

## **TOOLS FOR TRANSITION ANNUAL SURVEY RESULTS: 2014**

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 = 16. Survey results available on the project website: [www.eorganic.info/toolsfortransition](http://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

<b>Management Issues</b>	<b>NP</b>	<b>SP</b>	<b>MP</b>	<b>BP</b>	<b>NA</b>
A. Overall time requirements .....	<u>19%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>50%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>0%</u>
B. Access to capital, financing .....	<u>25%</u>	<u>31%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>6%</u>
C. Risk management (i.e. crop insurance) .....	<u>38%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>6%</u>
D. Access to FSA programs or tech assistance ...	<u>63%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>0%</u>
E. Access to NRCS programs or tech assistance.	<u>56%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>13%</u>
F. Current profitability .....	<u>19%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>38%</u>	<u>0%</u>
G. Projected profitability .....	<u>31%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>44%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>0%</u>
H. Cash flow challenges .....	<u>25%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>38%</u>	<u>0%</u>
I. Creating/interpreting annual business analysis	<u>38%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>6%</u>
J. Other: (Please specify): _____					

Other management comments: **None.**

<b>Regulatory Issues</b>	<b>NP</b>	<b>SP</b>	<b>MP</b>	<b>BP</b>	<b>NA</b>
K. Recordkeeping requirements .....	<u>31%</u>	<u>31%</u>	<u>38%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>0%</u>
L. Certification costs .....	<u>38%</u>	<u>38%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>4%</u>
M. Understanding standards .....	<u>38%</u>	<u>63%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>0%</u>
N. Meeting regulatory requirements .....	<u>44%</u>	<u>50%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>0%</u>
O. Completing Organic System Plan .....	<u>50%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>0%</u>
P. Other: (Please specify): _____					

Other regulatory comments: **None.**

<b>Production Issues</b>	<b>NP</b>	<b>SP</b>	<b>MP</b>	<b>BP</b>	<b>NA</b>
Q. Planning workable rotations .....	<u>19%</u>	<u>44%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>6%</u>
R. Cost of inputs .....	<u>0%</u>	<u>56%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>0%</u>
S. Availability of inputs .....	<u>19%</u>	<u>44%</u>	<u>38%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>0%</u>
T. Yields .....	<u>0%</u>	<u>31%</u>	<u>44%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>0%</u>
U. Insect pest management .....	<u>38%</u>	<u>50%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>0%</u>
V. Weed management .....	<u>6%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>38%</u>	<u>31%</u>	<u>0%</u>
W. Crop disease management .....	<u>38%</u>	<u>31%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>6%</u>
X. Fertility .....	<u>6%</u>	<u>38%</u>	<u>38%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>0%</u>

<b>Production Issues Continued</b>	<b>NP</b>	<b>SP</b>	<b>MP</b>	<b>BP</b>	<b>NA</b>
Y. GMO Contamination .....	<u>56%</u>	<u>31%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>0%</u>
Z. Chemical drift .....	<u>63%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>0%</u>
AA. Access to labor .....	<u>44%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>0%</u>
BB. Access to land .....	<u>38%</u>	<u>31%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>0%</u>
CC. Access to equipment .....	<u>44%</u>	<u>38%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>0%</u>
DD. Current farm infrastructure (eg. storage) ....	<u>50%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>0%</u>
EE. Product quality (crops, milk) .....	<u>38%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>0%</u>
FF. Animal health .....	<u>25%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>44%</u>
GG. Animal productivity .....	<u>19%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>44%</u>
HH. Availability of breeding stock/replacements	<u>44%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>50%</u>
II. Other: (Please specify)_____					

Other production comments: *None.*

<b>Marketing Issues</b>	<b>NP</b>	<b>SP</b>	<b>MP</b>	<b>BP</b>	<b>NA</b>
JJ. Finding buyers .....	<u>50%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>13%</u>
KK. Finding markets for small grains .....	<u>25%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>44%</u>
LL. Finding markets for rotational crops (i.e. hay)	<u>31%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>38%</u>
MM. High prices for conventional crops .....	<u>69%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>0%</u>
NN. Organic price volatility .....	<u>38%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>19%</u>
OO. Price transparency .....	<u>31%</u>	<u>50%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>13%</u>
PP. Proximity to markets .....	<u>44%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>13%</u>
QQ. Availability of processors .....	<u>44%</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>25%</u>
RR. Other: (Please specify)_____					

Other marketing comments: *None.*

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)

- *Weather (rain)*
- *Lender policies (“...having to use the conventional price, not being able to use the organic price on a typical cash flow plan for future time.”)*
- *Organic feed prices (high)*
- *Stray voltage*
- *Farm transfer to younger generation*
- *Maintaining land base with rented land*

## **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).

- *Easier transitioning the second time around.*
- *Higher than expected organic crop prices.*

- *Better than expected crop quality.*
- *Better herd health; lower vet bills.*
- *Reduced crop inputs.*

**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. <b>38%</b> Forward contracts with buyers             | F. <b>31%</b> Contract with milk buyer           |
| B. <b>31%</b> Spot or cash sales direct to buyers       | G. <b>13%</b> On-farm processing and direct sale |
| C. <b>6%</b> Brokers                                    |  |
| D. <b>13%</b> Farmer-owned cooperative                  |  |
| E. <b>13%</b> Other (specify): <u>All crops are fed</u> |  |

5.A. Did you use consultants or advisors this past year? **94%** Yes **6%** No

—————> If YES, please check all that apply:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| B. <b>69%</b> Soil consultant                           | G. <b>38%</b> Accountant/financial consultant (other than FBM) |
| C. <b>6%</b> Marketing consultant                       | H. <b>44%</b> Veterinarian                                     |
| D. <b>25%</b> Organic specialist (other than certifier) | I. <b>25%</b> AI technician                                    |
| E. <b>13%</b> Extension educator                        | J. <b>31%</b> DHIA   |
| F. <b>25%</b> NRCS and/or SWCD                          | K. <b>6%</b> Other (please specify):                           |

Other comments:

- *Nutritional consultant*

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

- |                       |                        |                        |                           |
|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| <u>Business Plan:</u> | <u>Financial Plan:</u> | <u>Marketing Plan:</u> | <u>Conservation Plan:</u> |
| A. <b>50%</b> Yes     | C. <b>50%</b> Yes      | E. <b>13%</b> Yes      | G. <b>56%</b> Yes         |
| B. <b>50%</b> No      | D. <b>50%</b> No       | F. <b>88%</b> No       | H. <b>44%</b> 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. <b>13%</b> 5 years | B. <b>31%</b> 10 years | C. <b>56%</b> 20 years |
|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|

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

**Opportunities:**

- *Stable milk prices*
- *Supplying wholesome food*
- *Increasing organic prices*

**Challenges:**

- *Access to affordable land*
- *Identifying others with common vision*
- *Ability to compete with high input farms*
- *Organic feed price swings*
- *Extending length of cropping rotation with economically viable crops*
- *Weed control*

**E. Farm Business Management (FBM) Program**

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

- A. **69%** To make production decisions
- B. **38%** To make marketing decisions
- C. **100%** To make financial decisions
- D. **50%** To make equipment purchase decisions
- E. **94%** To improve recordkeeping
- F. **94%** To prepare taxes
- G. **81%** When talking with lenders
- H. **6%** Other (please specify): *I don't know what we would do without it!*

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

*- We have been thankful in the last year to be able to talk with someone who knows our business and is able to give educated advice when we have important decisions to make. I would like to learn more about how to enter and read the [financial] information myself so as not to continually rely on the FBM program. However, the program is a great tool and we are thankful for it. The more you educate, the more you empower.*

*- Thank you very much for working with my son's family and my family. We have 11 children living on our farm, planting apple trees, rising horses, and learning how to work and help to protect their neighbor. You are a part of this!*

*- We have enjoyed being involved and hope it helps others. Session topic for conference should be transition pitfalls.*

*- We do lending with FSA. The cash flow projections completed with FBM are often unacceptable to FSA in my experience.*

*- I felt a little in the dark about some of the results. We have the printed out results but I don't understand the end point of some of it. I had hoped for a little more advice from this program.*

*- FBM is a great asset.*

*- They are both great. I love working with my FBM instructor. The Tools for Transition project was great. I learned so much from the other participants. I hope it continues in some form.*