



Western SARE

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AG PRO ORGANIC FIELD COURSE

Introduction

Environmental stewardship and resource conservation – core values of the organic movement – are now written into national organic standards, making it a federally regulated industry. These values are mirrored to a great extent in the goals and strategies of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and, to a lesser extent, the Cooperative Extension Service (CES).

Farmers, agriculture, and the public will be better served when NRCS, Resource Conservation District (RCD) personnel and members, and other agricultural professionals better understand the



Soil quality demonstrations proved to be good teachers.

Professional Development Program Grant

Title: Field Course for Agricultural Professionals on the Common Goals and Strategies of USDA's National Organic Standards and Resource Conservation Programs

Project Number: EW03-004

Principal Investigator

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requirements for organic certification, its relationship to resource conservation, and programs that support both.



This project was designed to help NRCS and RCD staff in California better understand organic practices and the common ground that exists between NRCS and RCD missions and organic agriculture.

Objectives

1. Provide agricultural professionals with greater understanding of USDA's National Organic Program
2. Describe and demonstrate the common goals and strategies between national organic standards and conservation program recommended practices

3. Increase the capacity of publicly supported agricultural professionals to address the information needs of organic, transitional, and aspiring organic farmers

Approaches

The National Center for Appropriate Technology delivered four workshops/trainings about organics to NRCS and other agriculture professionals around the state. Through its small grants program, NCAT provided training to 10 RCDs and their members in California, including one tribal RCD. In addition, NCAT gave a presentation about organics to the NRCS California State Technical Advisory Committee and the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide Committee.

The intent of these presentations was to:



SARE's mission is to advance—to the whole of American agriculture—innovations that improve profitability, stewardship, and quality of life by investing in groundbreaking research and education.

The Western Region, one of four SARE regions nationwide, is administered through Utah State University.

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- Build relationships at all NRCS levels; this happens before and after project is completed
- Understand NRCS priorities and relate them to organic production systems
- Educate NRCS staff with scientific documentation about organics
- Provide hands-on demonstrations and fieldwork on organic farms whenever possible
- Understand other states' approaches to cost-sharing organics
- Make NRCS the "good guys"

Tools Developed

- Organic Jeopardy game (effective & fun review tool)
- Fieldwork on soils at organic farms
- PowerPoint presentations about organics and natural conservation of the Big Five (plant, animal, air, water, and soil)
- Soil quality demonstrations (organic vs. conventional soils – seeing is believing)
- NRCS-Organics Conservation Practices Cross-Compliance Chart (a.k.a. The Rosetta Stone)

Outcomes

Because of the information conveyed to NRCS and the relationships developed as a result of this project, NRCS planned to incorporate some basic information about organics and organic practices as a component of ongoing NRCS soil quality training held around the country as many as 8-10 times a year.

Other specific outcomes of this project:

- Trained 396 NRCS and RCD personnel in California about organic certification and practices

Organic Rules and Regulations	Organic Soil Management	Organic Cropping Practices	Organic Pest Management	Organic Miscellaneous
100 pt	100 pt	100 pt	100 pt	100 pt
200 pt	200 pt	200pt	200 pt	200 pt
300 pt	300 pt	300 pt	300 pt	300 pt
400 pt	400 pt	400 pt	400 pt	400 pt
500 pt	500 pt	500 pt	500 pt	500 pt

Organic Jeopardy was an effective training tool for showing how the new organic standards and NRCS standards are often parallel.

- Developed an NRCS/California Organics Cost Share under the IPM Practice Standard (EQIP), which pays organic growers \$100/acre (up to \$10,000) to underwrite transition costs
- NCAT invited to become a member of the NRCS Soil Quality Cadre
- Established ongoing relationships with NRCS at federal, state, and county levels
- Conducted additional NRCS training (post project) in 2007 for 30 California staff

Future Recommendations

In view of the growing presence of organics in the market and by farmers wishing to transition to organics, there is a real need for NRCS staff around the country to develop a better understanding of organic practices and their conservation benefits.

NCAT staff found that demonstrating real-world differ-



Training was conducted in both the classroom and in the field.

ences between soils managed organically and those not so managed is an effective teaching tool that should be included whenever possible.

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ATTRA – the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service – is managed by the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) and is funded under a grant from the USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service.

Visit the NCAT website, www.ncat.org, or the ATTRA website, www.attra.ncat.org, for information, or call 1-800-346-9140. To learn more about this project, contact Rex Dufour, rex@ncat.org.