

# Organic

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This newsletter is published by the Organic Trade Association, the North American trade association committed to the promotion of organic products in the marketplace, and the protection of the integrity of organic standards. Its membership includes more than 1,700 producers, processors, distributors and retailers of organic foods, fibers, farm and garden supplies, and health and beauty products. OTA is your leading resource for information about this industry.

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## OTA's efforts on the Farm Bill pay off



By Holly Givens

OTA's hard work over the past four years on the U.S. Farm Bill paid off as the U.S. Congress passed a bill quintupling the amount of mandatory spending on organic programs, and authorized additional spending if appropriated. In its efforts, OTA created a comprehensive framework focused on four priorities based on input from members, and had success at each:

- fostering transition to organic agriculture and trade
- eliminating hurdles to organic agriculture and trade
- initiating and funding organic agriculture and economic research, and
- maintaining and enhancing current agency programs.

"OTA was fortunate to have a hard-working team in D.C. working with me to help deliver this bill," said

Caren Wilcox, OTA's former executive director. "OTA led the coalition of the organic community fighting for organic farmers, and OTA was instrumental in convening the influential panel that testified at the first organic hearing in Congressional history." She added, "After all those years of effort, including three sets of testimony before Congress, OTA and its members have much to celebrate."

Two of the biggest winners were research and the certification cost share programs. For instance, research programs garnered \$78 million over the life of the bill. This will allow the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to help prove the benefits of organic agriculture. It will provide for new research in improving conservation and environmental outcomes of organic farming and in developing new and improved seed varieties especially for organic farming. The increased spending on research will also provide farmers with more technical support for converting to organic production.

Additional authorizations for the National Organic Program (NOP) also represent a big gain. In addition to overseeing all enforcement of organic standards in the United States, NOP handles requests concerning materials, and must keep up with a growing industry and its emerging sectors. Because all food and beverage products sold as organic in the United States must meet or exceed U.S. organic regulations and many products come from outside the country, NOP must also work internationally to accredit certification organizations around the world. By 2011, funding for this program could triple, helping the program keep pace with increasing interest in organic products. By 2012, the authorized funding for this program will be \$11 million. These additional funds for this program must go through the appropriations process, but the language authorizing these sums is quite clear in suggesting to the Appropriations Committee that NOP should get more funding to fulfill its mission.

### Offsetting costs

Certification costs can discourage farmers from shifting to organic agriculture. The 2008 Farm Bill provides \$22 million over five years to help cover the costs of certification for farmers and handlers. Farms can receive 75 percent of certification costs, up to \$750, to help defray certification costs.

### Total mandatory spending on organic agriculture: 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills

TOPIC	2002	2008
Certification cost share programs	\$5 million	\$29.5 million
Research	\$15 million	\$78 million
Production and market data collection	No specific funding for organic	\$5 million
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$20 million</b>	<b>\$112.5</b>

Note: In 2000, separate from the Farm Bill process, there was an additional \$5 million for certification cost share for farms in specific states. In addition to mandatory funding, the 2008 Farm Bill also authorized funds that might be allocated during the appropriation process. This chart focuses only on mandatory spending.

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“This extremely popular program has been one of the success stories in the previous Farm Bill. OTA asked for this program to be re-funded, and I'm pleased to say that it was,” said Tom Hutcheson, OTA's Regulatory & Policy Manager.

Previously, this funding was administered by the states, so new and existing organic farms interested in applying are encouraged to contact their state's Department of Agriculture to ask about the program.

In addition to the \$22 million available nationally to producers and handlers, the Farm Bill increases funding for the Agricultural Management Assistance Program to \$15 million for each of fiscal years 2008 through 2012. Ten percent of these funds (\$1.5 million) is designated for certification cost share assistance for organic **producers only** in the following states: Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, Maine, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia and Wyoming.

### Equitable crop insurance

Organic farmers have been at a disadvantage in crop insurance programs in two ways. First, organic farmers have paid higher premiums to participate. Second, organic farmers' insurance claims have been paid out based on the value of non-organic crops, not for the higher-value organic crops.

The 2008 Farm Bill provides hope in this area. Congress mandated a review of the underwriting risk and loss history of organic farms to see if there is a variation between organic farms and non-organic farms. Then, the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation will review the data and work to eliminate any unfair premium surcharges that organic farmers currently pay. Furthermore, organic farmers will be given an option in their insurance policies to choose if they want to be reimbursed based on the actual wholesale or retail prices they receive.

### Assistance switching

The 2008 Farm Bill expands the purpose of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to include conservation practices related to organic production. This changes a patchwork of state level conservation policies about how organic production fits in with this program. Now, just changing to organic production is recognized nationally as being part of the effort to conserve natural resources.

### Organic data collection

So far, data collection of organic farm products has been very limited in scope. The 2008 Farm Bill provides \$5 million in mandatory funding, plus up to \$5 million per year in appropriations for USDA to collect and distribute price reports for organic agricultural products, to conduct surveys and publish reports relating to organic production, including consumer purchasing patterns, and to provide statistical analysis on organic agriculture products.

### Learn about Farm Bill implementation

The Organic Trade Association (OTA) and Organic Agriculture and Products Education Institute, in partnership with NCAT (home of ATTRA), Organic Farming Research Foundation and Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service, will present a one-day educational event, “Growing U.S. Organic Agriculture: Accessing the 2008 Farm Bill,” on Nov. 12 in Indianapolis, IN, at the campus of Indiana University and Purdue University. Farmers, state departments of agriculture, Extension Service agents, certifiers, farm associations, land grant colleges, and others will come together to learn how to access the new organic provisions in the 2008 Farm Bill, including crop insurance, data collection, research funding, certification cost share, funding for the National Organic Program, and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. More information will be available soon at [www.ota.com](http://www.ota.com), or contact Marissa Potter ([mpotter@ota.com](mailto:mpotter@ota.com)).

Having this type of data available to organic farm businesses, as it has been available to non-organic farm businesses, will enable organic farmers to make better decisions about what they grow, how much the market might need, and what price to expect.

Taken all together, the 2008 Farm Bill provisions for organic agriculture that OTA has encouraged strengthen NOP, encourage farmers to choose organic methods, and provide organic farm businesses better access to programs that will help them run their businesses more effectively.

For an expanded version of this article, go to [http://www.ota.com/pp/legislation/farbillOR\\_Summer08.html](http://www.ota.com/pp/legislation/farbillOR_Summer08.html). ❖

## Milk labeling challenged

The Organic Trade Association (OTA) on July 25 filed a motion for a summary judgment in its case challenging Ohio's 'emergency' dairy labeling rule. On June 30, OTA had filed suit against Ohio's Director of Agriculture Robert J. Boggs concerning Ohio's rule restricting statements about production methods (such as “produced without the use of synthetic growth hormones”) on dairy products.

“Ohio's rule puts the organic standards at risk and denies consumers their rights to know how their food is grown,” according to David Gagnon, OTA's Interim Executive Director.

OTA's summary judgment motion argues that consumers have a right to know, and want to know, about the products they purchase, and organic farmers and processors have a right to communicate with consumers regarding federally regulated organic production practices. The International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA) also filed a similar summary judgment motion.

Joining OTA and IDFA in their opposition to Ohio's rule is The Center for Food Safety, which has filed an amicus brief. For further details, go to [www.ota.com/news/breaking/ohiodairy.html](http://www.ota.com/news/breaking/ohiodairy.html). ❖

# A World of News

## Organic News

- Cook County Jail's garden project in Chicago, IL, has supplied over 500 tons of fresh produce to area homeless shelters and non-profit organizations since its inception. Increasingly, efforts are being made to incorporate organic management practices, with plans to supply local restaurants with organic produce. The project is seeking funding to build a three-season greenhouse.
- The Rodale Institute has launched [www.hero-farmers.org](http://www.hero-farmers.org) to offer practical steps to fight global warming in the way people shop, eat, garden, and support farmers.
- Dining halls at the University of Colorado in Boulder have begun adding local organic produce and other organic products.
- Dining services at the University of Arizona are continuing to add organic products, including meat.
- Good Stuff Eatery at Pennsylvania Avenue and 3rd Street SE on Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C., offers organic ingredients.
- Organic to Go has opened a freestanding airport café at San Diego International Airport.
- Wyndham Hotels and Resorts now serve organic and Fair Trade Certified™ Starbucks® coffees in hotel restaurants, cafés, bars, and through room service.
- Pizza Hut, Inc., is introducing pizza made with organic and all-natural ingredients.
- Grocery chain Supervalu, Inc., has launched a Wild Harvest organic and natural private label brand nationwide priced at a 15 percent discount to branded organic and natural products.
- United Grocers has introduced Natural Directions™, a line of natural and organic food products to be sold in independent grocery stores throughout the western United States.
- The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets granted Alfred State College \$29,320 for a collaboration between the College's dining services and local farmers. The Center for Organic and Sustainable Agriculture will provide technical, agricultural and marketing support to farmers.
- University of New Hampshire researchers have received a three-year \$380,000 grant to study the university's organic research dairy as a sustainable closed agro-ecosystem.
- Aurora Organic Dairy and Colorado State University are collaborating in a multi-year master research agreement involving several of the University's colleges, including the College of Agricultural Sciences and the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.
- New York State has established the New York State Organic Advisory Taste Force to help organic farmers meet increased consumer demand for organic products.
- The University of Minnesota plans to expand resources for

organic farming, including a faculty position at the College of Food Agricultural and Natural Resource Science, two or more graduate assistantships focused on organic research, and a faculty position at the Southwest Research and Outreach Center.

- According to The Natural Marketing Institute, consumers are increasingly incorporating organic into their lifestyles, with total household penetration across six product categories rising from 57 percent in 2006 to 59 percent in 2007. Also, the number of core users has increased from 16 percent in 2006 to 18 percent in 2007.

## Research updates

- **Carbon sequestering:** Research at The Rodale Institute has shown that organic practices can remove about 7,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from the air and sequester it in an acre of farmland per year. If all 434 million acres of U.S. cropland were converted to organic practices, it would be the equivalent of eliminating 217 million cars.
- **Protecting soil and wildlife:** A four-year study by the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology found that organic agriculture protects soils and conserves wildlife.
- **Comparable yields:** Research conducted jointly by scientists at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the agricultural consulting firm AGSTAT published in the March-April 2008 *Agronomy Journal* showed that organic crop rotations had similar yields to their conventional counterparts. The research compared six cropping systems ranging from diverse organic systems to conventional systems. Results found that forage crops produced using organic methods yielded as much or more dry matter as their conventional counterparts "with quality sufficient to produce as much milk as conventional systems."
- **More nutrients:** A report entitled "New Evidence Confirms the Nutritional Superiority of Plant-Based Organic Foods," jointly produced by The Organic Center and professors from the University of Florida Department of Horticulture and Washington State University, provides evidence that organic foods contains, on average, 25 percent higher concentration of 11 nutrients than their conventional counterparts. The report was based on estimated differences in nutrient levels across 236 comparisons of organically and conventionally grown foods.
- **Ecological virtues:** A study published in the March 6 online edition of *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* showed that fertilizing apple trees with synthetic chemicals produced

## Quote of Note

"Organic principles and practices improve world food systems and help mitigate climate change."

—Katherine DiMatteo, President, International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) World Board

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Farm Bill 2008  
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more adverse environmental effects than feeding them with organic manure or alfalfa.

- **Pasture-fed cows:** Organic cows grazing on fresh pasture produce milk with higher levels of antioxidants and beneficial fatty acids such as conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) and omega-three fatty acids, according to research findings from Newcastle University published online in the *Journal of Science of Food and Agriculture*. The study involved 25 farms across the United Kingdom.

### Environmental updates

- **Fertilizer run-off:** Research performed at Oak Ridge National Laboratory's Environmental Sciences Division confirms that hypoxia, killing thousands of fish, shrimp, and shellfish in the Gulf of Mexico each year, is linked to fertilizer run-off from agricultural activities in the Mississippi basin.
- **Deformed tadpoles:** According to research performed by Tufts University biologists, tadpoles experienced negative physiological changes, including deformed hearts and malfunctioning kidneys and digestive systems, in early phases of their lives when they were exposed to the herbicide atrazine.
- **Pesticides and Parkinson's:** Recent findings published in the *BMC Neurology Journal* found that of 600 people studied, those exposed to pesticides had a 1.6 times greater risk of developing Parkinson's disease than those who were not.

- **Pesticide exposure during pregnancy:** A study published in the April 2008 issue of *Environmental Health Perspectives* found that the sons of women exposed at work to pesticides during pregnancy suffered impaired reproductive development.
- **Children at risk:** According to findings published in the April 2008 issue of *Environmental Health Perspectives*, children living in regions of intense agricultural activity in the United States face a higher risk of many types of childhood cancer. The risk was found to be highest among children living in counties having 60 percent or more of their total acreage dedicated to farming, with a link between cancer type and crop-specific pesticides.
- **Concerns about antimicrobials:** In a draft opinion released in April 2008, the European Food Safety Authority expressed concerns about the growing use of antimicrobial agents in food and cited the potentially negative impact of these agents on human resistance to bacteria and other microbes.
- **Persistence:** Research conducted at Lund University in Sweden found that genetically engineered crops can remain in the soil for ten years, in spite of efforts to eradicate them. Following up on trials conducted in 1995, in which an oilseed rape crop was genetically altered, the research found that plants spawned from the altered crops persisted ten years after the original trials.
- **Glyphosate-resistant:** Glyphosate-resistant johnsongrass has been found in both Arkansas and Mississippi. It is believed to have developed with the increased use of Roundup Ready crops. ❖