

First Year Experience with Organic Corn

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Nineteen ninety-seven was my first year to grow certified organic corn. To be certified, you have to have records to prove no chemical use for three years.

We compared the returns from the organic corn and a field of our conventionally raised corn (Table 10). The conventional corn was planted April 28th on second year corn ground following alfalfa, with a manure N credit of 30 lbs and alfalfa credit of 50 lbs N. The organic corn was planted May 20th on first-year ground following alfalfa and manure. Weed control was good in both fields. Stalk rot was a problem in both fields.

Greg Koether, Jeff Klinge and Dan Specht at a PFI field day



I do not think fertility was limiting on the organic field. Corn following alfalfa without fertilizer or manure has been my best corn field for years. Organic corn is normally planted later to aid weed control. The later planting date plus lack of heat units in northeast Iowa were a factor this year. Ceiba 3475 has done well on sod ground in the past, but it is too late (108 days) for May 20th planting in northeast Iowa. Next year we will plant 100-day corn.

Of course, corn production doesn't tell the whole story of farm profitability. We may net more money on organic corn, but we won't be growing it as often. My crop rotation will be a five-year one: small grains, alfalfa, corn, soybeans, corn. The crops that are less profitable than corn will still contribute to the overall operation of the farm.

Table 10. Corn production budgets, organic and conventional, Klinge farm

Item		Organic	Conventional
Pre-Harvest Machinery		\$27.50 †	\$20.25 ‡
Seed (Ceiba 3475)	29,000 plants/acre	\$31.90	\$31.90
Nitrogen (no P or K)	60 lbs	\$0.00	\$14.40
Herbicide	2.4 qt. Harness Extra, .78 oz Permit plus additives	\$0.00	\$36.13
Insecticide	8 lbs Aztec	\$0.00	\$17.12
Crop Insurance		\$5.00	\$5.00
Interest	9.5% for 8 months	\$4.08	\$7.90
Pre-Harvest Total		\$68.48	\$132.70
Harvest Machinery	Combine	\$22.00	\$22.00
	Haul Grain	\$4.00	\$4.00
	Dry Grain (\$0.15/bu)	\$19.20	\$21.75
Harvest Total		\$45.20	\$47.25
Labor	\$8.00/hr	\$48.00	\$32.00
Land	cash rent equivalent	\$150.00	\$150.00
Total Cost per Acre		\$311.68	\$362.45
Crop Yield (bu/acre)		128	145
Cost per Bushel		\$2.44	\$2.50
Sale Price (per bu)		\$4.05	\$2.70
Gross Income/Acre		\$518.40	\$391.50
Net Profit/Acre		\$206.72	\$29.05
† Organic: tandem disk 2x, chisel plow, harrow, plant, hoe 2x, cultivate 3x			
‡ Conventional: tandem disk 2x, chisel plow, harrow, plant, hoe 1x, cultivate 1x			