At the July OAC meeting, UW Graduate student Martha Rideout presented a summation to the council which illustrated the results of a recent survey of veterinarians which assessed their needs for training in organic animal health practices. The survey was administered in conjunction with a series of organic animal health workshops organized by DATCP Organic Agriculture Specialist Laura Paine. For the survey, equal numbers of veterinarians who attended and who did not attend the workshops were polled and the responses were compared. Rideout, who is a practicing veterinarian herself, compiled the survey results into a set of recommendations to the UW School of Veterinary Medicine, which is currently revising its curriculum. Highlights of the report include the following:

- Approximately 70% of both attendees and non-attendees reported having at least one organic dairy farmer as a client in their veterinary practice.
- A majority of the veterinarians in both categories felt that it was important that veterinary students have exposure to organic practices and rules as part of their training.
- Martha’s recommendation is for the Veterinary School to take an integrative approach so that basic organic knowledge is standard in animal science curriculum. Organic practices would be integrated into existing courses as part of a continuum of options for farmers and their veterinarians to select from rather than presenting the material as a separate elective course.

The Organic Advisory Council wrote a letter to the Veterinary School supporting Martha’s findings and recommendations. The survey’s summary was also shared with the Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association. It is available at http://www.organic.wisc.edu/.

### OAC Consumer Education Committee Receives $9900 Grant

The Consumer Education sub-committee of the OAC recently received a $9900 Specialty Crops Block Grant to develop a consumer’s guide to organic food. Consumer education was one of the top priorities identified by the original Organic Task Force in 2005 and its focus remains a priority of the council.

Once drafted, the guide will help fulfill the Consumer Education committee’s mandate to increase consumer awareness of organic certification. The Certified Organic label differs from other ‘ecolabels’, and the guide will illustrate the stringent standards which define “Certified Organic.” The guide will provide consumers with science-based information on the nutritional quality of organic food and the environmental performance of organic production systems.

Committee members Margaret Bert-Mittlestadt (chair), Bonnie Widerman, Mike Schulist, Bob Wills, and Tricia Bross will work with Laura Paine on the project. Other partners include Rose Skora, Extension Agriculture Educator, Kiera Mulvey, Madison Area Community Supported Agriculture Coalition, and Jody Padgham, Sarah Stone, and Harriet Behar, Midwest Organic and Sustainable Services Association. The publication is expected to be completed in early 2011.
Organic Cost Share Update

The second year of the popular Organic Certification cost-share program has been completed. The program provides a 75% reimbursement of certification expenses up to a total of $750 for organic farms, processors and handlers. The USDA National Organic Program funds the program with an appropriation provided in the 2008 Farm Bill, and it is administered by state departments of agriculture. Wisconsin received $900,000 for the first two years of the program, with 10% going to pay for administration and $810,000 provided as reimbursement.

In 2009, 498 farms and 57 businesses received reimbursements for their certification costs. The average cost-share for farmers was $601; for business it was $709. Certification costs have more than doubled since the program was first offered in the 2002 farm bill.

We encourage readers to share information about the program with other interested parties. Next year’s application period will begin in July and run through October, 2010.

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"We commend USDA Secretary Vilsack and the NRCS for recognizing the potential of organic farming as an economically viable, environmentally sound farming system."

Secretary Nilsestuen on the new NRCS EQIP funding for organic transition

DATCP Unveils New Organic Farm Registry

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture has developed an on-line registry for organic farms and conventional and organic vineyards that wish to enable pesticide applicators to locate them when spraying in their areas.

The voluntary registry will be a public listing on the DATCP website and is searchable by name, zip-code, county or other identifiers (www.datcp.state.wi.us). The registry does not require farmers to sign up nor does it require pesticide applicators to check it prior to spraying in an area. However, this is a service that many applicators have asked for. It will enable them to have increased knowledge of organic farm boundaries. It is hoped that the registry will be well used.

We encourage organic farmers and both organic and conventional vineyard owners to sign up.

Secretary Rod visits with the Organic Advisory Council

DATCP Secretary Rod Nilsestuen addressed the Organic Advisory Council at their October 26th meeting. He praised the efforts of the OAC and their networks for supporting growth of the organic sector in Wisconsin. He discussed how organic efforts fit into the broader context of the Department’s goal of supporting a diverse agricultural economy that values small scale farming and local foods. Several new initiatives that he is focusing on include a specialty meats project similar to the Department’s Dairy Business Innovation Center, involvement in bioenergy development and renewable energy technologies for both large and small farms, and the Working Lands Initiative for which enabling legislation was recently passed.
NRCS Supports Organic Farming with Special EQIP Initiative

In May 2009, NRCS announced a special sign-up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The 2009 Organic Initiative was a nationwide special initiative to provide financial assistance to National Organic Program (NOP) certified organic producers as well as producers in the process of transitioning to organic production. A total of $50 million was available nationwide. Wisconsin’s allocation was $1.2 million.

Under the Organic Initiative, several practices were eligible to be cost-shared, including Conservation Crop Rotation; Cover Crop; Nutrient Management; Pest Management; Prescribed Grazing; and Forage Harvest Management for new and existing organic farms.

Applications were accepted for this program between May 11 and June 12. Wisconsin ranked first in the nation with 363 applications. Eighty-five applications for transition planning and 112 for new practices on already certified farms were funded. 117 applications were unfunded due to a lack of funds. Organic producers are also eligible for assistance under the general EQIP program.

EQIP high tunnel pilot project
Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan recently announced a new pilot project under the ‘Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food’ initiative for farmers to establish high tunnels - also known as hoop houses - to increase the availability of locally grown produce in a conservation-friendly way.

Wisconsin is one of 38 states participating in the 3-year study to verify if high tunnels are effective in reducing pesticide use, keeping vital nutrients in the soil, extending the growing season, increasing yields, and providing other benefits to growers.

USDA NRCS will provide financial assistance for the project through the EQIP, the EQIP Organic Initiative, and the Agricultural Management Assistance program. NRCS will fund one high tunnel per farm. High tunnels in the study can cover as much as 5% of 1 acre. To sign up or learn more about EQIP assistance for high tunnel projects, contact a local NRCS office.

2010 EQIP Sign-up is NOW Applications are now being accepted by Wisconsin NRCS from Jan. 19 - Feb. 19, 2010.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program. It supports production agriculture and environmental quality as compatible goals. Through EQIP, farmers may receive financial and technical help with structural and management conservation practices on agricultural land.

Visit your local USDA Service Center for more information. All applications received by Feb. 19 will be ranked for 2010 funding.

OAC Members Serve on Agency and University Committees

OAC Secretary Christine Mason is serving on an ATCP 29 advisory committee to help review parts of Wisconsin’s pesticide law. The Department routinely assembles a private sector committee of stakeholders to provide input when major department rules need to be reviewed and revised. This is the first time that a representative of organic agriculture has served on the committee.

The Department is in the process of identifying and appointing a second committee to review the Wisconsin Seed Law (ATCP 20). The Council suggested several names of individuals in the organic seed industry to serve.

Council member Jim Munsch and coordinators Laura Paine and Erin Silva are serving on the Wisconsin Institute for Sustainable Agriculture steering committee. This committee was established to develop recommendations to the UW College of Agricultural and Life Sciences on addressing sustainability through research and educational programs.

The diverse committee representing a cross section of Wisconsin agriculture expects to complete its recommendations within about a year, according to Chairman Jed Colqhoun.
OAC Committee Activities

Government Relations and Legal Affairs Committee
This committee is tasked with coordinating Council recommendations to DATCP and other agencies on rules and policies affecting organic agriculture, as well as developing recommendations to the National Organic Program and other USDA Agencies. It is also responsible for maintaining communications with the Secretary of Agriculture and the DATCP Board.

Biennial Report Committee
This committee develops and publishes a report on the status of organic agriculture in Wisconsin, meeting the objectives set out by the Organic Task Force Report to develop and track measurable goals for growth of the Organic Sector in Wisconsin. The committee is currently preparing the 2009 report which will be published at the end of the year.

Consumer Education Committee
This committee is charged with developing educational materials for consumers. It also addresses protecting the integrity of the organic seal by educating on products being sold as organic that are not certified organic, or inappropriate procedures are being followed that may decertify the product.

Farmer Education Committee
This committee works to enhance the capacity of Universities to provide training in organic agriculture and processing, enhance communication and networking capacity among organic farmers and with transitioning farmers. It provides education for transitioning and established organic farmers.

National Organic Issues committee
This committee addresses NOP topics & other national issues that impact organic farms, such as the farm bill. This group is responsible for communicating with other state Organic Advisory Councils.

Supply Chain Infrastructure Committee
This committee addresses marketing, market development, and processing capacity development. They are working on developing a organic farmer and business directory, among other projects.

Upcoming events and activities:

- The Next OAC meeting is February 3, 2010. More info: http://www.organic.wisc.edu/
- Wisconsin School For Beginning Market Growers January 15, 16, 17, 2010 Madison, WI Contact CIAS: 608-265-3704 or jhendric@wisc.edu

More local, regional, & national sustainable agriculture events:

- http://www.mosesorganic.org/events.html
- http://attra.ncat.org/calendar/