

Organic agriculture program viability study

Abstract: A survey was conducted to determine the viability of offering an organic agriculture program and classes at Western Iowa Tech Community College.

The survey findings indicate that there is interest in organic agriculture education as a non-degree and no-credit option, but not as a major diploma or a degree program with college credits at Western Iowa Tech.

What was done and why?

A mail survey was used to identify and analyze the perceptions of 1,000 Siouxland residents regarding their: 1) interest in organic agriculture education, 2) preference for class scheduling, 3) preference for credit/non-credit and/or degree/diploma options, and 4) their interest in subject areas such as livestock, field crops, fruits, etc. The sample was drawn from a target population of all students who have taken Western Iowa Tech Community College credit and non-credit courses, received a certificate, diploma or a degree in various fields, and reside in the tri-state area of Siouxland.



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What did we learn?

Overall, women seemed to be more concerned about food safety. People who were born between 1950 and 1970 seem to be most interested in organic agriculture. Participants perceived that organic foods are higher priced. Based on qualitative comments, participants seem to be either for organic agriculture or against it, with a much smaller number of undecided participants in the middle. There was little or no interest in pursuing a college degree, diploma or certificate in organic farming and there is some interest in learning more about organic agriculture on a non-credit basis. Weekend scheduling and independent study with media resources were preferred methods of course delivery for these participants.

Based on the findings of this survey, the researcher recommends the following actions:

- Design and offer non-credit organic agriculture education classes.
- Develop easy-to-follow educational materials for independent study.
- Offer non-credit short courses on weekends.
- Conduct further research to understand why participants who were under 40 and over 60 years of age were not interested in organic agriculture.
- Additional research may be needed to understand organic agriculture issues that polarize people.
- Similar surveys could be conducted in other regions of Iowa to see if opinions varied by area.

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More details:

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