

Getting to Organic: Profiles of How Michigan Farmers Made Their Transition to Organic Agriculture



This report features stories from five farmers in Michigan describing their path to organic farming. The stories were compiled based on telephone interviews with the farmers, and provide different perspectives on the change from conventional agriculture to organic certification and an organic farm system.

Introduction

Michigan is an agricultural leader in the United States, second only to California in the diversity of products grown or raised on the 53,000 farms across the state. Of those farms, it is estimated that 140 are currently certified as organic farms under the USDA's National Organic Program. This is less than 1% of all Michigan farms, but consistent with national statistics for organic farms.

According to a 2006 survey of Michigan's organic farmers, 80% of organic cropland is in beans and grains, 3% is in fruit, and 2% is in vegetables. Michigan ranked among the top 20 states in total organic acreage at approximately 45,500 acres. The average size of organic fruit and vegetable farms is 117 acres, with about 85 acres in production. The average organic bean and grain farm is 360 acres, with about 340 acres in production.

For the past 10 or more years, organic foods have shown tremendous growth as a sector of the retail food market. While it is projected that this growth trend, which had been over 20% per year, will slow, it is still estimated that organic foods will continue to expand in the marketplace as buyers are increasingly concerned about food safety and health issues related to diet.

For the farmer, organic production can mean higher profits because organic products often command premiums in both wholesale and retail markets. Given the growth still to come in organics, organic farming offers an opportunity for many new and existing Michigan farmers. This report illustrates how some farmers have taken advantage of that opportunity by making the transition to organic agriculture. Each farmer was asked about their farm business prior to organic certification, what led them to consider a shift to organic production, and how this change has affected their farm operations and markets. It is hoped that other farmers can learn from the experiences described in these profiles, and be inspired to consider organic farming as a viable option on their own farms. In addition, researchers and agricultural advisors may learn how to better direct their efforts to support the needs of farmers in transition.

Profile #1	Jim Sattelberg, Bay Shore Farms and Thistledown Farms (organic beans and grains)
Profile #2	Don Cinzori, Cinzori Farms (organic vegetables)
Profile #3	Gene Garthe, Garthe Farms (organic tree fruit)
Profile #4	Fred Leitz, Leitz Farms LLC (organic tomatoes)
Profile #5	Bernie Ware, Ware Farm (organic fruits and vegetables)



Profile #1 Jim Sattelberg Bay Shore Farms and Thistledown Farms

- Located in Snover, MI (Sanilac County)
- Approximately 2400 acres; 2200 certified
- Dry beans, soybeans, spelt, wheat, corn, alfalfa, other crops
- Family operates farm and processing business (cleaning, bagging, etc.)
- Certified by Global Organic Alliance (GOA)

Solving crop health issues and seeking a profitable business for the future

The Sattelberg family grew up as farmers in a farming community, and Jim, along with his wife, DeAnn, sons Ben and Matt, and daughter-in-law Katie, continue that tradition with their farm business. Jim began working for DeAnn's father on 500 acres growing sugar beets, dry beans and other crops. By the mid 1990s, the farm had changed and expanded to include about 4000 acres of dry beans, corn and soybeans.

As a large-scale bean producer, Jim developed experience in and expertise at marketing, in part through development of and participation in marketing and producer cooperatives such as Bayside Best Beans and Thumb Oil Seed. The farm expanded its business to include things like a specialty crop of cranberry beans and feed corn for a local egg production coop. Marketing the volume and diversity of the farm's crops required Jim to cultivate many connections with various buyers. In addition, the farm business diversified to include work as a distributor of Ag Spectrum fertilizers for no-till farm production. As a distributor, Jim was trained and educated about plant nutrition, soil health and the negative impacts of chemical carryovers on crop yields.

By the end of 2001, the farm had experienced serious crop loss in their soybeans due to aphids, and disappointing yields for several years due to chemical carryovers. The farm was dependent on bumper crop yields to generate income, and farm debt load was high. With their sons in college, the Sattelbergs questioned how to continue operating the farm profitably, and whether their sons should return to invest in the farm for their future. They were familiar with other farmers in the area who had started farming organically, including their crop insurance agent and friend, as well as a family cousin. Jim had been learning more about organics over time by attending local seminars for organic farmers. In addition, he was aware that the Michigan Bean Cooperative had done a feasibility study showing profitable potential in organic markets.

In late 2001, the family decided to consider organic production for their farm. They first needed to determine that there was a market available because organic crops couldn't just be sold at the local elevator. There was a market for 'no chem' and non-GMO beans, there were other area organic farmers with successful smaller-scale cooperative marketing at that time, and the Sattelbergs saw growth opportunities in the organic market in general.

To begin the transition, the Sattelbergs purchased a nearby certified organic farm business. This farm raised soybeans, wheat, corn and some dry beans on 150 acres, with an additional 350 acres of rented land, and a cleaning/bagging operation. In addition to acquiring the already-certified land, they began transition on about 1/3 of their existing soybean acreage. By 2003, another 1/3 of the soybean acres were in transition. As additional land was transitioned into organics, the farm's 4000 acres spread over three counties was reduced to allow more time to better manage weed control issues. Some land was enrolled in the conservation reserve program. Today, a total of about 2200 acres is certified with some new acreage still in transition. In addition, sons Ben and Matt have their own farmland in transition to organic.

New crops such as alfalfa were added to the farm's production base, both to meet the requirements for crop rotations and crop diversity for certification, and to respond to the increased need for pasture and hay due to growth in Michigan's organic dairy farms.

While the soybean crop is now marketed mainly to Japan, and the dry bean crop is sold nationally, Jim sees potential for more local marketing in the future because of high fuel and transportation costs. He notes that while the costs of organic fertilizers and pest controls are lower, there are higher fuel costs for cultivation and higher labor costs in organics. However, with good production practices and price premiums for the crops, he can operate his large-scale farm profitably. Since he began transition, he has learned the value of rotations and timing for weed management, along with other practices to promote soil health, the key to healthy, robust crop production.

Jim is confident about the future for organic foods and his farm. He is excited about consumer interest in local foods, and opportunities for a more "self-reliant" food system that would include better education in schools about organic foods, learn-to-farm programs, food preparation and the value of eating less processed food. He sees two challenges for his farm's future: ensuring that they have responsible and qualified labor to maintain high quality standards in the farm products, and teaching all aspects of the farm business to his sons--especially marketing--so they can successfully continue the family farm.

Keys to Successful Transition

- Extensive experience in marketing crops and continued efforts to find new markets
- Willingness to "let your imagination go" and envision changes in your farm business
- Support of family and interest of next generation in continuing organic farming for their future



Profile #2 Don Cinzori Cinzori Farms

- Located in Ceresco, MI (Calhoun County)
- 260 acres, some wooded; 200 tillable; approximately 100 acres certified in production with vegetables, cover crops, hay, greenhouses
- Vegetables (including 100 varieties of heirloom tomatoes), culinary herbs, vegetable bedding plants
- Certified by Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA)

New farmer becomes pioneer in organic vegetables

Some farmers come from generations of family farmers before them. Others, like Don Cinzori, come to the farm from a childhood in the city and life working in the automotive industry in Detroit. Don and his wife, Donna, were attracted to the countryside after years in the city. In 1975, they bought the 260 acres of farmland they still own, a working dairy farm--without the cattle--located with easy access to nearby expressways. Don believes that having no experience in farming was actually an advantage; it made it easy to learn things because "we didn't know anything".

They began growing corn, soybeans and hay, renting another 700 acres to add to their crops, with their grains marketed at the local elevator, just like their farming neighbors. They added a sow farrow-to-finish operation for about 5 or 6 years, something unusual for the area but indicative of their willingness to try things without preconceived ideas of what you can and can't do on a farm. As they raised their family of 5 children, they also grew a large vegetable garden organically, being sensitive to the use of chemicals around their children. As the kids grew up and left the farm, Don discontinued the farrowing business, but the vegetable garden had expanded. By 1984, they stopped renting additional acreage and began marketing their organically grown vegetables.

In the 1980s, organic certification was a voluntary system; certification was not necessarily very meaningful and few farms were certified. According to Don, Organic Growers of Michigan (OGM), a local growers organization, started writing strict standards for certification, prompted by a fellow Michigan farmer, John Clark, and others. The Cinzoris had been raising vegetables using organic methods and selling them at local farmers' markets. In 1985, Cinzori Farms received certification on 2 acres, and became one of the first farms in Michigan to be certified by OGM.

Don found that marketing vegetables in wholesale markets was more profitable than selling the corn and soybeans they had been growing on most of their acreage, even when the vegetables were not sold as organic. Demand for their vegetables was increasing, so they shifted some acreage from grains to vegetable production to add more crops, and expanded to sell at a total of 5 farmers' markets by the late 1980s. Given that there were few organic vegetable farmers at the time, to get advice about organic farming, Don attended organic seminars and conferences, and got general information and advice about growing vegetables from Michigan State University Extension agents and from conventional farmers.

By the 1990s, the Cinzoris had 20 acres in vegetable production, and as of today, they are up to about 60 acres of a wide variety of fresh organic produce. His son, Anthony, helps to run the farm business full-time, but other family members help at farmers' markets and in other ways. Don credits his success to a few things--diversified crops, a willingness to try new things, and relentless marketing. Diversified crops help the farm withstand crop failures and satisfy the interests of varied wholesale buyers such as restaurants, food coops, grocery stores and farmers' markets. Adding a small lean-to shelter as a greenhouse was a new venture started because they needed transplants for their vegetables. Anthony has now developed the farm's greenhouse production to include 6 full-size greenhouses for extended season growing. In an effort to focus his marketing to get the best results, Don now sells in only 2

farmers' markets, but has expanded wholesale marketing to about 80% of their business. He believes that organic certification adds credibility to his marketing efforts, and gets premiums for his products because of the quality reputation he has built up through the years.

Don sees challenges ahead for organic farming. With the wide variety of crops that he grows, getting quantities of organic seed can be difficult. He encourages farmers to support the companies providing organic seed even though costs may be higher. He also sees competition in the marketplace from sellers offering 'natural' or 'chemical-free' foods, or those offering questionable organic foods from overseas markets. These products are often sold as if they are the same as his local organic products. Don believes that it's important to "keep organic pure" with high and strict standards that make it easy for customers to trust the products they buy, and with increased enforcement of current laws against those who make illegal or fraudulent claims.

While Don and Anthony are still the only organic farmers in their community, their success as new farmers who turned a former conventional dairy farm into a thriving organic vegetable farm has earned the respect of their farming neighbors.

Keys to Successful Transition

- Expanded and diversified crops in response to market interest
- Focus on growing to high standards and producing good quality
- Open to learning new ways to farm and making changes in the farm business



Profile #3 Gene Garthe Garthe Farms

- Located in Northport, MI (Leelanau County)
- Approximately 360 acres in commercial orchards and woodlots
- Pears, apples, cherries (sweet, Montmorency and Balaton) for processing markets
- About 50% of orchards are in transition or certified organic
- Certified by Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA)

Balancing the risks and rewards of organic tree fruit production

Living in a home built by his great grandfather, Gene Garthe has deep roots in the northern Michigan farm life. Years ago, his extended family had a diversified farm raising cattle, hogs, chickens and grains on land scattered over several parcels. Four generations later, Gene combined these family farms and developed Garthe Farms into a successful commercial orchard.

He specializes in processing fruit, with spring and summer crops of cherries and pears, and a fall crop of apples, which do well in the low spots on the farm's rolling terrain. Over the years, to reduce costs and labor for a business he operated by himself for a long time, he learned and aggressively implemented integrated pest management (IPM) practices in his pear and apple orchards so that he was close to organic--"almost there."

Around 1999, Gene was asked by one customer and a potential customer if he could grow two different organic crops for premium prices. With his experience in intensive IPM, he began to gather new information about organic techniques in use at the time such as kaolin clay and mating disruption. He noticed that pest problems in the orchard responded to changes in his practices--pear psylla disappeared when he stopped pesticide sprays; codling moth, however, was not managed by use of mating disruption techniques. Because it was not a huge piece of his farm finances, he decided to transition his 3 acre pear orchard to organic in 2002, along with a couple blocks of tart cherries. He also started transition on his 30 acre apple orchard.

Gene learned that there was a big difference between being "almost there" and being organic. In his 2d year of transition, there was significant insect damage on the pear, cherry and apple crops, so he decided to scale back his organic plan to a couple blocks of tart cherries because the risk of losing crops was too high. He sought out assistance from specialists at Michigan State University. Gene noted that his farm became a research site to assess organic pest management strategies because of the initiative of an MSU research scientist who sought grant funds to support continued work on the farm.

Since those early years, Gene has expanded his organic acreage. According to Gene's farm consultant, the farm needed time to transition as an organic system, and Gene admits that he should have learned more about organic management before making the transition with some of his crops. While he still operates his orchards as 'split' production with some organic acres and some conventional, he continues to move trees into organic transition. He is learning about orchard floor management, the biological activity in organic soils, and credits better products and better techniques that are now available to help with managing pests. He has even applied some of the organic methods in his conventional orchards. He makes and uses compost on his farm, and sees benefits from that although he criticizes the organic standards for what he sees as their overly-strict regulations for on-farm compost. With several years of organic practices, and good yields in 2007, Gene is hopeful about future results, although he's not sure if

he is "good or lucky." He has noticed a difference in his organic crop--higher brix levels, more color and more flavor compared to his conventionally-managed orchards.

Gene emphasized the importance of establishing relationships with customers before getting into organic production. For organic processing markets, commercial customers are mainly concerned with size, not cosmetic appearance. Even with interested customers, he found that there were no guarantees of a market because they sometimes had enough product for their needs.

Price premiums are important to Gene because he has noticed that crop yields do fall off in organic fruit production; in addition, Gene felt premiums are needed to balance the risks in organics such as crop loss due to insect damage. In conventional production, there is plenty of "ammo" according to Gene to address insect and disease issues. That is a bigger gamble in organics. He has concerns about loss of price premiums with larger companies and farms getting into organics and driving down prices. He takes a conservative approach, recommending that farmers who are thinking about organics ask themselves "how much can you afford to lose?"

Gene's long-term organic farm goal is for "sustainable self-sufficiency", something he feels is still in the distant future. He is cautiously optimistic, knowing one thing for sure--the future "is guaranteed to be different".

Keys to Successful Transition

- Allow time for perennial crops like fruit trees to adapt to an organic system
- Establish relationships with customers and explore possible markets before you get into organic production
- Utilize agriculture specialists and experts who can conduct research and provide assistance in managing the organic transition for your farm



Profile #4 Fred Leitz Leitz Farms LLC

- Located in Sodus, MI (Berrien County)
- Large-scale wholesale vegetable producer (500 acres tomatoes, 200 acres cucumbers); apples; grains
- 5 acres certified for organic tomatoes
- Certified by Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA)

Commercial grower creates organic tomato niche to stay “a step ahead”

Fred Leitz approaches his family farm business with a keen eye to the bottom line. A 4th generation farmer operating an \$8 million operation with 250 seasonal employees, Fred tries to maximize the potential of his land, believing that “every acre has to be viable.” Leitz Farms used to be primarily tree fruit orchards, but with a drop in fruit prices in the 1970s, the family began vegetable farming with about 40 to 50 acres of tomatoes. That grew to about 375 acres by the late 1980s, and today they have over 500 acres in tomatoes, along with other crops such as cucumbers. In addition, they lease land for use in crop rotations, growing various cover crops on that acreage. Their vegetables are marketed to wholesalers and chain retail stores during the prime summer produce season.

Fred and his family have invested in innovation to keep the farm “a step ahead.” He was the first farmer to bring the grape tomato to Michigan markets. He created and continues to promote his own label for fresh market, hand-picked tomatoes--the “None Better” brand. When Leitz Farms began growing cucumbers in the late 1980s, they would take them off-farm for packing. By the 1990s, they added their own cooling, storage and packing facilities on-farm.

Fred watched the growth trend for the organic food market, and in 2004, he decided to try organic tomatoes on about 1 1/2 acres, knowing that at least some of his current buyers were interested. He consulted written materials to learn about organic certification and production, and in addition, talked with Michigan State University specialists.

The transition into organics was made easier by planting in a field that had been growing a ‘clean’ cover crop as part of their field rotations. As a result, Fred could apply for certification in the first year. He recalls that he didn’t have his organic certificate until September of that first season, and that delayed his ability to market the crop. He recommends starting the certification process early to avoid this problem. Because he grew more organic tomatoes than his interested buyers could purchase, Fred had to find additional markets in order to sell the entire crop.

Fred now has 5 acres in organic tomatoes, and is in his third year of organic production. Because he has a ‘split’ operation with organic and conventional production, there are some special challenges. His certifier looks for assurances that the farm’s production is moving in the direction of organic production as required by the certification rules. The farm’s production, harvest, packing and storage processes must be managed to prevent commingling and contamination of the organic crop. Equipment must be carefully cleaned. Because he has food safety certification, he is accustomed to following strict practices and keeping records, although he notes that the additional organic crop paperwork is tedious. From a marketing perspective, he sometimes combines his organic and conventional crop because premiums for the organic crop are not high enough to justify the extra labor costs for special handling and cleaning.

Fred notes that his venture into organics has been a valuable “learning thing” for his farm. His production costs for the organic tomatoes are lower because there are no fumigants used, although the yield per acre is lower. He thinks the organic crop also is better looking. Having land available in crop rotations is an advantage because he can start up a new field as organic with no waiting period for certification.

Many practices used for his conventional tomato crop such as plastic mulch and drip irrigation also can be used in organic production. Since he started in 2004, he has seen better organic greenhouse products become available to help grow stronger organic transplants.

He would consider growing other organic vegetables, but sees some crops as too difficult to tackle in Michigan's climate, and would want buyer support such as advice for alternatives to chemical management to allow him to get experience with organic production of new crops. He sees potential in the organic industry, and already has invested in a future crop of organic blueberries.

Although the organic crop produced by Leitz Farms is a small part of their overall operation, Fred shared concerns echoed by many organic farmers. He sees fraud as a serious problem in farmers' markets, with farmers and resellers illegally marketing foods as organic. He also is critical of global trade markets that promote free but not fair trade, for organic and conventional farm products, where producers do not follow comparable rules for environmental protection, pesticide use or fair labor practices. Hand labor is also a critical issue, for both his organic and conventional crops, because he can't operate a farm of his size without an adequate pool of available immigrant workers.

Looking forward, Fred wonders how the impact of rising food costs will affect organic premiums, and how much more consumers will be willing or able to pay for organic when all foods cost more. He also observed that rising fuel costs have already changed markets for his products. These costs are a "short-term hurt, long-term help" for his farm because while he pays more in production costs, he now has access to markets that don't want to pay the higher costs of long-distance transportation.

Keys to Successful Transition

- Having 'clean' land used for rotations and cover crops that can be planted and certified in one season
- Keeping track of 'split' production by good recordkeeping and on-farm management practices that avoid commingling or contamination of the organic crop
- Identifying multiple markets for your crop



Profile #5 Bernie Ware Ware Farm

- Located in Bear Lake, Michigan (Manistee County)
- 172 acres, some wooded; 85 tillable with about 16 acres in production; all acreage is certified
- Asparagus, strawberries, blueberries, vegetables; small variety of other processed farm products (pies, pickled asparagus, etc.)
- Certified by Ohio Ecological Food & Farm Association (OEFFA)

A different farm business with fewer acres, new crops, a better lifestyle

Bernie Ware likes to call himself a “reformed” industrial farmer. His father bought their Bear Lake land in 1950, and over many years, the farm business was developed to grow 20 acres of asparagus, 25 acres of pickling cucumbers and 20 acres of strawberries for processing and wholesale markets.

Bernie bought the farm from his father in the mid-1980s. Along with his wife Sandee and his father, Bernie continued to run the farm business selling asparagus and strawberries to fresh market wholesale buyers, while the cucumbers were sold on contract by the semi-load. Even with their aggressive marketing efforts and long-term relationships with commercial wholesale and retail buyers, competition in the fresh and processed markets was increasing, and it became more difficult to negotiate good prices.

In the mid-1990s, Bernie and Sandee attended some business management courses offered through Michigan State University Extension. They were advised to expand and get bigger to survive but they had concerns about added costs for land and bigger equipment, and the additional time it would take to manage more land. They didn't want to feel caught in the “big machine” of the conventional farming system.

At about the same time, they began experimenting with compost as part of their production practices, and increasingly used integrated pest management (IPM) to manage costs for pesticide use. Sandee was a long-time organic gardener, with an interest in environmental and ecological issues. In 1995, Bernie and Sandee began attending meetings of the northwest chapter of Organic Growers of Michigan. They also started reading about organic farming in *ACRES* magazine, and attended the annual *ACRES* farm conferences.

These on-farm changes in practices, their off-farm learning, and their reluctance to just ‘get bigger’ gave Bernie and Sandee confidence to move into organic farming as part of the farm's future business plan. Bernie saw the economics of this transition as a favorable way to compete in increasingly competitive fresh strawberry markets, even though he had no specific buyer in mind for these new organic products, and despite his father's concerns that lower quality organic products would cause them to lose some of markets. In 1997, they started to transition a 10 acre field of established strawberries, selling those berries as conventional during the transition period. It was difficult to manage strawberries both conventionally and organically because the equipment would have to be specially cleaned before use in the organic field. After that first year of transition, Bernie decided to make all strawberry fields organic, and at the same time, cut back on the total number of acres in strawberries. Cover crops were planted on the uncultivated acres.

As they transitioned further into organics for the farm, they also reduced the number of acres in cucumbers. At the time, no contract buyer was interested in organic cucumbers at a premium, so they concentrated on making more direct sales at higher prices. The asparagus crop moved into organic

transition by taking the older fields out of production. With increased competition in fresh asparagus markets, it was becoming more difficult to find adequate prices for conventional asparagus, so having fewer acres of a higher value organic crop made sense.

With fewer total acres in production, costs for hand harvesters were reduced even with increases in workers' wages. Bernie eventually stopped growing pickling cucumbers for the contract processing market, finding that yield and production per acre was not as important as getting high value for what he was growing.

Ware Farm now grows about 2+ acres of strawberries, with plans to expand up to 3 or 4 acres, 7 acres of asparagus, with plans to expand, 1 acre of blueberries, and 4 acres of vegetables. Markets for their products have changed dramatically--they now sell at 3 farmers' markets in northern Michigan, to a local food cooperative, and through a community supported agriculture (CSA) program. In addition, even with transportation costs, Bernie found profitable direct markets for his organic strawberries in the Detroit and Grand Rapids area through large orders from consumer buying clubs. These buyers are highly motivated, willing to pay good prices, and are able to buy quickly when this fragile, highly perishable crop is ready.

As part of their interest in not "practicing business" the usual way, the Wares began and built up what is now a successful 70 family CSA. The Wares grow a variety of vegetables, and local families purchase a membership share of the farm's vegetable production for the summer season, with weekly pickups of the harvested produce either on-farm or at two other locations.

In an effort to make more time for themselves, the Wares stopped selling products on-farm other than through the CSA. The Wares have added youth-focused projects on-farm that involve cultural exchanges, food system education and summer camp experiences. CSA members bring their children to the farm to visit a children's garden and playscape, and members participate in cooking demonstrations to learn more about how to use the food they receive in their farm shares.

Sandee and Bernie discovered a talent for making certain processed goods on the farm, and for a few years, they canned things like pickled asparagus and baked a variety of fruit pies sold on-farm, at farmers' markets and special events. They no longer have convenient access to a licensed processing kitchen, so they continue to sell available product, and do only special orders for their pies. They still discuss ideas for an on-farm processing kitchen, but have no specific plans for now.

Hand labor, help with farm oversight and weed management have been, and continue to be, issues for the now 100% organic farm. With fewer acres in production, hand harvesters don't make as much money working on their farm as they once did, so workers can be harder to find. Family, neighbors and others pitch in to provide labor from time to time, but having a few young experienced farm workers coming back for several seasons has enabled Bernie and Sandee to take time away from the farm, an important lifestyle benefit for them.

Bernie and Sandee's goals for the farm as they made the transition into organics have evolved over time. The Wares are not looking to expand and grow the business with more acreage or production. Rather, they have scaled back production and adjusted their needs to live more modestly, and to explore other interests. According to Bernie, this way is a more "nourishing" way to farm.

Keys to Successful Transition

- Ability to develop new markets focused on value, not yield per acre
- Willingness to venture into new crops and to reduce acreage
- Being open to new, evolving visions for the farm and their farm lifestyle

Conclusion

While each farmer's experience with organic transition is unique based on his circumstances and the crops he produces, there are several similarities among the farmers who were interviewed for these profiles. All farmers focused immediately on marketing challenges for an organic crop that would require new and different markets. Despite growth in the organic food sector and consumer demand for organic foods, farmers still face barriers in locating acceptable buyers for their organic products--buyers who are willing to pay appropriate premiums or who can buy large enough quantities of product at the right time. All farmers also were willing to be innovative and different, taking risks to reach for a reward of farm profits or a better future for the farm. Finally, each farmer took the initiative to learn how to make the organic transition work, with few resources available for support.

To address some of the issues raised by farmers in these profiles, agriculture specialists and educators in Michigan should consider how to offer tools and assistance for farmers interested in organic transition, such as guidance for decisions on how much land to transition, which crops to grow organically, or how to better access markets for organic crops. State and federal policy makers need to ensure that the organic label continues to reflect high standards, with enforcement at the local level that targets fraudulent sellers.

Resources

The following resources offer practical tips and guidance for Michigan farmers interested in organic certification and transition to organic farming.

Gaining Ground--Making A Successful Transition to Organic Farming (Canadian Organic Growers 2005)

This handbook features real-life experiences from organic farmers and practical, technical crop and soil management advice for farmers managing the transition to organic farming.

The New American Farmer, 2nd Edition (SARE 2005)

This book (also available as a PDF) includes profiles of more than 60 farmers and ranchers in the United States trying different approaches to farming to increase farm profits, improve environmental stewardship on their land, and add value to their communities. Visit <http://www.sare.org/publications.naf.htm>.

ATTRA (http://attra.ncat.org/organic.html)

The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service offers a wide variety of technical publications on organic farming and organic certification through its ATTRA website.

Michigan Organic Food & Farm Alliance (www.moffa.org)

This nonprofit membership organization organizes a statewide organic farming conference each spring, and publishes *Eating Organically*, a buying guide featuring many Michigan organic farms that market fruits, vegetables, livestock and other products.

New Farm (http://www.rodaleinstitute.org/new_farm)

A program of the Rodale Institute, this website includes an on-line training program for organic transition and other tools and resources such as the Organic Price Report.

New Agriculture Network (http://www.new-ag.msu.edu/)

This website offers resources from Michigan State University, Purdue University, and the University of Illinois, who have joined together to bring seasonal advice to field crop and vegetable growers interested in organic agriculture.

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