

A Smooth Move

A new resource will show Florida growers how to reduce pesticide use or transition into organics.

The Florida Organic Growers (FOG) is accepting applications for a new free program from growers who are committed to decreasing their use of pesticides. FOG outreach coordinator, Matt Vargas, answers a couple of questions on the new program below.

What kind of assistance will the project provide?

Matt Vargas: Numerous resources are available to assist transitioning farmers, and farmers interested in reducing their use of pesticides. A team of crop


advisors with experience in organic approaches to pest and disease management, fertility management, and other factors crucial to successful production of organic fruit and vegetable crops will provide direct assistance to farmers. Beginning with a farm visit, the advisors will consult with growers and discuss solutions to production issues that growers may face during the transition period. Another component of the project is field days hosted by demonstration organic farms whose operators have agreed to share their experiences with growers who want to learn methods

for reducing pesticide use. A third project component will provide marketing information so that participating farmers have access to up-to-date information on potential markets for transitional and organic produce.

What are the benefits of decreased pesticide use?

Vargas: Organics have been the fastest growing segment of agriculture. Every year since 1990, the organic market has grown by at least 20%. Consumers are ever more conscious of the foods they and their families consume and are the driving force behind the consistent growth of the organic foods market. There is also tremendous and growing interest in locally grown foods and rapidly expanding market opportunities for local foods. While not all farms that cater to local markets are organic, growers that are responsive to consumers' preference for foods produced without the most toxic of pesticides and who are able to differentiate their products as "organic," "transitional," or "pesticide-free" may have advantages in local marketing channels.

Growers who adopt methods to build their soils and develop resilient cropping systems often tap into ecological mechanisms for maintaining soil fertility and controlling pests and diseases. This can allow farmers to reduce the need for purchased inputs.

Eliminating or reducing pesticides and practicing proven soil-building methods are sound strategies for ensuring that farms remain productive over the long term. This may especially concern growers who farm their own land and who dream of passing on a healthy and viable farm to succeeding generations. 

For more information call Matt Vargas at (352)377-6345 or e-mail: matt@foginfo.org.

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