



Hunger Free North Dakota Garden project launched

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LOCAL NEWS

A North Dakota Department of Agriculture Initiative Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring



Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring (center) announced the Hunger Free North Dakota Garden Project on March 3 in Bismarck. Partners include (l-r) Duane Hauck, NDSU; Karen Gehrig, president of the North Dakota Farmers Market and Growers Association; Steve Sellent, Lutheran Social Services Great Plains Food Bank; Dwight Duke, Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society. In the foreground is Dwayne Walker, photographer for KFYP-TV.

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Garden goal 500,000 pounds

Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring has called on North Dakota's local foods community and other volunteers to mobilize against hunger in the state through the Hunger Free North Dakota Garden Project.

"The Hunger Free North Dakota Coalition is asking gardeners to plant some extra rows this season and donate the produce to a local food pantry or church organization," Goehring said at a March 3 news conference. "Food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters across the state need fresh produce to help improve the diets of the people who depend on them."

Goehring said the project has five main goals:

- To grow and distribute 500,000 pounds or more of fresh food to the state's 244 food pantries.
- To build a distribution system to supply food pantry clients with fresh and healthy produce.
- To recognize the growers and quantities of fruits and vegetables grown in the state.
- To improve diets through cooking, canning and education.
- To connect food to farmers.

Communities, groups and individuals are invited to be a part of the project. The North Dakota Department of Agriculture (NDDA) has more information, as well as brochures, pledge cards, sample press releases, community garden information, logos and more, available for free. These files can also be downloaded from www.agdepartment.com under local foods initiative.



Want to show your participation in the Hunger Free North Dakota Project? Sign up by May 25, and we'll send you this sign for your garden!

In addition to NDDA, the Hunger Free North Dakota Coalition includes the North Dakota State University Extension Service, Dakota College at Bottineau Entrepreneurial Center for Horticulture, Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society, the North Dakota Farmers Market and Growers Association, Pride of Dakota and Healthy North Dakota.

For more information, please contact:
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Tom Kalb, (right) NDSU Horticulturist for western North Dakota visits with local gardeners before the Hunger Free North Dakota Garden press conference.

North Dakota Farm to School program receives regional boost

Connecting farmers to school lunch programs is this year's focus of the North Dakota Department of Agriculture local foods initiative.

The push to include more local foods in schools has been strengthened by the creation of a regional farm to school network under the umbrella organization at www.farertoschool.org.

Sue Balcom has been chosen to be the state lead representing North Dakota on this committee including representatives from Oklahoma, Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, Missouri and the Center for Rural Affairs.

The first step in the farm to school program will be locating North Dakota schools that have begun working with local producers, capture their stories and use them to create profiles for the farm to school

website. Because of the regional partnership and the work of the ag department, the national organization has included North Dakota in its map of states working towards farm to school programs.

As a region, the task force will be holding training sessions for school food service directors and producers.

North Dakota plans to couple farmers with a minimum of three schools statewide and begin serving local foods this fall. Information about other activities such as education days and farm visits will be available later this year.

If your school is working with local producers or is interested in becoming a charter "farm to school" school in North Dakota, please contact Sue Balcom by email: suebalcom@nd.gov; or call 800-242-7535.

Dakota Grown Local Foods Conference a huge success



Ken Meter discusses "Finding Food in Farm County."

More than 100 people who grow and eat food gathered to learn and network at the second annual local foods conference and North Dakota Farmers Market and Growers Association annual meeting in Jamestown.

Keynote speaker Ken Meter, Crossroads Resources, Minneapolis, received rave reviews on his presentation "Finding Food in Farm County." Other session topics ranged from saving rural grocery stores to permaculture techniques.

Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring addressed the entire conference after Friday's dinner.

Comments about the conference were mostly positive – "the rooms were too small" was the most common concern and a good problem to have.

Is your community planning a local foods meeting or event?

Send your information to suebalcom@nd.gov
or list your event on our networking site at <http://goinglocalnd.ning.com>

Online tool helps farmers earn more

New integrated crop and livestock production and biomass planning tool

Iowa State University is offering a new, free, on-line tool to help farmers make better-informed operational decisions.

The program called I-FARM, found at i-farmtools.org, allows farmers to input various aspects of their operation with the location of their farm. The computer software then predicts and compares farming outcomes.

"This farming model gives you opportunities to calculate alternatives and see the benefits of each," said Ed van Ouwerkerk, a research associate and software developer in the department of agricultural and biosystems engineering at ISU, who developed the program. "The program gives information, and lets the farmer make the choices."

The program starts with the location of the farm. Using Google Earth® the farmer can locate his or her farm and highlight up to 20 fields to evaluate.

The farmer then inputs the crops intended for the field, the rotation cycle he or she will use, the types and amounts of fertilizer, the farm equipment used, typical yield and many other factors.

The program then tells the farmer what his or her costs may be, the labor required, amount of fuel needed, how much soil erosion he or she can expect, the amount of nitrogen and other chemical emissions the farm will produce, the amount of income (this function uses frequently updated market prices) and the subsidy payments the farmer can expect to get from the latest farm bill.

The farmer can input one scenario with one set of inputs, and a second scenario with different inputs and compare the two, according to van Ouwerkerk. For instance, a farmer might discover his inputs will result in greater soil erosion. The farmer can use the information to choose to plant different crops.

"The software knows the slope of the land because it uses Google Earth. If the farmer looks at the outcomes and sees that he is losing too much soil, he may choose to change crops," said van Ouwerkerk. "Maybe he shouldn't plant corn here, maybe he should plant a perennial, like alfalfa."

The software can also help the producer with many aspects of the farm.

"This farming model gives you an opportunity to

calculate alternatives to different crop rotations and see the benefits of each," he said. "That includes environmental benefits, ammonia release, erosion, perennials instead of annuals, and if you have cover crops instead of only annuals and different tillage practices."

The program should help farmers make smart choices about their operations, said van Ouwerkerk.



Assistance available to promote farmers markets

Farmers market operators and organizers are encouraged to apply for 2010 Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) grants.

Applications must be received by April 15.

USDA is emphasizing three priorities for the 2010 grant period:

- Focus on the recruitment and retention of new farmers to participate at farmers markets and other direct-to-consumer farm marketing outlets.
- Develop professional expertise for farmers market managers, farmers/vendors, boards and organizations to effectively manage and/or operate farmers markets and other direct marketing enterprises.
- Improve food access in local, rural and underserved communities to promote the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables from local farms.

Two new tools for prospective grant applicants are available on the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) website at www.ams.usda.gov/FMPP.

The FMPP Pre-Application Guide for 2010 helps readers assess their readiness for the grant application and implementation process.

FMPP grant-writing training is a detailed PowerPoint® presentation that provides step-by-step instructions on filling out the application forms.

The federal government has appropriated \$5 million for the program in 2010.

A book review by Sue Balcom

The no-work gardener

People who think gardening is too much work haven't had the privilege of meeting Ruth Stout.

It's no longer possible to meet her in person, but Stout's feisty personality comes through in the book she wrote called "The Ruth Stout No-Work Garden Book."

Published in 1971 by Rodale Press, Inc., Stout, then 80-years young, put her practice of deep mulch gardening into words for lazy gardeners everywhere.

One of 9 children, Stout (1884-1980) lived in Kansas until she was 18, when she moved to New York City. At the age of 45, she married, moved to the country, and began gardening the hard way-according to the gardening "experts" of her day.

Always ahead of her time in gardening and recycling, this hardcover edition was printed on waste paper promoting recycling efforts.

Currently out of print, copies of the book are still available through Amazon.com or Abebooks.com for about five times the original price of \$6.95.

An advocate of the local food movement for 30 or more years, Stout grew all the vegetables her family ate, freezing everything from asparagus to turnips.

Her claim to fame was saying "throw away your hoe and spade" and use the no-work method of raising produce. People laughed at her, but in all the years she gardened she never tilled the soil or pulled a weed.

Stout's method simply made use of all the available plant matter and hay. Rather than use a compost heap, she just heaped the old vines on top of the garden and let nature do what it does best.

Suggestions for the recommended eight-inch

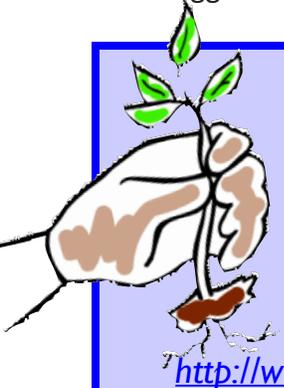
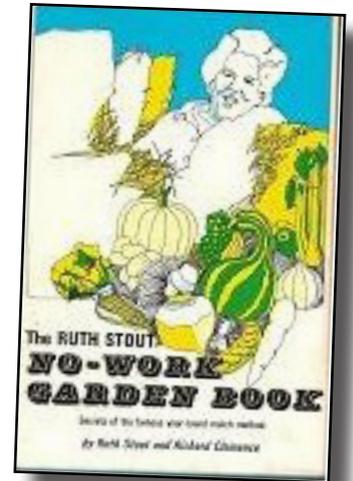
deep mulch range from hay, straw, leaves, pine needles, sawdust, weeds, garbage or anything that rots. The mulch is applied as needed whenever bare ground can be seen and spread on the garden all year round.

As far as planting, the rows can remain the same as in a normal garden. In the spring, the mulch is "opened" up along a row, the sun is allowed to warm the soil and then the seeds are planted. Later, bedding plants are placed in the soil and then gently covered with mulch as they grow and thrive in the humus-rich environment.

The only soil supplement mentioned in the book was the application of cottonseed meal.

While you cannot expect beautiful soil in the first year, Stout boasts after 11 years of practicing no work gardening, experts used to drive for miles to see the garden for themselves.

The technique is pretty much defined in the first few chapters of the book, and then Stout goes on to talk about varieties, flowers and other successes in gardening. You won't have anything to lose by beginning your mulching this spring and everything to gain - like a few more hours sitting in the sun with your iced tea watching your garden grow.



Ruth Stout also wrote "How to Have a Green Thumb Without an Aching Back" and "Gardening Without Work." Out-of-print books are available at Amazon.com, AbeBooks.com, and other online booksellers. Be prepared to pay from \$30 to \$200 based on condition.

You can read about Stout's methods of gardening for free. She wrote an article for Mother Earth news that was reprinted in the February/March 2004 issue. It is available online at:

<http://www.motherearthnews.com/Organic-Gardening/2004-02-01/Ruth-Stouts-System.aspx>



Food, Ag and Tourism Conference

The Hazen Chamber of Commerce/CVB and Hazen Community Development are sponsoring an educational luncheon from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. MT, Tuesday, March 30.

The event will be held at the Hazen City Hall in Hazen.

Guest speakers include Dean Ihla, Business Specialist for ND Tourism; Tracy Finneman, co-owner of Papa's Pumpkin Patch in Bismarck; and Holly Rose Mawby, director of the Entrepreneurial Center for Horticulture in Bottineau.

Learn how to expand your business and earn more income; become a niche or seasonal business; become a part of the farmers market; invite tourists to your farm; and share a skill or hobby with tourists.

Lunch is free, but pre-registration is required by Friday, March 26. Call 701-748-6848 or email hazen-chamber@westriv.com to register.

Seed variety trials yield recommendations

Approximately 350 families across North Dakota evaluated a total of 113 varieties of vegetables and flowers in their gardens last year thanks to Tom Kalb, horticulturist for western North Dakota.

Kalb has been conducting trials from the Burleigh County Extension Office in Bismarck. The program was so successful, North Dakota's seed trials exceeded any similar projects in the U.S. with more than 1,600 successful trials completed.

Home gardeners were provided seeds and evaluation sheets. Gardeners pitted variety against variety in their gardens and rated varieties for germination, plant health, earliness, yield and fruit/flower quality.

Anyone can participate in this year's trials, including children. There are 53 trials available for 106 vegetable varieties. Gardeners are given enough seed for a 10-foot row of each variety. They record information on the sheets provided and return them to Kalb. A few changes to this year's program include:

- Free seeds to children who participate,

Ample Harvest website provides nationwide pantry information

The AmpleHarvest.org Campaign is a nationwide effort to diminish hunger in America by enabling millions of backyard gardeners to easily find a local food pantry eager for their excess garden bounty.

Food pantry directors can enter their information in an online directory. The information includes pantry needs, address, phone and even a photo to make it easier to find.

Currently there are 1,516 food pantries registered across all 50 states on AmpleHarvest.org, and more are signing up every day. There are four North Dakota food pantries on the national map at ample-harvest.org/all-pantry.php.

This website has a wealth of information for gardeners and food pantries. It would be a great resource for the Hunger Free North Dakota Garden project. Gardeners will be able to locate pantries that can distribute produce when harvest rolls around.

AmpleHarvest.org has received support and backing from Google.com, the USDA, Rotary International, VFW, the National Gardening Association, Garden Writers of America as well as numerous faith organizations. It is available to food pantries and gardeners at no charge.

- All seeds will be untreated and
- All trials will be for vegetables.

Information on last year's trials can be found in the 10-page [summary report](#) or the [full 101-page report](#). This includes information on trial procedures, weather conditions, as well as performance data and comments from gardeners on all varieties tested.

Results from this testing was used to update the list of varieties recommended for gardeners in North Dakota. That document can also be found at the site.

To participate, each household may select up to five trials. There is a fee of \$1 per trial. Any child who agrees to manage a trial will receive their seeds for free.

Information and downloadable brochure can be found at <http://www.dakotagardener.com/trials/project.html>. All efforts will be made to give the gardeners their preferred varieties, but seed supplies are limited. Gardeners have the option to choose alternative varieties.