

# Investing in New Ideas for Agriculture Makes Good \$ense for Washington



The case for funding WSU's Biologically Intensive Agriculture and Organic Farming program

## THE FACTS

- Food and agriculture make up a \$29 billion-a-year keystone industry in Washington, providing 160,000 jobs, and producing more than 200 different crops for international and domestic markets.
- Washington farmers are being squeezed more than ever by international trade, urban sprawl, environmental regulations, and escalating production costs such as fertilizer, pesticides and petroleum products. Washington loses more than 23,000 acres of prime farmland each year – an area equal to the size of Lake Washington.
- Consumers are more interested than ever in food grown locally and with environmentally friendly methods. The demand for organics has grown at 20% per year for the last decade and is expected to continue doing so. Major players in the food industry are capitalizing on this trend as McDonalds offers organic coffee, and Safeway and WalMart offer their own lines of organic products.
- WSU's Biologically Intensive Agriculture and Organic Farming program is a cutting-edge program designed to help Washington farmers be profitable and sustainable. ***WSU has requested that the Legislature appropriate an additional \$400,000 to fund this program as part of its Unified Ag Initiative. Dan Bernardo, Dean of Agriculture at WSU, says the program "will allow the institution to quickly mobilize resources to develop research and education programs to address issues of critical importance to the state's food and agricultural sector and natural resource base."***

**WHY YOU SHOULD CARE.** Along with aerospace and high tech, agriculture is among the largest and most important sectors in Washington's economy. Our agricultural tradition has provided not just food and jobs, but a vital identity, culture, and way of life valued by rural and urban residents. As with the aerospace and high tech sectors, led by Boeing and Microsoft, significant investment in research and infrastructure must be made to keep our state's agricultural sector competitive.

Washington State University has a long and respected history of providing support and scientific research to our state's farmers. In 2001, WSU launched an exciting new program called Biologically Intensive Agriculture and Organic Farming. By providing cutting-edge research and teaching to Washington farmers, this program will ultimately give consumers more options for purchasing the freshest, highest quality food while supporting farmers who employ good environmental stewardship on their land.



**NOT JUST ORGANIC** – “Biologically intensive agriculture” refers to farming practices that rely on biological processes that are renewable, non-polluting, and mutually beneficial to both farmers and society. Examples include practices that may be implemented by both conventional and organic growers, such as: direct seed cover cropping systems; management intensive grazing; and biological pest control.

**WHERE THINGS STAND NOW.** Congress has provided more than \$700,000 to the Biologically Intensive and Organic program and WSU has redirected funds from other programs to staff it. In 2006, WSU requested \$800,000 from the Washington State Legislature for the program: the legislature provided first-time funding, but at a lower level of \$400,000.

In 2007, WSU is requesting \$400,000 in state funds to fill in the gap, together with funding for three positions. The request is part of WSU's \$10.8 million Unified Agriculture Initiative, a larger effort to make Washington agriculture more viable and sustainable.

- \$400,000 – Enhances an annual competitive grants program to find near-term solutions in the areas of conservation, biological pest control, and ecological nutrient management.
- Funds two extension educators, one in Eastern Washington and one in Western Washington, to work with producers, businesses and communities on value-added production and marketing strategies to overcome economic challenges in farming communities.
- Funds a Biological and Organic Agriculture Economist to assess economic opportunities in emerging industries, such as biofuels and bioproducts, as well as in alternative production systems.



#### **CHERRIES, A CASE IN POINT**

*Cherry fruit fly is the number one pest for cherries in the Northwest. Until recently there were no viable organic control methods for this pest, limiting production despite growing demand and consumer willingness to pay higher prices for organic cher-*



*ries. After three years of field trials, WSU researchers found a formula for applying a microbial insecticide that achieved 100% control of fruit flies in cherry orchards at a dramatically reduced cost to growers. The practice has been adopted by virtually all western US organic cherry growers and an increasing number of conventional growers. Federal funding of WSU's Biologically Intensive and Organic program made this vital improvement for cherry growers possible. State funding for the program would make possible many more success stories like this one.*

**BROAD STATE-WIDE SUPPORT.** The Washington Sustainable Food and Farming Network has brought together a broad and growing coalition of people and organizations who strongly support full funding of WSU's Biologically Intensive and Organic program. These supporters include conventional and organic farmers, agricultural organizations, farmers markets, noted chefs and food retailers, nutrition experts, medical professionals, faith-based groups, and conservation groups.

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