

Tools for Transition



Update

Spring 2015

SHARED CERTIFICATION ALLOWS FARMERS TO EXPERIMENT WITH ORGANIC

Dairy farmers Dan and Rosie Middendorf have been managing with mostly organic practices on 440 acres in Verndale, MN since the year 2000 – acquiring knowledge, equipment, and solid recordkeeping strategies along the way. They certified their land and herd in 2012 and then did something truly unique – the Middendorfs established an informal partnership with several neighboring farmers to cooperatively certify another 280 acres under one organic certificate.

“Our inspector thought it was a great idea,” says Dan. “I hold the organic certificate while [neighbors] Joel, Josh, and Clarence perform field work. It’s been a great way for them to get started farming organically; to try it out and see if it works.” Dan further explains that he is ultimately responsible for anything that happens with his partners’ organic fields. “But they have been very good at following the rules and supplying paperwork,” says Dan. “We all want to make it work.”

The partners include the Middendorf’s son, Joel Middendorf; employee, Josh Grundyson (who farms 10 miles away); and long-time neighbor, Clarence Horsager.

Under the partnership, Dan’s neighbors have the opportunity to experiment with organic management without committing all of their land to organic production or paying prohibitively expensive certification fees on smaller, “test” parcels.

Horsager, for instance, who most recently approached Dan about cooperative certification, said that he’d like to “try out organic” on 20 acres. “The certification fees on 20 acres would have been too much,” explains Dan. “It doesn’t cost me anything to certify an additional 20 acres.”



There are other savings too for the partners. By using Dan’s equipment, which is run strictly on organic fields, they save on “cleanout” as would be otherwise required when managing a “split” operation (moving equipment from conventional to organic fields). Most importantly however, Dan provides his partners with something that money can’t buy: 15 years of organic management experience.

What’s in it for Dan? Much of his neighbors’ acreage now under organic management abuts the Middendorf farm. Dan no longer needs to maintain a buffer along these stretches. More importantly, Dan has a guaranteed supply of supplemental organic feed for his dairy herd right next door and the chance to mentor new organic farmers.

Words of Advice. “Find a neighbor or experienced organic farmer that you can partner with if you’re interested in trying out organics,” says Dan. “This is the best way to learn and can save you both some money as long as you share common goals and communicate.”

For More Information:

Read more about the Middendorf’s organic management online: <http://eorganic.info/toolsfortransition/farmers>.

The Tools for Transition Project is funded by USDA NIFA Grant MIN-14-G12. Project partners are the University of Minnesota’s Department of Applied Economics, Center for Farm Financial Management, and Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture; the Minnesota Colleges and Universities’ Farm Business Management Program, and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.



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Tools For Transition *Update* Continued

SPRING 2015 IS LAST SEASON FOR TOOLS FOR TRANSITION SCHOLARSHIP

The **Tools for Transition (TFT) Project** grant expires later this year. This means that we will be wrapping up our research using the data and other information collected from you over the past four years. What does this mean for you? If you currently qualify for a Farm Business Management (FBM) program scholarship, the **TFT Project will continue to pay your scholarship during spring semester 2015** to enable you to complete the 2014 annual summary with your FBM instructor. However, this will be the last semester that scholarships are offered through the TFT Project.

If you have any questions about scholarship fees, please contact your FBM instructor or Meg Moynihan at meg.moynihan@state.mn.gov.

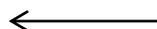
Look out this summer for a report highlighting FBM financial data from transitioning farms and for the *Organic Transition Business Planner* which will be published by the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program. These resources could not have been possible without your participation and data contributions. Thank you!

RESOURCE: TRIAL ORGANIC PRICE REPORTING SERVICE FREE TO TOOLS FOR TRANSITION PARTICIPANTS

Mercaris, an organic grain marketing and information service, is offering TFT participants free trial access to cash market price data and marketing tools (such as an online auction site for organic grain crops shown below). In exchange for access to this data during the two-month trial period, Mercaris will request your feedback on the data and new marketing tools. The interview is short (only 30 minutes) and can be done over the phone. At the end of the two-month period, you'll have a chance to continue your subscription to Mercaris data by subscribing to their services, but you will be under no obligation to do so.



Look at historical price data for organic and non-GMO grains, compare spot vs. forward prices, and food vs. feed. Information is broken down by region and it's all accessible from the web.



Interested? Contact Todd Jones at 312-423-1879 or todd.jones@mercaris.com.