

About the Author:



Tom Tomas has been with ICS since 1991. Experience with greenhouse operations and knowledge in horticulture and Ag Business are just a few of the things Tom brings to the Certification Committee.

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**Feed Your Family—Feed the Soil**

by Thomas N. Tomas

It is not too late to plant food for your family in the garden. The weekend of the 4th of July I usually try to plant a late crop of beets, green beans and cucumbers. They will mature in September. I love the smell of pickling in the kitchen in the fall and the green beans have a better quality going into the freezer than those that mature in hot weather. In mid August I will plant a fall crop of lettuce and spinach for fall salads.

Through-out July and August I will plant cover crops to feed the soil in the garden for next year. When I harvest my onions and garlic I will plant buckwheat. I work the soil about an inch or so deep and rake in the buckwheat seed I have broadcast over the bed. If I catch a rain just right or water the seed in I will have a crop of warm season weed seeds germinate along with the buckwheat. Within a week or two the buckwheat will smother the weeds before they even have a chance to think about setting seed and there will be fewer weed seeds for next year. The buckwheat will grow about two feet tall and be in bloom in time for the migrating butterflies in the fall. The blossoms also provide nectar and pollen for beneficial insects. The green plants may be tilled into the soil in late fall or covered with a foot of leaves and left to digest until spring but the greatest benefit comes from the root action underground.

Buckwheat has a reputation for making phosphorous more available to crops following it. This may be because the roots provide good habitat for the bacteria and fungi that have the ability to extract phos-

phorous that is tied up in the soil in forms unavailable to plants by themselves. When you pull up a buckwheat plant you will notice how much soil clings to the roots, almost as if it is glued on. Well, actually it is glued on by the sugars and complex polysaccharides exuded by the plant. These feed the bacteria and fungi, which in turn dissolve minerals and make them available to the plant.

This is why green manures do so much to improve the soil. This is also what is meant by feeding the soil. We are actually feeding the bacteria, actinomycetes and fungi that do the real soil building. We are also feeding the earthworms with the dead roots and tops when they become available. We are feeding the living community of the soil.

Annual rye grass is another good cover crop for the garden. It may be planted from August through mid September and will grow until snow covers it. It will be converting sunshine into soil food well into early winter. This is another benefit of a cover crop. You will be providing a crop to capture carbon from the atmosphere. I doubt that this will qualify for carbon sequestration credit payments but you will be doing your small part to return carbon to the soil where it will benefit us all and your soil most of all.

Start now to find a source of seed for your fall cover crops.

## Calendar Of Events

- July 22: Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society's Summer Symposium
- Aug 5-7: Mon-Dak Ag Open
- Oct 16-18: Expo East

ICS will be attending each of these events. Please contact us if you wish to meet with a representative.



## Classifieds

Please contact Brandi Eissinger, Marketing Specialist, to place a classified ad in the ICS Sustainable Times. Classified ads are free to ICS clients; ad rates available to non-ICS clients.

## Submissions

Letters to the editor are welcome. Please include complete contact information including your daytime phone number and signature. All letters are subject to printing in our newsletter, however submission does not guarantee printing. Letters may be edited and cannot be returned.

For information on submitting an article, or if you have any ideas on articles that you'd like to see in our newsletter, please contact Brandi Eissinger at 701-486-3578 or via email at brandi@ics-intl.com. Letters to the editor may be sent to this same address.

## Feedback

ICS welcomes and encourages feedback on our FVO Requirements as well as the other programs we offer. We also encourage comments and suggestions on our newsletter and website. If there is anything else you'd like to see, please let us know and we'll do our best to get you what you need.

To submit your feedback, either contact your Customer Care Specialist, email info@ics-intl.com, or contact our office at 701-486-3578.

## Resources for New Organic Growers

Looking for answers of how you should do things and what exactly the NOP requirements are asking of you? Or do you know of someone considering transitioning to organic? The following are only some of the good resources available to everyone:

- The New Farm: <http://www.rodaleinstitute.org/home>
- ATTRA—National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service: <http://www.attra.org/>
- Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education: <http://www.sare.org/>
- Foundation for Agricultural and Rural Resources Management and Sustainability: <http://www.farrms.org/>; info@farrms.org or 701-486-3569
- USDA National Organic Program: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/indexIE.htm>
- Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service: [www.mosesorganic.org](http://www.mosesorganic.org) or 888-551-4769
- Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society: [www.nebusag.org](http://www.nebusag.org)
- Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society: [www.npsas.org](http://www.npsas.org); npsas@drtel.net; 701-883-4304 (or 5205)

## New Web Site Serves North Dakota Organic Industry:

BISMARCK – North Dakota’s organic agriculture industry now has its own web site – [www.ndorganics.nd.gov](http://www.ndorganics.nd.gov).

Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson and Brad Brummond, Park River, chairman of the North Dakota Organic Advisory Board, unveiled the new web site Thursday, June 19th, at a news conference in Bismarck.

“This resource brings North Dakota’s organic community – organic producers, suppliers, processors and consumers – together,” Johnson said. “It provides certification information, consumer information, links to other sites and an overview of organic farming in our state.”

“This is the first comprehensive web site of its kind for the organic industry in North Dakota,” Brummond said. “It’s a must-see for anyone interested in North Dakota organic agriculture.”

“One of the key features of the web site is the on-line directory for users to find a producer or processor by name, town or product,” Johnson said. “Take buckwheat for example; just type ‘buckwheat’ in the directory search engine, and the names and

producers and consumers asking who sells what or who buys what,” Brummond said. “Now, people have a ready resource for finding organic commodities and customers.”

The web site also includes marketing information, links to other agricultural and organic sites, and an events calendar.

The web site is maintained by the North Dakota Organic Advisory Board and is hosted by the North Dakota Department of Agriculture (NDDA).

The 14-member advisory board, created in 2006, provides organic industry stakeholders with a forum to work with NDDA in developing and promoting organic production, certification, processing and marketing industries.

Johnson noted that as of 2005, North Dakota ranks second in the nation in organic cropland acres and seventh in organic pasture.



contact information of 15 producers appear.”

The next planned feature of the web site will be an online classified advertising section for North Dakota organic producers to post their products for sale for up to 30 days at no charge.

“We have needed this for years – I get phone calls all the time from organic

## Keep The Comments Coming!

With another inspection season under way, our clients will find themselves with a couple surveys to fill out. We realize that your spare time is slim, especially at this time of year, but please take a few moments to complete these short surveys.

One is the Survey of Inspected Party. On this survey, you can rate and com-

ment on the performance of the inspector sent to your operation. The comments on this form give us an idea of new training needs for our inspectors and how we can make your following inspections go smoother.

The other form is our Service Survey. Use this form to give comments and

suggestions on the service you receive from ICS—whether it is from your Customer Care Specialist, our Accounting Department, or anyone else within our office. You can also comment and make suggestions on the general procedures of ICS.

Working together, we can make the certification process as efficient and

## New Farmers' Guide to Disaster Assistance Available

ST. PAUL, MINN. - A familiar resource has been thoroughly revised and updated for farmers who are struggling in the face of natural disaster, and for farmers who want to learn more about the disaster assistance programs included in the 2008 Farm Bill. Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. (FLAG) announces that the sixth edition of its book, Farmers' Guide to Disaster Assistance, is now available.

"This updated sixth edition of Farmers' Guide to Disaster Assistance provides farmers current information on important legal issues such as program eligibility, obligations of farmers who participate in the programs, and appeal rights," says Jill Krueger, a FLAG staff attorney and one of the book's authors. "We were able to include an overview of provisions from the 2008 Farm Bill in the introduction, and to add key points in the discussion of each affected program. But we won't know all of the details until USDA publishes regulations for the programs."

Farmers' Guide to Disaster Assistance includes an easy-to-use chart that provides an overview of federal disaster assistance for farmers. Individual chapters provide detailed descriptions of programs offered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (including housing assistance and disaster unemployment), federal crop insurance, the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), disaster assistance programs for livestock producers, Emer-

gency Loans from the Farm Service Agency, the Disaster Set-Aside program for existing loans from Farm Service Agency, Small Business Administration disaster loans (including both home and business loans), as well as brief discussions of bankruptcy and federal income tax issues as they relate to losses caused by natural disaster. A new appendix addresses considerations unique to organic farmers.

The book uses clear language and detailed citations to applicable laws to help farmers and their advisors understand and obtain federal disaster assistance. Updated information will be posted on the FLAG website.

The book can be downloaded by chapter at no charge from FLAG's website. A bound copy of the book is available without cost to financially distressed Minnesota farmers by calling 1-877-860-4349. For other persons, the charge is \$40 per book, and orders can be placed by calling FLAG's office at 651-223-5400 or by visiting the FLAG website at [www.flaginc.org](http://www.flaginc.org). The book is also available on CD for \$10.

FLAG is a nonprofit law center in St. Paul, Minnesota, dedicated to providing legal services to family farmers and their rural communities in order to help keep family farmers on the land.

## More Help Available on ICS Website

ICS has recently added a few new sections to our website. The first is called "New to Organic?" This section is not only for those new to organic or to ICS, but for anyone who could use a little help with understanding procedures or requirements.

We have also increased the number of resources on our Links page. These sites offer good advice and assistance to those in the organic industry.

Also new on our website is our Forums. These discussion boards are intended to allow clients—both new and experienced—the opportunity to both seek and offer advice to others in the industry. Please feel free to make use of these boards to ask other organic growers or processors for advice, or to answer others' questions.

The discussion boards do require registration on the site. Although having to register can be an annoyance for some people, it is needed to keep spam at a minimum. We thank you for your patience and hope you will make use of these boards to communicate with each other in the organic industry.

We are continuously trying to improve our website to give our clients more of what they need for their operation. If you have any ideas on information we can add to the "New to Organic" section, or other ideas for our website, please email Brandi Eissinger ([brandi@ics-intl.com](mailto:brandi@ics-intl.com)).

# New Guides to Help Farmers Understand and Negotiate Organic Dairy Contracts

ST. PAUL , MINN. ~ The organic milk market is competitive, and organic dairy producers need information to understand their options when selling organic milk. Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. (FLAG) announces two new articles to help farmers negotiate organic dairy contracts. The articles contain important legal information for dairy farmers interested in selling organic milk to a processor, as well as for those who are already doing so.

The first article is called *When Your Processor Requires More than Organic Certification: Additional Requirements in Organic Milk Contracts*. It reviews contracts for the sale of organic milk that were used in 2007. All of these contracts required that farmers have organic certification. But all of the contracts also included farm practice requirements that went beyond those required for organic certification. For example, requirements related to access to pasture are often spelled out in greater detail than is currently included in National Organic Program regulations. Additional requirements are generally lawful. Farmers should be sure that they understand how to comply with the additional requirements, and how they will show that they have complied.

The second article is called *Hushed Up: Confidentiality Clauses in Organic Milk Contracts*. Some contracts for the sale of organic milk require farmers to agree not to disclose the terms of the contract with any other party. These contract clauses can discourage farmers from seeking legal advice, or from discussing farming or financial concerns

with other farmers or financial advisors.

"Farmers should read and understand their contracts before they sign them. That is the best time for them to try to negotiate the terms of the contract. Once they have signed a contract with a processor, they should keep a copy for their records," notes FLAG attorney Jill Krueger.

Ed Maltby, Executive Director of the National Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA) stated, "We believe that these articles will help organic dairy producers to make informed decisions for their own farming operations, as they strive to continue to meet consumer expectations for organic milk." Farmers may request a copy of one or both articles by calling FLAG's office. Minnesota callers should dial FLAG's office at 1-877-860-4349. For out-of-state callers, the number is 651-223-5400. A small fee is charged for printing and mailing costs for non-farmers. The articles can be downloaded at no charge from FLAG's website at: [www.flaginc.org](http://www.flaginc.org) <<http://www.flaginc.org/>> . They can also be downloaded from the NODPA websites at: [www.organicmilk.org](http://www.organicmilk.org) <<http://www.organicmilk.org/>> or [www.nodpa.com](http://www.nodpa.com) <<http://www.nodpa.com/>> .

Go to Hushed Up <<http://www.flaginc.org/topics/pubs/index.php#HushedUp>>

Go to When Your Processor Requires More than Organic Certification <<http://www.flaginc.org/topics/pubs/index.php#PracticeStandards>>

## New Certifications

### FVO Certifications:

Barnhardt Manufacturing, Co.,  
Massachusetts—Processor/  
Mfg  
Running Quail Ranch—Family  
Farm



ICS welcomes the following organizations to our family of certified clients. We're proud to have you with us.

### NOP Certifications:

Carlyle Cocoa Company, LLC—Processor/Mfg  
Empire Kosher Poultry, Inc.—Processor/Mfg  
Guptill, Pat & Mary Lou—Family Farm  
Medallion International, Inc—Processor/Mfg  
Morgan-TODT, Inc dba United Cold Storage—Contract  
Service

## Help From Your CCS: Preparing for Your Inspection

Whether it's your first organic inspection or your fifth, what you need to have available on the day of the inspection – and what this inspection will entail – can still be confusing. The most important part of organic certification, and what the inspection is meant to prove, is that your product can be tracked from field or point of purchase to the consumer to be free of chemicals and contamination from non-organic products. All those in organic production know first-hand that this tracking requires a great deal of paperwork and a good organizational system in place. To help you get through this inspection, ICS has developed a few tips. Some of these may not be relevant to your operation.

**1) Update your Production Plan:** Each year clients must submit an updated production plan. However, it often happens that changes are made to this plan between the time it is in and when the inspection happens. Make notes of these changes on your copy of the production plan and have copies available for the inspector.

**2) Resolve Previous Non-compliances:** Each year clients receive documentation of anything in their production plan that isn't in compliance or needs further information for determination of compliance to be made. Review all non-compliances you've received documentation on and be prepared to show the inspector what actions you've taken to correct them. Make certain all documents are available to provide more information on items requiring more specifics.

**3) Self-audit Your Recordkeeping:** Have all your records updated and available the day of the inspection. Go through your system so you can better explain your recordkeeping system and can easily find the paperwork the inspector may request.

**4) Make Arrangements for the Inspection:** To make the process run smoother, make arrangements to be able to devote enough time and attention with the inspector. Prepare a place – even if it's the kitchen table – for the inspector to be

able to sit and handle the paperwork. Be certain there will be access to all fields/facilities and appropriate travel arrangements to get to fields/facilities that are farther away. Make certain you tell the inspector beforehand that there will be other fields/facilities that will require more time to get to so he/she can also be better prepared.

**5) Be Comfortable:** The inspector isn't there to find things wrong with your operation – only to ensure that your product is indeed organic. The on-site inspection is important in giving you the assurance that your philosophies and concerns are being met as well as leading to the organic certificate you need to market your organic product. It can also help you come up with better, more efficient ways of recordkeeping.

Remember, if you have any questions or are unclear of what you need to have available and what needs to be inspected, contact your Customer Care Specialist before the day of inspection.

## Help from Your CCS:

### Check Your Mail!

ICS is required by the NOP to send Notice of Inspection Findings via certified mail. This means you will have to sign for the letter. Please do so as soon as you find out you have certified mail as you only have thirty days to address any non-compliances.

Certificates are being sent out to those who've already addressed, or had no non-compliances. Please open these packets and look them over to ensure they're correct. Also, make certain you review your Certification Status List for any inaccuracies. If anything on the certification status needs to be corrected, please notify ICS within 30 days of receiving your certificates. Otherwise, your certification status will stand and will be used to calculate next year's fee.

### Input Labels Again?

*To continue certification, a certified operation must annually pay the certification fees and submit the following information, as applicable, to the certifying agent: (4) Other information as deemed necessary by the certifying agent to determine compliance with the Act and the regulations in this part. (§ 205.406 (a(4)))*

ICS realizes clients often use the same input products year after year; however, we deem it necessary to review these labels annually to insure compliance. We need to verify that the ingredients and/or method of processing hasn't changed in these products.

We want you, as the organic producer or processor, to be able to say without any doubt that your product does indeed meet the requirements of the National Organic Program (and IFOAM standard if applicable).

# Thinking Like a Community

## By Fred Kirschenmann

*Ecosystems that have not been disturbed for long periods of time (whether by humans or by natural disasters) tend to reach a state of dynamic equilibrium which ecologists call a climax phase, meaning that organisms have adapted themselves to one another in such a way as to maintain relatively constant population levels, to avoid direct competition, to keep energy flow-through to a minimum, and to recycle available energy and nutrients as completely as possible. They have formed, to use an anthropomorphic term, a community. – Richard Heinberg, *The Party's Over**

As I write this column I am a few days away from heading to my farm in North Dakota for my annual two weeks of “working vacation.” I always long for this time of year when I can actually “be there” on the farm. It is like rejoining a community I have missed.

And, as I have learned over the years, our farm truly is a “community.” The crops, animals, wildlife, native and introduced species (and the farmers) – even the soil microorganisms – form an interdependent set of relationships. Wastes from one organism become food for another, and all tend to adapt themselves to each other. From my perspective it isn't always benign, but it is a community.

Such relationships have real value. Wendell Berry once told me that the sheep on his farm have adapted to the place (the hilly landscape and unique grasses that are native to his area) such that they would be less valuable in another landscape. To be as productive elsewhere, they would have to go through a process of adaptation that would require energy – a cost to the animals and no doubt to the farm.

Some time later I asked a retired animal scientist friend of mine if this was true. He said, “Oh yes. In fact in Scotland an animal always was considered more valuable when it was sold with the farm than when it was sold separate from the farm. When it was sold with the farm it already was adapted to the place.”

There are clues in this kind of ecological thinking that may be important for us to keep in mind as we attempt to deal with impending constraints such as peak oil, climate

change, diminishing groundwater resources and other challenges. We tend to try and solve these problems by inventing novel technologies, without attending to their potential ecological consequences for the biotic community.

In past months the news media have been featuring the prominent role that “synthetic biology,” the science of re-arranging an organism's entire genetic code, can play in solving our energy crisis. (See Nicholas Wade's column, “Genetic Engineers Who Don't Just Tinker,” in the July 8 *New York Times*, and John Carey's “On the Brink of Artificial Life” in the June 25 *Business Week*). Synthetic biology promises to bring us an entirely new generation of organisms that can replace the goods and services currently provided by fossil fuels.

We, of course, already have learned (sometimes painfully) that the introduction of non-native species to an ecosystem can cause major, unanticipated disruptions, and that the loss of a species can produce extensive and unanticipated desolation, both of which can have serious economic consequences. Just ask North Dakota ranchers about the cost of invasive leafy spurge.

Having learned these lessons, ecologists like Kevin McCann now caution us that there is only one way to proceed: “If we wish to preserve an ecosystem and its component species then we are best to proceed as if each species is *sacred* . . . species removals (that is, extinction) or species additions (that is, invasions) can, and eventually will, invoke *major shifts in community structure and dynamics*” (emphasis mine). Thinking like a community is critical, and it seems that such thinking is in short supply as we attempt to deal with the challenges that confront us.

Our present ecosystems provide farmers with incredible free ecosystem services: pollinators, nitrogen-fixing organ-

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*Organic farming has been shown to provide major benefits for wildlife and the wider environment. The best that can be said about genetically engineered crops is that they will now be monitored to see how much damage they cause. (Prince Charles)*

## Thinking Like a Community (continued)

*(Continued from page 7)*

isms, predator/prey relationships that keep pests in check. Creating our imagined synthetic nature may not be a viable substitute for the nature we already have!

We still know so little about the nature we have; consequently, we could easily destroy vital ecosystem services without knowing it. Research recently conducted at McMaster University in Canada showed that plants can recognize their kin, suggesting that gardeners could inhibit root growth by placing plant siblings near each other and encourage root growth by placing strangers close to one another. (It seems that strangers compete while siblings do not.) What else are we missing because we know so little about our biotic communities?

None of this is to suggest that we humans have no role to play in disturbing nature or introducing innovations. Controlled burns can reinvigorate grasslands. Cross-breeding can revitalize plants and animals. We are part of nature and we can do our part. But we must think like a community and use ecological screens to help us decide which

technologies to introduce and which to forego because they may cause major shifts in the community's structure and dynamics. And we should do what we can to enhance the community's capacity for self-renewal (as Leopold advised), rather than introducing novel organisms for the sole purpose of serving our own immediate needs without attending to the potential damage they could do to the health of the rest of the community.

It is unlikely that we can do well unless the community does well. We are, after all, "plain members and citizens," as Leopold so eloquently put it.

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*"Thinking Like a Community" has been reproduced in its entirety.*

*This article first appeared in the Fall 2007 issue of the Leopold Letter, a quarterly publication of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University. The newsletter also is available on the Web at: <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs/nwl/leoletter.htm>*

