

### **Rural Advantage Seeking Cover Crop Acres**

Rural Advantage, in partnership with Practical Farmers of Iowa, is seeking agricultural producers interested in utilizing cover crops. Cost-share dollars are available.

Cover crops are capable of providing multiple benefits when placed on the landscape. These benefits include: increased water quality, decreased soil erosion, increased carbon sequestration / soil organic matter, and increased soil nutrients. Common cover crops for Minnesota include: annual rye, oats, winter wheat, and field pea. Research is currently being conducted in Minnesota on aerial seeding of annual rye into corn fields in late August to early September. What is more commonly seen are producers utilizing cover crops after canning crop harvest or silage harvest as well as in other cropping systems.

Rural Advantage is seeking farmers willing to establish cover crops. Funding is available for up to \$20 per acre for up to 20 acres [\$400 maximum per farm]. Participating farmers may plant the cover crop of their desire, but must be willing to be a field day site if applicable. The sites will need to be research and demonstration related and simple reporting will be necessary. Funding for the project runs from Fall 2009 to Fall 2012.

For more information, please contact Jill Sackett, Extension Educator, at the Rural Advantage office. 507-238-5449 [sacke032@umn.edu](mailto:sacke032@umn.edu)

### **Celebrate Arbor Month by exploring seeds**

What can be smaller than a pea, but grow as big as a tree? A seed!

In Minnesota, May is Arbor Month and Arbor Day, Friday, April 30, marks the beginning of an entire month of celebrating trees. The theme for Arbor Month is "From Small Seeds Grow BIG Dreams." The idea is to demonstrate that seeds are packed with everything they need to get a good start in life.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) offers these reasons for planting trees:

- Plant trees or sow seeds to create a windbreak or shelterbelt, which will help reduce energy consumption and provide privacy.
- Mixed plantings of trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals provide excellent cover and a source of food for a wide variety of animals, big and small.
- Roots of trees and shrubs stabilize the soil and reduce soil erosion from water and wind.
- Trees play an important role in mitigating climate change by absorbing and storing carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas.
- In an urban setting, trees and shrubs provide soothing green spaces and flowers add a splash of color.

Ways people can celebrate Arbor Day or Arbor Month include:

- Attend a local Arbor Day ceremony or plant a tree or shrub.
- Find examples of seed formation, seed dispersal and seed germination.
- Collect a variety of seeds and create a display.
- Grow a plant or tree from a seed.
- Attract wildlife and add beauty to the landscape by planting annuals in a container.

For more ideas visit [mndnr.gov/arbormonth/resources\\_activities.html](http://mndnr.gov/arbormonth/resources_activities.html).

For a list of Arbor Day or Arbor Month celebrations in Minnesota, go to [mndnr.gov/arbormonth/celebrations.html](http://mndnr.gov/arbormonth/celebrations.html).

For information on choosing the right tree to plant, visit [mndnr.gov/forestry/nurseries/choosing.html](http://mndnr.gov/forestry/nurseries/choosing.html).

The DNR sent out more than 2,500 Arbor Month packets consisting of the “From Small Seeds Grow BIG Dreams” poster and a packet of red pine seeds to educators and natural resources professionals statewide. To obtain an Arbor Month packet, poster or red pine seed packet, contact the DNR Information Center at [info.dnr@state.mn.us](mailto:info.dnr@state.mn.us), 651-296-6157 or 888-657-3929.

In 1876, Minnesota became the fourth state to adopt the tradition of celebrating Arbor Day. Since 1978, May has been Arbor Month in Minnesota. The warmer weather in May allows newly planted trees to get off to a good start.

### **MPCA offering \$3 million in grants for water quality projects**

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is seeking grant proposals from local government units and other interested parties to reduce nonpoint source water pollution. Nonpoint source pollution comes from many sources, such as urban areas and farm fields, and not a single point, such as an industrial discharge. Eligible applications may apply to MPCA through a competitive process through May 21, 2010.

The MPCA anticipates \$3 million will be available this year, pending congressional appropriation, for projects implemented from July 1, 2010 to July 1, 2011. The funding comes from the Federal Clean Water Act Section 319 Nonpoint Source Grant Program (Section 319), administered by the U.S. Environmental Agency. This year, the MPCA will offer these funds for development, education or applied research (DER) projects and for Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) restoration projects.

DER proposals must offer a statewide or regional applicability that

- Demonstrates new or innovative technology,
- Demonstrates new best management practices (BMPs),
- Develops educational programs related to reducing nonpoint-source pollution, or
- Answers a research question related to the goal of reducing nonpoint-source pollution.

In addition to DER proposals, funds are also available for projects addressing TMDL implementation plans approved by the MPCA by May 20, 2010. TMDLs identify sources of pollution, the amounts of pollutants, and how to reduce the pollutants to a level that allows rivers and lakes to meet water quality standards.

The complete request for proposal and proposal forms are available at [www.pca.state.mn.us/water/cwp-319.html](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/cwp-319.html). Questions should be mailed to [CWP-319.grant.program@state.mn.us](mailto:CWP-319.grant.program@state.mn.us).

For more information, go to the MPCA web site at <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/> or contact Sara Johnson, Section 319 Coordinator for the MPCA at 651-757-2473, by e-mail at [sara.johnson@state.mn.us](mailto:sara.johnson@state.mn.us).

### **Seeing a Market Through the Trees**

Curt Kreklau isn't out of the woods yet. And if things go right, he'll only get deeper into them. Kreklau is growing thousands of trees on his farm near Sebeka with an eye toward the biofuel market. He is growing hybrid poplars, red oak, several types of pine, and even some native prairie grasses for bioenergy and more traditional uses.

In the late 1990s it was getting harder to rent out land. Kreklau wanted to keep drawing income from the property even when the time came when he would have no renters.

“I thought this would be a better choice — to put it in trees,” he explained. Though at first Kreklau admits having reservations. There are a number of benefits to putting land into trees. For example, trees are low-maintenance and after the first couple of years inputs are small if there's no insect problem. The trees also come back from the stump, “so the second crop is already seeded, so labor is saved,” Kreklau added. “It's good for an absentee land owner.”

In the long run sustainability of raising trees for things like bioenergy depends upon the markets. Physical viability is good and trees are highly compatible with other crops, but there has to be a market and the bioenergy market is still developing. Trees are an improvement over corn and beans where soil runoff

and erosion are concerned. After about three years Kreklau said there is virtually no need to go on the land, an improvement over traditional crops where chemical applications and driving on the land come into play. The hybrid poplar and native prairie grass was planted under the Environmental Quality Improvement Program of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The pines, red oak and shrubs this year are in the NRCS's Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program. The NRCS is part of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Along with the benefits there are challenges as well. During the first two or three years close attention to weed control is necessary. Trees don't do well with weeds so initially they are treated like a crop. And insects, of course, can be a worry. However the risk to hybrid poplars is limited.

"You just have to watch," he said. The pines can have insect problems, but those aren't too bad if the trees aren't stressed, by drought for instance. For the most part bugs aren't a problem according to Kreklau.

The University of Minnesota has test plots on his land where various types of willows grow to ascertain biomass viability. The project is in the final year of a three-year project and could expand options for growing trees for biofuel. That could be good news for the developing market. Kreklau thinks the most important factors for the emerging market are current energy prices and the availability of other energy sources. "When you plant you go on the idea of faith that there will be a market for it," he said. The usual markets, like pulp and lumber are there, possibly biomass may pick up, but one market that opened to Kreklau came as a surprise: shavings for livestock bedding. He was surprised to find a market for the shavings, which are used for cattle bedding.

Keeping his faith, Kreklau recently completed a thinning project, growing pines to lumber market sizes clearing room for remaining trees to grow larger. But until the markets solidify, Kreklau keeps his eyes and his mind open knowing new developments come forth all the time. "Like cattle bedding, it was a surprise, it's more than just the pulp mill now," he said.

### **Events:**

May 6<sup>th</sup> (Thursday) is a **Minnesota River Basin Trends Presentation** from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Montevideo Chippewa County Public Library. Kim Musser and Scott Kudelka from the Water Resources Center at Minnesota State University Mankato will give a talk about trends related to the Minnesota River Basin including water quality data, demographics, agricultural, wildlife, conservation practices and recreation usage.

May 8<sup>th</sup> (Saturday) is the **Hungry Hollow Creek Clean Up** sponsored by CURE and Granite Falls Chamber from 10:00 a.m. to 12 noon. Meet at Carl's Bakery on Main Street in Granite Falls. Hungry Hollow Creek flows into the Minnesota River just below the Granite Falls dam. Bring boots, gloves, pick up trucks and clothes that can get dirty. For more information call the Granite Falls Chamber at 320-564-4039 or the CURE office at 1-877-269-2873.

May 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> (Saturday and Sunday) is the 19<sup>th</sup> **Annual River and History Weekend** at Lac qui Parle County Park (Nash's Grove) on the Lac qui Parle River. Line up your canoes and kayaking partners, get that camping gear dusted off and plan on attending CURE's premiere outdoor event of the season. For more information, [www.cureriver.org](http://www.cureriver.org)

May 20<sup>th</sup> (Thursday) is a **Trail Planning Regional Workshop** from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the McColl Pond Environmental Learning Center (13550 Dakota Avenue South) in Savage.

June 6<sup>th</sup> (Sunday) is the **15<sup>th</sup> annual celebration of the Earth Sabbath**. The day begins at 1:00 and features Sabbath Sites: Blacksmithing, Weaving, Miniature Horses, Walking the Evolving Universe Story, tours, DVD "Story of Stuff", Live Music, Silent Auction and much more..... At 6:00 join us for the Sabbath Ceremony followed by an Earthrise grown and roasted turkey, baked beans, tabouli, garden greens and rhubarb crisp. Following this meal we will feast on the beautiful concert music of Sara Thomsen. We'd love to have you come. If you need to stay overnight we will soon be listing accommodation places on

our website <http://earthrisefarmfoundation.org/>. More information is also included on our website. Please bring a loaf of your favorite bread to share and call or e-mail us if you think you can stay and eat supper with us. Admission for the events of this day is \$15.00 per adult or \$25.00 for the entire family.

June 8<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday) is a **Trail Planning Regional Workshop** from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Bryant Lake Park (6800 Rowland Road) in Eden Prairie.

June 9<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday) is a **Trail Planning Regional Workshop** from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at Southwest Minnesota State University (1501 State Street, Room 117, Conference Center) in Marshall.

June 17<sup>th</sup> (Thursday) is a **Trail Planning Regional Workshop** from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at South Central College (1920 Lee Boulevard E119 and E121) in North Mankato.

**Check out additional upcoming events and workshops on the Minnesota River Calendar at:**  
<http://mrfdc.mnsu.edu/calendar/index.html>

### **Water Quality Articles:**

[Minnesota Senate OKs conservation funding](#) (St Paul Pioneer Press). Almost \$59 million in constitutionally dedicated money for a second round of statewide conservation projects received preliminary approval Monday in the Minnesota Senate.

[Thousands of Minn. contractors will miss EPA's lead deadline](#) (Minnesota Public Radio). Thousands of Minnesota contractors will miss a deadline this week for becoming certified in techniques that minimize the amount of lead dust generated during projects.

[10-yr.-old girl leads charge to pick up litter](#) (Albert Lea Tribune). Summer Rain Beightol really wanted to plant a tree this week. But since the 10-year-old and her family are currently living in a mobile home park, she's not able to do that traditional Earth Day activity.

[Target adds recycling to mix in celebration of Earth Day](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). Target, already a one-stop shop for groceries, household supplies, clothing and electronics, is adding one more function to its repertoire: recycling station.

[Community garden plots available](#) (New Ulm Journal). With a little help from a friend, a retired school teacher is creating a community garden on New Ulm Medical Center property just east of Oak Hills Living Center.

[Study finds levels of pharmaceuticals in wastewater widespread](#) (Minnesota Public Radio). In the most comprehensive study of a variety of chemical compounds coming from municipal sewage plants, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency confirmed widespread, but low concentrations of water contamination from human medications and antibiotics.

*Water is the most critical resource issue of our lifetime and our children's lifetime. The health of the our waters is the principal measure of how we live on the land. – Luna Leopold*

**The Minnesota River Watershed Alliance (Watershed Alliance) is an organized network of citizens, public agencies, and private organizations dedicated to communicating the benefits of an ecology healthy Minnesota River Watershed to others and are actively working towards its improvement and protection. We meet four times a year and encourage landowners and recreational users of the river to be part of the effort. For more information on the Watershed Alliance:**

<http://www.watershedalliance.blogspot.com>

Thanks,

Scott

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