Growing and marketing organic wheat, along with integrating livestock into alternative cropping systems, will be featured during the third annual Western Sustainable Ag Crops and Livestock Conference Dec. 11-12 at the Grey Goose Lodge in Ogallala.

On Dec. 11, conference participants will learn about organic wheat markets from industry experts and about wheat varieties that fit these markets.

“There is a huge demand for organic wheat, but the current system entails too much risk for seedsmen to grow new varieties for the organic market,” said Richard Little, UNL organic wheat breeding specialist. “Because of this, millers and manufacturers lack a reliable supply of the varieties that fit their needs. This part of the conference is an attempt to address these problems.”

Stephen Baenziger, UNL small grains breeder, will talk about developing and releasing wheat varieties for organic production with input from end-users, millers, farmers and seedsmen. Vicki Schlegel, UNL food scientist, will talk about antioxidant levels in organic wheat samples. Flour specialists and grain buyers for Bay State Milling, Heartland Mill and Kellogg’s will present results of quality tests for wheat varieties grown on certified organic land at four UNL research stations and discuss their criteria for buying organic wheat from farmers. Experienced organic farmers will share their production practices and marketing strategies, focusing on crop rotations involving wheat and cover crops, weed control, cultural practices and grain storage.

On Dec. 12, Gilbert Lindstrom, farmer and rancher near Sterling, Colo., and Francisco Calderon, U.S. Department of Agriculture soil scientist, will discuss cropping systems and livestock. Calderon will introduce the idea of using annual forages in cropping systems for livestock and discuss his research with grasspea and admiral pea for nitrogen fixation and use as grain or forage. Lindstrom will discuss several of his on-farm projects and his work with Colorado State University.

Livestock producers will join Gilbert for a panel discussion of experiences raising grass-fed livestock. Karla Jenkins, UNL cow calf and range management specialist, will follow with a presentation on “Monitoring the Range for Sustainability.”

Dale Lindgren, UNL horticulture specialist, will discuss opportunities for extra income that high tunnels can provide farmers and acreage owners. Farmers considering organic production will learn about cost-share and other opportunities from Natural Resources Conservation Services Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

The registration fee is $30 per session or $50 for both days. To register or for more information, contact Karen DeBoer at (308) 254-4455 or visit on-line .

Obtain reservations for a room at the Grey Goose Lodge by calling (308) 284-3623.

This UNL Extension program is sponsored by the Nebraska Sustainable Ag Society, Nebraska Organic Crop Improvement Association Chapter #2 and is partially funded by USDA and Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grants. Wheat samples were milled and tested by Heartland Mills, Bay State Milling, Kelloggs Corp. and CII Labs.