

## NEWSLETTER

# MIDWEST TOPP NEWS

SUPPORTING ORGANIC PRODUCERS TO ADVANCE FOOD SYSTEM RESILIENCE



**MIDWEST**  
TRANSITION TO ORGANIC  
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

## MEET TOPP

By Allison Walent  
Program Director, MW TOPP



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In August 2022, Agriculture Secretary, Tom Vilsack, unveiled the Organic Transition Initiative. Through this 300 million dollar, multi-agency USDA effort, the USDA hopes to open opportunities for new and beginning farmers; build and strengthen organic markets and streams of income for farmers and producers; and expand direct consumer access to organic foods through increased production.

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Community has been a key factor of success within the growing organic movement – it provides an important source of social connection and a sense of belonging – especially when the nearest organic neighbor is possibly hundreds of miles away.

## COMMUNITY BUILDING

By Roz Lehman  
Executive Director, Iowa Organic Association



# TOPP PRIORITIES

## »»» MENTORSHIP

Our Mentorship Program connects producers transitioning to organic practices with experienced organic producers who serve as mentors.

These mentors guide them through the transition process and offer valuable insights into their journey into organic farming.

## »»» TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

TOPP offers a variety of workshops, field days, and educational events in the region to provide technical assistance, training, and advising on organic-specific resources.

## »»» COMMUNITY BUILDING

To foster connections within the organic agricultural community, we will organize conferences, workshops, field days, and round table discussions to facilitate networking and collaboration.

## »»» WORKFORCE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

TOPP provides targeted training and education for the organic workforce, including the entire supply chain. Workforce development is key to our mission.

# APPLY TO BE A MENTOR OR MENTEE

»»» Visit: [www.organictransition.org](http://www.organictransition.org) to complete the online form

# INCLUDING NRCS IN YOUR TOPP PROJECTS

## CONNECTING NRCS ORGANIC PROGRAMS WITH GROWERS

By Kathleen Delate, Iowa State University and Lindsay Haines, USDA-NRCS, Washington, D.C.

### >>> NRCS

There's a lot going on in NRCS (USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service) these days to support farmers transitioning to organic ag, and for those already using certified organic practices. Ideally, your local and/or state NRCS should be included in all your TOPP projects, since they have a mandate to work with producers to conserve soil, water, air, plants, and animals on their land, which directly corresponds to organic ag's mission. This is the umbrella webpage for all of NRCS' organic programs: [NRCS - Organic](#)

## LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL TOPP WEBSITE

In collaboration, the six regional TOPP leads developed and launched a national TOPP website which includes mentor/mentee sign up forms, event announcements, and resources for transitioning producers.

Visit: <https://www.organictransition.org/>

### >>> EQIP

The beauty of the NRCS offerings is that they will provide free technical assistance for conservation plans, plus assist eligible farmers with applying for funds in their various conservation programs. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a "voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns and for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland." In addition to traditional EQIP-supported practices, since 2009, the EQIP-Organic Initiative funds directly target organic ag. [EQIP - Organic](#)

### >>> ORGANIC SYSTEM PLAN

The first step is a visit to your local NRCS office to determine your eligibility for funding. It is the responsibility of the producer to provide sufficient documentation to prove that no prohibited substances have been applied for 3 years, and that they can demonstrate compliance with all applicable USDA-NOP organic regulations. A site visit with an NRCS conservationist will help identify conservation resource needs on your farm. Examples that can be supported through NRCS programs include Crop Rotation, Cover Crops, and Residue and Tillage Management (which could include organic no-till). A conservation plan can be developed by NRCS staff, or producers can work with a TSP (Technical Service Provider), to develop a Conservation Planning Activity, called a CPA 138-Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition. Both types of conservation plans can be used as an opportunity to learn transition requirements and become the foundation for an organic system plan. The CPA 138 is a plan to transition some or all of the farm to organic production and will address conservation concerns on your farm. The final product is conservation plan or an NRCS-approved Conservation Planning Activity (CPA) that supports the Organic System Plan (OSP).

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United States Department of Agriculture  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
National Organic Program  
Transition to Organic Partnership Program

