

# Texas TOPP



## Texas Organic Farmer's and Gardener's Conference

Texas TOPP has been on the move from workshops to conferences telling all who will hear about the Organic Movement in the State of Texas. Texas TOPP had a booth and a workshop session at the TOFGA conference recently held at the end of January.

Agriculture enthusiasts from all over the state gathered at the Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (TOFGA) convention in San Antonio this week to learn, share ideas, and connect with like-minded individuals.

With over 200 people in attendance, our booth was the HOT hub throughout the convention. Attendees were eager to learn about certification programs as well as the services that Texas TOPP provides farmers.

The workshop group of farmers was passionate about sharing their knowledge and helping others succeed in the world of organic farming. We discussed topics such as soil health, crop rotation, and pest management, and even offered hands-on demonstrations to showcase their techniques.

## SOE is right around the corner

Full compliance of the Strengthening Organic Enforcement begins on March 19, 2024. This affects everyone in the organic supply chain. Operations that buy, sell, trade, or facilitate the sale/trade of organic goods must be certified under SOE by March 19, 2024.

Certifiers will be reporting lots of data to the Organic Integrity Database is going to increase, meaning that the data in the system is going to be more accurate and reliable. Certifiers must inspect each of their certified operations once per calendar year. Certifiers will have 5% of their clientele receiving unannounced inspections or records requests because certifiers are required to assess and assign risk to operations based on complexity and a variety of other factors. Know someone who needs to be certified or help send them our way!



## On TOPP of Organic

Don't forget to listen to our organic podcast! We release new episodes every other Wednesday. Join Timber Darnell and Bob Whitney as we interview organic farmers about their experiences with

organic farming. Our latest podcast features a special guest, Henk Postmus, who talks about his passion for organic farming. You can find our podcast on **Apple** and **Spotify**!

## No Son, You can't have THAT candy!

If you remember when you were little you had to ask your parents for a piece of candy. They were either going to say yes or no. But you had to ask. If you didn't, Mom would usually get a little upset and deal with a crazy kid in the aftermath. This week at the conference I felt this analogy come to my mind. You know how sometimes it feels like we're drowning in the requirements from the NOP to maintain our Organic Certification?

Well, I came to realize that maybe if we simplify and streamline, it's not as bad as it seems. All we need to do is create an OSP, add the products to our material lists, include the prospective seeds on the plan, and avoid using anything synthetic on our property. Easy-peasy, right? And if we want to add something new to our plan, we just need to ask for permission first. They're not going to yell at us or spank us just for asking. Our certifiers are just like that, they won't get mad or punish us for asking, but it's important to keep them informed about any changes to our organic system plan. So that we are not going against any of the rules, that may surrender the certification. The key here is communication, so let's keep the conversation flowing!

## TDA Resilient Good Systems Infrastructure Grant

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), entered into a cooperative agreement with the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) to work in partnership to make competitive subawards in the form of grants to eligible entities to support infrastructure and equipment needs along the middle of the food supply chain across the state.

For projects that support the expanded capacity for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, and distribution of locally and regionally produced food products

including specialty crops, dairy, grains for human consumption, aquaculture, and other food products, excluding meat and poultry.

**Applicants must submit one complete, electronically signed application through the TDA-GO system by TDA 11:59 p.m. CT on Thursday, February 15, 2024. <http://tinyurl.com/nsxwcz6>**



Committed to the future of rural communities.

## Value Added Producer Grant

The USDA Rural development has a Value-Added Producer Grant program is designed to assist agricultural producers in engaging in value-added activities related to processing or marketing bio-based, value-added products. This program aims to generate new products, create expanding marketing opportunities, and increase producers' income. The program has approximately \$31 million in total funding. Eligible for this program are independent producers, agricultural producer groups, farmers and rancher cooperatives, and majority-controlled producers.

**The deadline for submitting applications is April 16, 2024. <http://tinyurl.com/2s49b62u>**

## Apply for the Grants

I know applying for the grants may seem like a headache, but you're not the only one that feels this way. But imagine if you were one of the 21 who applied for the grant, and they gave out 21 grants. Everyone else feels the same way but **BE DIFFERENT and APPLY!** You never know unless you try!

## Come Grow Organic with US!

The organic movement in Texas has been growing at an unprecedented rate, and there's no better time to be a part of it. Whether you're just starting out or well into organic transition, there are a wealth of opportunities for you to **Come Grow Organic with Texas TOPP!**

*Timber Darnell*