Partnering in Agricultural Education

By Robert Schafer, Director, Central Lakes College Ag and Energy Center and DelRay Lecy, Dean of Management Education, Central Lakes College, Region II

A unique situation exists in central Minnesota. For more than 40 years there has been a team approach to agricultural education at several levels. Central Lakes College is host to the Agricultural and Energy Center.

Along with the rich history of research and demonstration efforts to support new opportunities for economic development in Greater Minnesota, partnering with Staples Motley High School and the CLC Farm Business Management program has been an ongoing effort.

The early years at the center included a heavy focus on demonstrating irrigation and hosting University of Minnesota research on edible bean production. Over time, these two focus areas have become a mainstay in this region of Minnesota.

The center continues with ongoing research and demonstration, relating to crop varieties and new crop opportunities for the region.

A key aspect to the work done at the center in these areas was to include high school agriculture students with hands-on activities and farm business management students with direct communications on the results of the work and teaming with the FBM faculty to host an annual farm forum.

The addition of the Living Legacy Gardens in 2000 has provided the general public the unique opportunity to experience an extensive flower and herb demonstration, a small orchard and a native prairie restoration.

High school ag students and post-secondary horticulture students have gained from both assisting in the development of the gardens and through use as a laboratory.

Recently the center has expanded the focus to include non-food crop demonstrations in alternative/renewable energy crop development. The center is targeting locally produced energy crops that can be converted to fuel. It is also encouraging new opportunities for farmers and entrepreneurs in the transitional area of Minnesota.

Two crops of note include: camelina and miscanthus. The first is identified as a potential non-food oilseed crop for the production of biodiesel. This drought hardy plant produces a fine seed that is high in oil content and produces well on marginal cropland. Miscanthus holds

THANK YOU MAAE FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

MN Ag in the Classroom is made possible by generous private contributions and in partnership with the
MN Department of Agriculture.

Show your support by donating today!
Great idea for an FFA Chapter community service project.

Visit us at: www.maitcfoundation.org or www.mda.state.mn.us/maitc
opportunity for the production of biomass in the region. Demonstration plots at the center are active with production data to be available this fall.

Kerry Lindgren's agriculture students (Staples-Motley High School) have been actively participating in early efforts in propagating the miscanthus crop at the center.

Because of several grants (including the Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council), FBM faculty has been helping to develop the management and economic data necessary to provide area farmers with the whole picture of these new crop opportunities.

As FBM students gain knowledge in the pros and cons of these crops, management decisions can be made that could provide added value to their existing business.

Further emphasis on energy crops has also provided a renewed interest from the non-farm community as discussions of farm-produced fuel becomes more commonplace.

As a part of Central Lakes College, the center also has the opportunity to work with other existing academic programs (heavy equipment and diesel mechanics) to test biofuel.

That in turn adds to the value of the data that the farm business management faculty can share with area farmers as well as what local high school students can experience.

Partnerships have been longstanding with both the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the University of Minnesota at the center. With the latest emphasis on energy, new partnership opportunities continue to expand.

The foundational partnerships with the local high school and FBM programs will always be intergraded with any new effort; and in fact, these partnerships in agricultural education will continue to provide the "added value" that makes this situation so unique.

For more information contact Robert Schafer at 218-894-5160.