

# **Challenges and Information Needs for Organic Production in Kansas**

## **Research Report<sup>1</sup>**



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## **Executive Summary**

The rapid growth in the production and sales of organic foods over the past decade has opened new possibilities for producers, processors and retailers. As this segment of the market grows, new opportunities are created for Kansas farmers to innovate and expand organic production of key agricultural commodities in the state. As farmers enter into this market their need for information specific to organic production, processing and marketing will increase accordingly. Likewise, retailers need specific information on organic markets, consumer trends and available products as they increase their activities in this area. This report describes a research effort in east-central Kansas to begin to assess the information needs of organic growers and retailers.

### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this project is to assess the information needs in the state for organic production, processing, marketing and retail. Findings are intended to inform the development of research and extension programs to address these needs.

### ***Procedures***

Two primary activities were designed to achieve the research objectives: (1) focus groups with established and prospective organic growers and (2) face-to-face interviews with retailers of organic foods. Four focus groups were conducted with growers in east-central Kansas -- three consisting of established organic growers, and the other of growers interested in making the transition from conventional to organic production. The other primary data source was individual interviews. Eight in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with retailers in the urban areas of Kansas City, Lawrence, Manhattan and Wichita. Retailers were varied by size and market orientation.

### ***Results***

#### ***Information Needs Identified by Organic Growers***

The growers identified the following priority information needs related to organic production, processing and marketing. Participants emphasized that the information must be specific to the region and to organics.

1. *Production Information Needs:*
  - a. Weed control (e.g., pigweed, bindweed, Johnson grass, velvet grass)
  - b. Soil health, soil testing and soil amendment recommendations
  - c. Cropping system design, whole farm systems research
  - d. Website clearinghouse for information on organics; knowledge networks
  - e. Alternative energy sources
  - f. Pest control (e.g., biopesticides, fly control in cattle)
  - g. Innovative equipment for organic production, cultivation

2. *Processing Information Needs:*
  - a. Need for local/regional scale processing of organic grain, meat (beef, poultry, pork), dairy
  - b. Need to develop low cost, high volume, portable grain cleaners
  - c. Pest and moisture management in organic grain storage
  - d. Need assistance with microenterprise planning and development in processing
  
3. *Marketing Information Needs:*
  - a. Research to develop new markets, niche markets
  - b. Strategies for supply/demand
  - c. Integrate organic foods into public institutions
  - d. Website/resource guide for organic marketing:
    - i. Directories of: organic producers (statewide and regional); grocery stores that retail organics; and certification bodies and issues
  - e. Education
    - i. For growers: workshops/short courses for organic producers on how to market organic crops, and certification and labeling issues
    - ii. For the public: education regarding the multiple benefits of organic agriculture (e.g., land stewardship, water and soil quality, etc.)

#### *Information Needs Identified by Retailers*

1. *Information on Consumers and Markets*
  - a. Studies of consumer demographics (primarily identified by conventional retailers)
  - b. Studies on purchasing patterns and the motivational reasons behind them
  
2. *Public Education about Organics*
  - a. Need general public education on organics (primarily identified by core-organic retailers)
  - b. Comparative studies of conventional and organic production and foods
  - c. Extension expertise in organics, to effectively achieve the public education component
  
3. *Limited Availability of Kansas Organic Products.*
  - a. Organic products from Kansas – especially packaged products, such as grain-based snacks, soy milk, meats, dairy – are very scarce
  - b. Need linkages with local/regional sources of organic products, proper packaging, and increased visibility of organic products produced, processed and manufactured in KS

#### ***Conclusions***

The findings herein demonstrate a clear demand for research and information in the organic agriculture and food sector in Kansas. These information needs span the agrifood chain, from inputs through production, processing, manufacturing, distribution, wholesale, retail and consumer patterns. The implication is that there is a demonstrable need in the state for a significant research and extension effort aimed at organic production, processing and marketing for family farmers and retailers in Kansas.

## **Introduction and Background**

The production and sale of organic foods in the United States continues to expand rapidly. Certified organic acreage for major crops and pasture doubled between 1997 and 2001 (Greene and Dimitri 2003), and continued expanding, bringing the total organic acreage in the US to 2.2 million acres by 2003 (ERS-USDA 2005). Although organic foods comprise only a small portion of total food sales, organic food sales have been growing by 17-21 percent annually over the past decade, with sales reaching \$10.38 billion in 2003 (OTA 2004). Moreover, global sales of organic products increased more than 10 percent in 2002, making it a \$23 billion dollar industry. The economic future of organic production appears bright in many areas of the world as forecast analysts anticipate the market expanding to \$30.7 billion by 2007 (Organic Monitor 2003).

This burgeoning consumer interest in organically grown foods has opened new market opportunities for producers and grocery retailers. Of particular interest to retailers is the fact that more organic food is now purchased in conventional supermarkets than any other venue (Greene and Dimitri 2003). Not only is there continued strong demand for fresh fruits and vegetables, but there is growth in demand for a broad range of organic products, including food products based on grain crops (e.g., pastas and snack foods), and dairy and meat products. The growth in these latter areas provides an opportunity for Kansas farmers to innovate and expand organic production of key agricultural commodities in the state. As farmers enter into this market their need for information specific to organic production, processing and marketing will increase accordingly. Likewise, retailers need specific information on organic markets, consumer trends and available products as they increase their activities in this area. This report describes a research effort in east-central Kansas to begin to assess the information needs of organic growers and retailers.

## **Purpose and Procedures**

### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this project is to assess the information needs in the state for organic production, processing and marketing. Findings are intended to inform the development of research and extension programs to address these needs.

### ***Procedures***

Two primary activities were designed to achieve the research objectives: (1) focus groups with growers and (2) face-to-face interviews with retailers. Each of these activities is described briefly below.

***Focus Groups.*** Four focus groups were conducted with growers. Three groups comprised established organic growers, and the fourth comprised growers interested in making the transition from conventional to organic production. The rationale for conducting a focus group interview with a transitioning group was to understand the unique perspectives of those

who have some experience in organic production and marketing as compared to the perspective of those presently considering a transition to organic production. In forming the groups we attempted to achieve some homogeneity of knowledge and experience across participants. In particular, there is concern in the focus group literature that disparity in knowledge levels across participants is likely to discourage those with less experience/knowledge of a topic – in this case the prospective organic growers – from fully participating in the discussion (Krueger and Casey 2000).

Several criteria were developed to determine the type of participants to invite to join the focus groups. Homogeneity was achieved in the groups by identifying people with approximately similar experience related to organic agriculture. Likewise, for the “transitioning” group, we located participants who were engaged in agriculture, and had some interest and perhaps intention of transitioning to organic production. We attempted to achieve some geographic diversity among the participants, however for practical reasons limited the geographic scope to eastern and central Kansas. Also, we attempted to limit the scope of the discussion within each group by emphasizing participants engaged in producing the major commodities in the state. Thus, in three of the groups the participants were engaged primarily in the production of grains, forage crops and/or beef. The fourth group emphasized horticultural producers.

Following standard practice, the target group size was between seven and twelve participants per group. Average actual group size in this case was between seven and eight participants. Three focus group discussions were held in Manhattan, Kansas, which was determined to be a reasonably convenient location for most of the participants in those groups. The fourth was held in Lawrence, Kansas to accommodate growers clustered in that area. The sessions were conducted following standard practice for moderating and documenting focus groups. Participants were asked about the challenges they face and what kinds of information they perceive as necessary for organic production, processing and marketing. In the case of the prospective organic producers, participants were asked about the kind of information they perceive as necessary to help them make the transition to organic production. (Abridged versions of the questioning routes are included in Appendices A and B respectively). It was determined that saturation was reached at the completion of four focus groups (i.e., a range of ideas had been established and no significantly new information was emerging), and thus further sessions were not deemed necessary (Krueger and Casey 2000).

***Interviews.*** The other key source of data for this project was interviews with retailers of organic foods. Informants were identified with some attention given to geographic diversity, as well as diversity by type of retail establishment. We sought some variation in retailers by size and market orientation. Interviews were sought with large conventional retailers, large retailers with an emphasis on organics, and small/medium stores focused on organics. Interviews were obtained with representatives in a variety of positions in the stores, including store managers, assistant managers, marketing directors, purchasers and outreach/education directors.

No attempt was made to obtain a random sample of interviewees; rather, the sample was seen as purposive (Altheide 1996). Eight in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in

the urban areas of Kansas City, Lawrence, Manhattan and Wichita. Some of these were with a single individual and others were with two or three people. Since the interviews were semi-structured, the questionnaires were not rigidly followed. Rather, they were used as guides to probe for salient issues, and to provide structure when necessary. The intent of the interviews was to maximize variation in responses so as to gain as complete a view as possible of the informants' understanding of challenges and information needs with respect to retailing organic foods (Strauss 1987). Informants were asked about their retail operations, about challenges and opportunities they face, and about information that would likely be helpful to them as an organic foods retailer. (Appendix C contains the general question schedule that was used with retailers, though some modification was done to accommodate the uniqueness of each retailer).

## **Focus Group Results**

The interaction with the groups began with introductory questions designed to: (1) lessen formality and reserve among participants, (2) quickly establish characteristics that participants share in common, and (3) ease the group into the general topic of discussion and foster conversation and interaction among participants. While they serve specific purposes in the functioning of the focus group, the responses to these questions are often not critical to the analysis (Krueger and Casey 2000), and thus for our purposes here we will move directly to the analysis of the transition and key questions.

### ***Challenges***

The transition question is intended to narrow the scope of the discussion and provide the logical link between the broader discussion (i.e., organic agriculture and their reasons for becoming organic growers) and the key questions. The transition question was phrased as follows:

***What do you see as challenges for you as an organic grower?***

Essentially the same question was put to the transitioning group with the following modification:

***What do you see as challenges for you as a future organic grower?***

From the discussion that ensued around this question a listing of key challenges was recorded on flip charts. After the discussion reached saturation regarding the main points, participants were asked to vote with dots on the flip chart sheets, prioritizing the issues they felt were the most important. This was done for all the focus groups. Tables 1 and 2 below show the challenges identified and how the votes were recorded and ranked according to the priority assigned to them by the participants. Table 1 is an example of challenges as prioritized by one of the established organic grower groups. Table 2 shows the challenges as prioritized by the prospective organic growers group.

A binary ranking system was used in which “R” (a red dot) represented a priority vote, and “O” (other color) was secondary in ranking. For example, in Table 1 “Weed control” received five priority and zero secondary votes. “Marketing” received three priority and one secondary vote.

**Table 1: Prioritization of Challenges Faced by Established Organic Growers**  
(a sample of priority challenges from one group)

Votes		Category
R	O	(R is priority, O is secondary)
5	0	Weed control
5	0	Communication: “Who ya gonna call?”; technical assistance, crops experts, scientists
3	1	Marketing
3	0	Educating the public
2	4	Time management, labor
2	0	Marketing power in a changing environment
1	3	Need an organic extension specialist
1	0	Cross pollination: (pollen drift from genetically engineered crops)
1	0	Cropping system design: integrating soil-building crops
1	0	Disrespectful (conventional farm) neighbors
0	5	Organic certification: bureaucratic, moving targets
0	1	Do it yourself needs
0	1	Storage facilities: grain, extended storage
0	1	Dealing with the Farm Bill: production v. quality, no till
0	1	Reducing tillage
0	1	Machinery maintenance: nonconventional machinery, diverse, critical
0	0	Financial assistance challenges

**Table 2: Prioritization of Challenges and Issues Faced by Prospective Organic Growers**

Votes		Category
R	O	(R is priority, O is secondary)
5	0	Weed and insect control
5	4	Information: regionally, locally specific information, dissemination, workable models, specifics, research
2	0	Start up costs: profit, long-term, equipment
2	0	Problem solving: no script to follow
2	0	Certification: fees, inconsistencies, record keeping, time, standards
1	2	Creativity: not enough partnerships with KSU/others
1	1	Equipment: availability, maintenance, innovation
1	0	Model for success: need for real-life models
1	0	Stigma (around organic farming)
0	3	How to innovate, cross over (crossing over refers to transitioning to organic)
0	1	Seed and input availability

Priority challenges perceived by growers in all the focus groups are analyzed below. They can be categorized into (1) technical/production challenges, (2) marketing challenges, (3) education/awareness challenges, and (4) practical challenges.

**(1) Technical/production challenges.** The majority of challenges perceived by organic growers can be categorized as technical/production issues. In terms of determining priorities, these issues received the bulk of priority votes. An important component of production challenges is a “communication” issue, captured by one of the participants’ comments, “Who you gonna call?” Both the technical and communication issues are discussed below.

*Weed control.* Weed control is a priority challenge. Issues raised here included mitigating weed problems through cropping systems design, the lack of products to deal with weed problems, and challenges associated with mechanical cultivation. Setting the equipment correctly for cultivation and maintaining it in good condition was the specific issue mentioned in relation to cultivation. Also, the benefits of reduced tillage were recognized, but the challenge of reducing tillage in organic production was also noted. Interestingly, pest/insect control emerged more in the transition/prospective group than in the others. This may be a reflection of more experienced organic growers’ ability to maintain pest populations in balance, resulting in insect pests being perceived as less of a challenge as compared to weeds.

*Organic expertise.* The availability of expertise in organics is another priority challenge. Participants agreed that when the need arises for technical assistance related to organic production, there are few people to call upon that have expertise relevant to their region. Extension, county agents, and local cooperatives have been unhelpful because these traditional

sources of information have little knowledge of organics, according to the participants. While general information about organic production is available on the internet, it is often not specific to the region in terms of climate, soils, varieties, pest cycles, markets, etc. One participant commented,

“When I have a question, I go to the web . . . but the information I find is not specific to the region; it is from the west or east coast, but it is often not applicable because it is not specific to our pest cycles, our regional/local climates, soils, etc. How do we access that information?”

Another participant stated the problem in practical terms:

“It would be helpful to have some like “*Joe*” around who could be called upon for advice.”

Whereas the established growers groups were more focused on concrete, immediate assistance (e.g., an organic extension agent they could call), the prospective group placed more emphasis on the availability of relevant information. This may reflect the different stages of the groups. The established groups, being more engaged in current production, have immediate needs, whereas the prospective group is more in an exploratory stage in which they are, for the most part, still researching the transition to organic production.

Some ideas that emerged out of the discussions on expertise were: (1) a qualified organic Extension specialist who could “float” in the state, and (2) a centralized database to provide information and regionally specific advice on organic production.

*Time management, labor.* Another category in production that received priority votes was time management and labor. There were two key issues associated with this category: (a) organic production is labor intensive, and finding the labor to manage an organic operation is often a challenge; and (b) there is a certain forced independence in organic production regarding equipment because equipment used in conventional operations can not be used in organic operations unless it is stripped down and cleaned. This leads to additional costs in terms of having dedicated organic equipment and storage facilities, and additional maintenance of non-conventional machinery.

*Start up costs.* Start up costs – the initial capital outlay for equipment and other capital assets needed to begin a farming operation – are seen as a barrier keeping younger generations out of farming. Moreover, organic farming requires more cultivation equipment, which is hard to find and has high maintenance needs, according to participants. This challenge was identified in particular by the prospective group.

**(2) Marketing challenges.** The two key challenges that growers articulated regarding marketing were organic certification and the bargaining power of small growers.

*Certification.* The groups saw the organic certification process as bureaucratic and cumbersome, particularly for vegetable growers as compared with grains, which are often bought sight unseen. The documentation requirements associated with certification were perceived as heavy, and thus as a potential barrier to entering into organic production or maintaining certification. Other issues raised in relation to certification were fees and organic standards. Finally, assuming one gets certified, what markets are available where organic products can be sold?

*Small growers and marketing.* The second challenge, in broad terms, has to do with the structure of agriculture, and the challenges faced by small-scale organic growers in that structure. Smaller organic growers face barriers related to a lack of marketing power in the context of a consolidating organic foods industry. Also, in many cases marketing and distribution networks are not as established as they are for conventional growers, federal programs are scarcer – all of which combine to make profitably venturing into organic agriculture more challenging.

**(3) Education and awareness challenges.** The key challenge that growers raised regarding education was the perceived lack of knowledge on the part of the public about the environmental, social and health benefits of organic foods.

**(4) Practical challenges.** The final category of challenges that emerged has to do with practical information and models. The central question was how to partner more with K-State in order to generate practical information helpful to organic farmers. One participant suggested a demonstration model:

“We need a model here in Kansas that is doing the whole thing [a working organic farm model]. Five-ten year project in this region, a farm that is making it work. The whole thing – technical issues, finance, markets, etc.”

The main issue here seemed to be that the participants were searching for a way to collaborate with K-State (e.g., on-farm research, research partnerships) in order to generate relevant information, and perhaps to develop a model for prospective organic farmers to follow.

### ***Information Needs***

Finally, the transition question was followed by key questions, which are the most narrowly focused. The key questions were divided into three areas, phrased as follows:

***If we think of the growing cycle as involving inputs, production, processing and marketing, what kinds of information on (1) Inputs/production, (2) Processing, (3) Marketing . . . would be most helpful to you?***

From the discussion that ensued around these questions a listing of key needs was recorded. Since the previous question had already allowed participants to discuss the challenges

they face, this discussion on information needs was relatively focused. The lists generated are summarized below.

### ***Information needs on Inputs/production:***

#### *Weed control:*

- Weed problems (pigweed, bindweed, Johnson grass, velvet grass)
- Information on organic methods of weed control (e.g., biological controls)

#### *Cropping system design:*

- Cropping system design specific to the region
- Whole farm systems research and design
- Information on the integration and utilization of cover crops
- Information on high tunnel/greenhouse production

#### *Soils:*

- Soil health and testing specific for organic producers
- Soil amendments: recommendations on which soil amendments are needed, acceptable and available for organic production (minerals, elements, manures, etc.); how to facilitate bulk buying of soil amendments

#### *Information Availability:*

- Website lists of sources and dealers of organic inputs (e.g., information on products, costs, availability, distribution)
- Website lists of organic growers in Kansas
- List server on organics (Q and As posted on how other growers have resolved problems); knowledge networks
- Regionally specific Extension publications for organic agriculture

#### *Information on other items:*

- Alternative fuels and energy
- Plant breeding and seed history for organic production
- Information on organic methods of fly control in cattle (e.g., biopesticides)
- Need innovative equipment for organic production (e.g., for cultivation)

There was some discussion around these issues, including questions about Kansas State University's (K-State) budget allocation for organic research. Participants also expressed a desire to work with K-State to develop an organic research program focused on the key needs. As one participant noted, "K-state has a diverse environment, and could make a name for itself in developing an organic research program."

### ***Information needs on Processing:***

#### *Cleaning and Processing:*

- Need for regional organic grain cleaning and processing
  - Need to develop low cost, high volume, portable grain cleaners
- Need for local/regional scale organic meat processing (beef, poultry, pork)  
Need for local/regional scale organic dairy processing
- Need information on the economics of processing:
  - Small scale, microenterprise
  - business planning and development
  - insurance

*Storage:*

- Need for on-farm grain storage
- Need information on managing moisture levels and pests in grain storage

***Information needs on Marketing:***

*Develop new markets:*

- Information/research to develop new markets
- Information on consumer trends
- Information on production costs and pricing
- Strategies for supply/demand
- Need to integrate organic foods into public institutions

*Education:*

- For growers: need workshops and courses for organic producers on marketing issues and how to market organic crops
  - Certification issues
- For the public: information regarding the multiple benefits of organic agriculture (e.g., land stewardship, water and soil quality, general community benefit, social benefit, health benefits)

*Growers' Cooperative:*

- Information on a growers' cooperative for: purchasing, insurance, equipment, marketing

*General Information:*

- Resource guide for marketing options
- Directory of organic producers (regional and statewide), including contact information, what they produce, etc.
- Site similar to KC Food Circle: <http://agebb.missouri.edu/sustain/kcfc.htm>
- Directory of grocery stores that retail organic
- Information on certification groups and issues
- K-State as a clearinghouse for information on organics

## ***Summary of Focus Groups***

*Challenges.* In terms of perceived challenges, groups generally identified technical/production challenges as priority. Among those issues, organic methods for weed control was a priority. Another top issue for groups was the availability of technical expertise to address a wide range of issues related to organics.

Priority marketing-related challenges included certification and the bargaining power of small growers. All groups saw a priority in education of the public regarding the environmental, social and health benefits of organic foods – a fairly broad concern. The prospective growers group was more focused on specific, practical models that new organic farmers could follow.

*Information needs.* Regarding inputs/production, groups emphasized the need for information on weed control, soils, and soil amendments. Regarding processing, information on local/regional scale organic processing of grains, meats and dairy was emphasized. Regarding marketing, groups noted the need for information on niche and new markets. There was considerable interest in K-State as a site for a web-based clearinghouse for information on organic production and marketing.

## **Retailer Interview Results**

As mentioned above, we sought some variation in retailers by size, market orientation and geography. The retailers in this study can be usefully categorized along two dimensions: size and market orientation. In terms of size, the two categories are large and small/medium. Of the eight interviews, five can be considered large retailers, and three are small/medium. The two categories we use to distinguish market orientation are “conventional” and “core-organic.” Not all of the large stores are conventional (two are core-organic). In contrast, all of the small/medium stores we interviewed can be considered core-organic.

### *Challenges Identified by Retailers*

The challenges identified by retailers can be categorized into three main themes: (a) public perceptions and understanding of organics, (b) limited distribution networks, and (c) the characteristics and in-store challenges related to organic foods.

(a) *Public perception.* Core-organic retailers in particular noted a public perception, whether accurate or not, that organic foods are not affordable, especially to those on limited incomes. These retailers offered arguments against this perception (e.g., that while this may be true for some organic products, others are price-competitive with conventional; and that in the broader view, if the eventual health and environmental costs of conventional foods are included, organic foods are less expensive in the long term, etc.). Still, some core-organic retailers conceded that “price keeps some away.” Further, these retailers generally held the view that the public still lacks full understanding of the environmental and health problems associated with the

conventional food system, and therefore does not understand the differences between conventional and organic. A final concern is that in a consolidating organics industry the meaning of “organic” will become diluted as large corporations entering into the market will use their influence to ease organic standards. For all of these concerns, public education is seen as a big challenge.

(b) *Limited distribution networks.* Since organic retail is stronger on the coasts, the distribution networks for produce in particular are more limited in the Midwest, and this occasionally causes availability and pricing challenges, according to retailers. For those who procure some organic foods locally, local wholesale and distribution networks are also prone to shortages and other disruptions.

(c) *Characteristics of organics and in-store challenges.* Conventional retailers also noted a number of challenges related to the characteristics of organic produce, including consistency, appearance, shelf life, and differences in stocking and display requirements (e.g., how to display in relation to conventional produce).

### *Information Needs Identified by Retailers*

*Information on Consumers and Markets.* There was generally agreement on this need. The conventional stores in particular were interested in studies of consumer demographics. Who is buying organics, who is not, and what are their characteristics by age, gender, income level, educational level, residential zip code? Some informants at conventional stores stated that they did not have this sort of information, which is likely a result of being part of a larger corporate structure where data and specific purchasing decisions are not managed at the store level. Thus, their information was more anecdotal. Both conventional and core-organic stores were also interested in the motivational reasons behind purchasing patterns. Questions such as: What attracts consumers? What convinces them to make the initial organic purchase, and to continue purchasing organics? Why do consumers convert to organic foods? What premiums will the market bear? What makes them stop buying or prevents them from buying more? How do we retain customers?

*Public Education about Organics.* One of the challenges expressed by core-organic retailers in particular is that the public’s knowledge of organics is often lacking, uneven, or misinformed. They articulated a clear need to define “organic” for the public, and to educate the public about organics in general. Specific needs expressed include general information bulletins on organic production, organic foods, the benefits of organic foods and organic production, including comparisons of conventional and organic foods and production. As one informant phrased it,

“People want to know if it’s more nutritious. That’s what I hear. They want a comparison when we’re out giving talks. They want to know if an organic apple is more nutritious than a conventional apple. That’s one I hear a lot. . . . And not just vitamins and minerals, but some of the vital [natural substances] that people

are really interested in for cancer prevention.”

In an interview with a core-organic retailer, it was suggested that to achieve the public education and outreach, they would like to see Extension expertise and outreach in organics: “I’d like to see Extension offices embrace organics because we interface with Extension . . . we need [their] buy in.”

*Limited Availability of Kansas Organic Products.* A third theme that emerged in the interviews was the limited availability of organic products from Kansas, especially packaged products, such as grain-based snacks, soy milk, meats, etc. Several retailers noted that while packaged organic has been a rapid growth area – and accounts for a significant portion of sales – there are very few packaged organic products from Kansas available to retailers. One retailer noted,

“We would like to do more. I only know of one company in Kansas who is making packaged organic products . . . other than Heartland Mill. If we had packaged organic goods from Kansas, that would be a competitive edge because we would have two strong reasons to buy the product: it would be local and organic.”

It was also noted that producers and wholesalers of organics may need help linking up with local/regional sources of organic products, properly packaging their products so that retailers can use them, and increasing awareness among retailers in the state that their product is available. On this last point, the concern is that even if a Kansas producer/wholesaler has a product, if it is not available through one of the large distributors, retailers may not be aware of it.

## **Conclusions**

The findings herein demonstrate a clear demand for research and information in the organic agriculture and food sector in Kansas. These information needs span the agrifood chain, from inputs through production, processing, manufacturing, distribution, wholesale, retail and consumer patterns. The implication is that there is a demonstrable need in the state for a substantial research and extension effort aimed at organic production, processing and marketing for family farmers and retailers in Kansas.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Questions for Focus Groups of Established Organic Growers (Abridged)**

#### **1:30 START**

##### **Prelude**

Researchers will give an overview of the study, stating its objectives and describing the role the focus group interview will play in the study. Participants' informed consent will be obtained.

##### **Opening Question**

1. Could each of you tell us about yourself and about your farm please?

*Probes:* Are other members of your family involved in the farm operation?  
Do you grow crops, livestock or both?  
Is your farm certified organic according to USDA regulations?  
"I'm not making this up..."

##### **Introductory Question**

2. What were your reasons for becoming an organic grower or producer?

*Probe:* Did you ever farm with non-organic practices?

##### **Transition Questions**

3. What do you see as challenges or issues for you as an organic grower?

*Probe:* Do you see one as a bigger challenge than the others?

##### **Voting (dots)**

#### **2:40 BREAK**

#### **2:55 START PART 2**

##### **Summarize reasons, challenges**

**Instructions: Organize into groups; instructions for participation; anchors; movement;  
List, summarize, report**

##### **Key Questions**

4. If we think of the growing cycle involving inputs (such as seeds or pest control products), production, processing and marketing, what kinds of information on inputs would be most helpful to you?

*Probes:* Basic research information or information on how to apply them?

5. What about the production phase of the growing cycle, what kinds of information on production would be most helpful to you?

*Probes:* Basic research information or information on how to apply them?

6. What kinds of information on processing (including storage) would be helpful?

*Probes:* Basic research information or information on how to apply them?

7. And what about marketing, are there particular kinds of information on marketing that would be helpful to you?

*Probes:* Basic research information or information on how to apply them?

### **Reporting of groups, recording on charts**

### **Voting (dots) on input points where K-State Extension can contribute**

*Probe:* Past, present, future... prioritize

<b>4:00 SHORT BREAK</b>
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<b>4:10 CLOSING</b>
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Let's review what we've talked about today....[Moderator summarizes discussion]

8. Is there anything else you face as an organic grower local food systems that should be added to what we have already discussed?

*Probe:* Are there communication needs you have—with K-State or with other organic growers—that we haven't talked about today?

9. What kinds of recommendations would you make to growers who are thinking about becoming organic?

<b>4:25 EVALUATION</b>
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## **Appendix B**

### **Questions for Focus Groups of Prospective Organic Growers (Abridged)**

#### **Prelude**

Researchers will give an overview of the study, stating its objectives and describing the role the focus group interview will play in the study. Participants' informed consent will be obtained.

#### **Opening Question**

1. Could each of you tell us about yourself and about your farm please?

*Probes:* Are other members of your family involved in the farm operation?  
Do you grow crops, livestock or both?  
Do plan to have your farm certified organic according to USDA regulations?

#### **Introductory Question**

2. What are your reasons for thinking about becoming an organic grower or producer?

*Probe:* Do you put more emphasis on environmental concerns or on possible price premiums of organic products?

#### **Transition Questions**

3. What do you anticipate as the three key challenges in your transition to organic production?

*Probe:* Do you see one as a bigger challenge than the others?

#### **Key Questions**

5. If we think of the growing cycle involving inputs (such as seeds or pest control products), production, processing and marketing, what kinds of information on inputs would be most helpful to you?

*Probes:* Basic research information or information on how to apply them?

6. What about the production phase of the growing cycle, what kinds of information on production would be most helpful to you?

*Probes:* Basic research information or information on how to apply them?

7. What kinds of information on processing (including storage) would be helpful?

*Probes:* Basic research information or information on how to apply them?

8. And what about marketing, are there particular kinds of information on marketing that would be helpful to you?

*Probes:* Basic research information or information on how to apply them?

### **Closing Questions**

Let's review what we've talked about today....[Moderator summarizes discussion]

9. Is there anything else you face as an organic grower that should be added to what we have already discussed?
10. Is there anything about K-State Research and Extension you would like added to what we have already discussed?

## Appendix C

### Question Schedule – Organic Retail

#### I. GENERAL INFO

1. Name of respondent:
2. Address:
3. Telephone:
4. Date of Interview:
5. Length of interview:
6. Interviewer:
7. Notes:

#### II. GENERAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Could you tell us about the size of your business?
- 2) How long have you been in business?
- 3) How long have you been retailing organic foods?

#### III. RETAILING ORGANIC FOODS: (what, how much and to whom?)

- 4) What categories of organic foods do you sell? (e.g., fresh produce, pastas, dairy, etc.)
  - a) Which of these do you tend to sell the most of in terms of units; in terms of sales?
  - b) Which of these tend to be the most profitable?
- 5) Do you keep track of the amount and/or value of organic foods that you sell?
  - a) Overall, would you say that amount has been stable, increasing, or decreasing?
  - b) Growth areas?
- 6) Overall, how would you evaluate the role of organic foods within your business?
- 7) What can you tell us about the characteristics of your customers who tend to buy organic?
- 8) Have you noticed any changes in customer preferences regarding organic foods?
- 9) What do you see as the biggest challenges you face in terms of retailing organic foods (sourcing, pricing, certification issues, standards, etc.)?

- 10) What do you see as the biggest opportunities you face in terms of retailing organic foods?

**IV. INFORMATION AND OUTREACH NEEDS:** (How?)

- 11) What are your primary sources of information about sourcing, purchasing, pricing and marketing organic foods?
- 12) Has there been research and information produced by KSU that has been helpful to you as an organic foods retailer?
- 13) What kinds of research and information would likely be helpful to you as an organic foods retailer?

**V. FUTURE/CLOSING**

- 14) What do you see as the future of organic foods in your relevant retail area?
- 15) What factors do you think will likely change regarding organic foods over the next five to ten years?
- 16) What do you see as the driving force behind those changes?
- 17) Are there any important issues we have not covered?