

## FRONT PIECE

### Respecting organic farmers and the land

As OTA's 20th anniversary year draws to a close, it is a good opportunity to refocus our sights on the benefits of organic agriculture and why it is important to encourage other farmers to use organic practices and more consumers to buy organic products.



In this issue of *The Organic Report*, various members of OTA and industry research organizations have given their thoughts on the prospects for the organic market and for OTA in the next 20 years. The prognosis seems favorable: increased sales although perhaps at a slower growth rate, more consumers choosing organic products, and the availability of organic products in every venue imaginable.

Elsewhere in this issue, there are news reports on studies showing environmental and health benefits of organic practices, and on the costs of continuing to "farm as usual."

For instance, findings recently published in the *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability* show conventional agricultural practices in the United States cost society somewhere between \$5.7 and \$16.7 billion each year for damages to water and soil sources, in greenhouse gas emissions, to wildlife and ecosystem biodiversity, and to human health. The study, conducted during 2002 and 2003 by Leopold Center scholar Erin Tegtmeier and former associate director Mike Duffy, concludes that agricultural policy should shift toward methods that lessen such external effects.

Organic practices do just that. As reported in the News and Trends section, a study funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found quite clearly that children who switch to eating organic foods from conventionally produced foods get dramatic and immediate reduced exposure to pesticides that are used on crops. At the same time, findings from British and French studies point to benefits organic farming practices bring to wildlife and biodiversity.

One of the challenges mentioned in our look to the future is the need for support for farmers to transition to organic production. OTA members, including Organic Valley Family of Farms, Stonyfield Farm, and California Certified Organic Farmers, already are offering ways to help encourage more farmers to choose organic as a way to farm.

It is going to take a concerted effort to get enough farmers to transition to organic to meet growing demand and to maintain the momentum. It will also take government buy-in that organic practices are an important part of the solution to some of the problems facing the agricultural community. And that is why OTA intends to press for provisions within the 2007 Farm Bill that will encourage and support organic agriculture.

It all comes down to showing the same respect for organic farming that organic farmers show to their land. The outcome? More farms using organic practices means more environmental and public health benefits for everyone.

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