

Organic News

Upcoming Programs

Tuesday, June 25 – Eagle Lake Rice Field Day to be held at the Rice Research Center. Meal and program following the field day at Eagle Lake Community Center.

Organic Cotton Meeting about GOTS Regulations!

We are working to set up a meeting sometime in the first two weeks of July around Seminole for a Face-to-Face meeting about GOTS regulations. Hope to get details to you soon.

Thursday, July 11 – Beaumont Rice Field Day will be held at the Rice Research Center near Beaumont. Organic research will be featured on the tour right after lunch.

Tuesday, August 20 – South Plains Organic Cotton/Peanut Field Tour near Seminole. 8 am to 1 pm. More information is coming soon but Dr. John Cason, Dr. Calvin Trostle, Dr. Ken Lege and Dr. Carol Kelly will be on the tour along with others!

Guayule! A West Texas Rubber Tree?



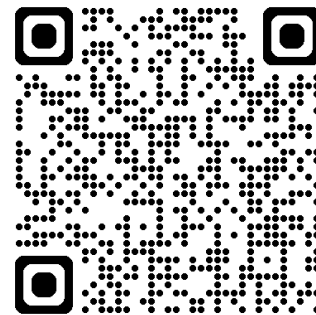
On May 2, 2024, I had the privilege of attending and speaking at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Uvalde – Vegetable Spring Field Day. The field day featured a morning walking tour of all the research going on at the center and

one of the stops was extremely interesting and informative, especially since it covered an area of agriculture I had never heard about. **Del Craig with Bridgestone Company** (maker of many brands of tires) was on hand to talk about their continued research into a plant called “Guayule,” and it was a fascinating introduction!

Guayule is a shrub native to the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. The scientific name is *Parthenium argentatum*, and it’s indeed a source of natural rubber.

Guayule is particularly interesting because it offers an alternative to the traditional rubber source, the *Hevea brasiliensis* tree, which is grown primarily in Southeast Asia.

Use this QR code to read a lot more than this about guayule.



USDA Offers Some Great Organic Outreach Materials

The organic label is more than just a marketing term; it is a rigorous standard of quality that reflects sustainable and environmentally friendly practices across the agricultural sector. The USDA’s National Organic Program (NOP) is at the heart of this movement, ensuring that products labeled as organic meet stringent, federally regulated guidelines. This unified regulatory framework is crucial not just for maintaining the integrity of the organic label but also for investing in and supporting a diverse array of stakeholders involved in the organic supply chain—from farmers and researchers to retailers and consumers. Tools such as the **USDA Organic Consumer Outreach Toolkit** play a vital role in promoting these standards, ensuring that the value of organic products is clearly communicated and understood by the consumer

but also by those outside looking in and examining the organic program family!

The **USDA Organic Consumer Outreach Toolkit** is designed to educate stakeholders along the supply chain and inform consumers about what the organic label represents. Clear, consistent messaging helps to ensure that the organic label retains its value and

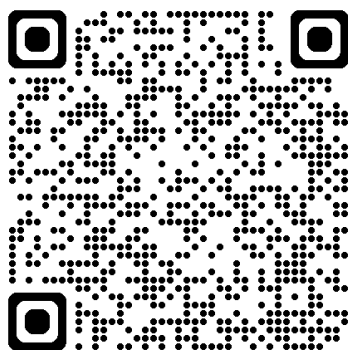
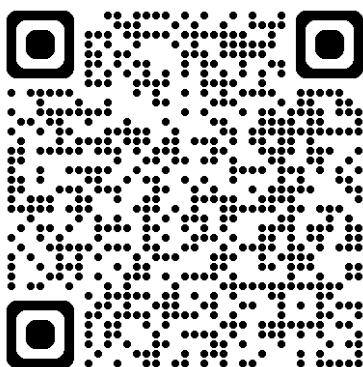
significance in the marketplace. For instance, retail businesses can use the toolkit to better explain the benefits of organic products to customers, reinforcing trust and understanding.

Or maybe you can use the toolkit to make sure that customers of your farm products know what organic means! You know the drill, just point your camera phone at the QR code above to see the toolkit and even download it!

GMO Strip Test? QuickStix can detect GMOs!

Most organic farmers understand what GMO means but to make sure let me define it. Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in plants refer to those plants that have been altered through genetic engineering to possess specific plant traits. These modifications typically aim to provide a level of resistance to pests and diseases, improve tolerance to herbicides, or other traits as companies want or consumer's demand.

GMOs cannot be expressed in any organic seed or organic plant and certainly GMO proteins cannot be found in products that a consumer wants to buy as certified organic. BUT how do you know if



something has these genetically engineered proteins that GMO crops express?

Recently I needed to know how to do a quick test for GMOs and to be honest I had no clue how that was done. But I did know Dr. Carol Kelly and she was a wealth of information. She shared with me that the cotton lab at Lubbock had used these simple and inexpensive strip tests (see the picture) for GE proteins.

The kits allow you to use a "leaf tissue punch" to get a leaf sample or to just crush a seed to test if a seed has GMO proteins.

Drop this into the little vial with the test solution and then insert the QuickStix and after

10 minutes you have results. You have to call to get a price, but estimates are +/- \$5 per strip. You will be ordering several at a time but a very handy test.

Plant Killer Compost?

Dow AgroSciences, now known as Corteva Agriscience makes the Grazon Next herbicide with aminopyralid and 2,4-D in a premix. It has been on the market for years and is very a popular pasture and hayfield herbicide.

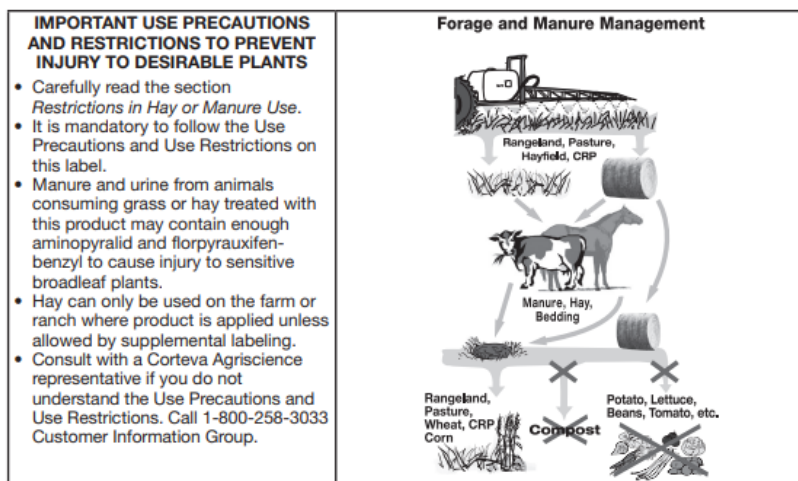
Corteva Agriscience also has a fairly new pasture weed control product called Duracor which is a mix of aminopyralid and florpiauxifen. This product is popular because it does not require a Texas Department of Agriculture pesticide license to purchase, which helps a lot of landowners who want to spray pastures and hayfields with their own equipment.

Both products have gotten used a lot more in the past few years because other pasture products with dicamba have been in short supply and more expensive. If someone wanted to spray weeds these "aminopyralid" products are probably what is



applied, and cattle eat the hay or grass with this herbicide on it!

* Hay from grass treated with DuraCor within the preceding 18 months can only be used on the farm or ranch where the product is applied unless allowed by supplemental labeling.



So, what's the issue? Well, the aminopyralid is very persistent in the environment such that they put this warning on the labels of both products. This chemical passes through the rumen relatively intact and stays in the manure. In fact, it stays in the manure for months and composting does not remove the chemical! This means that your **compost can be a great herbicide**, but that herbicide compost kills cotton, peanuts, vegetables, or almost anything but a grass type plant.

I have gotten a number of calls this spring about plants dying in the field or in planters and the common issue is they all had the same symptoms and they all had compost



added to the soil. The picture (middle) is of tomatoes in a planter filled with a mix of manure

and soil. The cows were fed hay harvested from Grazon Next treated fields and so the manure was DEADLY!

Bioassay – Fancy Name for a Simple Process?

What is a Bioassay?

A bioassay is a scientific method used to determine the concentration or potency of a substance by its effect on living cells or tissues.

In agriculture, bioassays are commonly used to assess the biological activity of substances such as pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, and soil amendments. By observing the response of a biological organism to a specific substance, researchers (or a farmer) can evaluate the substance's effectiveness, toxicity, and potential environmental impact.

Real-Life Example: Herbicide Residue Testing. A common application of bioassays in agriculture is testing for the presence of herbicide residues in the soil. Suppose a farmer uses a new herbicide and wants to know if it will affect the subsequent crop planting. By

conducting a bioassay, soil samples from treated fields are collected and plants are grown in these samples. (the picture shows

two pots – one with herbicide and one without)

If the test plants show stunted growth or other adverse effects, it indicates that herbicide residues are present at levels that could harm future crops. This information helps the farmer decide whether to



delay planting or take remedial actions such as soil remediation or selecting tolerant crop varieties.

Generally, I get this comment, "I can't wait for plants to grow to make a decision!" I understand that time is critical but remember you are taking soil from that area and moving it to a warm location with light. Warm soil means fast germination. Second, you are planting crops that do come up quick in warm soils; corn, peanuts, cotton, etc. will grow quickly if the air temperature and soil temperature are high.

What are the alternatives? Of course, you can just follow the field. Or you can mail it to a testing lab and spend \$75-\$500 and wait 10 days or more for the results. I kinda like the scientific method known as Bioassay or better yet On-Farm Bioassay!

2024 Organic Trade Association Consumer Perception Survey

I have many opportunities to talk to folks about organic and the nearly 400 organic families that grow organic crops and livestock. In talking to groups you try and share lots of information about what is organic and why they should buy organic products. These charts and graphs are from the recently released Consumer Perception Survey and the information is really great to look at. They

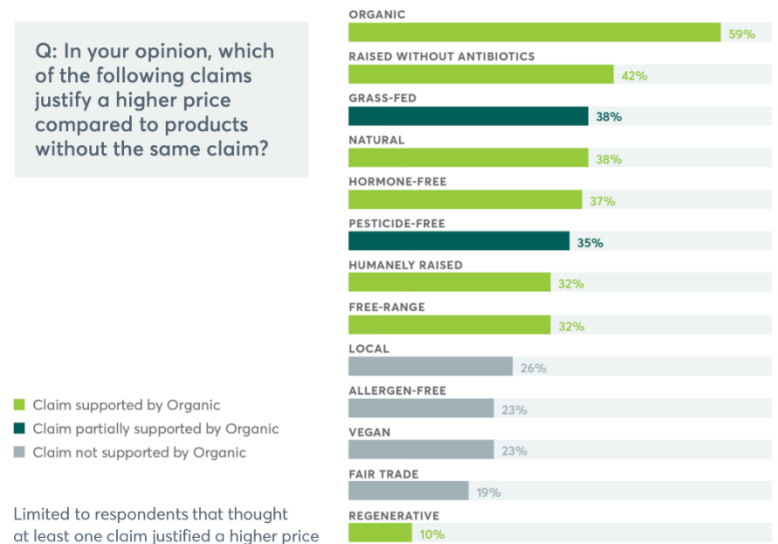
surveyed 1,201 ordinary consumers about what food they buy. Here is one fact I love, 88% of all consumers know about certified organic, the highest of any food claim.

Use the QR code to look at the whole survey.

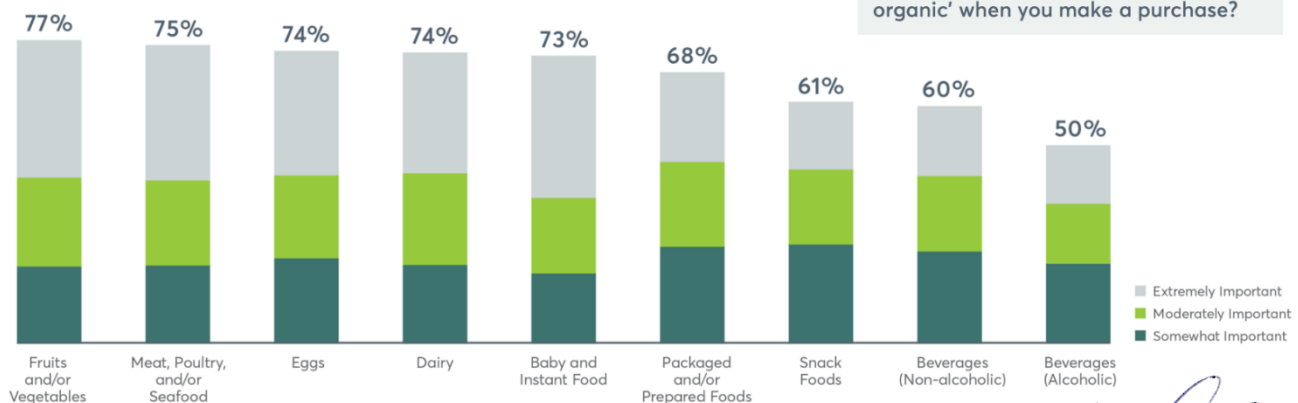


Organic is considered a claim that justifies a higher price for 59% of US consumers, higher than any other claim.

Q: In your opinion, which of the following claims justify a higher price compared to products without the same claim?



USDA Organic labels matter most to US consumers when purchasing fresh produce, meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, dairy and baby foods.



= % of respondents listing claim as extremely important or moderately important





TEXAS TOPP



Organic Cost-Share is BACK!

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP), administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA), provides organic producers and handlers with financial assistance to reduce the cost of organic certification. The program reimburses producers and handlers for a portion of their paid certification costs. Once certified, organic producers and handlers are eligible to receive reimbursement for 75 percent of certification costs for program year 2024, up to a maximum of \$750 per certification scope—crops, livestock, wild crops, handling, and State Organic Program fees. The deadline to apply is October 24, 2024.

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 (TPP) 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.



Mentorship Circles

We have had great success with our mentorship circles! Over the past few months, mentors and mentees have been able to connect via video calls to discuss industry-related topics. It has been wonderful to see the positive impact.

If you would like to join us, please get in touch! This is a great opportunity to learn from others.

Reminder: Don't forget RECORDS

It's that time of year when keeping records is crucial! There are no specific rules about how your record keeping should be set up. Whether you choose digital or handwritten, the NOP requires that operations retain records regarding the production, harvest, and handling of agricultural products that are intended to be sold as organic. Your records must fully disclose all activities and transactions of the certified operation in sufficient detail. They need to be

available for inspection. If you need help setting up a system, please reach out.



Common Mistakes by 1st-Time Organic

As a first-time organic grower, it's important to avoid some common mistakes that are easy to overlook. Here are a few key points to remember:

1. Make sure to keep detailed field records and harvest dates. This is essential for staying organized and compliant with organic certification standards.
2. Only use materials that are approved by the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) or by your certifier. Using unapproved materials can delay the transition process or lead to loss of certification.
3. When filling out your organic system plan, don't forget to include the exact field locations on the maps and paperwork. This information is vital for the certifier to send out inspectors to your operation.

By staying on top of these points, you can ensure a smoother transition into organic growing and maintain your certification.

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!**



A Message from Timber

Hi friends! I hope this message finds you all very well. It is with a mix of excitement and sadness that I share the news that I will be leaving Texas TOPP. My time working with you has been a blessing, and I have learned so much from each one of you.

Before I depart, I will stay part-time remotely as we transition to the next person who will take my position. As we know, there is a season for everything, and I genuinely feel that this season has come to a close and the next one is waiting for me. I am excited about what this next chapter holds, including the opportunity to travel to the nations sharing the Good News.

If I could leave you with just one thought, remember our world is only as big as we make it. Change is a good thing, and I admire your natural approach to growing crops and raising animals.

This is not a goodbye, but a see you later. I have valued the connections I have made, and I am optimistic that I will run into each one of you at some point. In the meantime, I want to express my gratitude and heartfelt thank you for your trust and partnership with me. It has been a pleasure working with you, and I look forward to crossing paths again. As always, my door is always open.

Wishing you all the best,

Blessings,
Timber

