Winter 2011-2012

The Organic Sprout

MOFGA's Newsletter for Organic Producers

Organic Seed Search: Satisfying but Confusing?

Dave Colson, Ag Services Director

One of the more confusing parts of the National Organic Rule, both for the grower and the certifier, is the requirement for organic seeds. The NOP rule states "the producer must use organically grown seeds, annual seedlings, and planting stock; except non-organically produced untreated seeds and planting stock may be used to produce an organic crop when the equivalent organically produced variety is not commercially available." The first part of this regulation is pretty straightforward; producers must use organic seeds. It's the exception that causes the confusion, what is meant by "equivalent variety" or commercial availability?"

To address this the MOFGA Certification Services practice manual requires certified organic seeds except when the kind, quantity, and/or quality cannot be found in a certified organic form. First, the equivalent variety or "kind" refers not to the generic broccoli, but to a specific variety you might use. If you have been using a variety that is unavailable from certified organic seed, or you choose to use a variety which has properties that fit your growing situation but is also unavailable, then non-organic seed may be used. Likewise if the organic seed variety you want is only available in a small quantity and you require a larger amount than is "commercially available" you may purchase non-organic, untreated seed. Finally, if you feel that the quality (let's say germination or vigor) of an organic seed is inferior to a non-organic seed of the same variety, then you may use non-organic, untreated seed.

Now here's where the rubber hits the road. As with most aspects of the organic certification process MCS needs to verify these exemptions in order to meet the NOP rule. Back to the practice manual, under seeds "not permitted, conventional seeds (may not be used) without demonstrating that the kind (variety), quality or quantity sought were unavailable as certified organic. You must conduct a broad search. You must keep records about your search to show to your inspector." OK, I have a variety I want to use that I can't find in the three or four catalogs I use, but how do I know whether that variety might be available in some catalog I don't usually source from. In New England we're lucky to have a choice of regional seed companies from which to buy. Both Johnny's Selected Seeds and Fedco Seeds list organic varieties, but not all the seed from these two catalogs are organic.

In some cases a variety may be offered as both organic and non-organic seed. Another regional seed house that only sells organic seed is High Mowing Seeds in Vermont. Often what I find when checking out organic

(*Continued on Pg 2)*

2012 Growers' Meetings Scheduled! See Pg 12 for upcoming events

Inside this Issue...

Page 2-3: Organic Seed Search ❄ Seed Resouce List
Page 4-5: 2012 Certification Fee Changes ❄ Funding Opportunities
❄ An Average Year Made up of Unusual Weather
Page 7-8: Org. Price Reports ❄ Biodegradable Mulch ❄ NOP Guidance
Page 10-12: Evaluating Livestock Inputs ❄ Calendar ❄ Directory

Organic Seed Search (*Continued from Pg 1)*

seed offerings is that the varieties available tend to be the same across different catalogs. For example in looking for choices for broccoli across four catalogs De Cicco and Bel-star consistently showed up, and in some cases were the only varieties offered. I've grown each of these varieties, but if you need a fall producing broccoli with a good single head these varieties may not work well. If the Organic offerings of broccoli do not meet your needs, non-organic, untreated seed may be purchased. But, I still want to know if that variety is available somewhere I don't usually check. A few years ago the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) created an Organic Seed Database, this was intended to be a single source for growers to use to find organic varieties. Unfortunately, not all of the seed companies participated in the database and while the list can be helpful it is incomplete. A new database is now in the works from the Organic Seed Alliance and may be more useful for organic growers. This kind of resource should help to alleviate the need to search multiple catalogs beyond the ones you may currently use. The Organic Seed Alliance is expected to be up and running later in 2012.

Tune into WERU's Common Ground Radio Show on January 6th - MOFGA's Melissa White Pillsbury will lead a discussion about the mid-winter allure of seed catalogues.

From a practical point of view I have some suggestions to growers doing their seed purchases. First, order early, organic seed stocks can go quickly. Second, trial a few new varieties each year. This is a good idea anyway and will help you to keep up on new varieties in case an old one is discontinued. On my farm, we target investing about 10% of our total seed budget in trial varieties each year, many of them organic varieties. Third, a target of 50% organic seed of your total seed purchases shows a good effort on the part of the grower, less than that will draw the attention of your certifier and possibly require more documentation. This is not an accurate metric of organic seed use and is not part of the NOP rule, but is a simple working guideline that a certifier can use to evaluate seed purchases. Fourth, keep a log of your seed search, if a non-organic seed is purchased a note of the seed and a check off of the other sources considered should be adequate. I would also suggest that you maintain a sowing log for all your sowings. This can help with planning for future years and will give you a place to note which seeds you actually use are from organic sources. Lastly I believe that any record keeping you do should benefit you as a grower. Records should help to give a basis for farm evaluation and management while at the same time satisfying the need for certification documentation.

Enjoy your search through the seed catalogs and the anticipation of the growing season to come.

Our newsletter is now a joint effort by MOFGA Certification Services LLC and MOFGA's Ag Services Department on behalf of our organic producers. We think this will increase the frequency of the newsletter, enhance its content, and let you all know what MOFGA is doing on behalf of growers.

For those of you who haven't heard the good news, Dave Colson, long-time MOFGA-certified vegetable farmer from Durham ME, is the new Director of Ag Services. He has an office, along with Certification Staff and much of the rest of Ag Services, in MOFGA's new Annex Building at 210 Crosby Brook Rd, which is right across from MOFGA's antique red barn and windmill. A complete list of staff and contact information can be found below. We hope to see you at the Ag Trades Show in Augusta; MOFGA's day is Tuesday January 10, 2012.

Mary Yurlina
MCS Director

MOFGA Certification Services LLC

Mary Yurlina - Director
Kate Newkirk - Assoc. Director of Processing
Jacomijn Schravesande-Gardei - Associate Director of Crops
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Seed Resource List

The field of organic seed suppliers has grown in the last few years. It was interesting to peruse the web for organic seed and planting stock and we thought we would share our findings with you. This is neither a complete list of organic seed sellers nor intended to be an endorsement by MOFGA.

Vegetables, herbs, flowers....

Fedco Seeds, Waterville, ME
http://www.fedcoseeds.com/
(207) 873-7333 or (207) 430-1106

Johnny's Selected Seeds Winslow, ME
http://www.johnnyseeds.com/
877-Johnnys (877-564-6697)

High Mowing Organic Seeds, Wolcott, VT
http://www.highmowingseeds.com/
Phone: 802-472-6174

Seeds of Change, Rancho Dominguez, CA
http://www.seedsofchange.com
1-888-762-7333

Harris Seeds, Rochester, NY
http://www.harrisseeds.com
(800) 544-7938

Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, Mineral, VA
http://www.southernexposure.com/about-us-ezp-18.html

Peaceful Valley Seeds, Grass Valley, CA
http://www.groworganic.com
(888) 784-1722

Territorial Seed Company, Cottage Grove, OR
http://www.territorialseed.com
800-626-0866

Irish Eyes Garden Seeds, Ellensburg, WA
http://www.irisheyesgardenseeds.com/index.php
1-509-933-7150

Family Farmers Seed Cooperative, Williams, OR
www.organicseedcoop.com
1-541-306-3863

Corn, soy, small grains, grasses, cover crops, oil seed, legumes...

Welter Seed Co., Onslow, IA
http://www.welterseed.com/
(563) 485-2762 or (563) 852-3325

Alberta Lea Seed, Alberta Lea, MN
http://www.alseed.com/index.php
(800) 352-5247

American Organic, Warren, IL
http://www.american-organic.com/index.php
(866) 471-9465

Planting stock: potatoes, garlic, and sweet potatoes....

Wood Prairie Farm
http://www.woodprairie.com/
(800) 829-9765
(Wood Prairie also sells vegetable seeds).

Maine Potato Lady
https://www.mainepotatolady.com
207-343-2270

The vegetable seed houses listed above (e.g., Fedco's Tuber division) may also sell organic potato and garlic planting stock.

Congratulations to Johnny's Selected Seeds in Winslow and Fedco Seeds in Waterville! They were named among the top vegetable seed companies in the country by a survey of *Mother Earth News* readers.

2012 Certification Fee Changes

We have made the difficult decision to raise our certification fees for 2012. The last fee increase took place in 2009. The fee increase was necessary to cover current activities such as on-site inspections as well as new expenses such as pesticide residue screening and material input review. We will also embark on a new information technology project—making organic system plans web-accessible in a password-protected environment. Certified producers will be able to log into their own OSP to complete annual updates and make plan changes. This capacity is something many producers have been asking for in recent years and we think it will allow everyone to save time and paper once the mechanism is complete. We hope to try out a beta-version on some producers later in 2012, with a project completion date expected in 2013.

Below are the new fee charts. Tier I is for farmers. Tier II is for processor/handlers, maple syrup operations, and other farms with significant processor/handler component. The federal rebate remains in place for Maine organic producers. Seventy-five percent of certification fees are reimbursed, with the maximum reimbursement amount capped at $750. For more details, see our Practice Manual.

Tier 1

Income at Least ($)	But less than ($)	Annual Fee	(select ↓)	*Actual Expense after State Rebate*	*Actual Expense after State and MOFGA Rebate*
0	2,500	**$325.00**		*$81.25*	*$43.75*
2,500	5,000	**$375.00**		*$93.75*	*$55.00*
5,000	10,000	**$550.00**		*$137.50*	*$75.00*
10,000	25,000	**$675.00**		*$168.75*	
25,000	40,000	**$800.00**		*$200.00*	
40,000	100,000	**$1000.00**		*$250.00*	
100,000	200,000	**$1200.00**		*$450.00*	
200,000	300,000	**$1400.00**		*$650.00*	
300,000	500,000	**$1800.00**		*$1050.00*	
500,000	750,000	**$2000.00**		*$1250.00*	
750,000	1,000,000	**$2200.00**		*$1450.00*	
Over 1,000,000		**$2600.00**		*$1850.00*	

Tier 2

Income at Least ($)	But less than ($)	Annual Fee	(select ↓)	*Actual Expense after State Rebate*	*Actual Expense after State and MOFGA Rebate*
0	2,500	**$375.00**		*$93.75*	*$43.75*
2,500	5,000	**$425.00**		*$106.25*	*$55.00*
5,000	10,000	**$600.00**		*$150.00*	*$75.00*
10,000	25,000	**$725.00**		*$181.25*	
25,000	40,000	**$850.00**		*$212.50*	
40,000	100,000	**$1050.00**		*$300.00*	
100,000	200,000	**$1250.00**		*$500.00*	
200,000	300,000	**$1450.00**		*$700.00*	
300,000	500,000	**$1850.00**		*$1100.00*	
500,000	750,000	**$2050.00**		*$1300.00*	
750,000	1,000,000	**$2250.00**		*$1500.00*	
Over 1,000,000		**$2650.00**		*$1900.00*	

Funding Opportunities for Organic Growers

Katy Green, Organic Transitions Coordinator

USDA NRCS has recently announced funding deadlines for the upcoming year for the Organic Initiative and High Tunnel programs. Applications are accepted on a continuous basis, but the first cut off date for ranking and review of applications for the upcoming year is February 3, 2012. The Organic Initiative is intended to help organic producers identify and address resource concerns on their farms while NRCS provides cost-sharing assistance to help remediate the concerns. Many practices that NRCS can provide assistance for are also recommended or required for certified organic operations. Examples include conservation crop rotation, cover crop, and mulching.

I often hear that these programs do not work for smaller growers and that the time it takes to fill out the paperwork is not worth the payments received. It is worth noting that organic growers receive a higher payment rate for certain practices than payments made under the traditional EQIP program. For example, an organic grower who planted a series of cover crops during the 2011 growing season to knock back weeds and bring an old field into production would have received $197.09 per acre to offset the costs if they were participating in the NRCS program or $236.51 if they were considered "historically underserved" by NRCS. This can help to cover many of the costs associated with doing something that you may have done anyway.

There are also more technical projects that can be addressed by NRCS, which include compost facilities, water wells, and heavy use area improvements around the barnyard. These activities are a big investment and it is worth exploring your options and speaking with your NRCS representative about your whole farm plan. For larger projects they can often help to pay for pieces that address resource concerns and schedule implementation over several years.

Finally, the High Tunnel program will be offered in every county of the state this year! Those of you looking to extend your growing seasons using a high tunnel should consider applying for this program. I expect significant cuts to conservation programs in the 2012 Farm Bill and encourage anyone who is interested in participating in these programs to visit their county offices this winter.

For more information visit your local USDA NRCS Service Center or contact Katy Green at MOFGA.

NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

2011 - An Average Year Made Up of Unusual Weather

Eric Sideman - MOFGA Organic Crop Specialist

Back in October I heard a weather forecaster say that there was a foot of snow predicted, which he said was very unusual for October. Then he said that unusual weather is very common. That pretty much sums up 2011. I am looking back at the Pest Reports that I sent out over the season and I see that I started on April 11 saying that the forecast was for 70 degrees, warm for early April and I warned folks not to be fooled. Do not rush into planting until the soil warms up because there are all sorts of pests and diseases that will jump all over your slow-to-germinate seeds sitting in the cold soil. Then it got dry as a bone in July for some folks. I finished the season talking about wet. Our soils here on East Wind Farm, my home in New Hampshire, have been water logged since mid August, even before Irene. Now it is mid December and the ground still has not frozen and it is completely water logged. There are all sorts of problems that can afflict your crops when their roots drown. I hope it dries up by spring.

My take home message is to farm based on the calendar, but take lots more into account such as daily weather, soil condition, pest history and even your mood. Here are some highlights from the 2011 series of Pest Reports that are good representations of the year. Also, check out the last picture. This is what lots of potatoes looked like this year. If you want to see more pictures of pests around in 2011, and ask questions, come to my presentation at the Trades Show in Augusta on January 10 (go to the MOFGA website and look at the Trades Show Schedule for details).

(From Pest Report April 11, 2011)

SEEDCORN MAGGOT (Delia platura)

The seedcorn maggot is a larva of a fly. The maggot mostly feeds on decaying vegetable matter in the soil, but if seeds are slow to germinate they fall prey too. Peas and beans are the most commonly injured seeds because people rush peas into the ground early in the spring and beans are slow to germinate in cool soil no matter what the calendar says. Corn, melons, cucumbers, potato sprouts, cabbage, beet, onion (here often confused with onion maggot), spinach, radish and more crops are also frequent victims.

The fly lays its eggs in moist soil. They are attracted to soil high in fresh organic matter. The fly eggs can hatch at very low temperatures. The larva feed on the seed, especially the embryo. Seeds may be killed before they sprout, or may sprout but be missing parts such as a cotyledon or growing *(Continued on Pg 6)*

2011- An Average Year

(Continued from page 5)

tip. I often see beans germinate that have two cotyledons but no more growth because this pest ate the growing tip.

Cultural Control

Everything that can be done to encourage and hasten seed germination is important in early spring plantings. For example, waiting for warm soil, waiting for a good 5-day weather forecast, planting shallowly, etc. Slow to germinate seeds are sitting ducks for the seedcorn maggot. Avoid adding organic matter that is not fully decomposed to fields of early spring planted crops (ex. unfinished compost, livestock manure). Clean cultivation is recommended for early plantings.

DAMPING-OFF IN THE FIELD

Below I will discuss damping-off of seedlings in greenhouses and on window sills. Last year I received calls about peas dying just after or just before germinating and I thought I better mention that damping off can also occur in the field. This time of year the problem is with peas.

The disease is caused by several different species of Pythium, which is a common soil inhabitant that persists in soil (often in root debris) as spores. The species have a wide host range of crops and weeds and so crop rotation will do little to avoid the problem.

During or just after germination the pea seedling begins to show symptoms. The symptoms may be as simple as yellowing and stunting because sometimes only the root tips are infected and this root pruning interrupts growth. Sometimes a soft rot of the stem kills the plant. Sometimes you just don't see any peas.

High soil moisture and warm soil temperatures (warmer than optimum for pea growth, i.e., 65-75) favors Pythium. You can't control the weather but you can choose when you plant your peas. If the soil is very wet and warm weather is forecast it may make sense to delay planting a few days for the soil to dry a bit.

There are resistant varieties. The resistant gene is tied to some visual characteristics of the seed. Wrinkled seeds are more severely affected than round seeds. Also, some biological seed treatments such as Rootshield may help.

(From Pest Report August 22, 2011)

LATE SUMMER DISEASES RAMPANT

This August has been wet. But even before we got the recent rains, August has been wet because it was very humid and the days are getting shorter. It is kind of sad for some people to see the days get shorter, and others that wake late in the morning don't notice it, but the days are much shorter now. It gets dark by 8:00 and not light until after 5:00. Shorter days, the sun lower in the sky and especially the humidity being high for quite a few weeks have lead to heavy dew setting early in the evening and not evaporating until late morning. That means the leaves stay wet longer. What has developed in this seasonal situation, and weather, and late August crowded plants is disease. Many spores depend on a minimum number of hours for spore germination, and we got it in the past few weeks. All of a sudden some crops that looked great are on the edge of death, or over the edge.

ONIONS- Botrytis leaf blight has gone wild. Botrytis leaf blight is one of the most common fungal diseases of onion. Severity depends on the abundance of overwintering inoculum, and the number and duration of high humidity and leaf wetness periods, and moderate (50-70°F) temperatures. When conditions are favorable it can take down an entire field. The disease often results in smaller bulbs and lower yield. Symptoms are whitish lesions on the leaves, usually at first having a greenish halo, then developing into a sunken, yellowish spot with a characteristic slit oriented lengthwise to the stem. Symptoms tend to appear first on older leaves. . As the disease progresses the lesions coalesce and leaves yellow and die back. Massive numbers of conidia (spores) are released from infected leaves and are wind blown to new plants. Botrytis overwinters as sclerotia, which were formed on infected tissue and appear as tiny black specks. Dead leaves and culls left in the field or in piles over winter are the source of new infections. The sclerotia germinate in the spring and release spores, which infect young onion plants.

Minimizing the leaf and cull bulb tissue left on the soil surface after harvest is key to management. Culls should be destroyed, not piled. Volunteer onion plants in the spring should be rougued. Crop residue should be removed from the field at harvest or plowed deeply. Crop rotation is effective if new field is well apart from the old field.

Minimizing periods of leaf wetness is key. Wide row spacing and within row spacing allows more air movement. Double or triple rows on wet years will lead to a problem. Overhead irrigation should be very early morning on sunny days to allow for quick drying and not extend the period of wetness from dew. *(Continued on Pg 9)*

Organic price reports: a tool worth investing in!

Melissa White Pillsbury, Organic Marketing Coordinator

One of the tools MOFGA provides to our community of farmers are certified organic price reports. The reports are published monthly from May to October. All price reports published since 2006 are available at www.mofga.org/Publications/OrganicPriceReports/tabid/260/Default.aspx.

Each month I send a friendly email to over 200 certified organic farms requesting prices for the products currently sold, in both wholesale and retail markets. Each month I get approximately 20 emails back.

Or I should say I hope to get 20 emails back, because the minimum threshold I have set for myself before I will publish a report is to have data from at least 20 farms (though I do let a lower number slip in from time to time).

The most common complaint I get about the price reports is that there isn't much data in them. Fair enough. The value of the price reports is to establish a baseline of the range of prices being received by farmers in different markets, and having only one price for a product is of very limited use because you have no way of knowing where this price falls on the range "typical" prices for that product in different marketing scenarios. I've been tempted in the past to eliminate any products from the price report where I didn't receive at least two prices, but since that would cut the report by at least half in most months, I can't bring myself to do it.

I know that many of you mean to send me your prices more regularly, because you have told me as much at whichever MOFGA event where I happened to run into you. And I know you're all busy running your farms. Who has time to sit down at your phone or computer to relay pricing information?

I'm guessing that those of you who do send in your prices fairly regularly do so not because you "have the time", but because you understand the value, to either yourself and/or to the organic community, of doing so. The price reports benefit the organic farming community by establishing a benchmark for prices of Maine organic products. This creates some transparency in the market, which has multiple benefits, including:

- First, if we have an idea of the market value of different goods, farmers can avoid undercutting each other because there is an understood baseline range of value for each product.
- Second, new farmers can more easily integrate themselves into the market by not being way off base in their pricing. These farmers would learn quickly on their own that their prices are either way too high or way too low, but having the price reports available as a reference point helps avoid major disruptions in your markets as a result of their learning process.
- Third, price reports help buyers understand the value of your products, and give you a tool to support your price if you're getting pressure from buyers about your prices being too high compared, say to those on the price sheet from Sysco.

Now that I've convinced you of the value of the price reports, let's tackle the reporting piece. You should have a price and product sheet for your farm, anyway. This is BASIC information you need to communicate with your customers and to keep sales and income records that you need to measure your success from year to year. There is no question that it is worth your time to create a tool for yourself that contains this information. If you need examples of ways that farmers keep these, and other records, there are lots of resources out there. Be in touch if you need help finding some useful tools.

If you have a price and product sheet, then sending your price information to me just became several degrees of magnitude easier. Just copy & paste or attach to an email (or fax it, or send it by carrier pigeon) and you're done!

What's up with Biodegradable mulch?

Certification staff are frequently asked about the use of non-GMO, corn-based, biodegradable mulch in organic production. The mulch mimics black plastic, but degrades in the field. Many growers see the application of biodegradable mulch as advantageous because it reduces labor costs and keeps petroleum-derived black plastic out of farm fields, consistent with the spirit of organics.

Bioplastics, such as the biodegradable mulch, also known as bio-polymers, undergo the synthetic process of polymerization. Even polymers from natural sources such as corn are therefore considered synthetic after this process takes place. The 2011 OMRI Generic Materials List officially recognizes bio- polymers as synthetic. To date, no bio-plastics manufacturers have petitioned the National Organic Program (NOP) for classification as an allowed synthetic input in organic agriculture.

Eric Sideman, MOFGA's Crop specialist has the following concerns. "We don't know what intermediate compounds might be in there. Are they absorbed by the plant? Are they any danger in any other way to the environment or toxic to people eating the food? While I doubt that it's a problem, I think it should be looked at. I think that OFPA (Organic Foods Production Act) was written well, and synthetic materials should be petitioned and looked at by a technical advisory panel." ***In short, for biodegradable mulch to be allowed, a petition must be submitted and if it is favorably reviewed, then the Rule changed.***

NOP Guidance

on Processed Animal Manures in Organic Crop Production

On July 22, 2011, the National Organic Program (NOP) published a new guidance document regarding the use of heat processed animal manures in certified organic crop production. The new policy (which can be read below) states that materials that satisfy specific processing conditions are now exempt from NOP regulations that require un-composted animal manures be applied at least 90 days prior to harvest for crops whose edible portions do not come in contact with the soil, and at least 120 days prior to harvest of crops whose edible portions do come in contact with the soil.

The new policy reads as follows:

Processed manure may be used as a supplement to a soil building program without a specific interval between application and harvest. As always, producers are expected to comply with all applicable requirements of the NOP regulations with respect to soil quality, including ensuring the soil is enhanced and maintained through proper stewardship.

Processed manure products must be treated so that all portions of the product, without causing combustion, reach a minimum temperature of either 150° F (66° C) for at least one hour or 165° F (74° C), and are dried to a maximum moisture level of 12%; or an equivalent heating and drying process could be used. In determining the acceptability of an equivalent process, *processed manure products should not contain more than 1,000 MPN (Most Probable Number) fecal coliform per gram of processed manure sampled and not contain more than 3 MPN Salmonella per 4 gram sample of*

Temporary confinement for breeding purposes

Heifers may be kept off pasture temporarily during the grazing season for breeding either by artificial insemination or by a bull. Heifers must still meet the "pasture rule" for the remainder of the season, however. This means they must graze for 120 days and obtain 30% or more of their dry matter from grazing. Confined heifers still must have access to the outdoors. Fence training is not one of the allowed reasons that heifers can be confined from grazing pasture.

Reasons the NOP rule allows keeping cattle off pasture temporarily NOP205.239(b)&(c):

- Inclement weather
- Stage of life (lactation is not a stage of life)
- Protect health, safety, wellbeing of the animals
- Risk to soil or water quality
- Administering health care procedures
- Sorting or shipping
- Breeding purposes (until bred)
- 4-H or other youth projects
- Dry off (from lactation)
- Birthing
- Newborn dairy cattle
- Shearing for fiber animals
- Milking for dairy animals

2011- An Average Year

(Continued from page 6)

Serenade (Bacillus subtilis) has been shown to be effective in at least one study.

Botrytis leaf blight

GRAY MOLD- There are a bunch of species of Botrytis but the one that causes gray mold has taken off in the humid weather and crowded garden conditions. The most common places you see this include soft ripe fruit after picking (ex. raspberries), tomatoes in humid greenhouses, tomatoes crowded in gardens, lettuce planted too close, and many flowers. Sanitation helps because leaving the fuzzy, gray mass of spores around is asking for problems. But, by far, the most important practice is to keep the air moving and drying the flowers, leaves and fruit. Of course, if the air is 100% humid it will help little.

Botrytis on tomato leaf

Pink Rot

Potato harvest in 2011 was very disappointing for many. Soils have been water logged since August and many have become totally anaerobic, a great environment for some pretty horrible diseases of potatoes. About half our potatoes rotted in the ground from pink rot, a disease caused by a species of Phytophtora (not the species that causes late blight). After being infected by this fungus, Erwinia, a bacteria flourish and turn the potatoes to liquid.

To see more pictures of this and other diseases that do well in the wet, come to the **Maine Agricultural Trades Show** on January 10th - (http://mofga.org/Events/MOFGADayatthe-MaineAgriculturalTradesShow/tabid/372/Default.aspx).

3:00 pm Season Recap (Androscoggin/Aroostook)*

Pests and Diseases had a field day in 2011. Many crops did very well this year, but some were total losses. Now that the farm work is a bit more quiet, take some time to come and see if you can identify your problems and learn about ways to manage them. Eric Sideman, MOFGA's Crop Specialist will show some pretty pictures of some ugly stuff and make some recommendations.

* These sessions qualify for one pesticide recertification credit. Questions? Contact Gary Fish, Maine Board of Pesticides Control by calling 207-287-7545.

PEST Reports...*are you getting yours?*

MOFGA Organic Crop Specialist Eric Sideman, Ph D., compiles a report every week or two during the heart of the season highlighting problems happening now or likely to show up soon. Eric hears about problems from growers all around the region so please help out and let him know if a big or unusual pest problem is happening in your area.
To contact Eric and to sign up to receive the report via email send a request to: esideman@mofga.org or call the office at 568-4142. You can also access current year reports from www.mofgacertification.org, as well as reports for the past 5 years, archived at: http://www.mofga.org/Publications/PestReports/tabid/732/Default.aspx.

OMRI Materials REVIEW

Evaluating Livestock Inputs

As the Organic Industry Grows, Public Material Listings Lag Behind

By Matt Sircely

When Lisa McCrory started as Dairy Technical Assistance Coordinator for NOFA Vermont, there were only a few certified organic dairy farms in the state. "It was definitely exciting," she says. "It felt like a family was growing. Everybody knew each other. It was very cozy and warm and personal." The producers had followed organic practices for years — none were transitioning conventional herds.

But new issues arose as more producers chose organic. Herds dependent on conventional methods like antibiotics experienced heavy cull rates, while producers scrambled for solutions that could meet organic standards. McCrory began compiling lists of allowed materials and products, sometimes categorized by health situation, to support transitioning farmers. Without a public comprehensive organic livestock materials list, certifiers nationwide began to fill the void.

In a sense, little has changed says Jim Riddle, Organic Outreach Coordinator at the University of Minnesota Southwest Research and Outreach Center. "Compared to crop inputs, the whole organic livestock sector is still in a much earlier stage of development," he says. The fact that certifiers still review most livestock materials means that products "end up on the certifier's list, but the manufacturer isn't driven to get a generic approval from OMRI or WSDA."

Today, the most extensive lists of organic livestock materials are still compiled by certifiers for internal use. Certifiers say that there are many reasons why OMRI listing is less prevalent for livestock products. Some input manufacturers are big enough that the organic sector is beneath their radar, while other manufacturers are so small, that the cost of a generic listing seems prohibitive. Many manufacturers still do not understand the basics of organic certification. Unfortunately, this means that certifiers must review the same product repeatedly and for each different application, each time requesting the most current information from the manufacturer. This can translate to higher costs for organic producers, because certifiers incorporate this unpaid material review work into their certification fees.

As Executive Director of the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Association (NODPA), Ed Maltby spends much of his time advocating on a policy level. "What has increasingly become apparent is that different certifiers will allow different products for different applications, and that has caused some certifier shopping. There also seems to be a lack of consistency of what kinds of records are needed, and how to review those records." In his efforts to advance producers' interests, Maltby advocates for a higher degree of qualification for certifying agents performing materials review, along with a greater understanding of the practical challenges producers face.

"Any movement towards more consistent review criteria between certifiers and with OMRI is a step in the right direction," says Johanna Mirenda, Materials Specialist and Inspections Coordinator at Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO). "It's better for us, it's better for the operators, less confusion, less certifier shopping. I think the guidance that's coming from the NOP, slow and steady, has been really helpful."

PCO maintains an internal list of more than 7,000 materials — approximately half are livestock oriented. Mirenda reviews products such as mineral and vitamin premixes, including the carrier, forage and silage inoculants, medical treatments, teat dips, fly sprays and drinking water additives to control bacteria or pH.

"First, we check with OMRI, because if that product is OMRI Listed, then that certainly saves us a lot of work," says Mirenda. She then determines review criteria based on the material's intended use, but then must usually contact the manufacturer. Most are proactive, but she sometimes has to explain the basics of organic certification. "It can really slow down a review if we're not getting responses from the manufacturer," she says.

Jackie Von Ruden, Farm Certification Manager at the Midwest Organic Services Association says materials review is "definitely not always enjoyable. We have a MOSA status of 'MU', she says. "Manufacturer uncooperative." Nevertheless, the MOSA staff have established strong working relationships with most manufacturers in the process of building their comprehensive list for internal use. These relationships grant MOSA quick access to current information, so that they can verify materials for each specific use. Some manufacturers furnish outreach materials that facilitate quicker reviews.

Von Ruden cites broad agreement among certifiers about what should be allowed, but since the process differs, so too do approval results. Some manufactures even use one certifier's ruling as blanket approval, says Von Ruden. "They don't understand why they have to release their proprietary information fifty times. I think the draw for manufacturers to OMRI would be the release of information one time and one time only."

Katherine Withey, Organic Livestock Certification Coordinator and Organic Material Registration Coordinator at the Washington State Department of Agriculture notes few livestock products are

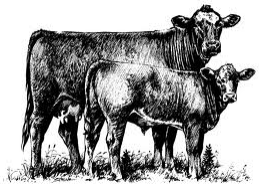
Evaluating Livestock Inputs *(continued from Pg 10)*

publicly WSDA registered even though WSDA has reviewed hundreds of products for individual operators. "The lack of OMRI

listed or WSDA registered livestock products means that we have a much more complicated job in other segments of certification. We're doing deeper reviews on a more consistent basis," she says.

The landscape of organic livestock inputs is broad. The National Organic Standards Board continues to discuss several materials considerations, including yeast products, enzymes, genetically modified vaccines, amino acids, and the issue of excipients. With forthcoming regulatory clarifications, input manufacturers, certifiers and producers must remain attuned to minute details of which materials and ingredients are allowed, prohibited and restricted.

Brad Heins, Assistant Professor of Organic Dairy Management at the University of Minnesota West Central Research and Outreach Center operates a low-input trial herd of 90 organic cows alongside a parallel conventional herd. A comprehensive list will be an ongoing need into the future, he says, and is integral to the industry moving forward. "I've talked to some producers who are thinking of transitioning, and one of their biggest holdups is: 'What do I do when a cow gets sick? I can't use antibiotics anymore, so what am I supposed to do?"



Albert Straus of the Straus Family Creamery in Marin County, California, notes that "Ninety-nine percent of the cure is prevention." Still, he worries most about the health of his fragile calves, and when searching for medications, vaccines and other materials, he generally approaches manufacturers before asking his certifier. "If there was a more user-friendly system to be able to know if something is allowed or not, I think that would be helpful. Most producers and processors don't have time to run around and figure it out," says Straus, adding "OMRI listing is a very effective tool for producers as well as manufacturers, helping to make it a more streamlined process for everybody involved."

Maltby echoes the importance of instant access to information in crisis situations. "There is a great shortage of veterinarians who understand organics, so in times of emergency, producers need to call on the nearest veterinarian and they need to know what they can and can't use."

Many certifiers and consultants agree that a public comprehensive list would aid innovation in the organic livestock sector. The combination of urgency and uncertainty around allowed inputs can drive producers to only use products that have already been approved for their operation, creating disincentives for the use of new products and technologies. Heins echoes the sentiment. "We tend to use things that we've used in the past just because they've been approved. Then we don't have a cow that's sick and need to do some fast thinking."

At Van Beek Natural Science, Anita Soodsma, Research and Development Product Formulator, says she is pleased with how certifiers and producers react to the OMRI Listed status of her organic product line. "They don't ask for any additional information from me because it has the OMRI seal."

For Lynn DeVaney, Vice President of Environmental Care and Share, Inc., OMRI Listing is crucial for several reasons. "OMRI not only helps us be sure we are in compliance with the organic standards, it is also a really great source of promotion."

OMRI has already incorporated into its strategic plan the goal of increasing livestock product listings. "Any time we can increase the utility of the OMRI Products List, we will," says Executive Director/CEO Peggy Miars, adding: "We're aware of the organic community's need for more public listings of livestock products, and we are consistently looking at ways to meet that need."

This article is reprinted with permission from OMRI (The Organic Materials Review Institute); originally published in OMRI's Materials Review Newsletter, fall 2011 edition.

MOFGA Certification is continuously researching and reviewing to find products that have ingredients that are allowed by the organic standards. Please let us know if there is a new product that you would like to add to your farm plan so that we can review it before you use it!

Milk House Products
All dairy soaps and acid washes that are allowed for use by the PMO (Pasturized Milk Ordinance) and your state milk inspector are approved for use by MOFGA Certification, provided that the final rinse step is an approved sanitizer. Milk house products need to be labeled for dairy use.

Allowed dairy sanitizers active ingredients commonly found on the market are:
Chlorine
Iodine
Peroxyacetic/peracetic acid

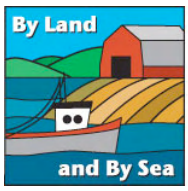
Teat Dips
Allowed teat dip ingredients are:
Iodine
Chlorhexidine—allowed when your iodine teat dip has lost its effectiveness

Events & Training **calendar**

January 2012

10 - **MOFGA annual membership meeting at the Maine Agricultural Trades Show.** 1:30 p.m., Augusta Civic Center. Hear reports from MOFGA board members, staff and committees; vote on a slate of board members. Q&A period. This is also MOFGA Day at the Trades Show – a full day of presentations and workshops on organic production in Maine. Free. Schedule at www.mofga.org

10, 11, 12 - **Maine Agricultural Trades Show.** Augusta Civic Center. Free admission. www.getrealmaine.com



19 - **By Land and By Sea: Leveraging the Co-op Model for Business Success**. Conference for Maine farmers & fishermen on the co-operative model of doing business. Sponsored by members of the Eat Local Foods Coalition of Maine, at MOFGA's Common Ground Education Center in Unity. 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Details. Snow Date: Friday, January 20, 2012 same time, same place!

25 **MOFGA Certified Growers Meeting. Ellsworth City Hall.** 8:30 am to 4 pm. Federal and State food safety legislation and rules are affecting how farmers grow, harvest, process, package and market. Join MOFGA staff and MOFGA Certification Services staff for a full day meeting covering topics such as Food Safety, Crop Insurance, Technical Assistance, Marketing and Organic Certification. MOFGA wants your feedback on how to improve the services it offers organic producers throughout the state. Please RSVP by emailing rsvp@mofga.org or by calling 568-4142.

27 - **Deadline for Maine farmers and food businesses to apply for low-interest micro-loan** (up to $5,000) for equipment or working capital from the No Small Potatoes Investment Club, which seeks to strengthen Maine's sustainable food system. FMI: Chris Hallweaver, 329-5048, chrishallweaver@gmail.com.

27-28 - **Maine Farmers' Market Convention,** Harraseeket Inn, Freeport. www.whcacap.org/farm-to-market/farmers-market-convention/

February 2012

15 - **MOFGA Certified Growers Meeting. Unity**. See January 25 listing above.

24-26: locations statewide, **Meet Your Farmers and Fishermen:** a celebration of Community Supported Agriculture and Fisheries (CSA and CSF)

27: **Start Your Farm Business the Right Way-by planning to make a profit! Unity.** Workshop led by Richard Wiswall, owner/operator of Cate Farm in VT, and author of The Organic Farmer's Business Handbook.

29 - **MOFGA Certified Growers Meeting. Royal River Natural Foods, Freeport**. See January 25 listing above.

March 2012

10 - **MOFGA's Spring Growth Conference. Unity.** "Tomatoes from seeds to fruit harvest" will be the topic. Stay tuned to www.mofga.org for more info.

14 (Tentative) **MOFGA Certified Growers meeting, Farmington**. Livestock emphasis. See January 25 listing above and check website for confirmed date and details.

28 - **MOFGA Certified Growers Meeting. Presque Isle.** See January 25 listing above.

Additional ways to register for the Grower's Meetings:

Web Site:
http://www.formstack.com/forms/MOFGA-rsvp

For Mobile Devices:
http://www.formstack.com/m/?1147153-IcILWd-7CEx

QC Code: