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December 2024

Quarterly Newsletter



TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM



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What is TOPP?

The Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) is a program through the USDA and Nebraska Extension that provides technical assistance and educational opportunities for those looking to transition to an organic farming operation.

We are working to build a community with other organic farmers and those interested in transitioning to organic. TOPP workshops and field days cover topics including organic production practices, certification, conservation planning, business development, regulations, and marketing. Our mission is to help producers overcome technical, cultural, and financial shifts during and following Certification, engage educational and training institutions (including crop advisors and extension agents) on organic workforce training and education and future human capital planning. **Your feedback and participation are essential!**

Nebraska Extension hosts 2024 Organic Farming Conference *2nd Annual Conference held Dec 5 in Ithaca*

The 2nd annual organic farming conference hosted by Nebraska Extension was held on December 5, 2024 at the ENREC facility near Ithaca, Nebraska. It was attended by 70 people and featured keynote speakers, farmer and market panels, small group discussion, vendor tables, farm-to-table lunch and snacks and plenty of time to network.

Keynote Speakers

Keynote speakers were Dr. Erin Silva, Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Nate Powell-Palm of Cold Springs Organics in Belgrade, Montana. Dr. Silva's presentation covered current research about no-till in organic grain crops and Mr. Powell-Palm did an overview of the steps to organic certification. (cont.)



2024 Organic Conference (cont.) >>>

Farmer Panel

The farmer panelists had a wide range of experience with some being long-term organic farmers and others either recently certified or going through the process. They shared their motivations, challenges, and valuable advice with attendees. Panelists included:

- **Junior Pfanstiel**, Outside the Box Agronomy, McLean, Nebraska
- **Logan Sheets**, Organic Farm Manager, Dorchester, Nebraska
- **Nicole Ragon**, Niobrara Grain & Milling, Valentine, Nebraska
- **Kevin Fulton**, Clear Creek Land & Livestock, Litchfield, Nebraska

Markets Panel

The afternoon panel discussion focused on markets with insights on grain quality, marketing strategies, pricing, and new opportunities. Panelists were:

- **Scott Ravenkamp**, Farmer and Contract Production Manager for Green Cover, Verdigre, Nebraska
- **Brent Reck**, heads up the North American Field Pea Production Supply Chain for PURIS.
- **Ed Reznicek**, Farmer and recent General Manager of Central Plains Organic Farmers, marketing cooperative, Nemaha Co., Kansas.
- **Jim Campbell**, CEO of New Country Organics, Lubbock, Texas and Waynesborough, Virginia.

Vendors

Several businesses and organizations joined the conference for a vendor session, including:

- Green Cover
- Nature Safe
- Nebraska Extension
- Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society
- New Country Organics
- Niobrara Grains and Milling
- OCIA Nebraska
- Rodale Institute
- Scratch & Peck
- Synergy Seed Blends, LLC



Nate Powell-Palm, keynote speaker from Belgrade, MT wanted to farm from an early age. Shown here with his nephew who loves to help on the farm where they are expanding their flour milling and animal feed production operation.

Keynote Takehomes >>>

Steps to Organic Certification

Keynote speaker, Nate Powell-Palm shared his insights and expertise about the organic certification process as both a producer and organic inspector. Nate was appointed to the National Organic Standards Board by Secretary Sonny Perdue in 2019 and testified before the US House of Representatives that same year regarding the economic benefits organic farming has on rural communities.

While Nate shared a lot more detail in his presentation, he broke down the process leading to organic certification into FIVE PARTS.

1. Land management, field history, boundaries & buffer zones
2. Seeds and Planting Stock
3. Soil Fertility, Crop Rotation, Manure Management
4. Pest & Weed Management, Post-harvest handling, Inputs
5. Recordkeeping

RESULTING IN the final INSPECTION and CERTIFICATION!

Nate's Take-home Message about Record-Keeping



"Producers must keep records for five years and have them available for inspections. Records must be in sufficient detail as to be readily understood and audited; and sufficient to demonstrate compliance."

No-Till in Organic Crops

Keynote speaker, Dr. Erin Silva, shared recent research for no-till in organic crops. A discussion with participants compared differences between Nebraska irrigated systems with Wisconsin non-irrigated systems.



Corn planted into rye/hairy vetch cover crop. Photo from Dr. Erin Silva.

In addressing the challenges of using no-till systems for organic grain crops, Dr. Silva focused on the use of cover crops as one of the primary tools. Here are some of her research take-home messages.

- Cover crop-based no-till systems require greater attention, advanced planning and adaptive management based on in-season conditions.
- New equipment for roller crimping and no-till planning are showing promise.
- Keep an eye out for different pests in these systems, such as perennial and early weeds (e.g. common ragweed) • Seed corn maggot, true army worm, black cutworm.



Dr. Erin Silva presented no-till in organic crops research.

FIND More information at:

OGRAIN – Organic Grain

Resources and Information Network

- <https://ograin.cals.wisc.edu>

CONTACT Dr.Silva at:

emsilva@wisc.edu

Organic Markets - Buyers

The Rodale Institute sponsored the afternoon organic markets session which featured insights from buyers that delved into crucial topics shaping the future of organic grain and livestock markets, especially in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa. This interactive panel featured perspectives from organic food grade, feed grade, seed, and cooperative buyers representing New Country Organics, Green Cover, PURIS, and Central Plains Organic Farmers Cooperative.

QUALITY IS KEY

- It's best to speak with a buyer before planting and continue communication throughout the season.
- Buyers often prefer Forward Contracts (also known as Pre-Plant Bushel Contracts or Grower Agreements) to secure sales ahead of time.
- Focus on quality for a positive sales experience and continued relationship with new buyers.
- Buyers highlighted the importance of attention to detail and spec necessities like germination rate testing for seed market opportunities.

CONSIDER COOPERATIVE MARKETING STRATEGIES:

- Cooperatives can serve as a powerful model for buyers to have access to a broader network of quality product and supplier partners.

ADDITIONAL TAKEAWAYS:

- Breakout group discussions identified a widespread desire for organic alfalfa market opportunities.
- Buyers considered increasing challenges to importing foreign organic grain, which could provide more opportunity and higher organic prices for domestic producers in the future.

Buyer Information

New Country Organics

Email: Jim Campbell (CEO)

jim@newcountryorganics.com

Green Cover

Email Scott Ravenkamp (Contract Production Manager)

scott@greencover.com

Central Plains Organic Farmers

Email Ed Reznicek (former Manager)

edwardreznicek@gmail.com

Scratch & Peck Feeds

Email Steve Reed (VP of Operations)

steve@scratchandpeck.com

PURIS

Email Brent Reck (Head of Supply Chain for Yellow Pea Production)

breck@purisfoods.com

Omaha Grain Exchange

Email Greg Lickteig (Owner)

greg@omahagrains.com



Upcoming events...

What's going on in Nebraska or in the region for organic farming?



January 4, 2025 – OCIA Nebraska's Organic Annual Event, Norfolk, NE. Keynote Speakers, Sponsor Exhibits, and Annual Membership Meeting, No registration or fees. <https://www.nebraskaocia.org/annual-meeting>

January 29, 2025 - NE Soil Health Conference, Hasting, NE - Explore key topics in sustainable agriculture, including: Carbon Stocks, Crop-Livestock Integration, Nitrogen Management, Cover Crop Resources. Gain insights from researchers, farmers, and industry; and discover strategies for enhancing soil health and regenerative ag practices. Event is free but pre-registration is required. Registration and details: <https://cropwatch.unl.edu/soil-health-program/events>
Interested in being an exhibitor? Please click here: <https://cropwatch.unl.edu/soil-health-program/events>

January 31-Feb 1, 2025 – Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Annual Conference, Nebraska City, NE - connect with fellow sustainable agriculture enthusiasts, learn from inspiring speakers, and deepen your knowledge about organic farming practices. Registration and details: <https://www.sustainablenebraska.org/event-details-registration/nsas-annual-healthy-farms-conference-2025-1>

February 11, 2025 - NE Soil Health Conference, West Point, NE - Explore key topics in sustainable agriculture, including: Carbon Stocks, Crop-Livestock Integration, Nitrogen Management, Cover Crop Resources. Gain insights from researchers, farmers, and industry; and discover strategies for enhancing soil health and regenerative ag practices. Event is free but pre-registration is required. Registration and details: <https://cropwatch.unl.edu/soil-health-program/events>

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THANK YOU to our sponsors: Nebraska Extension, OCIA-Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP), Rodale Institute, Organic Trade Association, and National TOPP.



United States Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Marketing Service
National Organic Program
Transition to Organic Partnership Program



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