

Iowa Organic Conference

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SPEAKERS

Speaker 3, Kathleen Delate, Christa Hartsook, Olivia Hanlon

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- C** Christa Hartsook 00:15
Hello, and welcome to the Small Farms Podcast, a production of the Small Farms Program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life.
 - O** Olivia Hanlon 00:29
In this episode, I interviewed Kathleen Delate, Iowa State Professor and Extension Organic Specialist, and talk about the upcoming Iowa Organic Conference. I'm Olivia Hanlon, Farm Food and Enterprise Development Extension Education Specialist and welcome to the show. Kathleen, welcome to the show. Thanks for being on.
 - K** Kathleen Delate 00:47
Thank you, Olivia, great to hear from you.
 - O** Olivia Hanlon 00:49
Could you tell our listeners a little bit about what exactly it is you do in your role for Iowa State Extension?

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Kathleen Delate 00:55

Sure, be happy to. Well, I'm called an Extension Organic Specialist and I'm also a full professor in the Department of Agronomy and Horticulture here at Iowa State. And in my extension role, I help give advice to farmers or agency people, anyone that wants to know about transitioning to organic or state of the organic industry. Right now in Iowa, we have about 134,000 acres of organic production, we're six nationally, as far as number of organic farmers, we have about 780 organic farmers, and the value of organic in Iowa keeps going up to about 145 million now, the value of the industry. We're number one in organic corn and soybean in the United States. And we produce 30% of the nation's organic oats. And all these numbers have gone up since the last USDA census in 2016. For example, our acreage has gone up 30% since 2016. So my playbook is full, I get a lot of calls, phone calls, emails, unfortunately, no face to face anymore. But although, I have been going out on farms to do my own farm research, because I also do research and teaching. And it's been great to be able to visit with farmers outside in the open air during this pandemic.

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Olivia Hanlon 02:17

Yeah, that's awesome. It's great to see folks getting back out there. And those are some awesome facts for our listeners to know. So you are also playing a role in the upcoming Iowa Organic Conference. Correct?

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Kathleen Delate 02:30

Correct. We are celebrating our 20th annual Iowa Organic Conference, I can't believe it. When I started in the year 2000. It was just a tiny conference at DMACC down in Ankeny. And well, the highest numbers we've had were about 400 people. We moved to Iowa City and have it at the University of Iowa traditionally, because that's where more organic farmers are on the eastern side of the state. This year, because of the pandemic, we are going virtual. University of Iowa has very strict rules about gatherings, they will not allow any gatherings of more than 50 people. So we knew that we'd have to go virtual long ago. So we've had a lot of planning around it. I have a planning committee. And one thing the planning committee decided, which is a little different from some other virtual conferences I've seen, is we don't imagine people want to sit in their chairs all day and watch on the computer sessions all day. So we're only going to have a half day. We're going to have it from 9:00am to 1:00pm on Monday, November 23.

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Olivia Hanlon 03:34

Awesome, could you give us a quick overview into kind of what people could expect from this conference?



Kathleen Delate 03:41

Sure. So what the planning committee did was look at a bunch of names of potential speakers. And we settled on four sessions starting at nine o'clock on November 23. So our first speaker is going to be Tom Harding. He's an international organic trade expert. He's worked with organic industry groups around the world. And he's going to bring a strong message of hope for organic especially during the pandemic because there seems like there's a lot more interest now of people knowing where their food comes from. And also there was this whole plethora of people growing their own food during the pandemic and wanting it to be organic. Our group, just a little plug here, did a series called gardening while isolated and just talked about organic practices to use in your garden, for example, because we had a lot of requests for that. So Tom's got that message of hope for surviving the pandemic by going organic. And then our second speaker is Dr. Joseph Heckman of Rutgers University, and he is a world renowned soil scientist who's been working in organic systems his whole life. He actually grew up on organic farm and he has his own little organic farm outside of Rutgers, and he will also bring a message of hope about how organic practices can increase your soil quality. And with global climate change, this is really critical to have more methods to sequester carbon and using organic practices like manure based amendments, compost, cover crops, normal crop rotations, that will enhance your soil quality. So that'll be probably pretty scientific presentation. But I told him, he's limited to only 50% slides of data slides, so hopefully, he will relate to everyone there. And then the last speaker for as far as farmers will be Jordan and Whitney Clawson of Grade A Gardens, a certified organic vegetable farm in Johnston, Iowa. And I'm just fascinated by them. Because I spent all since May, for the last five, six months going to their what I call COVID-safe farmers market in Des Moines, they only had about six vendors. Everybody wore masks, everybody socially distanced and it worked out really well. And plus, just to go there and get the bountiful Organic Harvest, they had probably I would guess, something like 30 different vegetables they grew over the season. So they've done really well during the pandemic. And I was really impressed by their operation and asked if they would speak and they agreed, fortunately. So we'll hear from them. And then lastly, we're going to have a cooking demonstration by the University of Iowa chefs using local organic ingredients. We brought them, for example, a bunch of our delicata winter squash that they're going to make this organic squash risotto from. They are the chefs that traditionally cook for us at Iowa City at the University of Iowa, Barry Greenberg and Anne Watson. They're fantastic chefs. Barry wins all these awards, and I don't know that the planning committee came up with this idea. I would never thought of it but it's gonna be cook along with the chef's this year. I'm sure our mouths will be watering, watching

everything they're gonna make. I haven't seen the full menu yet, I just know about the squash risotto. But anything they touch turns into a feast. So that'll be exciting to watch their cooking demo. And then we'll have basically 45 minutes of open forum and discussions. And at that point, people want to ask questions, the speakers, chefs, they can also ask questions of our what we call virtual exhibitors. Traditionally have a trade show with 40 to 50 exhibitors this year, they'll just have their information online, they'll still be showing it and a slideshow during the conference. Some have sent in short videos of their company so we can use those. And then if anybody wants has any questions for the exhibitors, they can ask them during that last period.



Olivia Hanlon 07:51

Well those sound like some great topics and a great chance to interact with some people, even though it is a virtual conference. I'm looking forward to watching the food one, although I do have to agree I think my mouth will be watering.



Kathleen Delate 08:04

That's what I'm worried about. It's like stay on the line, don't go eat yet!



Olivia Hanlon 08:09

Oh, perfect. Well, do our listeners need to register for this conference somewhere?



Kathleen Delate 08:17

Yes, so if you just the easiest thing is Google 2020, Iowa Organic Conference, it should pop right up. Otherwise, you can go through Iowa State Office of Conference Planning and Management. Or you can go to Iowa State Organic Agriculture website. And I have a link on my website. So it's a nominal fee of \$25, that'll cover our technology fees, and they'll have access to the website, we'll send them the link. And then they also get all the materials that the speakers are going to upload. And they'll have access to all the archives for up to a year. So it's a really good deal for \$25.



Olivia Hanlon 08:57

Absolutely. So if we would happen to have any potential sponsors listening, Kathleen, is sponsorship still open?

K Kathleen Delate 09:06

Yes, we readily welcome any new sponsors. So on that link, the conference like 2020 Iowa Organic Conference, there is a tab for Exhibitors Sponsors, but they're basically all sponsors this year. And so then you can click there, we have four levels of sponsorship, the highest level, you're welcome to send in a up to a one minute video about your company. And we've had four companies sign up for that. They can just to let anybody know that wants to do a video. It can be as simple as a YouTube or done on your cell phone and upload it as a mp4 file. So it doesn't have to be super sophisticated, just to get the word out about your company or your agency and if they have any questions, to be sure, and send me an email at kdelate@iastate.edu.

O Olivia Hanlon 10:02

Perfect. So if our listeners are looking for any more information on this conference or a full list of speakers and topics, where could they find that?

K Kathleen Delate 10:12

Right, well, by the all that information is listed on the web page 2020 Iowa Organic Conference. And there's different links on there with one with the agenda, it gives a full list of speakers and under each speaker, it has a link to more information about that particular speaker incase like Grade A Gardens, it'll have a link to their farm web page. And I believe by the way, they're gonna have another farmers market on the 21st, Saturday before our conference November 21. So if anybody's interested in catching that, that's their Thanksgiving farmers market. So just to let you know about that, and again, they are welcome to call me or email me, my number is 515-294-7069.

O Olivia Hanlon 10:57

This sounds like an awesome opportunity for all our listeners out there, Kathleen. Aside from this conference, are there any other organic educational events coming up that our listeners can look forward to?

K Kathleen Delate 11:08

Right, thanks for bringing it up, Olivia. Yes, we offer a transitioning to organic 16 week course run through Iowa State starting January 25, goes till May 7. And in that class, it's really a full blown course, we have both experts from Iowa State University and other universities. And then we bring in local farmers to talk about their experience and you

have the practical aspect. And it's all going to be run through them. So once you sign up for that, you'll get the link, and you'll be on your way. Now for the first time ever, and I think it's because there have been budget cuts here at Iowa State. They are charging \$200 for the 16 week course which really is a deal when you think about it, how much material are going to get because that's 48 hours of lessons for \$200. But we're also gonna have a link set up for scholarships. So if you want to take this course but you have some financial need, you can email me a kdelate@iastate.edu. And we can talk about scholarships. I have already five scholarships that I can hand out. So hopefully people will take us up on that. I will be advertising this more widely once I get the conference done. So like to advertise that here. Thank you.



Olivia Hanlon 12:32

Absolutely. That sounds like another great opportunity for folks and it's always great to be accommodating for those who may need it. Is there anything that we didn't cover today that you'd like to add, Kathleen?



Kathleen Delate 12:45

No, I appreciate what your doing getting the word out and supporting local. One thing that we did say during the pandemic was a pivot and many organic farmers part to ramp up their local sales. My dear little story on the Roseman farm out in Harlan, western Iowa. And they have a non-farm store, and that has skyrocketed during the pandemic. They've had a lot more interest from people buying local organic during the pandemic. They also are connected with a local restaurant, Milk and Honey, in downtown Harlan and I visited there twice over the summer just to see how they were going. Of course they were right there with mask requirements early on, and social distancing and keeping capacity at 50%. So they've been able to survive and actually thrive too. They do a lot of their sales through takeout which I know a lot of restaurants have pivoted to, to survive the pandemic but everybody pitching in everybody doing their part we'll get through this.



Olivia Hanlon 13:50

It was so great to talk to you today Kathleen about the conference and all of your knowledge on organic. Thanks so much for being on.



Kathleen Delate 13:58

Thank you so much, Olivia, good luck to you.



Olivia Hanlon 14:00

Thank you Kathleen.



Speaker 3 14:02

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