

Peterson to kick off Agriculture's Conference on the Environment 2009

BY NATALIE EBIG SCOTT, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



Battling climate change. Seeking and preserving quality water. Navigating the relationship between food production and fuel. Chris Peterson, director of the Michigan State University (MSU) Product Center and professor of agricultural, food and resource economics, acknowledges farmers have a lot on their plates when dealing with the challenges of sustainability.

Peterson hopes sharing his knowledge as a keynote speaker at Agriculture's Conference on the Environment (ACE) will help make understanding sustainability a little easier. He will lead off the ACE conference, beginning his presentation at 9 a.m. Jan. 28 at the Lansing Center in Lansing.

"Sustainability is very complex," said Peterson, who also holds the Homer Nowlin chair of consumer-responsive agriculture. "It takes an open forum like this conference to begin the discussion."

The ACE 2009 opening session, "Putting Prosperity, People and Planet into Perspective," will allow Peterson to introduce the conference theme with a focus on the three pillars of sustainability-achieving economic success for individual farms, preserving the environment and educating the community about agricultural production.

Sustainability has been a common thread woven throughout Peterson's career, from working on statewide projects such as the Sustainable Michigan Endowment Project and internationally with the Brazilian sugar

cane industry to TransForum in the Netherlands, a program dedicated to improving Dutch sustainability.

Peterson said these experiences taught him that, to understand sustainability, we have to look at the whole picture, not just one aspect.

"Sustainability cannot be reduced to just one of its elements," Peterson said. "It's not just about environmental impact without regard to economic and social impacts. If we look at it from a single angle, any way forward in the environmental arena will not be sustainable in the other areas."

Peterson said many people are afraid to start discussing sustainability for fear that there may be nothing that can be done.

"However wicked sustainability may be as a problem, it is not a four-letter word to be avoided," Peterson said. "We can make progress if we engage each other in an open search for new knowledge that turns today's tradeoffs among prosperity, people and planet into tomorrow's win-win situations for all three."

Peterson will use real-world examples to show conference

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January 28, 2009

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Communication key to change, ACE speaker says

BY NATALIE EBIG SCOTT, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



Janice Swanson wants people to start talking. Swanson, professor and director of animal welfare at Michigan State University (MSU), believes a lack of communication between various issue groups has caused some people to lose sight of how their actions may create challenges for others.

"Citizens who are passionately engaged in a cause are frequently unaware of the impact of single-focus decision making and the unintended consequences," Swanson said. "We must be prepared to promote studied deliberation of both the issue and all the potential consequences and outcomes. The first step is to actually start talking about it as a collective

rather than in separate groups."

As a speaker for Agriculture's Conference on the Environment (ACE), set for Jan. 28 at the Lansing Center in Lansing, Swanson will lead a discussion about the problems that this lack of communication creates and how to move past them in her lunch-time presentation, "Creating Balanced Approaches in a Single-Issue

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Swanson

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World: Lessons from Animal Welfare.”

Swanson will use her decades of research and experience in animal welfare to discuss how that issue could move toward solutions if interest groups started an open conversation and how this type of thinking can be applied to solving other issues.

“A challenge for solving the issue of animal welfare is that producers have to comply with an assortment of mandates, and it is entirely possible to be in compliance with one while falling out of compliance on another,” Swanson said. “To solve this, state government will likely have to play a leadership role in promoting processes where groups are convened to lay the issues on the table and have an honest conversation-with ground rules.”

Conference will promote agriculture’s environmental involvement



While headlines are grabbed by people camping in trees and destroying buildings, the yeoman’s work of protecting the planet goes on unnoticed.

Discovering what’s really being done in the trenches, and how current events affect that work, can be learned at Agriculture’s Conference on the Environment (ACE), set for Jan 28 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Lansing Center in Lansing. As part of the four-issue approach to sensitive environmental issues, the conference features exciting, informative programs on “People, Prosperity, Planet and Power,” with several experts touching on each topic. The conference begins with keynote speaker Chris Peterson, the Director of the Michigan State University Product Center. Peterson will discuss the balance necessary to sustain and grow agriculture in Michigan, putting all four themes in perspective.

When it comes to the planet’s issues, Dr. Kurt Thelen, professor at Michigan State University’s Department of Crop and Soil Sciences, will examine how replacing petroleum with perennial and annual crops will impact the environment and agriculture. Dr. Janice Swanson, an MSU professor in the Department of Animal Science, will discuss how consumer demands for cage-free egg production provide insight into all agricultural commodities.

Agriculture’s consistent, daily involvement with environmental issues is crucial for the planet, which brings business consultant Debbie Reed, of DRD Associates in Arlington, VA, to examine how agriculture will be affected as climate change and energy policy is debated, and how increasing agricultural input costs will bring changes.

With water foremost in many people’s minds, the Great Lakes will also be discussed in the “Planet” section of the conference. Scott Piggott, manager of the Michigan Farm Bureau Agriculture Ecology Department, will look at the future of water use in the Great Lakes and update farm compliance under legislation passed last summer that sets up a new water withdrawal tool. Piggott was instrumental in developing the tool, so his expertise will be well worth the time.

In Michigan, the state’s natural and economic resources are often the focus of conflicting interests between environmental and business groups that rely on those resources to make money. Swanson said that finding a balance can be tricky, and open communication is the key to success.



Dr. Janice Swanson

“The state is blessed with incredible beauty and the Great Lakes. It is natural for citizens to want to preserve that,” Swanson said. “However, this sets up the perfect storm for multiple special interest initiatives that can have a profound impact on the state’s food producers if attempts are not made to openly communicate and strike a balance on resource use and preservation.”

Swanson will also lead an ACE 2009 breakout session at 11:15 a.m. titled “Modeling Change of On-Farm Production Standards.”

Using examples from the move toward cage-free egg production, Swanson will discuss how trust can be built and change can happen in any issue as long as the proper framework is laid first.

“Change could be bearable or catastrophic, depending on whether the agriculture and food industry has a seat at the table,” Swanson said. “It is securing a seat at the table that should be the issue of concern.”

Peterson

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participants how they can maintain sustainability in their businesses.

“We are facing some real challenges within sustainability right now,” Peterson said. “I hope that putting it in the context of what businesses are doing locally and globally will make sustainability easier to understand.”

Peterson will also participate in a breakout session titled “The Food and Fuel Debate.” He will lead a discussion about biobased materials as potential fuel alternatives and other intersections between the food and fuel industries.



Dr. Chris Peterson

“The food and fuel debate has a lot of challenges,” Peterson said. “We need to think about how we are going to balance those two important industries.”

Throughout the daylong conference, a total of 25 speakers in a dozen other concurrent workshops will explore in similar detail topics central to agricultural sustainability, including the bioeconomy, climate change, water use, wind and other alternative energy sources, conservation programs and techniques, animal welfare and the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP).

The ACE conference will be held Jan. 28, 2009, at the Lansing Center. For information and registration, visit www.maeap.org/ACE or phone in registrations with credit cards to Jim Van Arkel, 517-241-2232. Registration is \$50 prior to Jan. 19 and \$75 thereafter; students may register for \$20.

Conference to address agriculture's power potential



Focusing on four key themes forever linked to the industry, the Agriculture's Conference on the Environment (ACE) will offer attendees a global-scale update on current farm trends. The themes of People, Planet,

Power and Prosperity will form the foundation of the biennial conference, scheduled for 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Jan. 28, 2009, at the Lansing Center.

The conference begins with keynote speaker Chris Peterson, the Director of the Michigan State University Product Center. Peterson will discuss the balance necessary to achieve agricultural sustainability, putting all four themes in perspective.

Four subsequent workshops throughout the day will look closely at power by addressing the issues surrounding our closely-tied needs for agriculture and energy.

- How Michigan's rank as 14th in the nation for wind potential can be leveraged for agriculture will be the topic of this presentation. By outlining the implementation of wind power on two Michigan farms, this presentation will explain wind energy opportunities from the ground up.
- With agricultural products currently being used for both food and fuel,

the relationship between what we eat and how we power our lives has become pointed. An MSU official discusses our need for both food and fuel, and the extent to which we can have both.

- One way to reduce energy costs is to reduce energy use. Officials from MSU and the MI Agricultural Electric Council will offer a number of strategies for efficiency and conservation that can save money and energy.
- Agriculture consumes energy, but new technology also allows it to create energy. An MSU researcher will demonstrate that Anaerobic Digestion systems can be used to produce value-added energy and chemical products on small scale livestock facilities.

Throughout the daylong conference, a total of 25 speakers in a dozen other concurrent workshops will explore in similar detail topics central to agricultural sustainability, including the bioeconomy, climate change, water use, food safety, agriculture's relationship with communities, conservation programs and techniques, animal welfare and the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP). A representative from Wal-Mart will also speak with attendees about how Michigan farmers can team up with the retailer for marketing their products.

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Haying and grazing on CRP land clarified

BY BRIAN BUEHLER, USDA-NRCS



An announcement in late May to allow farmers to harvest hay from land enrolled in the USDA's Conservation Reserve Program led to a court injunction and confusion for landowners.

Ultimately, some farmers were able to cut hay on CRP ground under the Critical Feed Use (CFU) practice. What some farmers may not know is that managed haying and grazing can be done on CRP ground if precautions are taken to protect wildlife. Of the 265,000 acres under CRP in Michigan, about 150,000 acres are eligible for haying or grazing, said Dale Allen, conservation chief for the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Michigan.

The CFU practice was implemented as a result of high costs for livestock feed. CFU allowed farmers to graze livestock or cut hay on CRP land without paying a penalty. To implement the practice, USDA approval was required and landowners were to take steps so that no adverse effects on wildlife or surface water occurred.

"There was a lot of interest in the Critical Feed Use practice, mainly because of high feed prices," said Allen. "There were even livestock producers interested in buying hay from CRP participants."

After the CFU practice was announced in late May, a temporary court injunction was filed after wildlife groups voiced concerns over its effect on wildlife. The temporary injunction was granted on July 8 and a permanent injunction was issued on July 24.

The permanent injunction allowed certain critical feed use to continue. Individuals approved prior to the injunction were able to continue the CFU practice and utilize the CRP forage without amendment. Individuals who had applied, but who did not receive approval prior to the temporary injunction, could continue in an amended version if they

could demonstrate they had incurred at least \$4,500 in expenses such as purchasing equipment or fencing in anticipation of approval.

Not many Michigan farmers had been approved for the CFU practice prior to July 8 because haying would not be allowed until August, Allen said. A few CRP participants who were approved in time were able to utilize their CRP ground for haying and grazing under the CFU practice.

Haying and grazing was already allowed under the CRP Managed Haying and Grazing Practice. Managed haying and grazing allows landowners to hay and graze certain CRP acreage once every three years with similar restrictions as the CFU practice to protect wildlife. Under Managed Haying and Grazing, however, landowners incur a 25 percent reduction in their CRP payments for the land where forage is harvested. Under CFU, landowners had only to pay a \$75 application fee.

Only about 10 percent of the CRP land eligible for the Managed Haying and Grazing practice is used, Allen said. Many of these landowners probably do not have livestock and have no need to hay or graze their CRP land. Others may not want to lose the 25 percent of their CRP rental payments, he said.

Haying and grazing under the Managed Haying and Grazing practice is permitted only during certain dates to protect the habitat for ground-nesting birds. The dates haying and grazing are allowed depends on the type of grasses planted. Warm season grasses, such as switchgrass and indiangrass, can be grazed or hayed between Aug. 1 and Aug. 20, while cool-season grasses and legumes, like brome and clover, can be grazed or hayed between Aug. 15 and Sept. 5. Managed Haying and Grazing is only allowed under specified CRP practices and only after approval by the USDA.

Brian Buehler is Public Affairs Specialist with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Conference to address agriculture's 'people factor'



Focusing on four key themes forever linked to the industry, the Agriculture's Conference on the Environment (ACE) will offer attendees a global-scale update on current farm trends. The themes of People, Planet, Power and Prosperity will form the foundation of the biennial conference, scheduled for 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Jan. 28, 2009 at the Lansing Center.

Four workshops throughout the day will delve deeper into the connection between people and the vital industry that feeds and clothes them:

- A pair of Michigan grape growers and representatives of the National Grape Cooperative will discuss how the state's grape and blueberry growers think globally and act locally, in partnership with companies like Welch's, to meet consumer expectations.
- A dairy farm family from Kent County that has made openness and outreach a priority will discuss their efforts to successfully bridge the gap between the farm and non-farm communities.
- Officials from MSU Extension and the state agriculture department will address food safety issues related to recycling manure and bio-solids as fertilizer – a practice that has posed opportunities and challenges since the dawn of agriculture itself.

- A visiting rural sociologist from Ohio State University will share insights from his investigations into the public's attitude about food, agriculture and environmental issues in our communities.



REGISTER FOR ACE

January 28

9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Lansing Center, Lansing, MI

Phone: (517) 241-2232

Web: www.maeap.org/ACE

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