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Organic Agriculture: A Growing Industry

By Andrew Walker

Amidst the hustle and bustle inside the Indiana Convention Center during the 81st National FFA Convention, there was one workshop concerning a new trend in agriculture: organic farming. With organic farming, no pesticides, herbicides or any other man-made synthetic materials are used. This new, innovative form of agriculture is growing among farmers across the country and more and more consumers are exploring the organic market.

However, it is no easy task to switch a conventional farm to an organic operation. As students learned in the session, it takes three years for a farmer to convert his fields and 12 months to switch his livestock to organic. During the switch, a farmer must treat his animals as if they were organic but continue selling the products in a conventional market. This can be a difficult and costly start up for farmers.

However, organic agriculture is also an expanding industry. It was included in the Farm Bill of 1990. This is a large step in promoting the future of organic agriculture.

“We are all farmers, whether you’re conventional or organic. We have to stick together,” said presenter Preston Green of Wisconsin.

Those in attendance were pleased to see how impartial the presenters were.

“I appreciated the non-bias attitude,” said Jane Eisemann, an advisor of the Kodiak FFA Chapter in Alaska. “My FFA group is building a sustainable greenhouse and we want the requirements for staying this way.”

Most students seemed to enjoy learning about a new wave in agriculture. Each had different reasons for coming to the workshop, but all wanted to learn more about this new craze.

“We went on a tour of an organic farm and thought it was neat,” said Tyler Krcil of the Wagner FFA Chapter in S.D.

To check products sold in the store, consumers are able to look for the official USDA organic symbol. This small symbol is not just a verification of an organic product, but a symbol of the hard work and labor that the growing number of organic farms are putting into their products.

The National FFA Organization, formerly known as the Future Farmers of America, is a national youth organization of 507,763 student members – all preparing for leadership and careers in the science, business and technology of agriculture – as part of 7,439 local FFA chapters in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. The National FFA Organization changed to its present name in 1988, in recognition of the growth and diversity of agriculture and agricultural education. The FFA mission is to make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education. Visit www.ffa.org for more information.

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