

A look at what it takes to be a certified organic farm

By
Jenna Larkin
IVN Contributing Writer

Local resident Matt Molyneaux has been working as an independent inspector since 2008 around Northern California, Central and Southern Oregon making sure that rules and regulations are followed by those filing to become a certified organic farm.

In 2003 Molyneaux took a training course provided through an organization called International Organic Inspectors Association. The four-day course provided future organic inspectors with the knowledge to be able to go out into the field and properly inspect a farm applying for certification, followed by an exam lasting approximately half a day. In order to be able to attend the class, a person must have certain prerequisites; having some sort of experience in organic farming or code enforcement.

"Taking this class was really one more level of credentials for me," said Molyneaux, who has a degree in horticulture.

In 2002, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) took over the organic certification process, implementing new rules and regulations towards the certification of organic farming. Molyneaux took the class in 2003, during which time all current organic inspectors were required to become re-certified. In 2009, Molyneaux was able to leave his full time job, which included a five-days-a-week commute, and inspect farms applying for organic certification part-time.

On average, Molyneaux inspects 40 to 50 farms annually beginning in March. But, with organic farming becoming more popular, Molyneaux will inspect up to 80 farms this year. Molyneaux inspects various types of farms almost all year. He inspects everything from orchards to hay fields; vegetable farms are normally inspected during the spring and early summer. Orchard inspections start around mid to late summer, either during or after the harvest season. Some inspections occur during the winter. These inspections, however, usually consist of audits of the selling and production records of individual farms after the fields and orchards have been completely harvested and are prepared for winter. Inspections take Molyneaux all over Oregon and to Northern California.

Some of the benefits of being an independent inspector are only working five to six days a week, traveling two of those days while the rest consists of computer and paperwork. Another positive benefit is being able to spend more time with his family, whereas a few years ago that was not possible due to his 40-hours plus job. One drawback is the copious amount of paperwork Molyneaux has to keep up for every farm he inspects.

In order to receive a certificate, a farm has to go through an annual rigorous inspection.

The inspection starts with what type of fertilizers, manure and pest controls are used. While popular myths entail that in order for a farm to be organic they can't use any type of pest control products, that is not the case. Over the last five to ten years there have been thousands of products made available for use. There is, however, a catch of sorts; the products can only be reviewed and certified from one of two organizations — the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) and the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA).

Guide books are compiled of lists of compost products and all sorts of sprays that are allowed to be used in organic farming.

The products have to be made from natural resources. Anything that is made from petrochemicals or is otherwise chemically based, such as insecticides and herbicides, are prohibited.

Farmers are encouraged to try and cultivate weeds by either mulching with hay, compost, cardboard or other natural ways of getting rid of weeds. The same is suggested for getting rid of pests in the fields and orchards. It is suggested to have a wide variety of blooming plants to help get rid of pests, if the natural methods do not work for getting rid of weeds and pests then the approved pest and weed control products are allowed.

Farmers also have to submit a fair amount of receipts for items purchased, everything from worm castings to purchasing organic seeds for planting. The reasoning is to make sure that the amount of items purchased matches the amount of food produced and what is sold. This is in an effort to reduce the amount of possible fraud. Any farm could claim to be organic, when in reality, the produce has not been organically certified. Many farmers have to keep weight and harvest logs, which are extensive records of what exactly is sold.

The last bit of the inspection consists of a tour of the land where the organic growing takes place. The inspector has to tour field parcels, checking the field health and weed population, making sure that what is reported is consistent with what is inspected. Farms have to fill out what is called an organic system plan, what the farmer plans on doing throughout the year with the farm and what is planned on being sold produce wise. After the inspector finishes a report, it is sent off to a certification agency which then reviews the paperwork. The farm is either certified or is informed that they need more clarification or more information on becoming organically certified.

For a farmer wanting to start up an organic farm, there are requirements along with all of the above inspections. For instance, if a parcel of land previously had pesticides or fertilizer such as Miracle Grow, the field has a waiting period of three years from the last date the fertilizer was applied before it can be even considered for certification. However, if a parcel of land has never had any kind of chemicals applied to the ground or it was used as a grazing field for livestock, that land could be certified in its very first year of production. The owner is required to sign an affidavit stating that no prohibited products have been applied to the land.

For new farmers interested in beginning an organic farm, Molyneaux offers consultations for a fee on how to get started, filling out the paperwork and any other requirements needed to get the farm up and running. Although once Molyneaux consults an up-and-coming new farm, he can't inspect that farm for at least two years to avoid any possible conflict of interests.

Molyneaux is often asked if becoming organically certified is worth it. His answer is yes and no. The reason being is if a farmer plans on selling commercially, say to Ashland Co-Op or Gooseberries, those

companies require an organic certificate from the seller.

For that farmer, yes, it would be profitable to get certified to sell organic produce. If, however, a farmer only wants to sell to the general public, at farmers markets for example, then no, it is not feasible to apply for an organic certification. A farmer is allowed to sell up to \$5,000 per year without having to apply for the certificate. If, however, profits reach above the \$5,000 mark, farms are then required to become certified. The only downfall to not being certified, is the seller is not allowed to advertise their product as "certified organically grown."

To apply for the certification, a farmer could pay anywhere from \$800 to \$1,200 a year. In the past, the USDA offered what is called a federal cost share program. The program was a subsidy program designed to reimburse farmers classed in the lower income bracket up to 70 percent of the certification fee. Due to budget cut backs this year, that program was lined out of the farm bill, making many farmers re-think the certification process.

If interested in becoming an organic farm, Molyneaux suggests the best place to start is by going to the USDA website and read up on the rules and regulations for getting land ready for inspection. He also says that there are multiple independent companies that work with organic farmers, for instance the company Molyneaux works for, Oregon Tilth. The company takes the regulations and breaks them down into a series of questionnaires, making the process a little easier to understand. For more information on Oregon Tilth visit their website at: oregontilth.org. For information on having Molyneaux come for a consultation, contact him at www.growingorganic@msn.com or call him at 541-415-4948.



(Photo by Jenna Larkin, Illinois Valley News)

Hope Mountain Organic Garlic owner Cat Moresco and Matt Molyneaux at the Cave Junction Farmers Market Friday, October 11.



Illinois Valley History and Hearsay

Compiled by Sally Yarbrough

Now available at:

Curves Cave Junction
Jett Sett Beauty Salon Cave Junction
Madd Moose Cafe Selma
The Kerbyville Museum Kerby

and at all home football games \$20.00 each,
or you can order one from
Sallyya@frontiernet.net
and I will mail it to you for \$25.00

**Illinois Valley Bikers
Toy Run 2013**
Sat., Oct. 19
With 'SILAS WOLF'
@ Junction Inn*

Poker Run sign-in @ noon
\$5 per hand
Music at 3 p.m.
Admission \$10
or New Toy of equal or greater value
Auction, raffles & 50/50 drawing!

**Sponsored by the
Rotary Club of Illinois Valley,
Cave Junction, Oregon**

All proceeds/contributions to benefit the Christmas Toy program
***Must be 21 to enter Timber Room Lounge**

Natural Vitality Calm
20% off

2 WEEK SPECIAL

Gooseberries
Real Food Market

Thayers Lozenges
20% off

Special Features

Now Serving BBQ on Fridays • 11-3

Spectrum Naturals Spray Oils
Butter it up • Cook it up
Grill it up

\$3.99
Great deal so stock up!
5 oz. Reg. \$7.29

In the Deli

Buy any one item off our grill menu and receive same second item at 1/2 off *

*Excludes items already on ad.

Painted Hills Rump Roast
Grass fed. A corn free diet. No hormones or antibiotics

\$4.59 lb.
Great for slow roasting.
Reg. \$6.59 lb.

Organic Fuji Apples
A crisp, sweet-flavored apple that keeps well.

\$1.39 lb.
Reg. \$1.59 lb.

Groceries

50 Delicious Coconut Milk Beverage
Assorted Flavors Non GMO verified 32oz.
Reg. \$2.99

\$1.99

Celestial Seasonings
Green Tea energy shot, Sleepytime Snooz Shots, both come in assorted flavors

Reg. \$2.69 to \$3.09
\$1.89 to \$2.19
2.5 oz.

Florida Crystals Organic Cane Sugar
2 lb. Bag
Reg. \$5.49

\$3.29
Great time to buy!

Imagine Organic Chicken Broth
4 to choose from 32oz.
Reg. \$4.09

\$2.49

Deli

Salad Case- Chicken Enchiladas
Homemade corn tortillas filled with chicken breast, cheese, salsa, sour cream, topped with red sauce more cheese, olives.

\$5.99 lb.
Reg. \$6.99 lb.

Breakfast Menu-Breakfast Burrito
Three Eggs choose your Veggies AND Meat AND Cheese

\$3.99
Add Potatoes \$1.50 extra
Reg. \$4.99

Grill Menu -1/2 Sandwich
with small soup of the day.

\$5.99
Reg. \$6.99

Grab-n-go Wraps
Assorted wraps side salad and cookie

\$6.99
Reg. \$7.99

Meat

Smart Chicken Whole Legs..... \$1.99 lb.
An air chilled chicken. Bake these in the oven. Reg. \$2.89 lb.

Diestel Turkey Chunks..... \$6.89 lb.
All 3 flavors, Roasted, Pastrami and Smoked. Ready to eat. Reg. \$8.79 lb.

Niman Ranch Fearless Dogs..... \$4.79 pkg.
No nitrates or nitrites. For a quick and easy lunch. Reg. \$5.49 pkg.

Applegate Turkey Bacon..... \$3.69 pkg.
All natural Turkey, great for Sunday morning breakfast. Reg. \$4.79 pkg.

Produce

Organically Grown Bartlett Pears..... \$1.19 lb.
Aromatic with that definitive pear flavor. Reg. \$1.39 lb.

Organically Grown Russet Potatoes 5 lb Bags..... \$7.19 ea.
Great for baking, mashing or french fries. Reg. \$7.69

Organically Grown Baby Carrots 1 lb Bags..... \$1.69 ea.
A popular snack any time of day. Reg. \$1.89 ea.

Organically Grown Vine Tomatoes..... \$4.59 lb.
The best tomato for eating fresh. Reg. \$4.89 lb.

We support our local farms!

Dairy

Gluten Free ZOI Yogurt
Blueberry Strawberry Honey Non Fat Plain

\$1.09 ea.
6 oz. Reg. \$1.39

All Natural Laughing Cow
Light - French Onion - Garlic & Herb Blue Cheese - Sun Dried Tomato & Basil - Original Swiss

\$2.79 ea.
6 oz. Reg. \$3.59

We Accept Oregon Trail Cards • Prices effective Wed., 10/16/13 thru Tues., 10/29/13. • Ad Specials - While Supplies Last

1201 Redwood Ave. • 541-471-2700 • Open Mon. - Sat. 8 am - 8 pm • Sun. 10 am - 6 pm