

Development of the OrganicAgInfo.org Website

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OrganicAgInfo (OAI) is a website consisting of an online searchable database of content pertinent to organic agriculture. The goal of OAI is to provide a user-friendly website where farmers, researchers and others can visit for current, accurate, scientifically-based or practically validated information about organic agriculture. OAI was conceived in 2000 and initiated with a grant from the USDA-CSREES Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems (IFAFS). A unique feature of OAI is that it is user-interactive. Individuals with Internet access may upload organic-pertinent materials directly to the site. Site browsers may search for topics by keywords, region, crop or livestock type. They may also evaluate the value of a submission and provide comments.

Organic farmers seek to manage and optimize diversified agroecological relationships within the constraints of extensive regulation and rapidly evolving, non-traditional market chains. The need for solutions to complex production, regulatory and marketing issues makes organic agriculture an information-intensive enterprise. In addition, advanced organic farmers and systems are vast repositories of practical information, but this knowledge base is not well documented or synthesized. U.S. agricultural research and extension providers have only begun to generate empirical information about organic systems, and as a group are still net consumers of such information. Recent increases in federal funding will lead to many additional organic information resources for public release. Untapped knowledge at the farmer level, as well as anticipated proliferation in organic research material, extension publications, and other information products points to the need for concerted efforts at integration of these materials for public access.

The first phase of development of OAI has been completed. The site is fully operational and contains approximately 700 entries. A site programmer is on call for technical support, and content reviewers ready to review new submissions. Future objectives for the site include a concerted effort at content acquisition, outreach to farmers and researchers to encourage information archiving and retrieval, and encouraging interactive usage such as comments, ratings, and new content under the Notes and Observations category. A group of organizations including the Organic Farming Research Foundation, The National Agricultural Library Alternative Farming Systems Information Center and the National Center for Appropriate Technology are engaged in multi-year planning and development efforts to make this possible. Within two years our goal is to acquire 3,000 to 4,000 site submissions. This includes capturing the majority of new or recently generated organic-pertinent materials, uploading valuable content from "grey literature", promoting and developing the Farmer Observation site category, and actively offering the site to institutions for information archival purposes.

Publications Resulting From This Work

OrganicAgInfo. 2005. <<http://www.organicaginfo.org/>>