

Monday, October 25, 2021

The Impact of COVID-19 on US Organic Farmers



All sessions are scheduled in Mountain Time.

Abstract Title: The impact of COVID-19 on US organic farmers

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Session Title: 3077.0 Round Table - OHS in a Rapidly Evolving Workplace: Emerging Issues

Session Date: Monday, October 25, 2021

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Program Title: Occupational Health and Safety

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Abstract

The emergence of COVID-19 and subsequent lock down restrictions to prevent the spread of disease triggered a global disruption in food systems, placing limitations on agricultural production and distribution. While farmers may be considered essential workers, there is a scarcity of data on the impact of the pandemic in this population, including organic farmers. We conducted a cross-sectional study of US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Certified organic producers recruited through the USDA Integrity Database. Participants completed a 28-items self-reported survey on COVID-19 prevalence and preventive behaviors. Data from 286 participants were included for analysis. Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha=.88$) was calculated to measure the internal consistency of a six-item prevention scale, and we performed correlation and regression analyses to assess the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and frequency of prevention practices. Self-reported infection rate was 5% among producers. While several socio-demographic characteristics were correlated with prevalence of prevention methods, only gender and farm size remained statistically significant predictors of prevention behaviors in the regression model, with females reporting more use of prevention methods ($\beta=.278$, $p<.001$) and those with 100 or more certified organic acres reporting less use of prevention methods ($\beta=-.231$, $p<.001$). Understanding the frequency of adherence to prevention methods within essential industries, such as agriculture, is important for effective targeting of public health policies and messaging.

Keywords: farmer health; COVID-19; organic agriculture; organic producers; health behavior, disease prevention