Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture

Program Update 2012 — 2021

A partnership of the
University of Minnesota's College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences
University of Minnesota Extension
Sustainers’ Coalition
A Message from the Staff

MISA was created nearly thirty years ago to bring the agricultural and University communities together in a cooperative effort to develop and promote sustainable agriculture in Minnesota and beyond. This report is designed to share and celebrate the accomplishments produced by this University-Community partnership from 2012 to 2021, and to describe MISA’s intended direction for the future.

There have been significant accomplishments:

• Ongoing support of the Sustainable Agriculture Information Exchange.

• Work with faculty, staff and students in the sustainable agriculture minors and through Cornercopia Student Organic Farm

• Selection and management of a total of 41 people in the School of Agriculture Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems

• Development and support of numerous interdisciplinary research and education teams comprised of University-Community partnerships

• Continued support of the Green Lands, Blue Waters and Forever Green Initiatives

• Continued support for the Minnesota North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program

None of these accomplishments would have been possible without the commitment, collaboration, and hard work of many people. Key players have changed, and MISA’s Bylaws will be renegotiated by July 2021. Thanks to the broad support of many friends, MISA managed to remain faithful to its purpose and goals.

Clearly there is more to be done. Covid-19 has altered our way of doing business in 2020 and 2021, but MISA will continue to support on-going activities while exploring new opportunities to develop and promote sustainable agriculture. We are excited to be a partner in this work and to continue the University-Community dialogue. With the addition of three new partners to the Sustainers Coalition, MISA is ready to take our work to the next level, and we invite you to be a part of this dynamic work.

—MISA Staff
History

MISA is a collaborative effort of the University of Minnesota’s College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS), University of Minnesota Extension, and the Sustainers’ Coalition. MISA’s cornerstone was laid in 1987 when a group of sustainable agriculture community individuals and organizations expressed concern about the level of sustainable agriculture work in the University’s research, education, and extension initiatives. A series of discussions followed, and from these beginnings, a model to organize and expand the University-Community dialogue on sustainable agriculture was created. MISA came into formal existence in 1992 with CFANS base funding currently playing a crucial role in this dialogue.

Structure

Board of Directors. MISA’s Board of Directors consists of twelve to fifteen members. Membership on the Board represents a 1/3 balance among University representatives, sustainable agriculture practitioners (e.g., farmers, ranchers), and representatives of the sustainable agriculture community (e.g., non-governmental organizations, business, government, citizen representatives). We welcome Board of Director nominations on an annual basis.

Partner Organizations

University of Minnesota’s College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences 1992-
University of Minnesota Extension 2006-

Sustainers’ Coalition Membership:

Big River Farms, a Program of The Food Group (formerly Minnesota Food Association), 1987-
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, 1996-
Lakewinds Food Co-op, 2021-
Land Stewardship Project, 1987-
Minnesota Farmers’ Market Association, 2021-
Renewing the Countryside, 2021-
Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota, 1994-

Former Sustainers’ Coalition Members:
Joint Religious Legislative Coalition, 1987-1993
The Minnesota Project, 1987-2015

The spectrum of regulations providing for the health and safety in our food system is intimidating when starting to navigate them. This is especially true when working with small food producers when resources are low and time is limited. As a technical assistance provider at a nonprofit, MISA has been my “Ace in the Hole” when I need actionable guidance for local food producers. MISA has been critical to demystifying the process to add confidence to a community partner that their initiative is possible with a clearer picture of the path before them. MISA is an absolutely critical resource for regulations expertise that I can’t find anywhere else. I would be lost without it.”

Dani Pieratos, Bois Forte Band Member, Rutabaga Project
Purpose & Goals

MISA’s purpose is to bring together the agricultural community and the University community in a cooperative effort to develop and promote sustainable agriculture in Minnesota and beyond. MISA promotes dynamic agricultural systems that integrate the ecological, economic, and social aspects of life. MISA’s goals and objectives are to:

- Increase the University’s response to the needs of the sustainable agriculture community and increase practitioners’ influence on the University. MISA serves as a door to the University’s resources.
- Increase communication and mutual exchange between the University and sustainable agriculture practitioners.
- Increase the influence of farmers and their practical knowledge on the faculty, staff, and students of the University.
- Increase practitioners’ access to information, literature and access to faculty, staff, and students.
- Identify gaps in knowledge of farmers and of the University faculty.
- Promote sustainable agriculture thinking within the University so that the concepts permeate teaching, research, and extension.
- Influence the movement of funds to researchers for sustainable agriculture.
- Foster teamwork on sustainable agriculture by promoting interdisciplinary research projects, supporting undergraduate and graduate academic programs, and fostering partnerships.
- Oversee an Endowed Chair in sustainable agriculture.
- Create a climate of political support for sustainable agriculture among Minnesotans.
- Increase the opportunities for students, faculty and staff to be involved in sustainable agriculture issues and discussions both on and off campus.
- Work with rural communities in discovering and implementing the values of sustainability.
- Promote sustainable community development principles throughout the State.

MISA works to achieve these goals and objectives through various programs in an effort to better serve Minnesota farmers and non-farming citizens, as well as University of Minnesota students, faculty, and staff.
Guiding Principles

Four core principles guide all MISA projects and programs.

1. **Systems Approach:** MISA believes that agriculture is a system in which the land, people, and production of food are interwoven. One aspect of the system cannot be changed without influencing all of it. MISA believes that all efforts to improve agriculture should take care to balance the long-term economic, ecological, and social effects.

2. **Synergy:** MISA believes that people of diverse interests working together cooperatively can produce a positive effect greater than the sum of their individual efforts. MISA’s intention is to create opportunities for people to work cooperatively on issues of sustainable agriculture in a way that promotes synergy.

3. **Healthy Debate:** It is MISA’s intention to promote sustainable agriculture through all of its various activities. In doing so, MISA welcomes input from any interested parties and will encourage healthy and vigorous debate.

4. **Balance of Power:** MISA is founded upon a balance of power between the Sustainers’ Coalition and the University of Minnesota. This balance is reflected in the composition of MISA’s Board of Directors and other governance structures. In addition to this internal balance, MISA seeks to achieve an appropriate balance of influence on the University between sustainable and conventional agricultural interests.
Student Programs

Helping students develop the capacity to address increasingly complex and trans-disciplinary societal and ecological challenges is critical for the future of agriculture.

MISA is actively involved with the University's graduate and undergraduate minors in sustainable agriculture systems.

The University of Minnesota's Theodora and Arnold Johnson Undergraduate Research Program is designed to provide students with an internship opportunity to work with a faculty member on a research topic pertaining to sustainable agriculture. The program provides an unique opportunity for students to collaborate with faculty to address issues affecting agricultural production, the environment, food science and nutrition, social impacts of farming systems, or economics of agriculture. The Johnson Program has supported 42 students doing research projects with faculty members since 1999.

Cornercopia is a student-driven, certified organic farm on the Experiment Station of the St. Paul Campus at the University of Minnesota. Our goal is to give students opportunities to learn firsthand what it takes to plan, grow and market food through coursework, internships, volunteer work, and otherwise. Covid-19 has limited student contact at the student organic farm. The pandemic affected this MISA program more than any other aspect of our work. In 2020 production was scaled back to a small plot of vegetables. We planted cover crops on most student organic farmland, hosted research plots and maintained organic certification. In 2021, we will cut back even further and forgo vegetable production completely, and again will cover crop the land, host research plots and maintain organic certification. In previous seasons, our students produced 100+ varieties of fruit and vegetables and marketed them on the Twin Cities campus; we hope to resume more normal operations in 2022. Cornercopia Student Organic Farm is a student program of the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) and the Department of Horticultural Science with faculty and staff advisors from Agronomy and Plant Genetics, Applied Economics, Animal Science, Extension and Food Science and Nutrition.
Sustainable Agriculture Information Exchange

MISA's Information Exchange is a service and meeting place for the sustainable agriculture and local food community in Minnesota and beyond. Our website houses an extensive collection of resources to support farmers and farm educators. Since 2012 we have authored, edited, or updated 20 publications, including web-based publications.

We offer three broad-audience listservs:

- Sustag, for information and resources (1,500+ subscribers)
- SustagMarket, for buy/sell/trade/donate posts (457 subscribers)
- Healthy Debate, for discussion, opinions, and advocacy (154 subscribers)

The Sustag listserv is the primary way members of Minnesota’s sustainable agriculture community share information with each other about job and internship opportunities, events, workshops, and other educational resources. Other organizations harvest information from Sustag and transmit it to their members. We offer a calendar of events that includes events offered by a variety of organizations, and a blog that highlights opportunities such as courses and workshops, jobs and internships, grants and scholarships, and federal and state programs for farmers.

MISA works in a highly collaborative environment with our formal partners and others to pursue grant funding, deliver programming, and develop publications. We are viewed as a trusted partner in grant-funded projects, and serve as the PI or convener as needed to help organizations collaborate with each other.

The MISA Information Exchange provides coordination and outreach services to the Forever Green Initiative. MISA staff develop and maintain the Forever Green website, assist with event management when dignitaries visit CFANS to learn about Forever Green, and assist with coordination of exhibits at the State Fair.

Local food systems and food regulatory information has been a major area of work for MISA’s Information Exchange. The Local Food Advisory Committee (LFAC) was launched in January 2013 and has met quarterly since. LFAC provides a forum for participants in local food systems—farmers, farm educators, farmers’ markets, and food processors—to meet face to face with food regulatory staff from Minnesota Department of Agriculture and Minnesota Department of Health, in a collegial and problem-solving atmosphere. LFAC is a catalyst that has resulted in development of a series of local food fact sheets, improvements in regulatory systems and access to information at the agencies, a grant-funded project to analyze Minnesota’s food regulatory system and recommend changes, and a grant-funded project to develop comprehensive food regulatory training for farm educators.
LFAC also gave rise to the Cottage Food Advisory Committee and the Food Innovation Team (FIT). FIT is formally established as a subcommittee of the governor-appointed Food Safety and Defense Task Force. FIT includes regulators and non-regulators, and provides clarification in specific cases from food business owners who have become stuck in the regulatory system. FIT serves an ombudsperson function as well as an educational function. MISA plays an ongoing role in maintaining the connection between LFAC and FIT, and in collecting and transmitting food business cases to FIT.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, MISA worked closely with partners like Minnesota Farmers’ Market Association, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Sustainable Farming Association, Minnesota Farmers Union, Renewing the Countryside, University of Minnesota Extension, and Farmers’ Legal Action Group to develop and deliver information for farmers and farmers’ markets. MISA coordinated all of these partners to deliver an ongoing series of webinars about federal COVID relief programs available to farmers.

Since the first printing in June 2004, there are 32,000 copies of the Building a Sustainable Business guide in circulation.

Sean McGovern, Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Program
## Forever Green
### 2016-2021
- Pageviews: 109,207

### Top crops viewed:
- Hazelnuts
- Winter Barley
- Elderberry
- Kernza®
- Pennycress
- Camelina

## MISA
### 2016-2021
- Pageviews: 247,887

### Sections & Views:
- Publications: 85,525
- Student Programs: 33,203
- Resources: 32,172
- Ask MISA: 16,948
- About MISA: 10,491
- Organizations: 4,775
- News & Events: 4,422

## Publications or Pages
### Developed 2012-2021
- Farmstay Manual (2012)
- Selling Meat (2012)
- Business Planning Guide (updated 2013)
- Farm Transitions Toolkit (2013)
- Local Food Advisory Committee (2013)
- Come & Get It: What You Need to Know to Serve Food on Your Farm (2015; updated 2019)
- Harvest to Sale Vegetable Handling (2015)
- Food from Farms Toolkit (2017)
- Local Food Fact Sheets (2017)
- National Sustainable Agriculture Oral History Archive (2017)
- Pack Shed Rules (2017)
- Perennial Fruit (2018)
- Blazing Trails through the Jungle of Food Regulations (2019)
- Farm to Grocery Toolkit (2020)
- Grants & Loans for Farmers (2020)
- Forever Green Cookbook (2021)

## COVID Response
### COVID-19 Website section established June 2020
- Webinar recordings:
  - Paycheck Protection Program (PPP; July 2020)
    - Hmong version
    - Spanish version
  - Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP; September 2020)
    - Spanish version
  - CFAP 2 (October 2020)
    - Spanish version
  - PPP 2 (February 2021)
    - Spanish version
School of Agriculture Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems

The Endowed Chair is dedicated to stimulating interdisciplinary discussions, new ideas, and leadership in agriculture. It seeks to promote a healthy environment, vital communities, and economic profitability over the long term. To date, 41 people have served in the Endowed Chair since 1997, working on a wide array of sustainable agriculture efforts across nearly all of CFANS departments, Research and Outreach Centers and with many groups across the State, USA and in Morocco and Italy.

Green Lands, Blue Waters Initiative

Introduction: Farming with Continuous Living Cover (CLC) is about meeting the multiple challenges of agricultural production and environmental quality. Year-round ground cover via annuals in rotations and deep-rooted perennials help to build soil health, recycle nutrients, provide system-wide resilience in the face of a changing climate, sequester carbon, and reduce agricultural pollution of surface and groundwater – while continuing to produce food and other farm products.

Green Lands Blue Waters (GLBW) is a unique and critical organization because of its singular focus on CLC and its existing broad network of partners that includes universities, researchers, educators, producer associations, environmental groups, businesses, nonprofits, governmental agencies, and practitioners. Its mission is to support the development of and transition to a new generation of multi-functional agricultural systems in the Upper Mississippi River Basin and adjacent areas that integrate more perennial plants and other CLC systems into the agricultural landscape. GLBW helps design and highlight models of positive agricultural transformation that can inspire and inform agricultural stakeholders and practices across the nation, and we work with partners to change the narrative around what is possible through agriculture.

For nearly 20 years, GLBW has been a connector, collaborator, convener, and communicator serving multiple partners and focusing on opportunities and challenges that our partners identify but cannot tackle alone. GLBW works primarily in the Upper Midwest states of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin but has strong partnerships across the Mississippi River Basin and Steering Committee representation from Missouri and Louisiana.

The work and reach of GLBW develops meaningful relationships between the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture with other land grant universities and research/educational institutions, a variety of state and federal agricultural and environmental agencies, local to national businesses; as well as with organizations that make up the rich sector of agricultural nonprofit practitioners and technical assistance providers.

Within the University of Minnesota alone, GLBW has brought resources to and worked in close collaboration with numerous faculty, staff, departments, and centers through the years, including the Forever Green Initiative.
and Partnership, the Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, the Center for Integrated Natural Resources and Agricultural Management, the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, the Carlson School of Management, the Institute on the Environment, the Office for Technology and Commercialization, and many others.

From the outset, GLBW has been guided by a Steering Committee of members representing academic institutions and agency/nonprofit organizations from across its multi-state region.

Recently, GLBW has been on the core development team forming the Forever Green Partnership, and along with Forever Green Initiative partners, is active in a new effort promoting continuous living cover agriculture to high-level decision-makers and funders, called the Partnership for Perennial Agriculture.

Strategic Approach: To realize the full potential and myriad benefits of CLC farming, it must be practiced widely across the agricultural landscape. The GLBW network has identified these priorities as a roadmap for multiple stakeholders to achieve landscape-scale change in the Upper Midwest.

- Expand CLC crop and systems development and research
- Strengthen market drivers for CLC crops
- Optimize governmental support for CLC farming
- Increase CLC implementation and integration of multiple CLC strategies on farms and across the region and work to strategically place CLC systems on the landscape
- Shift the narrative of Upper Midwest agriculture towards CLC and increase investment by leveraging and extending shared learnings through multiple communication channels and facilitating targeted convenings and the GLBW regional conference

The Endowed Chair position allowed me to strengthen relationships with University of Minnesota researchers and enabled me to dedicate a significant portion of time toward the task of obtaining funding for intermediate wheatgrass breeding research based at the University of Minnesota. I can see now that this first round of funding launched what has now become a substantial research effort, funded by numerous sources, and leading to release of a new variety of perennial grain.

Lee DeHaan, The Land Institute
Minnesota North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program

North Central SARE’s network of state coordinators—housed at each land grant university throughout the region—conducted train-the-trainer programs and share information about our grant programs and other sustainable agriculture resources in their respective states. MISA is the administrative home for this program in Minnesota. Kate Seager and Wayne Martin co-coordinate this program. Minnesota has received $12.5 million in funding and funded 329 projects since 1998. The Minnesota SARE program is funded by our North Central Region SARE office via the United States Department of Agriculture. Funds are used for sustainable agriculture education and outreach in Minnesota, with the primary goal of supporting educator activities and professional development through train-the-trainer opportunities. This includes Mini Grant and Travel Scholarship funds for agricultural professionals (e.g. Extension, NRCS, state and tribal agencies, NGOs, etc) and farmers to build their awareness, knowledge, and skills related to sustainable agriculture concepts. We provide travel scholarships to send educators to local, regional, and national events. We work with local educators and farmer-educators through our mini-grant program. We provide funds in each of our initiative areas to put on workshops, field days, and other events related to sustainable agriculture. We work closely with event organizers and share additional SARE information (grants, publications, etc) through these events. Lastly, we organize our own programming to supplement the mini-grant work as needed in each initiative area. We work with hundreds of Extension staff, agency representatives, NRCS and farmers each year to support sustainable agriculture research and education in Minnesota.

The help from Minnesota SARE has helped make some changes to our knowledge base and enabled us to help others explore methods to adapt, ideas for more diverse cropping systems or just reaching out to others that have a much wider area of expertise. This knowledge base provides a much quicker transfer of information and networking that has helped so many others think about adopting change on their farm. We host classes on our farm and share info with a large network of people from extension, farmers, and professional staff.

Noreen Thomas, Farmer and Educator,
Doubting Thomas Farms, Moorhead
PRESENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Shelly Connor
Lori Cox
Kathryn (Katie) Fernholz
Joe Gans
Bradley Heins
Tom Hockenberry
Mary Rogers
Molly Schaus
Greg Schweser
Jared Walhowe
*Dale Woodbeck
Kathy Zeman

PAST BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEMBERS

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*JoAnne Berkenkamp, 2001-2005
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Michael Chaney 2016-2019
Cecilia Coultier 2016-2019
*R. Kent Crookston, 1992-1996
Attina Diffley, 2009-2015
Gigi DiGiacomo, 2005-2011
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*Wayne Edgerton, 2004-2009
Carol Ekarius, 1996-1999
Emily Evans, 2003-2009
Jon Evert, 1992-1998
*Carmen Fernholz, 1992-1998; and 2003-2009
Marie Flanagan, 2012-2018
Muriel French, 1997-2003
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*Dale Hennen, 2002-2008
Ralph Hilgendorf, 1992-1999
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Jacqueline Jacob, 2002-2008
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Kris Johnson, 2008-2014
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Rebecca Knittle, 1992-1995
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Lynn Mader, 1999-2005
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Dan Miller, 2006-2009
Dave Minar, 1999-2005
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*Jan O’Donnell, 2000-2006
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Michael Russelle, 1992-1995
Vernon Ruttan, 1992-1995
Charles Schmidt, 1993-1996
Dave Serfling, 1992-1993
Lisa Smiley, 2009-2015
Jim Stordahl, 2002-2008
Deon Sturman, 1995-1998
*Mary M. Tachen, 1995-2001
Aimee Talbot, 2013-2016
Mark Thell, 1995-2001
Tony Thompson, 2005-2011
Okechukwu Ukaga, 2005-2011
Terry VanDerPol, 2003-2009
*Bruce Vondracek, 1995-2001
Michael White, 2000-2003
Aimee Witteman, 2011-2013
*Dale Woodbeck, 2009-2015
Vince Xiong, 2011-2014

PRESENT STAFF MEMBERS

Jane Grimsbo Jewett, Associate Director
Wayne Martin, MN SARE Co-Coordinator
Erin Meier, GLBW Executive Director
Helene Murray, Executive Director
Aaron Reser, GLBW Associate Program Director
Kate Seager, Program Associate and MN SARE Co-coordinator
Sarah Svoboda, GLBW Communications and Events Coordinator

PAST STAFF MEMBERS

Bridgette Bethke, Student worker, 2011-2012
Derek Braaten, Student Intern, 2004
Charlotte Conn, Senior Secretary, 1995-1998
Debra Elias Morse, Associate Program Director, 1995-1999
Emily Green, Regional Partnerships Coordinator, 2000-2001
Julie Grossman, Minor in Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator, 1997-1999
Sara Hartman, Principal Secretary, 1992-1994
Melinda Hooker, Minor in Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator, 1999-2002
Taylor Hundig, Information Exchange Assistant, 2010-2011
Sadie Schroeder Mathison, GLBW 2014-2017
Steve Morse, GLBW Executive Director, 2003-2006
Caitrin Mullan, Student Intern, 2001-2002
Beth Nelson, Information Exchange Associate Director, 1999-2010
Cody Schultz, Student worker, 2007-2010
Monica Siems, Regional Partnerships Coordinator, 1999 and 2001-2003
Yordanose Solomone, Student Intern, 2016-2017
Courtney Tchida, Student Programs Coordinator, 2003-2020
Daniel Ungier, Student Intern, 2004
Ken Virnig, Student Intern, 2000
Richard Warner, GLBW Director, 2010-2018
Elizabeth Wieland, MN SARE Co-coordinator, 2011-2013
Bill Wilcke, Acting Administrator, 2000-2002
Donald Wyse, MISA Executive Director, 1992-2000
Contact Us!

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Sustianers Coalition

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A program of The Food Group
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bigriverfarms.thefoodgroupmn.org

Institute for Agriculture Trade Policy
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Lakewinds Food Co-op
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lakewinds.coop

Minnesota Farmers’ Market Association
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Land Stewardship Project
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landstewardshipproject.org

Renewing the Countryside
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Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota
4924 Upton Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55410
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sfa-mn.org
info@sfa-mn.org

Sustainability Coalition

Contact Us!
A wise group of folks planted the seed for the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture 30 years ago - and Minnesoota is benefiting from the fruit is has produced.