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Transitioning to Organic Highlighted at Iowa Summer Field Days

The Iowa State University (ISU) Organic Ag Program (OAP) and Midwest TOPP project were main topics during on-farm and research station field days this summer



AMES, Iowa – Organic growers and those with an interest in transitioning to organic discovered research-based practices and practical farming solutions, along with information on the new Transitioning to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP), during four Field Days in Iowa this summer. These field days included a Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) Field Day, demonstrating organic no-till soybeans at A & W Farms, Cambridge, IA; an on-farm tour of organic corn varieties and weed management equipment at the Shriver Farm in Jefferson, Iowa; organic no-till black beans at the Rodale Midwest Organic Center in Marion, Iowa; and the long-term comparison of organic and conventional crop rotations at the ISU Neely-Kinyon Farm in Greenfield, Iowa.

Kathleen Delate, professor and organic specialist with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, and ISU program specialist, Josiah Pollock, met with many of the 256 total attendees at these events, explaining Midwest TOPP project activities and encouraging sign-up as Mentors or Mentees in the mentorship program. “We’re very encouraged to see the interest in organic

farming at these events,” Delate said. “Farmers are more interested because we are showing the agronomic, economic and environmental benefits from the organic practices, especially in light of climate change challenges.”

Included in Field Day research discussions were the latest corn hybrids from organic and non-GMO seed producers, Albert Lea/Blue River and Prairie Hybrids, on the Shriver Farm. Shriver and his family farm 1,800 acres organically, using modern organic farming practices and weed control. The family has been farming since 1867 and transitioned to organic in 1998. Shriver hopes to be paired with an aspiring organic farmer in the Midwest TOPP mentorship program.

Partners that served as speakers at the Field Days included plant breeders from the Iowa State University Agronomy Department and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), a soil scientist from the USDA – Agricultural Research Service, National Lab for Ag and the Environment, and organic farmers, Noah Wendt, Caleb Akin and Scott Shriver. Discussions included best practices for organic corn, soybean, wheat and rye production, including fertilizing and weed management. Attendees also learned about the benefits of using longer crop rotations, and judicious manure applications and cover crops, which has resulted in greater soil quality in organic fields at the ISU Neely-Kinyon Farm.



Support for the OAP participation at these field days was through a grant from the Midwest Organic Services Association (MOSA), the Midwest coordinator for the USDA-National Organic Program TOPP project.

Photos:

Kathleen Delate and Josiah Pollock, Iowa State University Organic Ag Program, explain the TOPP mentorship program and encourage field day participants to sign up as mentors or mentees.