

KEYNOTE
ECOLOGY AS A MODEL FOR ORGANIC AGRICULTURE
Francis Thicke

Saturday, March 1, 2008, 8:30 to 10:00am



“A crossroads we now find ourselves at is whether we will allow organic farming to become wholly defined by the materials that are allowed or not allowed in production. Or, can we take organic farming to a higher level, also defining it as an ecological production system that utilizes a range of biological and cultural methods to build soils, defend against pests, and achieve our production goals. The benefits of such a system should include more nutritious food, increased biodiversity, better protection of the environment and enhancement of the natural resource base, and greater prosperity for organic farmers and for rural communities.”

Francis Thicke

Francis Thicke is the Owner/Operator of a 75-cow, certified organic, grass-based, value-added dairy, producing organic bottled milk, cream, yogurt, and cheese for sales through local grocery stores and restaurants. Thicke has been in agriculture his whole life, and converted the family farm to organic in 1976. Thicke has also been deeply involved in research and promotion of organic agriculture, testifying before the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, on the 2007 Farm Bill in March of 2007. Thicke currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Organic Farming Research Foundation, the Iowa Environmental Protection Commission, and Steering Committee of Scientific Congress on Organic Agriculture Research (SCOAR).

Thicke also serves on the USDA State Technical Committee for the state of Iowa where he drafted and got adopted an incentive program to assist Iowa farmers in conversion to organic production—the first such program in the nation. Thicke was a member of the Board of Directors of the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services (MOSES) from 2000-2004; the Governing Council of the Consortium for Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (CSARE) from 1998-2001; and the Iowa Organic Standards Board during the writing of state organic standards, serving as chair of Livestock Committee (1998-2000).

Thicke has served as the project leader for several local community projects, including an organic farming mentor program, linking experienced organic farmers with novices; a "Shared Visions" project to bring local farmers and community members together to create a vision and initiate action toward a more sustainable agriculture and community; and, a "Rural Action" project to facilitate the development of local value-added agricultural enterprises.

Thicke has received many awards for his work including the 2007 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award from the Practical Farmers of Iowa, the “Outstanding Pasture Management” award from the Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District in 2001, and the “Steward of the Land” award from the Iowa Chapter of the Sierra Club, 2001. Thicke received his Ph.D in Agronomy/Soil Fertility from the University of Illinois in 1988.