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Spence Farm Tour -- May 4

URBANA - One wonders which is the greater passion for Marty and Kris Travis -- restoring the original buildings dating back to 1830 on their Spence family farm or the actual farming - which includes unusual products such as maple syrup and leeks. They have so much going on that Marty says "People think we never sleep and have found two extra days in the week, but we just go with the flow of the seasons."

Finding out how the Travis's accomplish so much will be revealed on a visit to Spence Farm in Fairbury on Friday, May 4. It is the first of this year's sustainable agriculture tours, sponsored by University of Illinois Extension.

Marty and Kris are stewards of Spence Farm -- the oldest family farm in Livingston County. Visitors on the tour will see the gardens, garlic planting, permaculture plantings like daylilies, pawpaws and wildflowers for propagating and seed. "They will see how we make use of the older buildings on the property and how we try to build new structures to fit the historic landscape of the farm," said Marty Travis.

Some of the unusual features of the farm include: the numerous outbuildings, the use of old horse drawn equipment reconditioned to be used for small crops today, a seven-acre prairie and a working woodlot that features ways to do agroforestry.

Travis says that the farm's sustainable practices include "thoughtful harvesting of our wild populations, careful soil management, seed saving, diversity of crops and approaches to production."

More information about the farm is available at www.thespencefarm.com.

The remaining tour schedule is as follows:

June 14 -- Triple S Farms, Stewardson

July 30 -- Living Earth Farm, Farmington (www.livingearthfarm.com)

August 17 -- Three Rivers Community Farm, Elsah (www.threeriverscommunityfarm.com)

September 14 -- Dixon Springs Agricultural Center, Dixon Springs
(www.cropsci.uiuc.edu/research/rdc/dixonsprings)

October 23 -- Kuipers Family Farm, Maple Park (www.kuipersfamilyfarm.com)

A fee of \$20 per person will be charged for each tour. This fee includes lunch. Registration at least one week in advance is required. Visit www.extension.uiuc.edu/smallfarm/ to register and for more details about each of the tours including a map and agenda or contact Donna Cray (217-241-4644; dcray@uiuc.edu).

The tours are sponsored by the University of Illinois Extension, the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Professional Development Program, the Agriculture Tourism Partners of Illinois (www.agritourismillinois.com), and the Agroecology/Sustainable Agriculture Program at the University of Illinois.