



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

FALL 2015

iowa organic news

IOWA ORGANIC DRAWS A BIG CROWD



Klaas Martens was the keynote speaker at the Iowa Organic Conference

The Iowa Organic Conference, which celebrated its 15th year, attracted a crowd of 327 people. The conference was held November 22 and 23 at University of Iowa's Memorial Union in Iowa City, Iowa. The keynote speaker was Klaas Martens, who along with his wife Mary-Howell, farms organic grains in up-state New York, and was the NOFA-NY Farmer of the Year.

The conference theme this year was: "Celebrating the Biodiversity of Organic Farming: People, Animals, Pollinators and Plants." A Local Foods Expo kicked off the conference with area farmers. Sarah Waring, with the Center for an Agricultural Economy, provided the keynote, "Using Your Resources Wisely: Examples of What Works in Vermont to Promote and Scale Up Local Food Purchasing."

The conference featured a full schedule of educational session on topics such as tips for increasing pollinators, organic poultry, local foods, dealing with pesticide drift, transitioning to organic, and others.

The Iowa Organic Association also held its annual meeting in conjunction with the conference.

Next year's Iowa Organic Conference is tentatively scheduled for November 12-13. ■

2016 PFI CONFERENCE TO BE HELD JANUARY 22-23

Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) will hold its annual conference on January 22-23 at Iowa State University's Scheman Building in Ames.

The conference will feature a keynote presentation by John Kempf, farmer and founder of Advancing Eco-Agriculture.

The conference also features a full slate of educational sessions on a range of topics, including small grains, cover crops, on-farm pollinator habitats, and high tunnel vegetable production, to name a few.

For more information visit www.practicalfarmers.org. ■

PRACTICAL FARMERS OF IOWA SEEKS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Practical Farmers of Iowa is looking for a full-time, collaborative, values driven, and visionary leader who is passionate about sustainable agriculture, and skilled at managing a complex, dynamic organization. The successful candidate will have a passion for improving the sustainability, profitability and ecological health of farms and farming systems. This individual will value the history and culture of Practical Farmers of Iowa, and work to guide the organization to meet the goals, values and vision of its membership. The Executive Director works with the Board of Directors to develop and achieve long-term goals and objectives. The Executive Director reports to the Board of Directors.

For more information, visit www.practicalfarmers.org. ■

NCR-SARE farmers grant program deadline is December 3

Farmer Rancher Grants are for farmers and ranchers who want to carry out Sustainable Agriculture research, demonstration, and education projects on their farms/ranches. Grant recipients have 24 months to complete their projects.

There are three types of competitive grants: 1. Individual grants (\$7,500 maximum), 2. Team of 2 grants for 2



farmers/ranchers from separate and distinct operations who are working together (\$15,000 maximum), 3. Group grants for 3 or more farmers/ranchers from separate and distinct operations who are working together (\$22,500 maximum).

To submit a proposal, visit <http://www.ciids.org/ncsare/fr>. ■

CALL FOR ORGANIC FARMERS TO COMPLETE NATIONAL ORGANIC SURVEY

Several organic farm groups, recognizing certified organic's growth and growing prominence in the marketplace, have discussed the need for a more effective and clear voice for organic farmers. We believe now is the time that farmers, who are at the core of this success, establish a focused and strong voice.

Please complete this short 10 minute survey to tell us your thoughts about a national effort to organize organic farmers and identify issues important to you.

Contact Kate Mendenhall, 585-944-2503 for more information and how to be part of the larger discussion. Paper surveys are available to those without access to the web. The survey will remain open through November.

Organic farms on the rise in Iowa

In response to a growing demand for niche products, Iowa added 94 organic farms last year, bringing its total to 612.

The state is currently the tenth-largest organic producer in the US, and growers are expected to expand production in the coming years. Organic corn dominated, up 37% from 2008 with sales of \$27 million. Organic soybean sales were up 54%.

"[Iowa] is definitely playing a role in this sector of agriculture," said Ginger Harris, a statistician with the USDA. "People find it profitable being in organics, so Iowa pro-

ducers are meeting market demand."

Grocery stores often can't keep enough organic produce in stock, as farmers' markets and CSAs gobble up the bounty from growers.

"It's a really good market right now. I can sell everything I produce," said Dan Beougher, who farms 11 organic acres with his wife in Maxwell.

USDA reported that 14,093 organic farms across the country sold a total of \$5.5 billion in 2014.

(Source: *Des Moines Register*) ■

Sustainable Farm Partners invests in the future of Iowa's organic farming

Making the transition from conventional to organic farming can be a big leap, but Harn Soper will tell you—based on experience—that it is worth it in terms of better crops, soil, and financial returns. Soper, a member of a four-generation Iowa farming family, is so convinced of organic farming's value that he has launched a fund, Sustainable Farm Partners, LLC to increase organic farming in Iowa.

The aim is to raise money to buy conventional farms, find operators to farm the land organically, and then, after

10 years, sell the land, ideally back to the farmer who has been working it.

"The goal is to put the land in an organic easement to ensure it is farmed organically in perpetuity," Harn says.

Investors, which can include individuals, endowments, or even food manufacturers, will earn returns from revenue generated by organic crops, and land appreciation.

The fund's goal is to purchase 10,000-12,000 acres initially and with plans to eventually add 30,000 to 40,000 more. ■

research news



Clif Bar spearheads \$10 million investment to fund five endowed chairs focused on organic agricultural research

Partners with Organic Valley on the first chair at the University of Wisconsin-Madison



Clif Bar & Company and Organic Valley recently named the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) as the recipient of the nation's first endowed chair focused on plant breeding for organic crops. The endowment, to be funded in perpetuity with a \$1 million gift from the companies and matched by a \$1 million gift from UW graduates John and Tashia Morgridge, will fund research to develop crop varieties adapted to organic systems.

The UW-Madison *Clif Bar and Organic Valley Chair in Plant Breeding for Organic Agriculture* is

the first of five organic research chairs to be led by Clif Bar. The company is now working with other organizations to raise an estimated total of \$10 million by 2020 to fund chairs dedicated to organic plant breeding.

"Clif Bar's goal to raise an estimated \$10 million for five endowments is putting a deep stake in the ground on organic research and making claim that it is here to stay for generations to come," said Matthew Dillon, Clif Bar's director of agricultural policy & programs. ■

Organic agriculture more profitable for farmers

A comprehensive study finds organic agriculture is more profitable for farmers than conventional agriculture.

In spite of lower yields, the global study shows that the profit margins for organic agriculture were significantly greater than for conventional agriculture. The results show that there's room for organic agriculture to expand and, with its environmental benefits, to contribute a larger share in feeding the world sustainably. Organic agriculture currently accounts for only one percent of agricul-

ture globally.

The study, published in June in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, was authored by Washington State University scientists David Crowder and John Reganold.

The actual premiums paid to organic farmers ranged from 29 to 32 percent above conventional prices. Even with organic crop yields as much as 18 percent lower than conventional, the break-even point for organic agriculture was 5 to 7 percent. ■

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USDA STUDY FINDS CONVENTIONAL FARMERS COULD EARN HIGHER PROFITS BY TRANSITIONING TO ORGANIC

A recent study by the US Department of Agriculture found that organic crop production offers greater profit potential for conventional farmers who are willing to switch to organic.

The study found that certified organic crop acres more than doubled between 2002 and 2011, as acreage

increased from 1.3 million acres to over 3 million acres. A large part of the growth was in major field crops, particularly corn, soybeans, and wheat where certified organic production increased about 264,000 acres.

The study found a profit potential from organic farming that is primarily due to

the significant price premiums paid for organic crops.

The authors found that “additional economic costs of organic versus conventional production were more than offset, on average, by higher returns from organic systems for corn and soybeans, although not for wheat.”

While the study finds

greater profit potential with organic, it states that “adoption of the organic approach among US field crop producers remains extremely low.” Reasons cited include challenges with weed control and achieving higher yields and complexities with organic certification. ■

USDA ANNOUNCES \$21 MILLION IN ORGANIC RESEARCH AND EXTENSION FUNDING

The US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) recently announced more than \$21.3 million in grants for research and outreach projects that will help growers, producers, and processors improve their organic operations' success and ability to innovate.

“Research, education, and extension gives the organic

agriculture industry the opportunity to expand on best practices, implement more efficient techniques, and develop new approaches to distributing its products,” said Sonny Ramaswamy, NIFA director. “With today's grants, USDA's university partners are better positioned to help ensure the continued success of organic crops and growers.”

The grants include \$17.5 mil-

lion for projects submitted to NIFA's Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI). This program focuses on helping producers and processors who have already adopted organic practices to grow and market high quality organic agricultural products. OREI's priorities include biological, physical, and social sciences, with an emphasis on research and outreach that

assist farmers and ranchers with whole farm planning.

Sixteen universities received OREI grants. The Organic Transitions Program (ORG) awards totaled nearly \$3.8 million for researchers to advancing science for practical application in organic agriculture production. Iowa State University was one of several universities receiving ORG grants. ■



ORGANIC DIET LOWERS PESTICIDE LEVELS IN CHILDREN



Switching from non-organic to organic foods significantly lowers pesticide accumulation, new research finds.

Forty Mexican-American children, 3-6 years old, took part in a study in California. Half live in an urban neighborhood (Oakland) and the other half live in the agricultural Salinas Valley. The children were measured for metabolites from two neurotoxic pesticides,

before and after switching to an organic diet.

The concentrations of metabolites of two organophosphates dropped by 40% and 49%. Levels of 2,4-D herbicide—known to be a possible carcinogen—dropped by 25% in both groups.

Organic crops don't contain GMOs and are free of the pesticides used to grow GM crops; they also contribute lower levels of cadmium and

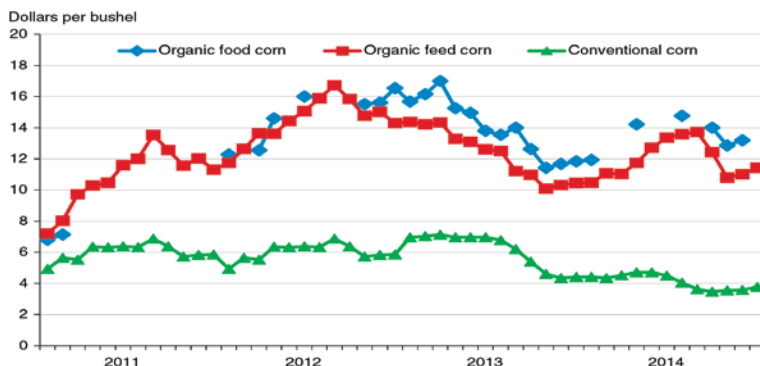
nitrogen compounds than non-organics, and higher levels of antioxidants.

The study was done by University of California, Berkeley, University of Maryland and Emory University researchers, led by Dr. Asa Bradman. It was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*.

(Source: *Environmental Working Group*) ■

Market News

Organic food and feed, and conventional corn prices, 2011-14



Source: Organic prices from USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service; conventional prices from USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Prices for organic food and feed corn are substantially higher than for conventional corn.

Organic Farm Sales Reached \$5.5 Billion in 2014

Sales of products from US organic farms topped \$5.5 billion in 2014, a 72% increase from 2008, according to a recent report from the US Department of Agriculture.

Farmer surveys conducted by the USDA found that milk was the leading organic commodity in 2014 with sales of \$1.1 billion. Sales of organic eggs were \$420 million.

While demand for organic foods continues to grow, the supply of organic crops and ingredients is not sufficient to meet the demand.

The number of certified organic farms in the US was 14,093 in 2014, which was down from 14,540. However, the decline came from farms that are exempt from organic certification because they earn less than \$5,000

annually from organic sales.

The number of larger farms that are certified as organic rose 15% from 2008 to 12,634, according to the USDA.

The USDA said that 39% of the organic farmers surveyed said they planned to increase production in the next five years.

(Source: Reuters) ■



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Supply challenges accompany growth in organic

Organic food sales are rising by double digits each year, reaching a record \$36 billion in 2014. That growth has enabled people like Andrew and Melissa Dunham to become full-time farmers—they're selling everything they grow on their 80-acre farm near Des Moines to Whole Foods, co-ops and farmers' markets.

But the industry is experiencing a supply crunch as retail grocers, restaurants and livestock producers seek to meet a grow-

ing demand for organic foods and feed. Lack of farmland in some regions, coupled with the three-year time frame required to transition to organic, are exacerbating the challenge.

Laura Batcha of the Organic Trade Association is concerned that the industry might not be able to fill the demand, and lose some shoppers.

Although organic growers like Bob Quinn in Montana are getting paid four to five

times more for wheat than conventional farmers, he wonders if the trend is sustainable—his grain customers might go out of business from having to price their products too high.

"We can see ever-faster growth if the supply was greater and the price was a little lower, so that the final cost wasn't such a shock."

(Source: *The Des Moines Register*) ■



General Mills increasing commitment to organic farming, food

General Mills aims to grow its organic food brands and is investing in initiatives to increase organic farming land.

Speaking at the recent US Soy Global Trade Exchange/Midwest Specialty Grains Conference, General Mills representative Beth Robertson-Martin said her company is the third largest manufacturer of natural and organic products.

General Mills' organic and natural food brands include Small Planet Foods, Larabar, Mountain High, Food Should Taste Good, Immaculate Baking, and Annie's Homegrown. Those brands generate \$600 million in sales per year, and General Mills aims to increase that to \$1 billion by 2020.

Demand for organic foods is outstripping the supply of organic grains and ingredients. Robertson-Martin said General Mills wants to "push the industry forward to expand organic acreage."

General Mills is involved in several initiatives to address the supply challenge. The company is a member of the US Organic Grain Collaboration, to increase organic acreage in the US. General Mills also supports the Montana-based Vilicus Farms' apprenticeship program to train new organic farmers. The company is also investing 20% of its agriculture research funding in organic agriculture and operates a 60-acre organic farm in Washington's Skagit Valley. ■

organic

USDA launches weekly price reports for non-GMO corn

New reports could help increase market for non-GMO grains, encourage farmers to switch to organic

Recognizing the growing market for non-GMO foods, the US Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) recently launched a weekly price report for non-GMO commodities.

"A growing number of consumers and commercial buyers are interested in purchasing and paying a premium for products with specific qualities, such as non-GMO," says Sam Jones-Ellard, AMS

public affairs specialist.

According to an article in *AgriPulse*, the non-GMO price reports could help increase the market for non-GMO grains and encourage farmers to transition to organic.

The report focuses on non-GMO corn and soybeans for food and feed use; there is an emerging market for non-GMO animal feed.

The new report includes two price types

– future delivery contract prices paid to the producer by the elevator, and spot market cash prices paid to producers by the elevator.

AMS also has price reports for organic grain and feedstuffs and organic poultry and eggs. On the AMS website, producers may create a custom report that includes organic pricing.

For more information, visit www.ams.usda.gov/market-news/. ■

GMO Contamination



USDA survey: Organic farmers lost \$6.1 million due to GMO contamination

Results of a US Department of Agriculture survey of organic farmers found that organic farmers suffered losses of \$6.1 million due to contamination of their crops by genetically modified crops from 2011 to 2014.

A total of 92 organic farms suffered average losses of \$66,395 per farm during those years. This is an astounding increase of more than 7000% from 2006

to 2011 when 13 farms reported losses of \$78,974.

The greatest losses, \$3.85 million, occurred in Texas on three farms. The majority of the other losses occurred in Midwestern states where most GM corn and soybeans are grown. These include 16 farms in Illinois (\$621,506), 10 farms in Nebraska (362,950), 9 farms in Ohio (\$119,816) ■





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