

Assessment of Future Organic Research Needs

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Abstract

With the passage of the 1990 Organic Food and Production Act and corresponding organic regulations created in 2002, the organic sector has seen tremendous growth of certified organic farms growing by 11% in 2012 to US\$28 billion (Greene, 2013). The USDA National Organic Program (NOP) had over 18,000 certified organic farms and processing operations at the end of 2013, which represented a 245% increase since the beginning of federal certification in 2002 (McEvoy, 2014).

Over the last 20 years, farmers, researchers, and the USDA have become aware that only a small portion of research was being related to organic agriculture systems and the need to increase in providing scientifically based technical information to the organic industry.

The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) has taken on the challenge of providing government and other funding organizations, farmers and ranchers, and the general public the information necessary to determine future research needs and direction. This information has been collected through three mechanisms.

1. This past year, OFRF has reviewed the major USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) OREI and ORG organic programs funding, analyzing the production, economic, and social topics that have been funded between 2002 and 2014. Approximately \$82 million has been allocated through the 124 OREI and 64 ORG research grants awards. Initial results have found that information generated thus far and additional findings accruing from ongoing projects can play a vital role in helping current and aspiring organic producers improve the economic, agronomic, and environmental sustainability of their operations.
2. OFRF conducted the second National Organic Research Agenda (NORA) survey, a national survey directly asking organic farmers and ranchers what they perceive as their most relevant research needs. The survey was sent electronically to all NOP certified producers and announced through OFRF website and other affiliated organic organizations. Results will be compiled to reflect the top research needs by organic farmers and ranchers.
3. OFRF reviewed its portfolio of funded projects to determine trends and gaps in topics supported for organic research and education. Results will help OFRF and other funding organizations in selecting future research support.

Results from these three activities were presented at the 2016 OARS meeting to show where funds have been spent and identify future research needs. After the presentation, OFRF hosted an interactive stakeholder session to continue our on-going process of collecting input from farmers and other interested parties about the appropriate process to collect research needs information and respond to the proposed research needs and provide any additional research needs.

References

Greene, C. 2013. Growth patterns in the US organic industry. *Statistic: Natural Resources & Environment*. USDA Economic Research Service.

McEvoy, M. 2014. The growth of an industry – 18,000+ certified organic operations in the US alone. USDA Blog, USDA.

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