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2017 Annual Report

Each year the Chairperson of the Board of Directors prepares an annual report to share with the Board and membership. The purpose of this report is to document and review accomplishments and growth while providing inspiration for the next year of activity.

Perspective and Context

2017 marked the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance as a 501(3)(c) non-profit, statewide, organization. We continued to build on our long-standing commitment to education and outreach in pursuit of our mission of *"Promoting organic agriculture and the development and support of food systems that revitalize and sustain local communities"*. MOFFA members can be very proud of their organization as a valuable contributor to the long term growth of healthy soils, healthy crops and livestock, and healthy people.

The need for food, feed, fiber and flowers raised, processed and marketed with a deep respect for managing living soil and the ecological balance of all living organisms has never been greater. The physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of human health are all integrated with our relationship with our natural world and our food.

The sales of organic produce and livestock products continue to grow at double digit percentage rates and we can celebrate the progress. But we know that organic accounts for a small fraction of the total agriculture and food system. We must also be aware of the apparent growing separation between people able and willing to support organic food production and the apparently growing number of people who are unaware of how food is produced and are able to focus only on food of any type needed to survive.

In 2017 we also became more aware of the difference between traditional support for organic food production and the growing number of those who are more interested in increasing "organic" product availability and premium profits with any methods they can use, even if it means leaving behind the foundational concepts of grown in the soil and under the sun. The loss of organic integrity is being made possible by USDA National Organic Program policy and the lack of enforcement. It appears that a minority of people in positions of power are using the guiding principle of

industrial agriculture to “feed the growing world population with more low priced food” as the new guiding principle for “industrial organic”.

In the 2016 annual report the increased awareness of changing weather patterns was recognized along with the options we have to make a difference. This past year has seen continued extreme rainfall events interspersed with longer periods of drought. But rather than progress, at the political level there has been regulatory regression and denial of the need for any regulation or changes in practice.

The questions “What is organic farming?” and “Why do we need organic farming?” are even more important now than they were just a year ago. Is it surprising the difference a year can make? Apparently the USDA NOP will not support and enforce long standing organic farming principles. It looks like it will be up to us to continue and cultivate the traditions of organic farming.

Board of Directors

The [Board of Directors](#) continued to grow and strengthen during 2017. Continuing members include: John Biernbaum (2009), Dan Bewersdorff (2015), John Hooper (2009), Vicki Morrone (2009), Amy Newday (2016), Emily Nicholls (2016), Dan Rossman (2015), Emily Shettler (2016), Julia Studier (2014), and Dane Terrill (2012). New members include John Edgerton, Jessie Smith, and Collin Thompson, bringing the total to 13. Our Board officers for 2016 were John Biernbaum, Chair; Dan Rossman, Vice-Chair; Dane Terrill, Treasurer; and John Hooper, Secretary. Our goal is to keep the Board at a minimum of 12 to 15 members and to have improved representation from each of the geographic regions of Michigan.



John Edgerton



Jessie Smith



Collin Thompson

Membership

Membership numbers fell slightly in 2017 to 126, a number that is 21 lower than in 2016 but higher than any other year since 2010. The membership included 65 individual or family memberships (\$40), 27 small business memberships (\$60), 15 larger business memberships (\$100), and two students or persons with limited resources (\$20). We added one life member in 2017, for a total of five. Total membership revenue was \$6,260 in dues with an additional \$1,120 of generous donations members included when paying their dues, for a total of \$7,380.

Board Meetings

To facilitate involvement of members from across the state, the Board of Directors uses a combination of in person and conference call meetings. We have established a schedule of eight meetings per year with three in person and five conference phone calls. The Annual Meeting is held in the Lansing area during April. For the July in person meeting we included a meal and social component, enjoying an

afternoon on the patio at the Biernbaums' with a great pot luck meal. Board member Amy Newday made it possible for us to meet at Kalamazoo College in November. A [schedule of meetings](#) for 2018 is available on our website, and we invite members to join us for any meeting.

During 2017 a component of our meetings was discussion about our vision for the organization as a guide to determining our activities and goals for the future. These discussions are ongoing and may be an important part of our 2018 activities. There are multiple possible projects for the Board and organization to address, and we need some time to prioritize the options. The consensus that developed was that the Board needs to work with a professional facilitator to take this important next step.

Organic Connections Newsletter

The quarterly [Michigan Organic Connections](#) newsletter continues to be a core method of connecting and reaching our membership and many more organic supporters. We published articles from authors including Leah and Jessie Smith of Nodding Thistle Farm and MOFFA founding member Maynard Kaufman and his wife Barbara Geisler in addition to members of MOFFA's Board. We also instituted a regular feature on developments in the public policy sphere which affect organic production. We continue to request contributions from members and others. The complete archive of the newsletter from 1992 through 2017 was made available on our website this year. The newsletter reaches close to 1500 addresses on our group email list.

Website

The [website](#) has continued to grow into a reliable source of information about organic farming and gardening, local food and business related events and announcements. Historical aspects including past newsletters and annual reports are available. Information about educational and employment opportunities and land available for organic production is maintained up to date for the community.

Publications

The MOFFA [Farm Guide](#), *A Guide to Michigan's Organic and Ecologically Sustainable Growers and Farms*, which is now available both as an electronic version on our website and as a printed book, continues to be a popular item. The listings grew from 144 in 2016 to 149 in 2017. One of MOFFA's goals is the vigorous pursuit of growers and farmers to add in order to expand this offering to the general public.

In late May MOFFA published a book titled [The Organic Movement in Michigan](#) edited by Maynard Kaufman and Julia Christianson. Maynard was instrumental in starting MOFFA and has served on the Board and as Chair of the organization. Julia has been the "very part time" administrative staff since 2013, and took on this project on a volunteer basis. Of the 15 authors, all of whom played a role in the development of organic agriculture



in Michigan, almost all are MOFFA members. After paying for pre-publication expenses, proceeds from the book contributed \$250 to MOFFA's bottom line in 2017 and will continue to help support MOFFA's programs in the future.

In 2017 MOFFA's [fact sheets](#) were reconfigured into a tri-fold format, and three new fact sheets were added, on organic certification in Michigan, online resources, and "What Is Organic?"—an overview of the definition from the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM).

Conferences and Meetings Attended

Michigan is fortunate to have a diverse and distributed array of organizations that support ecological and local farming initiatives and development of beginning farmers. While distributed systems are a hallmark of sustainability, to be more effective the organizations also need to be networked and responsive to each other. To that end, a standing MOFFA goal has been to be a trusted collaborator and partner that encourages sharing of information. In 2017 we continued to participate in the diversity of educational activities in Michigan where we could share organic ethics and methods. These conferences include:

- Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference (January)
- Michigan Family Farms Conference (February)
- MSU Organic Reporting Session (March)
- Organic Farmers of Michigan Field Day (August)
- Southwest Michigan Harvest Fest (September)
- Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit (October)
- Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Growers Expo (December)

An important contribution of MOFFA at these conferences is providing friendly conversation and answers to questions about organic farming and gardening and certification methods. A wide range of books is also made available to stimulate learning and discussion. In 2017 book sales totaled \$3,470. Our thanks to Board member John Hooper who most often is the friendly face that conference participants greet at the MOFFA table.

Education Programs

In 2015 the previously recognized "signature" Michigan Organic Conference event was reconfigured to the "Organic Intensives" (OI). The OI was modeled after the successful MOSES Organic University with the goal to allow more in-depth presentation and discussion of a smaller range of topics. In 2017 the third annual [Organic Intensives](#) was held on March 9th on the MSU campus. The topics included:

- Organic Weed, Insect and Disease Management for the Diversified Vegetable Farm
- Successful Organic Gardening: Growing Nutrient Dense Vegetables in a Changing Climate
- The Changing Face of Organic Field Crop Marketing

The OI is a project and event that most all of the Board of Directors work on together. It requires advance discussion and selection of topics and speakers. One goal has been to select topics that will interest all of MOFFA's members—large scale farmers and businesses, medium scale diversified farmers, smaller scale urban and homesteading farmers, and gardeners and consumers of organic food. Participants provided overwhelmingly positive comments and reviews of the 2017 event and speakers.

An important development during 2017 was the decision to move the timing and location for Organic Intensives 2018. We moved the date for the 2018 event up to early January and moved the location to the Plant and Soil Sciences Building on the MSU campus. The process required a significant effort that we think was justified and will provide for an improved event for years to come.



Participants in the Gardening session visit Bailey Greenhouse, OI 2017

Another key component to the success of the OI is the sponsorship support from a variety of business and organizations. We would like to recognize the support of the following organizations in 2017:

North Central SARE	Eden Foods	Certis USA
Blue River Hybrids	Crop Services International	Organic Valley
Herbruck's	George and Anne Bird	Grice Farms
SunOpta	GreenStone Farm Credit Services	Cherry Capital Foods
Bay Shore Sales	USDA NRCS	

Policy Efforts

MOFFA is active as a member of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC). Julia Christianson (in her role as a MOFFA member and volunteer Chair of the Policy Committee) is the primary contact who participates in the calls and keeps the Board informed of developments with the organization.

During 2016 and 2017 Board member John Biernbaum was one of 16 members of the USDA Hydroponic and Aquaponic Regulations Review Task Force. The Task Force submitted their report in July of 2016 and the National Organic Standards Board and USDA took no action until the November, 2017, NOSB meeting, at which widespread grassroots support to “Keep the Soil in Organic” was ignored and the continued certification of hydroponic and aquaponic operations was approved. John Biernbaum attended the meeting in Jacksonville and participated in the Protect Organic event. Seven of the 15 members of NOSB, the “soil seven”, were in support of excluding hydroponic. But the remaining 8 members voted to allow organic certification of hydroponics. In this case all that was needed was a majority vote, so this was a case of one vote making a very large difference for the future of organic.

Proposed rule changes for the certification of poultry and livestock, fifteen years in the making, were released in late 2016. Implementation of the new rule, initially scheduled for March 19, was postponed three times over the course of 2017, despite overwhelming support for implementation within the organic community. As we know now, the delays finally resulted in a total dismissal of many years of work to provide a level playing field for organic poultry and livestock.

By the end of 2017, the Organic Farming Association was up and running, and efforts were underway to develop new labels such as “Real Organic” and “Regenerative Organic”. While new labels are not likely a desirable next step, there are limited options when the USDA NOP does not do their job.

Financials

Total revenue for the year was \$32,779 on a cash basis, but \$7,900 of this represented corporate sponsorship of MOFFA for the year 2018. Not counting this \$7,900, revenue was 4% greater than budgeted. Total expenditures were \$25,177 (~1% below budget) resulting in a net loss of \$300 for the year.

Emerging Priorities for 2018

Priorities for 2018 include:

- Continue the Organic Intensives program with a date of January 12, 2019 at the Plant and Soils Sciences Building at MSU
- Consider possible regional Organic Intensive type events on other dates and at other locations
- Complete a new vision statement for the organization that can guide the Board of Directors in making decisions about MOFFA programs and priorities.
- Recruit article authors for the Organic Connections Newsletter
- Maintain and increase membership and membership involvement
- Prepare a position and responsibilities description that details the roles and operating norms for the organization
- Several farm tours arranged and publicized in partnership with OEFFA.

Respectfully Submitted by John A. Biernbaum, Chair

