

March 2012 Regional Fruit Grower Newsletter

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- 3/3-10 ANR Week**
MSU <http://anrweek.canr.msu.edu/>
- 3/6 North American Tart Cherry Conference**
Amway Grand Plaza, Grand Rapids
- 3/7-8 Eastern Winery Exposition**
Lancaster, PA <http://easternwineryexposition.com/>
- 3/9-10 Cincinnati International Wine Festival – Grand Tastings**
Cincinnati, OH <http://www.winefestival.com/>
- 3/13 Wine Grape Webinar – “Setting the Stage for Future Growth: Winery Collaboration & Economic Impacts”**
- 3/15 am Northern Michigan Ag. Labor Meeting**
NWMHRC See attached agenda - <http://agbioresearch.msu.edu/nwmihort/aglabor12.pdf>
- 3/15 pm Updating Farm Safety Plans & Training Series**
NWMHRC
- 3/16 Creating Farm to School Business Opportunities**
Central Lake High School Cafeteria
- 3/16 Spring Horticulture Meeting -** <http://agbioresearch.msu.edu/nwmihort/hortmtg12.pdf>
Hart United Methodist Church, Hart
- 3/22 The Farm Business Plan: One Page, Two Hours**
Northwestern Michigan College
- 3/23 Use Weather Knowledge As A Tool for Fruit Pest Management**
NWMHRC <http://agbioresearch.msu.edu/nwmihort/weather12.pdf>
- 3/28 Gisela Pruning Demonstration**
- 3/30 Deadline Date for Conservation Organic Farming Practices Financial Assistance**
- 4/1 2011 Ag Large Volume Water Use Reports Due**
- 4/5, 12, 19, 26 4-H Tractor Safety Program Classes -**
<http://agbioresearch.msu.edu/nwmihort/tractorsafetyreg2012.pdf>
NWMHRC
- 4/28 4-H Tractor Safety Written & Driving Tests**
NWMHRC
- 4/30 Michigan Wine Showcase**
Rattlesnake Club, Detroit
- 5/4 Vineyard Sprayer Technology & Calibration Workshop**
NWMHRC

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| 6/1 | Parallel 45/MSUE Viticulture Update Grower site to be determine |
| 7/13 | Vineyard Sprayer “Rodeo” Site to be determined |
| 7/26-27 | Save the Date – IFTA Study Tour Quebec |
| 8/3 | Parallel 45/MSUE Viticulture Update Grower site to be determined |
| 8/23 | NW Michigan Horticultural Research Center Open House & Viticulture Program |

Welcome to ANR Week!

Michigan State University and the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources extends a cordial welcome to visitors to the 97th Agriculture and Natural Resources Week (formerly Farmer’s Week). The nation’s pioneer land-grant college was founded more than 150 years ago, guided by a philosophy to serve all the people of the state, an idea that still prevails in 2012.

Agriculture and Natural Resources Week (ANR Week) continues to be one of the largest events of its kind in the nation. Foundations for the week were laid by the Farmers’ Institute more than a century ago. In 1898, Michigan Agricultural College hosted the first state-wide Farmers’ Institute “Round-Up.” Agriculture Hall was completed in 1909 and a fourth floor auditorium provided the meeting place. Five years later the round-up combined with farm association meetings to become the first “Farmers’ Week.”

The topics of interest over 90 years have changed with the times. In the 1960’s it was the space age, in the 70’s it was science and cybernetics, and the 80’s brought forth issues related to world hunger. In 1982, Farmers’ Week became Farmers’ Week and Natural Resources Days followed by another name change in 1985 to Agriculture and Natural Resources Week. The event now hosts more than 75 programs and annual association meetings.

ANR Week 2012 provides a wide-variety of topics in areas such as agriculture, horticulture, and natural resources, i.e. Quiet Water Symposium, Michigan Wildflower Conference, Growing of Michigan’s Organic Future, MSRBA Rabbit Show, food and nutrition conference: CHOICES and the 84th state convention of the Michigan FFA.

THE NORTH AMERICAN TART CHERRY CONFERENCE

Michigan growers are invited to an industry-sponsored meeting on March 6 for updates on tart cherry research, promotion and communications.

Nikki Rothwell, Michigan State University Extension

The North American Tart Cherry Conference IV is set for **March 6**. This conference will be held at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids, Mich., from **10 a.m. to 5 p.m.** This program is sponsored by CherrCo, and all Michigan cherry growers are invited to attend.

This conference will provide an overview of the challenges and successes the Michigan Cherry Industry has faced in the past two years. Topics will include high density tart cherry orchards, the impacts of the

marketing and promotion program, the influence of the federal marketing order, new tart cherry varieties and harvesting systems, and a summary of the New FARM (Farmer Assistance and Resource Management) recent trip to New Zealand.

Growers that are interested in attending should contact CherrCo, Inc. at tabrahamson@cherrco.com or call 231-845-8554 ext. 223.

This article was published on MSU Extension News. For more information from MSU Extension, visit <http://news.msue.msu.edu>.

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN FOR ENERGY & WATER SEMINAR

Registration is now open for the Michigan Chapter's ANR Seminar A Matter of Balance: Energy, Water and Working Lands on **March 7**. More information and registration can be found here: www.miswcs.org/News.html

Energy and water are inextricably linked, according to a Great Lakes Commission Issue Brief. How does this relate to Working Lands, such as Farmland and Forest Land? This Seminar looks at the relationships of energy, water and working lands, how each impacts the others and how both conservation and wise use helps to sustain all three.

This Seminar is for agency Conservation Professionals, Private Consultants, Conservation Advocates and Landusers.

Speakers include: Howard Reeves, Hydrologist, USGS, Lansing, Michigan; Steve Miller, Visiting Instructor, Dept. of Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering, MSU; Mike Wade, Executive Director, Agricultural Water Management Council, Sacramento, California; and Patricia Birkholtz, Director, Office of the Great Lakes, State of Michigan.

UPDATING FARM SAFETY PLANS AND TRAINING SERIES:

Farm Safety Plans – Training and Documentation March 15, 2012

A significant concern voiced during government enforcement actions on farms is “I didn’t know about the requirement.” The agricultural industry has an aversion to even asking a “regulatory agency” for information and are even more concerned with an Agency visit. Why are farmers frightened of being visited? A recent study found that because they are unsure of the health and safety standards required of them, they are meeting the “police” and they do not know what will happen on a visit, as they are rare events for most of us.

With heightened safety concerns due to national fatality trends, learn to be prepared, be proactive and know the standards that could apply to your operation. Developing and updating Farm Safety Plans are an essential step for your worker’s and your family’s safety. They also can provide documentation that you understand and follow safety standard requirement. Remember, the injury you prevent is likely your own on the farm.

Learn how to start or update your plan by looking at your own operation through farm risk images from around the country.

This 3-hour Seminar will topics related to local crops and issues. We will apply for 3 pesticide applicator recertification core credits for commercial and private applicators.

Tentative Seminar Agenda (for an afternoon program)

Introduction and Registration

Are You a Farm and Does it Matter – As farms expand both horizontally and vertically, there has been a slippage in the understanding of which safety and pesticide standards apply to farms and related operations. Learn the key areas we all need to look at regarding safety and how “who you are” impacts the standards you follow.

The Effect of Farm Fatalities on Safety Programs – MIFACE state and national fatality information provides a realistic review of the risks agricultural workers and owners face as well as some of the significant contributing factors to those events.

Break

Completing or Updating a Farm Safety Plan Using Multi-Crop Hazard Reviews – Using a Farm Facility Photo Review we will look at various crop and livestock issues to assist in identifying farm hazards related to equipment, pesticides, sanitizers and other common risk issues to use as a basis for updating Farm Safety Programs.

Training - The Food Modernization Act, FIFRA, GAP and MIOSHA – As the agriculture adopts industry and consensus standards in addition to required rules there is an increased need to streamline our Safety Programs while making sure we address both our buyer's and the government's safety and training requirements.

Local Issues – Topics might include Youth Employment, Grain Bin Safety, Electrical Safety, Drift Management, Chemical and Pesticide Use/Transportation

NORTHERN GRAPES PROJECT

Paul Jenkins, Small Fruit Education Coordinator, MSU

The new site for the Northern Grapes Project is up and running at <http://northerngrapesproject.org/>. Here you can find information about this multi-state project and links to archived Webinars.

About the project

The Northern Grapes Project was funded in 2011 by the USDA NIFA Specialty Crops Research Initiative. The emergence of cold hardy, *Vitis riparia*-based wine grape cultivars in the 1990s created a new and rapidly expanding industry of small vineyard and winery enterprises (over 300 wineries, 3,300 acres of grapes, 1300 growers) in more than 12 states in New England, northern New York, and the Upper Midwest, boosting rural economies in those regions. While the North American ancestry of these cultivars confers exceptional climatic adaptation (surviving as low as -40°C) and disease resistance, other challenges to production, processing, and marketing slow their successful commercialization in regional and national markets. Because their growth habit and fruit composition differ from traditional, cold-tender *V. vinifera*-based hybrids, new viticultural and enological practices are needed. Marketing tools are also required to educate consumers unfamiliar with the grapes and the wine styles they produce. Consequently, the long-term viability of these new businesses depends on coordinated research and extension to optimize viticultural, enological (winemaking), business management, and marketing practices. To meet the needs articulated by industry stakeholders, this CAP project uses a holistic systems approach, integrating the SCRI focus areas of production, distribution and processing, and consumers and markets. Objectives targeting optimized viticultural practice, genomic characterization, cultivar evaluation, enological characterization, optimized wine production, marketing strategies, agritourism, and product familiarity and preference are designed to elucidate and build on the relationships between these focus areas. Ultimately, this research will help producers overcome production and marketing constraints and increase the profitability and sustainability of emerging cold climate grape and wine industries in the Midwest and Northeast.

THE NORTHERN GRAPES PROJECT WEBINAR SERIES

Setting the Stage for Future Growth: Winery Collaboration and Economic Impacts

Tuesday, March 13, 2012

12:00 Noon Eastern (11:00 AM Central)

7:00 PM Eastern (6:00 PM Central)

To have a prosperous wine industry, a successful wine region needs collaborative wineries that understand, and can leverage, their contributions to the surrounding area. Our project includes several initiatives focused on the business side of wineries. In this webinar, **Bill Gartner**, from University of Minnesota, will briefly introduce the marketing/economics related initiatives of the Northern Grapes Project. He will then focus on economic impact, what it is and what it is not, and how it is going to be measured, including the wine tourist's contribution to overall economic impact. In part 2, **Dan McCole**, from Michigan State University, will address how wineries, particularly those that rely heavily on tasting room sales, can benefit greatly from collaboration. Whether it's working together with other wineries to form a wine trail, collectively lobbying for favorable legislation, or partnering with non-wine tourism organizations to strengthen a tourism destination, wineries that build and maintain collaborative relationships are more likely to be successful.

To Register: Registration is free, but required. To register, fill out the online form posted at:

https://cornell.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_7UPvtevAGCOqyKU

A few days prior to the webinar, those who register will be sent the web address (URL) for the Adobe Connect session. **PLEASE NOTE: Only those who complete the online registration form will receive connection details to participate in the webinar.** Even if you have registered for past webinars, you still must register for this webinar in order to receive the email.

Further Northern Grapes Project information is available on-line at <http://northerngrapesproject.org/>

The Northern Grapes Project is funded by the USDA's Specialty Crops Research Initiative Program of the National Institute for Food and Agriculture, Project # 2011-51181-30850

VITICULTURE PROGRAMMING FOR 2012

Duke Elsner, Small Fruit Educator, MSU Extension

The MSU grape team is happy to announce a new approach to our programming for the coming year. We are planning a series of programs that tie together around a particular topic, and for 2012 the topic will be sprayer technology and chemical application. There will not be a spring "kick-off" in April this year.

The sprayer technology series starts on **Friday, May 4**, with a 1-5 pm workshop on sprayer equipment set-up, calibration and operation. This will be held at the Northwest Michigan Horticultural Research Center. This meeting will feature hands-on work with different spraying systems and technologies.

The next meeting will take place at a commercial vineyard (site to be determined) on **Friday, June 1, from 3-5 pm**. We'll discuss sprayer set up changes to match canopy development along with topics of current interest.

On **July 13** we are planning to host a "sprayer rodeo" where vineyard managers and show off their sprayer systems. Various methods to assess spray deposition will be demonstrated.

The next session is scheduled for **Friday, August 3rd**, at a commercial vineyard site (to be determined) and the topics for the day will be timely issues based on the characteristics of the growing season.

Our last scheduled meeting will coincide with the annual open house at the Northwest Michigan Horticultural Research Station on Thursday, **August 23**. We'll look at the results of earlier spray applications and discuss late season canopy and fruit spray coverage issues.

Be sure to save these dates on your calendars and plan to participate in the sprayer rodeo!

GISELA PRUNING DEMONSTRATION DATE SET FOR NORTHWEST MICHIGAN

Nikki Rothwell, Extension Educator

From March 26-28th, a traveling Gisela pruning demonstration will come to Michigan. This demonstration will begin in the southwestern Michigan at the Southwest Michigan Research and Extension Center (SWMREC) on March 26 and move up the coast to Clarksville on the 27th. The travelling show will hit northwest Michigan on the **28th from 8:30-1:30**. The demonstration will feature MSU's own sweet cherry expert, Dr. Greg Lang. We are also fortunate to bring in Lynn Long, Oregon State University Extension Specialist; Mr. Long is the only specialist in the world whose only crop responsibility is sweet cherries. He conducts his work in The Dalles, Oregon which is the most concentrated cherry growing area in North America. Mr. Long has traveled the world's cherry-growing regions extensively and is known worldwide for his talks on sweet cherry varieties, pruning and training systems, and production experience, which includes briners as well as fresh market.

The demonstration will also feature Jon Clements, an Extension Specialist from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Mr. Clements has been a leader in the Northeast for helping growers transition sweet cherry systems to incorporate dwarfing rootstocks. He is also an expert videographer that has many excellent videos on YouTube for pruning dwarfing cherries and apples. The traveling show will also include Win Cowgill from the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station. Mr. Cowgill has extensive experience in tree fruit grown in the Eastern U.S., and he is co-owner and co-webmaster of the [Virtual Orchard®](#) with Jon Clements.

Details for the NW orchard stops are currently in the works, and we will send more information in the coming weeks. However, please mark your calendars for the 28th, and specifics will be forthcoming.

USDA RELEASES NEW HARDINESS ZONE MAP

New United States Department of Agriculture hardiness map features more up-to-date climate data and interactivity. Here are the strengths and limitations of the latest update since 1990.

Bert Cregg, Michigan State University Extension, Departments of Horticulture and Forestry

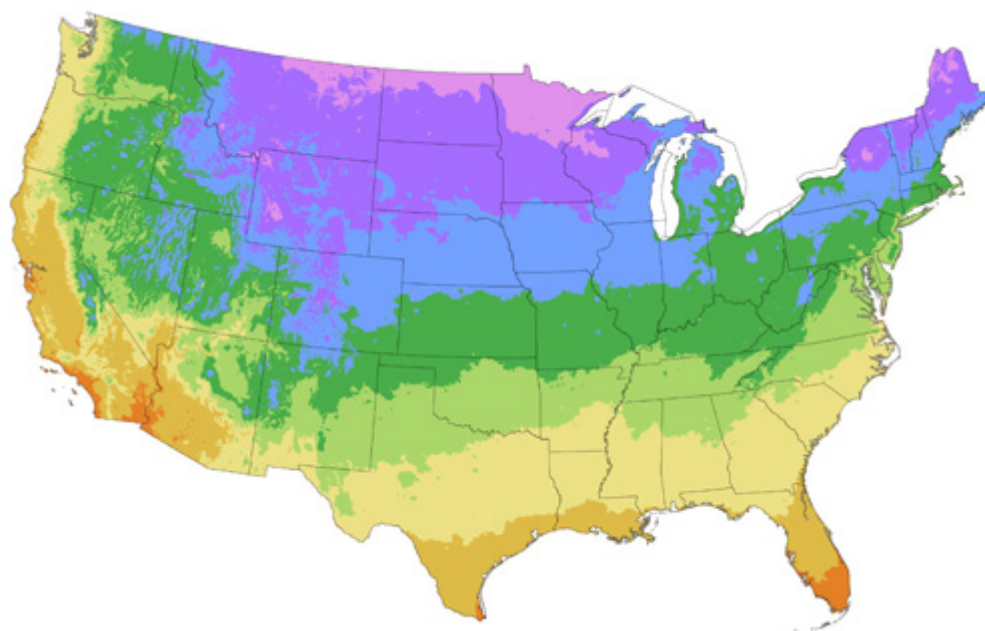
The United States Department of Agriculture has released a new plant hardiness zone map for the United States. The hardiness zone map divides the country into 13 hardiness zones based on average annual minimum winter temperatures, with zone 1 representing the coldest zone (-60 to -50°F) and zone 13 representing the warmest (60 to 70°F). Each zone is further divided into an “a” and “b” zone. The hardiness zones provide baseline information for gardener and landscapers looking to choose landscape plants for their location.

The new map replaces the earlier USDA hardiness zone map that was released in 1990. There are several features of the new map that are improvements on the old map. First, the new map integrates more complete and up-to-date climatic data so it offers a better representation of current climate conditions. In some cases, locations may be rated up to two zones warmer than the old map. Secondly, the new map offers much greater resolution and includes several user-friendly features such as a “zone-finder,” which identifies hardiness zones by zip codes and interactive maps.

In using hardiness zone information, it is important to recognize several limitations. First, since the maps are based on average annual minimum temperatures, there may be winters in which temperatures colder than the zone designation will occur. Second, zones may reflect micro-site effects that don’t pertain to a particular area. For example, suburbs around large cities like Chicago may be designated warmer than they actually are due to urban heat island effects associated with the core downtown area. Lastly, hardiness zones reflect plant cold tolerance needed to survive the average coldest temperature, but cannot account for fluctuating winter temperatures that may cause dehardening and subsequent injury.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, the new map is a welcomed addition and will provide useful baseline data for landscape plant selection.

New USDA plant hardiness zone map for the low 48 states.



Dr. Cregg's work is funded in part by MSU's AgBioResearch.

This article was published on MSU Extension News. For more information from MSU Extension, visit <http://news.msue.msu.edu>.

MSU RESEARCH GROUP NEEDS FARMERS TO INTERVIEW

Do you grow grain crops? Or do you raise and pasture livestock on your farm? The MSU Perennial Wheat Research Group is looking for a variety of Michigan farmers to interview to find out about your management practices and get your impression on how a perennial grain crop could (or could not) benefit your farm and affect soil health and conservation. This research will be used to help develop perennial grain systems that are profitable for Michigan farmers.

We would like to hear from you if this topic is of interest to you! Please take a quick, two-minute online survey <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/JMZMJ55> to let us know the most basic features of your farm and give us a way to contact you. We would then sit down with you for an hour-long, paid interview (\$25), which would take place on a day and at a location convenient for you. Thank you!

RENEWABLE ENERGY GRANT AVAILABLE TO FARMERS

Debbie Stabenow, US Senator

I am writing to update you about an important opportunity available for farmers and rural small businesses in Michigan to save money and reduce energy usage.

The USDA is now accepting grant applications for the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP). This competitive grant program supports renewable energy projects like wind turbines, solar arrays, or grain dryers. These opportunities and deadlines include:

- Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvement grant applications and combination grant and guaranteed loan applications until March 30, 2012;
- Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvement guaranteed loan only applications on a continuous basis up to June 29, 2012;
- Renewable energy system feasibility study applications through March 30, 2012; and
- Energy audits and renewable energy development assistance applications through February 21, 2012.

As Chairwoman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, I am working to support local farmers and small businesses so rural communities can continue to provide economic opportunities for their residents. The Rural Energy for America Program was established in the 2008 Farm Bill.

If you or someone you know is interested in applying for one of these competitive grants or loans, please contact your regional USDA office. If you do not know your regional office's number, you can visit the Michigan USDA Rural Development website at: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/mi/> or you can call the Michigan headquarters at [517-324-5190](tel:517-324-5190).

If you would like a letter of support for your grant application or need other help, please feel free to contact one of my regional Senate offices: Flint, Saginaw, Bay, Thumb ([810-720-4172](tel:810-720-4172)); Mid-Michigan ([517-203-1760](tel:517-203-1760)); Northern Michigan ([231-929-1031](tel:231-929-1031)); Southeast Michigan ([313-961-4330](tel:313-961-4330)); Upper Peninsula ([906-228-8756](tel:906-228-8756)); or West Michigan ([616-975-0052](tel:616-975-0052)).

NATURAL DISASTER DESIGNATIONS

Effective January 27, 2012, the Secretary of Agriculture designated 39 Michigan counties as natural disaster areas. The designation was due to losses caused by the combined effects of excessive rain, high winds, hail, freeze, frost, blizzard, tornadoes, lightning and drought that occurred from February

1, 2011 and continuing. The designation opens up the USDA disaster programs for those farmers in these counties who suffered losses.

The designation makes available Emergency loans to farmers who suffered a 30% loss in crop production due to the weather conditions specified in the designations. If you have any questions please call your local FSA office or contact the Farm Loan Program staff headquartered in the Traverse City USDA Service Center.

Counties in Northwest Michigan that were designated include Antrim, Grand Traverse, Charlevoix, Emmet, Kalkaska, Leelanau and Otsego. In addition to the 39 counties, farmers in counties named as contiguous counties may also qualify for FSA EM loan assistance.

The deadline for filing an EM loan application under Designation is **September 27, 2012**.

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM – STATE ACRES FOR WILDLIFE ENHANCEMENT (SAFE)

Owners and operators of cropland, orchards, and vineyards in Grand Traverse, Leelanau, and Kalkaska counties may enroll eligible land in a continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) practice called SAFE which creates a native pollinator habitat planting that consists of native shrubs, grasses and/or wildflowers providing cover, nectar, and pollen for native pollinators. Sign-up for SAFE is continuous until 2,500 acres are enrolled in the target area. Interested producers submit offers to enroll acres in CRP contracts for a 10-15 year period, provided the land and producer meet certain eligibility requirements. In exchange, producers receive annual CRP rental payments, incentives and cost-share assistance to establish habitat-enhancing natural covers on eligible land.

Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for this SAFE practice, the land must have a cropping history of 4 out of 6 years from 2002-2007, or be land capable of growing an annual agricultural commodity that is part of an orchard/vineyard/perennial fruit producing area. To participate in the pollinator habitat sign-up, landowners must convert a minimum of 2 acres to habitat with the plot being at least 100-feet wide. Exception: if part of a working tract that contains an orchard, vineyard or other perennial fruit producing crop, the 2 acre minimum can be realized through multiple plantings of not less than .25 acre with a minimum width of 20 feet.

Required Management Practices

The program requires that practices under SAFE be managed during the life of the contract. The management requirements are tailored to the individual practice. Fishing and hunting are allowed on CRP-enrolled land, including SAFE. As with other conservation practices and programs under CRP, certain restrictions apply.

If you are interested in enrolling or finding out more about the CRP-SAFE program or other Conservation Reserve Program practices, please contact the Grand Traverse Area Farm Service Agency at (231) 941-0951 Ext. 2.

FOOD SAFETY ON THE FARM

Garrett Coggon, Safe Food & MAEAP Technician

As consumers purchase more food from local growers, the safety of fresh fruits and vegetables is increasingly important. Opportunities exist for microbes to contaminate fresh produce at many steps between the farm and the dinner plate. Many large markets are now requiring growers to undergo some form of food safety certification: USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Certification,

PrimusLabs GAP, and others. These programs are all aimed at implementing practices which reduce the risk of microbial contamination of fruits and vegetables on the farm. Which certification is needed depends on what the buyer requires. Conforming to GAP requirements can be difficult and prohibitively expensive to small growers, however, most small producers are not currently required to have GAP certification. In order to ensure “A safe, secure and wholesome food supply,” the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, with support from the USDA, has teamed up with Michigan State University to develop a free, voluntary assessment which is appropriate for small producers. Michigan’s Safe Food Risk Assessment is now available to assist producers in understanding and documenting on-farm food safety practices by taking a proactive approach to this concern.

Even those farms which are already GAP-certified for the commercial portion of their farm can benefit from going through the Safe Food Risk Assessment for any farm market or direct market portion of the operation, which is not covered under the other certification. The Safe Food Risk Assessment is modeled after USDA GAP requirements, but tailored to the needs and challenges of small-scale producers who sell to direct markets. While a certified audit will require paying someone to visit the farm and examine your growing practices, this is a self-certification program with access to free technical advice from a local Conservation District Technician.

Using this free, confidential tool helps growers review their farm practices, identify any risks to food safety, and develop an action plan to minimize those risks. A technician will visit the farm and look at many things including: worker health and hygiene, cleanliness of water, timing of manure and compost use, harvesting practices, packing practices, and traceability. By taking a closer look at these practices, and identifying risks, producers gain another perspective on their farm, as well as access to free technical advice to reduce any identified risks. We have many resources to help growers meet the requirements of the program. We will work with the grower to implement their action plan in a way that makes sense for them. Farmers who complete the assessment with a passing score will receive a certificate which can be used to demonstrate that they are implementing responsible practices to deliver safe, high quality food to their customers.

This program is in the second phase of its pilot period and is currently available to fruit and vegetable growers in the western, lakeside counties of Michigan. Interested farmers in Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Kalkaska, Manistee, or Wexford Counties should contact Garrett Coggon, at the Grand Traverse Conservation District (231-941-0960x27, or gcoggon@gtcd.org).

CREATING FARM TO SCHOOL BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Who it’s for: Farmers and local food distributors who want to sell to or expand sales to schools in Antrim, Kalkaska, Emmet and Charlevoix Counties, including summer programs.

Meet school food service directors and:

- **Hear** firsthand from schools that are excited about buying local products.
- **Learn** specifics about what these schools want to purchase from you.
- **Discuss** barriers to increasing sales of local farm products in schools, and strategies for overcoming them.
- **Bring** business cards and other information about your farm, and samples if you like.
- **Plan** to leave with next steps to make it happen!

Friday, March 16, 2012, 2:00 - 5:00 pm
Central Lake High School Cafeteria
8190 West State Street, Central Lake, MI

THE FARM BUSINESS PLAN: One Page, Two Hours

No matter what type of farm or food enterprise you envision, a business plan will serve you well. In this workshop, you will learn some tried-and-true tools for getting that plan underway. The One-Page Business Plan and the One-Page Financial Plan that goes with it are tools for getting started. The next step will be to use that information and thought process to expand your business plan into a document that you can use for communication purposes, whether it is to articulate your business to partners, employees, or lenders.

Thursday, March 22, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Northwestern Michigan College
Parsons-Stulen Building, 2600 Aero Park Dr.,
Traverse City

Please register for these free workshops. Contact Jim Sluyter at 231-889-0199, jimsluyter@mlui.org, Daniel Marbury, 231-941-6584, daniel.marbury@foodcorps.org or register online at localdifference.org/getfarming/workshops.asp

REQUEST FOR ORGANIC BLUEBERRY FARMS

Mark Longstroth, MSUE Small Fruit Educator in southwest Michigan, is looking for names of organic blueberry farms in our region and is also interested in any and all organic fruit farms. If you are an organic blueberry or fruit grower or know of someone that is, please contact Dr. Longstroth at 269-657-8213, Ext. 3 or by email longstr7@anr.msu.edu

USDA ANNOUNCES NEW HIGHLY ERODIBLE CROPLAND INITIATIVE FOR CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has announced a new conservation initiative to protect up to 750,000 acres of the nation's most highly erodible croplands. Vilsack made the announcement via video to attendees of the National Pheasant Fest and Quail Classic, held Feb. 17-19 in Kansas City, Mo. The new initiative will assist producers with targeting their most highly erodible cropland (land with an erodibility index of 20 or greater) by enabling them to plant wildlife-friendly, long-term cover through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Producers can enroll land on a continuous basis beginning this summer at their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) county office. With the use of soil survey and geographic information system data, local FSA staff can quickly determine a producer's eligibility for the initiative.

"As we work towards President Obama's vision for an economy that is built to last, America's natural resources must play an important role. Lands in CRP help support strong incomes for our farmers and ranchers and are the source of good middle class jobs related to outdoor recreation, hunting, and fishing," said Vilsack. "This announcement will strengthen CRP by focusing on protecting the most environmentally sensitive land. It targets limited resources where they can make the most difference for farmers, ranchers and to drive economic growth. I urge landowners who have highly erodible land to visit their county office to learn more about this program."

Lands eligible for this program are typically the least productive land on the farm. In many cases the most cost-effective option to reduce erosion is to put the land into a wildlife friendly cover, which will improve habitat and reduce sediment and nutrient runoff and reduce wind erosion. For 25 years, CRP has improved water and air quality, preserved habitat for wildlife, and prevented soil erosion. Programs such as CRP are important conservation safeguards. They prevent the return of the dust storms of the 1930s and the ravages of unmitigated gully erosions of our past.

CRP is a voluntary program designed to help farmers, ranchers and other agricultural producers protect their environmentally sensitive land. Through this initiative, eligible landowners receive annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource conserving covers on eligible farmland. Land can be enrolled on a continuous basis for a period of 10 years. Land currently not enrolled in CRP may be offered in this sign-up provided all eligibility requirements are met. Current CRP participants with eligible land expiring on Sept. 30, 2012, may make new contract offers.

CRP has a 25-year legacy of successfully protecting the nation's natural resources through voluntary participation, while providing significant economic and environmental benefits to rural communities across the United States. In addition today's announcement, USDA will conduct a four-week CRP general signup, beginning on March 12 and ending on April 6. Currently, about 30 million acres are enrolled in CRP.

CRP continues to make major contributions to national efforts to improve water and air quality, prevent soil erosion by protecting the most sensitive areas including those prone to flash flooding and runoff. At the same time, CRP has helped increase populations of pheasants, quail, ducks, and other rare species, like the sage grouse, the lesser prairie chicken, and others. Highlights of CRP include:

- CRP has restored more than two million acres of wetlands and two million acres of riparian buffers;
- Each year, CRP keeps more than 600 million pounds of nitrogen and more than 100 million pounds of phosphorous from flowing into our nation's streams, rivers, and lakes.
- CRP provides \$1.8 billion annually to landowners—dollars that make their way into local economies, supporting small businesses and creating jobs; and
- CRP is the largest private lands carbon sequestration program in the country. By placing vulnerable cropland into conservation, CRP sequesters carbon in plants and soil, and reduces both fuel and fertilizer usage. In 2010, CRP resulted in carbon sequestration equal to taking almost 10 million cars off the road.

In 2011, USDA enrolled a record number of acres of private working lands in conservation programs, working with more than 500,000 farmers and ranchers to implement conservation practices that clean the air we breathe, filter the water we drink, and prevent soil erosion. Moreover, the Obama Administration, with Agriculture Secretary Vilsack's leadership, has worked tirelessly to strengthen rural America, implement the Farm Bill, maintain a strong farm safety net, and create opportunities for America's farmers and ranchers. U.S. agriculture is currently experiencing one of its most productive periods in American history thanks to the productivity, resiliency, and resourcefulness of our producers.

Producers are encouraged to contact their local FSA office or visit FSA's website at www.fsa.usda.gov/crp for additional information regarding CRP.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).

FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR CONSERVATION ORGANIC FARMING PRACTICES

The \$50 million EQIP program, (a huge victory of OFRF's policy efforts), is providing financial and technical assistance to growers who implement innovative conservation practices.

Don't let this opportunity pass you by.

Period 2 Submission Deadline: **Friday, March 30, 2012**

To apply, visit your USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) local service center.

Our friends at the National Center for Appropriate Technology have created a comprehensive info site for applicants, including links to all of the necessary documents for the program.

Conserve Organically!

Maureen Wilmot, Executive Director