



www.csrees.usda.gov

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Cooperative State
Research, Education,
and Extension Service

National Research Initiative (NRI)

The Healthy Grown Label: Healthy Food and Healthy Land

by Stacy Kish, CSREES

Eco-labeling is a new certification program similar to the organic label, but goes beyond the organic concept by reflecting new land management practices for the entire farm ecosystem, including non-crop lands. >>

With funding from USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), a Wisconsin team composed of scientists, growers, and environmentalists developed the "Healthy Grown" label to reflect land management practices that promote balanced agricultural management and support broad ecosystem health.

Dr. Paul Zedler from the University of Wisconsin, in collaboration with the World Wildlife Fund and the Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers

Association, is studying the biodiversity and ecological benefit of non-crop lands in agricultural landscapes.

Returning to natural vegetation has the benefit of sustaining biologically diverse ecosystems and minimizing management costs. The program was expanded from an existing integrated pest management model to understand insect population density and diversity changes among different habitats.

continued next page >>



Right: Hannah Gaines, graduate research assistant in entomology, explains her insect project on a field day in July 2007 to growers, local landowners, staff of the Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association, and fellow researchers.

Credit: Claudio Gratton

>> continued from previous page



Above: Jason Croft, field assistant in one of the forested areas, showing dense woody undergrowth that is thought to suppress biodiversity. It is the object of fire management to open up the understory of such sites.

Credit: Leith Nye

References

Anchor, T. 2007. "Standards for the management of natural areas on Wisconsin vegetable farms". Invited talk. School of Natural Resources, University of Missouri-Columbia. May 3, 2007.

Zedler, P. H., C. Gratton, D. Knuteson, N. Mathews, J. Barzen, T. Anchor, H. Gaines, M. V. Knight, L. Nye. 2007. Conservation and restoration in an ecological landscape: An eco-label focused approach. Talk presented at: Ecological Society of America/Society for Ecological Restoration meeting, San Jose, CA. Aug. 2007.

Knuteson, D. 2007. Potato growers restore native plant communities. *Badger Common Tater* 59: 22-23.

Knuteson, D. 2007. Ecologists take to potato fields and edges. *Badger Common Tater* 59: 17-19.

By controlling for beneficial insects, investigators feel it may be possible to reduce the application of chemical insecticides. The group is also using bird populations as indicators of ecological function and ecosystem health.

Farmers who produce Healthy Grown foods participate in demonstrations, presentations and discussions at field day events to encourage others to adopt these management techniques. In addition, the project educates consumers of the link between food grown with healthy land management practices and ecosystem services. The eco-label lets consumers know that producers grow foods following specific environmental standards and practices to ensure ecosystem health

The Natural Community standard protocol for certification, developed in 2006, is a direct result of the team's work. The program includes identification of non-crop land near crop fields and the selection of management activities, such as prescribed burning and invasive weed removal, to increase biodiversity on these lands. The program also requires farm monitoring to validate increased environmental services. The certification standard will expand

NRI awards grants for research, education, and extension activities that address key problems of national and regional importance in biological, environmental, physical, and social sciences relevant to agriculture, food, the environment, and communities on a peer-reviewed, competitive basis. For more information, visit:

<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/funding/nri/nri.html>

land management practices into a broader ecosystem perspective and increase the presence of beneficial insect species, alternative pest control practices, and environment biodiversity. It will also help reduce the application of chemicals that are harmful to the environment and costly to producers.

CSREES funded this research project through the National Research Initiative's Managed Ecosystems program. Through federal funding and leadership for research, education and extension programs, CSREES focuses on investing in science and solving critical issues impacting people's daily lives and the nation's future. For more information, visit www.csrees.usda.gov. ■