

eOrganic – Comprehensive, research-based electronic information for organic producers, educators, and ag professionals

By Jim Riddle, Organic Outreach Coordinator, University of Minnesota

The organic marketplace is growing rapidly, outpacing the availability of high quality, science-based information for farmers and agricultural professionals. **eXtension** is a new national, web-based, information source for Land Grant University (LGU) faculty and Extension agents to consolidate research findings and outreach materials. Within the framework of eXtension, **eOrganic** is being developed as the new organic agriculture Extension Service website to provide accurate and up-to-date information for organic farmers, conventional farmers, researchers, and agricultural professionals.

The eOrganic effort is being lead by researchers, Extension agents, and educators from Oregon State, Penn State, North Carolina State, Ohio State, Clemson, and the Universities of Illinois, Minnesota, and Vermont, in cooperation with ATTRA, OFRF, Rodale, and the National Ag Library. The eOrganic site will be launched in the fall of 2007, featuring in-depth content in three major areas of organic agriculture: certification; dairy production and marketing; and vegetable production and marketing.

The eOrganic Community of Practice (i.e. leadership team) is currently comprised of approximately 100 people representing diverse organic production regions and content areas. They include campus and county extension faculty and research and teaching faculty recognized for their expertise in organic and sustainable agriculture. In addition, the CoP includes experienced organic farmers, certification experts, and agricultural professionals.

The target audience includes a diverse group of conventional and organic farmers in all regions of the U.S., producing a wide array of horticultural and agronomic crops, livestock, and other agricultural products. A goal of the eOrganic project is provide high quality information on organic agriculture to agricultural professionals such as crop advisors, veterinarians, researchers, federal agencies (such as NRCS employees), processors, certification agencies, Extension educators, and Extension specialists.

The vision and framework for eOrganic is being developed and evaluated in partnership with key organic agriculture information providers such as ATTRA, The New Farm, OrganicAgInfo and the National Ag Library. eOrganic will initially offer searchable content consisting of brief articles; nationally compiled Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs); an interactive Ask-the-Expert tool; regionally-specific case studies; certification resources and decision tools; and a portal to in-depth information available from other sources, including partner sites (OrganicAgInfo, ATTRA, SARE) and local and regional Land Grant University and Cooperative Extension resources.

eOrganic team members and coordinators will identify and evaluate all relevant resources as a first step in developing eOrganic content. Existing information resources will be archived on the eOrganic site. Where information gaps are identified, team members will access and/or develop new content to populate the eOrganic site.

Over time, eOrganic will offer video streaming of expert presentations and certificate and continuing education courses. Organic systems researchers and experienced organic producers and certification experts will provide content. In addition, Integrated Organic Program (IOP), SARE, ARS, and other research results will be collected, discussed, distilled, and translated into

eOrganic content to deliver systems information to farmers and increase the impact of federal research dollars.

eOrganic will provide timely information on critical issues such as systems-level soil and pest management, animal health, grazing, feed supplements, community food systems, and international certification requirements. eOrganic will be evaluated from the beginning to the end of the project by organic farmers, conventional farmers, and agricultural professionals to develop the highest quality content and most effective delivery systems for these user groups.

To learn more about eXtension, and to see an example of an eXtension website, please go to <http://www.extension.org/>.