Welcome to the inaugural issue of The Rock Springs Rotation! The primary goals of this newsletter are to: (1) enhance the connection between the Organic Cropping Systems Project team here at Penn State University and the project team and advisory board members who reside off campus, (2) establish a dialog between team members and the farmer advisory board for communicating questions and concerns regarding the project, and (3) provide useful information regarding new findings and insights developing from the project.

The content of the newsletter will change from month to month; however, we hope to maintain a fairly consistent structure. Each issue of the newsletter will contain a “Meet the team” section which will highlight two different team members, one on-campus member and one from the advisory board. We hope that these sections will help to “put a face” on the project and provide insight into the unique talents that each member brings to the team.

In the “Thinking back, looking forward” section we will reflect upon the major activities relevant to the project that have occurred since the last newsletter. We will also use this section to discuss any pertinent issues or challenges that we anticipate or would like your feedback on. Any interesting data or results from the study will also be highlighted in this section.

Be sure to check the “For the future” section for important information or messages regarding upcoming project-related activities.

We look forward to working with you on this interesting and important project. See you in the next issue!

Sincerely,
The Organic Cropping Systems Project team.
Weed Management, Environmental Quality and Profitability in Organic Feed and Forage Systems

Thinking back, looking forward

With the new year approaching we would like to take this opportunity to reflect upon all that has occurred in the Organic Cropping Systems Project this past year.

The first “start” of the project was established in September 2007 with a rye/vetch cover crop across all four treatment systems. In the spring of 2008, system 1 was conventionally-tilled and seeded to brassica in May, followed by buckwheat in June and alfalfa/oat in late August. System 2 was conventionally-tilled and seeded to sorghum/sudan grass in June, followed by alfalfa/orchard grass in late August. System 3 was conventionally-tilled in mid-July and left as a bare fallow until rye was seeded in mid September. In system 4 we rolled the rye/vetch cover crop in June (which proved slightly difficult due to the density and height of the stand!). We then no-till planted buckwheat in late July followed by no-till rye in mid September. Interestingly, the buckwheat in system 4 was taller than the buckwheat in system 1 despite being planted at the same time. This may have been due to the increased moisture provided by the rye/vetch residue in system 4. This residue also appeared to be very effective at suppressing annual weeds in this system! As we expected, however, perennial weeds appear to be increasing in system 4 relative to the conventionally-tilled systems (though the picture on the left shows that even general principles have exceptions).

The second “start” of the project was established this fall and will be managed identically to the first start. We look forward to seeing how this all turns out!

Meet the team: Rich Smith

Rich Smith is a new member of the Organic Cropping Systems Project team. Rich is a postdoctoral research associate who will be helping to manage the project and will be working closely with the agronomic and weed management data. Rich received his BS from the University of New Mexico and his Ph.D. from Michigan State University. Before starting school in Michigan, Rich and his wife Angela served as volunteers in Papua New Guinea with the Peace Corps. Rich has spent time working on agricultural issues in Montana and California and is very much looking forward to working with everyone involved with the project here in Pennsylvania.

Rich lives in Bellefonte, PA with his wife Angela and daughter Sydney.

Canada thistle is making its presence known in some of the alfalfa plots (left, system 2). This is not the case in the rye plots (right, system 3). Both plots were conventionally-tilled.