

Organic News

Upcoming Programs

Wednesday, April 24 – Thursday, April 25 – Texas Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers Conference. Held in the Rio Grande Valley.

Friday, April 26 – Saturday, April 27 – Food Summit held as a part of the total conference.

Monday, April 29 – Wednesday, May 1 – National Organic Standards Board meeting online. Not that interesting unless you have an issue that needs to be addressed!

Thursday, May 2 – Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center – Uvalde open house and program. Great educational opportunity, food, and fun. Morning and afternoon programs, 8 am to 4 pm.

Monday, May 6 – San Saba Pecan Field Day, all day program in San Saba Texas. Organic will be part of the program for pecan producers. 6 CEU's offered. More details are coming. san-saba-tx@tamu.edu

Tuesday, June 25 – Eagle Lake Rice Field Day (depending on water availability for rice research) held at the Rice Research Center with meal and program following the field day at Eagle Lake Community Center.

Thursday, July 11 – Beaumont Rice Field Day, held at the Rice Research Center near Beaumont.

Thursday, August 29 – South Plains Organic Cotton/Peanut Field Day near Seminole. 8 am to 1 pm. More details coming soon!

Organic Advisory Groups Formed!

There are a lot of things going on in organic in Texas and it is hard to keep up. The organic market is changing constantly, there are new organic rules just this year, weeds are always an issue, what varieties to plant are changing, where to buy fertilizer and what new organic product is available for insects or disease? These and many other issues are on our minds as we move forward.

Because there are a lot of moving parts in organic, I reached out to groups of organic growers

with the prospect of meeting on a regular basis to find out the current issues for growers, talk about some solutions that are either being researched or are currently available, and catch up on any market news or contracts.



So far, we have established groups in **cotton** and **peanuts** with groups being formed for **rice** and **grains**. These groups are also a way to bring in experts as needed on topics and allow new organic farmers to learn from those who have been farming organically for years. The meetings are held on TEAMS Online and so far, everybody has been comfortable with the technology!

Award-Winning Growth: Texas Organic Entities Will Flourish with USDA Organic Grants

Last year USDA put out the call for grant applications for the Organic Market Development Grant program. This was a chance to apply for up to \$3 Million in grant funds with a match or up to \$100,000 for equipment with no match. The Organic Market Development Grant (OMDG) program supports the development of new and expanded organic markets to help increase the

consumption of domestic organic agricultural commodities. The program focuses on building and expanding capacity for certified organic production, aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, distribution, and development of consumer markets. OMDG aims to increase the availability and demand for domestically produced organic agricultural products and address the critical need for additional market paths.

Texas organic producers have excelled in their efforts, submitting a multitude of grant applications, and the results are now in. Below, discover the exceptional organic projects that have been chosen to enhance organic agriculture in Texas for the foreseeable future. Here are the grants awarded:

Promotion of Organic Yaupon Tea as a Domestic Alternative to Imported Tea Distributed to The Foodservice Industry. Recipient: Yaupon Holly Tea, LLC, Cat Spring, TX

Diversifying Organic Supply Chains for Small Producers in the Rio Grande Valley. Recipient: Triple J Organics, LLC, Mission, TX

Steelbow Farm: Expanding Access to Local, Organic Produce in Central Texas. Recipient: Steelbow Farm LLC, Austin, TX

Enhancing Organic Dairy Production and Market Access in Texas. Recipient: Armagh Fine Foods LLC dba Armagh Creamery, Dublin TX

Expanding Capacity and Improved Quality of Organic Cotton. Recipient: RKH GIN LLC, dba Woolam Gin, Odonnell, TX

Texas Organic Market Development & Promotion
Recipient: Texas Department of Agriculture, Austin, TX

Join Us in Enhancing Organic Cotton Production

We need your help! As a part of a large organic cotton grant, Texas A&M Researchers and Extension specialists will be studying many aspects of organic cotton production to both meet growing demand while making organic cotton more sustainable and

resilient. We will be starting with the soil, your soil, if you will be willing to let us do some testing.

You will...

- Receive **\$600 for each organic cotton field sampled** for soil analysis.
- Receive soil health analysis and microbial diversity reports on your operations free of cost.
- Collaborate with experts to gain valuable insights on your farming operations.



We will...

- Collect soil to evaluate various soil health indicators and soil microbial diversity data over a 4-year period.
- Study the suitability of agronomic practices for improving organic cotton production.

What do you need to do? **Just contact me or Timber** and our contact information is below or Faega.Mohsin@tamu.edu at TAMU Soil and Crop Sciences. We will help you get registered.

Dairy Issue Hits Organic Dairies Too!

You may have heard or read about a rare disease affecting dairy herds in the Panhandle of Texas but also appearing in New Mexico and Kansas. This disease is a form of avian influenza known as H5N1

and seems to be related to the highly fatal disease of birds. USDA has confirmed it, but still it could have other factors that contribute to the outbreak, so testing is continuing.

The disease is like the flu in that the animals do get sick and lose appetite and milk production does drop. Cows that have the symptoms are immediately put into the “sick pen” and the milk is not put into the bulk tank to be picked up. Fortunately, the cows do recover and other than losing milk production seem to be fine but long-term effects are not known yet.

Also, this disease has affected a dairy worker which is very rare and somewhat surprising. Again, it is like the flu and the individual recovered quickly. What those of us in agriculture need to understand is that we work around animals, including wild birds, and so might come into contact with this disease.

What did organic dairies do? Fortunately for these producers there was no need for antibiotics since they didn’t work anyway! Most organic dairies just let the disease run its course and although a difficult time, things are improving.

Non-Antibiotic Management of Mastitis in Dairy Cattle

This article first appeared in “Texas Dairy Matters” and has since been published in Texas Ag and Dairy Review. I have had an opportunity to work with some of these technologies and these researchers on an organic dairy investigating the potential to improve both mastitis control and long-term animal health. I know most readers are not dairy farmers but as organic producers you know the challenge of doing “organic” without a lot of help.

This article can be accessed by pointing your phone camera at the QR code and clicking on the link. That link takes you to the entire article I wrote on the AgriLife Organic website, and I promise, you won’t be scammed!!!



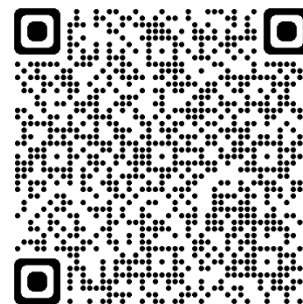
Organic fertilizer – what is it, what are the rules, where do you buy it?



In the last newsletter I wrote an article about “What is the True Cost of Compost (or manure) in 2024.” It was popular simply because I pointed out that you need to know how much water is

in your compost or manure before you buy it. Many producers never ask that question and end up paying a lot of money for delivered water!

I do get a lot of questions about organic fertilizers because many people just don’t know what is considered an organic fertilizer. Most people outside of organic circles think that organic manure and/or organic compost has to come from organic cows, which is not true!

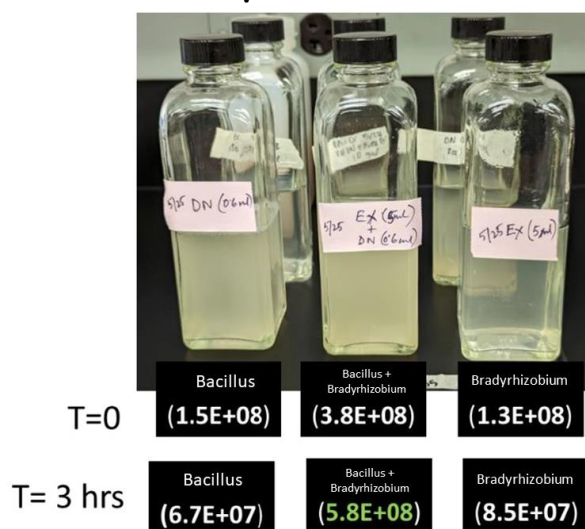


What are the sources for organic fertilizers?

1. Certainly, we can list both our crop residues and then our cover crops. Organic rules require that we use both to increase soil physical properties and increase overall fertility.
2. We can use raw manure which is usually the cheapest source of nutrients. The rules require you to incorporate it into the soil at least 90 days prior to harvesting a crop grown above ground and 120 days prior to a crop grown below ground - *peanuts*
3. We can use compost and there are rules for how to make it.
4. There is a class of fertilizers called protein hydrolysates made typically from grain but anything with amino acids will work.

Now that I have you using QR codes – or at least I hope you are using them, let me give you some articles to read on a variety of subjects that I hope you find useful.

Data confirms peanut inoculant and in-furrow Biofungicide are tank-mix compatible



There have been some concerns about an at-plant, tank mix application of certain biofungicides and Rhizobia inoculants in peanuts. To determine if the biofungicide *Bacillus amyloliquefaciens* strain D747 (trade name Double Nickel or Convergence™) had any negative impacts on the liquid peanut inoculum *Bradyrhizobium* sp. (*vigna*) (trade name Exceed Traditional Liquid for Peanut), Certis Biologicals' Research and Development team conducted an in-depth study on how these two products interacted in a simulated tank mix.

Organic Cotton Resources

Here are few things you might find interesting or helpful as you think about organic cotton planting in a few months (weeks). I will update this as I get new information, but it will be "here" to help

anytime you need it. If there is anything I need to add or change, please let me know. I want to keep this as up to date as possible.

Cotton Varieties for Organic

Commercial Varieties Developed without Genetic Engineering Methods. Be sure that any seed treatments applied are OMRI approved and okayed by your certifier.

Upland Varieties

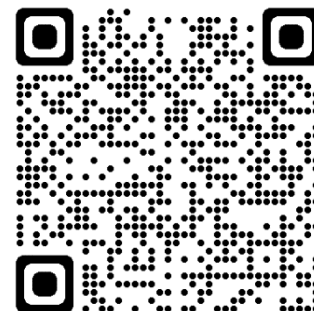
- Americot – UA48 (talked to Dr. Robert Lemon with NexGen and they hope to have some commercial varieties good for organic in a few growing seasons.)
- Brownfield Seed & Delinting – BSD 224, BSD 4X, BSD 598, BSD 9X, Ton Buster Elite, Ton Buster Magnum, Tamcot 73; three new Tamcot varieties being reviewed for future commercialization.
- Seed Source Genetics – UA222, UA103, UA 107, UA114
- ExCeed Genetics – 4447 or 4344 (May Seed from Turkey where they do not grow GE cotton.)
- International Seed Technology (IST) – BRS 286, BRS 293, BRS 335, BRS 2353. Varieties from Brazil and certified in Texas.

Pima or Pima hybrids

- Gowan – 1432

Organic Peanut Resources

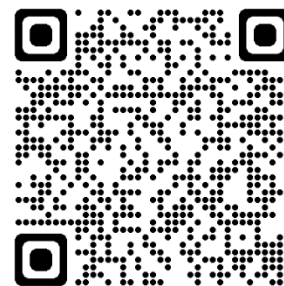
If you are interested in growing organic peanuts, they are a great crop and an excellent rotation to other non-legume crops. Fortunately, peanut varieties have never been developed with genetic engineering and so there is no worry about that issue.



QR Code for Cotton



QR Code for Biofungicide



QR Code for Peanut



TEXAS TOPP

Kicking Off Advisory Groups

We are off and cycling with our training wheels on. Over the past few months, Bob and I (mostly Bob) have collaborated to determine the most effective way for our farmers to learn from each other, whether they are transitional or organic farmers. Every month, we hold a commodity group meeting to discuss industry developments and all things organic. We are patiently waiting for a few more livestock producers to join in. If you're interested in participating, please get in touch!



Transition Production Plan

The USDA came out with an exceptional resource for you, our transition organic producer who works with the NRCS and the RMA.

The **Transitional Production Plan Template** can be used by new crop producers who are transitioning to organic production to create the necessary documentation that will enable them to qualify for OTI services provided by the USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). The TPP template is also helpful for transitioning farmers to learn how to document their organic practices in preparation for the Organic System Plan (OSP) process that is required when they apply for certification. Once a USDA-accredited

certification body has signed the TPP it can be used as the organic system plan documentation for transition crop insurance.



When should you apply for Organic Certification?

The time it takes to certify an applicant varies depending on the complexity of the operation. The general estimate is three to six months. If you have a specific date in mind for obtaining certification, be sure to notify your certifier and complete your OSP (Organic System Plan) as soon as possible. This will give the certifiers and inspectors enough time to review your operation. It's important to plan ahead and allow ample time for the certification process. Certifiers do offer expedited services, so if you have urgent timelines, it's advisable to inquire about these options.

Keep in mind that in order to start the process, you need to submit an application. After that, the certifier will review it, send an inspector out, and conduct a final review of the operation before making a certification decision. It's important to stay in communication with your certifier throughout the process and provide any necessary documentation or information promptly to avoid delays.

Future Organic Farmers Grant

If you are a student or have a student focusing on organic agriculture in a vocational program, or two- or four-year college, we encourage you to apply for up to \$5,000 to cover your educational expenses. Last year's grants supported students studying to be organic mixed vegetable and fruit growers, organic agronomists, and dairy farmers. The CCOF Foundation is here to support you as the future of organic.

Group Certification

Group Certification, also known as grower group certification, allows a group of small producers to organize and certify as a single entity. The primary condition is that these producers must collectively adhere to NOP standards across all their operations. This approach reduces the cost and administrative burden of certification for each member, making organic certification more accessible.

Due to the new SOE rule members will need to be organized into production units, all of which use common production practices and inputs and use centralized collection, processing, distribution, marketing systems, and facilities. Certifiers will be expected to verify the producer group's overall compliance as documented in the group's Internal Control System (ICS) through regular on-site inspections. This could be a great option for those who are on small operational farms. Bring your friends!

Feed and Supplements for Organic Livestock

Understanding the requirements for organic livestock feed and supplements involves knowing how to calculate, address special circumstances, and meet the nutritional needs of your animals while staying compliant with organic standards. It's crucial to always read labels and consult with a certifier before using unapproved feed on your operations. Here are things to keep in mind: Livestock feed must be made up of certified organic agricultural products. Feed rations can contain approved National List synthetic materials

as feed additives or supplements. Any agricultural ingredients used in feed supplements or additives for organic livestock must be certified organic. Feed rations can include non-agricultural nonsynthetic (natural) materials as feed supplements that are not prohibited or certified organic.

Organic Integrity Database

The Organic Integrity Database can and will be useful to everyone in the organic industry. Here is where you will find all farmer's and handlers' organic certifications. This will also help transition producers who want to apply for NRCS Grants and RMA crop insurance. Or need to look for certain certified organic products that you need to buy!



On TOPP of Organic Podcast

Don't forget about the podcast! Every other Wednesday we release a new podcast. We have some exciting episodes coming up! Tune in! You can find it on all sites Apple, Spotify, Amazon.

Come Grow Organic with US!

The organic movement in Texas has been growing at an unprecedented rate, and there's no better time to be a part of it. Whether you're just starting out or well into organic transition, there are a wealth of opportunities for you to **Come Grow Organic with Texas TOPP!**

Timber Darnell