



MIDWEST TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

A coalition of partners providing support for transitioning and existing organic producers

Minnesota Field Day Series Offers Hands-On Learning for Organic Weed Management

The University of Minnesota (UMN) Extension, with support from the Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP), is helping vegetable farmers across Minnesota gain practical, hands-on experience with mechanical weed control through a series of five regional field days.

Mechanical weed management can improve efficiency and reduce reliance on hand weeding, but the range of available equipment—from hand tools and two-wheel equipment to tractor-mounted cultivators—can make it challenging for farmers to determine which tools and techniques are the right fit for their operations. The field days provide farmers with an opportunity to see equipment in action, learn directly from experienced practitioners, and test tools before making significant investments.

Each field day combines expert instruction, peer-to-peer learning, and live machinery demonstrations. Farmers learn how to select, mount, calibrate, and adjust cultivation equipment for different crops, soil conditions, and farm scales. They also have opportunities to examine and test a range of hand-scale, two-wheel, and tractor-scale equipment in real field conditions.

TOPP mentor and mechanical weed management expert, Sam Oschwald Tilton, provides practical knowledge about cultivation systems and troubleshooting solutions during each of the field days. The host at each farm also contributes their own experiences, giving participants an opportunity to discuss challenges such as heavy weed pressure, crop rotations, and equipment selection with other growers.

The five field days were intentionally organized at farms of different sizes to serve a range of farming audiences, including emerging farmers, established organic growers, farmers using mechanized equipment, and farmers who rely primarily on smaller-scale hand tools. Several of the host farms are certified organic, making the events particularly relevant to growers operating within organic production systems.

The first three events demonstrated the program's ability to connect farmers across different farm scales, experience levels, and geographic areas:

Featherstone Farms, located in southeastern Minnesota: brought together growers from Minnesota and Iowa. Participants were able to see mechanical weed management strategies in a larger diversified organic



vegetable, commercial-scale organic production setting and learn directly from an experienced practitioner.

New Roots Farm in the Twin Cities, is an incubator farm supporting multiple farms operated by emerging farmers. The field day provided an opportunity for beginning and emerging growers to explore mechanical weed control options appropriate to their operations.

Lee Farm, south of the Twin Cities in Farmington, offered insight into mechanical weed management by giving participants an opportunity to observe equipment, ask questions, and learn how cultivation practices can be adapted to their own farms.

By bringing equipment manufacturers, Extension educators, experienced farmers, and emerging growers together in the field, the field days turn mechanical weed management from a concept into a hands-on learning experience. Farmers can see how equipment performs under actual field conditions, ask questions about setup and calibration, and make more informed decisions about potential investments.



The combination of practical training, farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, and TOPP mentorship is also helping strengthen connections among Minnesota's organic and emerging farming communities. With two additional field days remaining, the series will continue expanding access to tools and knowledge that can help Minnesota vegetable farmers manage weeds more efficiently and sustainably.

About the Transition to Organic Partnership Program

The [USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program](https://www.usda.gov/transition-to-organic-partnership-program) (TOPP) is investing up to \$100 million in cooperative agreements with non-profit organizations who are partnering with others to provide technical assistance and wrap-around support for transitioning and existing organic farmers. USDA is building partnership networks in six regions across the United States with trusted organizations serving direct farmer training, education, and outreach activities.

The Midwest Regional Lead, Midwest Organic Services Association (MOSA), partners with organizations experienced in the organic industry to provide mentoring services, technical assistance, community building, and organic workforce development for transitioning and existing organic farmers.

For more information on upcoming TOPP events, mentorship opportunities, and farmer resources in your region, visit [OrganicTransition.org](https://www.organictransition.org). Visit USDA's [TOPP Success Stories](https://www.usda.gov/topp-success-stories) page to read about the exciting work being done in communities throughout the United States.