

Progress report on the BIOAg Award “Development of Washington Organic Producer-Level Database on Crop Yields, Sales Value, and Price”

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Project Summary

The continued growth in the organic food market presents many Washington growers with the difficult decision of whether to switch from conventional production. While a cost and return estimate (enterprise budget) is a fundamental tool for the considering a new enterprise, information beyond a net return estimate for the “typical” producer is more crucial for organic producers. Net returns are more variable due to greater production and market risks. We initiated a project to capture yield and sales data on six organic crops from WSDA Organic Food Program records to understand the variability of these parameters and create estimates for use in budgets. This proposal requests additional funding to capture additional crops and years of data and construct an electronic database to be used for a range of research and extension purposes that aim at providing more complete information on the economic opportunities and risks from switching to organic farming.

Leverage Plan

The continued delay in the Farm Bill has delayed relevant RFPs. The recent passage of a Federal budget and the delayed progress with the SCRI program means that we expect a relevant RFP to be announced that we will be able to apply to. We have also had significant communication with USDA RMA and are continuing to work with them in the hope they may be able to fund future work related to this project.

Work Completed

Substantial additions were made to the database by completing most of the newly available 2012 reports along with the completion of some remaining 2011 reports. We now have a nearly complete database for all major organic crops covering the years 2009 to 2012. The only exception is inventory of 2012 production sold the following calendar year. Extensive data cleaning was also completed to resolve remaining questions about unclear or missing reporting. Extensive code was written in the programming language Python to automate processing of the raw database for quantitative analysis. This significantly speeds up and reduces the chance of error in data analysis compared to relying on Excel. The library of Python code is being documented and organized to be made available to any future users of the data, including WSDA. This code performs a number of tasks including creating summary statistics along a number of dimensions, aligning data either by crop production year or sales year, producing new variables, and performing statistical analysis such as regression analysis and distribution fit tests. The BIOAg funding allowed for a more extensive report to WSDA, completed in accordance with previous WSDA funding that helped launch the effort, than would have otherwise been possible. The first two, of many, Extension Fact Sheets are nearing completion on Organic Berries (Raspberry, Strawberry, Blackberry, Blueberry) and a more detailed Blueberry specific report. Under the BIOAg funding we have also worked extensively with USDA RMA to get their data on conventional

blueberry production, yield, and prices to compare to organics. This information is included in both fact sheets.

Future Work

Over the next 6 months we expect to submit additional crop specific Extension Fact Sheets. We have organized with Randy Baldree to make these a series of reports. We also plan to submit articles to peer reviewed journals on two topics. First, comparison of organic and convention yields. Second, analysis of producer entry and exit in organic crop production. We will also continue processing 2013 WSDA applications to add in the most recent data. We will also seek to organize workshops with growers to review the information published in the berries fact sheets.