

ORGANIC PRODUCTION IN OKLAHOMA

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

by George Kuepper

June 2007



Kerr Center for
Sustainable Agriculture
P.O. Box 588
Poteau, OK 74953
Phone: 918-647-9123
Fax: 918-647-8712
mailto:mailbox@kerrcenter.com
www.kerrcenter.com

WHAT IS ORGANIC PRODUCTION?

The USDA defines organic as a production system that responds to the site-specific conditions of farm, field, and region by integrating the cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity.¹

Organic crop production is done using few (if any) synthetic pesticides or conventional fertilizers. Organic livestock production requires 100% organic feed and is done without the use of antibiotics or synthetic hormones.

WHAT CROPS AND PRODUCTS CAN BE PRODUCED AND LABELED ORGANIC?

All crops and livestock can be raised and marketed organically. Any processed product made from organic agricultural ingredients can also be labeled as organic or indicate that it is made with organic ingredients, if it meets certain criteria for content, processing, and handling.

WHY IS THERE SO MUCH INTEREST IN ORGANIC PRODUCTION?

Organic producers can earn premiums for their products in the marketplace. At a time when prices for conventional crop and livestock products are unstable or declining, organic production appears more and more competitive financially. Furthermore, there is increased public and governmental support for farming practices and systems that are environmentally friendly.

WHAT ARE THE PROSPECTS FOR THE ORGANIC MARKETPLACE?

The organic marketplace has been expanding roughly 20% per year for well over a decade—a phenomenal rate of growth. While it is expected to slow, the rate of growth through 2010 is still projected at 10–14%. The fastest growing categories are organic meat, dairy, and condiments, though all basic food categories have expanded at double digit rates and are expected to continue growing.²

DOES OKLAHOMA HAVE ORGANIC ACREAGE? HOW MUCH?

There is measurable organic production in all 50 states. In 2005, Oklahoma had 36 certified farms with a total of 14,636 acres in crops, pasture and range. It ranks 37th among all states for the number of certified operations, and 28th with regard to organic acreage.³

ARE THERE UNIQUE CHALLENGES TO ORGANIC PRODUCTION IN OKLAHOMA AND THE SOUTH?

The high summer temperatures, humidity, and mild winters of southern states encourage some pest problems not encountered in northern states or in the Mediterranean-like climate of the West Coast. This makes a few organic enterprises—like peaches and apples—extremely difficult here. For these and several other fruit and vegetable crops, other regions have a clear competitive advantage, especially when transportation costs are low. Recent rises in fuel costs make locally grown organic produce more competitive.

Oklahoma is well-suited for many organic enterprises, including grain crops, forage crops, and livestock. However, the development of organic infrastructure—mills to store and process organic grain and small-scale organic slaughter facilities—is still in its infancy. This is slowing the expansion of organic production in Oklahoma.

An information packet, *Organics in the Midsouth...What are the Challenges?*, is available by writing or calling Kerr Center.

WHAT ARE THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS TO PRODUCE AND SELL CROPS OR LIVESTOCK AS ORGANIC?

All farmers or processors must be certified to the USDA's National Organic Standard, which can be downloaded from the National Organic Program's website at www.ams.usda.gov/NOP/NOP/standards.html.⁴ Operations that sell less than \$5000 of organic products each year are exempt from certification, but must still adhere to the National Standard.⁵ The standard requires that land have no prohibited materials applied to it for three years prior to being certified and harvesting an organic crop.⁶

IF I FARM IN OKLAHOMA, WHERE WOULD I GO TO GET CERTIFIED?

The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture is an accredited certifying agent for the USDA. You can contact them at 405.522.5924 or see www.oda.state.ok.us/food-organic-home.htm. The National Organic Program maintains a current list of accredited certifying agents on its website at www.ams.usda.gov/NOP/CertifyingAgents/Accredited.html. Many of those listed also serve farms and processing operations in Oklahoma. For additional guidance in selecting a certifying agent, see *How to Choose an Organic Certification Agency* at www.mosesorganic.org/factsheets/howtochoose.html.⁷

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE TO DETERMINE IF ORGANIC PRODUCTION WOULD SUIT ME?

Another information packet, *Organic...Is It for Me?*, is available by writing or calling Kerr Center.

WHERE CAN I GET ADVICE AND TECHNICAL INFORMATION ON TRANSITIONING TO ORGANIC PRODUCTION?

ATTRA,
P.O. Box 3657, Fayetteville, AR, 72702
www.attra.ncat.org
1.800.346.9140.

The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture,
P.O. Box 588, Poteau, OK, 74953
www.kerrcenter.com
918.647.9123

MOSES (Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service),
PO Box 339, Spring Valley, WI, 54767
www.mosesorganic.org
715.772.3153

The New Farm (The Rodale Institute)
www.newfarm.org/OrganicAgInfo
www.organicaginfo.org

Pathway To Organic
(Organic Trade Association)
www.howtogoorganic.com



NOTES

1. 205.2 of the National Organic Standard
www.ams.usda.gov/NOP/NOP/standards/DefineReg.html
2. NBJ Staff. 2006. U.S. Organic Food Industry VI. Nutrition Business Journal. Vol. 11, No. 3. (March) p. 1–9.
3. Greene, Catherine. 2007. U.S. Organic Agricultural Production in 2005. USDA Economic Research Service.
www.ers.usda.gov/Data/Organic
4. 205.100(a) of the National Organic Standard.
www.ams.usda.gov/NOP/NOP/standards/ApplicReg.html
5. 205.101(a)(1) of the National Organic Standard.
www.ams.usda.gov/NOP/NOP/standards/ApplicReg.html
6. 205.202(b) of the National Organic Standard.
www.ams.usda.gov/NOP/NOP/standards/ProdHandReg.html
7. Also available by writing or calling MOSES at 715.772.3153