

Glossary of Alternative Farming Production and Marketing Terms

Introduction

The continued development of alternative methods of agriculture has resulted in an often confusing array of production and marketing terminology. In an effort to help sort through the maze, a number of these terms are defined here. The words on this list range from ideas that are difficult to pin down (e.g. sustainable) to concepts that have a precise legal definition (e.g. organic). In all cases, an attempt has been made to provide a brief explanation of the most generally accepted meaning.

Terms and definitions

Agroecology is a whole systems approach to agriculture that applies ecology to the design and management of sustainable production systems.

<http://agroecology.org/>

Alternative farming and **alternative agriculture** are general terms that apply to agricultural production methods, agricultural enterprises, and/or crops that are different from traditional or conventional ones.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) are methods or techniques designed to minimize the environmental impact of plant and crop production on water quality. For example, BMPs address the problem of pesticide runoff into natural water sources.



The following EPA Agricultural Management Practices for Water Quality Protection module is a Web-based training unit that discusses practices suitable for reducing or minimizing the impact of agriculture on water quality.

<http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/wacademy/acad2000/agmodule/>

Biobased products are made largely from renewable plant, animal, marine, or forestry materials.

Biodynamic agriculture is a concept of agriculture that sees the farm as a living, dynamic, spiritual entity and attempts to bring it into balance. The Demeter Association establishes the specific guidelines for Biodynamic production and certification. While generally regarded as a type of organic farming system, Biodynamic agriculture is considerably more rigorous.

<http://www.biodynamics.com/>

<http://www.demeter-usa.org/>

BioPreferred is a new voluntary labeling initiative from the USDA that identifies commercial and industrial

products composed of renewable biological materials (biobased). The products bearing the BioPreferred label either meet or exceed the biobased content required for USDA certification. While food, fuel, and feed cannot be certified in this manner, the BioPreferred database does list a number of biobased agricultural products. These include barrels, fertilizers, lawn and garden care items, mulch and compost, and plant and flower pots.

<http://www.biopREFERRED.gov/>

Biological control (often shortened to **bio-control**) is the practice of using living organisms (e.g. predators, parasites, or diseases) to control or manage a separate, harmful organism (e.g. weeds, plant pathogens, or insect pests.) For a good source of bio-control information, refer to the North Carolina Biological Control Information Center Web site:

<http://cipm.ncsu.edu/ent/biocontrol/>

Biological farming is the term often used in Europe to refer to organic farming.

Biotechnology refers to the integration of the biological sciences and technology. Biotechnology can include anything from selective plant and animal breeding to gene manipulation and cloning. This term can also be applied to the use of biological organisms in industry (e.g. fermentation processes used to make foods; manufacturing pharmaceuticals from microorganisms, etc.).

Biointensive agriculture is an organic agricultural system that is practiced on a relatively small scale. It is also referred to as biointensive mini-farming or biointensive gardening. This system focuses both on obtaining maximum yields from a minimal area of land and on long-term sustainability in a closed system.

<http://www.growbiointensive.org/>

Biointensive IPM is an attempt to take integrated pest management back to its ecological roots. It emphasizes many of the concepts inherent

in IPM, such as understanding pest biology, rotating crops to disrupt pest life cycles, and using resistant varieties. However, only reduced risk pesticides are used, and then only as a last resort after other preventative tactics have proved ineffective. For more information, refer to the ATTRA publication on this topic:

<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/ipm.html>

Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) is a grassroots alternative to the USDA organic certification program and is primarily aimed at small farmers. This organization uses NOP regulations as the basis for its own high standards of organic production. However, the CNG puts less emphasis on record-keeping and encourages the sharing of advice between inspectors and farmers. Farms that have been inspected and certified by CNG members can use the Certified Naturally Grown logo on their products.

<http://www.naturallygrown.org/>

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a means of marketing produce and other agricultural products on a subscription basis to local community members. Individuals pay an annual or quarterly fee in exchange for a weekly assortment of the grower's farm products. Shares can include such items as fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, eggs, flowers, and value-added products.

Conservation tillage refers to a broad range of tillage practices that leave 30% or more of the crop residue from the previous crop on a field when planting the next crop. No-till, strip-till, ridge-till, and mulch-till are types of conservation tillage. Benefits include reducing soil erosion and minimizing disturbances to the soil ecosystem.

Conventional agriculture or **conventional farming** refers to traditional agricultural practices, such as a reliance on pesticides and synthetic fertilizers. These terms are often used in contrast to organic or sustainable agricultural systems. Growers who are not "organic" are referred to as "conventional" farmers.

e-commerce is short for electronic commerce. This marketing system involves the buying and selling of products or services via the Internet or other computer networks.

Ecological farming is a term used in Europe to refer to organic agriculture, but with a greater emphasis on environmental concerns.

Environmentally friendly is a general term used to describe products or services that have resulted in minimal to no harm to the environment.

Ethnic market refers to consumers or buyers that share a common cultural or racial background.

Food Alliance (FA) is a non-profit organization that provides certification for farmers, ranchers, and handlers who follow FA sustainable agriculture standards.

<http://www.foodalliance.org/>

Genetic engineering is the science of deliberately and artificially manipulating an organism's genetic make-up. Other applicable terms include: gene-splicing, genetic modification, and genetic enhancement. GMOs (genetically modified organisms) are the result of genetic engineering.

Genetically modified organism (GMO) refers to an organism that has been altered by genetic engineering. A gene from one organism is introduced into the genetic material of another organism in order to improve its quality or performance (such as disease resistance or pesticide immunity).

GMO-Free or No GMO products were produced without using genetically modified organisms.

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP or GAPS) is a nationwide, voluntary program that addresses the issue of microbial contamination in fresh produce. The Kentucky Department of Agriculture, the Kentucky Department for Public Health, and the University of Kentucky Extension have joined together to provide producers with the information, tools, and training they need to

minimize contamination risks during all phases of production and marketing.

<http://www.kyagr.com/marketing/GAP.htm>

Gourmet products are high quality, premium crops or food items that are often regarded as fancy or sophisticated. Such products generally have limited availability. **Gourmet market** refers to the group of consumers and other buyers who purchase these unique products.

Green refers to environmentally friendly products that are derived from recycled materials or renewable resources.

Holistic Management® is a sustainable farm planning tool that views the farm, the family, and the community as a whole, rather than as separate entities. Holistic management emphasizes the establishment of long-range goals, while also meeting immediate needs. Other related concepts include Whole Farm Planning, comprehensive farm planning, and integrated farm management.

<http://www.holisticmanagement.org/>

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a pest management strategy that uses a combination of biological, cultural, and chemical tools to reduce crop damage from insects, diseases, and weeds. These strategies are employed in such a way as to minimize environmental risks, economic costs, and health hazards. IPM uses such techniques as monitoring pest populations, observing weather conditions, understanding pest cycles, biological control, and crop rotation to reduce and/or manage pest populations. Pesticides are used minimally and judiciously as only one part of the pest management strategy. Visit the University of Kentucky IPM Web site for more information and resources:

<http://www.uky.edu/Ag/IPM/ipm.htm>

Irradiation is a method of disinfesting, sterilizing and/or preserving food using ionizing radiation.

Kentucky Proud is a registered service mark regulated by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA). The logo signifies that

the product was grown, processed, or crafted within the state of Kentucky. Those wishing to participate in this program must apply annually to the KDA for their free membership.

<http://www.kyproud.com/Members/index.htm>

Local or **locally grown** are subjective terms lacking a precise definition. Some consider “local” to be an area within a 150- to 250-mile radius of the market. Others apply these terms to the agricultural products grown or raised by independent farmers within the community.

Low input agriculture refers to the purchase of few external inputs (e.g. purchased fertilizers) with a greater reliance on on-farm resources.

MarketReady is a University of Kentucky training program designed to educate and prepare small farmers and ranchers as they seek to market their agricultural products to restaurants, groceries, wholesale buyers, and foodservice vendors. Training times and locations, along with training details, are posted on the Web:

<http://www.uky.edu/fsic/marketready/index.php>

Natural refers to foods or food additives that are not produced or manufactured. In addition, natural foods contain no artificial ingredients, including preservatives, and have undergone minimal processing. The FDA does not regulate the use of this term except when used on meat and poultry. Natural is *not* synonymous with “organic” or “sustainable.”

Natural farming is a highly refined method of working closely with nature to obtain high yields with little labor involvement. The founder, Japanese farmer Masanobu Fukuoka, refers to his method as “do-nothing farming.”

Naturally grown is a general term that suggests the crop was produced without pesticides or other synthetic chemicals.

Niche market refers to a relatively narrow, but potentially profitable market that targets a specific

group of buyers. These markets are characterized by a unique or differentiated product, a limited number of buyers and sellers, and the existence of potential barriers for entering the market.

Nutrient management relates to managing the amount, timing, form, and placement of soil amendments used in plant production. The current focus is on optimizing crop production and economic returns while also taking into consideration environmental concerns. For additional information, refer to Environmental Protection Agency Ag101 Web site:

<http://www.epa.gov/oecaagct/ag101/croplnutrientmgt.html>

Organic crop production refers to an agricultural system that follows the specific, legal requirements outlined in the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) regulations. For example, no GMOs are permitted and crops are produced without the use of synthetic pesticides or fertilizers. Growers are certified by a USDA-approved certifying agency only after they have demonstrated compliance with stringent NOP standards.

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/NOP/indexIE.htm>

Organic labels

Certified organic is used to label a farm, farmer, or product that has been certified in accordance with USDA National Organic Program (NOP) regulations. Only farmers that have been inspected and approved by a USDA-accredited organization (such as the KDA) may sell, label, and represent their products as certified organic. The USDA organic logo may be used on these products.

100% organic products contain only certified organically produced ingredients (with the exception of salt and water). Producers and handlers must be certified organic to sell, label, or represent their products as 100% organic. The USDA logo may be used on these products.

Organic refers to products in which 95% or

more of their ingredients are certified organic. Producers and handlers must be certified organic in order to sell, label, or represent their products as organic. The USDA logo may be used on these products.

Made with organic ingredients refers to products that contain certified organic ingredients. At least 70% of the ingredients must be organic; the label may list up to three of these ingredients. Producers and handlers must be certified organic in order to sell, label, or represent their products as “made with organic products.” The USDA organic logo may *not* be used on these products.

Organically inclined means the producer prefers organic crop production techniques, but it does not guarantee that organic methods were used exclusively.

Permaculture is a contraction of the words “permanent agriculture” and “permanent culture.” Based on the work of Australian Bill Mollison, permaculture incorporates techniques from tribal, traditional, and scientific cultures around the world. It is a sustainable form of agriculture that attempts to integrate the production of crops and animals into a low maintenance, balanced system. The three core values are: earth-care, people-care, and fair-share. Refer to the Permaculture Institute for more information:
<http://www.permaculture.org/nm/index.php/site/index/>

Pesticide-free crops are those that have been produced without the use of insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, or rodenticides. Products that bear the Pesticide Free Production logo (trademark of University of Manitoba) have not been treated with pesticides from seedling emergence to market, are non-GMO, and have not been grown where residual pesticides are commercially active. For a further explanation, refer to the Pesticide Free Production Farmer’s Co-op Web site.
<http://www.buypfp.com/>

Precision agriculture (aka **site-specific farming**) employs the use of modern technology (e.g. computers, GIS, GPS, and remote sensing) to achieve its goal of optimizing the application of production inputs (seeds, fertilizers, etc.). Inputs are applied precisely only when and where needed, based on detailed, site-specific information.

<http://www.precisionag.com/>

Protected Harvest is an independent non-profit organization that offers a Certified Sustainable label to growers. This program stresses the social and environmental aspects of sustainable agriculture, and includes the use of biointensive IPM. The certification requires a third party audit and an on-site inspection. Standards are specific to the crop and region.

<http://www.protectedharvest.org>

Regenerative agriculture is used to describe a sustainable agricultural system that focuses on restoring soil health and the balance of nature.

<http://newfarm.rodaleinstitute.org/features/0802/regenerative.shtml>

Residue-free signifies that a product does not have pesticide residues above an established limit set by the producer or company. This label does not mean that pesticides were not used at any time nor does it indicate that the product is 100% free of any chemical residue.

Sustainable agriculture is a philosophy that is committed to meeting current plant and animal production needs without compromising the earth’s natural resources for future generations. Sustainable practices are meant to allow a farm or farm system to continue to produce indefinitely. In addition to environmental quality concerns, sustainable agriculture also addresses the economic and social issues of the farm community. The following Web sites are good starting points for a better understanding of sustainable agriculture:

<http://www.sare.org>

<http://www.ssawg.org/>

Transitional refers to fields or farms that are in the process of being converted from conventional production to certified organic production. The USDA requires a minimum transitional period of three full years, during which time the grower must comply with all National Organic Program standards.

Value-added refers to raw agricultural products that have been altered or processed in such a way that their value, and therefore their selling price, is increased. This can include processing (berries made into jam), combining with other

products (bagged mixed greens), and packaging (individually wrapped melon portions). Distribution (getting the product to a more convenient buying location, such as the Internet) and added service (creating floral arrangements from cut flowers) can also add value. Organic crops are often considered value-added since they are produced in a way that makes it possible to label the product “certified organic,” thus adding value to the final product.

Whole Farm Planning See “Holistic Management.”

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Photo by Matt Barton, University of Kentucky Agricultural Communications

Logos courtesy of USDA National Organic Program (USDA Organic), University of Kentucky (MarketReady), Demeter, Certified Naturally Grown, Kentucky Department of Agriculture (Kentucky Proud), and Protected Harvest

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For additional information, contact your local [County Extension](#) agent