

ORGANIC NEWS

AgriLife Organics

Some of you may have already gotten a letter announcing the creation of an Organic Program Specialist position for AgriLife Extension but if you didn't then let this inaugural newsletter catch you up!



I (**Bob Whitney**) was hired in May and my responsibilities are

state-wide to:

- Work with certified and transitioning farmers to overcome the challenges they face farming organically.
- Help resolve issues with NOP regulations especially issues related to what is approved and can be used or done within the guidelines.
- Provide training for organic inspectors and certifiers.
- Work with NRCS and County Extension Agents to learn about organic farming practices and where or how they can help organic producers.
- Work with various commodity groups helping them with organic practices and issues related to their commodity. I help with crop seminars, field days, short courses, etc. providing organic production speakers and topics and teaching at those educational events.
- Coordinate and collaborate on research projects that could or do have an impact in organic agriculture. We have a great team of research scientists and extension specialists that work on organic programs, and we all collaborate to ensure we are addressing your organic issues in production agriculture.

This is your program, and I would love to hear from you about any issues, problems, or suggestions you have about organic agriculture.

Did You Know?

That Texas produces more organic peanuts than any other state and most of the world's supply of organic peanuts. There are over 70 certified organic

peanut growers on about 25,000 acres growing all 4 peanut types.

Texas is the largest producer of organic cotton in the US with 95 organic growers and the acres continue to grow every year. The problems in India over organic certification mean Texas should continue to enjoy very good organic cotton prices.



Also, Texas has 93 organic wheat producers growing wheat for dairies, organic seed, and organic wheat for bakery products. There are also 72 organic rice producers either on the east side of Houston around Winnie, Texas or on the west side around Eagle Lake. Rice producers are fortunate to have great organic rice research going on at Eagle Lake and Beaumont AgriLife Research facilities.

In addition, there are 38 organic corn producers, 14 organic milo producers and 39 organic vegetable/fruit growers.

AgriLife Organic Centers of Research

Texas A&M now has four research centers, Stephenville, Uvalde, Vernon, and Lubbock with dedicated organic (transition) acres we can use to conduct breeding and production research.



We have a new 99-acre organic farm at the Vernon Research Center with a dedicated organic crop breeding scientist.

Texas A&M Foundation Seed at Vernon has dedicated facilities to grow and process organic foundation seed in peanuts, cotton, and wheat with more crops to be added over time.

In August 2020, Dr. Waltram Ravelombola was hired to develop the Specialty & Organic Crops Breeding Program at Vernon, a unique and new

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

program within the Texas A&M System. The goal of this program is to release organic crop cultivars that are significantly lacking in Texas organic agriculture. Potential crops include organic legumes, peanuts, barley, and other small-grain crops.

Other Organic Research: *Dr. Katie Lewis* is working on “Organic and Conventional Agriculture: Learning from Each Other to Promote Soil Health and Economic Viability in West Texas.” *Dr. Curtis Adams* is working on projects to develop organic wheat seed germplasm and organic wheat systems. *Dr. Jane Dever* is developing new and innovative organic cotton breeding lines and *Dr. John Cason* has research plots for testing organic peanut varieties in 2 locations. There is organic rice, spinach and more research being conducted or planned!



Organic Resources

There are more and more great organic farming resources available today than ever before. I thought you might like to take a look at this resource I am enjoying. I happened to get this “tweet” on twitter to try out a new podcast called, “The Dirt on Organic Farming.” There are 6 podcasts, or if you prefer on YouTube. All 6 are practical and full of good information.

Another resource is a YouTube series put together by

AgriLife research and extension specialists with Dr. Emi Kimura as the lead. Good stuff and all organic! <https://tinyurl.com/ewkp87ch>

Another resource is a blog I use to post anything new in organics that might interest you the organic producer. <https://agrilifeorganics.wordpress.com>



Organic Cost Share

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has announced that organic producers and handlers can now apply for funds to assist with the cost of receiving or maintaining organic certification. Producers can be reimbursed for expenses made between Oct. 1, 2020, and Sept. 30, 2021, including application fees, inspection costs, fees related to equivalency agreement and arrangement requirements, travel expenses for inspectors, user fees, sales assessments, and postage. Reimbursement is up to \$500 but they have announced an additional \$20 million that will “complement” this cost-share program. Details are to be announced soon. You can sign up at your local FSA office or even better TDA is going to have an online signup. Check this website for details. <https://tinyurl.com/aznme3ry>

USDA Organic Enforcement

The latest USDA Organic Enforcement Quarterly Update lists 455 cases in progress. Of those 455 cases, **80% of them have to do with Fraud or Uncertified Operations making Organic Claims.** At this time just about everybody in the food or fiber business is trying to come up with a new and innovative label or to illegally latch onto a successful one like “Organic.”

Certified organic growers and handlers pay for their use of the word “Organic” and the right to display the **USDA Organic Seal**. There is not another program that “certifies” its food or fiber production like organic. Not “regenerative”, not “natural”, not “sustainable”, no other!

There is a real need for everyone to remember that the moment our consumers lose trust in Organic Agriculture being what it says it is – **Organic is doomed!**

Organic & Specialty Crops Survey

We have mailed a survey to organic growers throughout Texas to gain more insight into both organic agriculture and organic specialty crops. If you didn’t get one, then click on this link to complete one on the web:

<https://tinyurl.com/d7ezusz>