

Local Food Connection 2010 Workshop Notes

Workshop Title: Understanding Food Certifications
Estimated # of attendees: 29 plus 5 presenters

Room #225

Panelists:

(CK) Connie Karr, Oregon Tilth (OT)

(JH) Jude Hobbs, Salmon Safe

(JS) Jackie Sleeper, Certified Humane Raised and Handled

(PB) Peter Bloome, Food Alliance

Moderator: Larry Lev, OSU

Note Taker: Teresa Matteson

Larry Lev introduced the panelists. Each panelist addressed a list of questions regarding their program.

Oregon Tilth

CK began the discussion by describing organic certification and statistics for the number of OT certified farmers and processors. She explained that OT certification uses process based standards that cover the growth, farming, processing and handling of food products. She described the list of organically allowed inputs. She gave a brief overview of organic certification history starting in 1990's with the Organic Food Production Act and the "Organic standards". She shared the goal for a 3% per year increase in organic certified farms by 2015. OT certifies half of the 432 organically certified farms in Oregon.

CK stated that farms that sell to local markets and direct sales to processors and retailers benefit most from OT certification. Processors benefit by belonging to the value-added niche. Organic dairy production has experienced huge growth. 37% of organic product sales are in dairy products.

CK said that organic is the baseline certification for eco and sustainable ag labels. Certification requires an annual process with the following steps:

1. Farmer/processor submits a 7 – 20 page application
2. Application review by OT staff
3. on-site inspection to confirm application information
4. OT provides farmer/processor with report of initial findings
5. there is a review period where farmer/processor can access inspection report
6. non-compliance issues can be resolved (correction opportunity)
7. unannounced inspections occur throughout the year

Cost of certification is on a sliding scale based on income.

There is a USDA cost-share reimbursement for some of the organic certification costs.

Question: What is the process for transitioning to organic certification? CK discussed that the 3-year requirement for prohibited materials determines transition period. There is also a transition certification program and that term can be used for marketing.

Question: What number of conventional growers also grow organic? Inspector, Andy, mentioned that a lot of producers do "split" production", which means that the farm has

both organic certified and conventional production. Care must be taken to prevent cross contamination of crops and products.

LL mentioned that folks could visit the Oregon Tilth table in the convention hall.

Food Alliance

PB mentioned that FA is a third party certifier and separate 3rd party inspectors are involved, which lends to the FA program credibility. PB gave a short history of FA stating that in 1993 OSU, WSU and the Washington Department of Ag were involved in promoting the 3rd party system for certification of farms and processors. He provided statistics for FA certification and mentioned international countries involved, sale values and six distribution centers.

FA certification provides a genuine sustainable commitment that works well for the mid-level agricultural producer and producer owned co-ops.

There is a seven-step process for FA certification that begins with an internet self-assessment tool and includes documentation, inspection and incorporation of FA label into sales. Some of the FA criteria include: protection of soil and water resources, decreased pesticides, transparent chain of custody, no hormone use, safe working environment, humane treatment, continual improvement of practices and inspection cycles. Cost of FA certification is based on sales and range from \$400 to \$1400/year.

FA has benefits such as: on-line materials on marketing and labeling, connection with buyers (such as Food Hub), match making between producer and markets and the ability to retain and build the FA brand.

PB mentioned up-coming FA events from April through November, 2010 including Mindful Mouths and National Summit for Sustainable Food.

Question: Is it beneficial to have more than one certification, such as both FA and OT? Yes-because OT does not link farmer with buyer directly. LL stated that Stahlbush Island Farms and Cedar Summit has both – perhaps on different land.

Salmon Safe

Jude Hobbs is a site evaluator for SS. She shared a short history of SS certification starting in 1995 when the Pacific Rivers Council determined a market based incentive to protect habitat. The first SS certification was in 1997. SS certification is unique because it focuses on water quality, habitat and biodiversity. It is a non-profit organization that encourages the restoration of ag land and urban site developments. JH shared acreage statistics and the geographical description of the SS area from California to Puget Sound.

SS strongly encourages irrigation management. They have retail and business campaigns. SS can be used by large scale landscapers (urban) through agricultural production. Hops growers have used a business campaign "Drink like a fish".

The SS process includes corporation campuses, such as Nike, and involves independent inspectors and whole farm evaluation. They stress erosion prevention, biodiversity, manure management and riparian management. Healthy urban landscapes support SS. To begin the SS certification, call Dan Kent in the office. He will match you with an inspector. You discuss what you are doing today and SS helps facilitate the

transition away from chemical use that impacts salmon. They have a high risk chemical list. There is a 3-year cycle for follow-up inspections. Standards are currently in the process of being updated.

SS certification cost to grower can range from \$250 to \$1500 for 3 years. Recertification is less expensive. SS supports marketing, sales, public service campaigns and gate signs.

Certified Humane Raised and Handled

CHRH is based out of Virginia. Dale Douglas is the Executive Director and has a Washington DC background in market-based solutions to address issues. JS discussed statistics for the number of animals and the animal products that are produced nationwide.

An independent scientific committee established the CHRH standards. Independent inspectors have degrees in Animal Science and are species specific experts. Animals are tracked from birth to slaughter and inspection occurs from farm to processor.

There are various CHRH products including co-op producers (PPO) and Product Manufacturing Operation (PMO). This is a marketing label campaign and costs include application and inspection fees. There is a cost exempt category for small farms. CHRH benefits all stockholders in food production line.

Question: Can a process use the CHRH label if they buy certified meat? All animal ingredients must be certified for final product to be certified. Butter is a difficult example.

Question: Is CHRH flexible with CAFO's? They have strict space and other requirements for indoor production.

General Questions to all panelists:

Question: there is organic certification and other certification – what is the difference? There are 100 USDA certifiers in the world. USDA accreditation is required for the organic process certification such as OT.

Question: something about ODA labeling in 2010 and USDA Organic in 2012 – yes ODA is an accredited agency. ODA food safety program combined with ODA organic certification. This does not apply to European markets.

Question: What does SS require of farms near riparian areas for protection? Buffer size and biodiversity, chemical use, use of plants for sedimentation traps, log placement for fish habitat.

Question: Do you coordinate with EQIP grants? PB-FA – quality for FA is 95% there for NRCS programs; CK-OT – a person has been hired to work on NRCS programs; JS-CHRH – follow state and local regulations, value added grants for mobile slaughter units.

Question: Cleaning equipment standards? CK-OT depends on equipment, blow, ventilation, washing, purge; prevent contamination and commingling; can clean process equipment but it is often easier to have separate process plants for organic vs conventional.

Question: What about old farm treated lumber? OT inspector, Andy, answered that old wood is grandfathered in – you cannot replace old wood with treated wood.

Question: What about buffers? Between organic and transition fields? CK-OT there are no set limits. You must avoid contamination. Depends on your neighbor's practice. It is the organic farmers' responsibility to know your neighbor and foster good relations.

Question: Animal handling question about farmers market guidelines for products? CK-OT answered that the NOSB standards make it difficult to pinpoint sections about animal handling. There are pasture requirements and development of specifics are in the process and available soon.

Question on organic certification of aquatic species? PB suggested that participants visit the FA website.