



Idaho Organic Farmers Use Crop Insurance

27% Enrolled in 2009

Crop insurance, an important risk management tool for many farmers, is generally underutilized by organic producers.

“It may be painful to pay up front, but at the end of the day it isn’t a big issue. If I had a crop failure and no crop insurance, I couldn’t absorb the loss,” says one Idaho organic farmer.

The USDA Risk Management Agency estimated that 35% of organic acres nationwide are covered by crop insurance programs. Results from NCAP and Washington State University’s recent survey of Idaho certified organic producers showed only 27% of respondents used crop insurance in 2009.

Four Idaho organic farmers recently shared how they use crop insurance (names withheld).

Farmer 1: Always purchases a hail and fire policy for small grains and beans.

“I’m borrowing on an operating loan and need to be able to pay this back in the case of crop loss to hail or fire during harvest.” In 20 years, this farmer has made a claim only three times. He gets the minimal coverage for around \$8 per acre for the hail and fire combination policy, which pays 50% of expected returns in the case of a claim.

“I see this as managing my risk over the long haul. It is not worth gambling year to year whether or not the weather will be a problem.”

Farmer 2: Insures everything.

“I’m finding that other federal programs or loans are requiring that I have all of my crops insured.”

This farmer has benefited from an organic provision that allows claims when recognized organic farming practices fail to provide effective insect, disease, or weed control, even though a conventional practice would have prevented the loss. He experienced a very wet June, which impacted weed control methods and ultimately yields in his specialty bean crop. He was able to make a claim, since the weather impacted his ability to conduct timely and effective weed control strategies.

Farmers 3 & 4: Purchase hail and multi-peril insurance for small grains.

Farmer 3 lives in an area often impacted by hail. “It is better to pay for the insurance. It is not a lot of money, compared to the potential loss,” he says. He also uses a multi-peril policy in case

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NCAP Facilitates Meeting with Under Secretary and Congressman

The 2008 Farm Bill provided new funding specifically for organic farmers through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Organic Initiative. NCAP is working to ensure organic farmers know about these funds.

In March, NCAP organized a farm visit for 26 farmers with Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Harris Sherman, U.S. Rep. Walt Minnick, and Idaho Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff to discuss farm bill programs for organic farmers.



Beth Rasgorshek (left) of Canyon Bounty Farm in Nampa, ID hosted the visit. Clint Evans (right), assistant state conservationist with Idaho NRCS, described the EQIP program.



Fred Brossy (left) shared suggestions about improving the program with Congressman Minnick and Under Secretary Sherman.

As a result, Congressman Minnick invited Fred Brossy of Ernie’s Organics (Shoshone, ID) as a witness at the Idaho Farm Bill Hearing in May. Idaho held the third Farm Bill hearing in the country, as the U.S. House began listening sessions to plan for the 2012 Farm Bill. Add your comments to the official field hearing record at www.agriculture.house.gov.

NCAP will continue to notify organic farmers about Farm Bill programs, so look for future email announcements. ❖

of winter kill or other problems in his winter wheat. He spends around \$16 per acre for hail and another \$16 per acre for multi-peril insurance for 80% coverage of the estimated crop value.



Another farmer describes crop insurance as just part of his overall farm risk assessment. “I go with basic coverage and spend \$13-15 per acre.”

Nationwide, organic farmer participation in federal crop insurance has nearly tripled in the last five years, according to a recent report for Congress by USDA Risk Management Agency. The policies covered a 250% increase in organic acres, bringing the total to 565,000 acres covered. For more information, contact a crop insurance agent: www.rma.usda.gov/tools/agent.html. ❖

CSP Deadline is June 11

The 2010 Conservation Stewardship Program sign up deadline is approaching. Interested producers should contact their local NRCS field office to apply. ❖

EQIP Organic Initiative

Current estimates by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (of which NCAP is a member) indicate that only half of the \$50 million allocated for this program will be used by organic farmers in 2010. The following *preliminary* numbers come from each state’s NRCS office in NCAP’s region. Future availability of this program depends, in part, on participation rates. ❖

Applications for the 2010 Environmental Qualities Incentive Program (EQIP) Organic Initiative through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

State	Allocation	Number of Applications	Request (Preliminary)	Total Organic Farms ¹	Total Organic Acres ¹
CA	\$ 2.4 million	210	\$ 2.5 million	2,286	471,000
ID	\$ 798,000	21 (13 certified; 8 transitional)	\$ 210,000	219	148,000
MT	\$ 1.5 million	34 (20 certified; 14 transitional)	\$ 950,000	133	284,000
OR	\$ 867,000	33	\$ 260,000	433	106,000
WA	\$ 974,000	147 (90 certified; 57 transitional)	\$ 3 million	707	82,000

¹ Source: 2008 Ag Census of Organic Producers

NCAP/WSU Survey of Idaho Organic Producers

90% Plan to Maintain Certification for Next 5 Years

Jessica R. Goldberger

Washington State University

Among U.S. states, Idaho ranks ninth in organic acreage with 148,425 acres (USDA-NASS, 2010). In 2008, 219 certified organic and 35 exempt organic farms in Idaho sold more than \$71 million in organically produced commodities.

To understand the characteristics, marketing strategies, challenges, and opinions of the state’s organic producers, representatives from Washington State University and NCAP recently conducted a survey of all certified organic producers in Idaho.

One hundred fourteen (114) individuals completed the survey for a response rate of 54 percent.

Who are Idaho’s Certified Organic Producers?

Approximately 85% of the survey respondents were male. Nearly all respondents (97%) were Caucasian.

Respondents ranged in age from 27 to 85 with a mean age of 55 years. Respondents had spent 20 years, on average, as a farm owner, manager, or primary decision-maker and over two thirds (69%) had parents who farmed. Almost half (47%) worked at a regular off-farm job and 51% had a spouse or domestic partner with an off-farm job.

Characteristics of Idaho’s Certified Organic Farms

About two-thirds of respondents (65%) transitioned from conventional (non-organic) farming methods to organic methods, while 26% indicated they had always farmed organically. Nearly half (47%) of the respondents had been farming organically for five or fewer years. Ninety percent planned to maintain their organic certification for the next five years despite the fact that approximately two-thirds of respondents reported market demand and prices as worse in 2009 compared to the previous three years.

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UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO

ORGANIC UPDATE

University of Idaho researchers and extension specialists are conducting the following organic research projects.

Organic potato cultivar trials

Nora Olsen continues trials to evaluate potato cultivars grown under organic conditions at the Kimberly R&E Center certified organic field. Olsen will evaluate emergence rate, vigor, disease/insect susceptibility, yield, yield profile, and quality at harvest.

Nitrogen sources in organic potato production

Also at Kimberly, Amber Moore continues research into different nitrogen sources for organic potato production. She is testing the effect of distillers grains and Chilean nitrate on tuber yield and quality of Russet Burbanks. The goal is to develop effective nitrogen management for transitioning growers.

Powdery mildew management in organic table grapes

Mike Medes of Rocky Fence Vineyard teamed up with Ariel Agenbroad (Canyon Co.) to manage powdery mildew with a new trellising method and sulfur applications. Disease-free grapes were produced in 2008 and 2009. Results are summarized at www.sarc.org.



Enterprise budgeting for organic potatoes

In response to requests from potato growers considering transition, NCAP secured funding for Kate Painter (Moscow) to develop an organic potato budget. Painter developed two enterprise budgets to represent the different costs based on farm size. The budgets are available at www.uidaho.edu/~kpainter/.

Compost use in dryland organic alfalfa & barley

As part of a larger WSU/OSU/UI project, Cindy Kinder (Camas Co.), Lauren Hunter (Blaine Co.), Kate Painter and Jodi Johnson-Maynard (Moscow) are researching composted dairy manure for soil fertility management in an organic alfalfa and barley rotation. The impacts on soil quality (organic matter), soil fertility, and weed populations will be determined, as well as the economics.

Soil Stewards Organic Farm

This student organization runs an organic farm within the Plant Science Research Farm in Moscow. The students are in their seventh year of production, offering organic produce through a CSA and farm stand.

Biological control of early blight in organic potatoes

NCAP partnered with Oliver Neher at Kimberly and Montana Microbial Products to test the use of a biological control for early blight. In 2008, strip trials were conducted in three commercial organic potato fields. The trial will be repeated again in 2010, including small plot research with multiple OMRI listed products (microorganisms, plant oils, extracts, and minerals).

Potato variety and Colorado potato beetle damage

Erik Wenninger was recently awarded a grant to study host plant choice of Colorado potato beetle and variation in defoliation and yield losses among organically grown commercial potato varieties. A pilot study at Kimberly showed considerable variation among potato varieties. The project will begin in 2011. ❖

[Organic Survey]

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Respondents operated, on average, 291 certified organic cropland acres, 708 certified organic pastureland or rangeland acres, 28 transitional cropland acres, 12 transitional pastureland or rangeland acres, 370 non-organic cropland acres, and 53 non-organic pastureland or rangeland acres. Average certified organic acreage varied substantially by region: 71 acres (north), 391 acres (east), 397 acres (southwest), and 1,861 acres (south-central).

Respondents produced an impressive diversity of organically certified products during 2009. The most common products included: forage (60% of farms); grains and oilseeds (47%); vegetables and melons (26%); potatoes (20%); small berries and grapes (18%); herbs (18%); nursery, greenhouse, and floriculture (14%); dry beans and dry peas (13%); tree fruit (13%); cattle and calves (12%); and milk and other dairy products (11%).

When asked which product contributed most to their 2009 gross organic farm income, 31% of respondents selected forage, 16% selected vegetables and melons, 14% selected grains and oilseeds, and 11% selected milk and other dairy products.

Reasons for Farming Organically

Organic price premiums and environmental and economic sustainability ranked highest among the reasons respondents farmed organically. Produce quality, consumer health, consumer demand, and community values also ranked highly.

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NCAP ORGANIC EVENTS

July

Organic Field Day, Location and Date TBA

August

Organic Field Day, Location and Date TBA

December

Organic Markets Workshop, Twin Falls

February

2nd Annual Grower's Own Conference (Farmer-to-Farmer Exchange), Twin Falls

March

Launch of Eastern Idaho Grower's Own Conference

To ensure event notification, send your email address to Jen Miller at jmiller@pesticide.org or call (208) 850-6504.

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[Organic Survey]

Marketing Practices

More than two-thirds (68%) of respondents used direct-to-consumer marketing channels for their certified organic products in 2009, while 42% used direct-to-retail and 76% used wholesale marketing channels. When asked about the use of various types of marketing channels for their certified organic products, respondents relied most on other farmers (43%); natural food stores and food cooperatives (34%); farmers' markets (28%); distributors and handlers (27%); websites and catalogs (26%); restaurants and caterers (26%); and processors, millers, and packers (26%).

About one-fifth (21%) of respondents made value-added products (e.g., jam, salad mix, dried herbs, bread, packaged meat, and livestock feed) from their certified organic products. The average percentage of gross farm sales from these value-added products was 26%.

Nearly half (49%) of respondents' certified organic products were marketed locally (within 100 miles). Over one fifth (22%) of products were marketed regionally (between 101 and 499 miles) and 17% were marketed nationally (500 miles or more). The remaining certified organic products were handled by intermediaries (11%) or sold internationally (1%).

Additional survey results on marketing practices, farming challenges, and regional differences will be available at NCAP's website, www.pesticide.org. ❖

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