

generation. organic™ Rising

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THE GEN-O MISSION

Generation Organic is a community of young CROPP farmers united by a mission to:

Support one another with encouragement and wisdom;

Mentor those who are considering a future in organic farming or marketing;

Elevate the status of organic farming to a noble and desirable profession;

Inspire the next generation of farmers through meaningful dialog, educational activities and resources and professional networking.

Generation Organic Rising
(888) 444-MILK

Michelle Pedretti &
Kelly Gibson, Editors

Lisa Young, Art Director

Welcome to Generation Organic Rising!

Greetings! We're excited to send you this first edition of Gen-O Rising, covering Gen-O action from the summer and fall of 2009.

In this newsletter, we will share Gen-O-authored activity reports and articles; provide resource information such as web links on new research, interesting news articles and

industry happenings; and list upcoming opportunities for Gen-Os for leadership development, education and getting involved in CROPP Cooperative marketing activities.

Feedback and ideas welcome! We're looking for Gen-O contributors. Want to write a regular feature, create a comic strip or send in photos?

2010 Publication Schedule:

May Edition:

Submissions due April 1

September Edition:

Submissions due Aug. 1

December Edition:

Submissions due Nov. 1

Standing on the Threshold – Fred Kirschenmann

Despite the many daunting challenges facing farmers — pay prices going down, costs for most everything they have to buy going up, land becoming more difficult to acquire, etc. — there is some good news in the air. We have a new generation of young people who want to farm! The vast majority of them are not interested in mass production, undifferentiated, commodity agriculture. Rather, they are interested in producing differenti-

ated food products and establishing trusting relationships with the people who buy and eat the food they produce. Some want to do this through direct marketing: selling at farmers markets, through CSAs or Internet sales. Others want to become part of marketing networks and co-ops, create their own brand and establish relationships with the customers that buy their food, like Organic Valley.

This new generation is emerging all across the country,

some are interested in growing fruits and vegetables in more urban areas, others want to farm in more rural areas, producing dairy products, meat products, specialty grains and other high-value products. It is especially heartening to see this new movement at this moment when our farm population is aging and atrophying dramatically. Almost 30 percent of our farmers are now over age 65 and only a little more than 5 percent are under age 35. While national agriculture statistics tell us we still have 2.2 million farmers, it is a rather misleading number since we are still using the 1974 definition of a farm, namely anyone who produces \$1,000 annually in gross sales or anyone who "could have" produced the same amount in gross sales. Fully 30 percent of the 2.2 million farms identified in the national agriculture statistics did not have \$1,000 in gross sales. Slightly more than 400,000 farmers produce more than 94 percent of our

(See **Threshold**, Page 5)



Fred Kirschenmann inspires the next generation of organic farmers.

Central Gen-O Gathering

Gathering Sparks Ideas and Excitement for Central Farmers – Sarah Holm, Wisconsin

There was a tangible sense of excitement on the morning of June 13, 2009. The first Central Gen-O Gathering was about to get underway. Young Co-op members stood in small groups conversing on the front lawn of my family's farm near Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Some helped pass out name tags and folders; all eagerly watched and waited. There was little evidence of shyness as young people went up to each other and introduced themselves. A few moments later all were talking about haying, rain, cows and other memorable moments on their farms as if they had been friends for years. There was a current of energy in the air; it flashed in people's eyes and smiles. Everyone was excited to attend this event with the hope to network, learn and gain new leadership skills. We were young farmers gathering with a purpose.

We were eager to hear to what the day's scheduled speakers had to say. There was a broad range of speakers and subjects, however, they were tied together with one cohesive message: "Organic is the way of the future." Some of the presentations were visionary, such as that of Fred Kir-

schenmann, long-time sustainable ag leader and Policy Fellow of the Leopold Center, and Aaron Ellringer, founder of Just Local Foods Cooperative, Eau Claire. Others were more practical, such as Dr. Sarah Slaby's presentation on herd health, and public relations consultant Kristin Heinmets' tips on getting Gen-O stories in the news. Towards the end of the day, we all got a great combination of inspiration and practical advice from Organic Valley farmer and our host, Doran Holm.

The day began with a presentation by one of Organic Valley's founding farmers,

*"There was a current
of energy in the air;
it flashed in people's
eyes and smiles."*

Jim Wedeberg who shared the Co-op's model and history. He spoke not only of facts but also shared heartfelt stories from those first lean years and the dedication and teamwork required by the founding farmers and board members to meet the

trials they faced and to build the Co-op in those challenging early years. Jim said, "With confidence and support, following a mission that has been thought out, can be a difficult but noble path." He encouraged attendees and young farmers alike to work together in a cooperative spirit

Location: Holm Girls Dairy
Elk Mound, Wis.

Gen-Os: 28

Speakers: Jim Wedeberg,
Fred Kirschenmann, Aaron
Ellringer, Kristin Heinmets,
Doran Holm and
Dr. Sarah Slaby

to rise to the challenge and mission we've set for Generation Organic.

Fred Kirschenmann was another great source of inspiration. He laid out his vision of the future and what it will take to build a secure global food and energy economy. He spoke of the important role organic farmers, particularly young farmers, would play in creating this security.

We had plenty of time throughout the day to visit and network, as well as brainstorm with other Gen-O attendees. Personally, I was pleased to meet other young farmers who understood what it means to care so much about where our food comes from. It is easy for young farmers to be so dedicated to their cause that they isolate themselves and feel incredibly lonely. We are a tiny population with schedules consumed by daily and nightly chores. However, this gathering sparked a new enthusiasm and hope that the interest is growing and that we are actually not alone!

Just as CROPP Cooperative once brought together a small group of farmers to begin their journey of developing the Co-op into what it is today, they decided to gather together our Gen-O group so we may start our learning journey for tomorrow. To have the opportunity to meet, learn and gain inspiration from other young people with a similar vision - who share the same hopes and desires as well as troubles - was very inspirational and motivating! The Central Gen-O Gathering provided us an opportunity to start building the Gen-O foundation. We will work to inspire the next generation, and the one following it to invest in what truly matters: the environment, health and families. gen



Gen-Os Sarah Holm and Preston Green welcome attendees to the Central Gen-O Gathering on June 13 near Eau Claire, Wis.

An Opportunity for Mentorship – Mindy VanGelder, Wisconsin

I was unsure what to expect when I signed up for the Central Gen-O Gathering. The only thing I did know about the program was that it was for the new generation of organic farmers. After attending the gathering, I realized how important it is for our generation to get involved in organic agriculture. Meeting and talking to other members of my generation who share the common love of farming was rewarding. As the day went on, I think we all were feeling motivated to continue doing what we believe in and feel passionate about — organic family farming.

During break-out sessions to discuss opportunities and objectives for Gen-Os my group noted that Gen-O was not just about younger farmers...we realize we need guidance and mentoring from more experienced farmers and leaders. We are not



The Gen-O Rising Gatherings allowed young organic farmers a chance to get into small groups and share their ideas with the rest of the Central attendees.

all as educated as we would like to be on organics, and there is much wisdom within our current CROPP membership - those who know and have lived through the history of Organic Valley. Farmers like Jim Wedeberg, who was there, and shared the Co-op's history with us, recounting stories and showing photos from 1988 when it all began. I think Jim's presentation had the most influence on what we want our group to be. We are grateful for the founding farmers and staff who worked hard to get the Co-op where it is, and we are continuing something extraordinary. Thus, we plan to reconnect the generations and look to current Co-op farmers for education and guidance. It is important for us to be a part of Gen-O because we are the new generation of organic farmers. That may sound straightforward but our generation will soon be

the producers, spokespeople, teachers, and leaders of our Co-op. A lot of work has gone into making Organic Valley the great and successful co-op it is today, and now it is up to our generation to get involved in order to keep not only the Co-op going, but the farming community and consumers invested in organics.

Following the gathering, I am excited and feel I am part of something that is going to make a difference! Go Gen-O! ^{gen}

"As the day went on, I think we all were feeling motivated to continue doing what we believe in and feel passionate about — organic family farming."



Along with hearing from speakers about leadership development, Gen-Os got a chance to tour Holm Girls Dairy.



Above: Gen-Os spent time listening and exchanging ideas.



Below: Gen-Os used the opportunity to network with one another and share farming tips and tricks.



West Gen-O Gathering

Working Toward Quality and Sustainability Mitch and Acee Lucero, Idaho



As the world goes through its ups and downs it forces us to focus on why we exist. Existence does not relate to the car in the garage, the watch on your wrist or the material goods that dominate our lives. Our existence directly correlates to the basics of the food we put into our bodies today to fuel our tomorrow.

We are organic farmers. However, we have not always been producers of organic products. As the world continues to change, we had to ask ourselves: Why should we and how can we continue to exist as a family farm? The answer to the question was more complicated than making the decision to eat or drink organic food, but rather a decision to supply the food system with a product allows people, our farm and the environment to stay alive and be healthy.

We are third and fourth-generation family farmers. However, many farm practices have changed tremendously from the standard family farm our grandfathers homesteaded. Acee's grandfather started the farm that we now

live on and have transitioned to organic. A+ Turkey Ranch, our 120-acre farm, focuses on crops and organic turkey production. Our crop production provides organic feed for Mitch's parents' organic dairy and our turkey sales are geared to local restaurants and grocery stores. Mitch's great-grandfather started the 240-acre dairy farm that we and Mitch's parents worked to transition to organic. The dairy is home to a herd of 300 cows that graze on organic-certified pasture and supply milk to the Organic Valley Cooperative. We are proud to be able to produce organic products that are grown, produced and handled with the well-being of all in mind.

Being Gen-O farmers involved with Organic Valley has allowed us to realize that we can have a sustainable future in organic agriculture. Organic Valley makes tremendous efforts to create a viable future for family farms by setting a sustainable pay price, providing support for beginning farmers and creating outreach, education and networking opportunities for young farmers through their Generation Organic program.

“Existence does not relate to the car in the garage, the watch on your wrist or the material goods that dominate our lives.”

From Top:

The West Gen-O Rising attendees gather for a group shot.

Visitors listened intently during the farm tour.

Dr. Sarah Slaby talked to the group about herd health.

The Bansen farm includes a cow bridge Gen-Os got to experience first-hand during the farm tour.

Attendees took time to share and learn from one another.

Walking out to check on pastures during the farm tour.

At the Gen-O West Gathering at Jon Bansen's farm we were surrounded by the spirit of life. From the singing birds to the dog splashing in the water, from the smell of the lush green grass being grazed by the Jersey cows to the buzzing enthusiasm of the young producers gathered together. The common thread is a passion for living and supplying the food system with a quality product that will sustain life. We understand the responsibility of producing a product through stewardship and we thrive on it! 

Food for the Soul – Kelly Horton, Registered Dietician

Over the past several decades, knowledge of sustainable farming practices has largely been lost in favor of large-scale industrial farming practices – practices that are destroying environmental, animal and human health. A resurgence of the younger generation returning to the land and practicing sustainable, organic farming methods is pivotal for creating a food system that promotes health for all creatures.

The West Gen-O Gathering on Jon Bansen’s organic dairy farm in Oregon, enabled young farmers to come together and share ideas and enjoy a rare day of relaxation with their peers and mentors. It was inspiring to hear Gen-O farmer Pete Mahaffy talk about the experiences he had gained while working on Bansen’s farm several years earlier and how he had adapted some practices to meet the needs of his own farm. This spoke to the uniqueness and individuality that is vital

to family farms and within our food system.

As we discussed how organic farming affects the nutritional content of products going to market, Gen-O members started discussing how to promote value-added aspects of their products to the general public. This willingness to share ideas is a great advantage these farmers have over the depersonalized industrial food system. This Gen-O gathering was a great forum for growing and expanding these sorts of collaborations. I hope Gen-O farmers will capitalize on these sorts of events and understand that while they may miss a day or two on the farm, they are going to gain knowledge and networks that will fuel innovation for future growth. gen-O

“This willingness to share ideas is a great advantage these farmers have over the depersonalized industrial food system.”

Location: Double J Jerseys
Jon & Juli Bansen
Monmouth, Ore.
Gen-Os: 18
Speakers: Jon Bansen,
Kelly Horton, Amy Brown,
Pete Mahaffy
and Dr. Sarah Slaby

(Threshold, continued from Page 1)

food and fiber. The other nearly 2 million farmers produce only 6 percent. Add it all up and we are rapidly approaching a human capital crisis in agriculture in this country and that is just one reason that Organic Valley’s Generation Organic Gatherings are so important.

Of course, what this new generation of young farmers will need to be successful is access to land, access to affordable capital to get started and access to the kinds of markets that provide them with a sufficient return to compensate them for their investment and have a decent life. It is in the interest of everyone who eats to help our new generation of farmers to achieve those goals.

I was especially inspired by the beginning farmers who came out to Organic Valley’s Central Gen-O Gathering this summer. They were young men and women intent on being the next generation of organic farmers and anxious to learn from each other. It was also heartening to see Organic Valley providing this opportunity for them. The road ahead for them and for the many other members of this new generation of farmers will be challenging, but if they can be part of a support system, including their vendors and customers, there is real hope they can succeed and continue to provide good, wholesome, healthy organic food far into the future. gen-O

Frederick L. Kirschenmann, a longtime sustainable agriculture leader. He shares an appointment as Distinguished Fellow for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University and as President of Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture in Pocantico Hills, N.Y.

West Coast Gen-Os gather for dinner and conversation.



Pete and Kelly Mahaffy share their story during the West Gen-O Rising event.

East Gen-O Gathering

Gathering Builds Organic Community – Erin Benson, New York

In January of 2009, my husband Thane and I decided we would take the plunge and move back to his family's farm in Lansing, NY. After selling our house and leaving our jobs, we trekked from Denver to New York with our Subaru and an 8 x 5 foot trailer. My husband began work immediately, feeding the cows twice a day and filling in other areas as needed. I wanted to also have some exciting job like feeding the baby calves or collecting eggs from the chickens. However, I was told that if I really wanted to help, I would drive a truck. So less than a week after we returned I was driving a 20-ton dump truck full of silage. Shortly thereafter, my mother-in-law shared an invitation with us to attend an Organic Valley Gen-O conference. We thought it'd be a good opportunity to meet some other younger people working on farms in the area.

Not surprisingly, the Generation Organic conference offered so much more than what we expected. After a delicious breakfast and a warm welcome from the Knapp family and the organizers from OV headquarters, we settled in to hear CROPP founder Jim Wedeberg share the history of our Co-op as well as current happenings. Jim began by describing the chemical companies that came to visit his family farm, insisting that farmers use the

products to improve their yields. He described the salesman drinking a cup of the pesticides to prove how safe the chemicals were. Such beliefs permeated the farming community, but Jim innately knew the health of the land and people could not withstand these chemicals. He and other farmers met together to brainstorm about how to farm without using such pesticides. From there, Jim described the many obstacles, challenges, and blessings the cooperative experienced. Seeing photos of the original offices, with doors propped on cinderblocks for desks, really brought the grassroots nature of this organization home. The cooperative began with farmers envisioning an alternative path, one that cared for the earth and provided long-term stability for the land – and we farmers. As I learned about the history of Organic Valley, it really struck me how lucky I am to live on an Organic Valley farm and be connected to a socially conscious business. The tagline of “farmer owned, farmer operated” means so much more when you watch Jim share his passion about Organic Valley, not just as a manager but also as a farmer himself.

Before the end of the day, I heard many other motivating and touching stories. One young speaker came to tears as she discussed the selling of her father's cows and how difficult it was to watch her family farm fall apart. Most of us in the audience held back our tears as well, viscerally relating to the difficulty and beauty of being so intimately connected to the land.

The return to my husband's family farm has been a somewhat difficult transition. As we face the challenges of not being in control of our schedules, living in an iso-



Gen-Os from the East paused for a group photo on the Knapp farm.

lated area as young adults and being closely surrounded by family (yes, this can be a challenge as well as a blessing), other farmers' stories and Organic Valley's history energize us. In these stories, we're reminded that we are part of something larger than ourselves, larger than a single farm. We are connected to a family of farmers with Organic Valley. We are connected to a movement that supports sustainable living, local communities, healthy eating and the farmers. We are connected to a vision in food production that values relationships. 🌱



Erin Benson's husband Thane, his brother Chandler and Erin smile big for a group photo.

Location: Cobblestone Valley Farm

Paul & Maureen Knapp
Preble, N.Y.

Gen-Os: 24

Speakers: Jim Wedeberg,
Nena Johnson, Elizabeth
Horton, Heather Darby and
Paul & Maureen Knapp



“The cooperative began with farmers envisioning an alternative path, one that cared for the earth and provided long-term stability for the land and farmers.”

-Erin Benson
New York Gen-O



“It was great to meet young farmers working to make a difference, not just on their own farms, but also for the future of agriculture.”

- Heather Darby
Agronomic and Soils Specialist for the University of Vermont Extension

“I’ve noticed that just being in a space with your peers – sharing challenges and successes, tools and techniques – realizing that you’re not all alone in this, that you’re part of something larger, can be enough to get you through the tougher days.”

-Nena Johnson
Public Programs Director for Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture



Upper Left:
One of the cooperative’s founding farmers and current Dairy Pool Director Jim Wedeberg imparts some CROPP history to Gen-Os.

Upper Right:
Gen-Os brainstorm ways to get involved during a presentation.

Center:
Nena Johnson from Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture spoke to the gathered Gen-Os.

Lower Left:
Paul Knapp leads Gen-Os on a tour of his family’s farm and answers questions.

Lower Right:
Heather Darby from the University of Vermont Extension emphasizes her point when speaking to the young farmers.



A Gen-O Perspective on Bioneers 2009 – Preston Green, Wisconsin

It has been my great honor to have been selected to attend and represent CROPP at the Bioneers Conference in California. I used this opportunity to really watch and listen to other individuals in attendance and those who were presenting on stage or in workshops.

I listened to Michael Pollan talk about the importance of food. You would think that being a farmer I might have known about this topic but he said profound things as a consumer, not a producer. “Food choices are our first political choices.” He used this statement to talk about how people vote with every dollar they spend. If people settle for less, that is what they will receive. Mr. Pollan posed the question, “Why does food emerge at low costs?” He answered his question by pointing out agriculture’s dependence on foreign oil for fertilizers and fuel. As an organic farmer I felt under pressure because growing corn and plowing the soil were considered harmful practices because of how energy intensive these practices are. However, I felt inspired when he talked about “tasting the difference” in what you eat. It

is not just the price but how food tastes and makes you feel. I can relate this to what we feed our cows, calves and steers. If our family’s cattle eat great food they are going to feel great and be a better product for food for people like Mr. Pollan who says that, “food is a connective tissue for our

world.” Everyone eats and needs food. People know when they are eating good food because they feel good. One way Pollan advocated to get people good food was by changing food access. We need to develop agricultural communities that can be supported by growing and selling things locally. I think that CROPP is doing a great job with this because we strive to keep products regional and getting people fresher, better products. By consumers voting with their dollars and we, the producers, providing good food, we can have a sustainable, locally grown food source wherever it is demanded.

Being a Generation Organic Farmer, I used this conference as a place to come up with ideas for our other Generation Organic Farmers. Since 2004 there are farmers and employees who have been working very hard to get our young farmers together and create a network of farmers who are young and passionate about farming. It has been challenging to set a direction and define what Gen-O will be. It is no secret that our young farmers are leaders in some way and I went to every workshop and listened closely to everything that was said which might help this group as we begin to develop an identity and purpose.

As a Midwestern farm boy I have political views and personal beliefs that guide me through my days. Visiting California gave me an opportunity to learn a lot about how others think about politics and what their guiding principles are.

Bioneers are a diverse group of people that advocate for social change. Mainly change dealing with environmental issues such as global warming, deforestation, and other things deemed detrimental to the environment. I

heard people like Jerome Ringo of Apollo talk about government bills like Cap and Trade and his group’s influence and position on energy and the environment. I did not agree with everything that Mr. Ringo talked about and had the opportunity to question some of things he had told the attendees but one thing that he had said that raised my eyebrow was about energy and having a “diversified energy portfolio.” Thinking about Organic Valley’s headquarters in La Farge and picturing the sunflowers, the solar panels and all the things that are being done with windmills and oil seed crops for bio fuels, I realized

that our cooperative is trying many different energy alternatives. Within the Co-op, both employees and farmers, are diversifying energy research instead of only focusing on one source or idea.

It was interesting for me to hear about what our consumers and potential consumers are demanding. People love what we are doing. Everyone I talked to had so many good things to say about Organic

Valley. Being the largest sponsor of the conference definitely helped, but so many people love our products. Talking about the way my family is farming with people that question whether cows really like being milked is very rewarding. When it is ten below zero and the wind is blowing sixty miles an hour, I think about the people that thanked me for farming. It helps in-

spire me to keep doing what I do with my family. I like to think when money is tight and these people are grocery shopping, they picture my face and they will vote with their dollars for us, the farmers for Organic Valley and Organic Prairie. Farmers that have the environment in mind as we are milking our cows, collecting our eggs, feeding our steers and pigs, growing our vegetables and our crops; and farmers that go the extra mile to bring a high quality product to people, grown as locally as possible to guarantee the freshest products people can ask for.

No I did not agree with everything I heard at this conference, however, I was intrigued by this group of people who support what we do and love our products. I was happy to answer their questions. I was inspired by consumer feedback and enlightened by how others see the world. Having the opportunity to attend Bioneers helped this farm boy expand his horizons, both geographically and mentally. I am grateful to have had the chance to experience the Bioneers Conference. 



Green’s boots sit on California’s Muir Beach during his first visit to the Pacific Ocean.



Preston Green and CROPP employee Colleen Skundberg at a Bioneers dinner honoring Organic Valley.

National FFA Conference – Preston Green, Wisconsin



Preston Green and fellow Gen-O Sarah Holm led an introduction to organic farming and gardening workshop during the conference.

The national Future Farmers of America conference was great on many levels. It was exciting to see such passion and enthusiasm from the students who attended the conference. Once our booth was set up and ready, it didn't take long for the stu-

dents to start flowing in. For a few minutes, I sat in amazement as to how large the conference really was. Picture a room larger than a football field swarming with blue FFA jackets and the buzzing of pure energy.

Organic Valley's Plink-O board, free Stringles, drawings and prizes grabbed the attention of students as they were checking out the booths in the exhibit hall. This mix of attention-getting devices was a great way to break the ice and get people into our booth so we could talk about agriculture in general, their farms and production methods, and ultimately how we farm (organically). Although a lot of students did not know exactly what organic was and the methods we use to farm, their interest was extraordinary and genuine. For the most part, they were open to new ideas and most recognized the immediate need for more sustainable agricultural programs.

Having the opportunity to talk with students from all around the United States gave us a phenomenal opportunity to promote our brand and make positive connections with people. Organic Valley had a highly effective booth filled with passion, expertise and resources to back up our business. The men and women who came from headquarters were very well-trained and knowledgeable, which gave me reassurance as a Gen-O to be at the conference representing Organic Valley and my cooperative. 

Stone Barns Conference – Casey Knapp, New York

I attend college where few sustainable living and no organic agriculture courses are offered. I have a deep yearning for this sort of information so when I have the opportunity to learn more, I absorb it fully. I appreciate every occasion that allows me to attend educational events and conferences such as The Stone Barns Young Farmers Conference in New York.

I've attended this conference two consecutive years. In the fall of 2008 when I attended the conference, it was intimidating. I gathered together with other young like-minded farmers who care about what they are doing to the environment and believe in making change for the good. As I made my way home with a fresh organic buzz, I felt pretty good and hoping for more next year. Attending these conferences is like having ones own garden. The

first year the seed is planted. You hope something happens and when the seeds germinate, sprout up and you get to eat the food, there is great excitement. You gain some knowledge yet seek improvement for next year's crops.

The second year you have a garden, it is even more exciting because it gets better and better. You take the information learned from the previous year and expand on it, growing more than you thought possible. And it continues on like this with each year's work. This year's conference was like having a garden that was well taken care of. It doubled in size and the buzz was bigger than I thought possible. In many ways, these conferences act as my fertilizer for the year. They provide energy and inspiration to construct my life on a path I deeply believe in and know to be true.

Since I'm always seeking relevant and current information on how to live more sustainably, I can attest to an awakening of sorts. When thinking back, I recall walking into the hay mounds to listen to Keynote Speakers, Fred Kirschenmann and Wes Jackson. I remember feeling a sense of hope for the world. There is much negativity blasted through the media, information on GMOs and how organic cannot feed the world. That is fine! It needs to be said, acknowledged! BUT, I won't buy it. There is far too much good in the world and too many wonderful things happening to go down that path. I believe in another path and this conference was the epitome of hope. It shows what is and can be, young farmers working together to make positive change, and there is nothing more exciting to me! 

Washington DC Green Festival – Tyler Webb and Melanie Ross, Vermont

In October 2009, Melanie and I had the opportunity to represent our Co-op at the Green Festival in Washington, D.C. This was my third year attending the festival for Organic Valley, and for the third year in a row, it was a great experience. Often times, the rhythms, rewards and complexities of our own farm confine our thoughts and experiences to a localized area. The Green Festival is a great opportunity for Melanie and me to remember our farm is one of many working together as Organic Valley



Ross and Amanda Thurber's kids told Green Fest attendees about a day in the life of an Organic Valley farm.

to feed our world in a healthy, sustainable and viable fashion.

It is truly a rewarding and motivating experience to step away from our farm for a few days and feel the appreciation from so many people who want to learn and know more about where their food comes from and who want to support our Co-op for the values and ethics that define our family of farms and differentiate CROPP from the rest as the absolute best. I am amazed at the depth of knowledge and passion for ethical and sustainable farming our consumers hold. Even more exciting is that these folks are just the pioneers of a food revolution. There is a whole mass of people just waking up to our food system's realities. It is refreshing to share in their interest and excitement for learning about where their food comes from. It's also a little scary to hear the amount of misinformation out there and the power advertising has in influencing people's perceptions.

Folks who have the opportunity to meet us as farmers are truly amazed by our Co-op and our farms, yet they often have no idea what makes Organic Valley so special. It is clear to me it is tremendously difficult and expensive to pass on our message and values to the masses in a traditional advertising approach. We need the masses, our farmers, our Co-op and our retail partners to be out sharing with



Melanie Ross talks with a consumer about Organic Valley.

their friends and community the importance in supporting Organic Valley.

We find it a refreshing and rewarding experience to be out meeting our consumers and helping others discover why they want to support Organic Valley. We hope all our farmers get the chance to go out and connect with the people who want to know why Organic Valley is the best. Should the opportunity arise, go out and be a Farmer Ambassador! 

Bioneers Satellite Conference—Sarah Holm, Wisconsin

The Bioneers Satellite Conference in Minneapolis was a great opportunity for me as a Gen-O farmer to educate and interact with our consumers and with our partners in sustainable organics.

The people attending Bioneers and my fellow panelists were consumed with a great desire to improve their communities and the world. While their enthusiasm was encouraging to see, their lack of knowledge was saddening. I was glad to share my knowledge and experience of organic agriculture with them. It is

vital for people who care about the environment to understand how agriculture ties everything together. If a person can

“There was a current of energy in the air; it flashed in people’s eyes and smiles.”

understand food is dependent in large part on food policy, and how our food is raised affects people’s health, commu-

nity economies and the health of the environment. People need to understand that supporting sustainable family farmers translates to stronger communities and better health for people and the earth.

The people at Bioneers were very welcoming of me and my fellow farmers. They had many questions for us and we had a lot of good discussions. I was thankful to be part of this opportunity to teach non-farmers about organic agriculture while learning the average citizen’s view of organic agriculture. 

On the Front Lines of Farm Aid – Tom Beard, Iowa

Willie Nelson, Neil Young, Dave Matthews, John Mellencamp and many other well-known entertainers brought a huge group of people together for Farm Aid in St Louis in early October. Some attendees were dedicated fans following their favorite performer, some were hardcore Farm Aid supporters attending the event for the 10th or maybe even 24th year in a row, and others were locals out to see a great show. A group of Organic Valley farmers and employees from around the Midwest was also there. .

Although OV wasn't a big money sponsor featured on the Farm Aid

things I am already familiar with and enthusiastic about. Often, consumers responded very well when they learned that Organic Valley was a farmer owned cooperative and that I was one of the farmer owners. A common response was "I'll



From Top:

Jason Stensland made friends with Dave Matthews at the Farm Aid press conference.

The Organic Valley booth had a lot of visitors.

Andrea, Laura, Erika and Daniel Holm take a timeout at OV's Farm Aid booth with OV employee Kurt Eckes.

Tom Beard and one of OV's cut-out cows found their way to the Gateway Arch.

OV's booth gave Gen-Os a chance to interact with thousands of Farm Aid attendees.



to tote bags being handed out to

given the back-page spread on the souvenir program, OV had a deep and impactful presence at Farm Aid. Through both organized and opportunistic efforts of OV employees, the farmers and OV staff were able share some of the positive things going on in agriculture and at Organic Valley with concert-goers. Even Neil Young took part, tearing off his red "Stop Factory Farms" shirt during his performance to reveal the green "Go Family Farms" shirt Organic Valley gave him. See Young's antics at www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pV4scNkJvw.

I attended Farm Aid through the Farmer Ambassador Program. This was my first FAP experience so I was a little nervous and unsure of what to expect. I found it was easy to share with consumers the story of my family and farm, organic farming practices and OV products -

buy your products for sure now!" Other farmer attendees I visited with were envious of the "I'm Your Farmer"

shirts OV farmers wore as part of the "Who's Your Farmer?" marketing campaign.

Farm Aid was a very positive experience for me and for the other farmers attending too, I think. It was heartening to hear appreciative comments from consumers of OV products. I also gained appreciation for the excellent work OV employees do promoting our products. And, of course, it was amazing to see some of my long-time favorite musicians in concert!





**One Organic Way
La Farge, WI 54639**

Announcements

**Congratulations to Gen-O
Caleb Winkel on being
elected Dairy Executive
Committee Alternate for the
Wisconsin South
Lake Shore region.**

Recommended Films and Links for Gen-Os

Films

Food, INC.
FRESH
King Corn
How to Save the World
Real Food Now
Media that Matters: Good
Food
Two Angry Moms
The Story of Stuff
www.storyofstuff.com/
Dirt! The Movie
An Inconvenient Truth

2010 Gen-O Task Force Contacts

East

Casey Knapp h~ 607.749.4032 c~ 425.522.2739 caseydknapp@gmail.com
Erin Benson h~ 607.633.7220 c~ 607.339.1922 erindbenso@gmail.com
Abbie Corse c~ 802.368.7589 abbie.corse@gmail.com

West

Darby Holmes h~ 530.898.6343 c~ 707.696.5154 deholmes@csuchico.edu
Kelly Mahaffy h~ 541-269-3943 c~ 530.750.1928 mahaffyk77@msn.com

Central

Preston Green h~ 608.538.3838 c~ 608.475.0521 preston.green@uwrf.edu
Sarah Holm h~ 715.879.4440 c~ 715.829.0139 holmse@uwec.edu
Jake Wedeberg ov~608.625.3572 c~ 608.606.4430 jake.wedeberg@organicvalley.coop
Julia Hundt ov~608.625.3326 c~ 608.606.9125 julia.hundt@organicvalley.coop
James Frantzen ov~608.625.3554 c~ 608-639-0002 james.frantzen@organicvalley.coop

HQ

Toll Free: 888.444.6455

Jenna Krumenauer ov~608.625.3418 c~ 608.606.9253 jenna.krumenauer@organicvalley.coop
Michelle Pedretti ov~608.625.3470 c~ 608.606.1781 michelle.pedretti@organicvalley.coop
Kelly Gibson ov~608.625.3590 c~ 612.269.2115 kelly.gibson@organicvalley.coop

Web links

Farm-Based Education Association
www.farmbasededucation.org/
Farm to Table www.earthpledge.org/f2t/
Just Food www.justfood.org/
The Meatrix www.themeatrix.com/
Stone Barns www.stonebarnscenter.org

Real Food Challenge

<http://realfoodchallenge.org/>

Ag Observatory

www.agobservatory.org/index.cfm

The Greenhorns www.thegreenhorns.net/

Slow Food USA www.slowfoodusa.org/

Farm Aid www.farmaid.org/