




I S S U E

INFORMATION FLIER – A PUBLICATION OF THE ORGANIC TRADE ASSOCIATION

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September is Organic Harvest Month™! Let's celebrate organic!

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 1,100 producers, processors, distributors and retailers of organic foods, fibers, farm and garden supplies, and health and beauty products. The OTA is your leading resource for information about this industry.

PHONE:
(413) 774-7511

FAX:
(413) 774-6432

E-MAIL:
info@ota.com

WEB SITE:
www.ota.com

OR WRITE:
P.O. Box 547
Greenfield, MA
01302



There are many reasons to celebrate organic agriculture during September, designated as Organic Harvest Month™ by the Organic Trade Association.

In fact, recent research findings and studies confirm there are numerous benefits linked to organic agriculture.

Findings from The Rodale Institute's long-term Farming Systems Trial™, for instance, have demonstrated that organic methods can be as efficient, economical and financially competitive as conventional methods, and better for the soil and environment.

Funded by The Rodale Institute in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, this 12-acre experiment compares highly productive, intensive corn/soybean systems under conventional and organic management. After a four-year transitional period, crops grown under organic systems yielded as well as, and sometimes better than, those grown conventionally did. In years of drought, organic systems actually out-produced conventional systems.

"Organically managed soils achieve better physical structure. Soils in the organic systems gradually became looser and more porous, and absorbed and held water better than conventionally managed soils," Cass Petersen, Laurie E. Drinkwater and Peggy Wagoner wrote in a report

documenting findings during the first 15 years of the trial.

These improvements in soil quality directly affected yields, helping the organic systems maintain high production even in drought years. They also enabled the organically managed soils to perform their broader ecosystem role more effectively.

"Probably the strongest environmental benefit [of organics] is in building soil and improving soil quality. The United States, and the rest of the world, is losing topsoil, and topsoil is irreplaceable," according to Molly Anderson, acting director of the Tufts Institute for the Environment, in an Oct. 5, 1999, article by Lawrence Lindner in *The Washington Post*. Anderson described letting topsoil erode as akin to "taking out \$100 bills from a bank account, standing on a tall building, and letting them blow away in the wind."

Another benefit of organic farming is protection of the water supply. Because organic farmers don't use toxic and persistent chemicals that are found in many pesticides, there is no runoff of such toxins, and nearby water remains cleaner.

Minimizing water damage should be a priority. "The Quality of Our Nation's Waters — Nutrients and Pesticides," a May 1999 U.S. Geo-

logical Survey report, examined water quality in 20 of the largest and most important river basins in the United States. Researchers found 83 pesticides and breakdown products in water and 32 pesticides in fish or streambed sediment. More than one half of the streams sampled had concentrations of at least one pesticide that exceeded a guideline for protecting aquatic life. Some of the most frequently detected pesticides are suspected endocrine disruptors that may affect reproduction or development of aquatic organisms or wildlife by interfering with natural hormones.

Some of the highest concentrations of nitrogen and herbicides, including those most heavily used (atrazine, metolachlor, alachlor and cyanazine) were detected in samples collected from streams and shallow ground water in agricultural areas. Some of the highest concentrations of phosphorus and insecticides (including diazinon, carbaryl and malathion) were found in urban streams. Of the urban streams studied, nearly every one had concentrations of insecticides that exceed guidelines for protecting aquatic life.

In the Rodale study, meanwhile, organic soils had reduced levels of nitrate leaching compared to the conventional soils, and were more effective as a carbon sink.

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Ask Us About Organic!



By Kathleen Merrigan,
Recipient, 2000 OTA Organic
Leadership Award

The Organic Trade Association has selected Kathleen Merrigan, administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service, as the recipient of its 2000 Organic Leadership Award. OTA asked Merrigan to answer the following question for this edition of *What's News in Organic*:

Q: How do you anticipate USDA's regulations for natural organic standards will affect the growth of the U.S. organic industry?

A: In the short term, I expect that implementation of the National Organic Program will create some hardships. For example, an unknown number of farmers and processors who currently use the term organic are not certified. When certification becomes mandatory, the expected influx of new clients may stress our certification capacity, and we may lose market participants who don't want to bother with the bureaucracy and costs of certification. But in the long run, the National Organic Program will facilitate growth in the market. Consumers will enjoy greater assurances about organic products, and we will have a solid mechanism in place for the resolution of international trade disputes. ❖

If you have a question about any aspect of the organic industry, please call the Organic Trade Association's headquarters, (413) 774-7511.

September is Organic Harvest Month™

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Nitrate leaching from general agricultural production is a concern because it can affect water quality. Damage caused by the over-use of chemical fertilizers has been linked to the oxygen-starved "Dead Zone" in the Gulf of Mexico — an area the size of New Jersey. The Dead Zone is an area that forms because of the heavy flow of nitrogen and other nutrients down the Mississippi River.

Looking for ways to repair the damage that farm runoff has caused to the Gulf of Mexico, government scientists are considering recommendations to curtail fertilizer use and idle cropland. Up to two-thirds of nitrogen applied through synthetic fertilizer leaches into ground water, contaminating reservoirs, rivers, drinking water and aquatic ecosystems. The cost in human terms is high — the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has determined that excessive levels of nitrate in drinking water have caused severe illness and sometimes death in infants under six months of age.

Meanwhile, organic farming techniques, such as the use of cover crops, crop rotations, and composted organic manure as fertilizer, can reduce the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere, according to a news brief in the February 2000 issue of *The Green Guide*. "By returning organic matter to the soil, such methods in the United States can keep up to 200 million tons of CO₂ per year out of the atmosphere,"

Rattan Lal, professor of soil science at Ohio State University is quoted as saying.

Organic farming also benefits the environment in other ways, according to "The Biodiversity Benefits of Organic Farming," a May 2000 report from

The Soil Association of the United Kingdom. Reviewing the findings of nine biodiversity studies comparing organic farming and conventional farming systems in the UK lowlands, this report found that with organic farming:

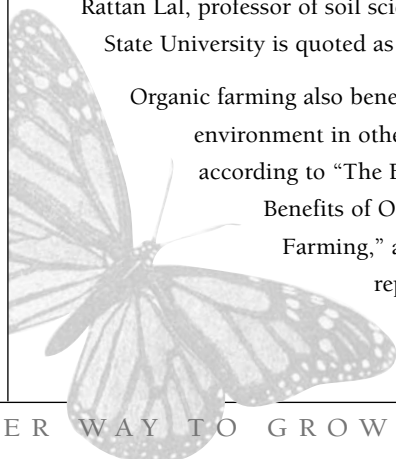
- ~ There are five times as many wild plants in arable fields, 57 per cent more species, and several rare and declining wild arable species found only on the organic farms.
- ~ There are 25 percent more birds at the field edge, 44 percent more in-field in autumn and winter, and 2.2 times as many breeding skylarks and higher skylark breeding rates.
- ~ There are 1.6 times as many of the invertebrate arthropods that make up bird food, three times as many non-pest butterflies in the crop areas, one to five times as many spider numbers, and one to two times as many spider species.
- ~ There is a significant decrease in aphid numbers.
- ~ The highest increases in wildlife were found in the cropped areas of the fields.

"The future will need people who understand that sustainable development is not merely about a series of technical fixes, about re-designing humanity or re-engineering Nature in an extension of globalized industrialization — but about a re-connection with Nature and a profound understanding of the concepts of care that underpin long-term stewardship," The Prince of Wales, said in a May 17, 2000, speech broadcast by the BBC.

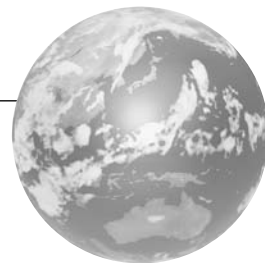
When consumers choose organic products, they are choosing:

- ~ living oceans and cleaner waters
- ~ more flowers, birds and butterflies
- ~ healthier soils

They're voting for a more vibrant planet. ❖



A World of News



OTA news briefs

- The Organic Trade Association has submitted comments to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) concerning proposed USDA draft oversight guidelines for commodity board research and promotion programs. OTA has asked that the guidelines be amended to provide “fair and equitable” support for all production methodologies for all commodities.
- After prodding by OTA and USDA officials, Cotton Incorporated’s Board of Directors has overturned its former policy and agreed to permit use of the “Seal of Cotton” and its associated trademarks on upland cotton fabrics and products marketed as organic. However, even with the change, there still may be hurdles for organic cotton. Part of the new criteria for eligibility states: “the prospective licensee must not, either individually or as part of a collective effort, publicly denigrate, criticize, or otherwise negatively comment about cotton, cotton products, or cotton production systems.”
- Sept. 21 is Organic Day in conjunction with Natural Products Expo East in Baltimore. OTA will hold its annual Organic Industry Dinner that evening at the 1884 Baldwin Roundhouse at the B&O Railroad Museum. At the dinner, OTA will present its 2000 Organic Leadership Award to Kathleen Merrigan.
- OTA will hold its premier conference and trade show, “All Things Organic,” May 17-19, 2001, in Austin, TX.
- Cotton Incorporated has approved \$5,000 funding for an OTA project to compile statistics on domestic and international acreage in organic cotton production.
- USDA’s Foreign Agriculture Service has approved a \$50,000 Market Access Program grant to continue OTA’s work to promote U.S. organic products for the export market.

International briefs

- The Falkland Islands is slated to begin exporting certified organic meat products by the end of 2000.
- The supermarket chain Iceland, one of Britain’s largest,

will offer organic foods at no extra cost to consumers. Iceland said it would buy almost 40 percent of the world’s organic vegetables in a move to replace conventionally grown produce in its frozen food.

- Price, quality and visual appearance are strong drivers in the overall decision by Northern European consumers to purchase fresh produce, according to a briefing by Promar International. Other issues affecting purchasing decisions include pesticide use, child labor, ethical trade, packaging costs, the use of genetic modification techniques, and the overall way in which produce is grown and transported.

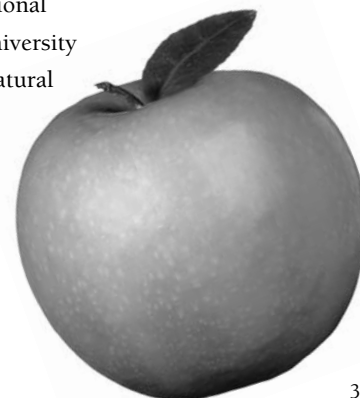
Environmental briefs

- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in June announced plans to phase out home and garden uses for the widely used organophosphate insecticide chlorpyrifos. Over 11 million pounds of chlorpyrifos are applied annually in home and garden use. EPA will continue to allow most current uses of the chemical in agriculture and various non-crop, nonresidential uses, such as golf courses and greenhouses and for mosquito and fire ant control.
- Publishing an update to its 1999 report on food safety, the Consumers’ Union in May reiterated that pesticide residues in foods children eat every day often exceed safe levels. The update said an independent analysis of USDA’s 1998 tests on fruits and vegetables found high levels of pesticide residues on winter squash, peaches, apples, grapes, pears, green beans, spinach, strawberries, and cantaloupe. The Consumers’ Union urged consumers to consider buying organically grown varieties instead.
- Soybean plants genetically modified to resist glyphosate-based herbicide yield less than conventional soybeans, according to researchers at the University of Nebraska’s Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. The two-year study showed Roundup Ready™ ’99 soybeans yielded 52 bushels per acre — 6 percent less than the 55 bushels produced by sister lines that weren’t genetically modified and 11 percent less than the 57.7 bushels produced by high-yielding conventional soybeans.

Quote of Note

“I happen to believe that if a fraction of the money currently being invested in developing genetically manipulated crops were applied to understanding and improving traditional systems of agriculture, which have stood the all-important test of time, the results would be remarkable.”

THE PRINCE OF WALES
May 17, 2000
broadcast on BBC Radio



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A World of News

Trends

- "Part of what makes the organic market unique is that the businesses and consumers it serves judge food not only by its taste, price and appearance, but also by the social and environmental benefits it represents," according to Carolyn Dimitri and Nessa J. Richmand in "Organic Foods Markets in Transition" published in April 2000 by the Henry A. Wallace Center for Agricultural & Environmental Policy.
- Almost one-third of the U.S. population currently buys organically grown food products. Another 60 percent does not, but would be willing to try them. Light organic buyers account for 29 percent of the U.S. population, while 3 percent are heavy organic buyers. Over half of all organic products are purchased at grocery stores and supermarkets. The most frequently purchased product groups are vegetables, fruits, and cereals/grains. Details: The Hartman Group, "The Organic Consumer Profile," January 2000.
- Of 1,000 shoppers polled in the Food Marketing Institute's *Trends in the United States: Consumer Attitudes & the Supermarket 2000* survey conducted by Research International USDA, 669 said their primary store provides natural or organic foods. Of these shoppers, 54 percent buy organic or natural foods at least once a month, 23 percent buy them at least once a week, 31 percent buy them at least one to three times a month, and 26 percent never buy organic or natural products. Meanwhile, 37 percent of the 1,000 shoppers said they have looked for and purchased products labeled as "organic," while 38 percent said they almost always or sometimes look at organic claims.✦

Questions about organic? Visit OTA at www.ota.com.