

1996 Sunset Review

The Fall of 1996 marked the fifth anniversary of the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA). The MISA by-laws have a sunset provision that requires a five year review. Specifically, the section of the by-laws pertaining to this reads:

"MISA will be dissolved on June 30, 1997, unless a resolution for its continuation is passed by the Joint Seminar and the MISA Board of Directors. Action on this resolution by both organizations must occur on or before the January, 1997, annual meeting.

The Board will establish a committee of Board and Joint Seminar members who will design and implement a review which begins no later than June of 1996 and which provides the information and analysis requested by both organizations for this sunset provision."

The review was conducted in October through November of 1996. As laid out by the committee appointed by the Board of Directors, the entire review process was designed to:

- Gauge MISA's progress to date,
- Set future directions for the organization (for the next 5 years), and
- Share information about MISA with the public.

The review process consisted of the following steps:

- Personal interviews (conducted by an independent party) with approximately 10 individuals familiar with MISA's work;
- A survey mailed to 268 people who have interacted with MISA over the past several years; and
- An external review panel who reviewed written documentation pulled together by MISA Staff and partners, and who made a site visit on November 14-15, 1996.

The information learned from the entire review process was used to provide the Board of Directors, the MISA Joint Seminar, and the Dean of the College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences (COAFES) with information necessary to determine the future of MISA.

In January of 1997, The Board of Directors and the MISA Joint Seminar voted unanimously to continue MISA for another 5 years.

Perspectives on Accomplishments and Future Challenges

Mary Anne Casey

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Five years ago the Minnesota Institute of Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) was created by the College of Agriculture at the University of Minnesota and the Sustainers' Coalition. Its purpose was to bring community and University people together to promote sustainable agriculture. In the bylaws, MISA's founders called for a formal review after five years. It is now time to formally reflect on what MISA has accomplished, how well it is functioning, and where it might head in the future.

Summary of Findings

- MISA has been very effective in connecting farmers, community members, and University faculty interested in sustainable agriculture.
- MISA has been less effective in impacting the work of faculty not already interested in sustainable agriculture.
- MISA has fostered change within the University including the sustainable agriculture minor, the coordinated sustainable agriculture research program, and the Minnesota Extension Service's Sustainable Agriculture newsletter. These are seen as the first steps in what is needed to internalize sustainability within the University.
- People repeatedly said that any limited progress is due to the difficulty of MISA's mission, not shortcomings of MISA.
- People agreed that there is a need for additional resources for sustainable agriculture and they encourage the Dean to provide additional financial support for sustainable agriculture
- The staff is highly regarded.
- The Board continues to struggle with issues of trust and process versus outcomes.
- The greatest challenges ahead for MISA? Developing a clear message which spurs action, getting funding, and getting more people involved.
- People believe MISA should continue. Its work is not done. No other organization is doing its work. And the work continues to be important.

Background

Five years ago the Minnesota Institute of Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) was created by the College of Agriculture at the University of Minnesota and the Sustainers' Coalition. Its purpose was to bring community and University people together to promote sustainable agriculture. In the bylaws, MISA's founders called for a formal review after five years. It is now time to formally reflect on what MISA has accomplished, how well it is functioning, and where it might head in the future.

As part of the review, nine people were asked to share their perspectives on the accomplishments and future challenges of MISA. Two farmers, a student, a member of the Sustainers' Coalition, a representative of a farm organization, a director of a legislative commission, two campus-based faculty, and one branch station faculty member were interviewed. These nine people are all supporters of sustainable agriculture and have all been involved with MISA in some way: some have been intensely involved in all aspects of MISA, others have been involved in a piece of MISA's work. This report summarizes the results of these nine interviews.

Findings

Accomplishments/Effectiveness

People said it in different ways, but most agreed that MISA's greatest accomplishment has been the opening of communication channels between the University and the sustainable agriculture community. This was no small accomplishment. According to the people interviewed, it was a huge challenge to bring together people who were skeptical of one another's views and motives to talk about issues and build trust. Out of distrust, arrogance, lack of respect, and misunderstandings MISA has created a structure, an environment, and provided resources for faculty and the sustainable agriculture community to come together to work on issues of sustainable agriculture.

Interviewees were asked to talk about how effective MISA has been in addressing four major goals:

- increasing University resources devoted to sustainable agriculture
- increasing practitioners' influence on the University
- internalization of sustainable agriculture within the University, and
- working with rural communities on sustainability issues.

Increasing the Amount of University Resources Devoted to Sustainable Agriculture

People were pleased with the financial commitment the Dean of the College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences (COAFES) has made to sustainable agriculture through MISA. They were also impressed with the faculty resources being devoted to sustainable agriculture. Although pleased that resources had been designated for MISA particularly during times of tight budgets, people said more funding is needed to address sustainable agriculture issues. Some expressed concern that Dean Martin may not be as supportive of sustainable agriculture as his predecessor. Others said he seemed very supportive. People agreed that there is a need for additional resources for sustainable agriculture and they encourage the Dean to provide additional financial support for sustainable agriculture. No matter what happens within the University, people said MISA needs to do a better job of helping people find grant money from outside the University.

Increasing Practitioners' [Farmers'] Influence on the University

One farmer said "if you look back on how much influence we had when we started, then I would say MISA has been extremely effective. If you look at where we have to go, then I would say we haven't been very effective." (This contrast captures the way a number of people thought about MISA's work in general.) People within the University tend to see less impact on the University than people from outside the University.

Internalization of Sustainable Agriculture within the University in Teaching, Research, and Extension

Most people interviewed believe MISA has been somewhat effective in internalizing sustainable agriculture within the University. Some observed that MISA has provided support for COAFES faculty who were already interested in sustainable agriculture. This, undoubtedly, got more faculty engaged in sustainable agriculture. Yet, some believe MISA hasn't touched the lives of other faculty. One faculty member said s/he believes most COAFES faculty have no idea what MISA is doing and don't really care.

Among teaching, research, and extension, people believe MISA has been most effective in internalizing sustainable agriculture with the teaching program.

Teaching

People believe the sustainable agriculture minor which has been developed by MISA will continue even if MISA disappears. It is a sign that sustainable agriculture has been internalized within some courses within the College. The minor gives visibility and credibility to sustainable agriculture. Yet, some say the concept of sustainability must permeate more classes in the College and in other colleges for it to truly be internalized

in the University.

Research

Some people believe MISA is helping to change the type of research done and the way research is done at the University. They cite the research teams and the conversations between researchers and sustainable agriculture practitioners as indicators of openness to different ways of doing research. They provide examples of individual faculty members transforming their approaches to research through inclusive and participatory methods. The farmers who were interviewed were excited about these changes. However, several people said that many faculty say they do sustainable research but that they aren't doing anything different than they did before.

Extension

People have seen the least internalization of sustainable agriculture within extension (when compared to teaching and research). However, there have been changes. The Minnesota Extension Service's (MES) Sustainable Agriculture newsletter is a positive sign that MES is listening to sustainable farmers. Also, people said MES has individuals who are very knowledgeable and committed to sustainable agriculture, but that the commitment to sustainable agriculture within MES is not widespread. One person explained that it is difficult to focus on both conventional agriculture and sustainable agriculture, and that most extension educators put their energy on conventional agriculture because most farmers use conventional methods. Another suggested that more sustainable agriculture publications be distributed through MES as a way internalizing sustainable agriculture within extension.

Working with Rural Communities on Sustainability Issues

Most people said they weren't aware of any work MISA had been doing with rural communities.

In summary, the people interviewed said MISA has made inroads on its goals, but it has a long way to go before real change is made. Far from criticizing MISA, people went out of their way to say that limited progress is due to the difficulty of the task, not shortcomings of MISA. People pointed to factors which make the job daunting: institutional inertia, resistance of some faculty, the University reward system, University culture, and the continued misperception of sustainable producers as "fringe," "organic," or wanting to turn back the hands of time.

Staff

People interviewed said the MISA staff is "excellent." They also said the staff is competent, hardworking, and personable and that they have been effective spokespersons for MISA, sustainable agriculture, and the University. A number of people commented on how hard the staff jobs must be -- to bridge the different cultures of the University and the sustainable agriculture community.

While almost all the discussion about the staff was positive, several people suggested that the staff needs to be more aware of when to step in and take control versus playing a supportive role. Some felt staff members occasionally overstepped their roles by doing too much for people or making decisions for people which results in a lack of ownership.

Board of Directors

People appreciate the diversity of the Board and most feel it has the right balance and types of people on it. (One person said it would be wise to include a state agency or legislative representative to get more buy-in from the state.) However, people said progress has been slow and meetings frustrating because individuals on the Board and Joint Seminar have been overly protective of their philosophy, ideas, or the organization they represent rather than concentrating on what would be best for MISA. One Board member said s/he would like to see the Board grow to be "more open to challenge and less protective of our philosophy."

Some talked about the struggle of bringing the Board together and building the trust needed to work together. Others talked about the endless "process stuff" which turns some people off, particularly faculty. Some MISA supporters are just refusing to go to more meetings. While people agree that much of MISA's success is based in its ability to develop trust among the players, some are weary of what seems like never ending process. Several people said MISA needs to find more balance between process and product. One person suggested MISA be more aware of which settings and causes require process work and which don't. Another said process is important but funding will certainly be cut if sustainable agriculture organizations aren't able to show research results.

Should MISA Continue?

Everyone interviewed said MISA should continue. They said MISA's work is not done, its work is not being done by any other organization, and the work continues to be important. However, two people qualified their statement by saying they would not want to see it continue if it was co-opted by COAFES administration or by corporate agriculture.

Biggest Challenge in the Future?

Funding is one of the biggest challenges people see for MISA. Several people said additional resources will be needed to move to the next level of impact. Several said additional research dollars are needed.

Another challenge will be getting additional people to support sustainable agriculture. This includes faculty and administration, elected officials, community members, and conventional farmers. This is not only important to reach the next level of impact, but also because some supporters are getting burned-out.

Interviewees said that to attract funding and new people, MISA must have a clear message and be able to make the case for sustainable agriculture to different audiences -- policy makers, academics, consumers, producers, corporations. What does sustainable mean? Why are we better off with sustainable agriculture? What impact would it have on me as an individual? What are the economic, environmental, and social arguments for it? Against it? MISA's message must be clear, convincing, and motivating. It must move people from not knowing about sustainable agriculture, to awareness, to understanding it, to believing in it, to taking action. As one person said, "theoretically it [sustainable agriculture] may make sense, but to live it and really change the way we do things, that is the greatest challenge."

Most Critical Sustainable Agriculture Issues?

According to most interviewees, the most critical sustainable agriculture issue in Minnesota today is the social impact of agriculture on the future of rural communities. They see structures like the mega-farm undoing the threads of community. Some broadened the issue from sustainable agriculture to sustainable communities. They want family farms and rural communities to thrive and they want the University of Minnesota to help make that happen. But to do this, the University must see sustainable agriculture and rural communities as viable in the future. Some people wonder if the University really believes these things have a chance when well respected University faculty continually predict bigger farms run by fewer people.

Other topics mentioned, though not with great frequency, were profitability, the privatization of research, unquestioning of the consequences of growth, marketing, risk management, crop diversification, bioengineering, food safety, hog confinement, the Minnesota River, the link between consumer choices and health, and the need for more people to carry the sustainable agriculture message.

What Should MISA Do in the Future?

- Many said MISA should do more of what it is already doing.
- It should become a larger voice in the College and the University.
- It should draw new people into its activities.
- It should build more grassroots support.
- It should talk more to people in power (elected officials, policy makers).
- It should find champions for sustainable agriculture and build their leadership.
- It should continue to facilitate others in work around issues of sustainability.
- It should enlarge its cooperation and involvement with other sustainable agriculture organizations.
- It should reach out to conventional agriculture groups -- be open to talking, sharing ideas, without feeling threatened.
- It should expand its work with rural communities.
- It should help consumers understand sustainable agriculture.
- It should hold more meetings, conversation, seminars out in the state.
- It has only scratched the surface of research -- much more is needed.
- It should help research teams find funding.
- It should spur more researchers to work with MISA.
- It should continue to build trust and relationships but should also produce outcomes.
- It should acknowledge, respect, and embrace what science can contribute to sustainable agriculture.
- It should ask faculty who aren't currently involved what it would take to get them involved.
- It should bring visibility to and honor research teams and their work.
- It should hold up its shining examples of success for others to see, not only in the College and in Minnesota, but also nationally.
- It should be patient.
- It should celebrate.

"The biggest accomplishment of MISA is opening up the channels between the University and the sustainable agriculture community."

"There has been a lot of trust built up with certain University people and some people in the sustainer community. There still could be a lot more trust, but to even have what we have is a huge step."

"If you think of two lanes on a bridge, the lane from the sustainable community to the University is taking more traffic than the lane of the University to the sustainable community."

"It is the MISA grants that have made the biggest difference in getting more sustainable agriculture research done."

"At times I would like to see the Board a little more positively aggressive, more open to challenge, less protective of philosophies, of turf, more open to saying this is an issue -- let's pursue it."

"... it is a daunting challenge, MISA is off to an excellent start and it is very important to give it an opportunity to continue to make progress."

"Continuing to get people together but to move from trust building to actually generating more outcomes -- that is a big challenge."

"Continue to work hard to draw new people into its activities in a way where they really put their strengths on the table."

Review Panel Report

November 13-15, 1996

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) is described as a partnership of community members and the University of Minnesota. Since its establishment in 1992, MISA has striven to bring together the common interests of the greater agricultural community in Minnesota, the people, organizations, producers, and the University. Together these interests under the umbrella of MISA have cooperatively pursued an agenda to develop, promote, and support a sustainable agriculture in Minnesota.

As one part of a mandated five-year review of MISA, an independent seven-member review panel was established. This panel was charged to study and review the accomplishments and functions of MISA during the formative five-year start-up period (1992-1996). Panel members selected were:

- Tracy Beckman, Minnesota Senate, St. Paul, MN
- Marilyn DeLong, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN
- Jerry DeWitt, Iowa State University, Ames, IA
- Mary Hanks, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, St. Paul, MN
- Marvin Johnson, Producer, Maple Plain, MN
- Margaret Smith, Iowa State University, Iowa Falls, IA
- C. J. Weiser, Oregon State University (retired), Corvallis, OR

The review panel was provided with extensive print resources and documentation of MISA including information on structure, research and education teams, the Sustainable Agriculture Information Exchange, endowed chair, research task force, collaboration, and evaluation. Also available to the panel were publications MISA 96-02 (The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture: A Partnership of Community Members and the University of Minnesota) and two reports (MISA 96-03, The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture: Perspectives on Accomplishments and Future Challenges, and an unpublished report: Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture-Survey Results, November, 1996) from Dr. Mary Ann Casey, an independent consultant.

The review process allowed for approximately nine contact hours of interaction with twenty-eight individuals over a two-day period. A preliminary oral summary report on the findings of the panel was presented on November 15, 1996 to 1). representatives of The MISA Joint Seminar and MISA Board, 2). Dean Michael Martin, and 3). interested individuals at an open forum at Borlaug Hall on the St. Paul Campus.

Structure and Organization

MISA is an evolving and dynamic entity. MISA Board members, supporters, and staff have demonstrated the ability to successfully work in this environment adapting to changing needs and challenges. MISA has adopted an encompassing, holistic view and definition of a sustainable agriculture embracing production, environment and community. The MISA Board members are unquestionably talented individuals who are respected by their peers. By the unique structure of the Board, they represent their individual views and good ideas and not officially any one organization. This is perceived to be an important operational principle for MISA and has helped ensure its success. Future partnerships and models may well forge structure and representation after this model. The Joint Seminar and Sustainers ' Coalition which is composed of organizational representatives makes it possible for the MISA Board to be organizationally independent and to function constructively. This structure of balance and creative tension appears to be appropriate, representative, and productive for sustainable agriculture in Minnesota.

In fact, MISA represents a working model of where no one entity or organization holds control, but where power and opportunity are shared, and where good ideas and persuasion are the negotiable currency for the

common good. This spirit of the model should be maintained; it is working. The review team had the fortune of witnessing the numerous examples of successes expressed energetically by MISA supporters sometimes interwoven against a backdrop of high unmet expectations and frustrations over the last five years. The review team encourages all MISA supporters to recognize that the most significant accomplishments brought forth by MISA may well be the incremental and widespread shifts in attitudes, priorities, partnerships, and processes created and adopted during the last five years by not only those directly, but also those indirectly associated with or influenced by MISA. These changes impact not only the academic community but the organizations and individuals eternal to the University as well. MISA supporters should consider means of recognizing and celebrating both the tangible and intangible successes such as both publications and partnerships, legislative funding and attitudinal shifts, and other accomplishments regardless of magnitude.

MISA is unquestionably at a major crossroads in its development and growth where transitions in several areas of operation would be both timely and appropriate.

The Review Team specifically encourages the consideration of the following possibilities:

1. Goals Revision

Consideration should be given to MISA partners reviewing and revising the goals of MISA. Specifically, it may be time for MISA to more explicitly state, emphasize, and pursue the goal of changing agricultural practices in Minnesota while continuing the pursuit of changing and influencing policy at the University of Minnesota. Considerable progress has been made on the latter which is a key means to the ultimate goal of achieving a sustainable agriculture across Minnesota.

2. Increased Partnerships

The Team senses that in order to effectively meet the long term goals of MISA it may be timely to consider broadening the cast of players in MISA including the Joint Seminar Group, The Sustainers' Coalition, The Board and other appropriate entities. Specifically, the Team senses that MISA is on solid conceptual ground and that it would be healthy and productive to soon begin to directly involve other constituencies in MISA including especially more conventional sectors of Minnesota agriculture such as the Farmers' Union, Minnesota Extension and others, and to visualize that broader participation including critics will ultimately be both required and helpful to fundamentally change the nature of Minnesota agriculture.

3. Recognizing Team Work

The Team recommends that the Dean of Agriculture and MISA consider actions to recognize and reward effective team efforts in order to improve the institutional climate for faculty and staff involvement in MISA and related teaching, extension, and research activities designed to address and support sustainable agriculture and MISA. Working as a team member is often the only effective way for individuals to contribute to complex cross-disciplinary issues. There are disincentives to working on a team including time and effort to communicate effectively, control and leadership, sharing credit, and coordination of efforts. Universities are historically focused and structured to recognize individual scholarly work. Efforts should be focused at the unit or departmental level to build support for recognition and reward of scholarly teamwork achievement. Specifically, the Team encourages consideration be given to the development of a annual reporting category for faculty and staff such as "Results of Team Efforts"; also the development of a college-level team award(s) and key awards by and within MISA to help foster peer and partner recognition of excellence may be fruitful.

4. Extending the MISA Model

The proposed regional centers, possibly modeled after MISA, provide a major opportunity for MISA partners

statewide to influence and assist in the development of College programs partnered with and designed to serve regional agricultural and community clientele. If properly organized such centers could play a major role in ultimately achieving MISA's sustainable agriculture goals. The Team encourages MISA partners to proactively provide their advice, experience, and support to establishing and shaping the regional centers recognizing that this new model will ultimately involve persuasion, compromise, and vision and not one of day-to-day oversight or control.

5. MISA Executive Director Position

The Team recommends that the Dean in consultation with the Departmental Head and the MISA Executive Director establish a specified term of service for the Executive Director appointment. An established (and renewable) term of service is preferable to an open-ended arrangement. A regular term ensures intensive, periodic review and possible reappointment based upon the wishes of the involved principles, past accomplishments, and the expected and needed leadership for the future term.

6. MISA Staff Evaluations

The Team recommends that the Dean establish a regular, annual performance evaluation procedure for all MISA staff. Specifically, the Team feels that the Dean should participate annually along with the appropriate Departmental Head in evaluating the performance of the Executive Director. The Dean should on behalf of the broader college interests focus on MISA activities and accomplishments while the Departmental Head would provide review of the assigned departmental responsibilities such as research, teaching, and/or extension. Salary adjustment decisions would be made in concert upon recommendations initiated by the Department Head. Similarly, the annual evaluations and salary adjustments of all other MISA staff should involve both the MISA Executive Director and the appropriate Departmental Heads working in concert.

7. The Endowed Chair

The endowed chair is impressive in design, concept, and flexibility and holds great promise for MISA, the agricultural community, and the University. Well-qualified candidates both internal and external to academia may not fully appreciate or realize their potential contributions to MISA. MISA partners should implement an aggressive nomination and recruitment process to ensure that well-qualified and diverse candidates are identified.

Team Activities

The Review Team noted the enthusiasm and synergy exhibited by the participants of the educational teams. The flexibility of how teams are organized and operate leads to their success. Teams learned from each other and apparently experimented with new enhancements. The one-model approach was not embraced and each team developed operational guidelines and diverse membership to meet their specific needs. The personal changes in philosophy and approach to research and education were apparent across team members. Researchers spoke to the team experience leading to change in not only "what they did but also how they now do it". Others shared a renewed commitment to outreach and extension activities even though they were not on specific appointments. Also noted was the opportunity to leverage MISA resources for additional in-kind and monetary support. The Panel recognized the necessary cost of time and resources spent in building trust among team members. The process of team building cannot be rushed and this is a relatively new approach to research and somewhat unfamiliar to most researchers, farmers and government staff. The process of building teams should become easier as more individuals gain experience working in team atmospheres and with diverse team memberships. MISA and the teams will be continually challenged to provide balance in process and production of tangible outcomes.

8. Investments in Teams

MISA should continue to invest resources in the support of the development of teams and assist teams in procuring and leveraging additional resources from other sources.

9. Process and Trust-Building

Trust has become a vital and significant element leading to the accomplishments of the educational teams. The process of trust-building has been worthwhile and educational efforts must be continued in support of teams. The investments of time and resources into trust-building and process must be recognized and wisely and effectively used. Trust must be both developed and earned and the process should not be unnecessarily prolonged.

10. Timely Transitions to Outcomes

Frustrations at times exist concerning process versus outcomes. Both must be recognized and an appropriate balance must be struck in all activities. Plans and programs should be constructed to ensure that appropriate and timely emphasis is transitioned from needed process activities to expected outcomes.

11. Team Research and Extension Linkages

MISA should develop efforts to increase initial and continuing connections between the team research findings and outcomes with Extension and outreach activities.

12. Expanding the Team Influence

The influence of teams should be expanded to reach more faculty and staff, educators, and others with diverse views and experiences to raise awareness of the team approach and prepare a broader audience to participate in future activities. Efforts to create more interest and participation in the Joint Seminar activities on campus should be undertaken by the University.

Research

The impacts of MISA on research efforts were apparent and readily visible upon study and review of the various team efforts underway. Although the four teams varied in size, mission, and approach, all were perceived to be successful models and no one exemplified the preferred approach to research. Similar attributes existed across the teams.

Consistent across the four MISA teams reviewed were a dedication to whole-farm approaches to research involving "farmers from the beginning". The importance of interaction between researchers and farmers was acknowledged. The value of trust and balance were continually identified by team members.

The research efforts are not only transforming research methodologies, they are also impacting process and organizational and institutional activities. For example, the Experiment Station commitment of resources for sustainable agriculture and faculty positions, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture grant program modification of involving team building aspects, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency work through CINRAM are examples of significant changes.

Additional professional changes on a personal level were noted and characterized by researchers who recognized that they were now working in a different manner. Also acknowledged by non-university

representatives were feelings of increased trust in the University as a result of the team efforts. Frustrations of difficulties in obtaining significant, recurring resources for sustainable agriculture were expressed. The current MISA budget (minus the Executive Director's salary) from the College is approximately equivalent to what the USDA estimates it takes to establish and support one research scientist position. In addition, developing a critical mass of supportive researchers was also expressed.

13. Measuring Success

MISA and the College should consider developing and determining an expanded set of measurements of success associated with research team activities and efforts. True indicators beyond biological, financial and social should be identified including attitudinal and process-related aspects. Successes should be identified, shared, and celebrated.

14. Financial Support

An annual plan of financial support to allow for a recurring and stable financial base should be developed and articulated widely by the Dean.

15. Community Aspects

Research related to work with rural communities and sustainability should be expanded and be made more visible. A broader definition, recognition, and articulation of sustainability may provide more community focus and support opportunities.

Outreach, Extension, and Education

Outreach efforts have brought both credibility and visibility to MISA. The Sustainable Agriculture Information Exchange provides targeted and appropriate outreach efforts of sustainable agriculture information and education for MISA through funding via the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. Efforts to extend information through established partnerships, new technology (WWW), print, and referral services are in progress after a brief start-up period. The Information Exchange is pursuing appropriate goals especially through bridging the gap between current information needs and existing sustainable agriculture information, and by identifying research and educational gaps and directing resources to address the identified gaps. The impacts of these goals, however, are not yet apparent so soon after funding (May 1995).

Perceptions arose concerning Minnesota Extension's new educational role and its relationship to MISA. Extension currently is focusing on wholesaling education rather than retailing education to the individual. This poses a potential problem because primary audiences for Extension education are often suppliers, buyers, marketers, and service providers to agriculture as it exists. These potential audiences are unlikely to be early advocates of sustainable agriculture practices. This was perceived to be a possible detriment to the rapid dissemination of sustainable agriculture information and education.

Field staff in Extension were generally perceived to be more supportive of sustainable agriculture than campus-based staff and faculty. Because of this observation, the research and teaching communities were perceived to have progressed more in the integration of sustainable concepts and programs than Extension. A perception exists that parallel programs exist in Extension regarding sustainable agriculture, i.e. a conventional agriculture program and a sustainable agriculture program. The designation or alignment of MISA staff in a more formal association with Extension may be helpful and bring increased visibility and recognized value to Extension's sustainable agriculture efforts. Articulation of these relationships and partnerships would likely be advantageous for faculty and staff understanding. Consistent visibility and credit of MISA-supported products and programs was deemed important for MISA's future. Products developed cooperatively with MISA support which the Team noted were the Sustainable Agriculture

Newsletter, Knee Deep in Grass, and Monitoring Sustainable Agriculture with Conventional Financial Data.

Although changes to and involvement with communities was stated as a MISA goal, visibility and targeted successes were limited and not readily apparent. This may present an opportunity for increased partnerships between MISA and Minnesota Extension. Extension could also be helpful in extending MISA's findings beyond the state borders at an appropriate time.

Resident education and instruction in sustainable agriculture is enhanced and made more visible through the minor in sustainable agriculture systems for graduate students and through an internship program and curriculum for undergraduate students. These are laudatory efforts and lead the nation in major agricultural universities. These efforts hold great promise for MISA, students, faculty, and staff. Although only a small number of students are officially minoring in these programs, a considerably large number of students benefit from the courses being taught. Several theses have resulted from efforts with the educational teams.

16. Resident Instruction and Education

MISA should consider the opportunity to facilitate and coordinate the graduate minor in sustainable agriculture, internship program and undergraduate curriculum. The diverse experience and partnerships within MISA would add value and unique opportunities to these offerings.

17. Relationship to Minnesota Extension

The Dean, in concert with MISA and Minnesota Extension, should explore new opportunities and strategies for enhanced, seamless partnering to expand the delivery of sustainable agriculture information and education statewide. Enhanced partnerships should be both on and off campus. Clientele both expect and deserve this approach.

18. Visibility and Marketing of MISA

MISA should determine methods to more consistently ensure strategic marketing, visibility, and credit for all MISA-supported programs and activities. The full partnership of players must be a part of this process.

Summary

The Review Team was impressed with the staff, people, and programs of MISA, the University, and its partners. A groundwork of change opportunity in sustainable agriculture has been seeded in Minnesota through the vision, commitment and dedication to MISA. Skillful nurturing is now needed to bring fruition to MISA and its goal of changing the landscape of Minnesota's agriculture, people, and communities.

Survey Results

Compiled Mary Anne Casey

November 13, 1996

Mary Anne Casey, Ph.D. is an independent consultant who specializes in organizational evaluation.

Limitation of this Survey

As one means of finding out how MISA is doing and how it can improve, we sent surveys to 268 people: farmers, nonprofit representatives, government agency staff, faculty members, and community members. Ninety-eight were returned for a 37% response rate. We had planned to send reminder postcards and do follow-up phone calls to boost the response rate but in the midst of preparing for the MISA review, time ran out. Because the response rate is low, the numbers in this survey should be used with caution.

Level of Awareness

Perhaps the most interesting finding is the number of respondents who felt they didn't know enough about MISA to answer the questions, even though surveys were mailed to people whom MISA staff felt were knowledgeable about MISA's activities. About 20% of the respondents said they didn't know enough to rate MISA's effectiveness or staff, and over half said they didn't know enough to rate MISA's board. Clearly, a fair number of people are not as informed about MISA as staff had believed. This might, in part, explain the low response rate.

MISA's Effectiveness

We asked people to rate MISA's effectiveness in accomplishing its goals on a five point scale:

- 5 = Extremely Effective
- 4 = Very Effective
- 3 = Somewhat Effective
- 2 = Not Very Effective
- 1 = Not At All Effective

Mean	Goal
3.7	Bringing people together to address sustainable agriculture issues
3.6	Supporting research on sustainable agriculture issues
3.6	Influencing the education of students in sustainable agriculture
3.5	Increasing faculty members' awareness of sustainable agriculture
3.5	Increasing the amount of university resources

	devoted to sustainable agriculture
3.4	Increasing awareness of sustainable agriculture issues in MN
3.3	Increasing sustainable agriculture community members' influence on the university
3.2	Getting sustainable agriculture information to farmers and other practitioners

On average, respondents said MISA has been "somewhat" to "very" effective in accomplishing each of its goals. It has been most effective in bringing people together, supporting research, and influencing the education of students. People said MISA has been less effective in increasing sustainable agriculture community members' influence on the university and in getting sustainable agriculture information to practitioners.

MISA's Board and Staff

We asked people to rate MISA's board and staff using a four point scale:

- 4 = Excellent
- 3 = Good
- 2 = Fair
- 1 = Poor

Mean		
Staff	Board	Attribute
3.5	NA	Professionalism
3.4	NA	Competency
3.3	3.2	Knowledge of sustainable agriculture
3.3	3.2	Ability to work cooperatively
3.0	2.9	Understanding of community concerns
3.0	2.7	Addressing of priority issues
NA	2.7	Representing all parties concerned
3.0	2.6	Understanding faculty concerns
		NA = not asked

Respondents rated the staff between "good" and "excellent" on all items, giving highest ratings for professionalism and competency. They rated the board slightly lower than staff on each item, with some ratings in the "fair" to "good" range. Ratings for the board and staff are almost identical on each item, except "understanding faculty concerns." Respondents gave the board its lowest rating for this item.

Comments about the Board:

- As mentioned earlier, some people said they just didn't know enough about the board to give an opinion. It seems that if people haven't been on the board they don't know much about the board.
- Other comments pointed to struggles and conflicts of the board but suggested that as MISA is maturing these problems are diminishing.
- Some people praised the board members' generosity in time and work.

Comments about the Staff:

- Most of the comments about the staff were extremely positive. People said staff members work hard, are friendly, helpful, and able to build bridges between the university and community.
- A few people said the staff and their work isn't visible enough.
- A few people said the staff has too much control or influence, particularly in the granting process.

MISA's Greatest Strength

We asked people to tell us about MISA's greatest strength. The most frequently mentioned strength was MISA's ability to bring people together to address sustainable agriculture issues. Several other themes were:

- The diversity of people involved in MISA
- The partnership between the University and the community
- A committed, knowledgeable board and staff
- Being part of the University

MISA's Greatest Weakness

We asked people to describe MISA's greatest weakness. Comments clustered into several areas. Each of these areas seemed to get about the same emphasis:

- Not involving or acknowledging people engaged in traditional agriculture (farmers, agribusiness, faculty)
- "Preaching to the choir." Not enough effort in reaching people who aren't aware or convinced.
- Lack of visibility
- Not enough funding
- Being a part of the University

MISA's Biggest Challenge

People see funding as MISA's biggest challenge in the future. In a time of tight money, MISA must find enough funding to continue what it has started and have significant impact. Here are additional challenges people foresee:

- Getting more farmers and faculty involved
- Making sustainability more than a fringe issue
- Building bridges with other agriculture groups
- Countering corporate agriculture

MISA's Impact

We asked people, "What kind of impact is MISA having on sustainable agriculture in the state?" Over 90% said MISA is having a positive impact on sustainable agriculture in the state.

- 16% great positive impact
- 76% some positive impact
- 7% no real impact
- 0% some negative impact
- 0% great negative impact