

## Meetings

# International Organic Conference in Long Beach Increases Collaboration among EU, U.S. Scientists

by Lise Andreasen, Ellen Mallory, Niels Halberg, Mathieu Ngouajio, and Kathleen Delate

A two-day international conference titled “Innovations in Organic Food Systems for Sustainable Production and Enhanced Ecosystem Services” was held on 1–2 Nov. 2014 in Long Beach, CA as a pre-conference to the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA International Annual Meeting. This conference was primarily supported through a competitive grant program offered by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Co-operative Research Program (CRP) on Biological Resource Management for Sustainable Agricultural Systems, with additional support from USDA-NIFA (Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative, or OREI) and the International Centre for Research in Organic Food Systems (ICROFS).

Conference organizers posited that organic farming is rapidly growing but not widely understood in terms of its potential for contributing to food security, economic development, and environmental health. Organic agricultural principles, however, can contribute to increasing food production at a global level, and there are strong indications that it is necessary to investigate all potential pathways for developing productive and, at the same time, sustainable food systems for the future. Organic agriculture, as defined

by USDA and international agencies, relies on ecological processes, biodiversity, and biological cycles adapted to local conditions based on agro-ecological approaches. Conference presenters emphasized that intensification in organic agriculture implies an intensification of the beneficial effects of ecosystem functions, including soil fertility and biodiversity, and using the biological elements of the ecosystems in a structured, organized, and more efficient way, which is otherwise known as eco-functional intensification.

The conference included 20 invited speakers from 12 OECD countries, including Australia (1), Austria (1), Canada (1), Denmark (2), Finland (1), Germany (1), Italy (2), New Zealand (1), Sweden (1), Switzerland (2), UK (1), and USA (6). Participants included 130 students, scientists, organic producers and processors, journalists, and organic interest organizations. The organizers of the conference wanted to take this opportunity to highlight new knowledge, innovations, potentials, and research needs that will strengthen the link between organic food systems, sustainable production, and enhanced ecosystem services. Mathieu Ngouajio, National Program Leader in the Division of Plant Production at USDA-NIFA, who heads the organic research

sections at NIFA, opened the conference with an update on organic funding research priorities, including the new emphasis on whole farming systems and underlying processes that support system sustainability. A challenge confronting organic research development in the U.S. is the lack of scientists who have received formal training in organic agriculture and the pressing need to train the next generation of organic ag scientists. While USDA-NIFA funding for organic research increased in 2014, almost 65% of organic research funding in 2013 had been attributed to private organizations, and the total amount of funding in the U.S. is significantly less than in the EU with a similar population size.

Scientific presentations were provided under three main headings:

1. Global Perspectives of Organic Food Systems, Sustainable Production, and Ecosystem Service
2. Opportunities for Meeting Ecosystem Services Challenges



Key organizers of the International Organic Conference in Long Beach included (l to r): Mathieu Ngouajio, USDA-NIFA; Ellen Mallory, University of Maine and ASA Organic Management Systems (OMS) Community 2014 Chair; Hans-Joachim Weigel, OECD-CRP SAB member; Lise Andreasen, International Centre for Research in Organic Food Systems (ICROFS), Denmark; Kathleen Delate, Iowa State University and OMS Past-Chair; Matthew Smith, representing USDA-ARS, now at Clemson University; and Niels Halberg, ICROFS, Denmark.

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