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Neighbors
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Photo By: Brenda Willcuts

Consumers Are Buying Into Organic Farms

BY ALEJANDRA CANCINO
McClatchy News Service

CHICAGO — Axel Burlin plucked oat grains from the farm field, rolled them around in his hand and marveled that he was growing cereal.

"Can I eat it?" the 10-year-old wondered out loud.

Axel was on his first visit to Two Roads Farm, a 400-acre organic farm in Shelby County, Ill., in which his parents were investing $25,000.

As consumers become increasingly aware of what they eat, they are also taking control of where their food comes from. Some shop at farmers markets. Fewer go out and buy stakes in an organic farm.

It's a small trend that reflects the growing interest in organic food consumption. But the recession also has helped nurture this idea for people of means who want to invest their money in places other than the volatile, and now languishing, stock market or in certificates of deposit or savings accounts that pay 1 percent interest or less.

"It's a safe investment," said Dr. Stephen Rivard, who in 2006 diversified his portfolio by investing $75,000 in an organic farm. Since then, he has plunked down an additional $200,000 in two other farms. The return is not immediate, Rivard acknowledged, but he counts on eventually benefiting from increasing food prices and a steady rise in farmland value, especially because organic farms command higher prices than those where chemicals are used to kill pests and weeds.

Another investor, Howard Harris, said a side benefit is the fun his children have when visiting the farm: "The kids like saying that they are farmers."

Axel's mom, DD Burlin, is not only a believer that organic products are healthier and better for the environment, she said she is also helping test a model for organic agriculture than can be replicated around the country.

The River Forest, Ill., mom also is a trained cook and for years has been focused on nutrition in preparing meals for her two boys and husband. Then last year she read "The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals" and realized she knew little about the origin of food.

The book prompted Burlin, 42, to buy food from local farmers who let their cows graze on pasture and didn't spray vegetables with pesticides. But that wasn't enough. She wondered how she could help other farmers move away from conventional agriculture so that more families would benefit. Then, at a conference on family farming, she met David Miller, a man on a mission to build an organic farm business that could compete with conventional farms.

He and his business partner, farmer Harold Wilken, like some others in the business, would help investors buy farmland and transition it to an organic operation. They would manage the farm through their enterprise, called Midwest Organic Farm Management.

Miller and Wilken started their business in 2006, challenged by the fact that less than 1 percent of Illinois farmland is certified organic. Transitioning a conventional farm into an organic operation takes at least three years. During that time synthetic herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers are not used. Also, genetically modified seeds aren't planted.

Crop yields usually fall because the soil can't produce as much. But the upside is that once the farm is certified organic, crops usually sell at higher prices, helping increase profits as well as the value of the land.

Miller and Wilken, who started with one farm four years ago, now manage eight farms. Five are organic and yielded organic crops last season — mainly corn, hay, oats and soybeans. The other three are transitioning to organic operations. Wilken supervises farm operations and the farmers, often offering advice from his seven years of farming organically.

The farms have different contracts with the farmers. In some cases, farmers split costs and profits with investors. And in others farmers lease the land and investors get rent.

Two Roads Farm investors expect to make a profit of 4 percent to 5 percent annually. Those investors include Burlin and her husband, Johannes, 45, president of Silliker Inc., a network of food testing and consulting laboratories.

Two weeks ago, Burlin packed her sport utility vehicle and drove nearly four hours southwest of River Forest to Two Roads Farm with her two children, Axel and Hans.

During their visit, the boys learned how organic farmers use crop rotations to

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BY LINDA WUEBBEN
P&D Correspondent

When the flax fields are blooming in South Dakota along Interstate 29, it looks like a lake.

Kathy Grady, plant specialist at South Dakota State University, loves to take the drive in late August and early September when flax is blooming and close to harvest. Grady is a specialist in oil seeds and loves the crop when it's blooming.

Flax has actually been grown in the United States since 1793 and older readers will recall flaxseed or as it's more commonly known, linseed oil, as widely used for years as paint thinner or in the linoleum on the kitchen floor.

The fiber in the flaxseed crop was also used to make linen and found in history as far back as the stone age for clothing. It was also used in the cloth which wrapped the mummies in Egyptian tombs. For years, it competed with wool as a choice for clothing until the creation of the cotton gin but remains competitive with cotton still today.

The linseed meal which is a byproduct of flaxseed after it is processed for linseed oil is used frequently as a high-protein animal and poultry feed. It gives an animal a glossy coat and used for this reason by horse breeders.

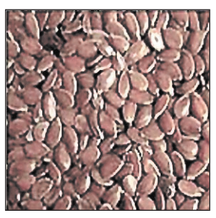
Flax is widely grown in Canada because of the cooler climate. Knox County Extension Educator Terry Gompert said flax needs a certain climate to grow in and northeast Nebraska does not provide that. The amount of daylight or lack of it and the heat factor are vital to a successful flax crop. South Dakota has some desirable areas for flax production further to the north but it is not a competitive crop for Yankton County in South Dakota or Knox or Cedar in Nebraska.

Extension Educator Steve Sutera of Bon Homme County has no producers interested in growing the flax crop either. He said it just does not produce profitably enough in comparison to the corn and soybean crops more popular in this part of the state. Commodity pricing for flaxseed delivered to Fargo, No. Dak., on July 2 listed a steady price between $11-12/bushel.

One of the new age uses for byproducts of the flaxseed crop is in the health food arena. New trends in eating healthy include adding flax seeds to a consumer's diet. It is an excellent source of Omega-3 fatty acids said Grady and not only is it good in an animal's diet but also gives a healthy edge to a consumer's diet. It has been proven to reduce cholesterol and provide protection against some types of cancer.

Even though it is an oilseed, today flax is not known for the oil it produces but rather for its use in baked goods either whole, cracked or ground into flour. It is high in fiber and the mucilage in the seed's outer coat makes it a good laxative. It also has a relatively high level of potassium which is a good addition to anyone's diet.

Producers often deliver the flaxseed being paid by the pound anywhere from $.09 to $.14 giving them a gross income of somewhere between $120-140 per acre. If shipping from any distance is involved, it is not very profitable.



As the healthier foods list grows, cattle producers are finding the Omega-3 fatty acids increase when the feed ration for the livestock and poultry contains linseed meal. Many grass and natural fed cattle are on a diet which includes the linseed meal. It can be traced in the processed meat and some natural livestock producers even label their product with the Omega-3 content so consumers can take advantage of a healthier choice of beef.

Flaxseed is found to also be very popular with small farmers and ranchers who raise range-free chickens. Adding the meal to the diet of the naturally raised chickens enhances the meat and also the eggs which are then advertised as high-omega eggs.

Facts from the Ameriflax Web site tell a healthy story for those consumers interested in living a longer life. Flaxseed is the best plant choice for Omega-3's and an excellent source of lignans which improve the fight with some types of cancer. Of course, it is high in fiber and an excellent source of protein and used frequently in baked goods. Either whole or milled, it adds hidden

■ FLAX, *Page 2B please*

FLAX AS A UNITED STATES CROP:

• 340,000 harvested acres with a total 5.7 million bushels in 2008. This compares with the 2008 corn crop of 12.1 billion bushels with an average of 153.9 bushels per acre. 95 percent of flax was grown that year in North Dakota with 323,000 acres harvested. From the 5.5 million bushels harvested, the yield was 17 bushels per acre.
(Information taken from Ameriflax.com, trade organization for North Dakota flax and the USDA Crop Production Summary.)

FLAXSEED FACTS:

• **Flaxseed** — sometimes referred to as linseed — is the seed of the flax plant. The primary industrial use for flaxseed other than seed for planting is for processing to obtain linseed oil and linseed meal.

• **Linseed Oil**

Linseed oil, which has been produced in this country since 1793, has been used in a variety of ways in many industries. Up until World War 1, the main use for linseed oil was for protective coatings and other manufactured products.

Linseed oil can be used as a drying oil vehicle in paints, varnishes, lacquers, enamels, oilcloth, linoleum, oil clothing, tarpaulins and tenting, patent leather,

Textiles, printing inks, soap, shoe polish and other specialty items.

• **Linseed Meal**

Linseed meal is a byproduct of flaxseed after it is crushed for linseed oil. The product is used as a high-protein animal and poultry feed. Linseed meal has a unique combination of amino acids in the protein, which produces a glossy, healthy coat for animals. Because of this, horse breeders throughout the United States use linseed meal for a spit-shine appearance on their horses.

• **Flax Fiber**

Flax is also grown for the fiber produced from the stem of the plant. The fiber is processed to make the finest paper and linen products. The fiber because it is a durable product, is also used to make mulches for horticultural use.
(Information taken from Ameriflax.com, trade organization for North Dakota flax.)

Mitchell Technical Institute Expands Farm, Ranch Business Management Program

The Farm and Ranch Business Management program at Mitchell Technical Institute is in the process of expanding the program to reach much of eastern South Dakota. With the addition of a third instructor and the movement to online-based instruction, the expansion is underway and plans to start enrolling farm families are in process.

Current instructors Roger DeRouchey and Calvin Pietz have been localized to a 90 mile radius of Mitchell until now. With the addition of Lori Christensen, former agriculture teacher at Madison High School, the school plans to move the entire curriculum online and enroll 40-50 new participants to begin instruction in 2011. If the transition goes as planned, the program will be adding additional instructors in northeast South Dakota and western South Dakota as the expansion progresses.

"This program is the hidden gem of agriculture management in the State. The average net cash income of participants in the program is 35 percent higher and net cash income per acre is 3 percent higher than that of those South Dakota producers not participating in the program according to the 2007 USDA/NASS Census. The resources that our instructors provide to individual farm families in helping them achieve success are invaluable. I firmly believe this expansion will be a great asset for the entire state when completed," said MTI President Greg Von Wald.

The Farm and Ranch Business Management program has partnered with Farm Credit Services of America to help with farm family recruitment and the use of office space to work regionally with participants. South Dakota Pork Producers Council, South Dakota Wheat Commission, South Dakota Corn Utilization Council, and the South Dakota Soybean Research and Promotion Council have also partnered with Mitchell Technical Institute to ensure that the expansion is successful.

AGNOTES

Research Farm To Host Summer Tour July 13

BROOKINGS — The South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station's Northeast Research Farm will host a field day and tour on July 13.

The event begins at 4 p.m. at the farm, which is located 2 miles west of the South Shore exit off Interstate 29. Tours and presentations will continue until dusk, and staff will serve a post-tour meal. County Crop Improvement Associations from the area, Farm Credit Services, and the South Dakota Wheat Commission have sponsored the meal.

The field day will include educational walking and flatbed tours. Those tours include a winter wheat update with South Dakota State University winter wheat breeder Bill Berzonsky, and a look at 2010 soil fertility issues with SDSU Soils Testing Laboratory manager Ron Gelderman.

SDSU spring wheat breeder Karl Glover will host a walking tour of spring wheat breeding plots, and SDSU graduate student Buyung Hadi will present information on wheat insect pests and diseases these pests can spread.

Lon Hall, supervisor of the Northeast Research Farm and SDSU oat breeder, will share information with producers in attendance on oat breeding and production, and South Dakota Cooperative Extension Plant Pathologist Larry Osborne will discuss cereal fungicides.

Extension Weeds Specialist Mike Moechnig will update participants on weed control topics and Bob Hall, SDSU plant science faculty member, will give the audience information about new spring wheat and oat varieties. Between tours, attendees can get information about agricultural marketing from Extension Area Marketing Specialist Al May.

The SDSU Plant Science Department, the SDSU College of Agricultural and Biological Sciences, the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station, and the South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service are sponsoring the event.

Farm Rescue Accepting App's For Harvest Assistance

JAMESTOWN, North Dakota —Farm families in need of crop harvesting assistance this fall should apply now for help through Farm Rescue.

The nonprofit organization is currently accepting harvest requests from farmers in North Dakota, South Dakota, western Minnesota and eastern Montana. Farm Rescue provides planting and harvesting assistance to farm families that have experienced a major illness, injury or natural disaster.

It is important that farmers apply early to receive top consideration, said Pam Musland, director of operations. Families assisted are selected based on a number of factors, including extent of need, farm size, farm viability, and geographic location for moving equipment and volunteers in a timely manner.

Since 2006, Farm Rescue has assisted 121 farm families that experienced hardships ranging from open heart surgery and cancer treatment to severed limbs and injuries sustained from tending livestock.

"Our mission is to help farmers through an unexpected crisis in their lives," Musland said. "Our work wouldn't be possible without a terrific volunteer labor force, and the many individuals and businesses that support

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