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15th Annual Iowa Organic Conference Highlights Biodiversity and Its Benefits

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Abstract

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Keywords

Agronomy, Horticulture

Disciplines

Agricultural Science | Agriculture | Agronomy and Crop Sciences | Horticulture

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ICM News

October 15, 2015

The 15th Annual Iowa Organic Conference will be held Nov. 22-23 on the University of Iowa campus in Iowa City, as a joint effort between Iowa State University and the University of Iowa Office of Sustainability. Producers and experts from across the country will share tips for transitioning into organic production and methods to enhance organic operations.

"The U.S. market for organic products reached \$39.1 billion in 2014 and the demand for organic grains and produce continues to exceed supply," said Kathleen Delate, [ISU organic agriculture](#) specialist.

"Growers everywhere are encouraged to consider the potential for organic production," Delate said. "With worldwide interest in monarch butterflies and pollinators this year, our

conference theme is 'Celebrating the Biodiversity of Organic Farming: People, Animals, Pollinators and Plants' to highlight how organic practices have been critical for preserving pollinator habitat and reducing impacts from harmful pesticides."

The conference keynote speakers are Klaas and Mary-Howell Martens, NOFA-NY Farmers of the Year, who grow and market more than 10 varieties of organic grains and have received numerous commendations for their [biodiverse organic farm in upstate New York](#). They run a multi-layered operation, from seed, grain and feed sales, to selling to area restaurants, including [Stone Barns, which uses their unique grains in special meals](#).

A Local Foods Expo will kick off the conference on Sunday, Nov. 22, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m., in the University of Iowa Memorial Union. The Expo, co-sponsored by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, will bring together area producers and buyers, including Lucky's Market, HyVee and other purchasers of local and organic products, to connect growers to potential buyers.

A keynote talk by Sarah Waring, with the [Center for an Agricultural Economy](#) at 2:30 p.m., will explore "Using Your Resources Wisely: Examples of What Works in Vermont to Promote and Scale Up Local Food Purchasing."

A reception, featuring local and organic food and drinks, will follow on Sunday night at 6 p.m. in the UI Memorial Union, followed by the movie, "[Queen of the Sun: What the Bees are Telling Us](#)," at 7 p.m., which explores the importance of maintaining biodiversity and eliminating bee-toxic insecticides in food system. The conference lunch on Monday afternoon highlights local and organic produce, meats and dairy products assembled into a gourmet meal by UI award-winning executive chef Barry Greenberg and his team.

Conference participants will learn about the latest techniques for transitioning into organic farming, or improving organic operation. Sessions will include lessons on weed management, organic cattle production and marketing, growing organic vegetable crops and dealing with pesticide drift. The conference also includes information on soil and water quality research, farmworker health and safety, organic poultry updates, economics of transitioning and land preservation.

Speakers include organic farmers, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach specialists, government agency staff and other professionals with unique experience related to organic agriculture and sustainable living. Also at this year's conference will be farmer-mentor round-tables, which will offer farmers interested in transitioning to organic, or with specific organic questions, to meet one-on-one with organic farmers and organic certification experts.

"The Iowa Organic Conference is the largest university-sponsored organic conference in the country," said Delate. Last year's conference brought more than 50 exhibitors, ranging from organic seed sales, to local food system nonprofits to government offices working with transitioning and certified organic farmers. Despite the challenges of

extremely wet weather this year in many parts of the state, organic farmers are anticipating successful organic yields with organic soybean prices currently averaging \$22 per bushel and organic corn at \$11 per bushel.

Conference information is available online at <http://sustainability.uiowa.edu/2015-iowa-organic-conference> with the link to registration at <https://www.signmeup.com/108970>.

The cost of the conference is \$95 on or before Nov. 7 and \$115 after Nov. 7. For additional conference information and directions to the conference, visit the webpage or contact Delate at kdelate@iastate.edu.

Conference partners include Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, New Pioneer Co-op, Organic Valley and Practical Farmers of Iowa.

Category:

Crops:

Corn

Soybean

Tags:

Author:



Kathleen Delate *Professor*

Dr. Kathleen Delate's current position as a professor and extension organic specialist at Iowa State University is a joint position between the departments of horticulture and agronomy, where she's responsible for research, extension, and teaching in organic agriculture. Organic agriculture is no...

