



Record Keeping for Crop Farms

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Record keeping. Not everyone's favorite subject, but one that's necessary to insure the integrity of a farm's organic system. This may be a requirement for certification, but ideally those same records should allow you to evaluate your farm operation and to meet your farming goals. But, what records are necessary for certification and how much detail do you need? For this issue I'll try to lay out what has been useful on our farm for both of these needs. Livestock record keeping requires another set of records, which will have to be addressed in future publications.

My record keeping has taken a number of forms over the years, all are of interest on our farm inspections, but some will be required by your certifier. The full list of records we keep include: a seed purchase log, a garden planning log, a sowing record, field maps, a fertilizer and supply log, a field activity log and harvest and sales records. Additionally, all of our farm purchases are recorded in a "One Write" checkbook system that allows us to keep track of the major purchase categories for use in creating next year's budget. That may seem excessive to some folks, so I want to focus on a few of these as the basic records.

Sowing Record

For me this is our index. The sowing record contains the basic information I need to find a particular planting in the field and trace it back to the seed company or source that it came from. The original sowing date is the key, and follows the crop to its place on my field map so that I can locate it in the sowing record. Recorded in this log, besides the date, are the seed type, variety, whether the seed is certified organic, the seed company, the amount sown, any grafting or repotting, transplant date and quantities planted, location and additional comments. This sounds like a lot, but all those columns fit across the length of a page, and can be filled in pretty quickly. This is my favorite log, since it looks so hopeful with all of these seeds started and I find it invaluable for helping me to plan and order seed for next season.

Maps

I like a map or maps that I can carry around on a clipboard while I make field observations or to refer to while I'm working on the tractor (yes, we have tilled them in accidentally once or twice). Each field or garden area will have its own map, the beds are numbered and show the crop planted, the original sowing date, the transplant date (if appropriate) and the number of bed feet planted. You're certifier will not need maps of this detail, but these maps are your link between what you sow and what you harvest.

Field Activity Log

I think this is a major point of confusion for many growers. How much detail is necessary here? You may find a record of daily activities like weeding, transplanting, watering, ect. to be helpful, but keeping up that much detail once the season is in full gear and there are multiple people involved in these tasks can be a challenge. What I try to capture in our activity logs are major tillage events and inputs added to the field. Each separate

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garden area (or map) has its own field record. Major tillage events would be plowing and discing or rotovating, fertilizer applications, mulching and green manure plantings. On this record I don't record the transplanting, or weeding or watering work, just the major field activities. On the back end of the season we record when field areas are tilled and fall cover crops are planted.

Harvest Records

This is another area where the level of detail can become overwhelming. I divide harvest records into two categories, first are the crops like swiss chard or kale, which are planted early in the spring and harvested throughout the season. For these I rely on my sales records, since that will give me a yearly harvest total and I have traceback to the field area planted, since they are only planted once.



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For crops with multiple plantings or ingredients (like salad mix) I create a page for each crop in a notebook and the person responsible for that crop records the quantity harvested and the field location each time that crop is picked. This gives me both a record of the gross yield of each crop and where it was grown for traceback purposes.

Finally, since all of our sales in recent years have been to wholesale accounts our sales records are done on Quickbooks. This gives us a total net harvest after sorting and grading and helps us with future crop evaluation and planning for the next season. Additionally, the sales date becomes our audit number for customers since I can use the dates on our harvest log to determine what crops were packed from which fields on any given invoice. For direct market farms a list of how many shares are distributed and what was in a share should be adequate for a CSA farm's sales records. Farmer's market sales records only need to show the cash receipt for each day at market to satisfy certification requirements, but you may want to have more detail for your own needs.

The bottom line for record keeping (and most any other farm task) is to make the job as easy as possible to do while still getting the job done. Try to set up a system that you can use on a regular basis without having the task become too tedious or the detail more than you need for your operation.

For more information or help in setting up a record keeping system contact Dave Colson at MOFGA, (dcolson@mofga.org) and have a great season.