Organic News

Upcoming Programs

Wednesday, February 4 – Sandyland Crops Conference, Seminole, Texas. 8am to 3 pm. Lots of speakers and plenty of exhibitors. For more information call Amanda at the Gaines Co. Extension Office – (432) 758-4006

Thursday, February 5 – USDA Organic Survey – Last day to complete the survey. The 2025 Organic Survey will be mailed in December 2025 and will collect new data on organic production, marketing practice, income, and expenses in the United States. The organic surveys provide acreage, production, and sales data for a variety of organic crop and livestock commodities as well as organic marketing and agricultural practices. These surveys help to calculate how resources from USDA are allocated to organic programs!

Tuesday, February 10 – Thursday, February 12, Southwest Cotton Physiology Conference – Lubbock. Organic Cotton presentation on Thursday, Feb. 12 at 10:00 am. Introduction to Organic Cotton Production and Challenges for the Future.

Tuesday, February 17 – 41st Annual Fort Bend Regional Vegetable Conference, Rosenberg. "Beyond Certification: Organic Principles for Small-Scale Growers." https://fortbend.agrilife.org/

Friday, February 20 – 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.

Tuesday, March 3 – Wednesday, March 4 – 2026 USDA Ogallala Aquifer Program Workshop, West Texas A&M Campus in Canyon, Texas. Discussion and plans for research and education to maintain and preserve the Ogallala Aquifer for agriculture.

Tuesday, March 3 – Annual WIC Nutrition Meeting, Rooted in Care: Growing Healthier Communities Through WIC Nourishing Immunity by Integrating Nutrition, Traditional Wellness Practices, and Public Health for Lifelong Resilience. Harris County Education Department Conference Center at 6300 Irvington Blvd. Houston, TX 77022. Noel Lopreore, Organic Program Assistant, will represent Texas A&M AgriLife Organic at this event talking about the health benefits of organic and the program in Texas.

Tuesday, March 17 – The Texas A&M University branch of the Agronomy Society of America (Agronomy Club) 6 pm at the Heep Center on Campus. Topic – Organic Weed Control in Field Crops.

Thursday, March 19 – Small Grains Soil Health, Fertility, and Cover Crops – Dalhart, Texas. Details are coming soon. Date is firm.

Cheating in the Organic Program

Organic certification isn't just a marketing label — it's a legal commitment governed by federal law. When a farmer or handler chooses to enter the USDA National Organic Program (NOP), they agree to follow strict standards that protect producers, markets, and consumers. Misrepresenting products as "organic" when they don't meet these standards undermines trust in the entire system and puts legitimate organic businesses at a competitive disadvantage. In Texas alone, the organic sector is a multi-billion-dollar industry, and even rumors or

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observed cases of illegal practices can damage the reputation and livelihood of honest growers.

The updated USDA organic enforcement regulations include significant penalties — civil fines of up to about **$22,900 per violation** and the possibility of criminal charges for fraud. Even if a chemical or input is legal in conventional farming, using it in a product sold as organic without approval is a violation. If there are concerns about suspected improper actions, it's important to understand these legal obligations and the steps the National Organic Program takes to uphold integrity in the organic marketplace.

If you haven't been caught yet, now might be a good time to stop!

Honoring Dr. Jane Dever's Cotton Hall of Fame Induction

Dr. Jane K. Dever, former Texas A&M cotton breeder and longtime supporter of organic cotton production in Texas, was inducted into the **2025 Cotton Research and Promotion Hall of Fame** at the Cotton Incorporated/Cotton Board Annual Meeting in New Orleans. This prestigious recognition celebrates her more than **40 years of leadership in cotton breeding and fiber quality research**, her commitment to improving U.S. cotton, and her mentorship of fellow scientists. After serving as associate director of the Texas A&M AgriLife Lubbock Research and Extension Center and professor of plant breeding, she now leads the Pee Dee Research and Education Center at Clemson University — a career that has strengthened both conventional and organic cotton systems.

Congratulations to Dr. Dever but more importantly a big thanks for all you did to support and improve our Texas cotton industry and people!

Organic-Adapted Varieties: Meeting Growers' Needs in Texas

Organic producers in Texas face a persistent challenge: very few **certified organic-adapted varieties** are available for the crops they grow.

Most seed on the market is bred for conventional systems and different environments, which means organic growers often plant varieties that aren't well suited to Texas heat, drought cycles, pests, or soil conditions — raising risk and limiting reliable performance. To change this, Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension is investing in **organic-first breeding** so that growers can one day answer "What variety should I plant?" with options **bred organically right here in Texas.** These efforts include organic **peanut** and **barley** varieties nearing release, **corn** lines targeted for future release, tests of **wheat** performance under organic conditions, and the start of an organic **sorghum** program. In fiber crops, Dr. Jane Dever and Dr. Carol Kelly have advanced a **cotton variety (CA4019) under organic development** with the aim of providing high-quality, well-adapted options for organic cotton producers in the coming years,

This work matters because **organic-adapted varieties** can reduce input needs, better tolerate stress, align with biological soil processes, and ultimately improve consistency and profitability for growers who want seeds that is both locally adapted and developed without genetic engineering. Building this seed base positions Texas organic agriculture to grow with confidence as markets and regulations evolve.

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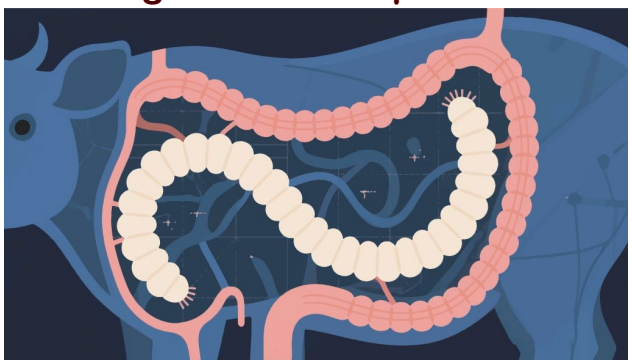
New Funding Opportunity for Texas Producers (HB 43 – 2025)

Texas has launched a **new statewide agricultural grant program** created by **House Bill 43 (2025)**. This new **Texas Agricultural Grant** expands the Texas Agricultural Finance Authority's (TAFA) ability to support agriculture across the state and may open up **new funding pathways for organic and transitioning producers**—especially those who need capital to strengthen production, improve efficiency, or expand market opportunities.

Status & Timeline (What to Watch For)

This program became effective **June 20, 2025**, and the TAFA board is working through **rulemaking during 2025**. The key date for growers is that **grant applications are expected to be posted in late January 2026**. If this grant rolls out the way it appears intended, it could be a **game changer** for producers who have struggled to find cost-share or grant programs that fit real on-farm needs.

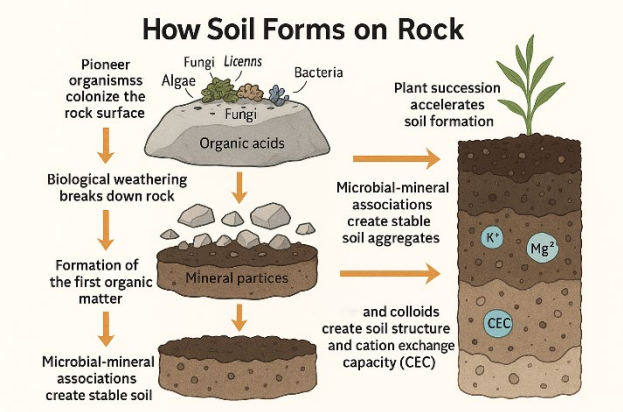
Organic Dairy & Internal Parasite Challenges — Your Input Needed



Internal parasites remain one of the most persistent health challenges facing organic dairy herds because treatment options are very limited under the National Organic Program (NOP). Conventional farms often use a range of dewormers and endectocides with established withdrawal times, but organic systems must rely largely on **preventive management** and only use approved products like fenbendazole or moxidectin in **emergency situations**, with strict restrictions on when treated animals can sell milk or retain organic status. Parasites such as gastrointestinal nematodes and coccidia can reduce body condition, lower milk production, and increase costs, especially in wetter years when pasture exposure increases risk.

To better understand how organic dairy producers are managing these challenges, **Texas A&M AgriLife and UC Davis are conducting a survey** on internal parasite management and deworming practices. This work aims to identify **practical, sustainable approaches** that work under organic rules so we can improve guidance and resources for producers. The survey takes about **10–15 minutes**, and responses remain confidential.

How Soil Can Develop in Just Decades



We often hear that soil takes thousands of years to form, but recent insights show that the **early stages of soil development can happen much more quickly — within just a few decades — when biology drives the process.** Soil begins forming when pioneer organisms like lichens, fungi, and bacteria colonize bare mineral material. These tiny life forms don't just survive on rock; they **break it down physically and chemically**, helping release nutrients and creating the conditions necessary for

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more complex soil to develop. As organic matter from plants and microbes accumulates, it begins forming **stable organo-mineral structures** that hold nutrients and water and support plant growth. Significant improvements in soil structure, such as aggregation (stable soil crumbs), can appear in just **10–30 years** when biological activity is high, organic inputs are consistent, and erosion is minimized.

For organic and regenerative producers, this means the practices we prioritize — longer living roots through cover crops and perennials, consistent carbon inputs from residues and compost, and reduced disturbance — aren't just "nice to have." They **actively accelerate soil building** and enhance water infiltration, nutrient retention, and resilience to stress. In real farm systems, measurable functional gains in soil health can emerge on management time scales that matter to growers.

Wheat Conditions and Vernalization

Wheat across much of Texas has established reasonably well where fall moisture was adequate, but the 2026 crop is entering a period where **temperature patterns matter as much as rainfall**. Conditions have been generally warm and dry, particularly in central and southern Texas, which has limited the accumulation of vernalization hours. Vernalization is the cold-temperature requirement winter wheat must satisfy to transition from vegetative growth to reproductive development. Wheat accumulates vernalization most efficiently when temperatures remain **roughly in the low 30s to mid-40s °F**, while temperatures above or below that range contribute fewer effective chilling hours

Current estimates indicate that cumulative vernalization hours in much of south and central Texas remain **below long-term averages**. While the recent freeze will contribute additional chilling, continued periods of warm weather could result in **delayed or uneven heading** later in the spring, particularly in varieties with higher vernalization requirements. At this stage, it is still too early to draw firm conclusions, but growers should be aware that fields may look vegetatively normal now yet show differences as the crop approaches jointing and heading. Monitoring crop development over the next several weeks will be important, especially as wheat transitions toward reproductive growth and water demand increases under persistently dry conditions.

Why "Scaling" Organic Agriculture Isn't About Size or Technology

A common misconception in organic circles is that **organic farming should "look" a certain way**—small fields, hand tools, and minimal technology—to remain true to its principles. The truth is that *organic is a regulated production standard*, not a farm aesthetic. Under the USDA National Organic Program, a farm can be 20 acres or 20,000 acres and still be certified organic as long as it meets the same legal requirements for soil fertility, pest management, recordkeeping, and exclusion of genetic engineering. It's not **farm size or the presence of sensors and data systems** that determines the ecological value of an operation, it's *how a farm manages soil, biodiversity, and resources.* Management quality, not size, is the key measure of stewardship.

Technology, whether soil moisture sensors, precision nutrient planning tools, GPS guidance, or decision support software—doesn't undermine organic principles. When used thoughtfully, these tools help improve **water use efficiency, nutrient synchronization, weed and pest monitoring, and traceability**, all of which align with organic goals. The real question for organic's future isn't "big vs. small," but whether systems are **well-managed with measurable outcomes** in soil health, biodiversity, and resilience.

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