ATHENS AREA ORGANIC FARMER RECEIVES STEWARDSHIP AWARD

Rich Tomsu of Rich Gardens Organic Farm, a certified organic farm in Athens County, was the winner of the 2009 OEFFA Stewardship Award. This award was given in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the sustainable agriculture community and was presented at the 30th anniversary OEFFA conference.

During his characteristically passionate acceptance speech, Rich recognized Mick Luber, a previous OEFFA Stewardship Award winner for introducing Rich and other Athens area growers to the organic movement. Rich harkened back to 1975 when he and his wife Ann Fugate made the “life-changing decision” to buy a farm near Shade, Ohio in southern Athens County. Ann related that the move to the farm was a political decision that came from their desire to feed themselves and others, in reaction to their distrust of the political system at the time.

While accepting his award, Rich framed his work in organic farming as being a part of a “revolution” that is increasingly becoming a mainstream movement. Rich and Ann trace their farming methods back to the Victory Gardens of World War II. “We never knew any other way to farm but organic,” said Ann. Rich mused that he wished he was 20 years younger so he could take full advantage of the new opportunities that are becoming available to organic farmers.

Athens OEFFA chapter president Ed Perkins remarked on Rich’s dedication to the organic movement: “Rich has always put his time into building OEFFA, and organic agriculture. He shares his knowledge every chance he gets.” Sarah Conley, Athens Farmers Market Manager, worked at Rich’s farm from 2002-2003 and recalls it as a turning point in her life. “Working for Rich gave me a deep appreciation of organic agriculture. Rich is an asset to the community,” said Conley. Rich has been a vendor at the Athens Farmers market since the early 80’s and, along with his wife, who is the Athens Farmers Market Association President, has been instrumental in its growth and recognition as one of the top 10 farmers markets in the county.

Harv Roehling, (left) 2006 Stewardship Award winner presents Rich Tomsu (right) with the 2009 award.
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by Carol Goland, OEFFA Executive Director

Recently, OEFFA Board member Mike Laughlin and I traveled to Washington D.C. to participate in the inaugural meeting of the newly formed National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC). This Coalition is the result of the merger of two venerable organizations, the National Sustainable Agriculture Campaign and the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. OEFFA has been a long-standing member of both organizations and has now become a charter member of the new group. We were joined by 60 other partners including farms, rural development organizations, and conservation groups that will continue working together to affect federal agriculture policy.

We spent two days listening to updates on the status of the Farm Bill programs that the Coalition worked so hard to promote. In addition, we engaged in a deliberative and democratic process to establish priorities for upcoming work. The new Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, stopped by to address our group. He shared with us his vision for the USDA and, perhaps more importantly, witnessed the size of our Coalition and heard the fervor of our commitment to small and medium sized family farms!

Mike and I spent the final day of our trip visiting the offices of key legislators from Ohio who serve on the House Agriculture Committee. We met with the legislative aides for Congressmen Bob Latta (from Ohio's 5th District) and John Boccieri (OH-16th) and we were especially pleased to visit with Congresswoman Jean Schmidt (OH-2nd). It was a great opportunity to introduce Congresswoman Schmidt to OEFFA and we asked for her support of organic and sustainable agriculture on behalf of all of our members.

In the House, we also visited the office of Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (OH-9th). Congresswoman Kaptur sits on the Agriculture Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, and we were keen to share with her staff our enthusiasm for some of the programs that are so valuable to OEFFA members while making specific requests for appropriations in the 2010 budget.

That included funding for Organic Production and Marketing Data Collection along with the alphabet soup of SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension), ATTRA (Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA), VAPG (Value Added Producer Grants Program),...
RMAP (Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program), and CSP (Conservation Security Program).

We highlighted the importance of organics as a way to bring prosperity to farmers and rural communities, and stressed that our sustainable agriculture movement involves not just farmers but also consumers, retailers, and chefs and who have been making great strides by working together.

While crisscrossing the Capitol all day, we also stopped in at Senator Sherrod Brown’s office and had a chance to visit with the Senator’s Legislative Assistant Joe Shultz, who is from a family farm in Logan County and came up through the ranks of the FFA in Ohio. Senator Brown is on the Senate Agriculture Committee and we had a far-ranging and comprehensive conversation with Joe regarding the agricultural funding programs that we believe are worthy of the Senator’s support.

Joe shared with us some of the work that the Senator has done recently, and clarified the intent of the bill introduced by Senator Brown, The Food Safety and Tracking Improvement Act (S. 425). Improving our food traceability system is a high priority for Senator Brown but he is not interested in creating onerous requirements for any farmers, despite the misinformation circulating about his bill. The bill (S. 425) would simply instruct the FDA to establish a mechanism for national trace-back in the case of a food recall. It keeps current exemptions for farms and restaurants in place. And, according to Joe, Senator Brown would be willing, if necessary, to make those exemption extensions more explicit as work on his bill progresses.

As the first Ohioan on the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry in 40 years, Senator Brown helped write the 2008 Farm Bill, which in many ways is a watershed bill for organic agriculture. During the crafting of the bill, Senator Brown supported proposals to expand the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and to provide a cost-share for organic certification. The Senator also introduced legislation to create the Healthy Urban Food Enterprise Development Center, which is intended to be a clearinghouse of information and small grants that are designed to encourage the creation of an infrastructure that will serve the development of local food systems, especially those that provide access for underserved populations.

At every stop we made in our nation’s capital, we encouraged each lawmaker to review every piece of legislation through the lens of small and mid-sized family farms. It was part of our mission to help Ohio legislators understand that regulations which might seem reasonable for industrial-scale farms could overburden, or threaten the very existence of, most of the farms in our state.

OEFFA members, it’s vitally important that your elected representatives hear from you! The following website www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml will help you find out who your representatives are and how to contact them. We also use the Action Alert page on the OEFFA website to let people know when there are matters of importance that need your response. Together we can create a beautiful and strong chorus of grassroots voices.
Growing Tomatoes

Fresh summer tomatoes are the symbol of gardening in Ohio. If most folks grow any vegetable plant at all, it is a tomato plant. Tomatoes make a comforting soup, a great garnish, a vitalizing juice, and are good as a snack or marinated as a side dish. They are vital to catsup, and good in all kinds of salads. There are many different varieties, and they come in all shapes, sizes, colors, and flavors. Growing good tomatoes in your own yard isn’t hard, but knowing a few tricks of the trade helps.

Choosing Tomatoes:

It is good to consider whether you would like to grow determinant or indeterminate tomatoes. Determinant varieties bear fruit earlier, and tend to fruit all at once. They don’t need as much support as the indeterminates because they don’t grow as big. They are good for patio plants and smaller gardens. Some variety examples are Celebrity, Golden Nugget, Oregon Spring, Siberia, Small Fry. Indeterminate varieties grow and grow and grow and as a result, grow much taller and have much larger fruits. They are wilder looking and fruit continuously until the frost. The heirloom varieties, as a rule, tend to be indeterminates, and they include familiar names such as Beefsteak, Brandywine, Fantastic, Garden Peach, Jubilee, Lemon Boy, Mr Stripey, Stupice, Sun Gold, Sweet Million, Sweetie, Top Sirloin, and Yellow Pear.

Getting Started:

The two most important things to think about when growing tomatoes are soil and water. Keeping plants happy and healthy is the very best way to avoid having to deal with sick plants.

If you feed and grow your soil, you won’t have to worry about your tomatoes. Starting with well-composted soil is always a good idea. Then, every four years or so I add greensand and rock phosphate. During the growing season I use Revita (an NOP approved poultry manure composite product) to help keep the soil fertile. Alternatively, I also recommend liquid fish fertilizer and liquid seaweed fertilizer as inexpensive fertilizing options. (Be aware that liquid kelp isn’t OMRI approved due to a preservative in the liquid.)

Regular even watering from a source other than a sprinkler, such as drip tape or a soaker hose, is also extremely important. Consistent moisture (instead of wet and dry, dry and wet), keeps plant stress down and discourages disease and insects, as well as cracking and splitting. Plant health is also encouraged when water is not allowed to splash up on the plant stems.

Cover Crops and Rotation:

There are several ways to keep the weeds down and keep water and soil from splashing up. Mulching with straw does the job, but you can also use a living mulch that will build the soil as well.

Covering Tomatoes:

One suggestion is to plant oats or rye between tomato rows as a cover crop. Another suggestion is to plant buckwheat between the rows, and then snap off the buckwheat just before it flowers (so you don’t have it where you don’t want it next year). The buckwheat heads can be tossed between the tomato plants to mulch the soil there too. If you have the space, annual hairy vetch or chickling vetch can be planted where you plan to have tomatoes the following year. Then seedlings can be planted directly into the dead vetch, which will act as a mulch. Rotating your crops (and their cover crop) from year to year will help deter insects. Elliot Colman’s New Market Gardener is an excellent resource full of ideas for small growers about these and other issues. One thing he suggests is planting tomatoes after a legume such as snap beans or chickling vetch.

Planting:

The temperature of the soil is the key to starting tomato seeds, and keeping young plants growing. The soil needs to be between 55 and 65 °F (65 °F is better). The plants will be in the seed pots for 6-8 weeks, so you can plan your planting time backwards from there, depending on if you plan to provide some protection from the cold once they are in the ground or wait for the final frost. As a guideline, seeds can be started with heat mats or the equivalent in April or May, and can be put out between Mothers Day and June 1st. Generally, planting them young (6-8 weeks) keeps them from getting preprogrammed to the size of the pot they are started in.

Greenhouses can be used to start seeds, but are not always the best option for beginning growers because they can be expensive to heat. Other options include sunny indoor windowsills, and heat mats that directly heat the soil. Once the plants are in the ground, Reema (a fabric cover), or Agribon, or even just plastic, can be used to create row covers that will help keep the soil warm. Row cover frames can easily be made from rebar and PVC tubing (slipping the PVC tubing over the rebar, which is sunk into the ground). You can also make your own heat mat by running heat wires through play sand and putting the trays on top of that.

Plant the seedlings in the ground 2 feet apart if you are using cages and in rows that leave enough room between them for you and the fully grown plants (4’). Staked tomato plants can be set closer together, but keep in mind that they may require a bit of extra fertilization. Overplanting is the best way to ensure that you are going to have the nice crop of undamaged tomatoes that you will want. Planting in succession will help spread the bounty throughout the harvest months. Or plant several varieties that have different maturity dates. One of the unique things about tomatoes is that every part of the plant will grow. Because of this, lower leaves can be stripped off the young plants and the plants set deep in the soil when they are planted, providing the plant with a stronger root system. Just keep the top two or three sets of leaves. The stem of a young plant can also be laid down in a trench and covered with soil, creating a good root system as the plant develops roots all along the buried stem.

Supports:

Keeping the heavy fruits off the ground so they look and grow their best can be done any number of ways, from using commercial tomato cages to using discarded cattle fencing. There are three basic options: caging, staking, and weaving. If you choose to cage the plants it is worth the investment to buy good cages. Put them in place while the plants are small and keep tucking in the branches as the plants grow so they go up and your
rows don't get congested. (The best time to redirect plants is in the afternoon when it is drier and hotter and there is less chance of snapping the branches.) Cages come in a number of sizes, but 60” cages should give you the height you will need.

Staking can be done on almost anything. The plant is tied to the stake to keep it upright as it grows. Green rope, biodegradable twine, torn up cloth t-shirts, and old pantyhose all serve well. Be sure to anchor the plant just under the blossom where it will need the most support once it is fruiting. 8’ 2x2s or 1x2s with a point cut on one end make great stakes. To encourage large tomato clusters, trim the lower branches of the plant and encourage the top blossoms. Because of pinching the suckers, you drive the energy of the plant into creating fewer but much larger tomatoes. Try mixing caged and staked tomatoes for both quantity and size.

The French Weave seems to work well for some people, and not for others. The advantage is that the plants’ branches don’t have to be regularly tied or tucked, reducing the amount of maintenance throughout the season. To create a French Weave, a stake is put into the ground every 3-4 plants and twine is woven between the stakes and around the plants as supports. More twine is then added as the plants grow.

Regular Patrol:
In addition to monitoring the growth of your awesome tasty tomatoes, you will want to look for several things. Suckers should be pinched off staked plants when they are small. This is the growth that sometimes comes in the "V" between a stem and a branch. (They do little more than take energy and nutrients from the plant.) If you are using cages, tuck in those stray branches. If you are staking or weaving, tie up branches that need support, and keep up with them so you are not snapping branches off once they are big. Look for pests that need to be removed, such as the common tomato hornworm. Skeletal stems are the tell tale sign to look for. If you see these skeletal stems, squatt ing down and looking up into the plant can help you find them. Just sit there patiently until one comes into focus. If the caterpillars have rice-like eggs sacks on their back, just leave them. You are breeding helpful parasitic wasps and the caterpillar will not be there long.

Another common problem is Blossom End Rot, which shows up at fruit set. It is a sign that the plants are not getting enough calcium. Don’t just assume it is the soil. Sometimes it is a problem with watering. Getting the right amount of calcium to the plant requires even watering, since both dry and waterlogged soils keep calcium from reaching plant cells. If a soil test shows that the soil needs calcium, dolomitic lime can be added. For insects, if need be, rotenone or pyrethrum mix or diatomaceous earth can be used safely.

Other things you can do to help prevent disease are to keep tobacco smoke out of the tomato patch (tobacco mosaic virus), mulch heavily, and clean up at the end of the year by raking and burning the dead plant debris.

Conclusion:
With the ground prepared properly, a water system in place, and cover crops or other mulch to keep water from splashing, tomato growers should have very little trouble. Those are the most important elements of successfully growing tomatoes.

(Transcribed from a workshop with Joan Richmond at the 2007 OEFFA Conference.)
When the calendar says spring but Mother Nature’s thermometer is still set on winter, hot soups featuring spring vegetables are just the thing to serve. Each of the following recipes will make an elegant first course to any meal this time of year. Even a sandwich supper will be a gourmet repast if accompanied by one of the following soups featuring the first fresh asparagus, spinach, peas and/or over-wintered leeks.

**Spring Vegetable Soup**

1 tab. olive oil  
2 thinly sliced shallots  
2 thinly sliced green onions  
2 cloves pressed garlic  
3/4 cup long grain brown rice (preferably basmati)  
6 cups vegetable broth or bouillon  
1 1/2 cups sugar snap peas, trimmed and halved  
12 asparagus spears, trimmed and cut in 1-inch pieces  
1/3 cup frozen green peas  
1/2 tsp. black pepper  
Salt or no-salt seasoning to taste  

Sauté shallots in oil for a few minutes, then add the green onions and garlic and cook for another minute or two. Add rice and cook for a minutes. Add the vegetable broth and bring to a boil. Reduce to simmer, cover, and cook for about 25 minutes, then add remaining vegetables and seasonings. Simmer for about 10 minutes more, until vegetables are barely cooked and rice is tender.

**Cream of Spring Soup**

1 1/4 cup butter  
2 large leeks, thinly sliced  
1 onion, chopped  
1 quart water  
1 quart chicken or vegetable broth  
3 large potatoes, chopped  
2 large carrots, chopped  
1 bunch fresh asparagus, trimmed and cut in 1 inch pieces  
1 1/3 cup uncooked long-grain white rice  
3 teaspoons salt  
1/2 pound fresh spinach, chopped  
1 cup heavy cream  

Sauté leeks and onion in butter in a large soup pot. Cook gently until tender. Add water, broth, potatoes, carrots, asparagus, and rice. Season with salt. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer 30 minutes, until vegetables and rice are tender. Stir in spinach and heavy cream, and cook 5 minutes before serving.
Asparagus Soup

1 pound asparagus  
6 cups chicken stock or canned broth  
1/4 cup green onion, thinly sliced  
1/4 cup minced shallot  
1 potato, grated  
Salt and freshly grated pepper to taste  
Plain low-fat yogurt or low-fat sour cream for garnish  
Grated lemon peel for garnish  
Snipped fresh dill for garnish

Peel and trim the asparagus, reserving the trimmings. In a large saucepan bring stock or broth to a boil and simmer 15 minutes. Cut asparagus spears into 1 inch pieces, reserving tips. Strain stock or broth into a large saucepan and add the cut asparagus, onion, shallot, potato and salt and pepper to taste. Bring to a boil and simmer 25 minutes, until asparagus is tender. Meanwhile, blanch the asparagus tips in a pan of lightly salted boiling water until just tender, then drain. In a food processor or blender puree the soup in batches until smooth, correct seasoning and return to saucepan. Heat until hot. Ladle soup into bowls and garnish with reserved asparagus tips, yogurt, lemon peel and dill.

Clearly Spring Soup

2 qts. chicken or vegetable stock  
1/4 cup flour  
2 medium leeks, sliced crosswise  
1 cup celery with leaves, finely chopped  
1 cup fresh green peas  
1 tsp. sugar  
1/4 tsp. bouquet garni or your favorite herb blend  
Salt and white pepper  
Inner leaves of a small head of romaine, shredded  
4 slices bread, crusts trimmed  
2-3 tab. butter for frying  
Herb flavored salt

Stir about a cup of stock into the flour to make a smooth paste. Bring the remaining stock to a boil, whisk in the flour paste, and continue stirring until the soup thickens. Add the leeks, celery, and peas with the sugar, salt, and pepper. Cover the soup and simmer until the vegetables are tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Five minutes before the end of cooking, stir in the lettuce. Meanwhile, make croutons. Cut bread in 1/2 inch cubes. Fry croutons over medium heat until evenly browned on all sides. Remove them with a slotted spoon and drain them on paper towels. To serve, taste the soup and adjust the seasoning. Spoon into bowls and top with croutons.
OEFFA
30th Anniversary Conference
The Changing Climate of Agriculture

Over 700 folks joined together in Granville, Ohio in February to learn about ecological food systems and to help celebrate OEFFA’s 30 years of service to the sustainable agriculture movement in Ohio.

Exhibitor and OEFFA Member, Cynthia Ringer of Ohio Earth Food, Inc.

Jeff Poppen, a.k.a. Tiki, shares the subtle qualities of agriculture.

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Conference attendees enjoy healthy, local, sustainable meals.

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OEFFA News

Board Elections Results

New and returning OEFFA Education Board members were elected for the 2009-2010 term at the Feb. 21 membership business meeting, held during the OEFFA 30th Annual Conference. Following more than four years of capable and dedicated leadership as president, Mike Laughlin passed the torch to Darren Malhame, a restaurateur in Columbus with a deep commitment to local and organic food. The new board, which is also comprised of chapter representatives, will convene for the first time April 26, at which time they will elect a vice-president. OEFFA will greatly benefit from the talents and commitments of these generous members who have volunteered their time to help guide our organization.

OEFFA Education Board of Directors 2009 – 2010

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Darren Malhame, Upper Arlington

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Gary Cox, Columbus

Heart of Ohio Chapter
Joan Richmond, Bellville

Lake Effect Chapter
To Be Announced

MOON Chapter
Harv Roehling, Oxford

OEFFA Grain Growers Chapter
Ed Snavely, Fredericktown

OK River Valley Chapter
Steve Daugherty, Ripley

Real FOOD Chapter
David Benchoff, Ashland

SW Ohio Chapter
Steve Edwards, Cincinnati

The OEFFA Certification Board, comprised of those members of the OEFFA Board who do not have holdings in any entity certified by OEFFA, will also hold its first meeting of the year on April 26, during which they will elect officers.

NEW CHAPTER FOCUSES ON GRAIN PRODUCERS

OEFFA’s newest chapter is dedicated to networking organic and sustainable grain farmers to support grain production, processing and marketing.

At its April 4 meeting, chapter members may come up with a different name than its working title of “OEFFA Grain Growers Chapter.” Formerly the Ohio Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA) Chapter 1, this group is open to all interested OEFFA members.

A summer meeting is in the planning stages. If you’d like to join this chapter, or would just like more information, please contact Marty Warnecke at 419-384-7279 or marty@watchtv.net.

OEFFA REAL FOOD CHAPTER MEETING

On January 15 the Real FOOD Chapter met with Casey Hoy of the ODA’s Food Policy Council and Amalie Lipstreau of the ODA’s Office of Sustainable Agriculture to discuss various means of building the local foodshed in the Wooster/Wayne County region. Among those in attendance at this “listening session” were representatives of a group that is working to establish “Wooster Local Foods Market - Local Roots” in downtown Wooster. The principal players in this project include Real FOOD Chapter members Monica Bongue (current chapter President), Keith Speirs (a local architect) and Jennifer McMullen (a local food enthusiast).
2008 was a year of growth for the Certification staff. We added on two new staff members, Kate Schmidt, Compliance Coordinator and Andy Hupp, Materials Reviewer. We certified 715 producers and handlers from 18 states, a 45% increase in one year! In 2007, we certified 480 producers and handlers by way of comparison.

Business is booming. We expect more than 900 applications in 2009, and anticipate adding new staff again. Please see our job postings in this newsletter (pg. 13) if you are interested in working with organic producers in a comfortable office environment. Other changes, we have raised our fees slightly and the fees paid to our hard working inspectors this year, as well as change our Organic System Plans the producers and handlers fill in yearly and the inspector reports. They bring the paperwork more in line with the National Organic Program (NOP) Standards.

Another change I wanted to highlight was the decision by the Board of Directors of OEFFA Certification to not take on any new applicants from outside our region. They have defined our region as Ohio, Michigan, West Virginia, Indiana, Pennsylvania and Kentucky.

Finally, our deadlines have changed for this year so if you are an organic grower who wants to be certified this year for the first time or a certified organic grower who hasn’t had time to look over the paperwork, please get on our website or call the office for more information. The certification staff, Janie Marr, Lexie, Kate and Andy, welcomes your calls anytime.

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**Obamas Dig Up White House Lawn, Time Now to Plant and Harvest Real Policy Change**

Excerpted from the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition’s March 23, 2009 Weekly Update

As advocates we often ask ourselves, “Do our efforts changes things on the ground?” Leaders and participants of a strong grassroots effort to change the ground on the White House lawn can now say, “Yes!”

Our hats go off to the folks at Eat the View, the WHO Farm and the White House Farm—among others—whose tireless work led to the newly-broken ground for an organic garden on the White House lawn. Apart from having tremendous symbolic value, this act will hopefully inspire anyone with access to a small plot of land to plant some seeds and take food matters into their own hands.

As the Obamas transform their own backyard, there are significant opportunities to transform the nation’s land as well. Without going through the exhaustive list of our current agricultural policy problems, here are examples of the low-hanging fruit that the Obama Administration can act on today to create a better food and agriculture system:

- Finalize rules for the Conservation Stewardship Program and start signing farmers up for this innovative program by late spring;
- Increase funding for the Value-Added Producer Grant program, a job creator as well as assistance for those who want to add value to their farm products for a growing consumer market interested in high quality local and regional food;
- Get the Office of Advocacy and Outreach up and running, which is to focus on small and mid-sized farms, as well as beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers;
- Change the loopholes, ensuring that real farmers, not those Wall Street types, receive government support for farming;
- Level the playing field by enforcing laws that would end meatpackers’ sweetheart deals with mega-volume producers at the expense of the little guy, and
- Insist that rewrites for the Child Nutrition Act provide substantial annual mandatory funding for Farm to School projects to provide school children new opportunities to eat fresh, local and nutritious!
March and April in northern Ohio offer a little of everything: sunshine, snow, wind, rain, warmth, freezing temperatures, and an eagerness to get to work in the garden. It's a good time to finish work I deliberately left in the fall. I cut back and compost perennials and grasses, prune, do light work building new beds, and do a few things with the compost pile. It's hard to resist the urge to dig, but memories of prior efforts that resulted in soil the texture of rock are a powerful reminder to stick to other tasks.

In early March chives are up and ready to begin harvesting as well as one or two other herbs. This first yield is a reminder to do a final check of the seeds on hand and order more if needed.

It's also time to think about what I want from the growing season ahead. I expand and amend the beds. I've decided to grow two or three new vegetables and perhaps five new herbs. Herbs often produce late into the fall and sometimes live through the winter and I find them to be a wonderful addition to my diet.

I also plan to extend preservation of food to continue to become more food independent. Farmer’s markets and U-pick farms are good sources for additional organic produce to enjoy this summer and preserve for the winter. Blueberries, cherries, zucchini, plums, peppermint, and tomatoes are still on hand from last summer.

I freeze some foods. For example I often grate zucchini, pack it in containers, and freeze. A thawed package is added to soups or is drained, mixed with an egg, a little flour and fried as pancakes would be, and topped with cheese before serving.

However, I like to dry the harvest best. I keep the dehydrator handy all season and use it often. Because I have lived in a humid climate, I freeze the dried foods. Most people find storing dried foods in airtight containers works well. A special treat is dried zucchini slices; they are so sweet! They are a hit served as “chips” with dip, as an addition to a stir-fry or as an ingredient in steamed vegetables. One can soak them before cooking or just throw them in with the rest of the ingredients.

In desperation over the large size of the harvest one summer, I dried apple and pear slices at the same time. The result was a tasty treat with hints of both flavors. Now I know why it is usually recommended that one kind of food is dried at a time, but it worked out well in this case where the mingled flavors enhanced each other.

The Solar Food Dryer by Eben Fodor covers building and using a sun-powered food dehydrator including food preparation for drying, storage, and recipes. In addition the book covers technical aspects not easily found in one place including sun path charts, solar collection principles, detailed design and building instructions including electrical backup, and many diagrams and photos. A solar food dryer has no operating costs and can be used anywhere.

Another resource is The Busy Person’s Guide to Preserving Food by Janet Bachand Chadwick. It contains detailed instructions on root cellar storage, freezing, drying, and canning the harvest. Drawings illustrate processes and recipes abound.
The OEFFA Certification Program is accepting applications for two newly-created positions. Both positions are open until filled, so please contact the office shortly if you are interested.

Organic Certification Assistant

Position Summary
This is a full-time position of 40 hours/week at a pay rate of $11.00/hr. Benefits include health insurance. The Organic Certification Assistant will provide clerical support and assistance for the Organic Certification Program as directed by the Certification staff. The Certification Program Assistant must be exceptionally well organized and detail oriented. Good computer skills, experience with the Internet, word processing, and spreadsheets are required. The ideal applicant will have an agricultural background (organic preferred but not required); candidates with other relevant backgrounds will be considered. Excellent communication skills (both written and oral), and the ability to work in a demanding, fast-paced environment are essential, as is a genuine desire and commitment to assisting organic farmers. The position is based in Columbus.

Qualifications:
• Outstanding organizational skills
• Exceptional communication and writing skills
• Excellent computer skills and typing proficiency, especially Microsoft Excel and Word; proficiency with Access a plus
• Unfailing attention to detail
• Sincere desire to assist organic farmers
• Knowledge of general office procedures
• At minimum, an associate’s degree
• Prior work experience in an office environment a plus.

Position Responsibilities
• Answer incoming calls and relay clear and concise messages
• Undertake daily administrative tasks
• Perform filing and mail processing
• Photocopy, assemble, and forward applications and reports to the appropriate recipients
• Answer routine general questions about organic certification
• Handle correspondence, fax, and email communications
• Assist with general office duties and additional projects.

Organic Livestock Coordinator

Position Summary
The Organic Livestock Coordinator will provide support and assistance for the Organic Certification Program as directed by the Certification Program Director. The ideal applicant must have a background in organic livestock, as evidenced by experience and education with organic livestock. Candidates should also have knowledge of organic standards, regulations, and the certification process. Excellent communication skills (both written and oral), and the ability to work in a demanding, fast-paced environment are essential, as is a genuine desire and commitment to assisting organic farmers. The Certification Livestock Coordinator must be exceptionally well-organized and detail oriented. Good computer skills, experience with the Internet, word processing, and spreadsheets are required. This is a full-time position (40 hours/week) at a pay rate of $14/hour, with some possibility of seasonal reduction in hours, depending on candidate preference. Benefits include health insurance. The position is based in Columbus. There may be some travel in Ohio.

Qualifications:
• Experience with organic livestock
• Bachelor degree in a relevant field required, with further education or training with organic livestock preferred
• Knowledge of organic regulations and certification procedures
• Outstanding organizational skills
• Exceptional communication and writing skills
• Excellent computer skills and typing proficiency, especially Microsoft Excel and Word
• Unfailing attention to detail
• Sincere desire to assist organic farmers
• Knowledge of general office procedures
• Prior work experience in an office environment.

Position Responsibilities
• Coordinate certification of livestock operations
• Perform initial review of livestock Organic System Plans for compliance
• Answer questions about organic certification
• Train organic inspectors for new developments with organic standards
• Review inspection reports and make recommendations for certification
• Develop and disseminate information related to certification of livestock for producers, vets and others
• Provide assistance to OEFFA certification clients
• Handle correspondence, fax, and email communications
• Assist with general office duties and additional projects
• Stay current with changes in national organic standards as they affect certification of livestock
• Help develop and implement OEFFA certification policies and procedures.

How to apply for either position:
Applications consist of cover letter, résumé, and names of three references (indicate relationship). Electronically submitted applications (preferred) should be addressed to Janie Marr Werum, Certification Program Director at janiemarr@oeffa.org, with a copy to Dr. Carol Goland, Executive Director, at cgoland@oeffa.org, or mail your application to Janie Marr Werum, OEFFA Certification, 41 Croswell Rd., Columbus, OH 43214. For questions, contact Janie Marr Werum at 614-262-2022.
THE 2008 FARM BILL
AND ITS IMPACT ON ORGANIC FARMERS IN OHIO

By Mike Anderson
(Organic Education Program Coordinator)

Since 1933, federal farm policy has been guided by farm bill legislation. Policy makers have used farm bills to address food supply issues and crop prices and to encourage conservation of natural resources. These goals have sometimes been at odds, and priorities have changed through the decades. The Dust Bowl encouraged soil conservation programs in the ‘30s and ‘40s. World War II resulted in legislation that addressed price volatility and production demands on American farmers. Conservation of natural resources and the need for price stabilization guided policy through the ‘50s and ‘60s. Federal farm policy continued to encourage conservation throughout the ‘80s and ‘90s, resulting in the creation of the Wetlands Reserve Program and the Conservation Reserve Program, recognized as two of the most successful conservation programs in American history.

Although conservation of natural resources has been an important priority in every farm bill that has passed since 1956, the term “organic farming” was not included in the language of the bills until 2008. The 2008 Farm Bill not only recognizes organic farming as a conservation system of production, but it institutionalizes organic production and directs the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to review all of its conservation practices and programs to recognize the resource conservation benefits of organic farming. This process has begun throughout the country and in Ohio.

The substantial changes that the 2008 Farm Bill has brought about will be evident to organic growers in Ohio this year. The policy changes in the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), the organic cost-share program and crop insurance availability will provide immediate benefit for organic farmers. Increased funding for organic agriculture research, for the National Organic Program (NOP), and for organic agriculture data collection may provide even greater long-term benefits for Ohio organic farmers.

The EQIP program is a voluntary conservation program administered by the USDA-NRCS. EQIP provides technical assistance to farmers who are adopting conservation practices on land that is in agricultural production. In addition to technical assistance, EQIP provides financial assistance to farmers through a cost-share program to develop structural and management practices on agricultural land. Farmers can access technical assistance and cost-share financial assistance for a wide range of management practices, including the use of cover crops, installing fencing, planting grass waterways and managing manure.

As the new rules governing this program are written, financial assistance may be available for conventional farmers who are transitioning to organic production. Farmers are encouraged to contact their local Ohio NRCS office to learn more about this program or visit the Ohio NRCS website at www.oh.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/.

The mandatory funding for the Organic Cost-Share Program will increase fivefold from $5 million in the previous farm bill to $22 million in the 2008 farm bill. This provision provides certified organic producers with a reimbursement of up to 75% of the certification fee (up to a maximum annual payment of $750). The substantial increase in funding for this important program is expected to provide this benefit through 2012.

The 2008 Farm Bill also authorizes an important first step in providing equitable crop insurance policies for organic farmers. A mandatory review of underwriting processes is required by the bill to determine if there is a variation between organic and non-organic farms.

Three major changes in the 2008 Farm Bill will provide indirect, but substantial benefit to organic farmers in Ohio. The Organic Research and Education Initiative (OREI) will see a fivefold increase in mandatory funding from $15 million in the 2002 Farm Bill to $78 million mandated in the ’08 bill with authorization for an additional $20 million. This additional funding for organic farm systems research at the university level will result in greater scientific understanding of organic farming systems and eventually lead to better recommendations for organic producers. Mandatory funding of $5 million for organic production and marketing data collection will provide organic farmers with important information on pricing, consumer preference data, and organic production. Mandatory funding increases for the NOP from $2.6 million annually to $11 million annually by 2012 will provide the necessary resources to meet the growing demand for oversight of accredited certifiers nationwide.

Specialty crop producers, precision agriculture interests and organic farmers will all realize substantial benefit from the positive changes that result from this new farm bill. There is broad consensus, however, that organic farmers may realize the greatest benefit from this new legislation. OEFFA will continue to update organic growers on these benefits as the program rules are written.

Questions about organic regulations and suggestions for future topics may be sent to: OEFFA Certification, Atttn: Making Sense, 41 Croswell Rd, Columbus, OH 43214 or email organic@oeffa.org.
April 16
Marketing Agriculture Products
Led by Christie Welch and Julie Fox and part of the Third Thursday Horticulture Business Training Series held at OSU South Centers, 1864 Shyville Road, Piketon, OH from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. Admission is $5.00. For more information, contact Julie Strawser at Strawser.35@osu.edu or call (740) 289-2071 or (800) 297-2072 (Ohio only) ext. 223.

April 16 - 18
Hands-On Basic Cheese Making -- Enhancing Dairy Profitability with Cheese
Enhance your dairy operation with a farmstead cheese business with the aid of an OSU Extension cheese-making workshop. The workshop will be held in Ashtabula County, 39 Wall St., Jefferson. The course will run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. with an optional evening cheese house tour. Peter Dixon, one of the nation’s premier cheese-making instructors and operator of the Center for Farmstead Milk Processing in Vermont, will teach the course. Registration is $425 per person and includes course tuition, resource materials, workshop supplies, lunches and refreshments. Registration is limited to the first 15 people. For more information, contact the OSU Extension office in Ashtabula County at (440) 576-9008, or email Abbey Averill at averill.10@osu.edu.

April 29
Sweet Potatoes: The Lazy Gardener's Crop
If you want an easy crop that you can plant and leave until harvest, sweet potatoes are the crop for you. Instructor Melinda O'Briant will teach participants about the raising of this crop, from slips to planting, from harvest to curing, and how to control some of the pests associated with this vegetable. Turner Farm, 7400 Given Road, Cincinnati, OH 45243. To register, contact us at (513) 561-7400 or, turnerfarm@zoomtown.com, or visit the website at www.turnerfarm.org.

Food Fraud, Pink Margarine, Pure Food: Lessons from 19th-Century Food Regulation
Sponsored by the Athens Chapter of the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association. Presented by Kathleen Sullivan, an Associate Professor at Ohio University. She teaches classes in constitutional law and American politics and is the author of Constitutional Context: Women and Rights Discourse in 19th-Century America. Athens County Extension Office, 280 West Union Street, Athens, 7:00pm. Dessert potluck to follow the talk. Please bring a snack item to share. Beverages will be provided. Contact Ed Perkins - Athens Chapter President - (740) 664-3370.

May 2
Creating Your Own Backyard Solar Oven Workshop
With little more than a cardboard box, some clear plastic wrap, a bit of paint, some aluminum foil and knowledge about how this all works, you can create your own durable oven. You will leave this workshop with a working solar cooker (that you built yourself) as well as the knowledge to create additional ovens at home. 1-5pm. For reservations, call (740) 674-4300, e-mail annie@bluerockstation.com, or register online at www.bluerockstation.com.

May 11, 2009
Brown Bag Series with Dr. Rich Pirog
The Social Responsibility Initiative will host Dr. Rich Pirog, associate director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, as part of its 2009 Brown Bag Series. This endeavor is supported by the Center for Farmland Policy and Innovation, and the Ohio Department of Agriculture’s Sustainable Agriculture Program. Dr. Pirog will share with us Iowa’s journey in developing a more resilient local and regional food system. Don’t miss this opportunity to learn! Contact: Molly Bean Smith, Social Responsibility Initiative bean.21@osu.edu, (614) 688-8798.

May 23 - 29
The Complete Straw Bale Building Workshop
This seminar will walk you through the entire process of building a straw bale structure using a pounded tire foundation. As part of this seminar, you will be provided with complete step-by-step design and construction plans to build your own structure. For reservations, call (740) 674-4300, e-mail annie@bluerockstation.com, or register online at www.bluerockstation.com.
Time to Renew Your Membership?
Student $10 • Single $35 • Family $50 • Farm Family $50 • Nonprofit $50 • Business $100 • Individual Lifetime $1000
Mail payment to OEFFA, 41 Croswell Rd., Columbus, Ohio 43214, call 614/421-2022, or renew at www.oeffa.org

Un-Classified Ads are FREE to OEFFA members in good standing, unless a commercial product or service is being advertised. Ads for commercial goods or services, and ads from non-members should be mailed with payment of $5 for each insertion, to OEFFA News, 41 Croswell Rd., Columbus, Ohio 43214 or newsletter@oeffa.org.

For Sale: Certified organic elephant garlic cloves for planting. $5.00 per pound plus S&H. Five pounds minimum order. German extra-hardy garlic. $10.00 per pound plus S&H. Order now for fall planting. Rich Tomsu (740) 696-1301, antomsu@frognet.net.

For Sale: Certified organic clover hay, alfalfa / grass hay (2nd cutting), and clover stubble straw (round bales). Call Terry at (419) 823-1322, Perrysburg, OH. Delivery available.


For Sale: Boulder Belt Farm Share Program near Eaton, OH (SW OH) is taking members for the 2009 season. We have monthly memberships for just $120 a month. We still have room for May through October. Members pick up their weekly share at the farm. For more information visit our website www.boulderbeltfarm.com and click on the Farm Share link.

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- Soybean Meal
- Corn Gluten
- Bone Meal
- Sul-Po Mag
- Potassium Sulfate
- Rock Phosphate
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