

LPES News



Livestock and Poultry
Environmental Stewardship

July 2005

A National Education Program

www.lpes.org

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Contributions Welcome!

We invite you to contribute a summary of new research or pertinent knowledge for future use as a newsletter article or an LPES lesson.

Share This Newsletter!

We encourage you to share the contents of this electronic newsletter, via existing newsletters or other media, with your colleagues, extension educators, or other clientele. To obtain Word files of the newsletter articles, go to the LPES website at www.lpes.org.

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LPES Updates

Small Farms Team Releases Fact Sheets about Small-Scale Animal Production

A new series of Livestock and Poultry Environmental Stewardship (LPES) fact sheets, perhaps the first national series prepared about small-scale animal production, is now available online at the LPES website. Called the *LPES Small Farms Fact Sheet* series, it provides practical, science-based information about best environmental stewardship management practices for small producers, for their advisors, and for educators. The series supplements the LPES Curriculum and the *LPES CAFO Fact Sheet* series.

The Small Farms Team—a nationwide collaboration of agricultural engineers, agronomists, and other experts from 12 land-grant universities, the EPA Ag Center, MWPS, and the USDA—developed the series. Mark Rice, assistant director of the National Center for Manure and Animal Waste Management at North Carolina State University, and Ben Bartlett, a Michigan State University livestock specialist knowledgeable about pasture systems, share leadership responsibilities for the team.

The 20-member team completed an initial series of seven fact sheets that address the following six general topics and one species-specific topic (horses):

1. Small-Scale Farmers and the Environment: How to be a Good Steward
2. The ABCs of Pasture Grazing
3. Manure on Your Farm: Asset or Liability?
4. Protecting the Water on Your Small Farm
5. Managing Animal Deaths: Your Options
6. Got Barnyard Runoff?
7. Good Stewardship Practices for Horse Owners

Small Farms Team co-leader Mark Rice says fact sheet authors were encouraged to follow certain guidelines during development. “To make our fact sheets reader friendly, we kept them brief, practical, and easy to

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LPES Updates

Small Farms Team Releases Fact Sheets . . . Continued from page 1

read and understand. We think the use of photos and callouts to illustrate important points will also appeal to readers.”

After recognizing a need for Spanish versions of the fact sheets, the team recently asked a bilingual publishing specialist to initially translate two fact sheets: “Small-Scale Farmers and the Environment: How to be a Good Steward” and “The ABCs of Pasture Grazing.” The translated fact sheets are expected to be available in August.

Ben Bartlett, team co-leader, notes that the team has already begun development of another seven fact sheets. These fact sheets, with their tentative titles, include:

- Nutrient Management Lite
- Managing Runoff from Open Lot Livestock Facilities with Vegetative Systems
- The ABCs of Livestock Watering Systems
- The ABCs of Livestock Fencing
- Manure Management for Small Swine Farms
- Modified Dry Litter System for Swine Farms
- Livestock Waste Management in Tropical Island Environments

The first seven Small Farms fact sheets can be accessed at the LPES website , <<http://www.lpes.org/>>, under the “Educational Products” button. They are



available as PDF files and are free of charge. Word files, suitable for modification, will be released later.

For more information, contact the co-leaders or the project manager at their respective e-mail address.

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Small Farms and the Environment

by Ben Bartlett, Small Farms Team co-leader, Michigan State University Extension

With the current focus on large farms and their environmental risk, the impact of small farms on the environment is often overlooked. For the benefit of the farming community and the environment, however, small farmers need to be informed about best environmental management practices because even small farms can contribute to environmental damage.

The USDA defines small farms as farms with yearly sales of \$1,000 to \$250,000. Although 90% of all U.S. farms are classified as small, they generate only 28% of total farm production. On the other hand, small farms control 68% of all farm assets and 60% of the land. They are also significant producers of certain commodities, for example, 60% of the hay and 38% of the beef cattle.

Most small farms are environmentally friendly, but even a few animals concentrated in certain places for too long can cause harm. When cows lounge in a creek, they can churn the banks into mud, and horses confined to a small paddock contribute to overgrazing.

The issue is how well farmers individually and collectively exercise their role as environmental stewards. Small farmers need to look for opportunities to gather information and create cooperation. With information, they can assess and improve their farm’s environmental friendliness. With their land holdings, they can partner with large farm owners (who have the highest concentration of animals and manure) to use surplus organic fertilizer wisely. •

What's Up?: Small Farm Events

Impact of Small and Mid-Sized Animal Operations Considered at Water Quality Workshop

In early May, a workshop exploring the impact of small and mid-sized animal operations on water quality was held in Baltimore, Maryland. The 70 people in attendance, including three members of the LPES Small Farms team, were extension educators and state agricultural or environmental personnel representing 20 states.

Appropriately titled “What’s Under the CAFO Radar Screen,” the workshop provided participants with technical and policy information about small and mid-sized operations and water quality as well as facilitated an exchange of ideas among regional colleagues.

Two workshop presenters offered a national perspective of the effect of smaller farms on water quality. In his comments on the status and trends of U.S. animal operations, Dr. Noel Gollehon, an agricultural economist with the USDA’s Economic Research Service, stated, “Small and mid-sized farms account for 99% of the animals and 80% of the animals, respectively, while 52% of the excess manure nitrogen is from farms with confined animals.”

Dr. Richard Smith, a hydrologist with the U.S. Geological Survey, considered the implications of changes in animal agriculture such as confined vs. unconfined (that is, pasture- or range-based livestock) systems on U.S. water quality. Dr. Smith said preliminary research findings suggest that pasture- and range-based systems may be a significant source of pathogens. He noted, “Model results indicate that confined animals introduced only 40% as much fecal coliform bacteria into streams as do unconfined animals.”

Following the presentations, workshop participants formed regional breakout groups. The groups met several times to address these three issues: (1) the impact of smaller farms on water quality in their region, (2) current educational, incentive, and regulatory approaches for addressing the issue, and (3) the direction of future research, extension education, and public policy strategies. Several key points resulted from the discussions:

- Limited data exist on the water quality effects of small to mid-sized farms; an improved information base is needed.

- The limited data available suggests that the issue is important in many states and needs to be addressed if progress is to be made toward reaching water quality goals.
- In general, relatively little emphasis has been placed on environmental programs for small-scale animal operations.
- State strategies to address smaller farms vary tremendously. Educational approaches are the most common strategy; several states use a progressive or “stepwise” approach with smaller farms. Regulatory approaches are the exception, and in most states, are not politically acceptable.
- Technologies and other assistance developed for large farms needs to be examined to see if it “fits” small and mid-size operations. Less comprehensive nutrient planning processes (than in a CNMP) should be considered for small and medium farms.
- The effectiveness of state strategies to address small and mid-size operations and of the performance of best management practices on water quality needs to be more thoroughly evaluated. Likewise, measuring water quality impacts and ensuring implementation requires greater investment.

In his closing remarks, Dr. Charlie Abdalla, the workshop committee chair and an agricultural economist at Penn State University, said the issue of small to mid-size animal operations was challenging to define, discuss, and address. He noted, “The strong response to this workshop and the useful perspectives shared have legitimized the issue and indicated that focusing on small and mid-size operations may enable us to make a difference in water quality.” He concluded, “The workshop initiated a dialogue that can be used to create an action agenda that addresses the needs of smaller operations for performance-based water quality policies and programs.”

For more information about the workshop, including links to key resources and reports from selected states and regions, view the website at <<http://www.smallfarmwater.aers.psu.edu>> or contact Dr. Abdalla at cabdalla@psu.edu. •

What's Up? (continued)

National Small Farm Conference Scheduled in October

In partnership with North Carolina A&T State University and North Carolina State University, the USDA will be hosting the 4th National Small Farm Conference on October 16-19, 2005, in Greensboro, North Carolina. The conference theme, "Enhancing Opportunities for Small Farmers and Ranchers," summarizes the main goal of the conference: improving the economic opportunities and quality of life of small-scale farmers, ranchers, and farm workers.

Denis Ebodaghe, the USDA's National Program Leader for Small Farms, thinks bringing together hundreds of small farm professionals from throughout the nation encourages dialogue and the exchange of ideas that will trickle down to the small farmer. He says, "We provide a venue for professionals to learn about successful programs they can take home to their constituents, helping the farmers and ranchers increase their incomes." Denis adds, "We pay special attention to programs that have the potential to be replicated elsewhere."

The conference will include four general sessions, six conference tracks, poster presentations, exhibit

displays, and educational tours. The conference tracks are (1) alternative enterprises, (2) marketing, (3) risk management, (4) bridging gaps in programs and services, (5) organic agriculture, and (6) professional/program development.

Daniel Lyons, a conference organizer from North Carolina A&T State University, says conference participants can select from ten educational tours, including an alternative enterprise tour, a very diversified tour, and two organic tours as well as a winery tour and an urban horticulture tour.

The National Small Farm conference, held every three years in a different region of the country, typically attracts from 600 to 800 state small farm program leaders, extension specialists, university educators and researchers, and small farm advisors.

For more information, visit the conference website at http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/ag_systems/in_focus/smallfarms_if_conferences.html or call Daniel Lyons at 336-334-7734. ●

Livestock Development Issues to be Discussed at Canadian Conference

The annual Tri-Provincial Conference on Manure Management and Livestock Issues will be held on October 25 and 26 this year in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

In keeping with its theme, "Growing the Livestock Industry," the conference's workshops, presentations, and posters will address water protection, planning for growth, food safety, manure treatment and innovation, health and safety, and economic issues. Karen Bolton, the conference coordinator, says the theme continues a trend of focusing on broader livestock development concerns beyond manure management.

Registration information is available at the conference website, <http://www.agr.gov.sk.ca/docs/events/growingLvStkFlyer05.pdf>. For more information, contact Karen at kbolton@agr.gov.sk.ca or 306-787-9183.

Karen, a provincial livestock environment specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, has adapted some LPES materials for Canadian use. ●



This newsletter was developed with support from the USDA-CSREES, the U.S. EPA's National Agriculture Assistance Center, and the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension at Lincoln, under Cooperative Agreement Number 2003-39490-14107.

The contents of this newsletter do not necessarily reflect USDA or EPA views and policies.



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Discounts are offered on LPES materials purchased as package deals or in bulk. See the MWPS website for details.