



Iowa Organic Association Box 185 Ames, IA 50010 www.iowaorganic.org

SPRING 2015

Kate Mendenhall joins IOA



Kate Mendenhall

The Iowa Organic Association is happy to announce that Kate Mendenhall has joined as Management Consultant.

Kate brings to IOA extensive experience in the organic farming community having served as Executive Director for the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY), helping to grow the New York organic farming movement.

Kate grew up in rural Northwest Iowa during the farm crisis, which sparked her interest in helping to create a more sustainable farm and food system. She studied biology at Bowdoin College and later designed a hands-on MA program to study organic agriculture from farmers across the world while volunteering on their farms.

In April 2014 Kate returned to her hometown with the hopes of helping to foster a more sustainable agriculture for Iowa and the Midwest. She currently is looking for land to start her own organic farm and works with the Pesticide Action Network on a statewide coalition introducing legislation to tighten pesticide drift regulations in Iowa.

"I'm really excited to be working with the Iowa Organic Association in 2015 to help the board and Iowa organic growers and processors identify what are the key issues

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14th Annual Iowa Organic Conference brings innovators to Iowa City

By Kathleen Delate, Professor, Organic Ag Program, Iowa State University

Over 325 farmers, processors, organic ag industry, students, and ag agency staff braved the record cold on November 16-17 and gathered in the University of Iowa Memorial Union to hear organic farmer, Mary Berry, daughter of Wendell Berry, farmer, novelist, poet and author of *The Unsettling of America*, share her vision of developing an ag system that provides a fair income for farmers, and particularly small farmers, who dedicate their lives to "an economy based on food and forests."

The Iowa Organic Conference brings together organic farmers who have had success with organic transition to talk to those interested in organic farming, and to share the latest research, marketing and processing information.

National organic production has increased from a \$3.6 billion industry in 1997 to one of \$32 billion in 2012 and Iowa now has about 100,000 acres under organic production, making the state the nation's fifth largest producer of organic crops. Lyn Brodersen, an administrator with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, a conference sponsor, told conference attendees, "It's amazing to see the growing commitment throughout the state to organic agriculture."

The Iowa Organic Association was

a key sponsor, along with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Organic Valley and Practical Farmers of Iowa. The conference will celebrate its 15th Anniversary next November 22-23 and is the longest-running, largest University-sponsored organic conference in the U.S. Please plan on joining us for this exciting event and thank you for your support of organic agriculture! ■



Mary Berry, daughter of famed sustainable agriculture pioneer

Updated CSA directory lists 85 enterprises connecting Iowans to local food

With spring here, Iowans have a resource to help them connect to local food producers in their area, *Iowa CSA Farms: 2015 Statewide List of CSA Farms and Organizers Serving Iowa*.

Produced by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, the newly updated directory lists 85 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) enterprises offering fresh produce and other products specifically for local consumers. The directory was compiled by Savanna Lyons, a graduate research assistant at the Leopold Center, and Craig Chase, who coordinates local food programs for the Leopold Center and ISU Extension and Outreach.

"This year's directory reflects the full bounty of what Iowa farms can produce, and there is a lot of diversity in the product offerings, from meat CSAs to breads to organic vegetables and heirloom fruits," says Lyons.

The 2015 CSA Directory can be found on the Leopold Center's website at www.leopold.iastate.edu/2015-iowa-csa-farms. It is also available from the ISU Extension Online Store at <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/PM1693>. ■

New report shows local food economy continues to expand in Iowa

Iowa's local food economy is growing more vigorously than expected, according to a two-year evaluation from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. The report also shows how modest public investment in the work of local food coordinators contributes to job creation in the state.

Sales of local food to grocery stores, restaurants, residential food service operations, food hubs, food auctions and other high-volume markets rose from \$8.9 million in

2012 to \$13.1 million in 2013, for a total of more than \$22 million over the two-year period. The report cites data showing that these larger markets are rapidly eclipsing direct-to-consumer sales at farmers markets and from Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs).

All this activity spells good economic news for rural communities and farm-based businesses in Iowa, including the creation of 171 new jobs in 2012 and 2013. ■

Survey shows Iowans support targeted approaches for multiple benefit agriculture

More than 1,000 Iowans were surveyed to learn more about their expectations for agriculture and concerns about environmental quality. The random sample survey found that not only do Iowans support targeted approaches for multiple-benefit agriculture, they are willing to pay for it too.

The survey was conducted by J. Gordon Arbuckle Jr. and John C. Tyndall, social scientists collaborating on the STRIPS project at Iowa

State University, which measures the impacts of strategically planting prairie strips in crop fields.

Fifty-five percent of Iowans surveyed agreed that agriculture has some negative impacts on the environment, and two-thirds indicated that they would support a shift toward a targeted conservation approach that would minimize these negative effects while also providing a range of benefits to agricultural landscapes. ■



US Organic News

USDA invests \$52 million in organic and local food economies

Reflecting an appropriate (if delayed) response to the boom in farmers markets and organic food sales since the last farm bill of 2008, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced \$52 million in grant support for the organic industry and local and regional food systems.

“Local and regional food systems are one of the pillars of our efforts to revitalize rural economies,” Vilsack said.

“Consumers are increasingly demanding more local and organic options.”

USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Services was awarded \$27 million for the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) and Local Food Marketing Promotion Program (LFPP), to promote food hubs, local processors, and aggregation businesses. More than \$19 million will go to the Organic Research and Extension Initiative to help market high-quality organic

products. Community Food Projects (CFP) will use its \$4.8 million to promote food access for low-income families and individuals.

Although the funding is a positive shift, \$44.4 billion will go to commodity programs and \$89.8 billion to crop insurance subsidies for industrial agriculture. ■



Organic Trade Association claims hard-won victory in check-off exemption for organic

The Organic Trade Association (OTA) applauded the US Department of Agriculture’s (USDA’s) recent announcement of a proposed rule to exempt more organic farmers and handlers from paying into conventional commodity check-off programs, saying this is an important step that recognizes the organic industry’s unique needs, and lets the industry decide where its dollars are best spent.

“OTA has worked very hard to get this exemption on the books, and we are optimistic that this important regulation will now soon take effect,” said Laura Batcha, CEO and Executive Director of OTA. “The organic sector is a fast-growing, distinct industry with its own unique demands for research and promotion. We’re pleased USDA is moving swiftly to allow the industry to use its money to grow and develop its own sector.”

The exemption from conventional commodity check-off program assessments is very significant for certified organic operations. USDA estimates that not having to contribute to conventional check-offs will free up an extra \$13.6 million for organic stakeholders to invest back into the organic industry. ■

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Young generation of farmers seek sustainable, meaningful life

A surprising number of young people are opting out of a city-based professional life in favor of living on the land—as farmers. While the average age of the American farmer is just over 58, and aging, under-35 year-olds are signing up for the agricultural life, especially in northeastern states such as Maine.

John Rebar, executive director of the University of Maine Co-

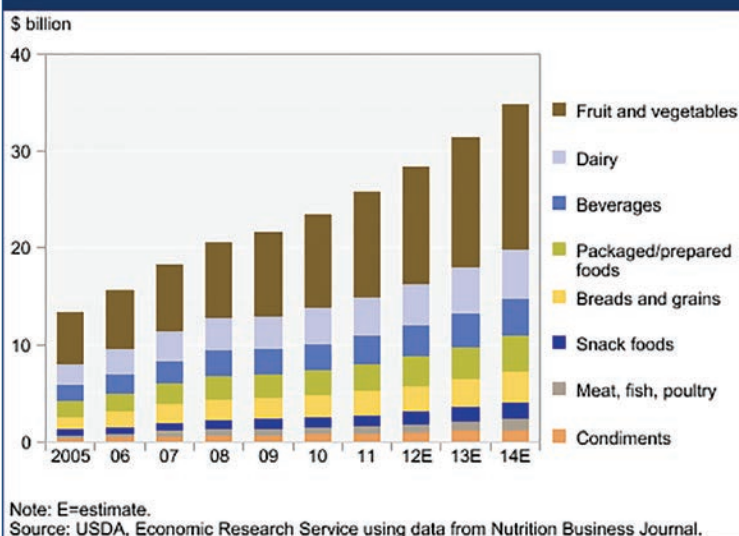
operative Extension, says the number of farmers 35-years old or less has increased by 40 percent in his state (nationally the increase is just 1.5 percent). He senses a cultural shift fueled by desire for a more sustainable, intentional and self-designed lifestyle more connected to community.

(Source: MPBN (Maine Public Broadcasting Network)) ■

Market News

Global organic market at \$72 billion with 106 million acres of organic agricultural land worldwide

U.S. organic food sales by category, 2005-14E



Consumer demand increases, reflected in the significant market growth of 11.5% in the US, the world's largest organic market. More farmers cultivate organically, more land is certified organic, and 170 countries report organic farming activities (up from 164) as shown in the 2015 edition of the FiBL-IFOAM study "The World of Organic Agriculture".

Market research company Organic Monitor estimates the global market for organic products in 2013 to have reached \$72 billion. The United States is the leading market with \$27.7 billion, followed by Germany (\$8.6 billion) and France (\$5 billion). In 2013 official market data was for the first time ever published for China (\$2.7 billion), making the country the

fourth biggest organic market in the world. The highest per capita spending was in Switzerland and Denmark.

Reaching a new all-time high, two million organic producers were reported in 2013. As in previous years, the countries with the highest number of producers were India (650,000), Uganda (189,610) and Mexico (169,703).

A total of 106.5 million acres were organic at the end of 2013, representing a growth of 14.82 million acres compared to the previous survey. In Oceania, organic land increased by a 42%, which was mainly due to rangeland areas shifting to organic production in Australia. Australia is the country with the largest organic agricultural area (42.5 million acres, with 97% of that area used as grazing), followed by Argentina (7.9 million acres) and the United States of America (10.36 million acres). ■



Organic industry poised for strong growth through 2018

The organic food market is projected to grow at an annual rate of 14 percent through 2018, according to a report, “United States Organic Food Market Forecast & Opportunities, 2018.”

Organic fruits and vegetables will continue to dominate the organic market until 2018 and, with the growth in organic food market revenues, the demand for organic meat, fish, and poultry, is also expected to gain demand.

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US western states hold the major market share in total organic food market revenues. However, increasing per capita income coupled with the growing domestic production and commercial sector are anticipated to surge the demand of organic food in other regions of the country.

(Source: Washington Times) ■

Demand for organic milk outstrips supply

There is a nationwide shortage of organic milk in the US as demand for the popular product is outstripping supply. Industry observers say there is no quick fix for the problem.

It's a basic issue of supply and demand. “Organic milk production has been relatively flat in terms of the amount of milk being produced, but the demand is obviously going up,” says Rick Kersbergen with University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

Organic milk, once unheard of, can be found in most grocery stores from Whole Foods to Wal-Mart.

Unfortunately, the supply is lacking. One reason is that it takes three years for conventional farmers to transition to organic.

John Cleary, of organic dairy cooperative Organic Valley, says the main message is that people want organic milk. He said retailers are coming to Organic Valley asking for the product and are willing to pay extra to get it.

Both Organic Valley and organic yogurt maker, Stonyfield Farm, are recruiting new organic farmers.

(Source: MPBN News) ■

Organic Research News

Study finds that eating organic reduces exposure to pesticides

A new study has found that eating organic foods can measurably reduce the levels of toxic pesticides in a person's diet. The study, published in the Feb. 5 edition of Environmental Health Perspectives, is among the first to predict a person's pesticide exposure based on information about their usual diet.

The study was led by Cynthia Curl, an assistant professor in Boise State University's School of Allied Health Sciences. Curl and her colleagues analyzed the dietary exposure of nearly 4,500 people from six US cities to organophosphates (OPs), the most common insecticides used on conventionally grown produce in the United States. OP pesticides are linked to a number of detrimental health effects, particularly among agricultural workers who are regularly exposed to the chemicals.

Results showed that among individuals eating similar

amounts of fruits and vegetables, those who reported eating organic produce had significantly lower OP pesticide exposures than those consuming conventionally grown produce.

“For most Americans, diet is the primary source of OP pesticide exposure,” said Curl “The study suggests that by eating organically grown versions of those foods highest in pesticide residues, we can make a measurable difference in the levels of pesticides in our bodies.” ■



Yields of organic farming comparable to those of industrial agriculture

A systematic overview of more than 100 studies comparing organic and conventional farming finds that the crop yields of organic agriculture are higher than previously thought. The study, conducted by UC Berkeley researchers, also found that certain practices could further shrink the productivity gap between organic crops and conventional farming.

The study, published online Wednesday, Dec. 10, in the Proceedings of the Royal Society B, tackles the lingering perception that organic farming, while offering an environmentally sustainable alternative to chemically intensive agriculture, cannot produce enough food to satisfy the world's appetite.

"In terms of comparing productivity among the two tech-

niques, this paper sets the record straight on the comparison between organic and conventional agriculture," said the study's senior author, Claire Kremen, professor of environmental science, policy and management and co-director of the Berkeley Food Institute.

The researchers conducted a meta-analysis of 115 studies — a dataset three times greater than previously published work — comparing organic and conventional agriculture. They found that organic yields are about 19.2 percent lower than conventional ones, a smaller difference than in previous estimates.

But the researchers found no significant differences in organic and conventional yields for leguminous crops, such as beans, peas and lentils, for instance. ■

Organic Seed News

New sweet corn variety for organic farmers hits marketplace

When the time comes for Wisconsin's organic farmers to decide which crops to plant this year, they'll have a tasty new variety of sweet corn—one with a particularly sweet name—among their choices.

The new variety, called "Who Gets Kissed?," is named in honor of a game played at corn husking bees of old, when communities gathered to husk corn together, while enjoying other fun activities such as dancing. When a person found an ear with all red kernels, known as a "pokeberry ear," they could choose one person among the group to kiss.

The new variety, which has yellow and white kernels, is the first in a series of organic, open-pollinated sweet corn releases being developed through a participatory plant breeding project—involving farmers and professional breeders—led by researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Organic Seed Alliance (OSA).

After nearly seven years of effort, the project has yielded 'Who Gets Kissed?,' an open-pollinated sweet corn variety with superior flavor and sweetness that yields well, tolerates cool soils, and is resistant to common rust and corn smut.

The new variety is available for purchase through High Mowing Organic Seeds. ■



Bill Tracy, sweetcorn breeder at the University of Wisconsin, holds "Who Gets Kissed," sweetcorn



High Mowing Organic Seeds offers nation's first full line of Non-GMO Project Verified seeds

High Mowing Organic Seeds recently announced that its entire line of seeds, all certified organic, has now been verified by the Non-GMO Project, an independent non-profit committed to preserving and building the non-GMO food supply.

High Mowing Organic Seed Company now offers the first full line of organic, Non-GMO Project Verified seeds for farmers and gardeners.

"This is an unprecedented achievement," said High Mowing Organic Seeds owner and founder Tom Stearns. "We committed to this because organic, non-GMO seeds have to be the foundation of the healthy food system of the future."

High Mowing Organic Seeds initiated the verification process for its 600+ varieties two years ago, committing itself to a rigorous process involving ongoing, third-party evaluation of the company's extensive efforts to prevent cross-contamination in the field, along with sampling and testing of selected seeds.

High Mowing Organic Seeds sells its seeds throughout the U.S. and Canada.

High Mowing has long been committed to non-GMO production. In 1999, High Mowing Organic Seeds led a coalition of seed companies in signing the Safe Seed Pledge to not sell seeds containing GMOs. ■

Blue River Hybrids Celebrates 10 Years in Business

Blue River Hybrids is proud to announce the celebration of their 10th year in business. Located near Ames, Iowa, Blue River is independently owned and operated, focusing on the production and sale of organic crop seed. The company takes an active role in the organic community, supporting organizations across the country.

Blue River Hybrids has a deep history in the organic industry. It began as NC+ Organics, a division of Nebraska based NC+ Hybrids, with founder Maury Johnson managing the production and sales of organic seed. This was one of the first efforts to establish a seed division dedicated to the needs of organic farmers. In 2005, Johnson partnered with several breeders who focused solely on non-GMO hybrids and together, they formed Blue River Hybrids.

Today, Blue River Hybrids carries organic lines of corn, soybeans, alfalfa, sorghum sudangrass and sunflowers as well as several non-GMO corn, sorghum and red clover varieties. Blue River has seen significant growth in sales over the past ten years, both in number and reach. Local dealers and distributors in 25 states offer seed products in 44 states and Canadian provinces.

Blue River has introduced several new products to the market during its tenure. One product, an industry breakthrough, is "GMO-blocking" PuraMaize corn, introduced in 2012. Blue River has also introduced leafy and leafy floury organic corn silage, cyst and aphid resistant organic soybeans, organic sunflowers, white corn and award winning organic alfalfas.

As they celebrate their success over the past ten years, Blue River expresses optimism for the future. Their commitment to developing and producing quality organic seed will continue into the next decade.

"We are grateful to those who choose Blue River Hybrids seed and are proud to play a part in organic agriculture. Every farmer who has ever planted a Blue River product has made an investment in our future and the future of organic seed as a whole. Our continued work would not be possible without the support of our customers." Maury Johnson.

For more information or additional interviews, please contact Erika Brodersen, erika@blueriverorgseed.com, 800-370-7979. ■

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to help grow the organic farming and food movement in Iowa," Kate said. "Over this year, I'll be helping the board create a strategic plan directed from input from stakeholders in the Iowa organic community to help the organization focus their future work in ways that prioritize the needs of Iowa organic producers. I look forward to working with Iowa organic growers and processors to learn more about their needs to be more successful now and into the future." ■



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BLUE RIVER HYBRIDS

Give us your input on how IOA can grow organics in Iowa

The Iowa Organic Association (IOA) formed in 2006 to help grow the Iowa organic community of farmers, processors, and consumers. The year 2016 will mark our ten-year anniversary, and the IOA board would like to ask you to help us in creating a clear roadmap for IOA's next ten years to continue growing organic food and farming in Iowa.

The IOA board will be writing a strategic plan to guide the organization's priorities for the next five years. As someone interested in organic food and farming, your input is extremely important to us! Understanding your needs and interests will help inform our strategic plan. Your survey comments will be kept confidential. Only overall results will be shared with the public in a formal strategic plan.

Thank you for helping IOA in this process!

TO TAKE THE SURVEY VISIT

<http://bit.ly/2015IOA>

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