BLUEBERRY WORKING GROUP
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Minutes
Organic Blueberry Working Group
March 17, 2006
Bacon County Extension Office

Group Members Attending:
Pete Anderson, Elvin Andrews, James Clark, Joe Coley, Gerard Krewer, Jerry Larson, Oscar Liburd, Allen Miles, Robert Price, Harald Scherm, Danny Stanaland, Neil Taylor, Relinda Walker

Others Attending: David Crosby and son

Group Members Absent:: Dan Horton, Steve Mullis, David Hardage

Meeting convened at 11:00 a.m.

Participants introduced themselves and their history related to organic blueberry growing.

Dr. Krewer announced the receipt of a three-year research grant of $354,166 from the USDA Integrated Organic Program to study organic blueberry production. Project will focus on establishment, fertilization, pest management and development of risk-based enterprise budgets. Money will be available in September or October.

There is expected to be overlap between this working group and advisory group established under the new grant. Dr. Krewer and Dr. Scherm are members of the grant research team as well as Organic Working Group members. We will add Dr. Anderson and Dr. Liburd to the working group and they will try to ensure that at least one of them attends each meeting.

Current blueberry production in south Georgia that is certified organic or in transition was estimated to be 130.acres

A general discussion of problems and needs for research, extension and infra-structure support produced the following list of issues:

Fertility issues.

- Need guidelines for use of manure, especially availability of nutrients
- Need to know more about manufacture of organic fertilizer
- Need technical and economic info to help maximize returns

Variety selection.

- Need to identify varieties most viable for organic production

Pest management concerns.

- Bird pests, particularly Cedar Wax Wings; grape extract as product?
- Insect pests: flea beetles (eat new growth), thrips, gall midge (buds in late winter), blueberry maggot, fire ants (esp young plants), gnats?
- Disease: mummy berry (Serenade?), leaf diseases; effectiveness of mulching for control
- Product availability, acceptability under NOP

Other issues.

- Processing: availability, NOP requirements for organic facilities

- Labor: hand versus machine harvesting; weed control
- Hygiene: moving machines between organic and chemical fields; possible purchase of dedicated machine(s) by Rural Development?

Informal discussion continued over lunch at the extension office. The following action items were proposed.

1. Group to compile list of bio-pesticides with which they have direct experience.
2. RW to obtain copies to share of SARE publication, *Resource Guide for Organic Insect and Disease Management*, which reviews organic pest-management materials and practices
3. Extension and growers to identify "abandoned" blueberry plantings that could be transitioned to organic production.
4. Dr. Krewer and Relinda to set next meeting date in late summer, after the peak of blueberry harvest.
5. Participants were reminded of the North American Blueberry Research & Extension Workers Conference in Tifton, June 4 – 8. An extended bus tour will include a stop at Allen Miles' organic blueberry field.

Meeting was adjourned at 1:30 p.m.

VIDALIA ONION WORKING GROUP
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Organic Vidalia Onion Working Group
April 6, 2006
Vidalia Onion and Vegetable Research Center
Minutes

Group Members Attending: Rick Berry, George Boyhan, Ralph Cavender, Shad Dasher, Mike Dollar, Chris Hopkins, Brad Phillips, Juan Carlos Diaz-Perez, Relinda Walker
Others Attending: Emily Cantonwine, Kadee Dasher, Jason Deal, Mr. Hill

Group Members Absent: Omar Cruz, Ray Hicks, Reid Torrance.

Meeting convened at 10:30 a.m.

Members introduced themselves and personal history relative to organic production; updated working group contact list (attached).

Group identified 45 acres in certified organic Vidalia Onion production for 2006 harvest; approximately 75 acres were planned or intended.

Group assessed "where we are" in organic Vidalia Onion production on scale of 1 to 5, with
1 = probably not feasible
3 = feasible but lots of problems to solve
5 = we've got it nailed down.

Individual assessments ranged from 3.0 to 5.0, with 3.5 as the most popular answer and an average of 3.6.

Members then addressed "What's needed to make organic production of Vidalia Onions viable and profitable?" Comments are loosely transcribed below; discrepancies or inconsistencies are a reflection of different experiences.

- Now we can produce yield equivalent to conventional onions but problem is seed bed – primarily weed control and cost of labor for hand weeding.
- Plant populations similar on plastic; fertility benefits on plastic.
- Biggest production problem is weed control; labor hours versus higher price for product.
- Dedicated equipment for organic production (to avoid contamination).
- Increase yield (now about 1/3 of conventional)
- Increase price. Some buyers want to pay only a few dollars more for organic. Plant population on plastic on some farms is 2/3 of conventional.
- Demand now stronger – price should be better.
- Reduce cost and raise yield =>Increase plant population.
- Jumbo size may be less interesting for organic buyers -- could provide opportunity for increasing population.
- Rotation could help to avoid soil-borne disease.
- Need better info, more open communication with Western universities and extension; for example questions regarding fertility to Texas extension.
- ➢ Dr. Boyhan offered info about national alliums meeting every 18 – 24 months; he will pursue contact with research personnel to ask questions.
- Use of plastic helpful, both in weed control and in nutrient and water management.
- Weed control: is corn glutin useful? Other products?
- Weed control: possibility of following livestock, especially pigs?

- Fungicides: how does disease management compare to conventional farms with intensive spray programs?
- Secret is you don't have to spray.
- Maybe its related to organic plants being less susceptible, not so "pumped up" with fertilizer
- Organic onions at research farm showed less disease than conventional which had been sprayed regularly.
- Possible cooperative effort to purchase specialized equipment, solve unique problems for organic growers
- Rotation could help with weed control.
- Untreated seed not a problem, but have to order early.
- Fertility not seen as a problem, though organic materials slower release.

SUMMARY; Weed control is key issue, especially for seed bed but also for transplant bed. Most growers felt that plasti-culture is the way to go on transplant beds, probably not viable for seed beds. Populations on transplant beds have to be increased for some growers. Premium prices must be maintained to offset costs, especially labor.

Research needs include

- Weed control, especially in plant bed;
- equipment for weed control, e.g., brush weeder (about $10k);
- plant populations, related to yields;
- cost reduction, especially related to labor.

Group proposed to ask Wendy Brannen (ED, Vidalia Onion Committe) and David Langston (plant pathologist) to join group. Both accepted in conversations after the end of the meeting.

Next meeting to be scheduled by George and Relinda in June or July to look at season results, make plans for next year.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:55 for Field Day lunch.

PEANUT WORKING GROUP
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Minutes of the Organic Peanut Working Group Meeting
April 21, 2006

The first meeting of the Organic Peanut Working Group was held at NESPAL, UGA Tifton Campus on April 19, 2006 from 10:30 to 12:00. The purpose of this working group is to promote organic production of peanuts in GA and neighboring states. The goal of this initial meeting was to develop specific objectives that the working group felt were important and realistic to tackle. Group members in attendance were Emily Cantonwine (UGA), Ralph Yoder (J. Leek Associates), John Beasley (UGA), Marshall Lamb (USDA-ARS Dawson), Bill Bullard (Birdsong & grower), Marcus Evans (Georgia Peanut Commission), Relinda Walker (Georgia Organics & grower), Sharad Phatak (UGA), Scott Utley (UGA), Albert Culbreath (UGA), Elton Baldy (grower), Mark Boudreau (Hebert Green Agroecology), and Carroll Johnson (USDA-ARS Tifton). Robert Lindsey with USDA-NRCS was a guest, sitting in on some of the meeting. Group members that were not able to attend this meeting, but will be participating in the future, are Robin Fazio (grower), Ronnie Barrentine (UGA), Rick Reed (UGA) and Kevin Calhoun (Birdsong).

Following brief introductions of attendees, Cantonwine presented a list of opportunities and challenges and a preliminary action plan that had been developed by the group's predecessor, the Organic Peanut Steering Committee. The new working group includes most of the original steering committee members, but has more representation from growers, UGA extension, and industry. For this reason, the working group will replace the steering committee. Yoder suggested adding preservation of organic status after harvest to the list of challenges.

Next, Cantonwine summarized actions that group members and others have already taken to promote organic peanut production. Lamb added a funded project by the GA Peanut Commission in 2006 and an organic symposium at the 2006 APRES meeting to the Action list.

Additional discussions related to the challenges of organic peanuts and actions needed to promote organic peanut production continued.

Bullard indicated that Birdsong was not able to acquire organic certified land this season to grow organic seed as they had planned. Cantonwine suggested that Birdsong consider growing seed for organic growers this year in a conventional system but to not treat the seed. Walker agreed that conventionally grown, untreated seed would satisfy organic standards if no organically grown seed of comparable variety, quality or quantity were available. Johnson requested that DP-1 be considered in addition to Georganic as a variety of interest. Beasley pointed out that cold storage of DP-1 and GA-01R improves germination rates and may be a tactic to maintain seed quality of these lines for the organic market. Culbreath added that O3-L & O5-E also have good disease resistance packages and would be potential lines for organic production. Bullard said that Birdsong may be able to provide a shelling service to organic producers at one of their smaller shelling facilities in South GA. Seed and shelling services were added to the action list. Lamb indicated that mobile storage facilities called PODS may be useful to preserve organic identity from the field to the sheller. Engineers in Dawson are testing the breathability of the pods this year.

Yoder indicated that from the large manufacturer point of view, quantity is important. Boudreau pointed out that taking a multistate approach to promoting organic peanut production may help develop desirable quantities more rapidly than a GA focused approach.

Baldy indicated that growers need exposure to successful organic peanut production and suggested that demonstration plots and displays at grower conferences would be a good way to get the message out. The Panama City Grower Conference in 2007, Albany Peanut Farm Show, Sunbelt Ag Expo and GA Peanut Tour were suggested venues. Walker agreed that her farm could be a stop on the GA Peanut Tour this year if the Tour Committee desired.

Cantonwine relayed that Fazio felt that production guidelines, similar is structure as those available for conventional peanut production, were lacking and would be helpful for producers interested in organic peanuts. Fazio also

mentioned that information related to what products were allowed and where they could be purchased was lacking. Boudreau is working on a decision tool as part of the SARE grant. Boudreau, Beasley and Phatak agreed to communicate with each other towards developing some sort of production guide and information resource. No timeline was discussed.

Lamb asked Walker to participate in the organic peanut symposium at the APRES meeting this summer by presenting a seminar on organic standards. The group agreed that additional certification workshops were needed for growers.

Utley mentioned that he would like to put in some demonstration plots next year, and that extension agent training opportunities in organic certification (with peanut as a model crop) would be useful. Ken Lewis and Phil Torrance are the contact people to schedule a training session. Walker mentioned that scheduling is typically done in August.

Culbreath suggested that alternative production strategies should be (re)considered for organics. For example, using a peanut salvager after digging (an engineer in Dawson has developed one) in fields with heavy weed pressure.

Lamb recommended that we consider developing an official Organic Peanut Team to help establish an identity. Boudreau suggested the team be regional. The group agreed to address this idea further at the APRES meeting this summer. Cantonwine and Johnson will look into what is required to establish an official team.

The meeting was concluded by defining specific objectives for the group. The group agreed that the primary objective should be to share observation & ideas throughout the year so that information exchange can take place and to update actions and action needs to promote the organic peanut industry. We will meet 2-3 times per year. Our next meeting will be at the 2006 APRES meeting in Savannah. Cantonwine will coordinate.

Thanks for your participation.

ORGANIC PEANUT PRODUCTION

CHALLENGES:

- Production hurdles
  - Weed management (#1)
  - Stand establishment & seed quality
  - Rotational crops
- Lack grower support network
  - To decipher NOP rules for certification
  - Production guidelines
  - Product alternatives
- Lack of Infrastructure
  - Quality seed
  - Sheller (link to the market!)
  - Organic preservation (from field to sheller)
- Funds needed for research & support

ACTION PLAN:

- Production Research
- Production oriented Outreach & Extension
- Secure More Funding
- Promote Infrastructure Development
- Build Political Support

ACTIONS:

- Production Research
  - SARE grant, USDA-ARS Tifton & Dawson, on-farm studies 2006, Phatak's work
- Outreach & Extension
  - Organic field day, NewFarm article, presentations at sci. and community meetings
- Funding
  - GA Peanut Commission funding in 2006
- Infrastructure Development
  - Informational workshop scheduled for May 23
  - Birdsong increasing seed in 2006 (conventionally) for organics in 2007
  - Birdsong providing shelling service in 2006
- Politics
  - Sent a 1-page summary of opportunity to GA Peanut Commission & Governor Purdue
  - UGA CAES Dean has appointed an Organic Ag Task Force for the college
  - GO and GA-SARE have made Organic Peanut a priority