

THE ROCK SPRINGS ROTATION

A monthly newsletter from the Organic Cropping Systems Project team

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Meet the Team



Tara Pisani Gareau

We are excited to welcome into our team, Tara Pisani Gareau, a postdoctoral researcher in entomology. Tara's main responsibilities will include helping with project management, processing and analyzing insect collections, and developing extension materials.

Tara comes to us from the University of California- Santa Cruz, where she conducted her doctoral research on the potential of perennial hedgerows for enhancing biological control services. Tara enjoys working closely with farmers and school groups on sustainable agriculture projects. She worked with the School for Field Studies in Costa Rica on sustainable development education; with the Peace Corps in Honduras on soil conservation, crop diversification, and IPM; with Conservation International in Bolivia on the development of an eco tourism project; and with Rural Roots in Moscow, ID on the creation of an

experiential educational program in small acreage farming.

Tara is looking forward to working with a diverse group of researchers, educators, and farmers on this interdisciplinary project and learning about Pennsylvania agriculture. Tara will be attending the upcoming PASA conference, so if you are there and see her, please come up and introduce yourself. Tara's email is tlp19@psu.edu.



Preston Yoder

Preston Yoder is a member of our off-campus farmer-advisor board and was also on the advisory board during the organic transition project. Preston has extensive experience in organic dairy production and owns Ore-Bank Farm in beautiful Belleville, PA, where he grows mainly corn, beans, an alfalfa-grass hay mix and oats on 170 acres.

While never relying heavily on non-organic approaches to farm management, Preston formally transitioned his ground to organic in 1997. *(continued on next page)*

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For the future:

- We hope that your new year is off to a great start.
- The advisory board meeting will occur in mid or late-March or the first week of April. We'll be contacting you shortly to solidify a date.

Preston Yoder (continued from page 1)

At that time, he was primarily a dairy and grain operation. As of last year, however, Preston has moved away from dairy and is now focused exclusively on organic grain production. His markets are primarily farmer-to-farmer where he provides high quality dairy forages.

Preston is a big proponent of tailoring crop rotations to meet farm-specific pest and nutrient management goals. For him, achieving soil balance, through crop rotations and amendments that enhance soil fertility, improve potassium and calcium levels, and reduce soil compaction, is a key component of his organic management strategy.



Thinking back, looking forward...

Two upcoming workshops address our project's outreach goals.



Our project is, in the terminology of the USDA, “integrated.” This means that we will integrate our research results into extension and outreach activities. We are conducting two project-related extension activities this year, both in conjunction with the PASA Farming for the Future Conference in early February. On Wednesday, Feb. 4, project participants Dave Mortensen and Dave Sandy, along with PSU weed scientist Bill Curran and On-Farm Research Coordinator Ron Hoover, are offering a hands-on “Weed School.” The workshop will take place in the Snider Ag Arena, and 40 participants will learn about weed biology and how to identify weeds using a plant key, including weed seedlings germinated from soil samples submitted by participants ahead of time. The afternoon will be devoted to demonstrations and discussions of implements used to control weeds both before and after they emerge. The equipment session will include hands-on examination, adjustment, and demonstration along with comments and input from organic farmers Jim Crawford and Roy Brubaker. Additionally, a video that highlights the weed-control strategies of project advisor Preston Yoder, and farmers Steve Groff, Roy Brubaker, and Jim Crawford, will be used to stimulate discussion among the participants. The film was

produced by Dave Mortensen and his wife, Libby, and their son, Christian, who together make up Oblivion Productions.

The second workshop, “Hands-on IPM and Biocontrols for Vegetable Growers,” will take place on the PSU campus on Thursday, Feb. 5. The workshop will focus on identification, using live and preserved material, and management of the main pest and beneficial organisms in vegetable



production. The workshop is being organized by project participant Mary Barbercheck, along with PA Dept. of Agriculture entomologists Cathy Thomas and Wade Esbenshade, and plant pathologist Tracy Olsen. Participants have been contacted to determine which pest and disease problems are most problematic on their farms. So far, the most “popular” pests reported are brassica flea beetles, Mexican bean beetles, harlequin bugs, root maggots, slugs, and mildews. Participants will learn about the contribution of healthy soil to pest management, conserving beneficial insects on their farms, as well as types of biocontrols that are commercially available.

We look forward to telling you about our workshops at the next project advisory board meeting, and discussing future extension activities that will help promote sustainable organic farming.

