

Joint Press Release from the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and the Blue Earth River Basin Initiative

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For Immediate Release

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IATP and BERBI to Host Third Crop Workshops in Fairmont, MN

Focus on Alternatives to Corn-Soybean Rotation

Minneapolis – The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), in cooperation with The Blue Earth River Basin Initiative (BERBI), is hosting a workshop series entitled “Third Crop Opportunities in the Blue Earth River Basin.” The workshops will be held at the Holiday Inn in Fairmont, MN on February 7th and 27th, 2003, and will address the introduction of Third Crops in the Blue Earth River Basin in southern Minnesota.

The current dominance of corn and soybean production in the Blue Earth River Basin has resulted in increased soil erosion, decreased water quality, and commodity prices falling well below the cost of production. IATP is working with BERBI to address these problems by working to diversify crops grown in the Blue Earth River Basin and to provide opportunities for additional incomes to family farmers in the region.

Workshop speakers will include farmers, university researchers and government agency representatives. They will discuss how to introduce alternative, perennial crops for energy production and other uses into the Blue Earth River basin. Alternative energy is a main focus for IATP in this collaboration, whose wind energy program, Windustry, will be present at the workshop to provide information and other resources to Blue Earth River Basin farmers.

The Blue Earth River Basin Initiative (BERBI) is committed to helping citizens in the Greater Blue Earth River watershed system address environmental issues. As part of the project, BERBI will pay farmers for agreeing to grow perennial crops instead of row crops like corn and soybean.

Third Crops are alternatives to the traditional corn-soybean rotation that can help improve farm incomes, diversify farm landscapes, while providing environmental benefits. Some examples include herbs, nutraceuticals, or specialty vegetables. Third Crops also include other less traditional forms of farm income such as energy production, agri-tourism, wildlife habitat, and other practices that help diversify farms.

At these workshops, landowners will be able to meet with companies, organizations and other landowners working with Third Crops to talk about opportunities for value-added

agriculture that increase environmental sustainability as well as profitability. Focus will be placed on marketing third crops, new market development, and networking opportunities.

Workshop speakers include such distinguished guests as Dennis Keeney, emeritus professor at Iowa State University and Senior Fellow with IATP, who will speak about some less traditional strategies that can diversify farms, such as carbon sequestration, water storage, and alternative ways to farm such as farming for wildlife and biodiversity.

Faculty and representatives from University of Minnesota, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, and Minnesota Department of Transportation will speak at the workshops on topics ranging from working landscapes and sustainable agriculture systems to how to transition to third crops. Speakers from the private sector interested in sourcing locally, such as AVEDA Corporation, will give presentations on their work with third crops.

Several local farmers, such as Tony Thompson of Willow Lake Farm in Windom, MN have been invited to serve on a panel illustrating many success stories of this new way of thinking about farming.

“We are very excited to bring some of the third crop work into the Blue Earth River Basin” says Linda Meschke, Executive Director of BERBI and farmer in Welcome, MN “This will be a great event for farmers in the region who are interested in the new opportunities with Third Crops.”

For more information about Third Crops or if you are interested in attending the workshops, please contact Linda Meschke at BERBI, (507) 238-5449, meschkel@berbi.org, or Lina Gordy at IATP, (612) 870-3460, lgordy@iatp.org. Visit www.thirdcrop.org for directions to the Fairmont Holiday Inn and workshop agenda.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy promotes resilient family farms, rural communities and ecosystems around the world through research and education, science and technology, and advocacy.

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