West Central Research & Outreach Center — Regional Extension Center
46352 State Hwy 329, Morris, MN 56267 Phone: (320) 589-1711

September 30, 2009

University of Minnesota
West Central News

Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP) Introduced This Fall

By Joel Tallaksen, Biomass Gasification Project Coordinator

This fall, the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) is beginning the first phase of a two phase program to assist in developing a biomass marketplace for biomass producers. In the first phase of the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP), the FSA will begin paying eligible biomass producers a matching payment for all materials sold to qualifying biomass energy or refinery facilities. These funds are meant to cover costs associated with collection, harvest, storage and transport (CHST) of eligible biomass. Residue from title I crops, such as corn, beans, and wheat, is eligible for the program. When implemented, the second phase of the program will be targeted to crops grown specifically for renewable energy or biobased refineries. Planning for the second phase is still underway, but it is expected that perennial crops such as switchgrass, miscanthus, or annuals like sweet sorghum would be eligible. For these crops, the FSA would pay a portion of the costs used to establish the plantings and then assist with annual payments.

The program was established to promote the development of regional biomass markets. One of the factors limiting the production of biomass energy is that those interested in investing in biomass production or a biomass conversion facility are reluctant to risk capital because of the relatively small unstable biomass market that currently exists. The FSA matching payment of up to $45 per dry ton of material should be enough that most biomass producers can make a sufficient profit to justify their time and effort to harvest biomass mass in addition to their other crops. The added income will also allow some producers the financial flexibility to purchase equipment specifically for biomass harvesting. The program is set up so that producers must work with a qualified biomass facility in their area, thus these partnerships may form the backbone of a long term regional biomass supply networks.

Biomass facilities are currently applying to be part of the program (Qualified Biomass Facility) by supplying the FSA with information about their facility, its biomass needs, and energy/product production capabilities. Interested producers must find a qualified facility in their area and enter into an agreement to supply biomass to that facility. They should then work with their FSA office to become eligible for payment. Once the biomass has been delivered, weight, and moisture tested, the producer can apply to the FSA for matching payment. I would strongly encourage interested producers to contact their local FSA office for the latest details. The program was fast-tracked for fall implementation and more information and policies are likely to be released as the program kicks off.

The University of Minnesota, Morris facility is expecting to finalize our Qualified Biomass Facility application in the next few weeks. While we will not be purchasing large volumes of biomass, producers interested in supplying biomass can contact me regarding biomass purchasing and our participation in the BCAP program. Informally, I have spoken with other local biomass to energy facilities who are applying to be in the BCAP program. I will have some information on other local facilities participating in BCAP once their application is approved by the FSA.

For more information on the BCAP program, contact your local FSA office or view the program documents online at http://www.fsa.usda.gov/. For questions on our facility, please contact me at tall0007@umn.edu or 320-589-1711.

Children's Garden Field Day

By Amy Rager, Extension Educator, Environmental Science Education

The day dawned sunny and warm, a perfect day for 300 fourth graders to visit the horticulture gardens. Twenty learning stations provided youth with an opportunity to learn about "the important role plants play in our daily lives" the theme for the day. Students learned tree identification, role played being pollinators, learned to make paper and to dye using natural plants, ran a biomass relay, practiced being active outdoors, made a mini pizza, toured the continents and plants from each one, learned about swine production, played insect jeopardy, planted in the greenhouse, used sense of smell, dug potatoes, and made salsa!

Evaluations report that students' favorite stations were swine, natural dying/braiding, renewable energy and making paper. Students are always amazed to learn where their food really comes from. Many have not ever dug potatoes or harvested vegetables in a garden. So this is a new and exciting adventure for many. This lack of youth getting outside and the concerns it raises are documented in the Richard Louv book, *Last Child in the Woods.* This book documents what many have known is happening for some time now, but puts a name on it; nature deficit disorder. Since the publishing of this book, No Child Left Inside initiatives have sprung up all across the United States encouraging youth and families to get outdoors.

Teachers receive a bag of educational materials to take back and use in their classrooms. This year the Pork Producers, Dairy Producers, Corn and Soybean Growers provided educational and fun items for the bags.

The day is organized by Extension Educators, Brian McNeill and Amy Rager. Presenters are other extension staff and faculty, Master Gardener volunteers, and other community volunteers. Ag Country provided the funds for the presenters to receive a box lunch and 4-H provided funds for additional bathrooms to be delivered for the day. Thanks to all who participated and donated.