

ASK THE AG TEAM, for the week of March 9, 2008

Sustainable Agriculture Conference –by *Tim Baker, Horticulture Specialist, University of Missouri Extension, Daviess County*

The USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program will soon be holding its 20th anniversary conference in Kansas City, Missouri. This conference will bring people together from all over the country to discuss topics related to agricultural sustainability. The conference starts mid-day on Tuesday, March 25, with thought-provoking keynote speeches and breakout sessions that concentrate on almost any imaginable agricultural topic. Wednesday follows a similar pattern, with even more fuel for thought, and perhaps a few practical ideas to take home to your farm. Thursday is reserved for tours.

I've long had an interest in sustainable agriculture, and when asked to help with one of the tours, it was an easy decision. There are 12 tours total, with a lot of fascinating miles to be covered in both Kansas and Missouri. Almost any interest can be found in the sites to be visited, including horticulture, marketing, livestock and dairy farming, and many others.

The tour that I will be leading will be visiting sites in Caldwell and Daviess Counties. Our first stop will be an organic produce farm south of Hamilton. The owners, Brian and Beth Snow, have read widely and are very willing to try out new ideas to see what works best on their farm. When I visited their farm, I was impressed with the variety of sustainable practices they were trying out.

Next, we will head to Jamesport for several stops. We will stop first at the farm of Freeman and Ida Gingerich, to visit their greenhouse tomato operation. There are some great early tomatoes grown in Jamesport greenhouses, and Freeman's are no exception. While it will be several months before they are ready for harvest, they will be well underway by the time of the tour.

After visiting the Gingerich's, it will be time to visit the North Missouri Produce Auction, in Jamesport. I've long been impressed with produce auctions as a great way for growers to market their produce. There are quite a few auctions such as this one spread around the country, usually associated with an Amish or Mennonite community. This stop will allow tour participants to learn the pros and cons of produce auctions, and how they work.

Our final stop of the day will be at Rains Natural Meats, of rural Gallatin. The Rains family has developed a very successful marketing venture specializing in hormone and antibiotic-free meats. They will also be catering our lunch, so tour participants will have the opportunity to not only see and hear, but taste the final product.

There are many other tours to choose from. If you are interested in attending the National SARE Conference in Kansas City, please call me for more information at 660-663-3232. They also have a web site with all the details at: <http://www.sare.org/2008conference/>

Horticulture tips from University of Missouri Extension --by *Tim Baker, Horticulture Specialist, University of Missouri Extension, Daviess County*

Planting trees

When planting trees, it's best to orient the tree the same way it was in the nursery. Plant the side which faced south in the nursery so that it still faces south at your new location. If you don't do this, previously shaded bark will suddenly become exposed to strong sunlight and may be damaged. If you don't know for sure how the tree grew in the nursery, wrap the lower trunk with tree tape or coat it with white, exterior latex paint to reduce potential damage.

Selecting vegetable varieties

When planning your vegetable garden, it's best to stick with proven varieties for your main crop. But I always recommend trying at least one or two new varieties each year, on a small scale, just to see how they work in your garden. If they work well over several years, and you really like them, you may eventually replace your current varieties with something even better.