

# Organic

I S S U E

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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 1,450 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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## Iowa farm survey

### Survey looks at impact of NOP on farmers

Availability of organic seed is one of the most pressing needs of organic farmers, according to a survey of Iowa farmers conducted by the Iowa State University Organic Program in collaboration with the Organic Trade Association.

In addition, nearly 40 percent (38.3 percent) of those responding said they plan on increasing their organic acres, with the majority saying they planned to increase their acreage by up to 25 percent.

Seeking to determine the impact of the National Organic Program (NOP) on farmers, the survey found that 37 percent of those responding to the poll felt NOP has helped in standardizing organic regulations. Some respondents also indicated that national organic standards have made it easier for beginning organic farmers and easier to find organic grains for livestock.

Farmers reported that in general, the NOP rule has not drastically changed organic certification requirements developed by private and state certification agencies from 1973 to 2000.

Launched in late 2003 with support from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, the survey was sent to over 400 farmers in Iowa; a total of 120 individual



Photo: Laura Sayre

**Kathleen Delate shows off an organic piglet.**

surveys were completed and returned. Kathleen Delate, assistant professor in the organic agriculture program at Iowa State University's Departments of Agronomy and Horticulture, oversaw the project.

The overall average of acres farmed, including organic and conventional acreage,

was 775 acres, although 51 percent of respondents farm 200 acres or less. The highest organic acreage reported was 1,050 acres. The majority of crops produced were corn, soybeans, oats, barley and wheat. Fruit grown included apples, grapes, raspberries, and strawberries, and farmers reported producing a wide variety of vegetables, particularly sweet corn, tomatoes, onions and garlic. Other farm products mentioned were alfalfa, nuts, flowers, herbs, poultry, eggs, and popcorn.

Asked what their biggest challenges were to getting their organic products to market, 37 percent of the farmers responding said "finding a market which will pay value-added costs of organic products." Interestingly, 31.5 percent chose "growing enough product to meet demand for organic products."

When asked specifically about

NOP, farmers said the new requirements for keeping logs concerning compost, developed in response to food safety concerns, and the necessity of obtaining organic seed were their key concerns. Some respondents reported the challenges of doing paperwork for organic certification, as well as marketing, competition, increased workloads, more difficult farm practices and enforcement.

The majority of respondents said they sell their organic crops to wholesale markets, which is typical for organic grain producers. Only 14.5 percent said they sell into direct markets, including farmers' markets, farm stands, and other sales. The lack of uniform standards among U.S., Japan and European certification agencies was mentioned as a barrier to international trade.

Expressing concern that the government program could be influenced by large corporations and special interest groups, respondents voiced strong support for maintaining high standards to ensure consumer confidence. Respondents also felt the following are important to improve the long-term economic sustainability of organic farms:

- More support of small farmers and less subsidization of large corporate farms

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## School vending machines are the latest frontier

With concern growing over childhood obesity, schools throughout the United States are exploring ways to offer healthier food choices to children during the school day. One result is that organic and natural foods are starting to show up in some school vending machines.

Instrumental in the movement have been the Rhode Island-based Kids First and Organic Trade Association member Stonyfield Farm.

A public/private partnership based in Providence dedicated to safeguarding the nutritional well being of Rhode Island's children, Kids First had been working for years on the concept of developing a healthy vending machine. During the 2002-2003 school year, it began working with three R.I. high schools to discuss ways of getting healthier products in their vending machines.

And that is when Stonyfield Farm stepped in to put the healthy vending program together. Stonyfield contacted partner organic companies and distributor United Natural Foods Inc., and put a plan together to reach out to students, parents, and the community to introduce healthy vending machines. Launched in October 2003 in the three R.I. high schools, the machines, which offer single-serve organic and natural products, are designed to handle products that need to be refrigerated as well as others that don't. Organic products featured include Stonyfield yogurt and smoothies, Silk® chocolate and vanilla soymilk, Organic Valley chocolate and white milk, and Organic Valley string cheese. Natural products include soy nuts, pita and soy chips, and other snacks.

"This project has generated a lot of interest among other schools. It also has created a discussion of what is organic and proven to adults that kids will buy healthier snacks," said Dorothy Hebert Brayley, executive director of Kid's First, Inc. She added that many adults have been amazed that the young people are choosing the products.

That, however, has not surprised her. Teens were on the team to help design the program and helped select products for inclusion as well.

The pilot project, however, has uncovered some challenges.

"For one, the machines have never been completely stocked because we have had distribution difficulties. We need to get distributors on board. Another hurdle is to make sure we can obtain nutritious organic products that are single serve and available at a price that is not prohibitive for students to pay," said Brayley.

Gary Hirshberg, president of Stonyfield Farm, is the force behind Stonyfield's involvement in the healthy vending machine project. Hirshberg, father of three children, became aware of questions about nutrition in schools through his children. And, when he learned of Kids First's efforts, he knew he could help make it happen.

"Gary believed that the vending machines would prove that kids will

eat healthy food if it tastes good and is available when they are hungry," according to Cathleen Toomey, Stonyfield's vice president of communications. Stonyfield asked other organic and natural companies to take part the project. Partner organizations all agreed to reduce their margins so that price would not be a barrier.

"It has been a big commitment by all of our partners to make it affordable," said Toomey, noting that Stonyfield not only takes a loss on its products but also covers the costs of providing the vending machines.

Stonyfield has since introduced the healthy vending program in schools in other parts of the country. Currently, it has healthy vending machines in six Massachusetts middle and high schools in the metro-Boston area, and six in California schools, as well as the three Rhode Island machines. This fall, three vending machines will be installed in Connecticut schools in a program in collaboration with Yale University. Plans are under way to roll out additional machines in New York and Miami.

"We currently have over 500 applications from schools in 36 states that are interested in the vending machines," Toomey said. To make additional installations happen, however, will require partnerships with other non-profits like Kids First and being able to find organic companies that can provide single-serve items that meet nutritional requirements as healthy choices.

Other information about organic foods in schools and tips for eating organic are provided on OTA's consumer web site, *The O'Mama Report* ([www.theorganicreport.org](http://www.theorganicreport.org)). ❖



Photo courtesy Stonyfield Farm

### Iowa Farm Survey — Continued from Page 1

- More research dedicated to the harmful effects of genetically engineered crops
- More efforts to increase consumer awareness and demand for organic products
- Stricter standards for livestock housing
- Increasing cooperatives and creating viable cooperative structure
- Finding ways to reward producers more, such as via higher prices and contracted prices
- Making certification less complicated and expensive. ❖

# A World of News



## Organic news

- Final results from the *Fourth National Organic Farmers' Survey* conducted by the Organic Farming Research Foundation show more than half (54 percent) of those participating in the survey farm fewer than 50 certified organic acres, with another 25 percent reporting farming between 50 and 179 certified organic acres, and 21 percent reporting farming 180 certified organic acres or more ([www.ofrf.org](http://www.ofrf.org)).
- Chez Panisse owner Alice Waters has committed the Chez Panisse Foundation to raising nearly \$4 million over the next three years and additional money through 2014 to help reinvent school lunch at the Berkeley Unified School District in California
- A report, "Local & Organic: Bringing Maryland Organics from Farm to Table," from the Chesapeake Fields Institute ([www.chesapeakefields.com](http://www.chesapeakefields.com)) found that although many Maryland consumers want to buy locally grown organic food, few retail outlets make these products easy to find.
- The Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture in Pocantico Hills (Westchester County), NY, established by David Rockefeller as a nonprofit center, is now open. It includes an organic farm and the Blue Hill at Stone Barns restaurant and education center, where it serves freshly harvested, locally grown food and helps teach visitors about sustainable agriculture ([www.stonebarnscenter.org](http://www.stonebarnscenter.org)).

## Organic research

- Research by A. W. Chassy, Alyson Mitchell and colleagues at the University of California at Davis has found organic tomatoes had higher levels of secondary plant metabolites and higher levels of vitamin C than conventionally grown tomatoes. At the IFT annual meeting in July, researchers also reported higher levels of flavonoids in organic broccoli than conventionally grown broccoli.
- New research from The Rodale Institute® and funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has shown that by composting manure, farmers can significantly improve the quality of water entering the nation's watersheds. The report, *Water Agriculture and You*, demonstrates that compost provides optimum nutrient levels for crop growth while minimizing non-point nutrient pollution of ground and

surface waters

(<http://strauscom.com/rodale/>).

- The University of California at Davis is continuing its long-term study of sustainable farming practices at its Russell Ranch. In addition to the main plots at Russell Ranch, the project includes a 14-acre area for studies designed to refine management practices for successful use of conservation tillage and cover cropping.
- A study of organic cropping systems in southwestern Minnesota found net returns from four-year organic crop rotation, with and without organic premiums, were greater than or equal to those of a corn-soybean rotation using synthetic pesticides or chemical processed fertilizers [*Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, March 2004, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 35-46].
- The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program recently awarded a three-year grant of \$187,688 to researcher Molly Jahn at Cornell University to support a participatory approach to plant breeding that will bring together organic farmers, seed companies and public breeders. Northeast SARE also has earmarked \$126,956 for a three-year project by Ruth Hazzard at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst to achieve high-quality Brassica crops on diversified vegetable farms, including using organic production.

## Consumer news

- Sixty-six percent of U.S. consumers report they use organic products at least occasionally, according to The Hartman Group's report, *Organic Food & Beverage Trends 2004: Lifestyles, Language and Category Adoption*. That number is up from 55 percent in 2000 ([www.hartman-group.com](http://www.hartman-group.com)).
- Consumers from eight Midwestern U.S. states responded positively to ecolabels emphasizing freshness and local production in an Internet study conducted by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the Iowa State University Business Analysis Laboratory. The most influential ecolabel was

## Quote of Note

"I used to think that there was a connection between environmental health and public health. I no longer think that. They are one and the same."

—Tyron Hayes,  
Professor of  
Integrative Biology,  
University of  
California at Berkeley  
(*Pesticides and You*,  
Vol. 24, No. 2, 2004,  
Page 12).

To view this issue electronically, go to  
<http://www.ota.com/news/whatsnews.html>

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Photo courtesy Wende Elliott

Joe and Wende Elliott and their three children were among Iowa farmers OTA surveyed.  
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freshness-dated, according to Rich Pirog of the Leopold Center ([www.leopold.iastate.edu](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu)).

- More and more supermarkets are providing natural and organic foods in their stores and, in fact, remain the dominant outlet for these products, according to Food Marketing Institute's 2004 study, *Trends in the United States, Consumer Attitudes & the Supermarket*. About four in ten consumers consider organic claims at least occasionally when selecting a product to purchase for the first time, and four in ten indicated it is at least somewhat important for their primary grocery store to offer natural and organic products.
- Seven in ten Americans express some concerns about the health risks of pesticides, hormones, antibiotics and other chemicals used in food production, according to a national consumer opinion poll conducted by Roper Public Affairs on behalf of Organic Valley Family of Farms ([www.organicvalley.coop](http://www.organicvalley.coop)).

**Environmental News**

- Tadpoles exposed to the commonly used pesticide atrazine were more likely to die after 30 days of exposure to lower concentrations than after exposure to higher concentrations for the same time period, according to a study by Sara I. Storrs and Joseph M. Kiesecker of the Department of Biology at Pennsylvania State University published in the July issue of *Environmental Health Perspectives*.

- The July 2004 issue of *Environmental Health Perspectives* includes a guest editorial ("Fertilizers, Water Quality, and Human Health") and feature article ("Global Nitrogen Cycling out of Control") concerning the effects of overuse of nitrogen fertilizers in conventional agriculture.
- Restoring soil carbon levels should be a top priority globally, according to a viewpoint article in the June 10, 2004, issue of *Science*. Rattan Lal, author of the article and director of the carbon management and sequestration center at Ohio State University, said the amount of carbon that can be restored in agricultural soils will directly influence global food security and climate change. ❖

**OTA takes its messages to D.C.**

Members of the Organic Trade Association (OTA) will be in Washington, D.C., Oct. 14 to share information about organic agriculture and products with members of Congress at OTA's Sixth Annual Congressional Education Day.

Congressional Education Day provides an opportunity for OTA members to visit their U.S. Senator and Representative offices to talk about organic agriculture and to build important relationships with their elected officials and staff.

OTA will be encouraging members of Congress to become part of the Senate's informal organic working group or the Congressional Organic Caucus in the House of Representatives. In addition, OTA will provide current information about the growth of organic agriculture and an update about the National Organic Program.