

WCC-67, Western Coordinating Committee for Sustainable Agriculture, 2002 Plenary Meeting:

“Organic Farming: Planning Professional Development Resources for Western Region Professionals ”

In association with:

The 3rd Annual National Small Farm Conference
Albuquerque Convention Center
Suite E213 E/F, East Complex
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Tuesday September 17, 2002
8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Chairman Sean L. Swezey (University of California) and Vice-Chairman Steve Guldán (New Mexico State University) convened the WCC-67 Western Coordinating Committee for Sustainable Agriculture meeting at 8:30 am. The following representatives from 12 western states were in attendance:

Baker, Brian (bb@omri.org) - Organic Materials Review Institute;
Jim Dyer (jadyer@frontier.net) - Colorado Organic Producers Assoc. & NCAT;
Jim Freeburn (freeburn@uwyo.edu) - University of Wyoming;
Brad Geary (bgeary@uidaho.edu) - University of Idaho;
David Granatstein (granats@wsu.edu) – Washington State University CSANR;
Steve Guldán (sguldán@nmsu.edu) - New Mexico State University;
Jim Jacobs (jjj@uwyo.edu) - University of Wyoming;
Del Jimenez (djimenez@nmsu.edu) New Mexico State University;
Phil Rasmussen (wsare@mendel.usu.edu) – Western SARE;
Charles Sanchez (sanchez@ag.arizona.edu) - University of Arizona;
Garry Stephenson (garry.stephenson@orst.edu) – Oregon State University;
Sean L. Swezey (findit@cats.ucsc.edu) – University of California;
Janice Uchida (juchida@hawaii.edu) – University of Hawaii;
Ron Walser (rwalser@nmsu.edu) – New Mexico State University;
Cinda Williams (cindaw@uidaho.edu) – University of Idaho

Vice Chair Guldán assembled agendas and committee packets which included the 2002 SARE-PDP grant “*Organic Farming Principles, Practices and Materials: Resources for Western Region Extension and USDA Professionals*” made to WCC-67 committee members, a time line for completion of the project grant, and the following agenda:

“Organic Farming: Planning Professional Development Resources for Western Region Professionals”

8:00-8:30	Coffee and continental breakfast
8:30-9:00	Welcome and Introduction

9:00 – 10:30	Review meeting objectives and agenda Introductions Brief state reports on size and growth of organic farming in the western states. Needs and previous training activities and materials in the states.
10:30-10:45	Break
10:45-11:30	Review and Discussion of new PDP Grant
11:30-12:00	Opportunities for other states to get involved (Freeburn)
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-3:45	Facilitated Planning of PDP deliverables and trainings [with a break from 2:30-2:45]
3:45-4:00	Meeting Evaluation and Adjournment

After introductions and thanking the Vice-Chair and the NMSU staff of the Alcalde Sustainable Agriculture Research Center for hosting the meeting, Chair Swezey explained the objectives of the committee meeting as:

- 1) Participants have a better understanding of the importance and scope of organic farming research and extension in the western region,
- 2) Participants are familiar with current organic compliance training (events and materials) in the western region, and the need for additional work in this area,
- 3) Participants become familiar with the newly funded PDP grant for organic compliance training and opportunities for additional collaboration,
- 4) Participants establish a work plan (with timeline and assigned responsibilities) for the PDP project,
- 5) Participants establish a communication protocol for future project development.

The Chair agreed to summarize the meeting as 2002 minutes with review assistance from Secretary Geary.

Introductions of all members were made and brief state reports followed. (The Chair noted that some survey information on organic production research in the western states supplemental to these reports can be viewed in the report “State of the States” at www.ofrf.org.)

Charles Sanchez (University of Arizona) gave a presentation entitled “Organic Desert Crop Production in Arizona”

A handout of the presentation was provided. He reported that information on organic crop production in Arizona can be obtained from the Arizona Crop Information Site

www.ag.arizona.edu/crops/crops.html. He reported that the greatest value of desert organic production is in vegetables (1500-2500 acres in production, 500-1000 acres in transition), and multi-disciplinary teams have been formed with both state commodity group and federal (including WSARE) funding. Quality and yield can be maintained in a seasonal window with organically acceptable insect control materials, including neem formulations, botanicals, insecticidal soaps, and Bt. Spinosad may also be integrated into the list and expand the production window, however, resistance management could become a major challenge. Production systems comparisons have indicated that an organic pest management program for lepidopterous pests is feasible at lower yield and higher cost; and a three-year comparison of intensive organic head lettuce production showed few differences in insect damage after three years, with the exception of thrips damage, for which there appeared a strong learning curve effect after three years. Disease control with fungal and bacterial formulations has controlled and/or reduced levels of lettuce drop, with some inconsistencies noted. Sulfur has controlled powdery mildew in lettuce and cantaloupes (although phototoxicity can be a problem in some cultivars at higher temperatures) however, botanicals, bacterials, and potassium bicarbonate have had mixed results. One hundred acres of organic citrus may be limited by fertility issues and thrips damage; clay particle film applied before thrips are numerous and maintained has produced results comparable to dimethoate applications.

Chair Sean L. Swezey (University of California) gave a presentation entitled “Growth and Structure of Organic Agriculture in California.”

The University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program has funded California organic production research since 1987, granting a total of \$1.8 million in 29 direct organic relevance projects, and \$4.3 million in 63 indirect organic relevance projects. Results of these projects can be searched by crop, author, county, and key words at the SAREP website’s organic farming information page: www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/organic/index.htm. California has over 2,200 registered on-farm producers and processors, and nearly 200,000 registered organic acres. Declared value of this production is over \$220 million, according to the California Organic Program. Lettuce, grapes, strawberries, rice, tomatoes, oranges, broccoli, almonds, carrots, dates, peaches, salad mix, avocados, spinach, processing tomatoes, vegetable transplants, mushrooms, and cauliflower are the top twenty crops, with total declared sales value of over \$120 million. Organic cattle, poultry, eggs, and dairy products are valued at an additional \$15 million in sales. 75% of declared value is produced by 8% of registrants, 25% of declared value can be considered “small farm” in origin. High cosmetic value crops such as apples and strawberries are emerging as commodities with evolving, scientifically-validated organic production systems knowledge. A University of California organic apple production manual (UC-ANR Publication 3343) has been produced under WSARE funding, and production manuals for strawberries, vegetables, wine grapes, olives, and other commodities are in production.

Frank Stonaker (University of Colorado) gave a presentation entitled “Organic Research and Education Activities in Colorado” including the following items noted by Jim Dyer, who provided a handout.

The last five years of growth in number of certified organic growers has been as follows (data from Colorado Department of Agriculture):

Year	Producers
1997	139
1998	171
1999	193
2000	209
2001	212

Colorado organic acreage and growth (data from Colorado Department of Agriculture):

Total 316,302 acres
 Non-pasture 47,330 acres (up from 25,679 acres in 1997)

Two important web sites are: COPA - Colorado Organic Producers Association:
www.OrganicColorado.org and ATTRA -Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas:
www.attra.org. ATTRA organic production and marketing publications include:

- “Creating an Organic Production Plan: A Guide to Organic Plan Templates”
- “Overview of Organic Production”
- “Organic Farm Certification and the NOP”
- “Organic Matters” Series

Frank noted that Colorado has a large organic operation, Grant Family Farms, on over 2500 acres of production. CSU has an interdisciplinary organic program and Specialty Crops Program including projects on marketing of organic fruit, soil fertility studies, curcubit seed production, and weed management. He noted that studies exist on long-term covercrop/manure treatments, Rogers Mesa organic fruit production, and student organic vegetable production project at CSU.

Janice Uchida (University of Hawaii) then gave a presentation on Hawaii Organic Production Research and Extension Issues.”

She noted that most Hawaii organic growers (70%) are on the Big Island of Hawaii. Statewide, 60 growers grow 100 different crops on approximately 500 certified acres, including lychee, starfruit, coffee, and other exotics and niche crops for export. Although there have generally been inadequate, low levels of funding for sustainable agriculture in Hawaii, the University of Hawaii does have sustainable and organic research activities, and Dick Bowen and Hector Valenzuela have been research leaders. Janice has been involved in a sustainable agriculture education program. Organic farming has been largely an opportunity for small farms (including some land which was formerly planted to sugar cane), but fees for certification may be an impediment to expansion. She noted that information sources and support for organic farming research and extension have not been adequate to support a growing industry.

Brad Geary (University of Idaho) then gave a presentation on “Idaho Organic Production Research and Extension.”

Idaho has experienced a doubling in organic production acreage over the past three years, to over 100,000 acres, primarily as a source of 100% organically-grown forage and feed inputs to the livestock and dairy industry in the West. Two hundred producers produced \$5.5 million in value in 2001. Combined with pasture acreage, Idaho leads the US in organic production acres. University of Idaho researchers have a small acreage of certified organic research ground, and organic potato production has benefited from biofumigant research.

Steve Guldan, Del Jimenez, and Ron Walser (New Mexico State University) then gave a presentation on New Mexico Organic Production Research and Extension.”

Steve Guldan reported that the New Mexico Organic Certification Commission has been a strong, long-term organizative presence in the state. 125-140 certified organic growers grow a wide variety of commodities, such as herbs, vegetables, salad greens, fruit, and some cotton. The industry and consumption is centered in the north central part of the state, in the Albuquerque-Santa Fe area. In the 16 statewide farmers markets, 2% of growers are certified organic, and 3.7% of all fruits and vegetables sold in retail outlets are certified organic in New Mexico. Del Jimenez reported that livestock producers are looking for a niche market, and the largest free-range producer of organic beef is located in Socorro. Poultry, pork, lamb, and turkey are also produced organically. Six hundred thousand lbs. of New Mexico organic wheat was produced with support of a WSARE grant. Ron Walser reported that 6.5 research acres are certified at the Alcalde Sustainable Agriculture Research Center. 2.5 acres are in tree and small fruits (wine grapes, peaches, cherries, apples). The apple production conditions are similar to Arizona conditions near Wilcox, and Ron has experimented with pheromone-based mating disruption, particle films, and oils in a pest management program. The concept is to bring the land-grant and the organic production community together at this research and demonstration site, and increase the number of organic production studies and publications. Ron expressed concern about the future availability of pheromone products due to new implementation of inert ingredient regulation of the national rule. He mentioned that some growers have dropped certification because they are well-known direct marketers, and many local growers are “getting shut out of the chains.”

Garry Stephenson (Oregon State University) then gave a presentation entitled “Oregon Organic Production.”

He noted that the organic industry in Oregon has a long history of development. The state offered one of the first certification programs (Oregon Tilth) in the western region. The industry centers around vegetable and some fruit production in the Willamette Valley (especially in processing), with some other crop and animal production in the more arid Columbia Gorge and south western Oregon. There are signs of a “dip” in growth of Oregon organic production, and the role of certifiers as sources of educational materials may be changing.

Phil Rasmussen (Utah State University) then gave a presentation on “Utah Organic Production and Research.”

Utah is the geographic center of organic production in the western region. Statewide, 105 organic growers have been identified in 2001. This is an enormous increase over one organic grower in

1987. Interest in organic wheat began in the late 1980s, with mills dedicated to supplying organic wheat flour to the California baking industry. Wheat remains the largest organic commodity in Utah. General Mills processes organic grain products in Ogden. Several large growers of herbs, flowers, and seed are located in Utah. The SE Plateau has largely concentrated on organic dry beans, and wheat. Utah has convened an official legislative committee on sustainable agriculture. The Wasatch Front is an affluent consumer area in which organic retailing is increasing.

David Granatstein (Washington State University) then gave a presentation entitled "Growth of Organic Production and Research in Washington State."

Several handouts were provided. Washington State provides both certification and enforcement programs. Over 40,000 acres are certified or transitional in 2002. A 1990 "spike" in organic fruit production was seen due to the "Alar" controversy, and acreage again began an upward trend in 1997. Increase in transitional fruit acreage is now slowing for the first time in five years, indicating that the demand side "needs to catch up." The farmgate value of Washington organic production is \$140-\$160 million, with additional processing revenues. The top commodities are vegetables (24% of value), apples (16%), herbs (11%), and hay (14%). The state can be roughly divided into two areas: the west, where average organic farm size is 40 acres and consumption of organic products is high, and east: where the average organic farm is 91 acres, and 82% of the total organic acreage is concentrated (Yakima, Grant County). The WSU Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources is developing a comprehensive research and education program on organic and biologically intensive agriculture, including statewide meetings and symposia, faculty surveys, certified organic research land, organic apple and vegetable production studies, organic wheat breeding, dryland cereal production, a research symposium, and a degree program. Organic product consumption trends are encouraging for a number of reasons (more research support, more regulatory certainty, GMO-free) He reported an increase in organic apple acreage to a total of possibly 15-20,000 acres in the region (trends in other fruit are not as accelerated). An oversupply and price/variety crisis in apples exists. A series of research models and needs and questions on what constitutes organic farming research priorities have now been discussed. The Web site www.tfrec.wsu.edu (organic page) can be accessed for organic production information and the handout reports.

Jim Freeburn and Jim Jacobs (University of Wyoming) then gave a presentation entitled "Wyoming organic research and extension activities and (Freeburn) WSARE PDP resources review."

A Torrington meeting on organic production attracted 55 producers and interested parties. The need for forage production and wheat production was covered. Range and pasture can be certified. Jim Jacobs mentioned that some area is to be set aside for organic production research at the new SAREC high plains area research center, which will feature pasture, feed lots, a cattle herd, etc. for integrated projects. Organic production has always been a subset of sustainable agriculture.

Jim Freeburn then reviewed the Chapter 1 (Utah State University) and Chapter 3 (University of Wyoming) WSARE programs, including competitive grants programs and the possibility of supplemental funds for special activities. Concerning the WCC-67 PDP grant activities, he

suggested a number of ways that additional states could get involved to hold organic compliance trainings, including using existing funds, or application to him for discretionary funds to integrate with the WCC-67 grant objectives. Jim Jacobs (WCC-67 administrative advisor) reviewed the requirements for the committee, and assisted in the necessary membership form filings.

Lunch was served.

Chair Swezey and Dave Chaney (UC-SAREP) then reviewed the text and objectives of the current WSARE-PDP grant, "Organic Farming Principles, Practices, and Materials: Resources for Western Region Extension and USDA Professionals," awarded to WCC-67 members to hold western region organic rule and compliance trainings for extension agents, USDA personnel, and agricultural professionals in 2003 and 2004. Dave Chaney distributed a timeline for project activities and discussed necessary changes. Chair Swezey noted that other state PDP programs should be involved beyond the present grant-holders (California, Washington, New Mexico) and it was agreed that the WCC-67 members should seek the formation of the following meeting program committees:

1. New Mexico/Arizona/S. Colorado
2. Idaho/Utah/Wyoming (Intermountain)
3. Washington/Oregon
4. California/Arizona low desert
5. Pacific Islands (Hawaii host)

A needs survey will be completed by February 1, and the reference guide for the trainings will be completed in draft form by May 1, 2003. The Pacific Islands and Intermountain area trainings (if state PDP representatives so desire) could then be planned and budgeted with Jim Freeburn's (and/or state) assistance with the reference guide materials in hand. Chair Swezey will communicate with members who expressed interest in additional trainings as the reference guide takes shape in early 2003.

A general discussion followed in which a number of committee issues and project possibilities were discussed. Committee members discussed project ideas including organic range health, organic range/grass fed beef taste comparisons, water quality, organic animal health, and organic forage and herb production. No consensus was reached as to a committee project, given the PDP training grant activities in the near future. Chair Swezey suggested California for the next meeting venue, in concert with the first California PDP grant organic compliance training in September 2003. A new committee project could be planned at that meeting. Chair Swezey agreed to make contact with members who expressed an interest in developing specific trainings in their states not presently funded by the grant. In general, committee members were encouraged to evaluate organic farming research and education needs in their states for possible follow-up by the Chair in preparation for a new project(s) in 2003.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 3:45 p.m.