



MESAS Newsletter

Maine Sustainable Agriculture Society

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Dairy Farmer, Bussie York, Grows BTUs by the Bushel

by Betty Jespersen (207)778-6991 bjespersen@centralmaine.com

Farmington dairy farmer Bussie York believes there is another future for corn other than cattle feed and corn-on-the-cob.

"Agriculture can come to the rescue of the energy crisis," said L. Herbert "Bussie" York of Sandy River Farms who raises dairy cows, diversified crops and corn along the Sandy River.

York sees the potential of corn as an alternative to fuel oil and wood, and points out that his daughter and son-in-law are heating their new house with a stove fueled by Farmington-grown corn.

"I see this as a way to make local agriculture viable again and find new use for the land," he said.

Dried shell corn, the same corn found in cattle feed, has been used in the South and Midwest to fuel corn stoves and furnaces for years. The idea, however, has been slow to take-off in Maine until the recent energy crisis. Now, agricultural entrepreneurs are taking notice.

"We can grow for our own energy needs right here," York said. "Corn is a clean fuel, it is up to 85 percent efficient and burns with no smoke, no odor, no creosote, no fire danger and produces very little ash. And you can grow a crop in 180 days."

A bushel of corn weighs 56 pounds and can replace 3.6 gallons of heating oil, York said. At the current price of \$2.41 per bushel of corn and over \$2 a gallon for heating oil, he calculates oil costs three times more than corn.

York said he has an order for 5,000 bushels of his shell corn this summer from a Fort Kent couple opening up the first corn-packaging facility in the state that he expects will be increased in coming seasons.

Dan and Lynn Beaulieu, the owners of Corn King USA in Fort Kent, are converting a potato barn into their new corn stove shop business. When they open in May, they will sell stoves and corn by the bag or in bulk and will deliver to dealers throughout the Northeast.

"Interest has been phenomenal," Dan Beaulieu said.

John Harker, a business development specialist with the Maine Department of Agriculture, is another person interested in corn's future. "This could be a really good profitable crop for farmers," he said. "There are a number of dairy farms in Central Maine that have gone out of business and those fields are still very productive for corn."

"If farmers can cut into this market, it could bring back productivity to land that is lying fallow or being developed into house lots," he said.

Residential corn stoves are attractive units with glass doors that use a hopper with a 40- to 80-pound capacity. An auger or carousel slowly drops kernels into the airtight burn pot in the fire box according to a thermostat setting. Oxygen for combustion is pulled into the stove from the outside through the double-flue pipe while a small internal fan blows the air over the corn to keep it burning. A chimney is not required.

For every 100 pounds of corn burned, less than a pound of compostable ash is created that only needs to be cleaned out once or twice a month. And new models come with a rechargeable battery back-up that can keep the stove burning for eight hours in a power outage. Depending on the model, stoves and furnaces can burn from 20 hours to two weeks on one feeding. In Farmington, Northern Lights Hearth & Sports co-owner Marty Farnum said several pellet stoves they carry can also burn a 50-50 mix of corn and wood. He plans to get a corn stove in by May to see how it works and will carry a selection if there is demand.

Harker said he is pleased to see farmers like York and Dave Barker from Leeds, a dairy farmer developing a system to make pellets out of the entire corn plant, trying out new ideas.

"There are some pretty innovative farmers in this state who want to stay in business and use the land and who are looking at other markets," Harker said. "I think they are on to something right now. People are looking for a local source for fuel and what better way to do that than to use corn?"

Bussie and Brenda York can be reached at Sandy River Farms, 560 Farmington Falls Road, Farmington, Maine, 207-778-3835.

Corn production used for heating has great potential. It is estimated that enough corn could be grown in Maine to displace the use of 4 million gallons of fuel oil, although our production costs will likely remain higher than those in the Corn Belt states. When grown using sustainable methods, corn production additionally has the ability to increase soil quality.



Bussie York
of Sandy River Farm, Farmington

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Executive Director's Column

MESAS welcomes new directors and new officers

New years often bring new directions and new opportunities. That appears to be the case with MESAS this year. At our annual members' meeting at the Trade Show this year, Bob Spear was elected to the MESAS Board. Bob is very well known in agricultural circles in Maine and around the country. Many know him as the immediate past commissioner of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources, a position he assumed under Governor King and agreed to serve for a couple years under Governor Baldacci. Bob is a champion of Maine agriculture, recognizing its diversity and promoting its importance to the Maine economy and culture.

Spear Farms, Inc. was an early innovator of sustainable agriculture principles. By adding a mixed vegetable operation to its dairy enterprise, Spear Farm captured the benefits of diversity and complex farming systems. Spear Farm is often cited as an innovative sustainable agriculture farm. Bob is and has been very active in a number of Maine farm organizations. We are delighted to have his knowledge and skills helping us promote the sustainability of Maine agriculture.

Gloria Varney left the Board this year to focus on her many other responsibilities. With husband Gregg, Gloria operates Nezinscot Farm, an amazingly diverse farming venture. Besides an organic dairy farm, Nezinscot produces a myriad of organic vegetable and livestock products and includes a very substantial farm store with café that seems to be a popular gathering place in Turner. (We often utilized Gloria's hospitality for our directors meetings.) Gloria is a leader in sustainable agriculture, including serving on the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education executive committee that sponsors much of the sustainable agriculture research in the northeast. While we will miss her yeoman contribution to the Board, we will continue to call on her when her wisdom is needed and our palates have a yearning for that terrific homemade soup and bread.

At the year's initial directors meeting this winter, the Board elected new officers. After serving several terms as secretary/treasurer, John Snell, Jr. was elected president of the Board. John and Ramona have transitioned Snell Family Farm in Buxton from a wholesale apple orchard to a growing and diverse mixed vegetable and greenhouse farming enterprise that features direct-to-consumer sales. Both John and Ramona are active in numerous agricultural projects and we look forward to John's leadership at the helm of MESAS. Bob Spear was elected vice president and Dennis King secretary/treasurer.

John represents only the third president of MESAS. Rob Johanson, who with wife Jan Goranson operates Goranson Farm in Dresden, served in that role when MESAS was founded and provided terrific guidance in those formative years. Adrian Wadsworth, as the second president, established an aggressive agenda that pushed MESAS into

the forefront of several endeavors, the most visible being Farm Fresh Connection, our marketing arm that connects Maine farmers to local institutional markets. Adrian has provided remarkable leadership to the organization for a number of years and determined he needed to have more free time as he transitions his Turner farm from dairying to other agricultural ventures.

That meeting also saw the appointment of two non-farm members to the Board. While the by-laws have always granted the president, with recommendations from the Board, the authority to appoint up to two non-farm Board members for one-year terms, that authority had not been exercised in the past. This year, President Snell appointed two MESAS members who have substantial ties to Maine agriculture to the Board. Rick Kersbergen, a UM Extension Professor, has been working with dairy and crop farmers out of the Waldo County Extension office for nearly two decades and is now assuming a statewide role for organic dairying in Extension. Rick has worked closely with MESAS promoting sustainable agriculture systems and we are delighted he is now serving on the Board.

Kerri Sands has a unique view of Maine agriculture as director of the Farms for the Future program administered by the Maine Department of Agriculture. That program assists farmers who want to transition their farms to better capture consumer trends for Maine-produced foods and services. Since that trend is a key to adopting sustainable agriculture systems, we look forward to working with Kerri as a Board member. Readers will undoubtedly be hearing of more activities by the Board and these members as the year progresses.

Research:

Peanut-Allergy-Fighter: Apple Protein!

Apples may hold the key to reducing the allergenicity of peanuts—great news for the estimated 1.5 million Americans and other folks worldwide who suffer from peanut allergies. Agricultural Research Service scientists at the Southern Regional Research Center, New Orleans, La., discovered that adding a natural compound from apples—polyphenol oxidase, or PPO—to extracts from chopped-up peanuts alters the allergenic properties of some peanut proteins. Plans call for lab-animal studies to confirm the apple protein's allergen-fighting actions. Other tests will determine PPO's effects on peanut flavor and shelf life (*Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture*, volume 85, pages 2631 to 2637). The scientists caution that simply eating apples won't control peanut allergens. For details contact: Si-Yin Chung, (504) 256-2077; USDA-ARS Southern Regional Research Center, c/o Arkansas Children's Nutrition Research Center, Little Rock, Arkansas.

From Milk: An Edible, Water-Resistant Coating

Cheese and other dairy-case foods might someday be coated with a thin, flexible film made from casein, a milk protein. The coating—edible and water-resistant—could comprise part of the wrapper for cheese or the lining of cottage cheese or yogurt containers, for instance. That could enhance the quality of these foods and extend their shelf life. What's more, flavorings, vitamins or minerals could easily be added to the coating to increase flavor and nutritional value. That's according to scientists at ARS' Eastern Regional Research Center in Wyndmoor, Pa., who developed the film and are seeking a patent for the process to make sheets or rolls of it (*Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, volume 52, page 1190 to 1195).

For details contact: Peggy M. Tomasula, (215) 233-6703; USDA-ARS Eastern Regional Research Center, Wyndmoor, Pa.; ptomasula@arserrc.gov

Grants and Opportunities:

Farms for the Future, Proposals due September 1, 2006
Support for Agricultural Business Plans and Plan Implementation
Contact: Kerri Sands, (207) 772-5356 x 114 or kcs@ceimaine.org
Or visit www.ceimaine.org/content/view/120/170/
www.ceimaine.org/images/stories/pdf/2006_fff_phas_1_app.pdf

Maine Technology Institute, Gardiner, Maine 04345
Seed grants for Agriculture Projects up to \$10,000
Request for proposals due April 13, 2006 and June 15, 2006
Elizabeth Crabtree, (207) 582-4790 ext. 5
ecrabtree@mainetechnology.org
http://www.mainetechnology.com/?cat_id=275

Calendar of Events

March–October, 2006 MOFGA's Organic Orcharding Workshop Series. A series of 5 day-long sessions, covering theory and hands-on practice in organic fruit tree and orchard management.

April 11, 2006 Central Maine Sheep Breeders Association, Orono, Maine, Witter Center, University of Maine, Orono with Dr. Scott Haskell who will be talking about Biosecurity on the farm. Contact Bob Peterson (207) 564-2596

April 14, 2006 Livestock Health Workshop, Unity, Maine. MOFGA will present a day-long workshop focusing on holistic livestock health care, Hubert Karreman, VMD. \$15 per farm includes lunch (\$10 for each additional lunch). Pre-register by April 10th. Send fee to MOFGA, PO Box 170, Unity, ME, 04988 or contact Diane Schivera (207) 568-4142, dianes@mofga.org

April 28–30, 2006 New England Beef Expo 2006, Fryeburg, Maine. Purebred cattle sales, feeder calf/commercial heifer sale, craft barn, equipment, products, services, food and youth activities. Free admission. Public invited. Prime rib banquet on Saturday night. Contact Ron Howard (207) 236-2739, e-mail: rhoward@mchct.org, or contact mbic@midmaine.com or call (207) 549-5972

April 29–30, 2006 Homestead Cheesemaking Workshop, Wiscasset, Maine. With award winning cheesemaker Caitlin Owen Hunter of Appleton Creamery. \$80 per person. Contact (207) 882-4080, e-mail: morrisfarm@morrisfarm.org or visit www.morrisfarm.org

May 5–6th, 2006 Maine Land Conservation Conference 2006, Brunswick, Maine. Tours, conferences and round table discussions. Contact (207) 729-7366, <http://www.mltn.org/2006conference.asp>

May 11, 2006 "Combined Heat & Power: Reducing Energy Costs Through Recycled Energy" Portland, Maine. Better understand the amazing potentials available in the new world of energy technology. The solutions may be at your fingertips. Come and ask the experts! This event will help you understand if it's right for your business—large or small—or your home. Learn about new CHP technology systems that recycle waste heat to produce maximum energy returns and allows you to operate at a 70%–80% higher energy efficiency level using conventional fuels.

Contact Joan B. Saxe, 20 Arnold Rd., Freeport, ME 04032 (207) 865-3648 or (207) 939-2634

jsaxe@suscom-maine.net or visit www.NECHPI.org

May 13, 2006 New England Market Lamb Sale, Windsor Fairgrounds, Maine. Open to the public.

Contact Wendy Reinemann, Sale Chairman (207) 785-2978

May 19–21, 2006 Technical Large Animal Rescue Training, Orono, Maine. Tomas Gimenez DVM and Rebecca Gimenez Ph.D. <http://www.tlaer.org>

<http://www.mainesmart.org/training/tlaerschedule.html>

Contact State of Maine Animal Response Team (SMART) (207) 287-7534, e-mail: SMART@Maine.gov

Marketing:

Coastal Enterprise, Inc. offers classes for effective marketing, costs vary. Contact Marita Fairfield, mlf@ceimaine.org, 1-877-340-2649 or register at:

<http://mail.ceimaine.org/workshops/register/marita-list.php>

May 31, 2006, Introduction to E-Commerce class, Auburn

May 31, 2006, Planning Your Website class, Auburn

June 07, 2006, Evaluating the Effectiveness of Your Website, Auburn

June 14, 2006, Marketing and Promoting Your Website class, Auburn

July 12, 2006, Advanced Web Marketing class, Auburn

June–September 2006, Grass Farmers Pasture Walks and Conference
Maine Grass Farmers Network, Rick Kersbergen.

Call 1-800-287-1426 or www.umaine.edu/umext/mgfn/
<http://www.mofga.org/news20050530.html#pw>

June 7–11, 2006 "Place, Taste, and Sustenance: The Social Spaces of Food and Agriculture," Boston, Massachusetts.

The Joint 2006 Annual Meetings of the Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Society (AFHVS) and the Association for the Study of Food and Society (ASFS) explore unlimited opportunities.

Contact Beth Forrest (617) 353-9853 or e-mail bforrest@bu.edu
<http://food-culture.org/conference.html>

<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/rhaynes/afhvs/NextMeeting.htm>

June 12–13, 2006 National Value Added Agriculture Conference, Nashville, TN. Contact Center for Profitable Agriculture, (931) 486-2777 or e-mail: cpa@utk.edu

<http://cpa.utk.edu/Value-AddConf/index.htm>

June 10–11, 2006 Sixth Annual Maine Fiber Frolic, Windsor Fairgrounds, Maine. Fleece show and sale. Sheep dog demos both days. The Maine Llama Drill Team. Used equipment marketplace. Workshops and demonstrations. Talks on fiber animals, spinning, rug hooking, dyeing, knitting, crocheting and raising animals.

Kid's area and 4H programs, educational presentations. Over 80 vendors. Contact Maine Llama Association, Michelle DeLucia, 377 Center Conway Road, Brownfield, ME 04010, call (207) 935-4075, e-mail: SSDDFarm@pivot.net or visit www.fiberfrolic.com

July 23–24, 2006 Border Collie Training Clinic, Washington, Maine. Denise Leonard of Tanstaaf Farm will conduct a border collie training clinic at Meadowcroft Farm. Contact Nanney Kennedy, (207) 845-2587 or at queen@getwool.com

August 4, 5, 6, 2006 Maine Fiberarts Open Studio & Farm Weekend, Studios and Farms will be open throughout Maine revealing a trail of statewide fiber destinations. Small farms producing mohair, alpaca, llama and wool, in addition to finding wool sweaters, handspun yarns, fabric, collage, thread, handmade paper, quilts, stitch books, coil baskets, felt masks and knit sculpture demonstrations in working studios. Contact Maine Fiberarts, 13 Main Street, Topsham, ME 04086; (207) 721-0678, or e-mail: fiberarts@gwi.net or visit www.maineiberarts.org

Western Mountains Alliance Receives Funding to Link Local Farmers with School Kitchens

Western Mountains Alliance is beginning an exciting new project aimed at enhancing the economic viability, and visibility, of western Maine farms while at the same time encouraging healthier eating habits among area students. Funded by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan, the purpose of the project is threefold: to introduce fresh, locally raised farm products into two regional school systems; to increase local consumer awareness of and demand for local farm products; and to stimulate local farmers to produce more for the local market.

The Alliance has contracted with Paula Day of the Maine Alternative Agriculture Association to run the project. According to Day, the project is the largest and most comprehensive of its kind focused exclusively on farmers in Somerset and Franklin Counties and on two local school systems, SAD 9, in Farmington and SAD 54, in Skowhegan.

The Alliance envisions a vital, local food system where a combination of fresh and preserved local produce and locally raised, pasture fed meat and dairy products are served in our local school lunch programs all year round: whole potatoes instead of processed, salad bars of hearty, locally grown winter greens, soups of local meats and root vegetables, milk, cheese, and yogurt from local dairies. "We would like to see students who know the farmers in their communities" said Kathleen Beauregard, Projects and Grants Coordinator for the Alliance.

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The MESAS Mission is “to explore, develop and promote agricultural systems and practices that allow Maine farmers to retain a greater share of consumer expenditures for farm products. This will be accomplished by developing methods to reduce the need for, and cost of, purchased inputs and by adding value to farm production.”

MESAS Board of Directors

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Interest in Connecting Dairy and Potato Farmers in Aroostook Growing

With two other states, MESAS participated in a four-year USDA project to evaluate the benefits and costs of reintegrating cropping and livestock enterprises across the midwest and northeast U.S., even when the ownership and management of those enterprises remain separate. Among other findings, that project documented the advantages of reintegrating Maine’s dairy and potato farms. While a number of farmers in central Maine, primarily Penobscot County, have been successfully “coupling” their enterprises for a number of years, little coupling has taken place in Aroostook County, where over 90% of Maine’s potato production occurs. The benefits from coupling are strong enough to encourage some dairy farmers from the central and southern part of the state to take a look at locating in Aroostook County.

MESAS participated in a meeting with some Aroostook potato growers last summer and a second meeting was held later. While considerable interest is expressed in relocating dairy activities, it is a bold step that requires considerable evaluation by prospective dairy farmers. MESAS stands ready to provide some of the needed assistance. With support from the Maine Dairy Industries Association and the Agricultural Bargaining Council, MESAS was invited to submit a proposal for funding to provide technical assistance to farmers interested in coupling dairy and potato enterprises in Aroostook. By reducing the costs of purchased feeds and purchased fertilizers, among other benefits, dairy/potato coupling directly fits the MESAS mission statement. We are pleased to work with farmers exploring these coupling arrangements, and we hope to be able to provide technical assistance to them. For more information on coupling, contact Andrew Files at 207.843.7581 or DirigoSolutions@aol.com