

TOOLS FOR TRANSITION ANNUAL SURVEY RESULTS: 2011

This annual survey of participants for the *Tools for Transition Project* is designed to gather qualitative information about experiences during and after the first few years of organic transition. Number of respondents = 24. Survey results available on the project website: www.eorganic.info/toolsfortransition.

A. Challenges

1. How important were the following problems during the past year for the portion of your farm business that is currently in transition or recently certified? (Circle your replies)

Scale: **NP** – no problem **SP** – slight problem **MP** – medium problem **BP** – big problem **NA** – not applicable

Management Issues	NP	SP	MP	BP	NA
A. Overall time requirements	<u>16%</u>	<u>28%</u>	<u>44%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>4%</u>
B. Access to capital, financing	<u>36%</u>	<u>4%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>28%</u>	<u>4%</u>
C. Risk management (i.e. crop insurance)	<u>44%</u>	<u>28%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>20%</u>
D. Access to FSA programs or tech assistance ...	<u>52%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>24%</u>
E. Access to NRCS programs or tech assistance.	<u>60%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>20%</u>
F. Current profitability	<u>28%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>0%</u>
G. Projected profitability	<u>44%</u>	<u>40%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>4%</u>	<u>0%</u>
H. Cash flow challenges	<u>28%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>32%</u>	<u>28%</u>	<u>0%</u>
I. Creating/interpreting annual business analysis	<u>48%</u>	<u>32%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>0%</u>
J. Other: (Please specify): _____					

Other management comments: ***“How to expand.”***

Regulatory Issues	NP	SP	MP	BP	NA
K. Recordkeeping requirements	<u>20%</u>	<u>36%</u>	<u>32%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>0%</u>
L. Certification costs	<u>24%</u>	<u>32%</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>12%</u>
M. Understanding standards	<u>40%</u>	<u>36%</u>	<u>16%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>0%</u>
N. Meeting regulatory requirements	<u>60%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>4%</u>	<u>0%</u>
O. Completing Organic System Plan	<u>40%</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>12%</u>
P. Other: (Please specify): _____					

Other regulatory comments: ***None.***

Production Issues	NP	SP	MP	BP	NA
Q. Planning workable rotations	<u>20%</u>	<u>44%</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>4%</u>
R. Cost of inputs	<u>20%</u>	<u>36%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>16%</u>	<u>4%</u>
S. Availability of inputs	<u>24%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>8%</u>
T. Yields	<u>12%</u>	<u>32%</u>	<u>40%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>4%</u>
U. Insect pest management	<u>44%</u>	<u>28%</u>	<u>16%</u>	<u>4%</u>	<u>8%</u>
V. Weed management	<u>12%</u>	<u>32%</u>	<u>36%</u>	<u>16%</u>	<u>4%</u>
W. Crop disease management	<u>56%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>8%</u>
X. Fertility	<u>28%</u>	<u>32%</u>	<u>32%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>0%</u>
Production Issues Continued	NP	SP	MP	BP	NA

Y. Access to labor	<u>60%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>4%</u>
Z. Access to land	<u>44%</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>4%</u>
AA. Access to equipment	<u>68%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>4%</u>	<u>4%</u>	<u>0%</u>
BB. Current farm infrastructure (eg. storage)	<u>56%</u>	<u>16%</u>	<u>16%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>0%</u>
CC. Product quality (crops, milk)	<u>48%</u>	<u>36%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>0%</u>
DD. Animal health	<u>40%</u>	<u>16%</u>	<u>16%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>28%</u>
EE. Animal productivity	<u>28%</u>	<u>32%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>4%</u>	<u>28%</u>
FF. Availability of breeding stock/replacements	<u>36%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>4%</u>	<u>40%</u>
GG. Other: (Please specify)_____					

Other production comments: *“Poor quality seed.”*

Marketing Issues	NP	SP	MP	BP	NA
HH. Finding buyers	<u>48%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>36%</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>28%</u>
II. Finding markets for small grains	<u>24%</u>	<u>16%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>36%</u>
JJ. Finding markets for rotational crops (i.e. hay)	<u>36%</u>	<u>16%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>4%</u>	<u>36%</u>
KK. High prices for conventional crops	<u>20%</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>28%</u>
LL. Organic price volatility	<u>28%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>16%</u>	<u>16%</u>	<u>16%</u>
MM. Price transparency	<u>16%</u>	<u>24%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>28%</u>
NN. Proximity to markets	<u>44%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>16%</u>	<u>16%</u>	<u>12%</u>
OO. Availability of processors	<u>36%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>28%</u>
PP. Other: (Please specify)_____					

Other marketing comments: *“Price gouging by large, corporate suppliers.”*

2. What challenges are you facing or did you face during the past year that have not already been addressed by questions in this survey? (Please describe)

- *Difficulty finding certifier.*
- *Difficulty understanding Organic System Plan requirements.*
- *Identifying profitable cover crops.*
- *Cash flow due to financing issues.*
- *Mastitis.*
- *Weather.*
- *Cost of pasture improvements to comply with NOP 30% pasture rule.*
- *Cost-effective pest control for alfalfa.*
- *Managing transition of land; feed enterprises.*
- *Lack of on-farm storage.*
- *Poor hired labor.*
- *Family trust issues.*

B. Benefits

3. Have there been unexpected positive outcomes associated with your transition to organic production – e.g. things that went better than expected during the past year or benefits that you did not consider when you made the decision to transition? (Please describe)

- *Improvements in soil health.*
- *More control over input costs.*
- *Lower input costs.*
- *Soil fertility.*
- *Improved weed control with spring plowing.*
- *Strong organic hay and small grain prices.*
- *Yields and pasture production better than expected.*

C. Marketing and Business Management

4. Which **one** marketing channel do you prefer to use for organic commodities? (Choose only one for crops and one for milk if applicable)

Crops:

Dairy:

- A. **30%** Forward contracts with buyers
- B. **45%** Spot or cash sales direct to buyers
- C. **0%** Brokers
- D. **10%** Farmer-owned cooperative
- E. **15%** Other (specify): _____

- F. **88%** Contract with milk buyer
- G. **12%** On-farm processing and direct sale

Other comments:

- *Sell crops direct to other farmers.*
- *Don't market crops.*

5.A. Did you use consultants or advisors this past year? **76%** Yes **24%** No



If YES, please check all that apply:

- | | |
|---|--|
| B. 52% Soil consultant | G. 20% Accountant/financial consultant (other than FBM) |
| C. 8% Marketing consultant | H. 40% Veterinarian |
| D. 24% Organic specialist (other than certifier) | I. 12% AI technician |
| E. 16% Extension educator | J. 32% DHIA |
| F. 32% NRCS and/or SWCD | K. 16% Other (please specify): _____ |

Other comments:

- *Farm Business Management program*
- *Nutritionists*
- *Dairy Diagnostics*

6. Do you currently have a written plan for your farm (other than an Organic System Plan)?

Business Plan:

- A. **24%** Yes
- B. **76%** No

Financial Plan:

- C. **32%** Yes
- D. **68%** No

Marketing Plan:

- E. **16%** Yes
- F. **84%** No

Conservation Plan:

- G. **48%** Yes
- H. **52%** No

D. Future Outlook

7. Is it likely that you or a family member will be farming organically in 5, 10 or 20 years? (Check greatest)

A. **28%** 5 years

B. **20%** 10 years

C. **52%** 20 years

8. Looking ahead, what are the most important opportunities and challenges for your farm operation?

- *Improving profitability, especially when input costs are high (feed).*
- *Generating enough farm income to support full-time on-farm job .*
- *Improving cash flow.*
- *Managing debt.*
- *Acquiring more land and/or expanding herd .*
- *Developing cost-effective crop rotation.*
- *Acquiring grain storage facilities.*
- *Improved access to financing.*
- *Managing weeds.*
- *Developing markets for niche markets and direct-market enterprises.*
- *Farming with next generation, eventual farm transfer.*

E. Farm Business Management (FBM) Program

9. How have you used information from the FBM Program? (Check all that apply)

A. **40%** To make production decisions

B. **24%** To make marketing decisions

C. **72%** To make financial decisions

D. **44%** To make equipment purchase decisions

E. **84%** To improve recordkeeping

F. **72%** To prepare taxes

G. **72%** When talking with lenders

H. **16%** Other (please specify): _____

Other comments:

- *“Just getting started but hope most would apply except taxes.”*
- *“Much of the information is/was helpful for us when participating in LSP's Farm Beginnings Program.”*

10. Do you have other comments about the FBM Program or the *Tools for Transition Project*? (Please share below)

- *“I would like help with figuring out a solid rotation of crops and have not received that kind of help.”*