



TALK ORGANIC

MOSES ORGANIC FACT SHEET

What You Should Be Saying About Organic Farming

While it is important that organic farmers and their supporters respond to and refute incorrect information about organic agriculture, it is even more crucial to talk about what organic is and why it is a critical step towards a sustainable future. If we spend energy and time mostly reacting to critics, we allow others to control the dialog and the discussion. Instead of being reactionary, we need to be proactive and frame the message in our own way.

The most effective way for organic farmers and consumers to promote organic agriculture and foods is to refine their message and remain positive and factual. Whether talking to friends and family, writing an article or letter to the editor, giving an interview, or talking to a class of 5th graders, it is critical that we accurately and honestly convey what organic really is and why it is important.

Be Careful with “Organic is Not” Statements

It is easy (and common) to define organic by using “nots.”

- Organic farmers do not use pesticides.
- Organic farmers do not use antibiotics.
- Organic farmers do not use hormones.
- Organic farmers do not deplete the soil.
- Organic farmers do not use genetically modified organisms.

The problem with these types of statements is that they are absolutes that can be challenged; they also tell us nothing about “why” these things are important. Organic antagonists use absolute statements against us. For example, “organic farmers do not use pesticides” is not true. We do use a limited number of approved natural, and even a few synthetic products that are on the National List. We can’t even say things like “do not use toxic pesticides” (all pesticides are toxic to some degree). We could, and some marketers do say, “do not use persistent synthetic pesticides.” While this is a true statement, it actually brings up more questions than it answers. You can see the problem with absolute, negative statements—you can back yourself into a corner quickly and such statements never tell you “why.”

Use More “Organic is and Why” Statements

State the benefit of organic production and why it is

important to you. This is highly effective, personal, and true.

“My herd is healthier since I converted to organic production. As my soils have improved and the quality of my feed has improved, my animals rarely get sick and I almost never call the vet.”

“My crop production is very good now that my soils have been improved through cover cropping, crop rotations, and compost fertilization.”

“Our family’s quality of life has improved. Organic farming allows us to stay in business and do the right thing for the land at the same time.”

“Organic farming is a holistic system- everything we do is connected and carefully planned so we remain sustainable economically and environmentally.”

“Since we stopped using all of the chemicals, we see a lot more wildlife diversity on our farm.”

“I like farming in harmony with nature. Since we stopped using herbicides the earthworm population has really increased, which has really helped improve my soils.”

“My organic farm is inspected every year. This helps build trust with the organic consumer.”

“I was worried about weeds at first, but I have found



that a combination of cultivation, crop rotation and cover crops keeps them under control and I like not using herbicides.”

“I can’t use antibiotics but that is not a problem. My animals stay healthy by going outside, exercising, eating organic feeds and if needed, there are natural options to antibiotics that work for me.”

Talk About Organic as a System- Unique to Each Farm

From 205.2 Terms defined National Organic Standards

“Organic Production: “ A production system that is managed...to respond to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity.”

This is an excellent description, and we can use it to form a number of positive messages:

- Every organic farm has a unique farm plan – one that takes into consideration the specific conditions that exist on that farm.
- As an organic farmer, I am required and committed to protecting the environment while producing high quality, safe food.
- Organic farming is a system that relies on cultural, biological and mechanical practices to protect the soil and prevent pests rather than chemical inputs.

We tend to focus a lot on the National Organic Standards and how every organic farmer must follow the same rules. This uniformity is important, but we need to talk more frequently about the flexibility that each farmer has to create a unique and appropriate Organic System Plan. Every farm is different and every farm has its own plan. Personalize your message. Here are a few ideas on how to incorporate this into a discussion or interview.

“My farm is quite hilly, so my Organic Farm Plan includes erosion control strategies like contour strips, permanent grass waterways, terraces, and cover crops.”

“We have a trout stream on our farm, and our Organic Farm Plan protects this valuable resource. We fence out the cattle and have installed stream crossings so we can move our animals and equipment back and forth with minimal disturbance.”

“We minimize our need for pest control inputs by protecting wild areas, planting native flowering plants and installing bird houses. By encouraging the natural predators of pests, we can reduce or eliminate the need

for other types of pest control.”

“Our crop rotation plan includes row crops, cover crops, small grains, and hay. This combination improves the soil and breaks pest and weed cycles.”

“The size of our herd is carefully matched to our farm size. We can produce our own feed and the herd produces the manure to fertilize the crops and pastures- a sustainable system.”

“We prevent illness in our animals by following a preventative health plan which includes vaccinations, natural mineral supplements, aloe vera, and other herbs. Healthy animals are much less likely to get sick.”

The Final Message

Keep your comments positive and do not criticize conventional farmers, most of them are trying hard to do what’s right for their families and farms too. We have too many good things to highlight about organic agriculture. An upbeat, personal and honest message from you will resonate with consumers and be much more likely to convince skeptics.

Resources for More Information

6 Myths Busted by Organic in 2011 – Organic Trade Association

www.ota.com/organic/standards/Organic-Mythbusters.html

Food Facts- Organic Trade Association

www.ota.com/organic/mt/food.html

Why the Organic Haters are Dead Wrong – Rodale

www.rodale.com/organic-myths

The Organic Center

www.organic-center.org/

In Defense of Organic- Grist

grist.org/organic-food/2011-07-21-in-defense-of-organic/

The Environmental Working Group

www.ewg.org/

MIDWEST ORGANIC
& Sustainable Education Service
MOSES

The Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) provides education and resources to farmers to encourage organic and sustainable farming practices. To learn more, please see:

www.mosesorganic.org