



Organic

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Learning about organic on the farm

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.

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Looking for a way to experience where organic food and fiber come from and learn how they are grown? Visiting an organic farm is a great way to celebrate summer or Organic Harvest Month™ this September.

A variety of organic farms throughout the country encourage folks to visit. Some offer a special experience, such as a tomato tasting (think of it as a vegetable variation on wine tasting), a hike through a corn maze, a chance to pick-your-own fruit or berries, or a hayride and garden tour. Some may specifically provide an educational lesson, while others may just wish to show what farm life is all about.

The farm experience

“It is so much fun to watch three- and four-year-olds milk a goat,” says Linda Barry of Barry Farm Enterprises, an 80-acre farm located in Ohio halfway between Toledo and Dayton. Children from the local Head Start Program are among the visitors she and her husband Bill regularly welcome to their old-time farm featuring animals, gardens, woods and a pond as well as a cannery. They previously lived in a nearby city but chose to buy this farm.

“We wanted to show what life was like on the farm in the 1950s, and have children experience the

fun of being around farm animals and farm life,” said Linda. Animals include goats raised for milk and meat, cows, chickens, ducks, geese, a female turkey, guineas, and peacocks. The farm also features six acres of vegetables, fruits and berries raised organically. The onsite certified organic cannery produces jams, jellies, pickles, relishes and other canned items.

Sunnyside Farms in Washington, VA, also encourages visits. Previously, tours were quite informal. However, because of demand, it now provides formal tours at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Saturdays throughout the summer and into November. Established in 1720, Sunnyside Farm is among America's oldest working farms. Located on over 500 acres, the farm, owned by David and Maggie Cole, is nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains and is adjacent to Shenandoah National Park.

“Our tours are for all ages,” says Shannon Province, Sunnyside's sales and marketing representative. Tours consist of a hay wagon ride through the orchards and farm grounds. The farm produces over 200 varieties of fruits, vegetables, flowers, and herbs, as well as organic beef and eggs.

Also in Virginia, Patowmack Farm near Leesburg is a small farm of 40 acres with a view overlooking

the Potomac River. It is open to visitors Wednesdays through Sundays. Visitors can walk in the gardens and on the nature trail, swim in the creek, picnic in the meadow, and shop in the farm's little country store. A special feature started by owner Beverly Morton Billand is “Dinner in the Garden” — a five-course meal offered every other Friday and Saturday evening from the last week in April through the first week in November.

Provided under a tent in the gardens overlooking the Potomac, the dinners feature organic produce, fruit and herbs she grows on the farm. “These have been so successful that I am planning to expand in the future to provide dinner Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings and Sunday brunch every week during the season,” says Billand.

Sundance Farms in Charleston, UT, meanwhile, has self-guided tours open to the public Mondays through Saturdays, and guided tours at 10:30 a.m. every Tuesday and Friday. Owned by Robert Redford, the farm features three acres of organically grown herbs and flowers used to produce a bath and beauty line of soaps, oils, bath salts, dried wreaths, and flower arrangements.

Fresh flowers, herbs and vegetables from the farm often are featured at the Sundance Village resort nearby, according to Karen Nabe, sales coordinator for Sundance Farms.

Illustration: Richard DiMatteo

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The farm is an educational resource for schoolchildren, gardeners, and anyone wishing to visit. “We talk about the land and the area. There is a sense of appreciation for the local bounty and beauty,” says Nabe.

Educational offerings are an integral part of other organic operations geared for exploring and demonstrating organic agricultural practices. Examples include The Rodale Institute, the Horizon Organic Farm and Educational Center, and Clements Agricultural Research Institute.

The Rodale Institute

The Rodale Institute in Kutztown, PA, has a 300-acre experimental farm where it provides education and training, production, and research centered around organic food and regenerative farming practices. It offers a wide range of educational activities for all ages year-round, ranging from field trips for school children to workshops for farmers or organic gardeners.

Visitors can explore the farm and accompanying exhibits through guided tours, walking workshops, and self-guided tours.

“We try to help our visitors understand that there is a relationship between their personal health and the soil, and that is through the food they eat. And, it is not only the food you eat, but how the food you purchase is produced that is important,” says Jeff Moyer, farm manager, adding, “We want our visitors to realize that knowledge isn’t enough. They also need to take action. We encourage them to ask for organic food where they shop, join a group to support local organic farmers, and grow something, even if it is one tomato plant in a small flower pot on their window sill.”

Clements Agricultural Research Institute

The Clements Agricultural Research Institute (CARI) at the Iroquois Farm, adjacent to the St. Lawrence River in northern New York, focuses on organic research. The site also features a bed and breakfast and a restaurant and country store.

Mahlon Clements established an endowment for CARI because he wanted to preserve the farm, owned by his family since 1877, while promoting organic agricultural research. Current research focuses on organic crops that can be grown in the region, particularly soybeans.

“The Canadians grow soybeans on the other side of the river, and yet very few soybeans are grown here,” says Clements. Currently, CARI is testing eight soybean varieties.

The institute is beginning to collaborate on research with nearby universities as well. Meanwhile, school children come for seminars and tours, and visitors are welcome to take walking tours. CARI also holds an annual Celebration of the Earth. This year’s event is slated for the weekend of Aug. 17-19, when nearby Lisbon celebrates its 200th birthday.

Horizon Organic Farm and Education Center

The Horizon Organic Farm and Education Center is an 875-acre farm located outside Annapolis, MD. Visitors can explore the grounds as well as the exhibits. One barn, for instance, is filled with interactive exhibits showing what happens underground in the soil.

Morning tours are generally reserved for school and camp programs. After 1 p.m., tours are open to anyone. The focus is on organic farming and natural resource management. Horizon is entering into cooperative agreements

The following resources, mentioned in the feature article, are no way meant to be a comprehensive list.

To search for additional organic operations that may offer educational or farm-related activities, go to [The Organic Pages Online](http://www.ota.com) on the Organic Trade Association’s Web site (www.ota.com).

Some of the tours may charge a nominal fee.

Maryland

Horizon Organic Farm and Education Center
100 Dairy Lane, Gambrills
(410) 923-7600

New York

Clements Agricultural Research Institute at Iroquois Farm, near Ogdensburg
(315) 393-6252

Ohio

Barry Farm Enterprises, near Criddersville, a mile from Exit 118, I-75. Call ahead.
(419) 228-4640

Pennsylvania

The Rodale Institute Experimental Farm
611 Siegfriedale Rd., Kutztown
(610) 683-1400

Texas

Texas Organic Cotton Marketing Cooperative, Lubbock
(806) 748-8336

Utah

Sundance Farms
3303 W. 2400 St., Charleston
(435) 654-2721

Virginia

Patowmack Farm
42461 Lovettsville Rd., Lovettsville
(540) 822-9017

Sunnyside Farm
Washington (540) 675-2627.
Reservations suggested.

Organic news

Forty-three percent of the U.S. population reported using organic foods or beverages in the past year, according to The Natural Marketing Institute's Organic Consumer Trends Study released May 1. The study is based on over 2,000 consumer households.

Land grant agricultural research institutions are generally failing to serve organic farmers, according to the Organic Farming Research Foundation's (OFRF) report, State of The States: Organic Farming Systems Research at Land Grant Institutions 2000-2001

Organic orchards can be more profitable, produce tastier fruit at similar yields compared to conventional farming, and be better for the environment, according to study of apple farming published in the April 19 issue of Nature. John Reganold and colleagues at Washington State University in Pullman conducted the six-year study.

All Things Organic, the Organic Trade Association's first conference and trade show held May 17-19, 2001, in Austin, TX, drew more than 1,200 persons from 20 countries. Due to the response, OTA has scheduled its second conference and trade show for May 9-11, 2002, at the Austin Convention Center.

News from Canada

The Quebec Accreditation Board, delegated by the Canadian Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Products to control the "organic" designation in Quebec, has adopted new organic reference standards to take effect in 2002.

Certification agencies estimate there were 2,321 certified organic producers in Canada during 1999, up 20 percent from 1998, according to Canadian Organic Growers. The total number of organic farms still was only 0.8 percent of the total number of farms in Canada. (Source: COG, Eco-Farm & Garden Winter 2001).

Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister announced \$600,000 in federal funding to help Canadian organic food producers increase their share of the international marketplace. Canada's organic sector currently has \$1 billion a year in retail sales.

Environmental news

Farmers in the Philippines have voiced fears that GE rice seeds introduced by the government will displace indigenous rice seeds traditionally used by farmers.

Farmers in the Cordillera region reported that one GE variety requires more chemical fertilizers and pesticides than native varieties, and another GE variety resulted in decreased yield.

A study conducted by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation reports that the number of persons poisoned by drifting pesticides increased by 20 percent during 2000. Meanwhile, a National Cancer Institute researcher who matched pesticide data and medical records in 10 California agricultural counties reported that pregnant women living within nine miles of farms where pesticides are sprayed on fields may have increased risk of losing an unborn baby to birth defects. Source: National Coalition against the Misuse of Pesticides Technical Report Newsletter April 2001.

A report from the Pew Oceans Commission has found that polluted runoff from farms and cities went largely unabated or actually increased over the past 30 years. The report, "Marine Pollution in the United States: Significant Accomplishments, Future Challenges," notes that many of the nation's coastal environments exhibit symptoms of over-enrichment. The report is available at www.pewoceans.org.

Nearly all crops grown in industrialized countries are exposed to more nitrogen than they can use, according to "Toxic Fertility" written by Danielle Nierenberg and published in the March-April 2001 issue of WorldWatch. Too much nitrogen can throw the soil community out of balance and lead to algal blooms that suffocate other aquatic organisms.

Microbiologist Rustam Aminov and colleagues at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found that bacteria in the soil and groundwater beneath two swine farms where tetracycline has been used as a growth promoter seem to be acquiring tetracycline resistance genes from bacteria originating in pigs' gut. (Applied & Environmental Microbiology, Vol 67, p. 1494)

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 From a Jan. 17, 2001,
 New York Times
 article by
 Marian Burros.