

# Ten Points to Effective Partnership Between Farmers and Organic Consumers

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I am pleased to be here today to share my perspective on the importance of organic farming from an organic consumer's perspective.

Many of you who have been providing services to farmers will no doubt agree with me that 10-15 years ago integrated pest management was considered radical. Now it has become the norm for conventional farmers. I predict that organic farming will become the "norm" within the next 15 years.

Over the past 10 years the organic movement has grown throughout the world. Here are some facts:

Fact: U.S. sales of organic foods have grown between 20-25% annually for the past 7 years, with overall sales of between \$3.5 and \$4.2 billion.

Fact: Once a small minority, there are now more than 10,000 certified organic farmers in the U.S. and that number is growing each year.

We are all concerned about small family farmers being forced into bankruptcy. Organic farming is a viable option.

What can each of you do to help organic farmers? I have compiled a list of 10 key points that can help build an effective partnership between organic farmers and consumers.

- 1) Know what organic consumers want:
  - Organic consumers want fresh organic produce that is locally/regionally grown.
  - Organic consumers want to know who, what, where, when:
    - who grew their food
    - (what) how their food was grown
    - where their food was grown
    - (when) how fresh is the food
  - Organic consumers want certified organic foods.
  - Organic consumers want great taste, lots of variety, and quality foods.
  - Organic consumers are willing to pay a higher

price.

- Organic consumers are informed and are demanding safe food.

- 2) Know what organic farmers needs are, their philosophy, and their growing practices. Spend a day with an organic farmer and learn first hand. There are some organic farmers here for this conference - learn from them. When you go back to your community, they are a wealth of information. You can't help an organic farmer until you understand why they choose to farm organically - free of pesticides, sewer sludge, chemical fertilizers, GE seeds, etc. Once you understand their philosophy and growing practices, then you can help them with their needs - marketing, planning, etc.

- 3) You can help organic farmers develop partnerships with consumers. There are many opportunities to connect farmers directly with consumers:

- Community Supported Agriculture - CSA's
- Farmers markets
- You-pick farms
- Farm tours
- Schools and churches
- Coops and health food stores

- 4) Help organic farmers find markets for their crops and produce:

- See #3 above
- Focus on local/regional markets - keeps transportation and storage costs down
- Help locate collectors/processors/distributors/wholesalers

- 5) Help sponsor and promote organic farming:

- Local/regional harvest festivals
- Organic booths at county fairs
- Forums/discussion groups/conferences
- Regional farming associations
- Training seminars

- 6) Help promote organic food consumption. Educate consumers about the positive reasons to buy organic

food. See 10 reasons to buy organic.

7) Help develop, research, and promote resource guides and brochures (see examples).

8) Help farmers make the switch from IPM to organic. It is possible!

9) Help farmers get certified:

- Locate appropriate certifiers.
- Minnesota's new cost-sharing program. The MN legislature passed a bill this past spring which set aside \$35,000 to help defray the costs of certification for organic farmers and to set up an Organic Advisory Task Force, of which I am a member, to oversee the cost-sharing program and to advise the MN Commissioner of Agriculture on organic farming issues/policies.

10) Why help organic farmers?

- It helps rural economies/communities.
- It helps support small family farms.
- It helps the environment - organic farming is sustainable.
- It provides healthy foods for our children, our families.
- It has a positive human health impact.
- Consumers are demanding certified organic foods
  - it all comes down to supply and demand.

**IT IS A WIN/WIN TEAM - ORGANIC FARMERS  
AND CONSUMERS!**