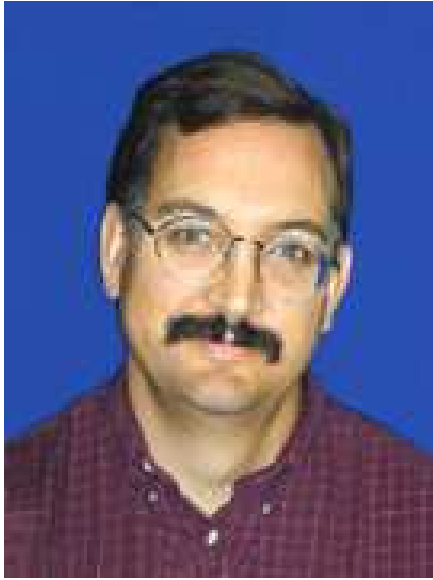


# THE ROCK SPRINGS ROTATION

A bi-monthly newsletter from the Organic Cropping Systems Project team

April 2010

## Meet the Team



### Jayson (Jay) Harper

Jay Harper is a Professor of Agricultural Economics in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology. His research and extension program focuses on the area of risk management and crop production economics. Jay's work on agronomic crops has included evaluation of crop insurance options, crop rotations, herbicide selection criteria, conservation tillage systems, machinery sizing and replacement, and crop harvest and storage systems. In our organic feed and forage cropping systems project, Jay handles the economic analysis.

In addition to dealing with the economic aspects of our project, Jay is also responsible for maintaining cost of production estimates for various crop and livestock enterprises, which are published in three production guides

and numerous publications in the Agricultural Alternatives series.



### Brian Snyder

Brian Snyder is Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA), a position he has held since 2001. Brian is originally from Indiana, where both of his grandfathers had been dairy farmers, and his family operated a purebred hog operation on a small farm.

In addition to writing and speaking in a number of venues on the subject of sustainable agriculture, Brian has also served on several boards of directors, including the PA State Council of Farm Organizations, Keystone Development Center and Food Routes Network. He has also served in an advisory capacity for the state Dairy Task Force in PA, the Northeast Sustainable Ag Working Group and the School of Hospitality at the Penn College of Technology.

(Biographical info from ResturantGuysRadio.com)

### Project contacts:

#### Mary Barbercheck

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### We're on the Web!

[http://agsci.psu.edu/  
organic/research-and-  
extension/Organic%  
20forage](http://agsci.psu.edu/organic/research-and-extension/Organic%20forage)

### Did you know?

- Pennsylvania ranks first in rabbit production nationwide.
- Nearly 100,000 rabbits are raised on 530 farms across the state.
- Lancaster, Mifflin, and Somerset are the top rabbit producing counties in PA.

(source: PA Department of Ag.)

# Thinking back, looking forward...

## New publication about organic certification

A major goal of our project is to communicate the results of our research in certified organic cropping systems to other researchers and the general public. But how do cropping systems become certified organic in the first place? A new publication developed by sustainable agriculture extension associate Charlie White and project leader Mary Barbercheck explains the nuts and bolts of organic certification.

The publication is titled “*Introduction to Organic Farming: A Growing Opportunity for Pennsylvania Farmers*”. In it, the authors explain that “deciding whether to be USDA certified organic is a personal decision that should be based on your own situation”. If you do decide that you want to become certified, the publication provides helpful information regarding things to consider prior to making the transition, such as becoming familiar with National Organic Program (NOP) regulations and determining what your products, and the markets for those products, will be.

The bulk of the information in the publication covers the “Steps to Certification”. In this section, the authors explain the importance of choosing and establishing a relationship with an

organic certifier, and becoming familiar with the certifier’s list of allowed and prohibited materials. The section also covers some of the important aspects of the three-year transition period, required prior to organic certification, and the importance of keeping detailed records of your farming practices. These records include the types and sources of any inputs and receipts for materials and non-GMO certificates for any seeds that are purchased. The authors also point out that “it is important to record dates and application rates of any fertilizers and other inputs, as well as dates of practices such as planting, tillage, and harvest”.

The remainder of the publication describes what you should expect during the application submission process and the steps necessary to maintain organic certification. The authors point out that an important component of the certification process is the development of an Organic System Plan (OSP) and provide a link to OSP templates provided by the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service.

The publication is the third in a series of outreach products to be featured in Penn State’s new Agroecology in Practice series. The publication will soon be available to download free of charge from the PSU College of Agriculture’s publication web site at <http://pubs.cas.psu.edu>. Contact Charlie White ([cmw29@psu.edu](mailto:cmw29@psu.edu)) or Mary Barbercheck ([meb34@psu.edu](mailto:meb34@psu.edu)) for more information.



**Introduction to Organic Farming**  
**A Growing Opportunity for Pennsylvania Farmers**

**Keep records that clearly describe your farming practices and inputs.** Save receipts for materials and non-GMO (genetically modified organism) certificates for seeds purchased. You will need these records and receipts as proof that the land has been free of prohibited substances for 36 months prior to the harvest of the first organic product. It is also important to record dates and application rates of fertilizers and other inputs, as well as dates of practices such as planting, tillage, and harvest. Sample record-keeping forms can be obtained from most accredited certifiers or from the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (800-546-5140 [English], 800-411-3122 [Spanish]), online at [attra.ncat.org/organic.html](http://attra.ncat.org/organic.html).

**Submit an Application**  
Once you have transitioned to organic practices, the next step is to submit an application for certification to your certifying agency. The application process differs slightly from certifier to certifier, but it will always include the development of an Organic System Plan (OSP) and a site inspection. The OSP is a document that describes in detail how your production practices comply with the regulations of the NOP. Organic System Plan templates can be obtained from most accredited certifiers or found at the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (800-546-5140 [English], 800-411-3122 [Spanish]), online at [attra.ncat.org/organic.html](http://attra.ncat.org/organic.html).

The purpose of the site inspection is to allow the certifying agent to verify that the farm is managed according to the OSP. You should have in order all

organic as that you understand your certifier's interpretation of allowable and prohibited production practices and materials. The Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) is a private organization that reviews materials intended for use in organic farming and publishes a well-known list of materials that they find to meet the NOP regulations. However, each accredited certifier also maintains a list of allowed and prohibited materials that takes precedence over the OMRI Product List. The lists maintained by accredited certifiers often include locally sourced substances that may not have been submitted to OMRI for review. During the certification process, the certifier's list, not the OMRI Product List, is used to determine whether a substance is allowed. You should always check with your certifier before you start using any new product or material to be sure that it is allowed for use in organic production.

**More on NOP Regulations**  
The NOP Regulations and Guidelines provide a detailed description of practices and materials that are allowed and not allowed in organic production and processing. Information on specific requirements can be found in the following sections of the rule:  
● Record Keeping: 205.102  
● Allowed and Prohibited Practices, Methods, and Ingredients: 205.104  
● Land Requirements: 205.102  
● Soil Fertility Management: 205.103  
● Seeds and Planting Stock: 205.104  
● Pests, Weeds, and Disease Management: 205.102

For clarification and interpretation of the rule, contact your certifying agency.

**Transition to Organic**  
The NOP requires that land or animals that are to be certified organic must be managed according to NOP regulations for a certain period of time prior to certification being granted. For a piece of land, there you must pass to which no prohibited substances have been applied. Landmark must be noted using organic management from the last third of gestation, and from the second day of life for poultry. Dairy animals require 12 months of organic management before milk products can be certified. You can transition some fields on a farm first with other fields to follow later on. If you do this, be aware of the regulations regarding you do not manure and implements that are used on nonorganic fields before they are used on organic fields.

It is important that you contact a certifier before transitioning to

**National Organic Program regulations require a clear and permanent delineation between organic and nonorganic fields and a buffer zone that extends to prevent spray drift from adjacent fields and roads. A "No Hot Spots" field must include organic and non-organic crops when organically managed land begins.**

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**Documentation and maps required by the certifier.** The inspector will examine production and input records, facilities, equipment, and fields and ask questions about your management practices. The inspector will also look at buffer zones that protect your farm from chemical drift that may originate from nonorganically managed land. After the inspection, the inspector will submit a report to the certification agency, which will determine if certification should be awarded. Your certifying agent will grant you certified USDA Organic status if your farm management complies with the regulations of the NOP and you complete all the steps of the application process.

**Organic Certification**  
Organic certification is an on-going process, and certification must be renewed annually. The renewal process includes an inspection of your farm or processing facility, a review of farm records by the certifying agent, and payment of a recertification fee.

Material from the new Agroecology in Practice series publication *Introduction to Organic Farming: A Growing Opportunity for Pennsylvania Farmers*. The publication can be downloaded free of charge from the PSU College of Agriculture's publication web site.