Twelfth Annual Iowa Organic Conference, Iowa City 
November 18-19, 2012

Iowa State University (ISU) and the University of Iowa (UI) invite you to attend the Twelfth Annual Iowa Organic Conference, at the Memorial Union on the University of Iowa campus in Iowa City, Iowa, with a reception on Sunday night, November 18, and a full day’s program on Monday, November 19, 2012. This conference is directed towards organic and conventional farmers, Extension staff, industry representatives, and students who want to learn more about science-based research in organic agriculture and practical applications for your farming system. “Iowa State University is very excited to be partnering with the University of Iowa Office of Sustainability and New Pioneer Food Cooperative in Iowa City to bring a new perspective to the conference,” said Kathleen Delate, ISU conference organizer.

This year’s morning keynote speaker is Mr. Will Allen, of Growing Power, LLC, who will address the conference theme of “Organic Farming: What You Do Makes a Difference.” Mr. Allen grew up on a small farm in Maryland, the second-youngest of six children of a sharecropper, and went on to become a recipient of a McArthur Genius Grant—only the second farmer ever to be so honored. His dedication to his farming roots and his connection to helping people in need led him to establish Growing Power, LLC, in Milwaukee, with satellite centers in Chicago, IL, and Madison, WI, as a not-for-profit center for urban agriculture training and building community food security systems. Growing Power employs a staff of 65 and is involved in more than 70 projects and outreach programs in Milwaukee, across the United States and throughout the world. Their motto is “Growing Food, Growing Minds, Growing Community.” Growing Power utilizes organic techniques, including vermicomposting and natural pest control. “I like nothing better than to get my hands into good, rich soil and sow the seeds of hope,” said Mr. Allen. By teaching people how to grow organically and close to home, he is also helping to cut down on fuel emissions from transportation, thereby reducing pollution. At Growing Power, and in community food projects across the nation and around the world, Mr. Allen promotes the belief that all people, regardless of their economic circumstances, should have access to fresh, safe, affordable and nutritious foods at all times.

The afternoon keynoter is Dr. Fred Kirschenmann, Distinguished Fellow at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture (LCSA) and an organic farmer. Dr. Kirschenmann will address the future of organic and how peak oil, rising fuel prices and limits on fertilizer supplies will necessitate a future more attuned to organic principles. As a Leopold Center Distinguished Fellow, Kirschenmann devotes his time to national sustainable agriculture priorities affecting broad segments of U.S. agriculture. He leads Iowa State’s participation in a multistate project to address the diminishing number of mid-sized farms, many of which are family farms. Both Mr. Allen and Dr. Kirschenmann were recipients of the Leadership Award from the James Beard Foundation, established to shine the spotlight on game-changing pioneers who have inspired positive action to improve our country’s food system.
“The world market for organic products reached $60 billion in 2011 and the demand for organic grains and produce continues to exceed supply,” said Kathleen Delate, ISU organic agriculture specialist. “Growers everywhere are encouraged to consider the potential for organic production. This year was particularly challenging, and we will have farmers and crop insurance experts address strategies used this year in dealing with the drought.” Also speaking at the Organic Conference this year will be experts on local food systems, EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) and certification cost-share programs, alternative grain crops, cover crops, vegetable and organic food research and application. Jeff Moyer of the Rodale Institute will be addressing the linkages between livestock and crop production—a new area of research at Rodale. Area organic farmers will be offering tips for best practices during transition to organic farming, including weed management strategies. Kathleen Delate will discuss crop, soils and economic data from the LCSA-supported, 15-year-old LTAR (Long-Term Agroecological Research) comparison of organic and conventional rotations at the ISU Neely-Kinyon Farm in Greenfield, Iowa. In 2011, organic corn and soybean yields grown in a rotation with oats and alfalfa were equal to conventional yields, at 164 and 41 bushels per acre, respectively. Dr. Cynthia Cambardella, of the USDA National Laboratory for Ag and the Environment, Ames, Iowa, has quantified carbon sequestration benefits of the LTAR organic rotations, which can help offset harmful global CO₂ emissions. “Organic prices are high, and organic promises an excellent return to management, with organic corn selling for $17 a bushel and food-grade organic soybeans reaching $30 a bushel. The demand for organic foods is greater than ever, with consumers focusing more and more on local, organic foods,” Delate said.

Included in the conference will be an all-organic lunch, featuring local/regional organic produce, meat and dairy products transformed into a gourmet meal by the UI Dining Services chef, Barry Greenberg and his staff. Included in the organic meal will be produce grown by the UI Student Gardeners and students in the ISU Organic Ag Program. “We will have a special session highlighting student efforts in producing and sharing educational information on organic production,” said Jason Grimm, Food System Planner at Iowa Valley RC&D, and a member of the conference planning committee.

Iowa currently ranks twelfth in the nation in the number of organic farms, with ISU’s Organic Ag Program and the organic division at the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship rated among the top in the country for providing educational and certification services for organic and transitioning farmers. In addition to the 15 workshop sessions, there will be 35 educational and industry exhibits on display at the conference. The vendor set-up and reception for conference go-ers begins Sunday, November 18, from 5 to 7 PM, with the full conference starting at 7:30 AM registration (Program from 8:00 AM to 5 PM) on Monday, November 19, in the UI Memorial Union Main Lounge. Discounted early registration ends October 28. Please register on the website at http://iowaorganicconference.eventbrite.com or contact conference coordinator, Kathleen Delate, at 515-294-7069 or kdelate@iastate.edu.
