
Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture:

A partnership of community members and the University of Minnesota

by Helene Murray, January 1996

The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) is a joint venture of the University of Minnesota's College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences, and the Sustainers' Coalition, a group of individuals and organizations which in 1996 includes: Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Land Stewardship Project, Minnesota Food Association, The Minnesota Project, Organic Growers and Buyers Association, and the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota.

The purpose of MISA is to bring together the interests of the agricultural community in a cooperative effort to develop and promote sustainable agriculture. MISA promotes dynamic agricultural systems which integrate the ecological, economic, and social aspects of life.

Background

In 1987 five community organizations joined forces to develop the Sustainers' Coalition, which, at that time, included the Minnesota Food Association, Joint Religious Legislative Coalition, Land Stewardship Project, Organic Growers and Buyers Association, and The Minnesota Project. The Sustainers' were united by their interest in strengthening the University's role in sustainable agriculture research and education. The Minnesota Food Association (MFA), under the leadership of Kenneth J. Taylor, the Executive Director, took a lead role informing the Sustainers' Coalition with the intent of challenging what they viewed as the University's resistance to sustainable

agriculture research, education, and extension initiatives.

Initially, the Sustainers' Coalition decided to approach the University about a series of seminars. According to Paul Gruchow, a member of the Sustainers' Coalition, there were two main catalysts for this idea. The first was an MFA-organized conference at which a faculty member from the University of Massachusetts was the key note speaker. Massachusetts had developed a state food policy during Governor Dukakis' administration that emphasized the local production and marketing of food, with some success; there were, at any rate, more farmers in the state by the end of the 1970's than there were at the beginning of the decade. MFA, which had its origins in the effort to save the Saint Paul Farmers Market -- one outcome of which was the Saint Paul and Ramsey County Food Policy -- hoped its conference would advance the idea of a state food policy in Minnesota.

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Following the conference key note speech, a panel of University of Minnesota, state and legislative officials responded, unanimously arguing against the idea of a state food policy. The collective argument against such a policy was that Minnesota was too unlike Massachusetts to learn much from its experience. After the panel, U of M Vice President Richard Sauer gave a talk

celebrating the accomplishments of industrial agriculture in which he quite bluntly suggested that critics of the industrial system sought a return to outhouses and hoes. The speech deeply angered many in the audience.

The second catalyst occurred a few months after the conference when Paul Gruchow, a journalist and member of the Sustainers' Coalition, organized a conference under the auspices of the Minnesota Newspaper Foundation. The conference focused on farm issues for Minnesota newspaper editors. Then Dean of the College of Agriculture Eugene Allen was one of the speakers. During the question and answer period, a participant asked Allen for his analysis of Wendell Berry's views. Allen replied that he was not familiar with Berry's work.

Paul Gruchow reported this to Ken Taylor. "You know," he said, "I don't think the problem at the University is so much active hostility to sustainable agriculture as it is a lack of information about what the critics of conventional agriculture are saying."

Taylor had a great deal of experience with using dialog as a tool for community organizing. He thought up the idea of a series of "closed-door conversations" between the University leadership and the sustainable agriculture community. He proposed the idea of holding a series of meetings or seminars to Sauer and the idea was accepted, resulting in the outcomes outlined in this paper.

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Initial Dialogue

Members of the Sustainers' Coalition met with a selected group of University representatives to identify areas of common interests, to develop possible working relations based on those areas of interest, and to look for ways of working out identified differences.

A set of ground rules to guide the joint university-community seminar series was established, and included the following:

- (1) Each group [Sustainers' Coalition and the University] was limited to ten participants plus resource people related to the subject area. Consistency of representation was deemed important.
- (2) The University provided a facilitator, the Minnesota Food Association provided staff to document the seminar proceedings.
- (3) No press representatives were invited, and no releases to the press were made during the seminar series.
- (4) Internal publication of minutes were to be approved by the participants, with no information from the seminars presented in newsletters or other public documents.
- (5) The Minnesota Church Center was the site of the meetings; it was chosen because it was deemed a "neutral" location.

The basic idea of the series of seminar meetings was simply to trade information. The promise that made this possible was that neither side would use what happened in the meetings in public to its own advantage; thus, the ban on public statements of either side, the strict limits on the number of

participants, and the decision that even the minutes of the meetings would not be publicly disseminated.

A meeting format and agenda were set for each of the four seminars, to be conducted between October 1987 and May 1988. The participants decided each seminar would last for about five hours. The first two hours were dedicated to presentations, followed by one hour for a meal and informal conversation. The last two hours were designated for discussion. Topics for each of the four seminars were:

- (1) The first seminar was designed to exchange "world views" of sustainable agriculture in an informal, open manner, and to get to know each other.
- (2) The second seminar was designed to allow each group to share information regarding their projects and current events within their institutions related to issues of agricultural sustainability.
- (3) The focus of the third seminar was to examine the decision-making and priority setting systems of each organization's system, and to describe and understand the motivating factors and driving forces of the six organizations. During this meeting it was agreed that a Joint Task Force, consisting of an equal number of University and Sustainers' Coalition representatives, would be formed to:

Design a mutually-empowered planning process which will guide the University in committing to a focused program of research and education aimed at creating a sustainable agriculture system in Minnesota.

The task force was to identify the planning tasks involved in such an endeavor, design a structure and timetable for the completing those tasks and identify the major barriers to the implementation of the planning process.

- (4) The final seminar was dedicated to identifying what had been learned from these series of meetings, to identify common ground, and identify differences in order to determine if there was merit in continuing working together.

It is unclear what motivated the University representatives to participate, but Taylor was very clear to members of the sustainable agriculture community about his own purpose: It was, he said, to evaluate the University's suitability as a potential partner in sustainable agriculture work. Although the initial four conversations generated some heated debate, many involved in the discussions noted they were genuinely surprised to discover how undogmatic such talk could be. Some members of the Sustainers' were surprised about how the University people seemed to feel about confusing and often contradictory pressures from the public; and some University participants seemed surprised to discover that the sustainable agriculture community genuinely wanted and needed the University's help.

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The Joint Task Force met in extended work sessions during June, July, and August of 1988. The results of the meetings were presented to the larger seminar group for discussion in October 1988; the model recommended by the Joint Task Force was approved. The decided upon goal was to keep long-term options open, while moving quickly to create a structure to: focus the work; motivate the participants; and to bring others into the process early. These meetings were the first sustained meetings between the university community and the sustainable agriculture community. They also prompted the first sustained conversations among the key players in the sustainable agriculture community. Every seminar was preceded by at least two lengthy meetings at which the sustainers' had to work through their own differences and sometimes rivalries. These sessions have been described as sometimes as divergent and heated as the seminars themselves.

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Recommendations of the Joint Task Force:

- (1) The establishment of the *Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture* (MISA), as a joint venture of the University of Minnesota's agricultural research and education establishment and the sustainable agriculture community, including farmers, advocate organizations, and other identified stakeholders.

The intent is to create a vehicle for organizing, extending and expanding the University-Community dialogue on sustainable agriculture, to use that dialogue for:

- 1a. identifying sustainable agriculture research and education priorities;
 - 1b. designing innovative participatory research structures;
 - 1c. extending access to sustainable agriculture information and educational opportunities to interested groups and individuals;
 - 1d. providing financial incentives to encourage the conduct of selected research and education projects.
- (2) MISA should be a private, non-profit organization, governed by a Board of Directors representing the partners in the venture, not dominated by any of them. The Institute would be an independent organization, operating under a general charter to be agreed upon by the sponsoring bodies.
 - (3) MISA's administrative funding should be sought from private sources; the grant budget should utilize public and private funding resources, without seeking new or additional legislative appropriations in the near term.
 - (4) MISA should be established as a "sunset" organization with a prescribed life-span [5-7 years] and a clearly-defined set of objectives to guide its operation during this phase of its existence.

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- (5) The following programs and strategies should be considered as being appropriate to the MISA mission:
- 5a. Design and implement an innovative research structure emphasizing collaboration within and among disciplines and between scientists and practitioners in the field of sustainable agriculture.
 - 5b. Provide challenge grants to researchers interested in pursuing projects which fit within criteria developed by MISA research committees.
 - 5c. Provide scholarships/fellowships to encourage student participation in the educational programs of the Institute. Students would include graduate students in the University, County Extension agents, farmers, and educators from other institutions and organizations around the state.
 - 5d. Offer special seminars aimed at target audiences (legislators, farm leaders, local officials, et. al.).
 - 5e. Provide challenge funding for collaborative research and education projects involving community-based organizations with compatible programs in sustainable agriculture.
 - 5f. Support the work of the Institute with a small staff which is highly skilled in planning, organizing, coordinating, and community relations.
 - 5g. Scientific expertise should be provided on a loaned-staff basis, through science-based committees and through the use of grants to scientists and scholars who would

operate within the structure of the Institute, pursuing selected research or education projects.

- 5h. Create a highly participatory structure of committees and task forces to define a program of research and education. The structure would be designed to: attract the interest and participation of faculty and students, bring farmers into the learning and teaching process, and define the University's long-term role in sustainable agriculture.

The Joint Task Force believes MISA should be designed as a catalyst for learning, a creator of incentives, a synthesizer of interests, not a monopolistic center which threatens the existence and effectiveness of other groups. Its program development process should encourage the strengthening of programs in other organizations.

- (6) The continuation of the present structure for implementation of a feasibility plan. The current dialogue groups should continue as the "parent" of the process, and the Joint Task Force should be charged with the responsibility to undertake the next steps.

The University of Minnesota committed \$10,000 toward the planning process, and the Northwest Area Foundation of Saint Paul, Minnesota contributed \$15,000. These monies were used for salary support, travel, meetings and other related expenses.

A series of public meetings were held in early 1989 to get additional outside input for consideration during the feasibility study. Additionally, five separate focus groups were held with participants representing:

(1) urban residents, (2) farmers, (3) rural non-farm residents, (4) University of Minnesota and State Government personnel, and (5) University of Minnesota faculty.

Formation of MISA

A draft of the feasibility study was completed in February 1990. The Sustainers' Coalition presented a position paper in March, and a group of five University faculty (designated by Vice-President Gene Allen) presented a response to the Sustainers' paper. The Sustainers' Coalition paper outlined reasons to move beyond reductionist research at the University, and advocated a call for increased interdisciplinary research, and presented a series of guidelines for development of a strong undergraduate program in sustainable agriculture.

The University team expressed general agreement with many of the positions stated in the paper. Major points of agreement centered around concerns regarding food safety, environmental protection, and rural social development.

However, university faculty found a number of the issues expressed by the Sustainers' to be problematic. The University team took issue with the notion that reductionist research does not provide any practical, useful information. While the committee stated they found multidisciplinary research to be of value, they pointed out the barriers to such research within the University system (i.e., limited rewards, high time commitment, and limited receptiveness to the idea by many faculty).

The committee did bring to attention several multidisciplinary projects underway within the College of Agriculture, some in conjunction with private non-profit groups in Minnesota. The University team's response made no comments regarding the

Coalition's distinction between multi- and interdisciplinary research. Finally, the University team listed their recommendations which included a joint examination of whole farm research, an international conference on on-farm research, joint Sustainers' Coalition/University development of decision cases, and recommended no further action be taken on curriculum development as the University had plans to initiate a minor in sustainable agriculture to begin Fall quarter 1990.

The Sustainers' Coalition met to discuss the University's response to their proposal a week after receiving the University committee's response. Sustainers' Coalition members attending the meeting expressed a general frustration with the University's response. "The five respondents to our paper don't appear to feel empowered to state a position for the University; they didn't advance their thinking any based on our thinking. Their paper doesn't clearly state a position, it's mushy," according to minutes taken during the Sustainers' Coalition meeting.

Members of the Coalition also felt the University team's response was defensive, and they lamented that their offer to provide leadership in making change at the University was refused. Members of the Coalition responded to the University's position paper in with the following resolutions:

- (1) the Coalition decided not to negotiate on their undergraduate curriculum proposal, but rather to proceed with what they believed to be a sound, interdisciplinary program that would involve the liberal arts and other non-agricultural colleges;
- (2) the idea of working with the University on the proposed on-farm

research conference was rejected. Rather, the Sustainers' felt their suggestion of pursuing a "paradigms of research" conference would be

- (3) the Sustainers' agreed further discussion on maintaining some formal relationship with the University was needed.

Obviously there were many areas of disagreement between the two groups and there was still a lack of trust after nearly three years of discussion. Subsequent joint meetings were held to clarify positions and to look for common ground. The meetings were long and often included heated discussion and debate. In July 1990, in spite of some on-going differences, representatives of the Sustainers' Coalition and the University of Minnesota agreed to form the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture. The institute would be housed at the University and governed by a board of community and University representatives.

Following a period of budget concerns, position vacancies, and administrative changes at the University, the first MISA Board of Directors was named in February 1992, and Richard Jones, then Dean of the College of Agriculture committed \$200,000 for the first year of operation, and \$300,000 per year to support MISA efforts for the next four years.

In July 1990, representatives of the Sustainers' Coalition and the University of Minnesota agreed in July 1990 to form the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture.

The Institute is governed by a fifteen-member Board of Directors jointly appointed by the Sustainers' Coalition and Since its establishment in early 1992 MISA has laid a solid foundation for sustainable

the University of Minnesota. Nine board members are nominated by the Sustainers' group, and six are nominated by the University. At least seven of the fifteen board members must be sustainable agriculture farmers. The Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota became a member of the Sustainers' Coalition in January 1994, and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy became a member in 1996. As of 1993, the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition is not an active participant in MISA, but individuals representing the religious community in Minnesota are members of the Sustainers' Coalition.

The first Board of Directors developed a written purpose for the Institute:

The purpose of MISA is to bring farmers and other sustainable agriculture community interests together with University administrators, educators, researchers, and students in a cooperative effort to undertake innovative, agenda-setting programs in sustainable agriculture that might not otherwise be pursued in the state.

MISA seeks to promote the general health and welfare in Minnesota by fostering programs of research and education that will create an agriculture that, over the long term, improves environmental resources such as soil and water, creates a healthful food supply, is not harmful to agricultural producers' and farm workers' health, and fosters a system of agriculture that is supportive of economically viable rural communities.

agriculture efforts involving the University of Minnesota with the Sustainers' Coalition

and other interest groups in the state and region. During the fall of 1992 the staff and board members met with faculty from each department and branch station within the College of Agriculture in an effort to provide a context for the development of MISA and to discuss a vision for sustainable agriculture within the University and the state. The board also elicited written responses from University personnel and the general public to a questionnaire regarding current sustainable agriculture issues for the state.

Using the information obtained, the Board worked diligently to develop a statement of values and by-laws for MISA, which serve as a guide for the Institute's overall direction. The board developed a set of guiding principles and laid out specific goals and objectives, and developed an organizational structure by which to operate.

Current Activities

Team Work

Beginning in 1994, MISA announced a competitive grants process to foster interdisciplinary team work. MISA offered "team building planning grants" as a means of bringing together farmers, U of M researchers and extension personnel, agency representatives, non-profit organizations and others, to jointly address issues affecting the long-term viability of agriculture.

The competitive grants process identified five teams, each of which received up to \$10,000, for interdisciplinary team development. After nine months of coordination, each team submitted full proposals to the MISA Board of Directors, and three were selected to receive full funding for project implementation. Two of the funded teams are examining various

aspects of management intensive grazing systems and the other team has developed a graduate program minor in Sustainable Agriculture Systems at the University of Minnesota. Details of each team's work are described in the next few paragraphs.

Monitoring Team: A team of representatives from a non-profit stewardship organization, governmental agencies, University of Minnesota departments, consultants and farmers has formed to study the biological, financial and social aspects of management intensive grazing systems. The team's objectives are to develop and test indicators that can be used by farmers for monitoring ecosystem health, and the economic and social well-being of the farm family. They are also attempting to implement a new model for designing agricultural research that is participatory and farmer-driven. The model being developed by the team uses a systems approach that depends on dialogue among all team members and fosters changes in research approaches by team members and their institutions.

Sustainable Dairy Team: Another team, composed of farmers, government agency representatives, and University faculty and students, is studying sustainable dairy farming systems. The research emphasizes intensive grazing systems with data being obtained from a combination of farms and experiment station pastures and laboratories. The team is evaluating strategies for renovating old pastures and establishing new pastures under intensively managed grazing systems. Additionally, the team is conducting case studies of dairy farmers who have adopted management intensive grazing systems to obtain baseline and historical information about each farm. This team is also preparing two decision cases to illustrate principles of effective conversion strategies to management intensive grazing systems.

Educational Team: A team of University faculty and students, farmers, non-profit organization representatives, and government agency representatives have been working to develop a minor in sustainable agricultural systems for graduate students (M.S. and Ph.D. students) at the University of Minnesota. The minor is designed to complement existing graduate programs throughout the University, not just within the College of Agriculture. In addition to course work on sustainable agriculture and agroecology, the team is developing an internship program for graduate students choosing the sustainable agriculture minor. Approval for the minor has been given, and the program officially began in Fall 1995. The team is now working on development of an internship program and curriculum for undergraduate students.

A competitive grants process was again announced in October 1995, and offered up to \$10,000 per project to help interdisciplinary teams form and become functional. By November 1996 each of the five teams will submit a complete proposal to the MISA Board along with a request for continued funding. The Board will determine which teams will receive continued funding from MISA. The teams funded in the team building planning grant process in 1996 are:

Visioning, Whole Farm Planning, and Alternative Economic Uses of Environmentally Sensitive Areas in the Chippewa River Basin This team will implement a whole farm planning process that leads to successful demonstrations of alternative animal and cropping production systems that enhance water quality in the Chippewa River Basin.

Integrated Approaches in Natural Resources and Agricultural Management: Establishing a Research and Educational Agenda for Minnesota The team will focus on determining how integrated approaches to natural resources management can blend economic, social and ecological concerns associated with the long-term viability of agriculture in Minnesota, and to develop a series of proposals that address the priority issues identified. An example of a project addressing these concerns might be to establish woody riparian buffers on farms that can be periodically harvested, providing additional on-farm profit, and helping prevent water pollution, and provide wildlife habitat.

Establishing Beginning Dairy Farmers Utilizing the Sharemilking Concept The goals of this project are to establish a program for beginning farmers that includes the personal support of other farmers and related mentors to help beginning farmers become better managers.

Evaluating Approaches in Comprehensive Farm Planning This team will work together to share information on comprehensive farm planning (CFP) approaches, and intends to develop a set of common criteria for successful CFP. The longer-term objectives include assessment of a variety of farm planning processes; working with farmers to evaluate completed farm plans; and to facilitate a state-wide CFP network.

Southern Minnesota Cropping Systems Team This project brings together a team to identify and develop research and educational programs that focus on the sustainability of cropping systems in southern MN, with an emphasis on systems-thinking approaches to management.

Seminar Series

A seminar series is coordinated or co-sponsored by MISA to provide a forum for a diversity of ideas and views. As of 1996, approximately three dozen speakers have presented seminars on topics such as research needs for the future, quality of life issues in agriculture, and alternative agriculture policy in the United States and globally. Most of the seminars have been held at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus to provide an opportunity for students, faculty and staff to discuss agricultural sustainability issues. During the 1994-95 school year, the MISA seminar series joined forces with the Sustainable Agriculture Study Group (SASG), a student run organization. Topics for the seminars are now identified by members of the SASG; the group meets twice each month during the academic year. The seminars are free and open to the public.

Additionally, MISA co-sponsors a number of field days, seminars and workshops to reach audiences outside the Twin Cities.

Information Exchange

The mission of MISA's Information Exchange is to help facilitate the exchange of information and ideas regarding sustainable agriculture in Minnesota and beyond. Specific goals of the Information Exchange are:

- (1) Bridge the gap between the need for current information related to sustainable agriculture and the resources and information currently in existence.
- (2) Identify gaps in the research base and in educational programming, and

to help direct resources to address these gaps as identified.

- (3) Promote public education and discussion of issues relevant to the long-term viability of agriculture.

To meet these goals MISA is developing a clearinghouse of information to provide user-friendly access to existing sustainable agriculture resources. Additionally, the Information Exchange seeks to provide a gateway for communication and sharing of resources and expertise among the University of Minnesota, the State of Minnesota and beyond, on issues affecting agricultural sustainability. One of the ways of connecting people to resources has been through development of a World Wide Web site. Visit our site at:

<http://www.centers.agri.umn.edu/misa/>

Additionally, MISA's Information Exchange seeks to link researchers, farmers, agribusiness operators, and others to address gaps in the research. An example of a linkage made recently include connecting people in the organic baking industry with a wheat plant breeder and a food scientist at the University of Minnesota; collectively they are looking at the possibility of developing wheat varieties with improved flavor for the baking industry.

Funding for the Information Exchange is made possible by a 1995 State Legislative appropriation to MISA (through a contract with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture) for the development of a sustainable agriculture information exchange.

In 1996, the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture announced the funding of six interdisciplinary teams that will create educational materials. The

materials created will support the development of sustainable agricultural systems by providing access to educational materials on a variety of subjects. Teams were chosen through a competitive grants process that offered up to \$25,000 per team.

The six funded teams will work with the agricultural community to identify issues and information needs on specific topics, create educational materials to address the issues and needs, and to identify user-friendly formats and delivery systems for the new materials.

The six teams that were funded include:

- (1) Developing Marketing and Business Planning Materials for Sustainable Agriculture Farmers and Entrepreneurs
- (2) Guide to Integrated Soil Management
- (3) Creation of Educational Materials for the Transition to Organic Production and Certification of Organic Crops in Minnesota
- (4) Whole Farm Planning Educational Materials Development
- (5) Self-Guiding Decision Support System for Producers Choosing Alternative Hog Production Systems
- (6) Developing a Minnesota Agroforestry Resource Guide

Endowed Chair

The Minnesota State Legislature's Omnibus Agricultural Act appropriated \$75,000 of the

\$1.5 million needed to establish an Endowed Chair in Sustainable Agriculture at the University of Minnesota in 1987. Governor Rudy Perpich signed the bill in June of 1987 and stated he would play a lead role in obtaining additional funds from corporations and foundations. In 1988 the University announced it would match private gifts from the Permanent University Funds (PUF) account up to \$750,000. No funds were raised through the Governor's office efforts.

A series of round-table discussions, public meetings and seminar presentations about sustainable agriculture sponsored by the College of Agriculture were held throughout the state for the agricultural community and legislators in 1989. The process indicated that definitions of sustainable agriculture were too numerous and proved controversial, resulting in a poor environment for raising the monies necessary to fund the Chair position.

By 1990 there was a change in leadership within the College of Agriculture; Eugene Allen, Dean of the College of Agriculture, was hired as Vice President of the Institute of Agriculture, Forestry and Home Economics. Kent Crookston, director of MISA, was hired as the Head of the Agronomy and Plant Genetics Department, and the MISA Coordinator left the University of Minnesota for other employment. Due to lack of momentum, the PUF authorization decreased to \$500,000.

In 1991 Richard Jones was hired as the Dean of the College of Agriculture, and Donald Wyse was appointed as Director of MISA. The Chair proposal was revised to a rotating Chair to reflect the comprehensive nature and varied needs of sustainable agriculture studies and research, and to better utilize earnings of a \$1,000,000 endowment.

The changes resulted in renewed energy and the School of Agriculture Alumni Association endorsed the Endowed Chair project and assumed fund-raising activities. The School of Agriculture (1888-1960) set the stage for the development of higher education in agriculture and home economics in Minnesota. Through the School on the Saint Paul Campus, farm families were introduced to new concepts and technologies which have had a marked impact on social and economic development of the state, the nation, and the world. The students developed a spirit of purpose and leadership that has become a hallmark of the School of Agriculture.

A two-year extension of the \$75,000 legislative appropriation was requested and granted in 1992. The endowment was renamed the School of Agriculture Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems. By 1993 a committee was working to meet an anonymous challenge of \$100,000. Richard Jones announced that MISA would administer the School of Agriculture Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems, with the Director of MISA named as the responsible authority.

The Director of MISA is responsible for administration, design and operation of a selections process for filling the chair, as well as proposing a budget that conforms to the funds available. Funds from the Legislature, the Permanent University Fund, gifts and pledges from the School of Agriculture Alumni Association totaled \$1,000,000 in 1994, providing an annual budget of \$55,000 for the chair position; over time the yearly allotment for the chair will increase as the value of the endowment grows.

The purpose of the School of Agriculture Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems at the University of Minnesota represents the

opportunity to enrich and expand on a strong existing program, and to add to the University's national reputation as a significant center of agricultural and environmental study.

The endowed chair will be filled on a rotating basis, continually replenished with visiting scholars and experts from throughout the world. This flexibility will address the interdisciplinary facet of agricultural systems while utilizing the availability of outstanding leaders from diverse fields. The chair will be a catalyst in attracting federal research dollars and in attracting outstanding students.

Specific objectives of the endowed chair:

- (1) To expand the teaching, research and extension activities related to agricultural systems and develop a program that will attract outstanding undergraduate, graduate and post-doctoral students to the University, and hence into the farming or agricultural business world.
- (2) To provide national leadership in programs directed at the needs, problems and assess associated with sustaining our basic food production and natural resources.
- (3) To attract additional sources of funding for research in comprehensive agricultural systems.
- (4) To expand and strengthen consultation and interaction with the agricultural, environmental and related industries.

The endowed chair is designed to encourage diversity while building on the expertise of numerous prestigious departments. Its domain will include faculty in the Colleges

of: Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences; Natural Resources; Veterinary Medicine; and Human Ecology. Beyond the campus, it will tap the world of experience of farmers, legislators, and government, foundation and business leaders.

A diverse committee of individuals representing the University, the School of Agriculture, community representatives, farmers, and agricultural business has been named to develop specific goals, objectives, and guidelines for the Endowed Chair. The committee is also developing a three year time-line for prioritized topics and potential nominees to fill the Endowed Chair position.

We anticipate announcing the first person to hold the Endowed Chair position in 1995.

1996 Board of Directors

Mary Doerr operates a 20-acre farm with a Grade A dairy facility using sustainable practices such as crop rotation, manure management, and controlled grazing of dairy goats. Manager of a seasonal Grade A dairy facility, Mary obtained Minnesota's first licensed farmstead goat cheese plant which produces fresh goat cheeses under the "Dancing Winds Farm" label. Mary is also a Board member for the Sustainable Farming Association.

Carol Ekarius and her husband operate a diversified livestock operation in Verndale, Minnesota. Seasonal grass-based dairying is the primary enterprise, supplemented by direct marketing of beef, pork, and lamb. Carol is actively involved with the Sustainable Farming Association, and is past chair of the Central Chapter.

Jon Evert is a Red River Valley farmer from Comstock, Minnesota. Jon has a great deal of community experience, including his current work with the Lutheran Church as a field staff. He has been active in sustainable agriculture work with a number of organizations, and is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Minnesota Food Association.

Carmen Fernholz is a Madison, Minnesota, farmer with a history of involvement in sustainable agriculture. He has extensive on-farm research and demonstration experience, and interest in establishing relationships with educational institutions on the subject of sustainable agriculture. Carmen served as the Chairperson for the MISA Board of Directors from its inception until 1995.

Ralph Hilgendorf is a retired State Services for the Blind counselor and has become active as a partner in the Whole Grain Milling Company, a family business operation in Welcome, Minnesota. Whole Grain Milling is an on-farm processing business, focused on producing organic grain products. Ralph is responsible for marketing and new product development for the business.

Dana Jackson is the Associate Director of Land Stewardship Project (LSP). In addition to fund raising and administrative responsibilities, she oversees communications for LSP and serves on the policy team. Dana has worked as an advocate for sustainable agriculture with several organizations for the past fifteen years. She has also been involved with the development of the proposal for a graduate program in sustainable agriculture at the University of Minnesota.

Loni Kemp is a Senior Policy Analyst with the Minnesota Project. She holds an M.A. in Public Policy from the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. Currently she chairs the water quality committee and is on the coordinating council of the Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture. She represents The Minnesota Project to the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group. Loni is an advisory member of the Sustainable Agriculture Task Force of the President's Council on Sustainable Development. She is an avid gardener at her home in rural Fillmore County. Loni currently serves as Chairperson for the MISA Board of Directors.

Randy Meyer and his family operate "Pine View Dairy, Inc" a family-held farm corporation. Their farm includes a 95 cow semi-seasonal dairy, rotationally grazed on 280 acres, with hay, oats, barley, winter rye and sorghum sudan in rotation. The farm is 100% certified organic and they market milk through C.R.O.P.P. (Organic Valley). Randy's other affiliations are: State Chair, SFA; Chair, Hiawatha SFA; local advisory board for Midwest Organic Alliance; Board for local Wells Creek watershed.

Roger Moon is a professor in the Department of Entomology at the University of Minnesota. He has made major contributions to biological control, with major research emphases in ecology and management of livestock insects and mites, biological control of dung- and manure-inhabiting flies, mosquito ecology and dispersal, and modeling and sampling of insect populations.

Jerry Perkins is a cash-grain farmer with an active interest in implementing sustainable farming practices. He has experience in farming and agricultural development in a variety of settings, including southwestern Minnesota, a Montana Indian reservation, and the Andean Highlands in Bolivia. He served as chair of his local ASCS board in southwestern Minnesota and has been active in a sustainable agricultural research project through the Southwest Minnesota Farm Management group.

Deon Stuthman is a professor in the Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics at the University of Minnesota, where he leads the oat breeding and genetics research project. He has shifted some of the project emphasis to more sustainable agriculture related activities including the variety release of Pal, a semi-dwarf oat that is well-suited for companion cropping. He currently serves on the Board of the American Oat Association, and is treasurer as well. He recently served as President of the Council of Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST). Deon grew up on mixed crop and livestock farms in northeastern Nebraska.

Mary M. Tacheny has worked for the past sixteen years as resource person, educational consultant, and activity coordinator on rural concerns for the Diocesan Rural Life directors and the Catholic Bishops of Minnesota. During ten of those years she served as a lobbyist for them. In the process she got to know, work with, and become an advocate for farmers and other rural people. One of Sister Mary's interests is the practice of a more sustainable model of farming than the industrial model. Mary has masters degrees in American Literature and Educational Administration. She has also done post-graduate work in theology and ethics.

Mark Thell and his family operate a 230-acre beef and vegetable farm in Carlton County, which they purchased in 1987. Through direct market, roadside stand, and u-pick sales they are able to market most of their beef, sweet corn, chickens, eggs, raspberries, peas and barley themselves. All of the components of their operation are tied together as much as possible. They recently started using rotational grazing practices with their fifty-head herd of cows and calves. Mark serves on the Sustainable Farming Association Northeast Chapter Board of Directors, is president of the Lake Superior Meats Cooperative, and also works off the farm.

Bill Wilcke is an Associate Professor and Extension Specialist in the Department of Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering at the University of Minnesota. His interests are in crop drying and storage, alternative energy sources, and sustainable agriculture. He has ongoing Extension programs on crop drying and storage and on produce cooling and storage; he conducts research on grain drying and storage. Bill is also Co-Chair of the Leadership Team for the Extension faculty in the Crop Systems Specialization. Bill serves as the current Vice Chairperson for the MISA Board of Directors.

Bruce Vondracek is the Assistant Unit Leader of the MN Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and an Adjunct Associate Professor in the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife. His areas of research include stream quality, fish habitat and restoration, and biological indicators in aquatic ecosystems. Bruce is a member of the Monitoring Team funded by MISA.

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