

Some Nebraska farmers shifting to more healthful, organic farming

By Betsie Ammons

Few persons think of farmers when they eat their morning toast or bowl of Wheaties, but it is farmers who bring those products to the breakfast table.

Farmers today are developing new ways to provide products which are inexpensive and healthful, said three Nebraska farmers who will participate in Food Day at UNL.

The farmers, Fern Norris of Walthill, State Sen. George Burrows of Adams and Bert Evans, a UNL economics professor who has a small farm in northern Nebraska, contend that the emphasis in farming is shifting from producing food chemically to organic farming.

Organic farming is farming without using pesticides or chemical fertilizers. The three farmers agreed that these are the farming methods of the future.

Norris, who calls herself a farm wife, said she believes that chemically produced foods are unhealthy.

"Nationwide, our food is contaminated," she said. Norris and her husband farm 480 acres in northeastern Nebraska. She said they decided to convert to organic farming when their cattle became contaminated by chemicals and died. Norris contends that organic farming will improve crop quality and result in healthier animals.

The Norrises were chemical farmers for 27 years prior to their conversion to organic farming in 1974.

However, Norris said, organic farming involves more than just discontinued use of chemicals.

Rotation enriches soil

Crops are rotated to enrich fields with varied minerals, she said, and farmers use compost to return natural matter to the soil and to maintain it. Compost is decomposing animal and vegetable refuse.

Burrows said he is using manure, rather than chemicals, for fertilizer. He said he thinks it will be dangerous to continue using chemicals in farming without testing their long-range effects.

Both Norris and Burrows expressed concern that small family farms are disappearing in America.

Norris said she thinks small farms are still "the most efficient way to produce food."

Stronger government support of small farms is needed, according to Burrows.

Evans agreed that to maintain a free system of farming, the government must subsidize farm prices. Farmers have suffered from inadequate government programs during the administrations of President Gerald Ford and former president Richard Nixon, he said.

Farming is a family business which stands out in a corporate society, Evans said, and he said he thinks this is the farmer's disadvantage.

Evans said a farmer's return for the work he does is "drastically low" compared with the profit made by food retailers and farm machinery manufacturers.

However, Evans said, he does not advocate corporate farming.

Instead, he said, farmers should organize to get the profits they deserve.

Farmers work every day to produce large quantities of food, which makes it inexpensive for the consumer, Evans said. Food in the United States is "cheap" compared to food-costs in other countries, he added.

Any problem in the system is passed back to the farmer, Evans said. If food retailers aren't selling many products, they lower the price they pay the farmer, and often that price reduction is accompanied by a rise in machinery costs, he said.

Norris said less machinery is needed for organic than chemical farming and added that organic farmers don't need to work the fields as much as they do for chemical farming.

Consumers waste food

The three farmers agree that food waste is not a problem on the farm, but that a large amount of food is wasted by the consumer.

Convenience foods result in consumer waste because

food
for
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third
dimension

they spoil faster and the materials used in containers contribute to pollution, said Patricia Kaminski, a member of Lincoln's Open Harvest Food Cooperative, and an organizer of Food Day at UNL.

She said the food cooperative sells only "whole foods," such as raw beans, rice and grains, and added that persons carry food home in their own containers.

These foods, when prepared correctly, are more efficient and economical because a consumer can choose his own quantities, Kaminski said.

The first step to a more healthful diet is to establish a closer relationship with the land, Kaminski said. Even city dwellers can have gardens, she said, adding that she agrees with Burrows and Norris that small family farms must be preserved.

Kaminski said she advocates persons buying food that is regionally produced on these farms. This food often is fresher and retailers and consumers can find out what the product contains and how it was grown, she said.

Studies have shown that foods grown in a person's particular region are often the foods most healthy for their consumption, Kaminski said.

Local food stores stock more regionally-produced foods than those found at supermarket chains, she said. It is important to look at the labels when shopping to "be aware of what you will be eating," she said.

If consumers show a demand for regionally-produced foods, she said, more stores will stock them.

"A man who is willing to undertake the discipline and the difficulty of mending his own ways is worth more to the conservation movement than a hundred who are insisting merely that the government and the industries mend their ways."

—Wendell Berry, *A Continuous Harmony*

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The Electoral Commission of ASUN shall hold a referendum on 14 April 1976.

Polling places shall be open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., in the East Union on East Campus and in the Student Union on the City Campus.

ABSENTEE BALLOTS: Students who will not be in Lincoln, Nebraska during the hours the polls are open because they are on officially recognized University field trips may, by stating the official function on a form supplied by the ASUN secretary and having their signature notarized by 4 p.m. on the Friday before the election, be permitted to vote by absentee ballot.

DISABLED BALLOTS: Disabled shall be defined as being unable to attend class due to confinement to University Health Center or a hospital. Students so disabled shall call the ASUN secretary before noon of election day. A ballot will be brought to the student before 9 p.m. on election day.

Other applicable rules of the electoral commission shall apply to this election.

The referendum is concerned with the following material.

AN ORGANIC ACT

Be it known that by the powers vested in the Senate of the Associated Students of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, hereinafter known as ASUN, under Article VII, Section I, Paragraph D of the ASUN Constitution:

We, the Senate, thereby declare that the Coalition

for University Reform, hereinafter known as the Coalition, is a recognized student organization under the Coalition Constitution submitted to the Senate.

We further declare that the Coalition shall hereinafter be the supreme student governing body of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and shall assume all responsibilities, contractual agreements, rights, powers, duties and official functions of ASUN as presently defined and outlined by the By-laws of the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, the By-laws of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the laws of the State of Nebraska, the Nebraska Constitution, and the Constitution of the ASUN.

We further declare that all monies of the ASUN be transferred to the respective student activities accounts of the Coalition and that the present application for UPFF funding by the ASUN is hereby transferred to the Coalition.

We finally declare that within eight class days or by the last class day of April, 1976, whichever comes first, there by a general election. In this election the members of the Coalition Assembly shall be determined.

SAMPLE BALLOT

() I favor adoption of the organic act.
() I do not favor adoption of the organic act.

Votes by punching out the darkened box to the left of your choice. To be a properly marked ballot, the punched rectangle to the left of your choice must be completely removed.

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