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Traditional Small Family Farmers Keep On Farming!

ROGER ALLISON raises livestock on a traditional small family farm in Missouri. He has been in the trenches fighting for small farmers for forty years. The organization he founded, Missouri Rural Crisis Center, continues to be one of the strongest grassroots voices in rural America.

DENISE O'BRIEN became an organic farmer in Iowa on her husband's fourth generation family farm. She was soon a leader in the fight against the foreclosures of the farm crisis, focusing especially on the struggles of rural women. She has worked at many levels—grassroots advocacy, non-profits, national, international, in the soil—with common threads of feminism and caring for the land and her community running throughout.

MOLLY BRESLIN AND HER FATHER JOHN have been less active politically, but have created a cultural shift in their Illinois farming community as they have transitioned their family land from conventional corn and soybeans to organic heirloom grains and beans.

Leaders like these are working rural land and speaking out in small towns all across the country. Their stories have much to teach all of us working for a healthier and more just food system, whether we live in a city, in the country or somewhere in between. To learn where we have been, we must reconnect with the radical elements of this nation's agricultural history; in shaping the future, we must listen to those carrying on that legacy.

(This article was originally published on WhyHunger's CONNECT blog, www.blog.whyhunger.org. Read more at <http://grassroots.whyhunger.org/>; enter "farmer" in the search box.)

Organic farmers NEITHER WANT nor NEED an Organic Checkoff

By: Jim Goodman

FFD board member and organic dairy/beef producer near Wonewoc, WI



The "Organic Industry" represented by the Organic Trade Association (OTA) wants to make some money, supposedly for promoting organic food in the marketplace and for more research related to organic farming.

So the "Go to Place" is the paycheck of organic farmers.

Promoting organic food is good, so is more funding for organic research, which has always been the ugly stepchild of conventional agricultural research.

However a national checkoff on organic producers to raise money for these efforts is not the solution.. Since a checkoff would be operated through the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, (AMS) any comparison and claims that organic food is superior to conventional food would not be allowed— that is a fact.

To me it makes more sense to let processors do their own promotion for their own brands, with their own money instead of jumping on the sweating backs of farmers for a mandated checkoff.

As to research money, since a checkoff would be placed on all organic commodities (and I hate calling organic food "commodities", because it is food, not a commodity — a tool of profit for industry), from apples to eggs, meat to milk, who would have more voice in how that research money is used, someone like organic giants Aurora Dairy and Earthbound Farms or a farmer with two acres and a hoop house?

How about getting a percentage share of federal agricultural research dollars and dedicate it to organic research? USDA knows what percentage of food production is organic — that seems like a good percentage to start with.

From my past experience with the dairy checkoff (you remember, the milk mustache ads?) it did not sell more product, it did not raise farm income and most consumers viewed the adds as little more than silly. Since the dairy checkoff was put in place in 1983 consumption of dairy products has increased, but so has the population— per-capita consumption, the real measure of promotional success, has steadily dropped. All farmers did was give their money to an already bloated dairy industry that was more concerned about paying outrageous salaries to the executives of the promotion efforts than it was about increasing farmer profitability.

Commodity checkoffs were never intended to increase the profitability of the farmer, although farmers were led to believe that. Checkoffs, paid by the farmer, are put in place because the farmers paycheck is an easy target, an easy source of funding for the industry to use as it sees fit. The beauty of it, to industry, is that the farmers have no voice and are required by law to pay.