Organic Program Update
October 2001

This update provides information about the new National Organic Program, upcoming workshops, organic acreage information, market trends, and results of the customer survey that was conducted earlier this year. If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact the Organic Food Program at (360) 902-1924, FAX (360) 902-2087, email: organic@agr.wa.gov or visit our website at www.wa.gov/agr/fsah/organic/ofp.htm.

National Organic Program

The USDA National Organic Program (NOP) requires all organic certification agencies to obtain accreditation to demonstrate that they comply with the new federal organic standards. Applying for NOP accreditation involves developing a Quality Manual that demonstrates expertise in organic production and handling techniques; ability to comply with and implement the NOP organic certification program; and ability to comply with the requirements for accreditation. The WSDA Organic Food Program submitted its application for National Organic Program (NOP) accreditation in mid-September. USDA will conduct a site visit during the next few months to verify that our organic certification program meets the federal requirements.

The NOP will require changes in the WSDA Organic Food Program including amending the state organic standards and modifying the certification process. Over the next year these changes will be implemented. Examples of some changes include:

- Organic producers are required to use organic seeds unless organic seeds are commercially unavailable.
- Raw and uncomposted manure must not be applied to soil within 90 days of harvest for crops not in contact with the soil (tree, berry and vine crops) and 120 days of harvest for crops in contact with the soil (vegetable crops).
- Processed organic foods must contain at least 70% organic ingredients in order to label the product as “made with organic ingredients” on the principal display panel.
- Organic Production and Handling System Plans need to be developed and implemented by producers and handlers. These plans must meet NOP requirements and will become a central component of the certification process.

Training Planned on New National Organic Standards

With the final adoption of the National Organic Standards by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture last year, the WSDA Organic Food Program is amending regulations and modifying forms to comply with the new standards. All these changes have led to many questions among organic growers in the state. To help growers adapt to the changing rules, a series of training workshops are being planned for the coming winter and spring. This educational program is a cooperative effort among the Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources (WSU), the WSDA Organic Food Program, Tilth Producers, and Spokane Tilth. David Granatstein of WSU secured two grants to support the program; one from the New Priorities Foundation in Spokane for work in eastern Washington, and one from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to take the program statewide. He is working with Miles McEvoy (WSDA), Carol Miles (WSU), and Marcy Ostrom (WSU) to develop and implement the workshops.

Two sessions will be held this fall, one session will be on October 30th in Wenatchee, and the other on November 10th at the Tilth Conference in Olympia. Then, after the first of the year, once the WSDA revisions are complete, up to 10 workshops will be held around the state. The sessions will focus on the major changes mandated by the national rule, how WSDA is

responding, and strategies for growers to be in compliance. Developing an acceptable Organic Production and Handling System Plan will be a major topic, as will discussions of the new rules on compost and certified organic seed.

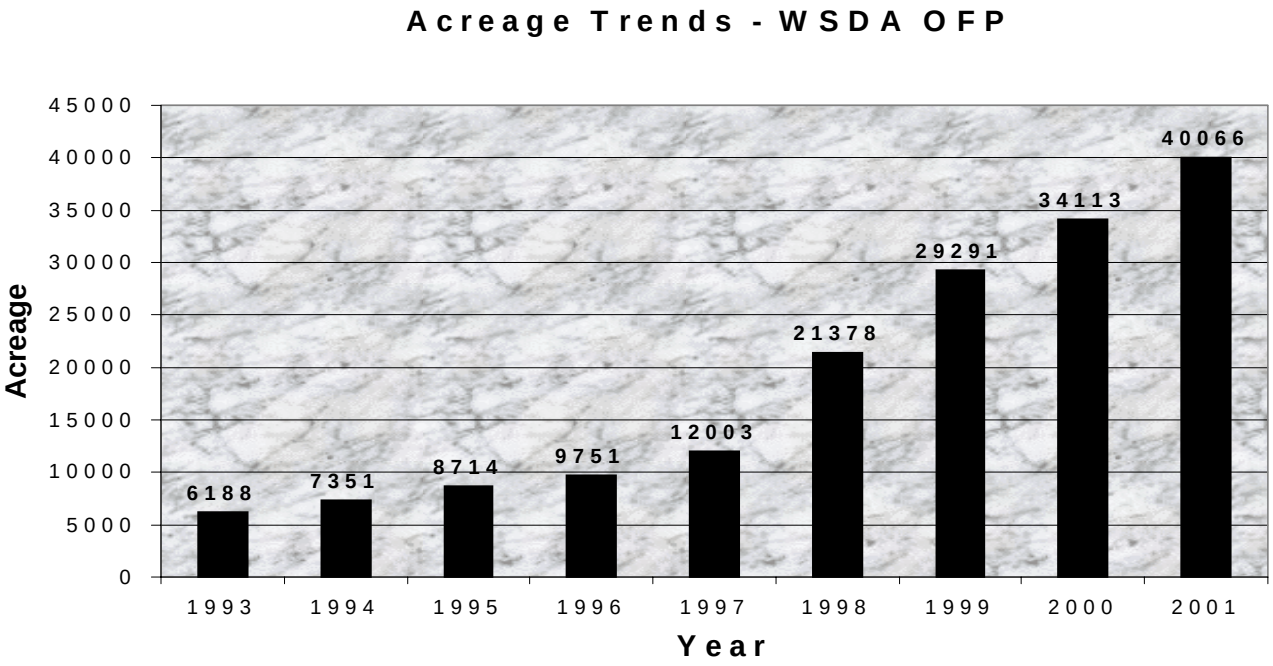
Adapting to the New National Organic Program
Tuesday, October 30, 2001
2 – 4 PM
WSU Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center
Main Conference Room
1100 N. Western Ave.
Wenatchee, WA 98801
Contact David Granatstein at (509) 663-8181 x.222, or email: granats@wsu.edu for more information.

Saturday, November 10, 2001
3:15 – 4:45 PM
The Evergreen State College
Olympia, WA 98505
Contact Tilth Producers at (206) 442-7620 for Tilth Conference registration information.

Dates and locations for the next year's workshops will be announced later this fall and posted on the CSANR (csanr.wsu.edu) and WSDA website (www.wa.gov/agr/fsha/organic/ofp.htm).

Applications for Organic Certification
There has been a slight increase in the number of applications this year. The program has received 534 applications from producers (518 in 2000), 229 applications from processors and handlers (206 in 2000). Of the applications received, 99 are new producer applicants, 27 are new processor applicants, and 22 are new handler applicants. The total number of applicants has increased from 724 in 2000 to 763 in 2001.

Acreage in organic production continues to increase as shown in the following table.



Market Trends

The Natural Marketing Institute, in partnership with the *Organic Trade Association*, has recently completed a research study on sales of organic food products. The study shows that retail sales of organic products have grown steadily for the past ten years, showing compounded annual growth of 22.74% over that period. Growth rates are similar over the past five year (22.61%) and three year (24.72%) periods. Assuming steady growth at a conservative rate of 20%, retail sales of organic in 2001 are projected at $9.3 billion. By 2005, sales are expected to reach nearly $20 billion.

Organic Food Program staff

- Mark Amrhein, Material Review Specialist, Olympia, 360-902-1882 - Evaluates materials for brand name material registration, maintains organic web page; seasonal inspector.
- Jeff Collins, Organic Food Inspector, Chelan, 509-682-8457 – Inspector, North Central Washington.
- Les Eklund, Organic Field Supervisor, Olympia, 360-902-1891 - Supervises and trains field inspectors; conducts inspections throughout Washington State.
- Mike Haskett, Organic Food Inspector, Yakima, 509-225-2612 - Inspector, South Central Washington.
- Yolanda Holder, Organic Office Assistant Senior, Olympia, 360-902-1805 - Conducts application review and general administrative support.
- Rachael Jamison, Organic Program Specialist, Olympia, 360-902-1951 - Reviews inspection reports; issues export certificates; works on export issues; seasonal inspector.
- Miles McEvoy, Organic Program Manager, Olympia, 360-902-1924 - Works with Organic Advisory Board, Organic Certifiers Council, and National Association of State Organic Programs; responsible for organic rules and National Organic Program implementation.
- John Morrison, Organic Food Inspector, Spokane, 208-882-7322 - Inspector, Eastern Washington.
- Chris Soderstrom, Organic Food Inspector, Olympia, 360-866-8347 - Inspector, Western Washington.
- Marcia Wilkinson, Organic Certification Coordinator, Olympia, 360-902-1885 - Reviews applications and inspection reports; issues organic certificates.

Organic Food Program Customer Survey

The 2001 WSDA Organic Food Program Customer Survey was sent to all renewal applicants in the WSDA Organic Food Program (OFP) as an enclosure with their renewal application materials. The survey asked applicants to evaluate three areas of the Organic Food Program: 1) clarity and usefulness of OFP information, 2) effectiveness and utility of organic food inspections, and 3) responsiveness and satisfaction with technical assistance. All respondents remained anonymous.

Section A. Organic Food Program Information

This section consisted of eight components. Respondents were asked to rate the clarity and effectiveness of the following Organic Food Program documents: Renewal Application, Yield/Sales Information Form, Organic Farm Plan, New Site Information Form, Brand Name Materials List, WSDA Organic Standards, Organic Resource Manual, and letters sent from the Olympia OFP office.

The understandability and usefulness of OFP information was rated as follows: 28% *Always,* 47% *Usually,* 6% *Seldom,* 2% *Never*, 8% *Not Applicable,* and 9% of all respondents didn't answer the questions in this section.

Section B. Inspections

This portion of the 2001 Customer Survey consisted of seven components. Respondents were asked to rate the following areas that pertained to their annual inspection for organic certification: whether the inspection was thorough and complete, whether the inspector was knowledgeable, whether the inspection was conducted in a courteous and professional manner, whether the inspector provided useful information, whether their inspection report was accurate and objective, whether they received a response to their inspection report in a timely manner, and whether the chemist/sample report is useful.

The accuracy and helpfulness of both organic food inspectors and organic food inspections was rated as follows: 54% *Always,* 29% *Usually,* 3% *Seldom,* 1% *Never*, 5% *Not Applicable,* and 8% of all respondents didn't answer the questions in this section.

Section C. Technical Assistance

This section consisted of five components. Respondents were asked to rate the following areas as they pertain to the technical assistance provided by the Organic Food Program (OFP): responsiveness of the Olympia office staff, understandability of the OFP Webpage, whether the OFP staff clearly explains rules and regulations, whether OFP staff is responsive of requests to have farm inputs/processing aids reviewed, and whether the OFP successfully keeps applicants updated on policy and regulatory changes.

The responsiveness and accessibility of OFP staff and the technical assistance they provide was rated as follows: 29% *Always,* 39% *Usually,* 5% *Seldom,* 1% *Never*, and 8% *Not Applicable*, and 18% of all respondents didn't answer the questions in this section.

Comments

The 2001 OFP Customer Survey provided space for respondents to make any additional comments they had about the Organic Food Program. Of the respondents who submitted a completed Customer Survey, 27% (78 out of 293) commented in the space provided. Comments on the following topics were the most common:

- Forms are confusing and inconsistent. It would be helpful if forms were simplified.
- Timely and helpful feedback was received from OFP staff.
- Decisions on approved materials need to be more timely.
- The fee is high for the services received. The fee structure needs to be revised.
- Inspectors are better informed and more helpful than they have been in the past.

Excerpts:

- "I appreciate that the Organic Food Program staff is always responsive and kind to our company."
- "The renewal application needs to be simplified – it is very confusing. I realize it is very difficult, but an effort should be made to make it easier."
- "WSDA has the best organic program in the country, maybe in the world. When you get 'organic' from Washington State, you are getting the best the world has to offer. Guaranteed!"

The complete set of comments is available on the Organic Food Program website at www.wa.gov/agr/fsah/organic/ofp.htm under hot topics.