

## **TN Organic Production Network (TN OPN)**

Holeman Building, Ellington Agriculture Center, 440 Hogan Road, Nashville, TN 37204  
2:00-4:00 pm Central Time, December 2, 2009

### **Meeting Summary**

#### **I. Attendees:**

Annette Wszelaki, UT Vegetable Specialist  
Joe Gaines, TDA  
Curt McDaniel, USDA NRCS  
Allen Persinger, USDA NRCS  
Denise Barrett, Appalachian Sustainable Development  
Regan Soloman, USDA FSA  
Megan Bruch, Center for Profitable Agriculture  
Shasta Hubbs, Center for Profitable Agriculture  
Bob Ary, UT Extension  
Dan Strasser, TDA  
Tom Bible, TN Farmers Coop  
Kim Stearman, TN Tech  
Joe Pearson, TFBF  
Tiffany Howard, TFBF  
Jon Frady, TDA  
David Cook, UT Extension  
Jason Adkins, TOGA

For a complete listing of people interested in the TN Organic Production Network, including those who were unable to attend the December 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting, please see the TN OPN Roster.

#### **I. Welcome, Introduction & Presentation:** Organics in TN Annette Wszelaki

*Focus of Meeting:* Review goals and highlights of the TN Organic Production Network, discuss program updates and prioritize next steps.

##### **A. Goals of the TN OPN**

1. To support, promote and advance organics in TN through networking and partnerships
2. To collaborate to address the critical issues in organic agriculture in TN

##### **B. Highlights of 2009**

1. Certified organic operations in TN increased 25% since 2008
2. TDA certification cost-share and Ag Enhancement Programs were well utilized by organic producers in 2009
3. USDA NRCS launched the Organic EQIP Program to provide a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranchers that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality

4. The UT Organic Initiative unveiled their website with program information, educational and networking events, Extension publications, research findings and links to informational websites
5. UT also initiated a 10-part Organic Crop Production Workshop Series in 2009

## II. **Program Updates:**

### A. Producers & Industry

1. Denise Barrett, Executive Director, Appalachian Sustainable Development
  1. ASD founded on transitioning traditional tobacco growers to vegetable production in southeast VA and northeast TN
  2. As new Executive Director, Diane will support ASD on a strategic planning exercise
  3. Striving to make profitable, social enterprises
  4. Current needs:
    - a. Need more volume
    - b. Recruit additional growers
    - c. Maximize productivity
2. Jason Adkins, TOGA Board Member/Sonfarm Grower
  1. TOGA has increased their infrastructure through marketing-e-newsletter, farm tours, Annual TOGA Conference
    - a. Conference: March 5-6, Franklin, TN with Joel Salatin as featured speaker
  2. Current needs:
    - a. Organic farm incubation program to help get interested young people into organic farming (i.e., Intervale Farms Program, Burlington, VT)
    - b. Land Trust Program to link interested growers with abandoned or aging farms
    - c. Access to inputs to reduce grower costs

### B. Policy & Legislative Issues

1. Proposed food safety legislation has potential to affect all growers
2. Current needs:
  1. Organic growers need to relay their diversified production practices and concerns with proposed legislation to their representatives

### C. State & Department of Agriculture Programs

1. Regan Soloman, USDA FSA
  1. FSA provides loan guarantees to farmers and ranchers working through eligible lending institutions and also makes direct loans to qualifying farmers and ranchers

2. Exciting year for organic producers with new leadership in Washington and USDA
3. Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food website launched: [www.usda.gov/wps/portal/knowyourfarmer?navid=KNOWYOURFARMER](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/knowyourfarmer?navid=KNOWYOURFARMER)
4. Conducted RC & D workshops this year on organic production
2. Curt McDaniel, USDA NRCS
  1. NRCS mission is to address resource concerns and help resolve these concerns with conservation practices
  2. Organic EQIP Program launched in 2009- \$1 million/state for life of Farm Bill
    - a. Last year was sharp learning curve for determining practices to support and payment schedule
    - b. This year better address needs and payment rates
  3. Current needs:
    - a. Need to determine more specific practices/payments; 2<sup>nd</sup> year of 6 year program
    - b. Cooperative effort with universities in TN to research practices that could be funded- Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)
3. Jon Frady, TDA
  1. TDA administers a cost-share program that reimburses eligible producers 75% of their organic certification expenses up to \$750
  2. TN Agricultural Enhancement Program provides cost share funds for long term investments in Tennessee's livestock and farming operations; has an organic component that reimburses certified organic growers 50% up to \$15,000
  3. Natural Beef Program- marketing program for direct marketing of freezer beef produced with no antibiotics, no hormones and no mammalian by-products
4. Tiffany Howard, TFBF
  1. Farm Fresh Program successfully completed second season
  2. Launched social media sites (Facebook, Twitter) for the program

#### D. Organic University Research

1. Kim Stearman, TN Tech
  1. Farm started two years ago (113 acres), certified 10 acres
  2. Focus on season extension and compost
  3. Students selling produce on campus
  4. Received two Federal grants:
    - a. Beginning Farmers
    - b. Managed Ecosystems
  5. Current needs:
    - a. Collaboration within and beyond state to further work in season extension
2. Annette Wszelaki, University of Tennessee

1. Farm dedicated to organic crop production Fall 2007 (21 acres under cultivation, 14 acres in second year of transition)
2. Focus on season extension, cover cropping, minimum tillage and organic pest management
3. New projects for 2010:
  - a. UT Farm Market Internship Program- starting internship on farm to teach interested students and potential growers all aspects of beginning a small farm from business planning to production to marketing
  - b. USDA SCRI Biodegradable Mulches for Specialty Crops Produced under Protective Covers- collaboration with Washington State University, Western Washington University, Texas A & M and Texas Tech to investigate production of high value crops in high tunnels and the biodegradability of mulches in these systems
4. Current needs:
  - a. Input for OSCP website
  - b. Collaboration across the state
3. Megan Bruch, Center for Profitable Agriculture
  1. Hired new marketing specialist, Shasta Hubbs, to focus on farm-to-market connections across TN
  2. Conducted marketing workshops with the TFBF Farm Fresh Program in 2009 and will continue in 2010
  3. Marketing Cents Workshop Series initiated
  4. Agritourism Conference joined with TN Hort Expo in Nashville, January 28-30

### III. **Next Steps**

- A. Review NRCS EQIP proposed payment schedule for 2010- *Everyone*
- B. TOGA will work with members to provide more information on inputs and quantities most needed by growers for the TN Farmers Coop- *TOGA, Coop*
- C. Continue discussion of collaborative research and Extension ideas among TN universities (CIG, OREI, etc.)- *UT, TTU, TSU*
- D. Investigate VoAg programs in state teaching organic production (survey?)- *UT, others who are interested*
- E. Meet with TN OPN more often (quarterly?)- *Everyone*