



Michigan Organic Connections

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A Message from the Chair

Welcome to the first installment of Organic Connections for 2018. There are so many timely organic food, farming and gardening topics to address as we start off the year.

Happy to report that Organic Intensives was successful at a new time of the year (Jan. 6) and at a new location (Plant and Soil Sciences Building at MSU). We had three timely topics including Growing Organic Grains, Integrating Livestock, and Transplant Production. Separate reports on each

session are provided later on in this newsletter. We were able to draw participants from across Michigan. Anyone who has helped organize a conference or workshop knows that there are many pieces from finding a place to developing the program and working on publicity. I hope you will



all thank Julia Christianson and all the MOFFA Board of Directors who worked hard to make this year's OI a success.



Are the USDA and some certifiers properly enforcing the organic regulations? The debate continues over hydroponic and livestock methods. Hope you added your voice to the list of comments supporting implementation of the new livestock rules. Each of us are called to do our part to participate in and uphold the organic certification process.

We are about in the middle of conference season with GLEXPO, ACRES and Bionutrient Food Association in December, and OI, NMSFC, Family Farms, OEFFA, and MOSES in January and February. Please make the best of these great opportunities. Think about carpooling as a great way to increase the value of the conferences. Read John Hooper's [report](#) from NMSFC later in this issue, and stop by and see John at the MOFFA booth at the [Family Farms Conference](#) in Kalamazoo on Feb. 3.

The Organic Farmers Association (OFA) is up and running. Hope you will keep in touch with their activities and progress. Consider membership. While there has been a national Organic Consumers Association (OCA) and Organic Trade Association (OTA), this is the first national association representing organic farmers where farmers will be able to have a vote in policy positions. organicfarmersassociation.org/

I read that the Bionutrient Food Association Conference experienced rapid growth in attendance in December. Organic farming has always included food quality and nutrition along with soil management and livestock welfare. Now the story includes even more emphasis on the importance of balancing soil organic matter building (living, dead, really dead, really-really dead), balancing biology (bacterial, fungal, nematodes, etc.), balancing all the important nutrients for plant, animal and human health, and balancing soil aeration and water retention. A great

resource that is now available are all the recorded presentations from the Bionutrient Food Association Conference from December (bionutrient.org/site/library/soil-nutrition-conference-archive). This is an impressive no-cost opportunity to learn from some of the top voices sharing a range of perspectives on the topic.

The team at Michigan / Kalamazoo based Crop Services International (CSI) is continuing a long tradition of working with growers to mineralize soils and boost soil biology. I was fortunate to participate in their 2-day Soil Health Seminar held for 40+ participants in Kalamazoo January 11-12. Exciting to see the diverse audience of blueberry growers, vegetable farmers, composters and gardeners.

Just yesterday (Jan 27) I presented about Compostponics and Organic Gardening to 150+ Master Gardeners at the Winter Symposium of the Capital Area Master Gardener's Association. I shared what I have been learning about how to bring balance to our gardening and farming approaches with the goal of focusing on Health. Later this year in early August I will be back at MSU Garden Day to talk more details about making compost.

With a new year upon us, we ask you to show your support and commitment to MOFFA and organic farming in general by [becoming a supporting member](#). At this critical time for organic farming, let's see if we can have more than 10% of the nearly 1500 people and organizations receiving this mailing join for 2018. Thanks to those of you who consistently support MOFFA and our activities.

Dr. John Biernbaum is Professor of Horticulture at MSU, one of the founders of the MSU Student Organic Farm, and was elected Chair of MOFFA's Board of Directors in December, 2015.

Science, Technology and the Humanities: Towards a Successful Anthropocene

by George Bird¹

For the vast majority of the past 12,000 years, we (humans) have lived in the Geological Time Period (Epoch) known as the Holocene.² During the last 300 years, technologies evolving from the western Industrial Revolution have had major impacts on the ecology of our planet. As a result, it has been proposed that the Holocene has ended and we are now living in the Anthropocene (Human Epoch).³ To achieve a successful Anthropocene, the impacts of our innovations must be long-term blessings and not

curse to humankind.⁴ They must foster the evolution of traits necessary for a desirable quality of life for future generations of the people of our planet.

For this to take place, it is imperative for science, technology and the humanities to work in harmony with each other.

In concert with a famous philosopher's mandate, if you wish to communicate with me, kindly define your terms:

Science—Science is a body of knowledge and the requisite methodology used to acquire new understandings about how the world works. As a process, science involves development and testing of alternate hypotheses. It is important to recognize, however, that there are ways to acquire knowledge other than through scientific method.⁵

Technology—Technology is applied knowledge. As a process, it involves engineering and construction of useful innovations.

The Humanities—The humanities consist of activities related to the Human Condition.⁶ They include history, language, religion, art, music, philosophy, law and many others which impact the thoughts and actions of society.⁶

Our institutions (academia, government, private business) are not usually designed to foster direct tri-trophic interactions among the domains of science, technology and the humanities. After a recent showing of a film comparing the differences between food systems that include molecular-genetically-modified crops with organic agriculture, a panel of elite scientists addressed a series of questions from the audience. Most of the interrogatives required moral/ethical value judgments related to the time-honored question of good versus evil. The panel member responses indicated a distinct need for scientists, technology development experts and humanity scholars to find new ways to foster conceptual synthesis and intellectual interactions related to what will be required for a successful Anthropocene. A January 1, 2018, article in USA Today entitled, As science marches forward..., was about technology and contained no information about science.

The technologies required for a successful Anthropocene must abide by fundamental Laws of Science.⁷

Law of Conservation of Energy (First Law of Thermodynamics)—Energy (ability to do work) cannot be created or destroyed. Overtime, energy is transformed from one state (physical, chemical, biological) to another.

Law of Entropy (Second Law of Thermodynamics) When system energy is transformed from one state to another, readily usable energy (high potential energy) is lost, resulting in low potential energy/entropy (process where a system losses more energy than it takes in).

Law of Complex Non-Linear Systems (Entities with two or more interactive parts and external sources of energy) Complex non-linear systems possess feedback processes that impact the system in different ways at different times. These result in

emergent properties not present in the system's parts. These also initiate and self-organization attributes within the system.

Law of Maximum (System Carrying Capacity)—Successful systems evolve and subsequently become extinct. During this process systems undergo the phases of development (anti-entropic), dynamic equilibrium (slightly above/below carrying capacity) and senescence (entropic). Systems fail when they excessively exceed their carrying capacities.

Law of the Butterfly Effect—System feedback, emergent properties and self-organization associated with small changes in a complex non-linear system can result in major unexpected consequences.

Technologies in violation of the Laws of Science are unlikely to contribute to a successful Anthropocene

Human-inhabited systems have always been complex. In our world of about 7.5 billion people, electronic communication and modern transportation systems have increased this complexity. It is important to differentiate between science and technology. For a technology to be adopted, it must be facilitated by being readily available, easily understandable or associated with appropriate education, and on occasion, catalyzed through persuasive attributes of the carrot or stick. As the envy of the world, the Extension component of the U.S. Land Grant System should be designed to play a major role in the adoption of technologies likely to lead to a successful Anthropocene.

The key question is how to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate technologies in regards to future human quality of life. Random technology implementation can be dangerous. Processes known as alpha and beta analyses are used to evaluate innovations, but can have short comings in regards to broad long-term impacts. Conceptual simulation modeling based on the fundamentals of Systems Science is an option for evaluation of potential impacts if a technology. The question of successful Anthropocene appropriateness, however, should be the responsibility of the humanities, interacting with the science and engineering communities.⁸ In itself, this can be considered an innovation requiring facilitation, education and institutional persuasion. It will most likely mandate change. With humans having the capability of destroying the Anthropocene and beyond, this is not a trivial matter!

¹ Micro-Essay 105 (January 1, 2018) George W. Bird, Department of Entomology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824, birdg@msu.edu

² International Union of Geological Sciences

³ Stoermer, Eugene F. 1980s and Paul Crutzen, 2000.

⁴ Paraphrased from Albert Einstein

⁵ What Do Science, Technology and Innovation Mean from Africa? Chapperton Mavhunga, 2017, MIT Press.

⁶ The Meaning of Human Existence, E. O. Wilson, 2014, Liveright Pub. Co. N.Y.

⁷ The Myth of Progress: Towards a Sustainable Future, T. Wessels, 2013, University Press of New

England, Lebanon, N.H.

⁸ Social Sciences such as Economics, Political Science etc. are intentionally not considered in Micro-Essay 105. They may, however, be the topic of a future contribution.

Dr. George W. Bird is a Professor in the Department of Entomology at Michigan State University. He has been at MSU since 1973, where he teaches, does research on soil-borne issues, and works closely with both organic and conventional growers. In addition, Dr. Bird served as the first National Director of the U.S. Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE), and was a member of MOFFA's Board of Directors from 2002 through 2010.

It's Membership Time!

With the new year we once again ask those who support the growth of organic in Michigan to show that support by joining MOFFA. Membership dollars make it possible for us to

- Publish *Michigan Organic Connections*, our quarterly newsletter
- Maintain the Farm Guide online and in print
- Develop fact sheets on topics of interest to organic growers and consumers
- Monitor and keep our members apprised of developments in the policy sphere that affect organic production
- Present Organic Intensives and other educational opportunities
- Maintain www.moffa.net/, which provides links to organic resources, educational opportunities, available employment and internships, and a wealth of other information
- Respond to questions from researchers, journalists, growers, and the general public about organic practices, obtaining organic products, and achieving organic certification

You can join online at moffa.net/membership.html or download the [membership form](#) and mail it along with your check to MOFFA, P.O. Box 26012, Lansing, MI 48909. Membership fees range from \$20 for students and others living on a restricted income, to \$100 for businesses grossing \$100,000 or more per year. Additional donations are of course gratefully accepted.

Global Warming, Droughts, and Floods: The Complex Environment We Live In

by Leah Smith

The interview in the June 2017 Acres U.S.A. with Judith Schwartz about her book, [Water in Plain Sight: Hope for a Thirsty World](#), was informative and insightful. Certainly opportune considering our feast and famine water cycle, and the attitude of some in this nation towards global warming. With both new information and reiterations of the familiar, it provided me with more to think about and remember when planning land use on our farm. It also

reminded me why our farm and the many like it are so important to our food security and the environment in general.

Humans are creating climate change by how we do and don't manage carbon in the soil. But more than that, how we shape the face of the earth also affects the atmosphere and the resulting weather that we experience. The focus has previously been on emissions and gases in the atmosphere and the

burning of fossil fuels when it comes to climate change. The idea that there is more to it than that is startling, though hardly surprising and, I think, encouraging. If the lost carbon content of soil can contribute to climate change, then keeping that carbon there or restoring it can help to buffer that change. Yet another reason why land use and management should be more important than it is in this country. More carbon dioxide has gone into the atmosphere from the soil than has been released from burning fossil fuels? With the fervor surrounding Ozone Action Days and the reduction of carbon emissions being prominently discussed on the national and international levels, it seems that the implementation of farming systems that have a positive impact on soil carbon should be of paramount importance as well.

Bare ground heats up and covered ground does not. A farmer who uses mulch has always had to be mindful of that fact so that the timing of mulching was just right. You have to let the ground warm up for the peppers and melons before you mulch them. However, the brassicas need to be mulched early in the summer before their roots get too warm so you can help them keep cool. You may think mulching to prevent global warming is a small contribution, but you are certainly controlling your farm's climate. Shading (trees, mulch, etc.) cools your microclimate. Transpiration from plants cools your microclimate. If you have ever walked in the woods on a warm day you will have experienced this first hand. Your implementation of these microclimate adjustments will help to ensure your farm is less at the mercy of the changeable climate, or is better positioned to weather these changes by creating a little bubble of localized cooling. And if many small farms and homeowners used such practices they can have a combined effect. Building a sustainable and healthy farming model should be given its due, and the more farms that survive and are successful will mean the more chances of people taking notice.

In this era of moisture extremes, that soil carbon can be just as important to the moisture supply for your crops as precipitation becomes a wonderful statement. It leaves room for hope that there is something we can control and act upon. Make rainfall more effective by its intelligent management. Keep it in the landscape with various methods (permaculture, raising healthy and water efficient plants, using swales, collecting it, etc.) So many farmers of my acquaintance deal with rain shortages by simply turning on the irrigation. Surely we can do better than that. We know from experience that absolutely nothing replaces rainfall and that no amount of watering can do what it does. Sustainable agriculture has always acted accordingly. But the reiteration that it is not simply the quantity of precipitation that is important but the speed that the water flows off our land and the amount of water that the soil is able to absorb and retain is encouraging. Knowing that soil carbon is a veritable sponge, that every gram of soil organic matter represents the potential to hold 8 grams of water, is phenomenal.

Sustainable farmers know that there is more than one way to attack a problem. Do you control a plant disease by attacking the disease or by feeding the plant? Both, of course. And with weed management you both discourage your weeds and encourage your plants. Also, it isn't just one detail or one event that causes an issue in the garden, but a collection of requirements coming together to create that disease or make that pest problem possible. Nor is there a simple panacea. Soil carbon to keep your plants well watered and to fight global warming should come as no surprise at all.

Leah Smith is a Michigan State alumna. She works on Nodding Thistle, her family's farm, which has a history of organic gardening and farm marketing since 1984.

It's Conference Season ...

We're in the thick of it now ... Michigan agricultural conference season. Beginning in November with the Great Lakes Bioneers conference and continuing through Agriculture and Natural Resources Week at MSU in March, the calendar is packed with educational opportunities for farmers and gardeners.

Thanks to the leadership (and physical effort) of long-time board member John Hooper, MOFFA was present at [Bioneers](#) in Detroit with our display and books for sale. MOFFA board members Vicki Morrone and John Biernbaum organized an extensive series of presentations on organic topics

at the huge [Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Expo](#) in Grand Rapids in December. On January 6th we presented our own [Organic Intensives](#) (of which more below). We were present with the display and books at [Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference](#) last week in Traverse City, and will be at the [Family Farms](#) conference sponsored by MIFFS in Kalamazoo this coming Saturday.

A bit farther away, but definitely worth consideration, are the [Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association's](#) annual conference in Dayton February 15-17, and the [MOSES Organic Farming Conference](#) Feb.

22-24 in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Both offer a wealth of educational sessions, networking opportunities,

extensive trade shows, and pre-conference educational intensives.

The Report from Organic Intensives 2018

On January 6th MOFFA held its fourth annual Organic Intensives. This year we changed both the date and the venue—rather than convening at Brody Hall during Agriculture and Natural Resources Week at MSU, we moved the date earlier in the year and the location to the Plant and Soil Sciences Building where there were facilities for hands-on demonstrations and an opportunity for everyone to eat lunch and take breaks together, which seemed to facilitate networking among participants. We did have some weather-related cancellations, but just under 90 people attended and participated in one of three in-depth educational sessions (reports on the individual sessions appear below).

MOFFA Organic Intensives 2018
Participant Evaluations - All Aspects



■ Excellent ■ Above Average ■ Average ■ Below Average ■ Poor

Participants were asked to evaluate their experience at the end of the day, and 82% responded. Once again, participants overwhelmingly felt that their

time was well spent. Fifteen of the participants attended on full-coverage scholarships made possible by a SARE mini-grant, and 13 received registration fee subsidies of \$55 to \$80 thanks to a generous donation by George and Anne Bird.

The Organic Intensives planning committee is gratified and encouraged to see the continued positive feedback expressed by the participants, and will begin planning soon for Organic Intensives 2019. If you have suggestions for next year's event, or would like to participate in the planning, please let us know. The date currently selected is Saturday, January 12, 2019.

Small-Scale Livestock for the Integrated Farm

If you ever wanted to know more about how to raise and feed chickens and hogs on pasture, we hope you attended the MOFFA Organic Intensive session on January 6, 2018. The Small to Medium Scale Livestock for the Integrated Farm session provided its attendees with two very informed speakers on the topic. Aaron Brower, of Bluestem Farm, shared the experiences he and his wife Mary have had raising

pastured broilers, egg layers, hogs, and organic vegetables for their CSA in northern Michigan. With a plan for making whole farm decisions, they have added to their farm's output over the years until now they are providing vegetables, eggs, hogs, and broilers to their subscribers.

For those in the audience who have already started down the road of pastured egg flocks, broilers, and hogs, we hope you connected with Jeff Mattocks of Fertrell. With a deep background of experience in animal nutrition, Mr. Mattocks addressed feeding and housing requirements and ration compositions for pastured poultry and hogs throughout the day. In an in depth presentation on corn and soy alternative diets, he also shared extensive information on the feeding values of many grains and detailed supplement formulations. He is also available for advice at Fertrell if you have questions.

At the end of the day my sister Leah Smith and I shared a different perspective on the integration of animals into a farm based on the homestead model. We shared our experience producing dairy products, beef, broilers, and eggs for our own use and for sale. We also told the many additional benefits of having these animals on our farm. Though the farm's main income is from 4 acres of vegetables, we spoke of the advantage of integrating animals to the farm's health and income.

—Jessie Smith



Organic Transplant Production: Secure a Stellar Season with Successful Starts

The new time and location for Organic Intensives worked perfectly for the Transplant Production session. January is a great time to get started thinking about sowing seeds and growing transplants. With some sun and normal winter temperatures, high tunnels can be ready for cool season transplants like kale and lettuce by mid-February. The session participants seemed happy to see the seedlings started in a variety of root media.



Having the classroom adjacent to a head house work area and greenhouse s provided the oppor-

tunity for hands on demonstrations. Collin Thompson, Manager of the UPREC North Farm, an experienced transplant grower, and a new MOFFA Board member, demonstrated a variety of production and seeding methods. He also brought some microgreens from the UP and demonstrated microgreen sowing and harvesting. Growing microgreens is another way to benefit from the investment made in transplant facilities.

The Transplants topic also gave the opportunity to share class materials from the on-line organic transplants class I teach for MSU. Participants will get the opportunity to try out the online course format once I get the recorded presentations updated.

We had about 30 participants this year and it is a topic that could be offered again. A potential format for the future would be to have participants do the on-line course first, and then come for a hands on and discussion day.

—John Biernbaum

Diverse Grain Options for Farms and Homesteads

The Small Grains Organic Intensive facilitated many conversations about how a more cooperative system of grains production could be developed in our state. John Sherck of Sherck Seeds led off the morning discussion by demonstrating a homestead model for growing heritage grains. His trialing of small plots of these grains has provided important cultural information such as which grains might be best adapted for our bioregion. John's model could help encourage backyard gardeners and small farmers to

replicate these trials. This would provide even more information and help increase limited seed stocks. After his delightful presentation, John encouraged attendees to take samples of seeds from many of the small grains he has raised.

In the afternoon, Tom and Vicki Zilke of Zilke Vegetable Farm and Megan Goldenberg of New Growth Associates and Macon Creek Malt House led participants through their organic oat project. Tom and Vicki covered the planting through harvesting continuum to ensure food grade oats; Megan spoke to the processing and marketing of these oats and other grains. This grower / marketer / processor relationship is an important link. Farmers need a dependable market and processors and marketers need a quality, food grade product.

Ashley McFarland, coordinator of Upper Peninsula Research and Extension Center, finished off the afternoon. Ashley spoke about organic grain trials in the Upper Peninsula, especially focusing on barley. We all owe Ashley a huge debt, as she has helped to encourage and promote grain trials across the state. This year, she and Megan will host an organic



oat trial at the Kellogg Biological Station.

The Small Grains Intensive was instrumental in helping all of us better

understand how we might encourage this movement. The tremendous growth in craft beer brewing has created demand in Michigan for many types of small grains. Other parts of the country have developed some excellent models of cooperation between breeders, farmers, millers, and artisan bakers. It would be great to see an adaptation of these models here in Michigan so we can see more delicious artisan breads, beers, and other food products made from organic grains.

—Amy Newday

Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference

An annual mid-winter tradition the last 19 years for all enthusiasts and proponents of the sustainable growing of healthy food, fiber, flora, fauna, and the ecological prosperity and well-being of our air, water and soil, has been the [Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference](#). MOFFA is grateful to have been a partner and sponsor these last two decades—first in

Gaylord, then on to the Grayling High School, and these last few years at the new venue at the Grand Traverse Resort in Acme.

Well over 1000 folks celebrated the highly informative three farm schools on Friday, enjoyed the expansion of the trade show to two days,

attended a reception with live music in that same trade show great hall in late afternoon, followed by a wonderful keynote, and concluding with a live music dance on Friday night. Saturday began with the continuation of the trade show in full regalia and a day featuring over 36 workshop sessions (9 running concurrently). An amazing lunch was provided both days, buffet style sourced almost exclusively from local farmers and growers, put together by the consummate staff at Grand Traverse—a feast of wonderful food for all in attendance!

A joyous gathering from the newly born to our elderly mentors and guides. A time greeting many dear friends, making numerous new acquaintances and assimilating so much knowledge both traditional and cutting edge. Certainly an event that offers hope and solace for the planet and to the future generations to follow. Knowing that our path forward is all about community, the NMSFC exemplifies it at its finest. If you have never attended, it is highly recommended that the 20th annual event next January would be a grand beginning to the new year.

—John Hooper

Family Farms Conference

The 15th Annual Michigan [Family Farms Conference](#) takes place this coming weekend (Saturday, February 3rd) in Kalamazoo. The conference offers beginning, small-scale and culturally diverse farmers a chance to network, learn, and build sustainable family farms.

John Edgerton and John Sherck will be there to discuss growing upland rice in Michigan. Emily Nicholls will present in the morning on her research

into non-grant funding for beginning farmer initiatives, and she will team with Vicki Morrone in the afternoon to discuss the essential factors in planning a successful garden. Megan Goldenberg and Vicki Zilke will be there to talk about markets for Michigan-grown oats and other grains. These are just a few of the many sessions offered on a wide variety of topics. MOFFA will be there with its display and books—be sure to stop by and see us!

Structural Racism in the Food System

The MSU Center for Regional Food Systems has just released the Fifth Edition of [An Annotated Bibliography on Structural Racism Present in the U.S. Food System](#). This resource identifies literature that links the social construction of whiteness and its intentional or consequential impact on structural racism within the United States' local food movement. It is focused on recent peer-reviewed and gray literature* materials that are national, regional, and local in scope that included significant references. The fifth edition contains 9 videos and 47 new citations.

A [Zotero group library](#) for the references cited in this document is available. Zotero is free software that lets users easily save, manage, and cite sources. You can create an online account at zotero.org or download the free desktop application, which allows you to sync with the group library and save documents to your computer.

Racial Equity in the Farm Bill

A new series from NSAC explores issues surrounding historical, current, and future aspects of inequity in the food system and ways in which the 2018 farm bill might address these issues. As discussed in the first post in this series, Contexts and Foundations, it is vitally important that advocates and policymakers alike understand, speak to, and reflect upon the massive extent to which our current food and agricultural system is built upon the exploitation of communities of color throughout history and into the present day.

The second post in this series, Barriers for Farmers of Color, examined some of the ways in which the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and other government agencies have worked to remedy past discrimination. Still we have a long way to go in addressing the historical exploitation and oppression of farmers of color, farmworkers, and immigrant farmers who still face major barriers and challenges within agriculture. The final post, Recommendations and Opportunities, builds upon historical context and discuss specific ways that the next farm bill can rectify and correct past discrimination and present-day marginalization, from fine-grained policy changes to big picture cultural and institutional changes.

Policy Corner

by Julia Christianson

After multiple postponements of the new [Organic Poultry and Livestock Rule](#), originally due to have taken effect in March, 2017, the USDA announced in December its plans to withdraw the Rule altogether. As usual, the Department solicited public comment, and we urged everyone to communicate their opinion. MOFFA filed its public comment as well (available [here](#)), but given the fact that at every postponement public comment was overwhelmingly in favor of immediate implementation but no implementation was forthcoming, we will be surprised if the USDA takes notice of public opinion on the withdrawal.

The other major issue in organic regulation during the last quarter was the failure of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) to pass the recommendation of the Task Force on Hydroponics and Aquaponics to prohibit organic certification of hydroponic and aquaponic operations, in spite of the very vocal support of that recommendation by thousands of organic farmers. Oddly enough, the Board voted unanimously to prohibit organic certification of aeroponic—a technique which differs from hydroponic essentially only in the method by which water and nutrients are delivered to the roots, and the amount of money currently invested in each.

To me, both decisions represent the ascendancy of corporate organic over the cooperation between man and nature envisioned by the pioneers of the organic movement. What I'm less clear about is whether that's really a bad thing. Is it better to see more acres under at least partially organic cultivation, and livestock fed organic grain in tight inside quarters, even if it's not what I consider to be truly organic? With an ever-increasing demand for food that is produced without synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, is it better to meet that demand even if it doesn't address the obligation to restore our soils and sequester as much carbon as we can? Do these actions spell the end of the National Organic Program, as the [Cornucopia Institute](#) and [Keep The Soil in Organic](#) suggest? And even if we're not there yet, are they indicators of a concerted effort by certain members of Congress and other powerful interests to achieve that end?

I don't know the answers to these questions, but I would be very interested in hearing what our readers think. We'd be grateful if you'd take a few minutes and [let us know](#).

Julia Christianson is the volunteer Chair of MOFFA's Policy Committee.

Organic Activity in the U.P.

by Collin Thompson

Part I: The Apprentice Farmer Program – Growing Farmers in the Upper Peninsula
Beginning farmers can get their start at the Michigan State University North Farm.

The Apprentice Farmer Program (AFP) at the Michigan State University North Farm is entering its fourth season in 2018. This farm incubator program is designed to reduce the barriers to entry for beginning growers by providing access to land, equipment, infrastructure, and technical assistance.

Aimed at small-scale specialty crop producers, the AFP provides access to up to one acre of organically managed land for up to five years. During this time, growers work to fine tune their production skills, develop a business plan, secure markets, and build capital. By utilizing available resources, program participants have the opportunity to establish their business without making large capital investments,

allowing beginning growers to identify and develop markets before taking on a large debt load.

In 2018, we welcome back Landen Tetil, owner of Bean Pole Farm for her fourth season as part of the incubator. Landen will dedicate her acre of production space to vegetable and flower production for



Apprentice Farmer Program participants work alongside other growers, creating a community of farmers at The North Farm.

sale at the Marquette Farmers Market and through a weekly vegetable subscription program, also known as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. During the winter of 2017, Landen and her partner, Kyle, purchased a farm in Skandia. She will continue to participate in the AFP while she works to prepare her new farm for future production. Landen will begin working and cover cropping existing hay fields at her new farm, preparing them for vegetables and flowers. Learn more about Landen and Bean Pole Farm at www.beanpolefarm.com.

We also will be welcoming Joe and Kate of Mighty Soil Farm to the program in 2018. Kate and Joe have spent the last several years learning the ins and outs of farming in Michigan, New York, and Vermont. They will be managing ¼ acre of mixed vegetables in their first year, working to develop their production systems and markets. They come with a wide breadth of experience and we look forward to helping them get started.

The program is currently accepting applications for two more farms – complete details about the program can be found at www.msunorthfarm.org/apprentice-farmer-program.html. If you are interested in learning more about the farm incubator program, feel free to reach out to Collin Thompson at 904-439-5058 or <mailto:thom1264@msu.edu>. Applications are taken on a rolling basis. Thompson is the Farm Manager of [The North Farm](#) at the Michigan State University Upper Peninsula Research and Extension Center in Chatham, and a Community Food System Educator with MSU Extension.

Part II: North Farm Summer Workshop Season

LIVESTOCK ON THE SMALL FARM ·

June 10 · 1-5 pm

Livestock can be a great addition to the small farm or homestead, providing a wide range of benefits, including land management services, meat, fiber, and income. This workshop will focus on the basics

of pig and sheep management for the small-scale producer with presentations by Ben and Denise Bartlett, Log Cabin Livestock and Dale Rozeboom, MSU Animal Science.

PLASTICULTURE: SEASON EXTENSION 201 ·

July 15 · 1-5 pm

Plastic can work to the grower's advantage by extending the production season in cool climates and managing weed and disease pressure. See season extension using hoopouses, greenhouses, plastic mulch, and weed control tarps with Collin Thompson, MSU North Farm.

FLOWER PRODUCTION ·

August 19 · 1-5 pm

Flowers are a great addition to any operation, whether for pleasure or profit. Learn about variety selection, production management, bouquet arrangement, and marketing with Shailah Bunce, Rock River Farm and Jeff Heidtman, Color Blind Gardens.

FOREST RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ·

September 30 · 1-5 pm

Wooded areas can provide food, fuel, and habitat for wildlife. Find out about forest resource management, developing a forest management plan, and identifying the value of that may lie just outside your back door with Dan and Mary Rabine, Reh-Morr Farm, Holly Wendrick, MAEAP, and Matt Watkeys, District Forester.

Each course will begin at 1 pm at MSU North Farm, then move to visit farms in Alger County with an emphasis on demonstration and hands-on activities so you can practice what you learn in class with other farmers and gardeners. \$30 per course, or \$100 for the series. Farm rate is available for multiple individuals from the same farm: \$45 per course, or \$150 for the series. Register at www.msunorthfarm.org/short-courses.html.

Collin Thompson is a Small Farm Educator with MSU Extension and manager of The North Farm at the Upper Peninsula Research and Extension Center. He joined MOFFA's board in June, 2017.

Seeking Member Input!

by Vicki Morrone

Have you ever wanted to share your experiences with other farmers but just have not gotten around to it, YET? Well this is a chance for you to share a story about your farm, about trying a new approach on the farm, like Ridge Tillage or your first year of a hoophouse. Perhaps you tried a new crop recently, or you are grafting your tomato plants for transplanting on your farm this year or went to a really



A neighbor helps with the harvest at Nature's Urban Farm in Lake Orion.

great field day. Another idea to share may be a story about a workshop or conference that you attended. If there is a session you feel others would enjoy, you are encouraged to

write about what you learned.

Whether the topic is organic production, processing, or marketing, the MOFFA Board members hope that you will take a moment to write a story to share in an edition of Michigan Organic Connections. The newsletter is published four times per year; the next edition is scheduled for the end of May. We would love to have your ideas and experiences shared with others and help create a newsletter that is engaging for our members, and together we can make that happen. Send correspondence or questions to Vicki Morrone—volunteer coordinator, MOFFA board member (<mailto:sorrone@msu.edu>). We all look forward to hearing about your experiences and the chance to grow together.

Vicki Morrone is organic field crop and vegetable outreach specialist with the Center for Regional Food Systems at MSU, and has been a MOFFA board member since 2009.

MOFFA News

Board – We are still actively seeking a member from the southeastern area of the state, ideally someone who is involved in urban agriculture. If you are a MOFFA member who would be interested in serving on the board, please [let us know](#).

Annual Meeting – MOFFA is planning to hold its Annual Meeting on Tuesday, April 10, in Lansing. Members are invited and encouraged to attend. If you are interested in attending, [contact us](#) to confirm the date and location.

Sponsors – Beginning in 2018, and continuing for the long term, we hope, MOFFA is accepting Sponsorship from organizations and individuals who are willing to demonstrate their support of our mission with a financial contribution. The change

from soliciting sponsorships specifically for Organic Intensives will enable us to increase our activities throughout the year. Please take a moment to view the logos of those who have already pledged their support below and let them know you appreciate their sponsorship. If you are interested in becoming a sponsor for 2018, please [email us](#) or view the [sponsorship page](#) on the website.

Newsletter – We are very interested in featuring new voices in the newsletter. If you are interested in contributing, or if you have a suggestion about content or can recommend someone who would be interested in contributing, please contact us. If you're not interested in writing an article, please consider contributing photos of your farm or your harvest; we're always looking for more illustrations.

WHY JOIN MOFFA : To position yourself and every dollar you donate toward spreading a wholesome, just, ecologically focused Organic ethos across all of our local Michigan communities.

MOFFA Sponsors 2018

