



Organic Matters

Organic Farming on the Hi-Line

To call Dave and Dee Turners' certified organic farm near Oilmont a "dryland grains" farm understates the conditions in recent years. The region between Cutbank and Chester has been bone dry, averaging several inches below normal in a region that normally receives an annual 12 inches of precipitation.

Yet the Turners have managed a living on the farm homesteaded by Dave's grandfather 98 years ago. They grow certified organic winter wheat, spring wheat, barley, and peas, and transport their wheat to organic flour millers in Utah. Goats are used to provide weed control and prescribed-grazing services for neighbors.

On July 12, 2008, the Turners will host a tour of their certified organic, dryland grain farm near Oilmont. The tour is co-sponsored by the Montana Department of Agriculture, Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO), and the Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA), North Central Montana Chapter.

Registration begins at 9:30 a.m. The tour starts at 10 a.m. and will conclude by 3 p.m. A barbeque lunch with all of the trimmings is included, and a registration fee of \$5 is being charged to help pay costs of the lunch.

Dave and Dee and their son, Matt, are 3rd and 4th generation farmers on land that includes the family farm homesteaded in 1910. The farm has grown to include about 3,000 acres with a rotation of winter wheat, spring wheat, barley, and peas. The entire farm is certified organic by the Organic Crop Improvement Association

and has been for fifteen years.

The Turners will describe the long-established rotations and farming practices that have enabled them to adapt to the environmental conditions and succeed despite rainfall of just a few inches several years during the past decade. The tour will provide new and aspiring organic farmers, as well as established farmers, an opportunity to learn about organic farming methods in a challenging environment.

The practices include unique weed control, including a herd of 1,500 meat goats managed by Matt, and also used for the family's own weed control as well as custom weed work. Tour participants will have an opportunity to see the goats in action on nearby ground infested with leafy spurge. The goats' grazing activity also helps reduce the damage from wheat stem sawfly, which is a challenge in the region.

Cultivation is carefully timed in the fall and spring to provide maximum benefits for weed control. Soil fertility is maintained with rotations including a winter pea cover crop that is plowed down to improve soil health and fertility.

To reach the Turner Farm, drive 15 miles north of Shelby, then 14 miles east on Highway 343. Turn north on Willow Creek Road and go three miles. Turn left and go one-half mile, turning left at the first mailbox. Watch for two large, white fabric sheds.

Tour attendees are asked to pre-register by July 7 by contacting the Montana Organic Association at (406)

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Montana Organic Association is a 501(c)6 non-profit organization dedicated to advocating and promoting organic agriculture for the highest good of the people, the environment and the state economy.

Organic Matters is published quarterly by the Montana Organic Association. Send queries, suggestions, letters, and requests to:

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Polson MT 59860
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Organic Matters occasionally includes guest articles and opinions. While we review these for relevance to our mission, the opinions in these articles may not reflect the opinions or policy of the MOA.



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887-2869, by email at info@montanaorganicassociation.org, or by mail to the Montana Organic Association, P.O. Box 1675, Polson, MT 59860. For additional information, contact Lise Rousseau, (406) 871-0019, at the Montana Organic Association.

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duction and processing result in food that is different than food produced using non-organic practices. For example, studies show that organic foods (tomatoes and catsup, grapes and red wine, for example) have higher amounts of antioxidants, important in cardiac and circulatory health. Organic oranges have higher amounts of vitamin C. Children who consume organic foods don't have the organophosphate insecticide residues in their bodies found almost universally in children on non-organic diets. The nutritional quality of breast milk is enhanced in mothers who drink organic milk. Studies link organic diets with improvements in our immune systems, higher levels of certain vitamins, and reduced body weight. Certified organic farming benefits our surroundings by increasing soil health, reducing water and air contamination, preserving species diversity, and sequestering carbon as organic matter, which is thought to be one of the ways to combat global warming. If you are interested in more of this information, visit the The Organic Center's website (<http://www.organic-center.org/>).

My family has a small truck farm where we grow certified organic vegetables to sell at Helena's farmers market. We meet our friends, neighbors, and customers face-to-face at market and frequently in our daily lives, and we value this connection. It helps us remain committed to producing nourishing, safe food and treating our land respectfully. We eat plenty of the food we grow and relish it. Like many of our friends across Montana involved in certified organic agriculture, we value the health of our land and all of the creatures we share it with, and we hope to leave it in a condition that is as good or better than when we came.

So, I say eat proactively and know that your food choices matter. If you choose the highly sweetened, calorie laden processed food, packaged in individual serving containers designed to fit in a cup holder; be aware of the food system you might be supporting. Better yet, make informed choices that are healthy for you and the land. And take pleasure in it all!

Yours in Good Eating,
Steve Baril

NOSB News...

Back from the Trenches

by Barry Flamm

I am back from my first NOSB meeting, a three-day marathon held in Baltimore May 20-22. Back in March, I was moved from Vice Chair to Chair of the Policy Development Committee and according to colleagues was the first Board Member to serve as Chair before even attending a first Board meeting. It also means I serve on the Executive Committee, along with serving on the Crops committee and Compliance, Accreditation and Certification committee (CACC). It made the Board meeting especially interesting.

The most important purpose of the biannual meetings is for the Board to receive oral and written comments and to interact with the attendees. All full Board meetings are open to the public. Public participants have the opportunity to hear committee and task force reports presented to the full Board and later respond. These Board meetings are the only time the members physically get together to discuss issues, handle problems, work, hear committee reports, and vote on recommendations. Most of the work is done in committees by email and conference calls with advice being obtained from Task Forces and Technical Advisory Panels.

Space does not allow me to present the many sub-

jects covered. I can only highlight a few which I think are of most interest to you. I encourage you to go to the NOSB website for the whole story.

The organic seed requirement is of special interest to many MOA members. The Organic Regulations (205.204) states that, "The producer must use organically grown seeds, annual seedlings, and planting stock except that non organically produced, untreated seeds...may be used...when an equivalent organically produced variety is not commercially available." The exception is widely used and today only a small proportion of the seed currently used is certified organic. In the recent past, NOSB has issued recommendations on this subject, without notable effect. During this past year, the Crops and CAC committees again addressed the subject resulting in recommendations for consideration at this Board meeting. Comments were heard from organic seed producers, organic farmers, and certifiers. Although there was mostly agreement something needed to be done to increase organic seed use, there was concern that the methods proposed were unwieldy and created unfair and unequal burdens. The joint committee accepted these concerns and withdrew the recommendation for further work to address a better system for collecting, managing, and dispensing organic seed availability, and needs information and equitable sharing of the burden

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TEN SPOON

"Run around, leap across the creek, howl at the moon, drink only the best--Ten Spoon Organic Wine--made right here in my backyard."

-Albert, vineyard bird dog, Missoula, Montana

Dog Photo: Elise Schemm

The advertisement features a black and white photograph of a dog named Albert, a vineyard bird dog, sitting in a vineyard. Above the dog, ten silver spoons are arranged in a horizontal line. The text "TEN SPOON" is written in large, white, serif capital letters at the top. Below the spoons, a quote is written in a serif font. At the bottom right, the dog's name and location are mentioned, along with a credit to the photographer.

NOSB, Continued from page 3

between seed producers, farmers, certifiers, government, and other institutions.

One of the many materials petitioned to be added to the National List of Allowed Substances was Tetracycline—oxytetracycline hydrochloride (a different formulation than now on the List)—and to extend use from fire blight control only to all disease and crops registered by EPA. The Crops committee has concern for the use of any antibiotics in organic crop production due to its potential impact on human health and the environment. The existing antibiotics on the National List (205.601) will be up for “sunset review.” Primarily for these two reasons, the Committee recommended against accepting the petition. The Petitioner in a public statement at the Meeting modified the petition to eliminate the extended uses and to agree to a sunset time which would coincide with the other crop antibiotics. Based on these proposals by the Petitioner, NOSB action was deferred until the Fall meeting. MOA may wish to comment on antibiotic use in organic crop production.

Action was taken on many other materials petitioned to add to the National List including recom-

mended approval of Fenbendazole as prescribed by a veterinarian for emergency treatment when an organic system fails to prevent infestation. It is believed that this material is a better alternative than existing listed materials and that when Fenbendazole is listed it is the intention of the Board the others be delisted.

Besides materials, there are several other topics I believe should be of special interest to MOA members that will be worked on by committees for presentation at the Fall Board meeting. These include reworking the multisite certification discussion paper and developing an acceptable recommendation (CAAC), developing recommendations for hydroponics (Crops), Aquatic plants (Crops), and Aquaculture especially fish feed issues (Livestock).

Lynn Coody presented the Wild Farm Alliance’s fine report, “Biodiversity Conservation as part of the National Organic Program,” a topic dear to my heart. MOA’s Becky Weed serves on the Alliance’s Board. This would be good topic for a MOA conference.

I encourage you to present your ideas, concerns, and recommendations to the Board in writing and if possible in person. I welcome your comments, questions, and advice at any time. You can reach me at 406-883-2858 or email barryexplorer@yahoo.com.

I hope you are all having a good year growing and handling Montana’s great organic food and best wishes to the sellers of organics and the fortunate consumers. We are all better because of you!



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The New Farm Bill

from the office of Senator Jon Tester

Dear Montana Organic Association Members:

As you know, Congress recently passed a new Farm Bill to assist America's farmers and ranchers and improve our food security. As one of two farmers in the United States Senate I have taken an active interest in this Farm Bill to make sure it works for Montana. While the bill is not perfect, it has a lot of good programs for Montana and rural America, including a \$10 billion increase for nutrition programs and incentives for on-farm renewable energy development.

The bill also contains several provisions to help organic agriculture continue to grow, including one I added to provide substantial increases for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Organic Program. Organic agriculture is no longer hidden in other sections of the Farm Bill, but is now part of a newly named Title X, Horticulture and Organic Agriculture. I wanted to take the opportunity to let you know about some of the provisions that have an impact on the organic industry in Montana.

- **Crop Insurance for Organic Crops.** Current USDA insurance policies do not accurately reflect the realities of the organic market and production systems. Legislation will now require USDA to evaluate crop insurance premium levels and price elections for organic crops, requiring both to be established by price and loss history for individual organic crops and other available data.

- **Grants for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers.** Many beginning farmers and ranchers are interested in organic practices but need additional resources to implement cropping or grazing systems that meet required standards. The Farm Bill incorporates organic farming into the programs and services eligible for competitive grants under the beginning farmer and rancher program.

- **National Organic Program (NOP) Funding.** The NOP has been underfunded since it was established by the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) in 1990. New funding will now be provided for the NOP to regulate organic standards and certification. NOP funding will be initially increased by \$5 million (currently at \$3.1 million), rising to a total of \$11 million by 2012. This new funding level will finally allow for hiring of critical staff to meet the needs of a growing industry.

- **Farmers' Market Promotion Funding.** Farmers' markets have long provided opportunities to deliver

fresh organic products directly to consumers. The Farmers' Market Promotion Program, which provides targeted grants to help promote and improve farmers' markets, roadside stands, and other direct producer-to-consumer marketing opportunities, will now be expanded with a \$33 million boost in mandatory funding to develop and expand farmers markets across the country.

- **Local Food Promotion.** Montanans want healthy lunches for their children. What better way to do this but through the support of local farmers and ranchers? The Farm Bill encourages institutions receiving funds through the bill and the Child Nutrition Act to purchase locally grown and raised agricultural foods.

- **Interstate Meat Shipments.** For too long, small Montana meat packers have been unfairly barred from interstate commerce. New legislation will now allow state inspected facilities that have 25 or fewer employees to ship meat to other states, provided they meet all federal requirements and policies under the Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act.

- **Organic Certification Cost-Share Assistance.** The cost of organic certification has been prohibitive for many small and medium sized producers. The Farm Bill provides cost-share assistance, up to \$750, to organic farmers or handlers for offsetting the cost of becoming USDA certified.

- **Organic Data Collection.** Data are critical for any agricultural growth industry, particularly for implementing relevant crop insurance and market assistance programs. This legislation requires the USDA to collect, analyze, and publish data related to organic production and markets. The bill provides \$5 million in mandatory funds annually, through 2012, to collect information.

- **Organic Role in Conservation.** Organic producers have always played a critical role in doing their part to conserve our nation's landscape. Farm Bill rules integrate organic production into USDA's conservation practice standards, enhancing technical assistance and locally available expertise. Practices related to organic transition and production systems will now be recognized under the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) as eligible activities.

- **Organic Research.** Organic agriculture research needs have long been underfunded and unable to keep pace with industry growth. Finally, help is on

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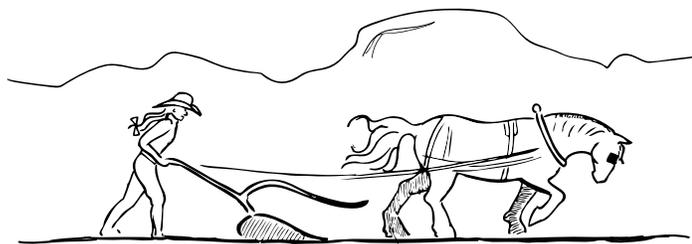
New Farm Bill, continued from page 5

the way. The bill establishes competitive grants, in the amount of \$78 million, that will be available to research institutions for organic initiatives.

I look forward to working with you and all Montanans to support and promote organic agriculture in Montana by ensuring implementation of these important Farm Bill provisions.

Sincerely,

Jon Tester
 United States Senator



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Good Ideas

From the Montana State University...

“Organic Information for the 21st Century”

eOrganic has been developed to meet the growing need for information about organic agriculture among producers, consumers, researchers, and agricultural professionals. eOrganic is a web community where farmers, researchers and educators exchange objective, research- and experience-based information about organic agriculture. Go online and check out eOrganic’s searchable collection of articles, videos, presentations, interactive materials, ask-the-expert features, and on-line courses. Learn how you can participate in the eOrganic experience by visiting <http://eorganic.info>!

From ATTRA’s Weekly Harvest Newsletter...

Farm Aid is inviting people to upload a photograph and enter a description of approximately 150 words about their Farmer Hero. People who submit a Farmer Hero will be entered in a drawing to win a grand prize of a trip to the 2008 Farm Aid concert, or other prizes. The sweepstakes will run until September 2, 2008. The Farmer Hero entries may be viewed at the Farm Aid website at www.farmaid.org/farmerheroes.

Editor’s note: I can think of myriad Montana organic farmers that qualify, can’t you?



The Organic Kitchen is on summer hiatus...cherries and lambs and lots and lots of mowing are keeping us out of the kitchen. Eat light, eat organic, eat local, and eat healthy. Enjoy the bounty that is summer in Montana.
Cheers, Lise

"You know, when you get your first asparagus, or your first acorn squash, or your first really good tomato of the season, those are the moments that define the cook's year. I get more excited by that than anything else."

- Chef Mario Batali

Here's Looking at You

In this issue we continue our series profiling MOA members, to give all of us a better understanding of just who makes up the MOA. In our fifth installment we'd like to introduce you to **The Johnsons...**

Names: Matt and Sonja Johnson, along with parents Darwin and Sandy

Kids: Chaz 15, Brett 11

Where they live: 25 Miles north of Hinsdale in the northeast part of the state

Time in Organic Ag: 4 years

Occupation: Farmers/Ranchers

What we grow: Wheat, Barley, Flax, Kamut, Peas, Hay, Cows, and Chickens

Why we are involved in organics: Initially we were looking for a way to make our family farm comfortably sustainable. We desire a healthy lifestyle and believe we are being the best stewards with the land God gave us.

Our perfect day: Matt loves to harvest. A bright crisp late summer morning, a quickly fading dew, a well-serviced combine, large full heads of grain, and no break-downs.

Who or what inspires us: Our family is inspired by the love of our savior Jesus. Sonja is inspired by new projects, "I love thinking, planning, and organizing. The anticipation and hope that is wrapped up in the challenge of something new is exciting." Matt is inspired by the ability to live and work on the family farm.

Words of wisdom: Opportunities are usually disguised as hard work, so most people don't recognize them -- Ann Landers



From L to R:
Darwin, Matt's dad, Matt, & Sonja Johnson

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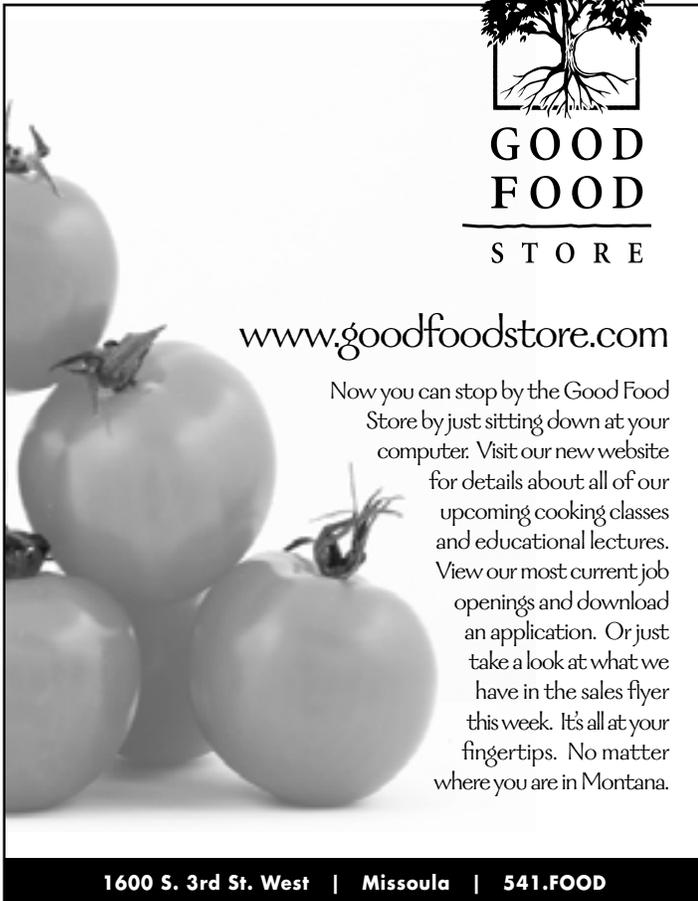
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A View from the Chair...Eating Proactively

A friend once commented that many farmers don't eat any of the grain they produce for human food. My friend's concern was that these farmers get disconnected from the people who eat the food and instead become connected with an industrial food system that is more concerned with volume and profit than with healthy farms and people. Wendell Berry, in an essay "The Pleasures of Eating," describes eating as "an agricultural act, and that how we eat determines, to a considerable extent, how the world is used." He urges people to "eat responsibly" and his suggestions for doing this include eating food that is personally or locally grown and food that is grown under the best farming practices. I like to think of this as being an active participant in the connection between eating and care of the land.

Michael Pollen's book, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, describes an unsettling connection between producers and an industrial food system that grows and manufactures most of the food in this country. He illustrates this system with corn and beef. After leaving the farm, most corn ends up in processing plants where it is fractioned, processed, and subjected to various chemical treatments to break it into components

and molecules; then reassembled with other substances "adding value" to create foods, many which don't resemble anything the farmer produced or anything found in nature for that matter. Cattle, which evolved to eat grass, are fed high calorie grain and hormones in feedlots and kept alive with antibiotics to produce fatty cuts that are nutritionally inferior to grass fed beef not to mention the ecological disaster associated with huge feedlots. Much of the food that leaves this system has lost any identity with a farm or ranch, and many producers couldn't identify with the products made from the food they grew let alone connect with the people eating it.

More and more people recognize the value of their connections between food choices and farming and ranching practices. I, like many people, choose to eat organic food knowing that it is healthier for me and the land. Organic proponents have known this on a gut level for quite some time. Now, information is increasing from peer reviewed scientific studies about the benefits of certified organic food. It is becoming clearer that the methods used in certified organic pro-

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