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