

Tools for Transition

Update

Summer 2012

Weeds? Check Out Organic Risk Management Guide



Visit the New TFT Website!

Weeds? Don't panic. An electronic manual, titled *Organic Risk Management*, is available online from the University of Minnesota: <http://www.organicriskmanagement.umn.edu/default.htm>. The manual, co-authored by Kristine Moncada and Craig Scheaffer, includes 14 chapters – each with a discussion about how to mitigate risk through the use of cultural practices, variety selection, pest management and disease management.

Chapter topics range from soil health and fertility to crop production with a special primer on transition-related risk management strategies.

Each chapter is jam-packed with a wealth of information. The 24-page chapter on weeds, for example, discusses cultural risk management strategies such as rotation, cover crops, smother crops, delayed planting, alternate planting rates and nutrient applications. Mechanical weed management strategies reviewed include primary tillage, seed bed preparation/secondary tillage, cultivation (many types) and flame weeding.

Each chapter concludes with a quiz to test your new knowledge as well as a list of additional resources and references.

For more information contact author Kristine Moncada at monc0003@umn.edu or 612-626-4906.

It's the place to go for information about the *Tools for Transition Project* – including past newsletters, farmer profiles, scholarship information, survey results and transition-related resources. If you have friends, neighbors or colleagues interested in learning about organic transition, send them here:

<http://eorganic.info/toolsfortransition>

Share the News: Scholarships Available to Transitioning Farms!



Financial management scholarships are available to newly certified (less than 3 years) or transitioning dairy producers and row crop farmers. Scholarships pay up to 90 percent of Farm Business Management (FBM) Program tuition annually (tuition is approximately \$1,700/year). For more information about the FBM program, visit:

<http://www.fbm.mnscu.edu/>

Share the news! Contact Meg Moynihan at meg.moynihan@state.mn.us or 651-201-6616 for scholarship handouts or for an electronic copy of the above scholarship announcement for use in your newsletter or website!

To Learn More About the Tools for Transition Project visit our website: <http://eorganic.info/toolsfortransition>. Or contact Rob King, Department of Applied Economics, University of Minnesota, king@umn.edu, 612-625-1273.

First Time Transitioning Dairy Producer Stresses Importance of “Networking”

Photo: Angie Walter



Nate and Angie Walter operate a 100-cow transitioning dairy in Villard, Minnesota. They have two young children whom they hope will take over the farm someday. “We dream of building a successful family farm,” says Nate.

The Walters purchased the farm in 2002 from Nate’s father: 160 acres of pasture/cropland, 80 cows, 80 young stock, equipment and buildings. Assets were financed through a long-term loan guaranteed by the Farm Service Agency.

Nate and Angie had been considering organic certification for five years before eventually making the decision to switch in October 2010. “We went to an organic field day in 2005,” recalls Angie. “I was really excited about it but Nate wasn’t so sure.” So they waited ... until 2009 when their Farm Business Management instructor ran some numbers showing them that the farm would have “grossed another \$180,000 that year if we’d been organic,” says Nate. That extra money would have helped the Walters reach their goal of becoming debt free.

The Walters began transitioning all of their land in spring 2011. At that time, they added 20 cows and acquired another 80 acres to support forage needs for the dairy herd.

The Walters will begin transitioning their cows in the fall of 2012 so that land and animals can be certified in October 2013. Milk will be sold on contract to Organic Valley.

The Walters currently run a five-year rotation that includes two years of corn and three years of alfalfa hay. They feed all their corn - supplying approximately 60 percent of the herd’s energy ration. The Walters purchase needed grain, protein and straw. “We’re nervous about having to buy all this organic feed [during transition],” says Nate echoing the concerns of many transitioning farmers. “We’ll get a slight transition premium for our milk [from Organic Valley] during our third year [of transition] but it’s not enough to compensate for the [high] feed prices.” An FBM Program instructor from Alexandria Technical College is working with the Walters to develop financial plans that will allow them to address cash flow needs during transition.

The Walters are diligent about asking questions, researching ideas, and trying to “get it right” when it comes to production and finances. “Information is knowledge,” says Nate when offering advice to other transitioning farmers. “Make sure you network.”

The Walters rely heavily on their FBM instructor, among others including veterinarians and certifiers, to guide them through alternative strategies. “FBM has been the center spoke for all of our networking,” says Angie. Nate agrees saying “We could not make the transition without the advice and help of so many people.”

Photo: Angie Walter



For More Information:

Read more about Nate and Angie Walter’s transition experience online :

<http://eorganic.info/toolsfortransition/farmers>.

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