

## SUMMIT RECAP

### North American Summit on Organic Production, Marketing

OTA partnered with the National Association of State Organic Programs (NASOP) to host a successful three-day North American Summit on Organic Production and Marketing in May in conjunction with the All Things Organic™ Conference and Trade Show at McCormick Place in Chicago.

The Summit provided a collaborative forum for government and industry representatives from Canada, the United States and Mexico to establish contacts and create networks that will assist in the continued and improved movement of organic product throughout North America and the world.

“The fact that producers, certifiers, manufacturers and government officials were able to come together for this dialogue is very significant and truly reflects the growth in organic trade,” said Caren Wilcox, executive director for OTA. “Any opportunity to open channels of communication, be it between government and the private sector, or counterparts from different countries or states, can only be beneficial.”

Doug Crabtree, outgoing president of NSAOP agreed. “I was very encouraged by the sharing among representatives from the three countries. I see this as a very positive step in the progress of the organic movement,” Crabtree said.

Sessions included a look at organic agriculture and products from the U.S. government’s perspective, an overview of organic standards and products in Mexico, and an overview of Canada’s proposed national organic regulation, as well as perspectives on organic research to date, a look at emerging non-food products and standards for them, a round-table discussion of the public-private partnership, and efforts to advance

the organic marketplace from local to global trade.

Wilcox told attendees that OTA will explore future opportunities to work with NASOP and the governments of the three countries to continue the dialogue.



Mexican speaker Roberto Vazquez

#### A LOOK AT ORGANIC IN MEXICO

According to Mexican law, organic products are cultivated without using chemical fertilizers, insecticides or fungicides, using specific cultural practices and verified certification. Hectares under organic cultivation have grown nearly 36 percent since 1996, with the number of producers up nearly 23 percent and earnings up by nearly 28 percent, according to Roberto Ismael Vazquez Ochoa, analysis and relations director for the Undersecretary of Agriculture for SAGARPA, who spoke at the Summit.

Certified organic area in 2005 totaled 292,459 hectares, he said, with coffee representing 147,137 hectares. Certified organic producers in 2005 totaled 80,664, with most handling less than 30 hectares. Even the “big” producers have no more than 200 hectares

each, he noted. Indigenous people, who are not certified, grow most of the products raised organically for sale in farmers’ markets. Most certified organic products are aimed at export markets.

Mexican organic producers want an official Mexican seal for organic products, a national association for producers and marketers, and the development of a national market.

The organic law published last October promotes and regulates the criteria and requirements for organic production, establishes the best management practices in production and processing of organic foods, promotes criteria for social justice and sustainability, establishes minimum requirements for verification and certification, aims to identify organic products to maintain credibility, establishes lists of permitted, restricted or prohibited substances, and creates a support organization to provide advice to SAGARPA.

The law still must be implemented, he noted. Also, work is under way to set up a National Council for Organic Production and to set in place a Mexican seal of quality with an Organic seal.

In other talks, Larry Jacobs of Del Cabo/Jacobs Farm touched on some of the hurdles faced by Mexicans



Mark Bradley of the U.S. National Organic Program



wishing to export product to the United States, including transportation and labeling problems, while both Jacobs and Cara Smiley of Integrated Organic Services pointed out major challenges concerning organic seeds, with the U.S. National Organic Program requiring organic seeds to be untreated, and Mexico requiring treatment.

#### CANADIAN PARTICIPATION

The governments of Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta sent representatives to the Summit. In addition, the government of Canada sent staff from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and International Trade Canada. CFIA's Organic Task Force project manager Michel Saumur gave a presentation on the planned organic regulation.

#### PERSPECTIVES ON RESEARCH

Included as part of the Summit was a session on organic agriculture research.

One of the biggest hurdles has been a lack of investment in organic research by institutions and the government, but that is slowly changing, according to Jane Sooby of the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF). Currently compiling a third *State of the States* report for OFRF to measure organic research at land grant institutions, Sooby said Wyoming, Idaho and Oregon have agricultural experimental stations that focus on organic research, while Nebraska, Georgia, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania have new organic research programs, and Wisconsin and Michigan are strengthening their existing organic research programs. States with the strongest organic research programs include Ohio, Iowa, North Carolina, Minnesota, and West Virginia.

Ideally, Sooby said, research on organic agricultural systems should be conducted on certified organic land. It would also be useful to have studies that show how soil quality translates into crop quality, she added.

Also speaking, George Kuepper of the National Center for Appropriate Technology's ATTRA arm explained the role of ATTRA to review and synthesize research results and make it available to farmers. More information is becoming available, Kuepper said,

adding, "There are now state extension offices where you can get good information—something that should make us very optimistic."

#### LOOKING BEYOND FOOD

The state of standards for emerging organic products, such as pet foods and other non-food products, is confusing, David E. Carter of Natural Pet Nutrition told Summit attendees.

"The consumer is confused over what organic food means, let alone the other non-food products. And USDA is confused about whether these other products are covered under the scope of national organic standards," Carter said, joking that perhaps the Organic Foods Production Act should be changed to the "Organic Stuff Production and Handling Act."

Still, Carter reminded attendees, there is a process, albeit a long one, for adopting standards for these emerging products. Steps might include recommendations from a task force to NOSB, which could then develop its recommendations. The next step would be by the National Organic Program, which might consider a directive or a rule change.

Jaclyn Bowen of NSF International gave an update on the Organic Personal Care Joint Committee that is drafting language for a standard for organic personal care products. Work is well under way, she said, adding "We hope to have completed the standard by next January or February."

Grace Gershuny of GAIA Services discussed the challenges surround developing standards for organic aquaculture, while John Foster of Oregon Tilth talked about standards for fiber processing. ■



Above, Ray Green of the California Department of Food and Agriculture helped organize the Summit.

At left, speaker Michel Saumur of Canada talks with Danielle Schami of the Canadian Organic Initiative and Stephanie Wells, OTA's Canadian liaison.