

**Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Project  
Producer Grant Final Report  
Certified Organic Associated Growers**

1. Restate the goals of your project.

The goals of the Certified Organic Associated Growers were initially three:

- o to bring Connecticut certified organic growers together to form a cooperative marketing association;
- o to connect Connecticut growers with the many food cooperatives and buying clubs throughout the state;
- o to tap the resources of the University of Connecticut and the State Department of Agriculture as well as the ideas of local growers to develop other marketing strategies.

2. Update the information on your farm since you received a producer grant. Include acres farmed, crops/livestock.

Since this was a marketing grant, the impact on the farms and crop production of the Connecticut certified organic growers who participated has been one of expanded production. Wayne Hansen of Wayne's Organic Garden in Oneco, CT expanded his production of garlic and specialty potatoes for distribution by other farmers, Bill Pallman of Windy Hill Farm expanded his corn crops for likewise distribution and four certified organic farmers in the southeastern part of Connecticut have begun to cooperatively plan their crops to complement each other for future joint ventures at farmers' markets. In addition, other farmers have begun to contact and cooperate with each other to supplement their crops or seek supplements.

We began, however, by sending notices to all of Connecticut's certified organic growers to convene an organizational meeting. This was done in January of 1996, before we knew whether or not we would receive SARE support. At that meeting, we talked about what a cooperative marketing corporation could do for farmers and set goals for 1996. (See minutes of January 13, 1996 meeting for long- and short-term goals.)

More significantly for the long run, one of the first goals that the group set at its first meeting was to "empower organics." This was further defined as empowering certified organic farmers to participate more in the agricultural organizations in the state as well as publicizing the existence of the state's certified organic farmers.

The Connecticut Chapter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association has historically been dominated by consumers and landscape businesspeople. Although NOFA/CT sponsors the Certification Committee, through which virtually all Connecticut organic growers are certified, these growers have always been a minority on the Board of Directors and there has never been a certified organic grower as President of its Board.

In the fall of 1996, at the annual meeting of NOFA/CT, the membership voted in a Board of Directors that contained a majority of certified organic growers and one of them was elected President. Also, that same fall, for the first time in the state's history, the seven-member Board of the Farm Fresh organization, which runs the state's farmers' markets, contained three certified organic farmers.

Those certified organic farmers who were elected to the NOFA/CT and Farm Fresh Board were either members of the Certified Organic Associated Growers (COAG) or were encouraged to run by members. We feel that the bringing together of certified farmers at the monthly meetings of COAG, and the resulting activity those meetings produced, "empowered" these growers to come forward and participate, on a decision-making level, in these organizations.

Upon receiving SARE support, we embarked on developing bylaws and filing for incorporation with the CT Secretary of State as a nonprofit cooperative marketing corporation. Both were accomplished by January, 1997.

In the 1996 and again in the 1997 session of Connecticut's General Assembly, members of COAG talked to legislators and the Departments of Agriculture and Consumer Protection about updating Connecticut's antiquated laws on what defines "organic." In the 1997 session, NOFA/CT joined with COAG in the legislative effort. On December 3, 1997, there will be a meeting at the State Capitol to develop an updated definition of certified organic for introduction into the Legislature for the 1998 session.

At this meeting will be the chairpeople of the Legislative committees on the Environment, General Law and Planning and Development (the three committees such a proposed change would have to pass) as well as state representatives of a number of certified organic farmers who have been educated about certified organic by their constituent farmers. Also attending will be representatives of the Commissioners of the Departments of Agriculture and Consumer Protection. (See attached information sheet which exhibits current definition and definition proposed by certified farmers.)

COAG also participated in the Agriculture Day at the State Capitol in March of 1997 and the Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Exposition at the State Armory in Hartford on October 25 & 26, 1997.

We produced two printings of a brochure that the members considered imperative: A Consumer Guide to Connecticut Certified Organic Produce. The first printing of 1000 was out by the end of the summer of 1996. A second printing occurred in 1997.

Membership drives were held in 1996 and 1997. Our member numbers totaled 30 out of the 47 certified growers by the spring of 1997. Dues were set at \$10 per year for each of those years. (See attached list of member farms.)

A directory of member farms was produced in early 1997 to be used as a marketing tool in approaching food cooperatives and buying clubs. Rather than host a separate conference to bring farmers and food cooperatives/buying clubs together, NOFA/CT offered to make that gathering one of its workshops during its Winter Conference. Unfortunately, the organizers of the Winter Conference failed to understand the purpose of the meeting, failed to send notices to the food cooperatives/buying clubs and billed the workshop as an event for farmers.

Despite the poor publicity, three representatives of food cooperatives/buying clubs attended. Since then, COAG has mailed notices to the entire list of over 100 food cooperatives/buying clubs in the state and we intend to make that list part of our regular mailing list for all future events. By the end of ~~the~~ 1997, several farmers were supplying food cooperatives/buying clubs with local and certified organic produce.

On September 14, 1997, COAG sponsored the first all-certified organic farmers' market in the state of Connecticut, called "Taste of Organic Connecticut." The event was held on the grounds of The Barney House, a conference center owned by the University of Connecticut. The event was an incredible success. Over 500 people attended and over \$3000 in certified organic, Connecticut-grown produce was sold in less than three hours. (See attached newsclips.)

At the market, videotape was taken and eventually produced into a half-hour program titled "Organic Connecticut." This videotape was shown continuously at the Agricultural Exposition and will be scheduled for cablecast on various public access channels in the state. (A copy of the videotape will be forwarded independently of this report as copies need to be made on 1/2" (vcr) tape from the 3/4" cablecast tape.)

COAG also produced bumper stickers that are being distributed at relevant events that state: SUPPORT CONNECTICUT'S CERTIFIED ORGANIC FARMERS. (Bumper sticker is enclosed).

3. Who were your cooperators and what were their roles in the project?

Cooperators include the CT certified organic farmers who joined COAG and who participated at meetings and other events. Other cooperators include: Steve Olsen, Farming Services Manager, Division of Agriculture, University of Connecticut; William Hopkins, Marketing Division, CT State Department of Agriculture; and, Kim Stoner, Research, CT Agricultural Experimentation Station, New Haven. (See membership lists and meeting minutes for complete list and activities.)

4. Tell us what you actually did in your project and how it was done.

For our activities and accomplishments, see answer to question 2. For details of documentation, see Documentation Manual which contains all records of COAG activities.

5. What were your findings and accomplishments? Did you have unexpected results? If so, what were they?

As suspected, marketing is the biggest obstacle that CT certified organic farmers face. Besides the cooperative selling that occurred since COAG was formed, the organization has become the network that certified organic farmers need to exchange ideas and solicit suggestions, not only about marketing, but also about crop selection, production and maintenance.

The unexpected results was the empowerment of CT's certified organic farmers, mentioned in the answer to question 2, which has greatly increased the participation of these farmers in agricultural activities in the state. In addition, as ideas generated more ideas, various farmers are embarking on activities with other farmers, and each COAG meeting seems to generate more ideas about how the state's certified organic farmers can engage in cooperative ventures to increase their visibility and sales.

6. Is there any specific site information relevant to your project or the results?

We believe that certified organic growers in any region or state could initiate a similar organization to address the needs of marketing their produce.

7. What were your economic findings (if relevant to your project)?

We found that many consumers are frustrated by the lack or infrequency of certified organic produce where they shop. This was evident by the response of those consumers who attended the "Taste of Organic Connecticut" and the response of the food cooperatives/buying clubs. Consumers in both situations expressed gratitude to the certified organic farmers who were offering their produce. We intend to continue and expand the linkages we have made with consumers in general and food cooperatives/buying clubs in particular.

8. Have the results from your project generated new ideas about what is needed to solve the problem you were working on? What would be the next step?

COAG will again participate in the Agricultural Day at the State Capitol and the Agricultural Exposition at the State Armory. In addition, goals have been set for 1998; those goals include:

- o complete the cycle of linking with food cooperatives/buying clubs by mailing a directory of COAG members to all food cooperatives/buying clubs in December of 1997 and mail to all COAG members the list of food cooperatives/buying clubs in early 1998;

- o continue to work on passage of updated CT legislation on certified organic and, as a group, participate in the comment period on impending federal legislation;

- o organize two one-day conferences for COAG members (offering to nonmembers at an additional fee); these workshops will be: a value-added marketing seminar, a soil building and small scale composting seminar; a produce manager/certified organic farmer seminar which will teach produce managers what certified organic means and farmers what produce managers want in terms of marketing produce to their stores (the CT State Department of Agriculture originally suggested this and will help with arrangements).;

- o explore various strategies to assist farmers with labor recruitment including talking to the vocational-technical high schools about their work/study programs and investigating apprenticeship programs;

- o based on the success of "Taste of Organic Connecticut" all-certified organic farmers' market, organize nine such markets in 1998 between May 1st and October 1st with six to seven being held at the original site, The Barney House in Farmington, and

two or three new test sites either in Suffield, New Haven, Branford, Windsor, Glastonbury, Westport or South Norwalk.

9. Will you continue to use the practice you investigated? Why or why not?

COAG has provided CT's certified organic farmers with a forum and network to address their marketing and other needs. Many members have expressed their delight in having such an organization and our membership recruitment, since January of 1996, continues to bring in a higher and higher percentage of the state's certified organic growers.

10. What do you tell other producers about your project and the results?

We are certainly willing to share any and all information about COAG with any farmers who request it. We are also constantly encouraging newly certified farmers, or farmers who have yet to join, and telling them about the benefits of membership.

## MEMBER FARMS OF CERTIFIED ORGANIC ASSOCIATED GROWERS OF CT

Alice	Rubin	Alice's Org. Garden	117 Miller Rd.	Chaplin	CT	06235 860-455-9658
Tony Norris &	Mike Kandefer	Aux Fines Herbes	Dimock Lane	Bolton	CT	06043 860-224-3724
Guy & Pat	Beardsley	Beardsley Organic Farm	276 Leavenworth Rd.	Shelton	CT	06484 203-929-3080
Lee	Bristol	Bloomingfields Farm	PO Box 5	Gaylordsville	CT	06755 860-354-6951
Chris & Evelyn	Morgen	Blue Moon Farm	15 Landing Hill Rd.	East Haddam	CT	06423 860-873-8089
Cipah	Shapiro	Blue Twine Farm	21 Polly Dan Rd.	Burlington	CT	06013 860-675-3619
John D.	Clark	Clark Farm	1037 Main St. N.	Woodbury	CT	06798 203-263-5801
Gail	Voisin	Everlasting Gardens	670 East St. S.	Suffield	CT	06078 860-668-4648
Elisa Santee &	William Trietch	Foxfire Farm	85 South Bedlam Rd.	Mansfield Ctr	CT	06250 860-455-0739
Rob	Miller	Full Moon Farm	314 Statcon Rd.	Hampton	CT	06247 860-455-1196
Gordon	Ridgway	Garden Ridgway	142 Town St.	W. Cornwall	CT	06796 860-672-0279
Gail	Bennett	Herbal Works	1028 Boulevard #272	West Hartford	CT	06119 860-233-0276
Hyman	Srulo	Johnny Random Farm	199 Cherry Ln.	Durham	CT	06422 860-349-3063
Nelson & Nancy	LaMonica	LaMonica Farm	1200 Halladay Ave.	Suffield	CT	06078 860-668-7898
Leonard	Urbanowitz	Leonard's Eco-Farm	49 N. Route 7	Falls Village	CT	06031 860-927-4079
Mark & Carol	Gauger	Maple View Farm	276 Locust Rd.	Harwinton	CT	06791 860-485-0815
Peter & Judith	Rothenberg	Northfordy Farm	53 Lanes Pond Rd.	Northford	CT	06472 203-484-9570
George	Hall	Ogre Farm	180 Old Farms Rd.	Simsbury	CT	06070 860-658-9297
Duesing	Family	Old Solar Farm	153 Bowers Hill Rd.	Oxford	CT	06478 203-888-9280
David M.	Blyn	River Bank Farm	33 River Rd.	Roxbury	CT	06783 203-350-3276
Marleen Cenotti &	Anthony Wight	Salt Meadows Gardens	21 Helen Rd.	Branford	CT	06405 203-488-9436

Janet	Nelson	Smith Farm	c/o AVP Box 435	Chester	CT	06412 860-526-5306
Jerry L.	Horkey	Spring Fed Farm	183 Packerville Rd.	Plainfield	CT	06374 860-564-1276
Teri	Natoli	Stone's Throw Farm	89 Music Vale Rd.	Salem	CT	06420 860-889-3714
Lee Warren &	Kathleen Duffy	Thankful Crcl. Farm	34 Schnoor Rd.	Killingworth	CT	06419 860-663-3126
Kathryn & Benedict	Caruso	The Upper Forty	86 Nooks Hill Rd.	Cromwell	CT	06416 860-632-9029
Joan and Tom	Kemble	Udderly Wooly Acres	581 Thompson St.	Glastonbury	CT	06033 860-633-4503
Messrs.	Horan	Waldingfield Farm	24 East St.	Washington	CT	06793 860-868-7270
Wayne M.	Hansen	Wayne's Org. Gard.	PO Box 154	Oneco	CT	06373 860-564-7987
Gordon	Whitbeck	Weatogue Farm	32 Locust Ave.	Salisbury	CT	06068 860-824-7504
Malcolm	MacLaren	Whipporwill Farm	PO Box 717	Lakeville	CT	06039 860-435-9657
William F.	Pallman	Windy Hill Farm	97 Beaver Head Rd.	Guilford	CT	06437 203-457-0626