



Dedicated to providing agricultural education & resources that bring agriculture to life in the classroom since 1984.

MAC Winter 2008 Newsletter

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Summer Graduate Course

Our popular Graduate Course for educators is back for a third summer. Massachusetts Agriculture in the Classroom, collaborating with Fitchburg State College, is offering a **three-credit graduate course**. Titled "Growing Agriculture in the Classroom," the course uses Massachusetts farms as its classrooms. Teachers participate in agricultural-literacy training through fun, hands-on study and investigation of agriculture education resources. It helps enhance their curricula and meet many MCAS requirements.

The course meet **Wednesdays, June 25 and August 13** at the **Brigham Hill Community Farm in North Grafton from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.** Each participant must attend both sessions and also participate in **six additional workshops** during the summer, selected from approximately twelve workshops on a variety of topics in locations across the state.

Participants will also keep a journal of their agricultural journey and spend ten hours developing a classroom project, which they will present to their peers on August 13. Farm workshops may cover topics such as embryology, nutrition, plant science, soils, water, economics, ag-history, aquaponics, energy, heritage breeds, genetic diversity, sustainable agriculture, technology and much more.

This course will assist new educators and those who want to expand their offerings to integrate agriculture into the classroom. Participants will learn how to create community partnerships; link the classroom to the farm; expand math, science, social studies, art, nutrition and other educational knowledge using agricultural examples, and explore technology and engineering techniques.

The fee for this eight-day course is \$450 and includes all materials; farm workshops; some meals and three graduate credits or 67 professional development points from Fitchburg State College. Participants will be paired with a MAC board member to give long-term access to agricultural resources and support. [For more details.](#)

President's Message

2007 has been a good year for Massachusetts Agriculture in the Classroom!

We appreciate the wonderful teachers who work with MAC. These teachers are looking for activities and ideas that will excite their students. They wish to make the subjects that they teach, particularly science, easier to understand to encourage their students to want to learn more.

These teachers see the rewards of community involvement. They really appreciate participating in our many workshops on the farm. They are excited by the opportunity to return to the farm with their students and they wish to find and purchase locally grown products.

Many thanks to all of our donors. We would not be able to continue without the many donors who include us in their annual giving. Our list of in-kind donations and gifts is impressive. The volunteer board members who

work in committees to make things happen are also invaluable.

The National Agriculture in the Classroom program offered grants to individual states last year. Former board member, Heather Ware submitted a grant proposal and the resulting award helped a great deal. The 2nd Summer Course with Fitchburg State College was a great success, the MA Department of Agricultural Resources and MA Farm Bureau Federation are important partners. The largest contributor to our budget is the MA Lottery through tickets sold at the Big E. The many Lottery personnel demonstrate the professionalism, stamina and good nature that is necessary at the Big E.

The feature article in the current magazine of American Farmland Trust is titled ***“Farms Go Back to School.”*** This quote is from Chef and Author **Alice Waters**: *“We must teach the children that taking care of the land and learning to feed yourself are just as important as reading, writing and arithmetic.”* I heartily agree.

We depend on your assistance to continue to promote this philosophy.

Marjorie A. Cooper, Co-President

Massachusetts Ag Tags

Orders are being taken for the **Massachusetts Agriculture Specialty License Plate**. Proceeds from the sale of these plates will go to a newly created **Massachusetts Agricultural Trust**, which will fund marketing and education programs and services that help farmers succeed and remain current.

In the next two years, three thousand license plates must be sold. Once one thousand five hundred are ordered, license plates will be produced and sent to the regional RMV offices for distribution. The **cost** to transfer your registration to an “Ag Tag” is **\$60**. This includes the \$40 donation to the Agricultural Trust, and a \$20 fee to swap plates paid directly to the Registry of Motor Vehicles when the new plate arrives. Renewals every second year will cost \$81, which includes the \$41 RMV registration fee, and \$40 contribution to the Agricultural Trust.

To apply for your Massachusetts Ag Tag License, send a \$40 check made payable to the Registry of Motor Vehicles. From this, \$12 will go for production costs and the Agricultural Trust will receive \$28. The Trust will then distribute \$15 to the organization responsible for the sale. We hope that you will mark your support for Massachusetts Agriculture in the Classroom, when you send in your order. For more about the Ag Tag, visit www.mass.gov/agr/agtag.

2007 Mini-Grant Awards

The MAC Mini-Grant program **awarded \$4,793 in 2007** to support these ten worthy agricultural education projects. Grants of up to \$1,500 are awarded three times a year. The deadlines for proposal submission are the first of April, September and November. We encourage Massachusetts educators to submit a proposals to enhance their educational program. [Click here for Mini- Grant guidelines](#). You can also [review description](#) of all mini-grant winners from 2007 and past years.

April Mini-Grants	April Funding Total	\$893
“Apply Health & Nutrition Concepts” \$368 Silver Lake Middle School, Kingston	“Quest for the Elusive Beach Plum” \$125 Quincy Beach and Coastal Commission	“Winship Elem. Sch. Garden Initiative” \$400 Winship Elementary School, Brighton

September Mini-Grants	Total September Funding	\$1,650
“Incubation of Eggs” \$500 Norfolk County Agricultural HS, Walpole	“Trip to Cold Spring Orchard” \$400 Cold Spring School, Belchertown	“After School at the Farm” \$750 Maple Street School, Spencer

November Mini-Grants	November Funding Total	\$2,250
<p>“Food, Farming & Fun After School”</p> <p>\$750 The Farm Institute, Edgartown</p>	<p>“Involving Elementary Schools in Sustainable Agriculture”</p> <p>\$750 Newton Community Farm</p>	<p>“Learning From the Land: Teacher Open Farm Days”</p> <p>\$600 Red Gate Farm Education Ctr., Buckland</p>
<p>“Hatfield Farm Art Mural Project”</p> <p>\$150 Smith Academy, Hatfield</p>		

Biomass Energy

When plants photosynthesize, they utilize solar energy to combine carbon dioxide and water to manufacture carbohydrates. These carbohydrates provide the nutrition and building blocks for the growing plant. The solar energy is stored in the chemical bonds of the plant’s sugars, starches and cellulose. At each step along the food chain, some of this stored energy is passed along to other organisms.

The organic matter that makes up these plants, animals, fungi and bacteria, (living or recently living) and their metabolic by-products is known as **biomass**. Energy can be extracted from biomass to produce electricity, heat, liquid fuels, gaseous fuels and a variety of useful chemicals. The use of biomass for any of these purposes is called **biomass energy**.

Utilization of biomass by humans for its energy is not new. It dates back to the ancient peoples who first burned wood, animal dung or coal for light, heat and cooking. Technological advances over time have led to new and increasingly efficient methods for extracting energy from biomass.

Worldwide, biomass is the 4th largest energy resource, after coal, oil and natural gas. Since 1999, it has been the leading renewable energy in the U.S., producing 4% of our total energy usage as recently as 2003. Like other forms of renewable energy (wind, solar, water, ocean and geothermal) it offers great potential to serve humanity’s ever expanding energy needs, reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and slow the rate of CO₂ release into the atmosphere.

Biomass is an attractive petroleum alternative because it is easily converted to other forms of energy in a way that is friendly to the environment. Biomass is regenerative when it is harvested sustainably. It is also widely available across the planet and, if properly managed, can not be depleted. It is estimated that just 1/8 of the total biomass produced annually would provide for all of humanity’s current demand for energy.

Biomass can be used for a wide variety of energy uses -- from transportation fuels to heat and electric power production -- with reduced toxic emissions and greenhouse gas production as compared to fossil fuels. Biomass energy also has the advantage of providing a means to dispose of wastes while at the same time reducing fuel use and costs, and in some cases, providing a surplus that can be sold. Biomass technology also supports agriculture and forest product industries and rural economies.

Biomass is available from several industries and includes agricultural crops and wastes; animal wastes; livestock operation residues; aquatic plants; fast growing plants and trees; forest and mill residues; and the wastes from construction, transportation, industry and municipalities. Even the fumes from landfills can be used for energy.

Some crops are grown solely for their biomass because they are known to produce large volumes of energy. Other biomass materials come from the parts of plants used to make other products or even the parts we compost, recycle, process or throw away. These include: dead tree; branches; yard clippings; left-over crops; wood chips; bark; sawdust; manure; solid wastes and even used tires.

Biomass energy can be divided into three different categories based on whether the products are used for transportation fuels, heating, electric power or to produce a chemical product or material. **Biomass Fuels** (biofuels) are liquid or gaseous fuels used for transportation and heating, such as ethanol and biodiesel. They can be manufactured from crops, trees, animal fats or the biodegradable fraction of waste.

Biomass Power (biopower) refers to systems that generate electricity by burning biomass directly, or converting it to gaseous or liquid fuels that burn more efficiently. **Biomass Product** (bioproduct) is used to describe a chemical, material or other product derived from renewable resources that would typically be made

from petroleum. These include: plastics; glues and adhesives; foam insulation; anti-freeze; artificial sweeteners; gels for toothpaste; photograph film; lubricants; textiles, and synthetic fabrics.

Concerns

Concern exist about the sources for first-generation biomass feedstocks and the impact they may have on biodiversity, as well as their competition with food crops. In addition, since these crops are grown specifically for their biomass energy, the fossil energy inputs of modern agriculture must be factored into their overall impact. Fuel efficiency must also be improved to match or exceed that of petroleum products. The flex-fuel vehicles that can take higher percentage of biofuels are beginning to get better mileage.

Today and Tomorrow

As biomass conversion programs become more cost competitive and produce higher performance products, interest and markets are expanding. Vehicle manufacturers have increased the production of modified vehicles which run on higher biofuel blends. Waste disposal methods that also produce energy and generate income are also being pursued. Development of high energy, sustainably grown, cellulosic biofuels, made from the fibrous material that makes the bulk of the plant and do not rely on food crops are being explored.

Massachusetts Energy

Massachusetts has the third highest energy prices in the country. The state is looking for ways to reduce dependence on petroleum using more production and use of biomass energy. While fuel-grade ethanol (a 10% blend) is the only non-petroleum fuel source with a significant market share, three biodiesel plants are proposed for Pittsfield, Greenfield and Greater Boston.

Massachusetts farmers are also looking to meet the state's need for energy, while also reducing their own energy costs. However, the biofuel production equipment that is currently available is expensive and geared to large farms with regularly sized fields. In Massachusetts, most farms are small and fields are irregularly shaped. While several farms in the state grow corn for their own energy needs, only one farm in the state grows corn to be sold commercially for solid fuel.

Several farms use outdoor wood boilers to produce hydronic heating and a few nurseries utilize wood-chip boilers to generate heat for their greenhouses. Two feasibility studies are underway to assess and fund anaerobic digesters for small-size dairy farms like those in MA — one direct manure, the other manure mixed with food and other off-farm wastes. A few farms use vegetable oil to produce biodiesel for vehicles and heat.

There is increasing interest in whether fuel crops such as soy and corn, or cellulosic such as switchgrass or secondary waste wood can be grown and harvested cost effectively. UMass was awarded a new Agricultural Innovation Grant to create a model to build networks between farms to grow and use shelled corn for greenhouse heat.

The Sun is the Source

The original source of the energy present in biomass is the sun. Small 'factories' in plants called chloroplasts use solar energy, together with carbon dioxide from the air and water from the soil, to manufacture a range of compounds. These compounds include sugars, starches and cellulose — collectively called carbohydrates. The original solar energy is now stored in chemical bonds in these compounds.

Photosynthesis is carried out by many different organisms, ranging from plants to some algae and bacteria. It is the process of converting light energy to chemical energy and storing it in the bonds of sugar. Plants need only light energy, CO₂ and H₂O to make sugar.

The process of photosynthesis takes place in the **chloroplasts** inside the leaf. Chloroplasts are filled with small pigment grains, known as **chlorophyll**. The chlorophyll absorbs red and blue light waves, making that energy available for use in photosynthesis. The absorbed waves are not visible. It is the green light waves that are not absorbed that make chlorophyll appear green to human eyes.

When the red, blue and violet rays of the sun are absorbed by chlorophyll, light energy is transformed to chemical energy. This energy splits water into hydrogen and oxygen atoms and electrons are released.

These electrons help provide stored energy in the form of ATP and NADP. The NADP accepts the hydrogen ions to become NADPH and oxygen is liberated as a gas is liberated. This is called the **light reaction**, since it requires light.

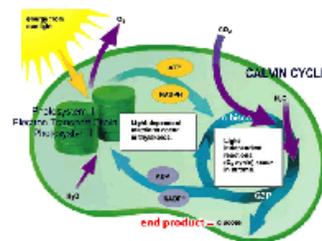
The energy harvested via the light reaction is stored by forming a chemical called **ATP (adenosine triphosphate)**, a compound used by cells for energy storage. This chemical is made of the nucleotide adenine bonded to a ribose sugar, and that is bonded to three phosphate groups. This molecule is very similar to the

building blocks for our DNA.

A second reaction (**the dark reaction**) takes place in the cytoplasm of the chloroplast (known as the stroma), and converts CO₂ to sugar. This reaction doesn't need light to occur, but it does need the products of the light reaction (ATP and NADPH). The dark reaction involves a cycle called the **Calvin Cycle** in which CO₂ and energy from ATP are used to form sugar.

Biofuels

Biofuels are liquid or gaseous renewable fuels used to power vehicle engines. They are derived from recently living organisms or their metabolic by-products. Sources include agricultural crops such as corn, wheat, soybean and sugarcane. Biofuels produced from these feedstocks are known as first-generation biofuels. Second-generation biofuels come from biomass resources such as trees, wood, grasses, animal fats, manures and municipal wastes.



These materials are converted to fuels through biochemical or thermochemical processes. **Biochemical conversion** occurs when biomass is separated into its component parts. **Thermochemical conversion** heats the feedstock with no oxygen to produce “synthesis” gas.

Biofuels must contain a minimum of 80 percent renewable materials, and they may not add to total amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere. They can be substituted for gasoline or diesel or blended with them to reduce greenhouse emissions. To utilize more than low concentrations of biofuels, most of today's vehicles must be adapted. The most commonly used biofuels are ethanol and biodiesel. Methanol, biocrude and methane are also biofuels.

Ethanol was first used as automobile fuel by Henry Ford in the 1880s and continued with the 1908 Model-T. Farmers could adjust the carburetor to use ethanol as fuel. Today bioethanol is the most widely used biofuel. It's an alcohol product made from fermenting plant sugar and starch. Fermentation occurs in a watery solution, where starch crops are converted to sugars. The sugars are fermented into alcohol and the ethanol is distilled. Bioethanol is made from corn and other field crops, such as sorghum, wheat, potatoes and sugar cane. New technologies are being developed to make ethanol from other agricultural and forestry resources such as: corn stalks and residue; grain straw; switchgrass and fast growing trees. They also come from waste products such as sugar cane bagasse, rice hulls, orchard prunings, wheat straw, and forest thinnings or municipal wastes such as paper and yard clippings or industrial wastes such as pulp/paper and sludge.

Bioethanol is added to gasoline to increase octane and reduce pollution. Current specifications allow blends of up to 10% in U.S. and 5% in Europe. Higher concentrations can be used in specially modified Flexfuel vehicles.

Biodiesel is made from vegetable oils, such as soybean or canola; animal fats; refined cooking oils, or microalgae oils. The oil or fat is combined with an alcohol (methanol or ethanol) in the presence of a catalyst to form biodiesel and a glycerine byproduct.

Biodiesel is biodegradable, nontoxic and burns cleanly - free of sulfur and aromatics. It contains no petroleum, but can be blended at any level with petroleum to reduce emissions and improve lubricity. It can be used in existing vehicles with little or no modification. In fact, when Rudolph Diesel first demonstrated his compression ignition engine in 1898, he used peanut oil as the fuel.

Biofuel does not increase gas mileage in traditional vehicles. Flex-fuel vehicles, designed to run on higher ethanol blends, may experience reduced miles per gallon, but these engines can be tuned to minimize detrimental effects on fuel economy.

Methanol is an alcohol obtained by chemical synthesis after products containing carbon have been gasified. It can be used as a synthetic fuel.

Biopower

Biopower systems burn biomass such as wood chips, lumber scraps and paper mill residue to generate electricity or industrial process heat and steam. Biopower system technologies include direct-firing, cofiring, gasification, pyrolysis, and anaerobic digestion.

Most biopower plants use **direct-fired systems** that burn bioenergy feedstocks such as wood or wood chips directly to produce heat which turns water into steam. The steam then drives a turbine, which turns a generator that converts the power into electricity. In some biomass industries, the spent steam is also used for

manufacturing processes or to heat buildings, increasing the overall energy efficiency. This is known as **cogeneration**.

Co-firing refers to mixing biomass with fossil fuels in conventional power plants. Coal-fired power plants can use co-firing systems to significantly reduce emissions, especially of sulfur dioxide.

Gasification systems use high temperatures and an environment with limited oxygen. Biomass is converted into synthesis gas, a mixture of hydrogen and carbon monoxide. "Syngas," can be chemically converted into other fuels or products, burned in a conventional boiler, or used instead of natural gas in a turbine to turn an electric generator. It can also be used in a combined system in which the exhaust gases are used to boil water for steam.

Using a similar thermochemical process but different conditions, which totally exclude oxygen, will pyrolyze biomass to a liquid state. **Pyrolyzed oil** is burned to generate electricity or used as a chemical source for bioproducts such as plastics and adhesives.

The natural decay of biomass produces **methane**, which can be captured and used for power production. In landfills, wells are drilled to release the methane from decaying organic matter. Pipes carry the methane to a central point, where it is filtered and cleaned before burning. This produces electricity and reduces the release of the methane gas into the atmosphere.

Methane can also be produced from biomass through **anaerobic digestion**. Bacteria decomposes organic matter in the absence of oxygen in closed reactors. Gas suitable for power production is produced, and wastes from sewage treatment plants or feedlots, are turned to usable compost.

Fossil Fuels

Fossil fuels are made of hydrocarbons and contain stored solar energy that originated during plant photosynthesis hundreds of millions of years ago. There are three major forms of fossil fuels: coal, oil and natural gas. They are found in deposits deep within the earth.

During the Carboniferous Period, 280-300 million years ago, the land was covered with swamps filled with huge trees, ferns and other large leafy plants. The water and seas were filled with algae and diatoms that also produced energy during photosynthesis.

As the trees and plants died, they sank to the bottom of the swamps and the oceans where they formed layers of a spongy organic material called **peat**. Over many hundreds of years, the peat was covered by sand and clay and other minerals, which turned into **sedimentary rock**. The solar energy was essentially trapped within the rock.

More rock piled on top, increasing the weight on the rock and organic matter below. As pressure and temperatures increased, the organic material broke down into simpler forms of hydrocarbons and hydrogen. Eventually, over millions of years, turning into **coal, oil and natural gas**.

Fossil fuels are burned to release the chemical energy that is stored within them. Because they took billions of years to make, they are a non-renewable source of energy. In addition, when burned, they release carbon dioxide that was captured by plants millions of years ago -- essentially a "new" greenhouse gas. This is a primary contributor to the increasing levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Food Chain & Food Webs

All living things need energy to stay alive. Plants make their food energy from the sun during photosynthesis. Animals depend on other living things for their food. Some animals eat plants, while others eat animals. Still other organisms feed on dead plants and animals.

When plants photosynthesize, the sun's energy is stored in the chemical bonds of carbohydrates. That stored energy is transferred when it passes from one organism to another. This passing of energy from plants to animals to other animals and micro-organisms is called a **food chain**. At each step along the chain, a smaller portion of stored energy is available. Energy is also lost through respiration, heat generation and movement.

The relationships in a food chain are demonstrated using arrows (sun - - -> seeds ---->, mice ---->, snakes, ----> eagle). The arrows point in the direction that the energy transfers in the food chain.

Animals do not generally eat just one thing, nor are they eaten by only one thing. Each organism is interconnected to many other organisms in a complex food pyramid. When many food chains weave together they are called a **food web**.

While a food chain shows only the organisms that contribute to the diet of the top consumer, the food web is a diagram of the links among the many species in an ecosystem. These many species feed at various levels. The base of a food web is occupied mostly by producers (vegetation) and decomposers. Primary consumers (herbivores) and secondary consumers (carnivores) occupy the higher levels. Omnivores are in the middle.

Ask students to create a simple food chain with only one animal at each stage. Then try making a food web for a local eco-systems, that includes many levels of energy exchange. Trace the strands of the web to see what happens when one organism is removed.

Is It CO₂ Neutral?

Burning biomass releases about the same amount of carbon dioxide as burning fossil fuels. However, fossil fuels release CO₂ that was captured billions of years ago which adds to the total stock of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere today.

The carbon dioxide that is released into the atmosphere when biomass energy is burned is balanced by the CO₂ captured by the recent growth of the plants from which they are made.

Depending on how much fossil fuel energy is used to grow, harvest and process the biomass feedstock, this has the potential to substantially reduced net greenhouse gas emissions. Biomass energy is therefore considered to be carbon dioxide neutral.

Biomass Activities

1. Ask students to generate a list of “things we know about renewable biomass energy “and a “list of questions we have about them.”
2. Ask students to make a plan to determine how much and what kind of energy are involved in your home or school’s operations, including heat, cooling, hot water, light, transportation, meals, waste management and purchasing? Are any of these renewable energy? Are there other renewable sources that could be used?
3. Ask students to calculate their ecological footprint using the model at www.myfootprint.org?
4. Ask students to research different biomass fuels to determine how each is grown and harvested. Which is the most sustainable? Which require the least amount of petroleum inputs in their production?

Biomass Energy Resources

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<p>U.S. Department of Energy 1000 Independence Avenue Washington, DC 20585 (800) Dial - DOE www.eere.energy.gov</p>	<p>Alternative Energy News and Information www.alternative-energy-news.info/</p>	<p>Environmental and Energy Institute www.eesi.org/programs/agriculture/biofuels.htm</p>
<p>National Biodiesel Board www.biodiesel.org</p>	<p>National Renewable Energy Laboratory www.nrel.gov/learning/re_biomass.html</p>	<p>Planning and Conservation League www.pcl.org</p>

Project Clean Air www.projectcleanair.org	The Renewable Fuels Association www.ethanolrfa.org	US Dept of Energy - Bioenergy www.energy.gov/energysources/bioenergy.htm
The Biobased Manufacturers' Association www.biobased.org/association/veneman.php	Shell Oil Company www.shell.com/home/content/aboutshell-en/what_we_do/refining_selling/fuels/biofuels.html	

The information from this newsletter was taken from the resources listed above. A special thanks to Gerry Palano, Renewable Energy Coordinator for the Mass. Department of Agricultural Resources for his insights about Biomass and agriculture in Massachusetts.

Resources

Journey North, a Global Study of Wildlife Migration and how your students can get involved, visit www.learner.org/jnorth.

Vegetable & Fruit Facts, including nutrition, history and shopping tips at www.producepedia.com.

Basil Seeds available from NASA's STS-118 mission, register on-line at

www.nasa.gov/education/plantchallenge.

Classroom-ready lesson plans about the 2007 Census of Agriculture for junior and senior high from FFA & AITC at www.agprofessional.com/show_story.php?id=50232.

Nominations due March 8 for the 2008 Excellence in Energy & Environmental Education Awards at www.mass.gov/envir/ee/default.htm.

Nominations for the 2008 American Stars of Teaching from the U.S. Department of Education are due March 31. For application info., www.ed.gov/teachers/how/tools/initiative/index.html.

Video on How to Make Ethanol at www.drivingethanol.org/ethanol_facts/producing_ethanol.aspx.

Three A Day Dairy" Poster Contest, sponsored by MA Dairy Industry Promotion Comm., is open to all MA grade K-6 students. Winning posters will be displayed at the Big E in September and winners will receive Big E tickets and a savings bond. For more information, call Margaret at 508-867-5136.

2009 MA Agriculture Calendar Photo Contest. Send photos of MA agriculture sites and products by June 1 to Photo Contest, MA. DAR, 251 Causeway St., Suite 500, Boston, MA 02114. For details visit www.mass.gov/agr/.

Mission: Massachusetts Agriculture in the Classroom is a non-profit 501 (c)(3) educational organization with the mission to foster an awareness and learning in all areas related to the food and agriculture industries and the economic and social importance of agriculture to the state, nation and the world.

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