

## Why should I buy organic seed?



*Maury Johnson*

**Maury Johnson**

Founder, Blue River Hybrids

**U**ndoubtedly, you've been asked that question several times over the years. The obvious answer is that using organic seed is one of the rules of the National Organic Program. But beyond this obvious answer are some very positive reasons for using organic seed.

The organic farm environment is different from the conventional farm environment. Organic seed has been selected for its ability to perform in the organic environment that is different in terms of fertility, weed control, pest and disease management, and end uses for the grains and forages produced. Following are some of the characteristics that are unique to organic seed:

- Early emergence with good canopy is needed to compete with weeds.
- Seedling vigor allows rapid uniform emergence to sustain timely, effective mechanical tilling.
- Ear Flex is the ability to produce a larger ear and more kernels in response to a reduced plant population. This is an advantage in organic production where the stand may be reduced by weather or tillage.
- Good agronomic package is needed to resist disease and maintain good plant health.

**Those involved in organic seed production and conditioning are subject to inspection and certification.** Therefore, they offer more careful and deliberate care to organic seed than is provided by conventional seed companies.

- Organic seed production and conditioning facilities are inspected by NOP-approved certifier groups. Conventional seed companies who are not certified do not have this rigorous inspection.
- Non-certified conventional seed companies size and bag their untreated seed with the same equipment that they use to condition their GMO-treated varieties.
- BRH tests all our varieties for GMO contamination; not all non-certified seed companies test for GMO presence. The per acre cost of production for organic seed is much higher than for production of non-GMO conventional seed because of higher land rent and increased cost for weed control.
- Non-certified seed companies store their conventional untreated seed in the same buildings that hold their GMO treated inventory using insecticides and pesticides to control insects and rodents.

**Purchase of organic seed also supports the work of seed research, seed growers, and seed sellers, resulting in services that are valuable to many organic farmers.** It also makes possible future products and innovations so that organic seed 10 years from now will be better than organic seed today. Organic seed purchases are an investment in the future.

# What's New?

## **NEW** Blue River SC1 Seedcoating

Blue River Hybrids has actively been seeking materials to apply to seed corn to assist seed growth and plant productivity, in spite of adverse weather and soil conditions. As a result of this effort, Blue River Hybrids has developed "Blue River SC1." Blue River SC1 does the following:

- Encourages root development, giving the seed greater potential to bring in water and nutrients.
- Increases the seed's ability to grow into a plant that survives stress caused by adverse weather and soil conditions during the growing season.

### **Ingredients in Blue River SC1 are individually**

- Compliant with NOP, JAS and EU organic rules.
- Approved by OMRI for organic use.

Blue River SC1 has been approved by OCIA, Blue River Hybrids' Certifier, for use on organic seed.

## **Don't Forget Aphid Resistant Soybeans!**



"Thinking a little about soybean aphids, because next year is an 'odd numbered' year. Huh? Why should that matter? It seems a little strange, but both farmers and researchers in

New York are noticing a trend. In the years we have problems with soybean aphids, we see lots of ladybugs in the fall. The following year, the numbers of both are down; then the next year, both are up again. 2010 was a light year; we saw virtually no ladybugs last fall, so all indications point to heavier pressure in 2011. If you have had problems with soybean aphids in the past, you might want to consider some of the aphid resistant varieties on the market."

*Acres U.S.A., February 2011 issue by Mary-Howell R. Martens. www.acresusa.com*

## **Red Falcon BR**

If you need to plant alfalfa this year, consider planting Red Falcon BR. This variety has excellent disease resistance scores (30/30) and tolerance to animal and wheel traffic. Its branch-rooted trait makes it an excellent choice for heavy soils that don't drain well and keeps Red Falcon BR persistent longer and more productive. In the New York state alfalfa trials, its yield was 108% of the check average for the years 2008–2010; in Wisconsin, it was 104% of the check average in 2010. The supply of Red Falcon BR is conventional this year, but will be organic for 2012.



Tom & Irene Frantzen were voted MOSES Organic Farmer of the Year in '09 & received the 2010 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award from Practical Farmers of Iowa.



## **FEATURED CUSTOMER**

## **Tom Frantzen**

New Hampton, IA

Tom Frantzen began using organic and sustainable practices in 1979. He completed the certification for his land in 1998 with his hog operation and beef herd soon to follow. Tom believes in the long-term principle that for his organic farming operation—"Diversity leads to stability."

He has a 7-year crop rotation including corn, soybeans, and small grains. He plants a range of corn maturities from 95 to 107 days. This spreads the harvest out so the corn doesn't get too dry. Tom picks his corn on the ear, eliminating the need to dry the corn. Whole cob corn is fed to the cattle, shelled corn is fed to the hogs, and the cobs are used for bedding. His favorite hybrid is 44R57. It has good early emergence, standability, and yield. It also works well to pick on the ear.

Tom farms in northeastern Iowa near New Hampton where the climate is generally cooler and wetter than most of the rest of Iowa. Aphids have been a challenge in his area since 2001. Even though aphid pressure was limited in 2010 and yields were good, Tom is still including Blue River Hybrids' aphid resistant soybeans in his production plan for 2011. Tom has described the aphid damage in the past decade as catastrophic, with aphids destroying a field's yield potential by 50% almost overnight.

Tom sees a positive future in organic farming. He markets his cattle and hogs to Organic Valley Co-op, a strong force in the stability and strength of organic agriculture. He sees the increased demand for organic products as an incentive for farmers to consider organic production for long-term success.



## FEATURED CUSTOMER

### Eden Valley Dairy

Leon, NY

In 2007, Mammoser Farms, Inc. owners Jerry, Rick, Ron, and Craig Mammoser were in the process of starting an organic dairy at the same time that Upstate Farms Co-op in Buffalo, NY was looking for a source of organic milk. Today Eden Valley Organics LLC, managed by Brendan O’Gorman, is in its fourth year and is one of the largest organic dairies in New York state. The dairy began with 140 organic cows and currently is milking 430 cows. With improved genetics, feed ration, and pasture and crop management, they have been able to increase their production from 40 lbs. of milk to 60 lbs. of milk per cow.

The crop advisor for Eden Valley Dairy is John Noto. The farm consists of over 2,000 acres with approximately half in haylage and pasture. They have planted BRH 30A12, 33L90, and 39B17 corn hybrids. For 2011, John Noto will be adding a 104 day dual purpose hybrid, 53R57, to his usual 90-100 day lineup. They harvest to fill their needs for silage first, then leave the remainder to mature for use as grain. They also roast soybeans for use in their feed ration. This year they are planting BR Brand 09FC8 and 11A1.

### Leon Stoppel

Julesburg, CO

Since 1996, Leon Stoppel has been the manager of Stoppel Farm, an organic farm with 7,000 acres of both dryland and irrigated production. The farm produces yellow corn, feed grade soybeans, hard red wheat, winter prose millet, and—in the 2011 growing season—450 acres of Sierra Organic Sunflowers. Leon has grown both oil and confection sunflowers for many years in Kansas as well as in Colorado. Sunflowers grow well in Colorado, and Stoppel reports that he doesn’t have problems with disease, insects, or birds. It is a good rotational crop with a root system that goes deep into the soil to use nutrients other crops can’t. Currently, sunflowers have a reliable market, another good reason to include them in an organic rotation.

Leon Stoppel has been a longtime customer, originally with NC+ Organics and then with Blue River Hybrids beginning in 2005. Leon started farming in the 1950s on his family farm in Kansas and began farming organically in the 1980s. Stoppel was trained and worked as one of the first inspectors for OCIA, FVO, and QIA. Leon says, “I enjoy what I am doing. I use my past experience as the best teacher. Never get locked into one plan or idea. I believe God created everything as ‘living’. . . . I treat everything and everyone with respect.”



## FEATURED CUSTOMER



Leon Stoppel





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[info@blueriverorgseed.com](mailto:info@blueriverorgseed.com)

Thank you.



## “Coming Home to Farm” Retreat Scheduled for July

Your purchase of Blue River Hybrids’ organic corn supports the “Coming Home to Farm” retreat (July 14-16, 2011) for veterans interested in agricultural careers. Located in Des Moines, Iowa, the retreat combines educational sessions, mentoring, and farm tours. We welcome applications from United States veterans, with preference for post-9/11 vets. Please contact **Michael Porter** with the Farmer Veteran Coalition at [michaelp@farmvetco.org](mailto:michaelp@farmvetco.org).

## Kevin Ferguson Rosendale, WI

Kevin Ferguson’s innovative silage mix of sunflowers and corn has proven itself to be an asset to his feeding program. Not only do his dairy cows like sunflowers, they have a nice “finish” and have stood up well over the stress of the winter months. It is a “good thing for me. I like it,” says Ferguson. He plans to continue to include sunflowers in his feeding ration next year. See the article from the fall issue of the Organic Sower.



**FEATURED CUSTOMER**