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Fall 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!**

## No Till Organic Corn Field Walk & Buyer Tour

*The following article was contributed by Carla McCullough Dittman*

In September, the Rodale Institute, with financial support from National TOPP, and in partnership with Clear Frontier and Albert Lea Seed hosted a field day near Cairo, NE focusing on no till organic crop production, agronomy lessons learned, and connecting producers with organic buyers.

Following presentations at the Prairie Creek Barn, attendees were able to tour a nearby property farmed by Ty Fickenschier where organic corn had been planted into a living mulch of alfalfa. The concept is not new but may be gaining ground as organic farmers gain experience implementing this technique. Farmers in the room represented a total of 2,700 acres of no till corn into living alfalfa across Nebraska.

Ben Miller, organic farmer from North Platte, Nebraska and employee of Clear Frontier, presented information about his more than 10-year journey of planting corn into living alfalfa. If successful, the benefits of this combination are many, such as reduced tillage, labor time, and costs for fuel and fertilizer, and increased soil health and biodiversity. In this system, the producer would only need four passes over the field – row stalking, planting, harvesting, and fertilizing.

After a decade of trials, in recent years Miller has implemented a rotation that starts with sowing wheat together with alfalfa in the fall, or wheat in the fall and alfalfa in the spring. This first year, only wheat and alfalfa are harvested. The following spring, corn is planted into the alfalfa and then two more years of corn into alfalfa. For certified organic acres, it's recommended for producers to consult with their certifier before doing corn-on-corn for three years, but Miller has been successful in using this due to the continuous living cover on the land.

*(Continued on page 2)*



Figure 1. Organic Buyers and Sellers had lots of opportunities to connect throughout the day. Photo credit: Marco Briones

## No Till Corn – (cont.) >>>

One of the lessons learned about this system is that if you have a bad or weedy stand of alfalfa, it will translate into a bad or weedy stand of corn. Miller also fertilizes with manure from nearby feedlots, applying the equivalent of 40-60 lbs N/acre in fall or spring. The amounts he needs to fertilize however, are less due to the nitrogen-fixing advantages of alfalfa.

Miller has tried several different pieces of equipment to optimize this process and has most recently landed on the best option so far – a row stalker or stalk puller. This equipment is designed with two large disks that are typically used to pull out corn stalks in corn-on-corn fields. Turns out it works well for this application as well. It pulls the taproot of a percentage of the alfalfa plants,

fracturing the ground and creating a great seedbed for corn. The timing of pulling is ideally 10 days before the alfalfa starts to bloom, so around mid-May in Nebraska.

Any farmer knows that no two years are alike and in 2025, it was a challenging weather year for lots of farmers for planting. In May near Cairo, NE, it was pretty dry and the corn stalker implement struggled to pull the alfalfa. Some producers turned on their pivots to pre-irrigate, which helped with that situation.

One great benefit of this system is that it makes for excellent grazing after the corn harvest. Not only do you have the corn stalks, but the alfalfa is green and ready to go. Miller said the first time he had cowboys out with their cattle to graze; they were skeptical. After the first year, however, they came back and didn't want to tell anyone else about it. Through hard work, persistence, and



Figure 2. Organic corn grown in living alfalfa near Cairo, Nebraska. Photo credit: Marco Briones

ingenuity, Miller has started to crack the code on a good system for no till corn planted in living alfalfa. For more information about his work, reach out to:

Ben Miller, [bmiller@clearfrontierag.com](mailto:bmiller@clearfrontierag.com);  
cell: (308) 530-4250

OR

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## Midwest Organic Markets Insight

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

Here in Illinois, summer work is winding down, and field days are picking up as we prepare for fall grain harvest. I have been hearing weather reports from around the Midwest, and while there are spots that have been too wet, others have had great rain like they haven't seen before. We saw a solid summer grains crop, and I am expecting another solid organic corn and soybean crop. In the US., Poultry and dairy have seen major profits over the past year, and that's been good for us grain growers. I have seen the markets correct over the past year, and it's looking like a profitable year for organic corn and soybeans overall. Generally, feed corn comes between \$7.75-\$8.50, and soybeans \$20-\$24, depending on freight. At these prices, it seems like everyone can make a good profit, and I really hope we see these numbers for a while. If you are growing these grains and would like to keep these prices strong, please encourage everyone you know to eat organic eggs and drink organic milk. Those two end products are huge drivers of organic grains. It is amazing how much we can affect change when we all work together.

There are a few buyers looking to lock up some last-minute corn before the new crop comes out. If you still have any on hand that you want to sell, please contact someone from our Rodale Markets Team.

As we move into specialty crops and small grains, this time of year is pretty quiet. I have not heard much talk about these crops with the exception of blue corn. If anyone has 10,000 bu of blue corn in the bin that can meet food grade specs, I think that we can move it. Buyers only seem interested in old crop, not new crop. I imagine they came up short or had a large increase in demand. For small grains, the best market I have seen is for cover crops. There are a lot of conventional farmers around who are seeking cheap cover crops to cover their CSP contracts. The best way for a farmer to tap into these markets is to get a germination test and clean the grain, then package it in minibulk. The CSP requires a germination test and that is why it's so crucial. We recommend working with a local fertilizer dealer to see if they will retail the cover crop or put an ad in a local farm paper.

Otherwise, I did not see much interest in organic small grains until after the first day of the year last year. Just keep an eye on the condition if you choose to hold the grain into spring or summer 2026.

Other than that, have a safe and happy harvest!

### 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](mailto:Markets@rodaleinstitute.org) or Will at [will.glazik@rodaleinstitute.org](mailto:will.glazik@rodaleinstitute.org) (309-824-7467)

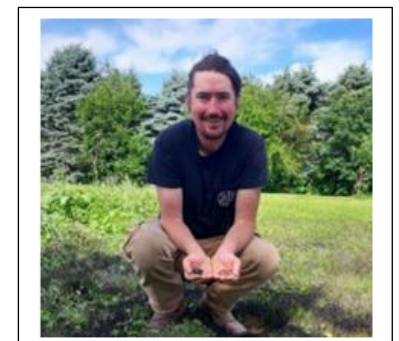
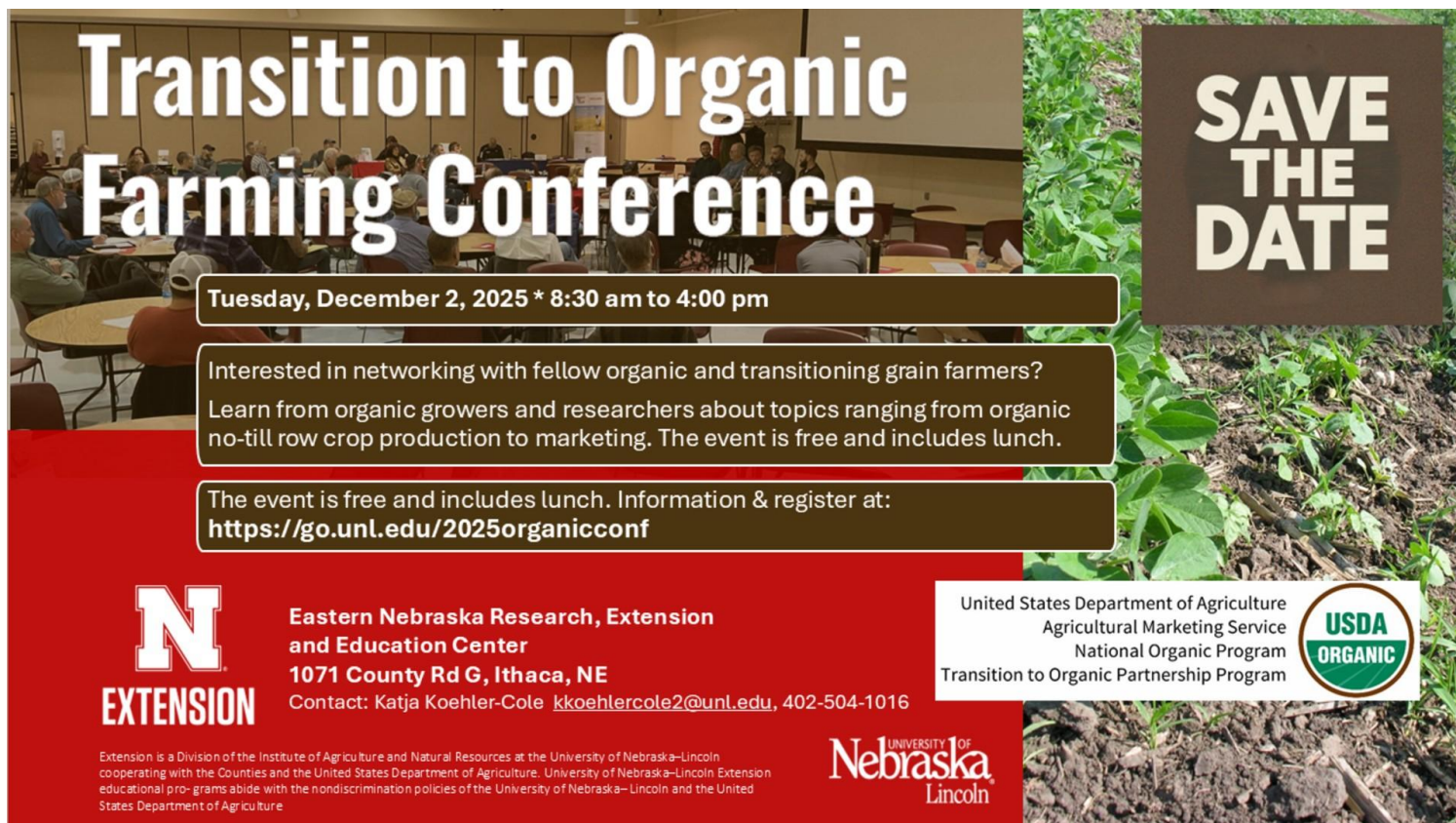


Figure 3. Will Glazik, organic farmer and Rodale Institute contributor



# Transition to Organic Farming Conference

**Tuesday, December 2, 2025 \* 8:30 am to 4:00 pm**

Interested in networking with fellow organic and transitioning grain farmers? Learn from organic growers and researchers about topics ranging from organic no-till row crop production to marketing. The event is free and includes lunch.

The event is free and includes lunch. Information & register at:  
<https://go.unl.edu/2025organicconf>

**N EXTENSION**  
**Eastern Nebraska Research, Extension and Education Center**  
**1071 County Rd G, Ithaca, NE**  
 Contact: Katja Koehler-Cole [kkoehlercole2@unl.edu](mailto:kkoehlercole2@unl.edu), 402-504-1016

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

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**SAVE THE DATE**

**USDA ORGANIC**

Hello everyone,

Are you interested in learning more about organic farming, are in the transition process or are already a certified organic producer? We invite you to join us for our third annual “Transition to Organic Farming” conference on December 2, 2025, at the Eastern Nebraska Research and Extension Center near Mead.

This is a great event that brings together producers, extension, industry, non-profits, and researchers. Online registration is now open and is free due to funding from our sponsors, the USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) and Nebraska Extension.

Click here to register:

<https://enreec.unl.edu/2025-transition-to-organic-farming-conference/>

Would you like to be an exhibitor at the conference? Please click on the link below to reserve your table by November 25.

<https://cvent.me/x9WaRG>

Any questions, please let me know.  
 Katja

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Fig. 4 (above). Lively small group discussions followed the market development workshop at the 2025 Transition to Organic Farming Conference in Ithaca, NE

Fig 5 (below). The Buyer-Seller panel offered valuable insights to the 2025 conference attendees.



# Upcoming events...

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



**OCT 20, 2025, 9am-12pm. SMALL EQUIPMENT FIELD DAY.** 4417 Fair St, UNL East Campus, Lincoln, NE. Nebraska Extension showcasing small equipment with hands-on demonstrations of BCS tractor, flail mower, tiller, plow, bed layer, buddy cart, woodchipper, power harrow, flamer. Geared for farmers, home gardeners, students, researchers, and educators. Learn about how small equipment can save time, reduce costs, and improve efficiency, as well as practical maintenance and safety tips. Bring closed-toe shoes/boots & gloves, water, sunscreen, notebook, and questions. Please RSVP at: <https://shorturl.at/vcil9> . For questions, contact Katja Koehler-Cole, 402-504-1016, [kkoehlercole2@unl.edu](mailto:kkoehlercole2@unl.edu) OR Christian Stephenson, [rstephenson9@unl.edu](mailto:rstephenson9@unl.edu)

**DEC 2, 2025, 8:30am-4pm. TRANSITION TO ORGANIC ANNUAL CONFERENCE.** Hosted by Nebraska Extension, Katja Koehler-Cole, [kkoehlercole2@unl.edu](mailto:kkoehlercole2@unl.edu), ENREC, 1071 Country Rd G, Ithaca, NE. Interested in networking with fellow organic and transitioning grain farmers? Learn from organic growers and researchers about topics ranging from organic no-till row crop productions to marketing. The conference is free and includes lunch. Information and registration at: <https://go.unl.edu/2025organicconf>

**JAN 10, 2025, 9am-3pm. Nebraska Chapter OCIA Annual General Membership Meeting.** Nebraska Extension ENREC, 1071 Co Rd G, Ithaca, NE.

For information and registration, go to <https://www.nebraskaocia.org/annual-meeting>

**JAN 30 & 31, 2026. NEBRASKA SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE.** Workshops, Keynote speakers (including Gabe Brown), All-Nebraska dinner, networking, and more. *Registration starts in early Nov.* Divots Conference Center 4200 W. Norfolk Ave, Norfolk, NE Info at [www.sustainablenebraska.org](http://www.sustainablenebraska.org).

**Center for Rural Affairs.** Numerous workshops, tours, and other educational opportunities throughout the year. More info at: [www.cfra.org/events](http://www.cfra.org/events).

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

THANK YOU to our sponsors:



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



This newsletter is brought to you thanks to the contributions of the Nebraska TOPP team:

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