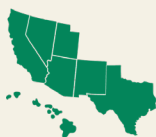


Field Day Toolkit

A guide to organizing field days for agriculture research dissemination



Photo credit: Cal Poly



**WEST/SOUTHWEST
TRANSITION TO ORGANIC
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM**



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“While organic farmers clearly consider other farmers their most valuable information resources, they have varying preferences for information venues and formats. Because individual learning styles vary, it is important to continue providing organic farming information through a variety of venues and formats.”

-2022 National Organic Research Agenda



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Introduction - What is a Field Day?

Field days are research dissemination events that provide a great way for agriculture industry professionals, farmers and ranchers, and researchers to engage with and learn from one another. Simultaneously, it is a way for farmers to communicate their observations and experiences on their operations to researchers to help highlight emerging issues, real-world applicability, and build relationships with the research community and each other.

OFRF's [2022 National Organic Research Agenda](#) confirmed that farmers value opportunities to learn from one another as well as to receive in-person technical support from agricultural service providers. Interactions between producers, researchers, and industry professionals can be useful for informing focus areas for future research and education efforts. Hosting field days extends the benefits and impact of agricultural research as well as provides further opportunities for collaboration, project coordination, and relationship building.

But, these opportunities are not only about sharing the most up-to-date research findings and related information. They are about creating a strong network that can ask/answer questions, providing opportunities for researchers to ground-truth their ideas with farms, and connecting vendors with farmers—just to name a few.

This toolkit provides a road map to plan a successful field day event and optimize the reach of your organization or farm's research and extension activities.



Field day participants learn about spinach variety trials. Photo credit: Cal Poly.

Phase 1 - Set Objectives & Outline the Event

Event planning requires time and resources. Start early to ensure that your field day makes an impression!



Getting Started

Start planning your field day event as soon as possible. Beginning at least 3-4 months in advance is recommended to ensure that your event is a success.

Collaboration & Partnerships

Planning an event is a big undertaking. We recommend assembling a core field day planning team with colleagues or with other organizations that share your interests. This could include NRCS, conservation districts, local Extension staff, farm bureaus, and other agricultural organizations like OFRF. Collaborating can amplify the capacity and reach of your event through increased access to resources, funding, publicity, and logistical support. Determine when, where, and how frequently the planning team will meet, likely more often the closer the event is.

Planning Topics & Setting the Date

Consult with organizational partners, your research team, local growers, industry professionals, and other interested parties about their needs and values regarding timing and priority issues. This step can be completed through interviews, focus groups, or informal surveys/polls that are likely already ongoing for current research.

Your field day topics and themes will likely be informed by your organization's recent research and what grows in your region. Examples of common field day topics include cultivar trials, innovative production practices (tillage, cultivation, pest management, irrigation, etc.), or conservation strategies in production agriculture.

Key Event Considerations:

- How many attendees are you expecting?
 - Will you have a maximum or minimum number of attendees?
 - Will you require registration? If so, when will registration open and close?
 - Will there be admissions fees or suggested donations? (We recommend offering free admissions to producers.)

Key Event Considerations, cont'd:

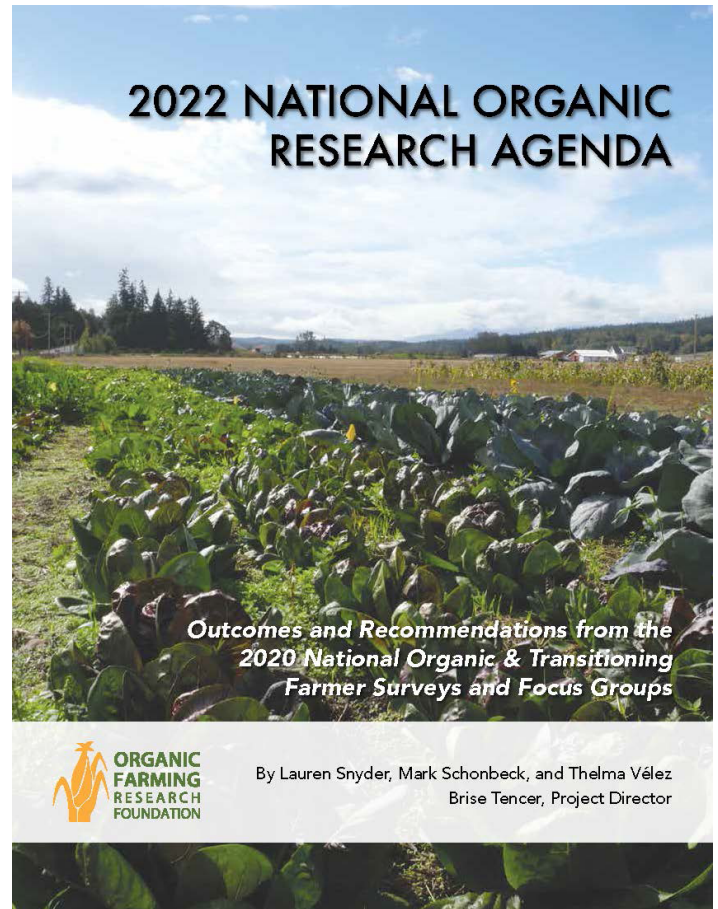
- What is your event budget? Where is your funding coming from?
 - Do you need to acknowledge event sponsors in any outreach materials, or at the event itself?
- How long will the event be? Half day? Full day? Is this field day part of a series?
 - How many topics will be covered? Will multiple talks occur simultaneously?
- Will refreshments or lunch be provided?
- Where will the event take place?
 - Is the site ADA-compliant?
- Will you need to rent tents, chairs, tables, or portable restrooms?
- Will you offer virtual attendance options?
- Will you need to schedule a rain date, or plan for any other contingencies?
- How will you support beginning farmers, farmers of color, non-English speakers, and individuals with financial or transportation barriers?
- Do you need event insurance, liability insurance, or permits?
 - Does your organization have an appropriate emergency plan in place?
 - Do you have a first aid kit onsite?
- How will you complete event outreach? (Event webpage, social media, local news media, email listservs, etc.)

Topic Selection Considerations:

- Narrow the scope of your event to 1-3 topics for a half-day event, or 3-5 for a full-day event. Be realistic about timing and available resources.
- Do you have the ability to obtain all supplies/resources for the selected topics and themes?
- Are there specific lecturers, dissemination formats, or activities that would be engaging and enticing to your specific audience?
 - Farmer-centered research suggests planning for a farmer-focused event.
- Are knowledgeable and respected speakers available?
 - Speakers should be comfortable with public speaking about the subject matter.
 - We recommend budgeting to compensate guest speakers and additional event personnel.

Based on the 2022 National Organic Research Agenda, OFRF recommends the following focus areas to meet growers' needs:

- Present farmer information on best organic soil health, conservation, and climate mitigation practices within a framework of cost management, yield stability (resilience), and improved net returns for farm enterprises.
- Provide informational resources to help organic farmers access sources of high quality certified organic seed, and to identify and procure suitable cultivars for organic production in their regions, including new releases from organic plant breeding endeavors.
- Build farmer capacity to grow organic seeds for on-farm use and/or commercial sale.
- Provide information on crop-livestock integration, optimizing animal living conditions, grazing and pasture management, compliance with NOP requirements for organic livestock, and procurement or on-farm production of certified organic animal feed.
- Offer practical guidance on optimum use of manure, compost, organic fertilizers, and other inputs for production, soil health, and net returns, including:
 - Making the best use of on-farm and nearby nutrient resources.
 - Nutrient budgeting to meet crop needs without building excesses of P or other nutrients.
 - Minimizing both direct and environmental costs of organic inputs.
 - Integrating inputs with cover crops and rotations to enhance soil health.



- Provide technical assistance in building resilience to regional impacts of climate disruption through soil health and other organic practices.
- Provide technical assistance in establishing perennial buffer and habitat plantings to protect organic fields from NOP-prohibited substances, create habitat for pollinators and other beneficials, control erosion, and provide other conservation benefits.
- Provide spaces for farmers to bring their questions to researchers during field days, providing lightly structured conservation circles or other similar options.
- Since farmers' #1 source of information is other farmers, make sure your event has time for attendees to talk to each other. This can be as simple as building in 15-minute breaks between sessions or before/after lunch.

Phase 2 - Establish Event Details

Events of all scales have many moving parts. Create a checklist to track resources, activities, and service procurement.



Create a Schedule of Activities

Creating a schedule of activities is an important step for keeping your team on track in the planning process, identifying needed resources and materials, and coordinating with speakers, staff, and vendors.

- We recommend having a shared system to keep all planning team members on the same page.
- Create a public-facing schedule of field day events and activities.
- Create or use a [checklist](#) and/or a [“tick-tock” timeline](#) and list of duties for staff, including event set up, day of operations, and break down.

Click the images at right or the links above to access editable resources that can be used to create a field day timeline or checklist for your event.

FIELD DAY TIMELINE

FIELD DAY TICK-TOCK TIMELINE					
(Name of event)					
(Date, Time)					
(Location)					
Lead up to the event					
Timestamp	Task	Time needed	Materials needed	Point person	Notes
3/1/2025	Assemble planning team & delegate tasks	2 hrs	Timeline	Jessie	Kickoff meeting set for 00:00/0000
3/1/2025	Review documentation of past field days & events	1 hr	Past surveys	Pat	Link to surveys sent to Pat
During the event					
Timestamp	Task	Time needed	Materials needed	Point person	Notes
8:00:00 AM	Set up for registration and food/beverage tables	2 hrs	Timeline	Jessie	Kickoff meeting set for 00:00/0000
9:30:00 AM	Ensure smooth operations as attendees arrive and check-in	1 hr	Past surveys	Pat	Link to surveys sent to Pat
10:00:00 AM	Official start time				
After the event					
Timestamp	Task	Time needed	Materials needed	Point person	Notes
6/2/2025	Event clean up & rental returns	4 hrs	University vehicle	Chris	
6/3/2025	Post photos and event highlights to social media	2 hrs	Photos and event artwork	Pat	

FIELD DAY CHECKLIST:

Field Day Planning Timeline and Checklist	
3-4 months before the field day	Assemble planning team & delegate tasks
	Review documentation of past field days & events
	Select location, date, and time
	Outline contingency plan & rain date
	Secure funding & create budget
	Set attendance capacity (min. & max.)
	Inventory resources/materials needed (e.g. portable toilets, food services, A/V equipment, tents, tables, chairs)
	Obtain liability/event insurance and event permits
	Identify needed vendors, services, and additional staff (e.g. photographer, caterer, waste disposal, parking & information attendants)
	Identify target audience & determine priority interests
Logistics	Select theme & topics
	Contact & confirm speakers
	List educational & program materials needed
Program	Identify media & marketing outlets (e.g. social media, local news, farm bulletins)
	Send invitations to key community members
	Contact NRCS Extension and partner organizations
	Create media calendar & deadlines
Outreach	Create event webpage & registration form
	Develop digital flyer and social media graphics (include hashtags, QR codes, and links to event webpage)
	Coordinate with vendors/exhibitors (request proof of required licenses & permits)
	Launch event registration & monitor ticket sales
2 months before (cont'd on next page)	Order all event rentals and materials
	Create an event day schedule
	Finalize event day staffing & assign duties
	Finalize event map
	Review and update emergency plans and supplies (inventory first aid kit)

Prepare Speakers & Staff

- Schedule an event walk-through with all staff and speakers in the week prior to your event.
- Set a deadline for speakers to share their final presentation materials, ideally the week prior.
- Develop and implement speaker contracts to avoid last-minute cancellations.
- Recruit backup speakers/presenters in case of unforeseen circumstances.

Coordinate Vendors, Exhibitors, & Service Providers

Once you have identified any vendors, community partners, or other service providers for your event, create a contract/agreement to ensure that all parties are aligned. This should include details regarding set up/clean up, timing, services provided, payments, and documentation of required permits and licenses. Examples of vendors and service providers you may wish to contact include:

- Organizational partners for added capacity/support
- Photographer/videographer
- Translator(s)
- Waste management services
- Information & parking staff
- Printing and signage services
- Event rentals (tents, tables, chairs, a/v equipment, stage)
- Catering/food vendors

Assemble Materials and Equipment

- Audio/Visual equipment (rental?)
- Tent or canopy (rain plan?)
- Portable restrooms
- Signage
- Waste management (compost, recycling, garbage)
- Tables & chairs
- Protective gear for audience and speakers (depending on activity, e.g. chemical or mechanical demonstrations?)



A California Polytechnic State University/California Strawberry Commission field day provided a shade structure, microphones, and visual aids. Photo credit: Cal Poly.

Phase 3 - Event Outreach

Market the event to maximize attendance, create buzz, and ensure all audiences are targeted effectively and equitably.



Marketing Your Field Day

A successful field day event requires sufficient communications about its happening and why. Consider including the following information in communications:

- Date, start and end time, location
- Registration info/deadline
- Event scale (limited attendance?)
- Topics/themes
- Notable speakers, vendors, presenters, exhibitors
- Offerings (what will they get from this event?)
- Activities

 **Personally invite key partners and influencers, ask for help spreading the word.**

 **Event website:**

- ✦ Have information for future events to plant the seed early with your audience.
- ✦ Provide IOS, Google, and Outlook calendar event links.

 **Social media:**

- ✦ Start early to create buzz.
- ✦ Diversify to reach wider audiences.

 **Send alerts to partner organizations' newsletters.**

 **Place physical signage in location where your audience will see it.**

 **Press release:**

- ✦ Local news outlets
- ✦ Grower/Industry Publications

 **Email newsletters & listservs.**

 **Eventbrite or other registration tool for estimating attendees.**

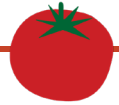
- ✦ Collect photo releases from attendees during registration.

To increase attendance among your target audience, consider incentivizing registration or social media engagement. Examples of motivational incentives include:

- Raffle of agricultural tools/products/services with registration or social media engagement.
- Free technical service counseling.
- Free or discounted admission to beginning, certified organic, or transitioning producers.

Phase 4 - Implementation

Engage the audience with best practices, build your audience for future events, and follow up with partners to articulate impact.



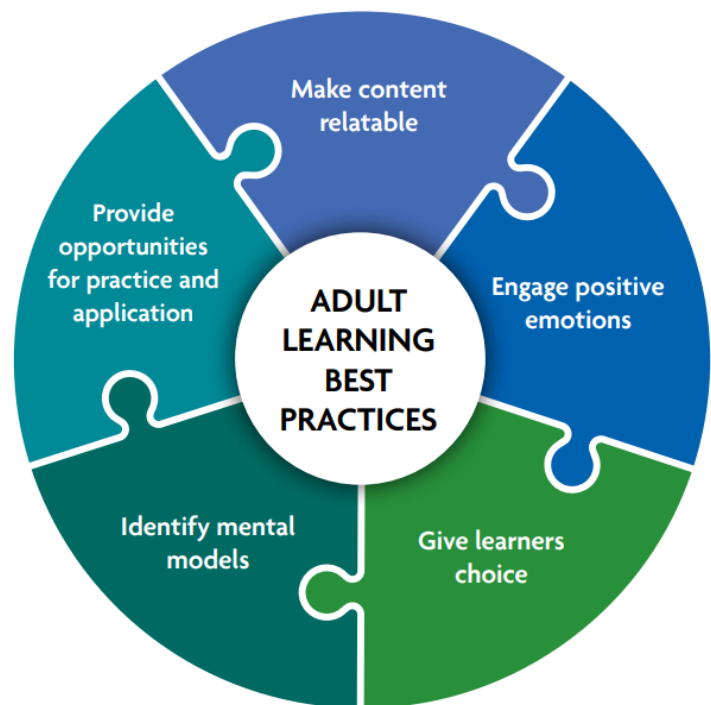
During the Field Day

Use best practices for adult learning. [Sustainable Agriculture Through Sustainable Learning](#) from the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) outlines five best practices:

1) Make content relatable:

- When a new topic is introduced, speakers can ask “How many of you have experience with ___?”
- Before the event, ask 1-2 farmers to come prepared to speak about their experiences with the topic and to take questions from attendees.
- Ask, “Does anyone have experience with what we just talked about and want to share?”
- Have participants share their best and worst experiences and lessons learned about content with each other in pairs or small groups.

Five Best Practices for Adult Learning



Graphic credit: SARE.

2) Engage positive emotions of joy

- Allow participants to share where they came from, why they came, and what they hope to take away.
- Present relatable but startling or fun facts, interject a humorous photo or graph or story, and switch from presentation to small group or partner discussions.
- Pass an object around.
- Create and take a poll and discuss results.

3) Give learners choice:

- Invite feedback from farmers about the agenda and content.
- Give participants opportunities to choose other participants to speak to.

4) Identify the mental models of farmers in your audience:

Mental models are unique combinations of knowledge and unconscious biases related to a topic, such as farming. They can impact how people learn. Questions can help an educator or presenter understand the mental models of participants:

- What do you find most challenging about...? Why is this challenging?
- What is the key factor for success with...? Can you tell us more about the factor?
- What is one thing that would make this new practice work for you?

5) Provide opportunities for practice and application:

- Present fictitious scenarios or real-life case studies for participants to discuss and work through together.

Build your audience for future events:

- Collect emails/contact info from attendees.
- Use this as an opportunity to build your audience and partnerships (have take-home materials ready in multiple formats, including QR code).
- Have a check-in/info booth.
- Take suggestions for future field days through tools like a survey, suggestions box, or an open discussion space with organizational staff.

After the field day:

- Follow up with vendors, partners, and attendees to celebrate your success and share highlights/photos from the event,
- Encourage photo sharing/reflections from audience through social media.

Resources

[Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education \(SARE\) - The Farmer Field Day Toolkit & Sustainable Agriculture through Sustainable Learning: An Educator's Guide to Best Practices for Adult Learning](#)

[Organic Farming Research Foundation \(OFRF\) - National Organic Research Agenda \(NORA\)](#)