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June 2025 **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

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!**

Producer Spotlight – Kevin Fulton

The following article was contributed by Carla McCullough Dittman

Kevin Fulton is the Owner/Operator of Clear Creek Land and Livestock near Litchfield, Nebraska. If you attended the Nebraska Organic Conference last December, you had a chance to see Fulton as a panelist of organic producers. Fulton runs a diversified farming operation in the loess hills region of central Nebraska where he raises crops and livestock. His land base is a combination of native prairie and highly productive irrigated crop land in the Clear Creek Valley. We asked Kevin to give us some insights about his strategies for cover crops and grazing and how it looked for his bottom line.

Pictured below are Fulton's cattle grazing cover crop planted in the previous year's crop ground. The photo was taken in early May and that was the second time he had grazed it that spring.

It was first grazed it in early March and was a cover crop mix of annual ryegrass, rape, turnips and radish aerial seeded into standing corn in September. Fulton said the only thing that really overwintered was the ryegrass. It cost him $46/acre to seed it. ($26/acre for the seed and $20/acre to hire the airplane application). There were approximately 12-13 million seeds per acre dropped. He watered it in with the pivot which also helped to finish the corn crop. He made a NET profit of $1,250/acre on the organic corn and another $275/acre in net grazing value. He estimates he saved $500/day in feed costs by grazing instead of feeding hay. No compost or manure or other soil amendments were used to produce this crop. It had been planted to organic soybeans in the prior year.

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Figure 1. Fulton's cattle grazing on cover crops in May. This was the second time they had grazed this area, with the first time being in March. Fulton holistically manages his land, incorporating cover crops with corn and soybean production cycles to help both his livestock grazing and row crops be more profitable.

Fulton – (cont.) >>>

Another technique Fulton uses is Adaptive Multi-Paddock (AMP) Grazing. AMP involves grazing using multiple smaller paddocks for short durations with higher stock density followed by forage rest and recovery periods. The idea behind this is to mimic the historic herd migrations of wild ruminants such as bison and elk. In the spring Fulton's herd was only given access to about 35 acres at a time, allowing the rye to recover in the resting paddocks. This lush green ryegrass also helped to utilize the cornstalks to a greater degree. According to Fulton, "This is how you make money farming organically without purchasing a lot of high-priced inputs".

When he isn't busy farming and ranching, you might find him out on a public speaking circuit, advocating for regenerative organic farming and conservation.

Figure 2. Fulton uses AMP grazing as part of his holistic management strategy.

Midwest Organic Markets Insight

The following article was contributed by Will Glazik of the Rodale Institute.

My name is Will Glazik. I'm an organic farmer in Illinois and have been working with the Rodale Institute Consulting Markets Team since last summer. Since this is the time of year when many organic markets decisions are made, I wanted to share an update highlighting some markets insight and observations that I gathered this spring. Keep in mind that these prices are constantly changing, and I am not an economist. Our team strives to maintain up-to-date lists of prices, volumes, and buyer contacts across the country, so please reach out to us with any questions. I also welcome feedback and alternative perspectives. Here are some of my key observations:

As crops are being planted and small grains begin to head out, I've been reaching out to assess new markets and monitor existing ones—primarily throughout the Corn Belt, but also along the coasts. Conditions appear slightly more favorable than earlier in the year, though this does not indicate that markets are stable. Overall, I've observed a modest upward trend in both food- and feed-grade grains, which offers some optimism for U.S. organic producers.

Corn: Feed-grade yellow corn has increased by approximately $0.50 to $1.00 this summer. Typically, prices trend upward during the summer months and ahead of new crop harvests, assuming quality is maintained. On the East Coast, delivered prices range between $10 and $11, which puts FOB (freight on board) prices in the Midwest at around $7.50–$8.00. Prices appear to be slightly lower west of the Rockies, likely due to transportation costs. While rail shipments remain competitive, westbound truckloads are generally not fetching the same prices as those moving east. Food-grade yellow corn is expected to rise in value due to a white corn seed shortage this year. Although I haven't yet seen any new contracts for food-grade yellow corn, I remain optimistic about pricing for my own crop. White food-grade corn experienced a supply issue this year, rendering a large portion of inventory unavailable. As a result, I anticipate strong demand for the white corn that was successfully planted, which could create a ripple effect and boost prices across tortilla-grade corn varieties.

Soybeans: Feed-grade soybeans remain in high demand among poultry producers, with prices holding steady at $18–$22 FOB—slightly higher than earlier in the season. The U.S. continues to rely heavily on imported organic soybean meal, as domestic production is insufficient to meet current demand. Due to this ongoing dependence on imports, I do not expect a significant increase in soybean prices.

Small Grains: Compared to corn and soybeans, the small grains market appears more stable. Many farmers sold their feed-grade wheat last summer, though there are still occasional spot opportunities with prices generally holding around $6.00–$6.50. High-protein wheat is seeing increased demand, with some smaller mills looking to source directly from growers. Prices for high-protein wheat range from $9.00 to $13.00, depending on quality and location. Heavy oats (38 lbs+ bushel weight) have seen growing interest, particularly when certified gluten-free. A new oat mill currently under construction in Albert Lea, Minnesota is actively seeking relationships with growers. Rye has a relatively soft bulk milling market, but there is promise in developing local markets for rye as a cover crop. The spread is significant—bulk prices are often under $9.00, whereas rye sold for cover cropping locally can exceed $14.00.

Regenerative Organic Certified (ROC) & Specialty Grains: Interest in Regenerative Organic Certified (ROC) grains has grown slowly but steadily, particularly among U.S. brands committed to organic principles. A mill in Hastings, Nebraska is currently looking to contract ROC hard red winter wheat. If interested, please reach out to our marketing team. Beyond that, most interest comes from smaller brands looking for unique or specialty crops. Lentils, chickpeas, and other pulses are gaining traction, though the market remains relatively small. However, in the case of organic chickpeas, I'm hearing reports of multiple consecutive poor harvests, which is pushing prices higher going into 2025.

I hope that this update provides some helpful context. Wishing everyone a safe and successful planting season. I'll check back in closer to the fall.

CONNECT WITH US

If you're a producer looking for deeper markets access guidance, organic crop rotation support, or to get connected with buyers, contact Rodale Institute's Consulting Markets Team at Markets@rodaleinstitute.org or Will at will.glazik@rodaleinstitute.org (309-824-7467)

Figure 3. Will Glazik, organic farmer and Rodale Institute contributor

Roller Crimping Cover Crops

This article was contributed by Katja Kohler-Cole, Nebraska Extension

On May 22, a roller crimper workshop was held at the Eastern Nebraska Research, Extension and Education Center (ENREEC). The morning program included a live crimping demonstration of cereal rye, triticale and wheat cover crops, along with discussion on the conditions needed for successful termination.

Roller crimpers mechanically terminate cover crops while leaving the soil undisturbed, ideally creating a thick mulch that suppresses weeds. They are commonly used by organic and regenerative farmers, as well as others looking to reduce herbicide inputs or improve weed control with cover crops.

In organic systems, roller crimping cover crops reduces the need for tillage if done correctly. Dr. Erin Silva from the University of Wisconsin-Madison has done extensive research in organic cover crop-based rotational reduced-tillage systems and has identified best management practices for managing the cover crop and subsequent cash crop. The following recommendations are based on her research in Wisconsin and on-farm trials conducted by Rich Little, former organic research technician in Nebraska.

Cover crops must be managed for high biomass production for this system to be successful, at least 8,000 lb/ac of dry matter or about 4 to 5' of height. Cereal rye is the most winter-hardy small grain, tall-growing and with a lot of biomass, making it the most popular choice for roller crimping. Triticale can also be used, especially in rotations where rye is undesirable. Although a bit more expensive, named varieties usually mature more evenly than VNS, which is important for termination. The cover crop should be drilled early (mid-to late September in Eastern Nebraska), at a seeding rate of at least 100 lb/ac to ensure good establishment and tillering in the fall.

In the spring, when the cereal rye or triticale cover crop reaches flowering (anthers are visible on the seed heads, see Figure 6), it is time for crimping. Depending on the year and cover crop variety, flowering occurs between mid-May and early June in Eastern Nebraska. If crimping before flowering, the cover crop may regrow. If crimping after flowering, viable seeds may form. To get the best termination or kill of the cover crop, the crimper should have sharp blades that crimp or crush the cover crop stem while rolling over it. Crimping at an angle to the row direction may aid in covering the soil surface with cover crop residue, reducing weed growth. It may be necessary to fill the drums of the roller crimper with water and to make two passes in the same or slightly angled direction to effectively kill the cover crops.

Figure 4 (above). Discussing cover crop management. Also in the picture is the 10' roller crimper.

Figure 5 (right). Flowering cereal rye, anthers are visible on the seed heads (May 16, 2025 at ENREEC).

Figure 6 (below). The cereal rye after the first pass with the roller crimper done parallel to the rows.

Upcoming events...

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

Grow Local Field Day. June 24. 9-12:30pm. UNL East Campus, 4018 Walker Ave, Lincoln, NE 68504 walking tour and presentations to learn more about specialty crop and local food systems research. https://agronomy.unl.edu/extension-outreach/field-days-and-workshops/grow-local-field-tour-2025/

Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society. July 9. Social at Hub Farmers Market, 250 N 21st St, Lincoln, 5-7pm. July 19. Great Plains Nursery Tour, 10am-12:30, Weston, NE. August 9 - Larry Stanislav & Liz Sarno Organic Farm Tour, 10am-12:30, Linwood, NE. Info at www.sustainablenebraska.org.

Center for Rural Affairs. Numerous workshops, tours, and other educational opportunities throughout the summer. More info at: www.cfra.org/events.

Grain Place Annual Field Day. July 12. Tour the farm and grain processing plant in the morning, join us for an afternoon program at the Leadership Center in Aurora, NE with keynote speakers, a film screening of Dreaming of a Vetter World, plus a lunch of organic food. We are pleased to welcome Ray Archuleta, as our 2025 keynote presenter. For more information and registration, go to www.grainplacefoundation.org/field-day-2025/

2025 Flame Weeding Workshop. September 10. Eastern Nebraska Research and Extension Center, University of Nebraska, Ithaca, NE. Flame weeding is an acceptable method of weed control in organic farming and is gaining interest with conventional producers due to increased weed resistance and cost of GMO seeds. Research results, demonstrations, Flame Weeding Manual, and lunch provided. Limit of 40 people, $150. For information and registration contact Stevan Knezevic 402-472-6498 (sknezevic2@unl.edu) or Connie Hansen 402-472-8747 (chansen1@unl.edu).

OCIA Nebraska Chapter. The chapter plans to attend and have a booth for Husker Harvest Days on September 9-11, Gateway Farm Expo held in Kearney on November 19-20, and the Ag Expo in Lincoln on December 9-11. OCIA Nebraska members will be on sight to answer any questions about how to transition to organic farming, current membership and how to become a chapter member, and organic markets in Nebraska along with other related information and guidance. OCIA Nebraska has a website at www.nebraskaocia.org where there is a wide variety of organic information and videos.

Annual Transition to Organic Farming Conference, December 2, 2025, Eastern Nebraska Research, Extension and Education Center, 1071 County Rd G, Ithaca, NE. Hosted by Katja Koehler-Cole, kkoehlercole2@unl.edu

For up-to-date information on current events and other resources, visit our website: https://cropwatch.unl.edu/organic/

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