

Organic News

**Wishing you and yours a
 very Merry Christmas and
 a Happy New Year!**

Upcoming Programs

Tuesday, December 9 – Wednesday, December 10,
 Texas Plant Protection Conference, College Station.

The program this year is focused on water in agriculture with many great speakers. I am speaking on, "Use of Biopesticide and Biostimulants to Manage Crop Pests and Diseases" on Wednesday.

Wednesday, December 10 – Organic Trade Association, Virtual Buyer-Seller Mixer. An online event for organic buyers and sellers – like online speed dating to support expansion of the U.S. organic supply chain! Online (11 AM to 2 PM Central Time). Registration is limited. TO REGISTER NOW: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/YBCCCHNL>

Monday, December 15 – Last Day to Help Shape the 2026 Organic Market Report. The Organic Trade Association is asking anyone who sells organic products to answer a short 10-minute survey. If you are a grower or handler, please go here before

December 15:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/OIS26OTAEM> to start the survey.

Thursday, December 18 – Calling all West and Southwest farmers and stakeholders! Join us on December 18, 2025, from 11:30 PM – 1:00 PM CST for an in-depth walkthrough of "Advancing Regional Organic Markets: A Farmer's Toolkit", a new resource designed to strengthen regional organic economies. Click here to register:

<https://tinyurl.com/muw9m74m>

Monday, January 5, 2026 – Terry/Yoakum Crops Conference. Details coming soon. Date is firm.

Tuesday, January 6, 2026 – Southern Mesa Ag Conference. Tahoka, Texas. Details coming soon. Date is firm.

Wednesday, January 21, 2026 – Western Rice Conference in El Campo, Texas. Contact Wharton Co. Extension at (979) 532-3310.

Thursday, January 22, 2026 – Southeast Texas Rice Symposium, Winnie-Stowell Community Building 1301 Park Street, Winnie, TX. 8am to 1pm. Organic Rice Production included.

Wednesday, February 4, 2026 – Sandyland Crops Conference, Seminole, Texas. 8am to 3 pm. Lots of speakers and plenty of exhibitors.

Friday, February 20, 2026 – East Texas Fruit and Nut Conference, Cross Brand Cowboy Church, 11915 FM 2015, Tyler, Texas. For more information or to register click here:

<https://smith.agrilife.org/fnvc/> I am speaking on EarthKind Pecan Production for East Texas and including some organic pecan production tips.

Thursday, March 19, 2026 – Small Grains Soil Health, Fertility, and Cover Crops – Dalhart, Texas. Details coming soon. Date is firm. Great Topics with plenty of new information.

Congratulations To Our 2025 Finalist!

Carl Pepper, Texas Organic Farmer near O'Donnell has been named one of four finalists for the **Organic Growers Summit, Grower of the Year Award!**

The Grower of the Year (GOTY) Award recognizes growers who have excelled in commercial organic agriculture practices, made significant contributions to the organic industry, and are recognized as role models among their peers. Four outstanding organic producers will be recognized on stage as Grower of the Year finalists at the annual Organic Grower



Summit in Monterey, CA, one of whom will win the prestigious overall Grower of the Year Award. Each finalist will be provided with up to a \$1,000 travel stipend (if needed) as well as complimentary hotel accommodation for the duration of the conference.

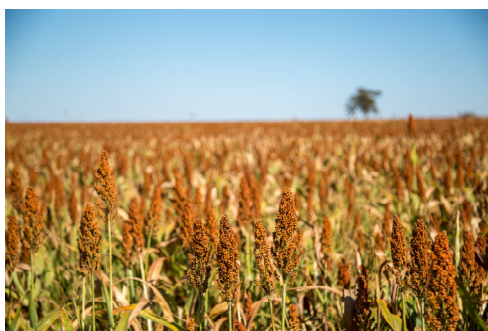
I am extremely excited that Carl has been named a finalist for this national award. Carl is a constant source of trusted information and practical advice. Whether it's a new producer seeking mentorship or a research team testing mechanical weed control methods, Carl is the first person most of us call. His openness to experimentation and eagerness to innovate have made him an indispensable part of organic work in Texas. From perfecting finger weeding to refining cover crop strategies, Carl's contributions have helped shape many of our technical recommendations for organic systems. What sets Carl apart is not just his technical ability, but his spirit of service. He is always willing to host a farm tour, lead a demonstration, or speak candidly with fellow producers about the challenges and rewards of organic farming. His presence and voice lend credibility to organic in Texas.

He is also one of the most encouraging voices for the organic movement in Texas. At a time when producers are weighing risks and uncertainties, Carl is the example of how organic production can be economically viable, ecologically sound, and personally rewarding. His enthusiasm is contagious, and his leadership has been critical in moving Texas organic agriculture forward. **Congratulations to Carl Pepper and his family on this outstanding honor!**

Need Help with Sorghum Markets?

Recently I was at the Southwest Dairy Day and visited the United Sorghum Checkoff

Program booth where Dr. Brent Bean, Agronomy Director for Sorghum and Shelee Padgett, Director



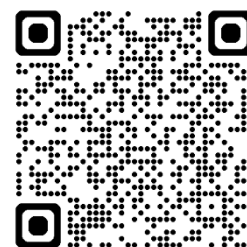
of Emerging Markets & Grower Leader Development for Sorghum were talking to producers. I mentioned that we are having some difficulty marketing organic sorghum. Shelee immediately said she would like to help!! I hope you are reading this because that is huge.... If you want more details reach out directly to Shelee at email: shelee@sorghumgrowers.com or United Sorghum office: 806.687.8727 or her Cell: 830.998.1815. **Shelee** knows I am putting this in the newsletter and she welcomes your reaching out.

Extension Economists Need Organic Farmer's Help!

Organic farmers - we need your help!

Extension economists are working on a Custom Rate Survey that will provide answers to custom agricultural service

providers as well as those who use those services - like farmers. Typically, the survey includes producers, custom service providers, county Extension agents and other experts with some knowledge of custom services and operations in your area. We need more and better information on organic practices (like running sweeps and finger weeders) to help us make decisions and budget accordingly. Please take a few minutes to give us your input by scanning the QR code!



Variety Trials: Choosing Wheat for Organic Systems

On Thursday, November 13th, Dr. Brandon Gerrish, State Extension Small Grain Specialist planted our first Texas Organic Wheat Variety Trial at Todd Vranac's certified organic farm in Rule, Texas. This test is an opportunity to evaluate wheat lines under authentic organic production conditions. This irrigated farm, managed organically

over many seasons, offers an environment that conventional research plots often cannot replicate.



The trial this year includes a mix of public and private genetics—everything from long-standing varieties like **TAM**

114 and **Smith's Gold** to experimental Oklahoma and Texas lines, plus new materials such as **Green Hammer**, **Paradox**, **High Cotton**, and **Guardian**. All the information about the trial is on the website and you can get there by scanning the QR code to the right.



New Organic Cowpea 'TAMC 101': A Cover Crop and Forage Option for Southern Farms

by Dr. Waltram Ravelombola, Texas A&M AgriLife Research – Vernon

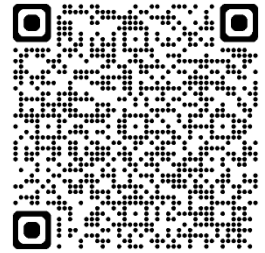


Texas A&M AgriLife has released a new organic cowpea variety called **'TAMC 101'**, developed specifically

for farms across the southern United States that are working to build soil health in hot, dry conditions. Cowpeas have always been a dependable summer legume in our region, sprouting with very little moisture and growing through the intense heat that shuts down many other cover crops. What makes this variety stand out is that it was bred and

selected entirely under organic management, meaning it performed well without synthetic nitrogen, without chemical weed control, and under real dryland field pressure. That alone makes it unusual—and useful—for organic and regenerative growers.

Across three years of trials in Vernon and Lubbock from 2021 to 2023, TAMC 101 consistently produced more biomass than the check. Its average dry matter yield was **3,850 lb/acre**, compared with **3,485 lb/acre** for **'Iron & Clay'** cowpea, and in every single environment the new variety came out ahead. That extra biomass matters for weed shading, soil organic matter, and forage harvest. Nitrogen accumulation followed the same pattern. **'TAMC 101'** averaged **74 lb N/acre**, compared with **70 lb N/acre** for the check, giving organic producers a dependable warm-season legume to help cycle nutrients naturally and reduce the strain on soil fertility.



Texas Organic Agriculture: Expanding from Farm to Market

The Texas organic industry continues to grow on both ends of the supply chain—from the farms that grow organic crops and livestock to the companies that process, package, and distribute them. As of October 2025, the state lists **412 certified organic grower operations**, including farms that produce crops, livestock, and wild crops on **512,000** Texas acres. At the same time, the number of **certified organic handlers**—processors, distributors, and packers—has climbed from **457 in 2023 to 694 in 2025**, a **52% increase in just two years**.

Who are all these handlers in Texas for organic products? Texas's 694 organic handlers now represent a wide range of activities. The largest sectors include **fruits and vegetables (285)**, **beverages (125)**, **grains, flours, and cereals (105)**, **nuts and seeds (111)**, **seasonings and flavorings (102)**, and **oils and oleoresins (71)**. These

categories show that Texas's organic sector is growing not only in raw production but in **value-added processing, product manufacturing, and consumer-ready goods**. Additional activity in **livestock feed (23), dairy and dairy alternatives (27), meat, poultry, and eggs (35), processed foods (47), and fiber, textiles, and cotton (20)** round out the picture of a maturing organic industry.

So, my reason for telling you this was to ask, "Have you reached out to any of these Texas handlers to tell them what you grow, why you grow it and where you grow it?" They might want to meet you!

From Farm to Consumer: Why Organic Markets Need Transparency and Storytelling to Grow

In our last "Texas Organic News" newsletter, I conducted a single question survey and the question was: **"What's standing in the way of producing and/or selling more organic products?"**

Here are the results from the 1,360 newsletters sent out – only 32 responses! In this survey you could only pick one answer for the question and here are the results so far.

Lack of grower contracts or reliable customers for organic products — 13 responses (40.6%) This is a question about demand for organic production or products, whichever segment you are involved in. If we don't get customers, we don't get paid!

Paperwork and certification take too much time or effort — 8 responses (25%) Of course everyone in organic says this is a problem but it ranks second behind selling more organic products.

Competition from imported organic products that reduce grower contracts or retailer profitability — 5 responses (15.6%) I thought this might be more of an issue and it is for some commodities but right now it ranks third.

Not enough profit margin in organic production or sales — 2 responses (6.3%)

Growers: Not enough organic inputs or supplies to grow efficiently — 3 responses (9.4%)

Handlers: Not enough consistent organic product available to sell — 1 response (3.1%)

Although overall response numbers have been low, I think the pattern is clear: the two largest barriers identified by producers are market access (customers/contracts) and certification/time-burden. These aren't simply agronomic issues—they point to deeper economic and institutional challenges in our organic systems. We need to do a better job **attracting customers** and we need to **improve certification systems** to make them easier and cheaper.

New Research Proposals Advancing Organic Agriculture in Texas and the Southern Region

Our Extension team has submitted research proposals this year that strengthen organic production across rice, grapes, wheat, cotton, and corn. **Hope they get funded!**

In **rice**, we are testing beneficial microbes to improve nutrient uptake, plant vigor, and yield while reducing fertilizer needs. Field trials and microbiome analysis will help guide future biological tools for Southern rice systems.

In **grapes**, our multi-state proposal evaluates trap crops and organic-friendly insecticides to reduce sharpshooters and spittlebugs that spread Pierce's Disease. Pairing trap crops with *Beauveria bassiana* and kaolin clay provides non-chemical options for organic vineyards.

Our **wheat** project advances high-anthocyanin purple and blue lines with greater antioxidant and nutrient levels, opening new identity-preserved markets for Texas growers.

In **cotton**, we are supporting an AFRI proposal to engineer electrical weed control tools that reduce tillage, protect soil, and offer organic producers effective non-chemical weed control options.

Finally, our **corn** proposal builds hybrid seed-production capacity for regionally adapted non-GMO hybrids suited to organic, water-limited systems—strengthening the seed supply for organic grain and dairy producers across the South.