

# Organic AG NEWSLETTER

## ROA: IT'S WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED



Most Americans don't think much about farming, except perhaps that it's fun to go to the farmers' market on Saturday morning. But while agriculture may seem to many like a distant issue best left to others, in reality it is the most important aspect of our world today. Not only because we all need to eat, but also because we need a planet to live on. And farmers are the key to both.

Today, a growing number of America's farmers are at the forefront of agriculture's next generation. Knowing we must feed people, restore the soil, conserve water, and combat climate change, these leaders are transforming how we farm, who is farming, and the role of farming in our health.

As a physician, I can personally attest to the power of farming. In ways we could have only dreamed of a few decades ago, healthy food and modern medicine are coming together. Put simply, the care many physicians are now ordering for their patients is being delivered by a fork rather than a pharmacy.

The reason is simple: medical professionals now see the American diet is responsible for a chronic disease crisis that's devastating the nation. Today, most Americans suffer at least one chronic disease, such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and obesity. Worse, fully 40 percent of all Americans are stricken by two or more. And food is often the cause.

*cont. pg. 2*

## JUNE 2023

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### FSB LOCATIONS

301 W. Falcon, Flanagan  
 403 State, Benson  
 2401 E. Washington,  
 Bloomington  
 111 N. Fayette, El Paso  
 500 S. Persimmon, Le Roy  
 208 E. Gridley, Gridley

## ROA: IT'S WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED (CONT)

This is more than just a health crisis. With so many of Americans struggling medically, our economy is weaker than it would otherwise be. Child development isn't as robust as it should be. And our national security isn't as strong as it must be.

Clearly, this is a critical problem. And the great news is American farmers are delivering the solution.

Today, a growing number of farms and ranches use Regenerative Organic Agriculture methods to produce the nutrient rich foods on which human health depends. Called ROA for short, these methods include composting, cover crops, rotational cropping and grazing, reduced tillage, and more. They are proven to be a sustainable, climate-smart approach to producing nutritious foods. They help restore farm and ranch lands, preserve scarce water, and generate a cleaner environment. Just as important, they improve producers' profitability by reducing input costs, enhancing output, and attracting higher prices.

I've had the opportunity to visit many farms and ranches, and I can never get over the difference ROA makes. Their topsoil is healthier, their produce and animal products are better, and the economic outlook for their operators is brighter.

I'm especially excited about what ROA means to my patients. I've long known about the power of healthy food and, in fact, had the privilege of writing several best-selling books about it. But when I see what nutrient-rich foods do for my patients, that's when the power of ROA to fix America's broken food system truly comes to life.

Nor am I the only one. In medical offices across America, nutritious food is being treated as what it truly is – medicine. And that means, a whole new market is being created for ROA farmers and ranchers. With more than 4-in-5 adults and 9-in-10 children receiving medical treatment every year, the opportunity to use food as medicine is almost limitless.

Federal and state lawmakers and officials get it, too, and are adopting Food Is Medicine policy in significant ways. A pilot program involving medically tailored meals is already underway, policy changes are being developed to train doctors and nurses about nutrition, and this year's Farm Bill promises to place even greater emphasis on ROA and nutritious food.

So, to all the ROA farmers and ranchers out there, I thank you. And to all the conventional producers who are giving ROA a look, I say this: As a farmer or rancher, you already have your country's deepest respect. And if you opt to use ROA to make your nation healthier, you will have the heartfelt gratitude of the medical profession, too.

Why? Well, it's simple. More and more every day, ROA is what the doctor orders!

*Dr. Mark Hyman*

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# COVER CROPS IN ORGANIC SYSTEMS

Cover crops are a vital part of making organic systems work. I enjoy the challenge that comes with organic systems. I grew up on an organic farm and currently work with many organic clients. In this article, I'll share some of my experiences.

In the spring of 2022, we did a lot of testing to see how much nitrogen we were getting from the cover crops. This is all from above-ground plant biomass, since 90% of the nitrogen comes from the plant, with not a lot below ground. We got 150 units of nitrogen per acre from a clover mix.

We also had a situation where the farmer couldn't get the clover mix established in the fall. Instead, he planted oats and peas in March to help fix some nitrogen in front of corn. We had a cool, wet spring so the peas didn't get incorporated until early June. By that time, the peas were in full bloom and the test came back at 295 units of nitrogen per acre. Lots of biomass. According to SARE research, we can figure half of the nitrogen from cover crops to be available the first year (if it's incorporated). That depends a lot on the health of our soil biology. It's also critical that we keep our carbon to nitrogen (C:N) ratio balanced to maximize the benefits from the cover crops. Cereal rye can have a lot of nitrogen that it scavenged out of the soil, but the C:N ratio is a lot higher, which has to be figured in.

Now that we have all this biomass, how do we manage it? I've seen huge benefits to soil health and increasing organic matter by incorporating a green manure crop. I like using a plow, especially shallow plowing. Don't plow deeper than you have to. A speed disk and other machines can work, but it's easy to pulverize the soil with those fast-moving machines. The more we pulverize the soil or work it when it's too wet, the more weed pressure we'll see.

For a long time, I had thought that it was best to incorporate a green manure crop one to two weeks before planting corn. The idea was to wait to plant until the heat and gas from the fermentation process is gone. Now there are farmers that say their highest-yielding corn is from the fields that are plowed and planted the same day. Their goal is to have the corn emerge before too much of the green manure fermentation heat comes off, which can stunt the corn. Their best stands and even emergence come from these fields as well. This was a new thought to me, but it makes sense. This also allows us to let the legumes make more nitrogen for us.

A final note on tillage. It's never good to work bare soil. But I'm convinced that incorporating a green manure cover crop completely changes the picture.

Organic farming is exciting! If you have questions or would like some discussion, I'm here to help.



Aaron Fisher  
Byron Seeds  
*"The Bridge to Better Cover Crops"*  
765-569-3557



# RISK MANAGEMENT FOR LIVESTOCK AND FORAGE GROWERS

Crop insurance is typically talked about in the sense of coverage for your corn and soybeans. Did you know it can cover so much more than that? Livestock and forage growers are often left out of the conversation when it comes to ways to protect your commodities. However, there are a few programs within the federal crop insurance program that support this industry and can be pretty enticing to this group of growers.

Pasture, rangeland, and forage (PRF) insurance has been around for a while, but surprisingly hasn't gained traction nationwide. This policy is unlike any other where it covers you solely for a lack of rainfall in the area where your perennial haying or grazing fields are. The average rainfall is tracked all the way back to 1948 and compared with the current rainfall for the time periods the farmer selects. If it falls below your guaranteed moisture level (90% of average is the highest), then you will collect an indemnity. I personally have wondered why more people don't use this policy as it's the most stress-free insurance option available. Acres are signed up in the fall and then moisture is tracked the whole following year. Farmers do not need to report any rainfall or yield information; a claim is automatically opened if the two-month interval that the farmer selected is short on moisture.

To sign up acres, farmers must select at least two different two-month intervals to choose to insure their acres in. For example, farmers can select May-June and July-August to make sure they have coverage on their grass for the months the cows are out on pasture. However, you can choose more intervals if you want and even insure every month of the year. Intervals are weighted, so you can apply more coverage to one interval if desired. For instance, in the scenario above you could make it even and select 50% of your acres be insured in May-June and 50% in June-July. However, if you are always lacking moisture in May, it may make more sense to put 70% of your acres in May-June and 30% in June-July. The maximum coverage allowance depends on the state and county your land is located in. Need another reason to explore the product further? This policy is unlike your traditional crop insurance policy because it allows you to pick and choose which fields to insure. Under a corn contract, any acre planted to corn in the county automatically must be insured. For PRF, you can just insure one field if you'd like. This insurance is still considered a pilot program so there may be changes in the future on it but as of now, it's a great affordable option for farmers to make sure they're protected against a shortage of hay or pastures due to lack of moisture.

Livestock risk protection (LRP) has gained a lot of popularity over the last few years. The policy has been around for quite some time, but they revamped the program in 2021 increasing the subsidy levels which in turn made it more attractive for farmers. LRP covers you solely on a decline in market

price for livestock and swine. Farmers can select from a variety of coverage levels and insurance periods, often ranging from 13 weeks up to 52 weeks. From there, they can see the expected ending value (predictions for the market price at the end of the time period) and decide if they think that price point is worth insuring at. The prices change daily following the market so there isn't one major deadline throughout the year, making this a unique product. Another major benefit to this product is you can insure up to almost 100% of the value which is typically unheard of in crop insurance. LRP also does not require any major record keeping. Everything is tracked using area pricing so if the price falls below the expected ending value, an indemnity will be paid out. Since this product is subsidized, farmers are starting to turn to insurance to protect themselves on livestock rather than going through a broker. The example below shows a farmer who wants to insure 100 head of feeder cattle at 800 pounds each. The expected ending value for this timeframe is \$230 per cwt.

*Coverage – 200 head x 8 cwt x \$230 = \$368,000  
of insurance coverage*

*Actual Value – 200 head x 8 cwt x \$205 = \$328,000  
Indemnity = \$40,000*

Cover crops are often part of a livestock grower's rotation which could spill over into some crop insurance benefits for these farmers. In the past, a Pandemic Cover Crop Program (PCCP) allowed farmers who planted cover crops to receive a \$5 per acre premium discount on those acres if they certified those planted acres with the Farm Service Agency by the deadline date. 2023 is the first year they have discontinued this program. However, some states felt it was extremely beneficial and decided to continue it on a state-by-state basis. Will the program come back nation-wide so you don't have to wait every year to find out if your state is included in this? So far, that is unclear but there is definitely talk about this program coming back just with a different name. I suggest staying in touch with your crop insurance agent to find out when/if this program comes back around and how to make sure you are eligible for the premium savings involved!

Crop insurance is more encompassing than most realize. It is not just for the corn and soybean farmers. Almost every crop/commodity can be covered, even if it looks a little different than we're used to. Livestock and forage products are a great addition to the risk management strategies used in your operation. If an extreme drought occurs or there's a drop in the cattle market, how do you plan to recover?

**Megan Vaith**  
**Northbourne Organic Crop Insurance, LLC**  
**605-660-9527**



# AgProfit Strategies

## Beginning Farmer Workshop

**National Farmers**

Farming Less Than 10 Years?  
You Can Receive a \$250 Farm  
Travel & Expense Allowance.  
Seminar is Free!

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Department of  
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 **National Institute**  
of Food and  
Agriculture



Offering today's marketing  
and farm management tools  
to improve your profits.

**June 21  
Henderson,  
Kentucky  
9 a.m. -2 p.m.**

**Cooperative  
Extension Services  
Henderson County  
3341 Zion Rd  
Henderson KY  
42420**

**National  
Farmers**

9:00 a.m. Registration and Pre-Program Survey  
9:15 a.m. Welcome and Attendee Introductions — Lauren Neltner, host  
9:20 a.m. Putting Yourself In The Top-Third of Grain Markets — Lauren Neltner, National Farmers Grain Adviser  
10:00 a.m. Maximizing Profits With Crop Insurance— Mike Kleaving, National Farmers Crop Insurance Adviser  
10:30 a.m. Break  
10:40 a.m. Myths and Facts About Farm Profitability — Katie Wilts Johnson, Extension Economist, University of Minnesota Center for Farm Financial Management  
11:25 a.m. The Latest in Veterinary Care — Dr. Savannah Basham  
12:15 p.m. Lunch  
1:00 p.m. The Ins and Outs of Securing Your Next Farm Loan — Michael Miller, Farm Loan Manager, FSA  
1:45 p.m. Profit More With Cattle Risk Management — Jeff Rose, Cattle Contracting Manager, National Farmers  
2:00 p.m. Program Survey  
2:15 p.m. Adjourn

**A free lunch will be provided.**

**Questions? Contact Austin Geist, [ageist@nfo.org](mailto:ageist@nfo.org)  
or call 641-750-7871.**

Program sponsored in part by:

 **United States**  
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Agriculture

We continue to have opportunities to reward beginning farmers financially under our USDA/NIFA beginning farmer grant which will expire on August 31, 2023. These opportunities are open to beginning farmers (anyone who has completed less than 10 years of Schedule F tax filing) in a block of 15 states. If you have any questions about the program, please call. This is a 3-step process with each eligible applicant receiving \$250 for Step 1, and \$350 offered by application to mentees in Step 2. Step 3 offers up to \$5,000 financial assistance to beginning farmers after Step 1 & 2 qualification and after submitting a financial assistance application until funds are depleted.

# THE OPPORTUNITY OF ORGANICS

Those involved in Midwestern production agriculture are well aware of the changes and challenges today's producers are facing. Decreasing commodity prices, rising equipment costs, rising interest rates, non-farming investors increasing their interest in purchasing ag land and additional competition from producers willing to travel larger distances to rent land are just a few of those headwinds. These items affect not only the farmers themselves but the businesses in our rural communities.

While it is cliché, within every challenge is an opportunity. I believe farmers tend to be life-long learners due to the changes they encounter each year in seed traits, chemicals, tillage practices, etc. As such, producers as a whole are well accustomed to identifying new ways to succeed.

One of those tools has been organic grain and livestock production. Like any other management or production change, organic modification requires study and education to successfully implement. Candidly, the majority of those whom I have heard discount this practice as a potential diversification tool for their operation seem to have taken little time to truly understand its possible effect. While organic production will not benefit every operation due to potential market access, land type, etc., it is certainly a tool worthy of significant investigation to determine its potential profitability impact.

I have personally seen this practice successfully employed by large, and small, scale producers. The farmers with which I have first-hand knowledge accurately viewed it as a higher profit margin production practice that fits well within their individual operation's footprint. It has allowed them to maximize per acre profit on certain tracts of row-crop production, hay, and pasture lands.

Another ancillary value of this practice is a potential benefit to current and/or future landlords. Depending upon the

producer's rental arrangement, this may present a new, or additional, revenue opportunity for the landlord. It may also speak to the landlord's belief in the value of minimizing the utilization of chemicals or commercial fertilizer on their property. I have observed a producer who has this particular circumstance with one of the landowners for whom they farm. Working to implement the priorities of that farm's owner has allowed them to build a stronger business relationship thereby reducing the potential loss of that rented land. It has also allowed the owners of that operation to have different-level conversations with new potential landlords. They achieve this advantage by providing specific examples of how a landowner's economic and other desires are considered as a part of their partnership in renting land.

As farmers, we are providing products desired by both American and international consumers. Those desirous of organic products are willing to pay a premium to obtain a food item that is meaningful to them. I do not personally believe there will be a day in which all consumers will purchase nothing but organic milk, meats, etc. I am, however, of the opinion that we as farmers and ranchers need to be mindful of our end customer's product preferences and work to ensure they are served.

The commodity markets do not consider if agricultural products can be produced at profitable levels. It is up to farmers and ranchers to find ways to serve the end user's needs while also ensuring an adequate rate of return to their operation. While organics will not be the answer for every farm, I certainly believe it is something worthy of consideration as an additional profit center.

*Alan Hoskins*

*President & National Sales Director  
American Farm & Financial Services*





# IS THERE A PLACE FOR FARM MANAGEMENT IN ORGANIC FARMING?

For lack of discussion... Yes!!

The role of a farm manager is to represent the landowner's interest in attaining the goals they have established for their farm. This is the primary focus of the farm manager. There is no preconceived notion of how a farm should be leased, what crops will be grown, or what cultural practices should be followed. All of these decisions are the result of a multifaceted analysis of how best to utilize the resources of a farm. This process is where a professional farm manager can create opportunities for a farm operator while advocating for the landowner.

There several types of leases. Each achieve specific results for both the farm operator and the landowner. For the landowner who has an interest in producing organic products to meet an increasing demand for the all-natural consumer, utilizing a professional farm manager can help implement a plan that matches the landowner's resources with the right farm operator. To that point, the farm manager becomes a facilitator. Putting together the best match for two entities to thrive long-term. Is organic farming, the best choice for all landowners? Certainly not. Does every farm operator have the skills to operate an organic farm? Again, certainly not. The landowner's side of the equation takes into consideration some of the following:

- 1) What is the tolerance to risk relative to financial reward?
- 2) Tax benefits can accrue to an owner who materially participates in farm operation?
- 3) What is the level of commitment to the long-term preservation and enhancement of soil conservation and soil health?
- 3) What markets are accessible for the production your land produces?
- 4) Are there other farmers in the area who are successfully operating organic farms?
- 5) Are you an advocate for trying new ideas and practices that can differentiate your farm operation from others, resulting in a value added production?
- 6) Are you willing to operate in a shared decision-making process? Or do you like controlling all of the operational decisions.?
- 7) Do you have the financial resources to cash flow an organic operation based on the leasing terms, such as crop-share or custom farming and working through the transitional years where income is substantially reduced?

The farm operator has several issues to take into consideration as well:

- 1) What tolerance does your farm operation have to risk?
- 2) How does organic farming complement or conflict with the logistics of your existing farm operation?
- 3) Does the farm operation have adequate labor resources to be timely in an organic operation?
- 4) Does the farm operator have the right equipment?
- 5) Does the farm operator have adequate capital to cash flow organic farming and work through the transitional years with minimal income?
- 6) How committed is the landowner to a long-term organic operation in order to recapture the upfront investment in organic farming that an operator typically has to make?
- 7) What kind of lease works best for your farm operation?

Once the goals and objectives of a landowner are identified, a farm manager will typically look at the inventory of resources available to implementing a farm plan. The following are some of the consideration of available resources:

- 1) Is the farm conducive to organic farming?
- 2) What are the current fertility values and how can they be sustained or enhanced?
- 3) Is organic fertilizer economically available in the area?
- 4) What are the drainage issues?
- 5) What type of conservation practices are needed to protect the farm?
- 6) What kind of weed pressure exist?

All of these factors and more are calculated and analyzed by a farm manager to ensure that the landowner and farm operator mutually achieve long-term success. Creating an economically solid relationship that carries into successive generations.

(cont. pg. 8)

## IS THERE A PLACE FOR FARM MANAGEMENT IN ORGANIC FARMING? (CONT)

Selecting a farm manager is also a critical step. How does one find a farm manager? How does an owner know the farm manager is qualified to facilitate his organic operation? The best endorsement to the public and source for finding a qualified farm manager is to look at the professional organization that self-regulates the profession. The American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers, (ASFMRA) is the organization that awards the accredited designation of AFM (Accredited Farm Manager) and AAC (Accredited Agricultural Consultant) which is awarded to individuals who have undergone rigorous testing and have proven that they have the knowledge and experience to be a reliable resource for managing farmland. The ASFMRA administers the accreditation process and the accreditation is awarded to deserving individuals. Said designations can be withdrawn by the ASFMRA for deficiencies demonstrated by the individuals who have received the designation. At the state level, there are chapters to the ASFMRA that support and facilitate the continuing education and training of its members as well as networking and supporting each other in the profession. The Illinois chapter ISPFMRA is the founding chapter to the national organization and is the oldest chapter in the organization. The only professional farm managers and rural appraisers maintains a website that can facilitate helping individual landowners to find a qualified farm manager. I would invite you to access the website of both the national organization [www.asfmra.org](http://www.asfmra.org) or the Illinois chapter <http://ISPFMRA.org>. As the current president of the ISPFMRA I am happy to address any questions you might have regarding professional farm management and how a farm manager can facilitate your farm operation. Please feel free to contact me at 217-351-1321.



*Russell L. Hiatt, AFM/ARA*

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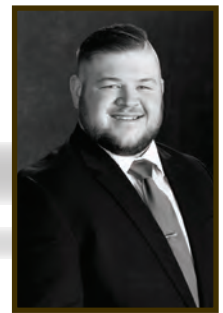


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