

Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance



Annual Report to Members for the Year 2005

MOFFA is the only non-profit, volunteer organization in Michigan that seeks to promote the development of food systems that rely on organic methods of food production and that revitalize and sustain local communities.

At a time when the increased industrialization of our food system has concentrated control of this system into fewer hands, degraded the environment and profaned the human spirit, we believe that organic agriculture restores wellness in people, community and the earth.

We advocate for local organic food systems that create the necessary connections between healthy people, communities and the earth. We work to create more public awareness about the nature of industrialized food supply and its environmental and social hazards. We promote the value of local and organically grown food and we seek to increase public awareness about the need for more decentralized food systems that allow for greater participation, access and involvement by all citizens.

As we review our activities and accomplishments during the calendar year 2005 we quickly appreciate and applaud the tremendous achievements and dedication of a few dedicated volunteers. At the same time, a variety of events during the year, such as the continuing controversy over use of the word 'organic' and uncertainty over the status of the state's organic program, create a range of challenging opportunities as we chart our future course.

Activities and Accomplishments

Education and Outreach

Throughout the year, we continued to provide financial support for, and volunteer time to host MOFFA displays and to sell and distribute informational materials at regional organic festivals and events celebrating both organic and healthy living. These included: the Southwest Michigan Community Harvest Fest; the OGM Harvest Festival and the Healthy Traditions Network's Growing Connections Festival.

We also continued to support and collaborate with others to promote awareness of organic food and farming in a diverse range of venues including: the Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference in Gaylord; the Oakland County Earth Day Event in Troy in collaboration with Maple Creek Farm; other Earth Day events in Muskegon and in Macomb County; the Organic Festival in Bellaire; the Great Lakes Bioneers Conference at both the Traverse City and the new Detroit (Wayne State) sites; and, the Great Lakes Fruit & Vegetable Expo in Grand Rapids.

Our "signature event", the 2005 Michigan Organic Conference held on the MSU campus convened almost 170 registered participants and 14 exhibitors. Doug Murray and Chet Kendell, among others, were instrumental in all phases of planning, organizing and running this event. Generous contributions from Eden Foods, the MSU Student Organic Farm, and the Organic Growers of Michigan helped immensely to assure the success of this annual meeting for the organic community in Michigan.

Several other collaborative activities helped to broaden the audience for information about organic food and farming: MOFFA is now linked on the Clinton River Watershed Council website; Pat Whetham represented MOFFA during a "farm lobby day" in Lansing; we collaborated in showings of "Future of Food" video with Clean Water Action/Macomb County, Grosse Pointe Park, and in St. Clair Shores; and, we helped to publicize a showing of "The Real Dirt on Farmer John" with Maple Creek Farm in Bloomfield Hills. Thanks to a MOFFA volunteer and new member, Terrie Hampel, MOFFA is included in a "Healthy Food" brochure for the Muskegon area; LocalMotion gave us credit in a newsletter story on organic; and our "Choose Local Organic Food" brochure was distributed during Organic Day at the Michigan State Fair as part of the display organized by the Michigan Organic Advisory Committee.

Carolyn Koch committed considerable time and effort to putting together our signature publication, the *Eating Organically Guide*, and assuring its availability by September. The guide continues to sell well at numerous events, with just over \$700 in total sales in less than four months. The guide is now also available on our website. Brian Thomas continues as our volunteer webmaster and the MOFFA website is still the first "go to" place in searches for 'Michigan organic'. While our electronic News Group sputtered a bit, toward the end of the year, a new member, Suzanne Rutkowski, volunteered to assume editorial responsibility for *Michigan Organic Connections*.

Advocacy & Grants

In addition to soliciting signatures for a range of political and legislative issues confronting the Michigan organic community at various festivals, MOFFA also opposed "pre-emption legislation" that affects organic food and farms. MOFFA Board members and others participate in a variety of policy forums that help us to express an "organic position" on a range of food and farming issues: Board member Barb Mutch is a consumer representative on the Michigan Food Policy Council and on the Michigan Organic Advisory Committee (MOAC); Carol Osborne, former Board member and MOFFA project staff, is also a consumer representative on the MOAC. MOFFA is a member of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture and the Michigan Environmental Council; and, we have established a closer relationship with the Michigan Farmers Union.

Our major grants include two research projects in collaboration with Michigan State University.

The *MSU Sustainable Agriculture/Organic Transitions Grant* is a special two-year project that focuses on organic transition issues. It seeks to identify the barriers and concerns of conventional fruit and vegetable growers about making the transition to organic production. This project also supports the publication of a "white paper" on the state of organic agriculture in Michigan. A second project, *Partnering to Cultivate Organic Agriculture in Michigan and the Midwest*, funded under the USDA Organic Transitions Program was approved in 2005 and will provide funds to develop profiles of Michigan organic farmers and their experience with organic transition, and to assist with research on organic vegetable and field crop marketing.

Membership & Organization

We gained 47 new members during 2005, and as of December, we had 201 members, including 33 business members. The MOFFA News Group is sent electronically to 118 individuals. In addition to membership fees, we received \$350 in additional contributions from members.

Perhaps "fluid" is the best way to describe our Board of Directors membership during the year. As Carolyn Koch, Carol Osborne and Suzanne Smucker reached the end of their terms after several years of Board service, in March 2005, the Board welcomed new members Barb Mutch, John Van Voorhees and Kurt Cobb. Unfortunately, for several reasons, John Van Voorhees and Claire O'Leary resigned from the Board during 2005.

Our Office Administrator, Carol Osborne agreed to work 8 hours per month, and with her oversight and commitment of time that has gone well beyond one day/month our financial, banking and tax records and reporting are in order.

Major Opportunities

As we enter 2006, we face two sets of closely related challenging opportunities – one organizational and one related to policy and programs.

Organizationally we must find a way to assure adequate compensation and office support for office staff. This will be closely tied to making a major effort to secure funding for core organizational activities. Our central and distinguishing activities require regular oversight responsibility: newsletter; news group; guide; brochures and educational materials, including our display; keeping files and records of activities and involvement; and, revising several of our policies and procedures, including the use of the MOFFA trailer and support for local festivals.

At the same it is now more important than ever for us to strengthen our leadership role for organic in Michigan. We have a message for, and respond to the concerns of a growing number of Michigan citizens. We are and will continue to be a significant part of the future of food and farming in Michigan! Healthy Food, Healthy People, Healthy Environment!

Submitted on behalf of the MOFFA Board of Directors (December 2005), by Co-Chair, Jim Bingen.

MOFFA Board of Directors 2005/2006

Jim Bingen

George Bird

Kurt Cobb

Maynard Kaufman

Nancy Jones Kaiser

Barb Mutch

Doug Murray, Co-Chair

Pat Whetham

June 1, 2006 (revised from April 29, 2006 Annual Meeting report)