November 11, 2015

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News Release

Annual Iowa Organic Conference Highlights Biodiversity and Its Benefits, Nov 22-23

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 UI 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 to 5 p.m., in the UI Memorial Union. The Expo, co-sponsored by ISU 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.

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, ISU 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 [https://www.signmeup.com/108970](https://www.signmeup.com/108970).

The cost of the conference is $115 after Nov. 7. For additional conference information and directions to the conference, visit the webpage or contact Delate at [kdelate@iastate.edu](mailto: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.

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*News Release*

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**Registration Open for Midwest Dairy Day**

Register today for the Midwest Dairy Day *Genomics 101: Putting Genomics to Work* held on December 4 from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at Iowa’s Dairy Center located at 1527 Highway 150 S, Calmar, IA 52132.

The annual Midwest Dairy Day is a collaborative effort between Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, The Northeast Dairy Foundation, and Northeast Iowa Community College. The program will provide information on the use and application of genomic technology. Dairy producers, students and industry members are encouraged to attend.

“Improvement of dairy herd genetics can affect herd health, longevity, reproductive traits and many other vital aspects of dairy cattle production. It can also lead to increased milk production, milk quality and overall animal performance,” said Jennifer Bentley, dairy field specialist for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

Over the past few years, the integration of dense genomic information into statistical tools used to make selection decisions, commonly referred to as genomic selection, has enabled gains in predicting accuracy of breeding values for young animals. The possibility to select animals at an early stage allows defining new breeding strategies aimed at boosting genetic progress while reducing costs.

Midwest Dairy Day is free and generously supported by local businesses. The day will include a presentation from Dan Weigel of Zoetis and Carla Stetzer from Accelerated Genetics. The program will conclude with a panel of area dairy producers. Lunch will be provided for all participants. To register, call Northeast Iowa Community College at 800-728-2256, ext. 399. Registration deadline is Wednesday, November 25.

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**Related links:**

- [Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Dairy Team](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/dairyteam/)
- [Iowa’s Dairy Center](http://www.iowadairycenter.com/)
- [The Dairy Foundation, Northeast Iowa Community College](https://www.nicc.edu/dairysfoundation/)

**Images:**

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Workshops to Maximize Economic Returns to Fertilizer Expense

With low commodity prices predicted through next year, many farmers are looking to trim costs. For fertilizer, don’t simply trim overall costs but rather selectively maximize economic returns to fertilizer expense. ISU Extension is conducting small-group workshops for those wanting to understand soil tests and fertilizer recommendations.

“We will take a step-by-step approach on understanding what to test for, how labs provide test results, and how to turn those results into fertilizer rates”, says Brian Lang, agronomist with ISU Extension. Even if you already have soil testing and recommendations hired out to an agri-business, in two hours you can still gain a very good understanding of how to manage one of the top three dollar per acre expenses on your farm.

Knowledge gained from this program will likely allow you to selectively reduce fertilizer costs while improving income. The two-hour program is free but seating is limited, so please RSVP to the County ISU Extension office location listed below that you wish to attend. For more details about the program content, contact Brian Lang at 563-387-7058 or bjlang@iastate.edu

Dec. 18, 10:00 am to Noon, Dubuque Co. Extension office, 14858 West Ridge Ln., Dubuque, 563-583-6496
Dec. 21, 1:00 to 3:00 pm, Clayton Co. Extension office, 120 S. Main St., Elkader, 563-245-1451
Dec. 22, 10:00 am to Noon, Delaware Co. Extension office, 1417 N. Franklin St., Manchester, 563-927-4201
Dec. 28, 10:00 am to Noon, Allamakee Co Extension office, 210 7th Ave. SE, Waukon, 563-568-6345
Dec. 29, 10:00 am to Noon, Winneshiek Co. Extension office, 325 Washington St., Decorah, 563-382-2949
Dec. 30, 1:00 to 3:00 pm, Chickasaw Co. Extension office, 104 E. Main St., New Hampton, 641-394-2174
Jan. 4, 10:00 am to Noon, Howard Co. Extension office, 132 1st Ave. W., Cresco, 563-547-3001
Jan. 5, 1:00 to 3:00 pm, Fayette Co. Extension office, 218 S. Main St., Fayette, 563-568-6345

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