Organic News

Upcoming Programs

Tuesday, June 2, Rice Delphacid Program, Nada, Texas. 1 pm to 3 pm. For more information, contact the Texas AgriLife Extension office in Colorado County at 979-732-2082; in Matagorda County at 979-245-4100; or Wharton County at 979-532-3310.

Tuesday, June 30, Eagle Lake Rice Field Day, at the David R. Wintermann Rice Research Station, northwest of Eagle Lake off Hwy 102. Tours starting at 4:00 pm, which will be followed by an evening program and dinner at the Eagle Lake Community Center. For more information call Brandy Morace, 409-752-2741 or email bmorace@aesrg.tamu.edu

Thursday, July 9, Beaumont Rice Field Day, at the Research Center, west of Beaumont off U.S. Hwy 90. Field tours starting at 8:00 AM, followed by a morning program, a barbeque lunch, and an afternoon tour on current research projects at the center. For more information call Brandy Morace, 409-752-2741 or email bmorace@aesrg.tamu.edu

Thursday, July 30, Hi-A Corn Variety Tour (date depends on the weather), at the Halfway Research Center, Halfway, Texas. 9am – Sponsored lunch meal at the Halfway Center.

Monday, August 3-Tuesday, August 4 – Southern Family Farmers & Food Systems Conference, San Marcos, Texas. Pre-conference workshops Aug 2-3rd. LBJ Student Center, Texas State University. Email: conference@farmandranchfreedom.org or smallproducers@txstate.edu

Tuesday, August 4-Wednesday, August 5 - TAMU Research and Extension Small Grain Workers meeting at the High Plains Research and Extension Center in Canyon. Great time when all of our TAMU Small Grain folks can talk about issues, problems and new research. If you have Organic Small Grain concerns let me know so I can share with our group!

Wednesday, August 19 – Organic Cotton and Peanut Tour, Seminole, Texas. 8 am to 1 pm. Several stops, great sponsored lunch and lots of organic crop updates. Lunch is provided by generous sponsors for the tour. More information is here -→→→

Wednesday, September 2 – Southwest Dairy Day, Dalhart, Texas. Lots of exhibits, speakers, tours, and sponsors.

Thursday, September 3 – Organic Variety Tour – New Deal, Texas. (Tentative Date!) This tour is part of an on-farm SARE grant to develop new organic varieties in Texas. On the tour new corn, sorghum, peanut, cotton, guar and cowpea varieties will be featured. Tentative plans are to start at 10 am and go through a sponsored lunch starting at New Deal Grain in New Deal.

Monday, September 14 – Friday, September 18 – Global Sorghum Conference, Lubbock, Texas. Hosted by Texas Tech University and a part of the Global Sorghum Association, an international organization - dedicated to sorghum production and research. -→→→→→→

Rice Delphacid Activity in Texas Rice

As part of the Texas A&M AgriLife rice entomology program, **Dr. Lina Bernaola, TAMU AgriLife Research Entomologist,** and her entomology team are monitoring some rice fields across the Texas Rice Belt throughout this growing season to track rice delphacid activity. To date, **rice delphacids have not been detected** in any of the monitored fields located in Wharton, Waller, Liberty, Chambers, and Jefferson counties. Most monitored fields are currently in the early- to late-tillering stages. While rice delphacid remains a pest of concern due to its recent impact on Texas

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rice production, current scouting observations indicate that populations have not yet been detected in our monitoring network. Regular field scouting remains important for early detection and timely management decisions should rice delphacid populations develop. **We will keep you informed!**

"Probing Our Country's Soil Health"

A new public-private partnership for improving how soil health can help with management decisions is being conducted in the United States. The project is called "Probing Our Country's Soil Health". They are looking for farmers and ranchers to participate. In fact, the project is looking for 420 fields in Texas with up to 210 participants – just in Texas. The only restriction is that you be a farmer – sorry gardeners, just farmers should apply!

Organic Farmers should jump at this chance to get free soil health testing including someone to actually take the samples! **At least ~$1200 in value……**

GOTS Version 8.0 – What It Means for Texas Organic Cotton

The Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) is the primary certification used to verify organic cotton as it moves from the farm through the gin and into textile markets. While USDA organic certification covers production, GOTS governs how that cotton is handled, processed, and sold as organic in the textile supply chain.

GOTS released Version 8.0 this spring (**effective March 1, 2027**), and while most of the discussion centers around global textile supply chains, there are several changes that matter directly to organic cotton producers and gins here in Texas. From my perspective, this update is less about changing how we grow cotton and more about tightening how the system verifies and documents what we are already doing. I hate more rules but we do operate in a global market!

One of the clearest shifts in Version 8.0 is the increased focus on the **gin as the first control point** in the organic textile chain. GOTS continues to define the gin as the "first processor," but now places more emphasis on what happens at that stage—especially around **segregation, documentation, and traceability**. In practical terms, this means the gin is no longer just moving cotton

through the system; it is playing a key role in protecting and verifying organic integrity.

Another area that will get attention is **GMO testing at the gin level**. GOTS 8.0 reinforces the requirement for testing, but it is important to understand what *did not* change. There is still **no numeric GMO threshold written into the standard**. Instead, certification decisions continue to be based on whether the farmer followed approved organic practices and whether the certifier can verify compliance. In other words, a test result by itself does not determine the outcome—the system and the documentation behind it still matters most!

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Texas TOPP Continues to Support Farmers Interested in Organic Production

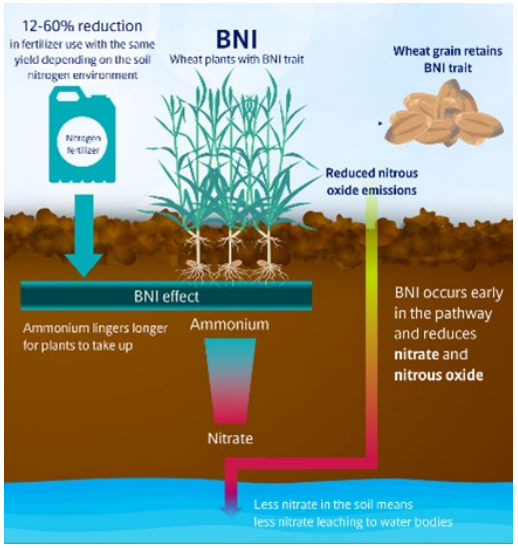
Although the USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) grant is scheduled to conclude on September 30, 2026, support for farmers interested in certified organic production remains strong in Texas. The Texas TOPP network continues to connect farmers, ranchers, and agricultural professionals with practical information, educational resources, and experienced organic producers who understand the opportunities and challenges of transitioning to organic production.

If you are considering organic farming, exploring certification, or simply have questions about organic practices, we encourage you to reach out. Through the Texas TOPP network, we can help answer questions about certification, production practices, recordkeeping, marketing, and organic regulations. We can also connect you with an experienced organic mentor who can provide one-on-one guidance based on your crops, livestock enterprise, and region of the state. Whether you are just beginning to explore organic agriculture or are already taking steps toward certification, Texas TOPP remains committed to helping producers make informed decisions and build successful organic operations.

BNI Wheat: Can the Crop Help Manage Its Own Nitrogen?

Nitrogen is one of the most important nutrients in crop production, but it is also one of the hardest to manage well. In organic agriculture, that challenge is even greater because we do not use synthetic nitrogen fertilizers. We depend on legumes, manure, compost, crop rotations, soil organic matter, and biological activity to supply nitrogen over time.

That makes nitrogen efficiency extremely important. Every pound of nitrogen released from manure, compost, legumes, or soil organic matter needs to be captured by the crop as effectively as possible. When nitrogen is lost, the farmer may lose yield potential, grain protein, forage value, and money. The environment can also lose because nitrogen may move into water or escape from the soil as nitrogen gases. This is why a concept called **Biological Nitrification Inhibition**, or **BNI**, has great potential and why we are looking at it in our wheat breeding programs and even other crop breeding programs.



BNI is a natural plant trait where roots release compounds that slow down **nitrification**, the microbial process that converts ammonium nitrogen into nitrate nitrogen.

That matters because ammonium nitrogen, written as NH_4^+, tends to stay attached to soil particles. Nitrate nitrogen, written as NO_3^-, is much more mobile and can move with water below the root zone. In simple terms, **BNI** may help the crop **slow the leak in the nitrogen bucket!**

Building Local Hybrid Seed for Organic Farms

One of the biggest limitations I continue to see in organic grain and dairy systems—especially here

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in Texas and across the southern region—is not just fertility or weed control. It is **genetics**. We simply do not have hybrids that are truly adapted to our heat, drought, and water-limited environments.

2026 Southern SARE Producer Grants Funded
March 27, 2026

GRIFFIN, Georgia – Over $344,000 in grants from the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) program has been funded for farmers to further sustainable agriculture production and marketing practices throughout the Southern region.

Topics including interseeding cover crops into cotton, establishing native wildflower cover crops in apple orchards, building local corn seed production, and evaluating cage-grown oysters are among the Producer Grants funded for FY2026. The Producer Grants are strictly for farmers and ranchers to conduct research projects on their farm to not only solve production and marketing challenges, but to also share their results with fellow farmers in an education and outreach capacity.

A new on-farm project as part of a Southern SARE grant is being led by Seth Fortenberry (New Deal Grain) is working directly on that problem. This work is supported through the **Southern SARE program**, which is designed to fund practical, on-farm research that can be quickly adopted by other farmers—making it a strong fit for advancing organic systems in our region.

What This Project Is About

This on-farm project is focused on **building local hybrid corn seed production** for organic systems. Instead of relying on seed developed and produced in the Midwest, the goal is to produce **Non-GMO hybrid seed right here in the South**, under the same conditions farmers actually face.

A key part of this project—and one I think is worth highlighting—is the direct connection to public plant breeding. The hybrids being used in this work, including TAMZ106 and TAMZ107, were developed by **Dr. Wenwei Xu, Texas A&M AgriLife Research corn breeder in Lubbock**. His program has focused heavily on stress tolerance—heat, drought, and disease—which is exactly what our organic systems require in this region.

You may have noticed the announcement in **Upcoming Programs** on the first page of an **Organic Variety Tour** set for Thursday, September 3rd starting and ending at New Deal Grain just north of Lubbock. This tentative date has been set and as we get closer expect more details. Plans are to not only feature corn hybrids developed and grown on an organic basis but also other crops of importance to Texas organic farming. Mark your calendar for this great opportunity.

Organic Agriculture, Markets, and Trust: Emerging Trends for Texas Producers

Organic agriculture is increasingly revealing itself as more than simply a production system built around prohibited substances. Over the long term, it may be better understood as a biological and economic strategy centered on trust, resilience, traceability, and system function. While conventional agriculture often optimized around maximum efficiency, scale, and external inputs, organic agriculture has gradually emphasized relationships between soil biology, nutrient cycling, biodiversity, food quality, and consumer confidence. The USDA National Organic Program helped create a framework where consumers can trust production methods they cannot personally observe, making organic agriculture as much a transparency system as a farming system. At the same time, many long-term organic farmers increasingly report that mature organic systems (greater than 5-7 years) often become less dependent on purchased inputs such as soil health, rotations, and biological regulation improve over time.

These broader trends are also becoming increasingly visible within organic grain and dairy markets themselves, where pricing is often shaped less by simple commodity production and more by quality, traceability, transportation, end use, and long-term supply relationships. Current (Jan. to May 2026) USDA AMS reports and organic market activity continue to show that organic agriculture operates through highly differentiated markets where buyer confidence, dependable supply, and product identity can significantly influence value. If you scan the **QR Code** you can read some analysis of Corn, Wheat, Dairy, and Soybean Organic Markets!

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