



Michigan Organic Connections

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A Message from Emily Nicholls

Hello MOFFA Members and Supporters,

I hope everyone is enjoying the return of the sun, and all of the pleasures that it brings! It is an honor to be writing my first “From the Chair” address. I have been a MOFFA board member since 2016 and am excited to now be leading such a dynamic and capable organization. I’d like to recognize Dr. John Biernbaum for his commitment to the organization for nine years, and for serving as the Chair for two years. He has done so much to keep the organization both energized and stable during a time of expansion, and has worked hard to refine and continue our annual Organic Intensive workshops in January. Under his leadership, we went from seven board members in 2015 to our current roster of 12. We are now stronger than ever and ready to take on new challenges and new projects!

One of those new projects is our first annual Sustainable Farm Tour Series. We will be conducting three farm tours this summer: Westwind Milling Co. in Swartz Creek, Plymouth Orchards in Plymouth, and Zilke Vegetable Farm in Milan. These tours are aimed at both producers and consumers; our hope



is to bring together the diverse community of folks in Michigan that are concerned with healthy soil, healthy food, and healthy communities. For more information, and to register, please go to moffa.net.

In thinking about the theme of this newsletter, “relationships in agriculture,” I found myself coming back to an event hosted by MSU’s Center for Regional Food System last November called the “Statewide Food and Health Network & Food Council Leaders Event.” I had the pleasure of representing MOFFA and meeting leaders in the local food and farming movement from all over Michigan. Curtis Ogden, from the Interaction Institute for Social Change, gave an inspiring presentation about building sustainable networks within the food system. He stressed the idea that social networks are an embodiment of health itself. Isolation, he said, leads to stagnation, while connectivity leads to vitality. I looked around the room and realized just how many people across the state working to bring healthy food to more people in the most sustainable way possible—from food banks to farm incubators, and health departments to universities. We have so many tools to connect with each other and share so many similar goals, but I feel we are still learning how to best put our tools to use.

Ogden also touched on the role of food and health organizations within the community, saying that, “an organization needs to do what it does best, and connect to the rest.” In the spirit of connection, and forming and strengthening networks, MOFFA has been working with [OEFFA](http://oeffa.org) (Ohio Ecological Food and Farming Association) to extend OEFFA’s network into Michigan and extend our network into Ohio and the rest of the Midwest. OEFFA is one of

the leading Organic Certifiers in Michigan, and they have an impressive education program as well. They have also just begun a Beginning Farmer Mentorship Program, [highlighted](#) later in this newsletter. We hope our relationship will lead to fostering new connections and opportunities for our members, as well as strengthen our collective political power.

As the new Chair, I am focussing on strengthening the connections we have and forging the new connections we hope to have. I am excited about our Farm Tour Series. As a farmer myself, I love seeing different production systems. Additionally, I think spending time face-to-face, as old-fashioned as it may sound, is still the best route to forming and strengthening our community. I wish to enliven this organization across the state by giving our members and supporters opportunities to come together in support, education, and advocacy. Healthy social webs, as Ogden noted, are diverse, intricate, and robust. As much as we need healthy soil and healthy food, we need each other to be truly healthy. I hope you join us in whatever capacity you find suits you: as a member, a volunteer, a grower, or an advocate in your community for organic food and farming.

After managing CBI's Giving Tree Farm for seven years, Emily Nicholls changed gears this year to work on various agriculture-related consulting projects with MSU, MIFFS, and the USDA. She and her husband own Rust Belt Roastery, a certified organic coffee roasting company in Lansing, and chase around a 1 and a 3 year old. She was elected Chair of MOFFA's Board of Directors in April, 2018.

First and Foremost—Thank You John Biernbaum!

by John Hooper

One cannot overstate the importance of conveying our unabashed gratitude to John for his guidance, insight, dedication, diligence, understanding, and the contagious spirit of curiosity he has manifested in the role of Chair of the Board of Directors of the Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance these last few years. The only certainty in life is change; and MOFFA at this time in its long storied history is at a very pivotal moment. Dr. John Biernbaum is relinquishing the reins of leadership. It is with a wholehearted enthusiastic welcome that board member Emily Nicholls is now newly elected as

MOFFA Board Chair. Emily will certainly, as a person with skills and talents abounding, create her own legacy in the years to come. But today we honor John, and for those of us who have worked closely with him it is with great admiration that we do so.

MOFFA enters its 26th year as a volunteer-run non-profit and finds itself in a very focused place in no small part due to John’s leadership. This recognition is not meant to list all the specifics of the accomplishments of John’s tenure but rather the telling of his inspiration. Throughout the last decades

anyone who has been involved with organic ecologically sound agriculture and food production and consumption knows of John's depth of knowledge. His skills as a communicator and teacher of the principles and substance of organic growing have led countless individuals to delve into the world of organic. Many of us have attended his sessions and intensive workshops over the last 20 years and walked away amazed, recharged and filled with ideas. Now at a moment when we are seeking clarity and redefining with "beyond organic" that knowledge is more critical than ever. When contemplating what is really the crux of what MOFFA does almost all our endeavors concern education and information dissemination, and for years John has been the Education Committee leader and driving force behind almost every MOFFA event and participatory role in other conferences, and he will continue in this role in the near future.

MOFFA has never been in a better position to effect positive change in our support of community food systems. John has fostered a spirit of cooperation throughout our great state and beyond with his work nationally and regionally. Our 12 member strong MOFFA board is currently working to redefine our vision for the future and strategically plan for the years ahead at John's urging. These are tumultuous times for the proponents of what true organic is and embracing the world vision through the principles of the International Federation of Organic Movements (IFOAM) has been a concept that John has strongly

endorsed, and that has allowed us to see that there are so many more aspects to our organic principles than what inputs go into growing our crops.

As the book "A History of the Organic Movement in Michigan" has allowed us insight into where we have been, John's leadership has provided a path for where we may dare to go and should! There is no doubt when our descendants write the next chapter in the MOFFA history that John's role will stand out at the head of those who have been most influential in fostering the giant leap forward in consciousness necessary for our survival as a species. Because above all else what John has allowed MOFFA to become is an organization that is unassuming and unafraid to wear our "heart on our sleeve." Principles and concepts and knowledge are crucial but without compassion worth naught. Sometimes the planet just needs a good hug—as we all do!

Thank you to our friend, colleague, mentor—a deep appreciation for all you have done and will continue to do on this grand journey! John, know that you have made a profound impression on and a wonderful contribution to the many lives you have touched. Onward—we still have much to do together..

For over 40 years John Hooper has been an advocate and practitioner of the organic method of food production. He has been a member of MOFFA's Board of Directors since 2009 and served as its Chair from 2011 through 2015.

Are You Ready With Talking Points for the Market and Gardening Season? Let Us Help!

by John Biernbaum

Over the last three years, organic farming in general has entered into a new growth phase. The growth is in part a response to the growing awareness of the importance of soil health and soil management methods and their role in addressing climate change and the water cycle. The growth is also a continuation of consumer concerns about the short and long term access to and safety of our food supply.

Along with this growth has been a growing concern about certification and methods to protect the meaning of organic. For this issue of Organic Connections, I am excited to share with you the thoughts of two key leaders in the organic certification movement. We talked with Jeff Moyer, Executive Director of the Rodale Institute, about current changes and the Regenerative Organic

Certification Program. We also invited Dave Chapman of the Real Organic and Keep the Soil in Organic Movements to share his ideas and perspectives with you. Please take the time to read and enjoy our interview with Jeff, and the article from Dave. We know you are busy and hope that we have done the homework to get you the information that will help you be ready to be a voice for organic agriculture. As you will read, Jeff and Dave also know you are busy, and they are working to help you.

Dr. John Biernbaum is Professor of Horticulture at MSU, was instrumental in the founding and growth of the Student Organic Farm at MSU, has been a member of MOFFA for over 15 years, and served as MOFFA's Chair 2015-2018.

**The organic landscape has changed significantly in the last two years.
Keep up to date with a review of these seven web sites:**

Real Organic : <https://www.realorganicproject.org/>

Regenerative Organic Certification Program : <https://regenorganic.org/>

North American Office of IFOAM : <https://www.ifoam.bio/en/our-offices/north-america-office>

Organic Farmers Association : <http://organicfarmersassociation.org/>

IFOAM Standards : <https://www.ifoam.bio/en/ifoam-accreditation-program>
<https://www.ifoam.bio/en/ifoam-family-standards-0>

Regeneration International Movement : <http://www.regenerationinternational.org>

Keep the Soil in Organic : <http://www.keepthesoilinorganic.org/>

Organic: Past, Present, and Future

by Dave Chapman

The unfortunate history of the National Organic Program for the last seven years is one of failure, although within the NOP and within parts of the organic industry, it will be seen as success. The growth of certified organic sales is skyrocketing, even as the integrity and transparency of the program are collapsing. It is important to remember that the vast majority of certified organic farms are real organic. It is only a small fraction of certified American farms that deviate from the traditional meaning of organic. These deviant producers include CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations) and HYDROs (soilless producers of berries and vegetables). Add to that the imported products that are fraudulently certified.

Unfortunately, these "fauxganic" producers have become a serious percentage of the certified sales. In some categories such as eggs, they are the majority of sales. In categories such as tomatoes, peppers, berries, and milk, we can only speculate, as no one has certain numbers. The hydro lobbyists themselves have said their sales equal a billion dollars. But clearly, the CAFO and HYDRO production is increasing by leaps and bounds. In the case of eggs and poultry, it exceeds 75%. In the case of milk and tomatoes, it has probably crossed 50%. The NOP has officially embraced hydroponic production. At the same time, the USDA has ruled that animal welfare may not be considered in setting organic standards, opening the way to CAFO certification. We are truly losing the regulatory battle. At the same time that the EU is moving towards stronger organic standards that prohibit both HYDROs and CAFOs, the US is giving it all away to industrial agriculture.

But even as the house is on fire, we are making great progress in building an alternative to all of that. As farmers and eaters demand a way of connecting with greater transparency, two new add-on labels to the NOP label are being created. One is by the newly formed [Real Organic Project](#). The other is the [Regenerative Organic Certification](#). The Real Organic Project was formed in the aftermath of the dismal regulatory failure in Jacksonville by the National Organic Standards Board in the fall of 2017, which was soon followed by the USDA rejection of the animal welfare reform. Organizations such as the [Organic Farmers Association](#) and the [National Organic Coalition](#) will continue to fight for reform. But the two add-on labels are more concerned with creating an alternative so that we can identify real organic in our time.

The Real Organic Project is a grassroots organization led by farmers. It has quickly drawn together a group of 45 people who serve on one of the three boards; 29 of them are working farmers. The rest are scientists and advocates who have a deep belief in organic farming. We are spread all over the country. We include vegetable, berry, tree fruit, dairy, meat, egg, and grain farmers. Five are current members of the NOSB. Eight are former NOSB members. Eight have PhDs in soil science. This is a group that is well qualified to set real organic standards, and that is what we have done. The program requires USDA certification as a base. But in addition, it requires that food be grown in the soil, that the soil be managed to improve fertility, and that animals be raised outdoors on pasture. These are the simple basics of organic farming that have been lost by the USDA. We are going back to the

organic standards that the NOP was supposed to be protecting. It seems crazy that another label is needed to identify real organic, but it is time for us to move on and deal with that reality.

I see the Regenerative Organic Certification as an aspirational program that lays out very well where we want to be going. They set standards for reduced tillage, animal welfare, and worker justice that we should all be working towards. But most of us aren't there yet. I see the Real Organic label as a basic program that will give eaters transparency in the food that they are buying right now. It will rebuild the platform from which we can reach higher. We hope to see many organic farms move to ROC in the future. Most organic farms can already meet the Real Organic Project standards. It is mostly the CAFOs and HYDROs that can't meet these standards. Finally, people will be able to tell the difference in the marketplace.

Real Organic Project and the Regenerative Organic Certification are working towards the same goals. The leadership of both organizations is working together to move us forward. As climate change and human health become the challenges of our time, a sane agriculture is the only answer. It is all hands on deck. We will see what the future brings in terms of bringing the two labels together. At the moment we are working independently towards that common goal. We each have our own strengths.

In 2018 the Real Organic Project is running a pilot program with fifty farms across the country. Next

winter we will finalize the provisional standards and then offer certification to many more farms for 2019. Right now we need all the help we can get, so please join us and become a member by going to realorganicproject.org. If you can afford it, make a donation as well. By becoming a member, you will be sure of hearing the latest updates. We are building this program out our own sweat. We can do this together, and reclaim the meaning of organic.

Another hope from the Real Organic Project is to continue to educate farmers and eaters about WHY soil matters. Why does it matter to all of us whether America's farming is based on healthy soil? This is a very important question that we will be working on in the coming years.

We also urge everybody to ask the staff at their stores whether those organic tomatoes and berries were grown in the soil. Were those eggs grown in a CAFO? They won't know, but if fifty people ask them, they will certainly try to find out. And if fifty people ask five hundred stores, the world will change. We will win. We have that power if we will only use it.

Dave Chapman runs [Long Wind Farm](#) in East Thetford, Vermont. He is a founding member of the Vermont Organic Farmers and has been active in the movement to Keep The Soil In Organic and the Real Organic Project. He is proud to be a current member of the Policy Committee of the Organic Farmers Association. He served on the USDA Hydroponic Task Force.

Jeff Moyer Speaks on Organic and Regenerative Agriculture ...

with John Biernbaum, May 16, 2018

John Biernbaum: Hello Jeff. We appreciate very much your taking the time to share some thoughts with our Organic Connections readers.

Jeff Moyer: My pleasure.

Biernbaum: Let's start with a big picture overview question. What our Organic Connections newsletter is about this time is trying to help our readers see the various organic issues and changes that are out there and how they do or don't fit together. I have on my list seven different things. One is with the USDA NOP, you've got the hydroponic issue and the live-stock animal welfare decisions that have not gone the way we hoped they would. We have the initiation of the Organic Farmers Association in the last few years, we have the initiation of IFOAM North America. I was looking at the IFOAM website today and how they've updated their Family of Standards

and the IFOAM Norms. We have the development of the Regeneration International Movement which I learned a little bit more about in the last few days, looking at what Ronnie Cummins and others are doing there. And then the one that you're more involved with specifically, the Regenerative Organic Movement, and then the Real Organic Movement. I It seems like you're in a unique position being involved in some way in most all of those efforts. So I want to ask you to share your perspective on this moment in time for organic agriculture where we have all these emergent efforts. What do you see about how they are or are not interwoven and integrated and evolving?

Moyer: Wow. You're right that is a big picture question. I think what you're describing or what you're seeing is the—I don't want to say the early stages but maybe middle stages of growth and

change in the organic industry. If you go back historically to the early 1940s when J.I. Rodale was working on this—on this word Organic, and it was growing slowly, into the 70s. And of course Bob [Rodale] wanted to see it grow even more, to expand the acceptance of "Organic" by essentially giving it away and creating an opportunity for the USDA to step in, and people still argue whether or not that was a good idea or a bad idea, but there we are. And the industry continues to grow, driven by consumer demand; and those are all real positive steps.

I think what you're seeing is the—I don't want to say the early stages but maybe middle stages of growth and change in the organic industry.

We can discuss and argue whether we're in a good spot or a bad spot and whether change is good or change is bad, but the fact of the matter is change is happening. I see it as positive

steps although you know, any time there is change like this there are growing pains. There were all along, with what we were doing in the past, and there will be as we move forward and things shake out based on consumer demand, based on the activism of farmers and other groups. But all in all I think it's all very positive. You've described several of the actions that are happening. We're seeing a bit of—at least under this administration a reduction in the strength and power of the NOSB and deregulation not just of organic but of the many institutional pieces that the government has their hands in. And that pendulum could swing in a different direction in four or eight years, we don't really know. But I think what you're seeing is the industry growing; the industry is feeling strong in some cases and weak in others and it's being pushed and pulled in many different directions.

Rodale Institute being connected with the concept of organic from the very beginning, as you well described, is a voice with its fingerprints on many of these changes that are taking place and we're going to see where it all goes.

Clearly I'd like to talk a little bit about "Regeneration" and what's happening there. If you look in the marketplace in general the word is beginning to have a lot of cachet. I think there's issues of concern about that. Again we're going to go back in history a little bit and work that spot. Bob Rodale in his early writings about regeneration going back into the late 70s into the 80s, he was a little bit frustrated with the concept that we gave up on when we turned the

word "organic" over to the USDA. The concept of improvement, you know, we sort of lost that. And he didn't really like that. He really saw the idea of focusing energy on soil health, on having a real positive impact on many parts of our community—he really believed that by changing the way we farm, in the way we manage soil, we can have impact on farmers—just the spirit of farming: our farmers get happier, our communities get stronger, people get healthier, all these things that aren't really embodied in the marketing standard that USDA has. And that we need to focus on those things. So he came up with the word regeneration, using that, and most of the—at least in the US, everybody kind of latched on to the word sustainable, or sustainability. That's not a Rodale word, we never used it much here and it doesn't really fit with any of our philosophy.

On the relationship of food and human health, but the marketplace at least in the US—Bob was a world traveler and in his travels he came to the conclusion that many parts of the world were not interested in trying to sustain what they had because what they had wasn't very good. I've got a friend, Greg Bowman, you may know him or know his work, he's an ag journalist, and he always says if somebody asks how your relationship is with your spouse or significant other and you say, oh it's sustainable, would they be happy or would they be sad? I think it's not a very powerful word. Regeneration is a much more powerful word. And the world is slowly catching on to that word—it's used up the word sustainable as it relates to agricultural production and soil management and now they're using the word regenerative. We have to be concerned about that because people want to over-simplify the word and use it as a marketing tool disconnected from the word organic. We're fairly adamant about the word—you can't be regenerative if you aren't first organic. That's the central philosophy; we hold fast to that. We believe that organic farmers deserve an opportunity to showcase their movement in the industry and that they are continuously—good organic farmers as any business person in any industry would be interested in showcasing that they're improving the system over time. We want to give them an opportunity to showcase how and where that works that's why we came up with the organic standard.

Again, looking at what the world is doing, looking at what IFOAM is doing, looking at what Regeneration International is doing, and trying to find opportunities to do that very thing. Talking about healthy soil which again, we've been talking about—J.I. Rodale wrote it on the blackboard in his office in 1942. That's the groundwork of our mission statement for all that time. So we're really excited about what's happening, and probably concerned, as anybody

would be in our industry. I don't know if that's helpful or not.

Biernbaum: I would say it is very helpful. You know, there's several important points there that you connected on that resonate for me. One, particularly, the historical perspective, but then you addressed "sustainability" and that word has always been problematic for me, and I like exactly the way you phrased it, I think that will be helpful for others also. And just the dynamic nature. So let's see if there's a wrap-up there ... what about these different initiatives working together, do you see that happening much? Or do you think that's still something more for the future?

Moyer: I think that's for the future. I think people are trying to find their voice and their way. We've had some early conversations with Regeneration International. Of course I've been involved with that and been talking with both Andre and Ronnie about what's going on there. I serve on the board for IFOAM North America, I sit on the advisory board of the Real Organic group up in Vermont, and we've talked about a mechanism where we can work together. In the short term I think what you're seeing is people are striving for specific language within their own group that they feel is vitally important. And it's just going to take some time until we figure out where do the consumers fall in this whole paradigm; how can we get brands to support the work that we're doing and carry the message to their consumers, and what's important and what's not important. I think over time we're going to gravitate toward something that is meaningful and understandable for all of us. And that's really what we saw in the organic industry as it started.

You know, we started with a group of independent-minded passionate people who all wanted to have their own certification standard. It became clear after a few decades of that, literally, that that wasn't going

Our position that we're holding to here at Rodale is that we cannot decouple the word regeneration from the word organic.

to work in the marketplace. It led to too much consumer confusion and the introduction of fraudulent practices, and the inability to ship across country or across state. I don't know if that will happen with the word regeneration. It may or it may not and that remains to be seen. Again, our position that we're holding to here at Rodale is that we cannot decouple the word regeneration from the word organic and we're going to fight hard to make

sure that those words are linked together. Whatever we decide regeneration means, or regenerative ag, we'll figure that out hopefully as a group and as a team that involves many many voices. The idea that we can somehow say that we're regenerative and still use Roundup or any other technology that we find unacceptable in organic just doesn't work for us in regeneration.

Biernbaum: That's good, that's helpful. I learned early, early on from listening to you and others that I could talk about organic agriculture and sometimes people had questions or doubts about that, but it was easy to talk about organic matter because nobody had any doubts or questions that organic matter is good. And so just going down that road, and I think building on that word regenerative and how it's related to the organic matter and building healthy soils I can see that as the big direction. And you've opened the door for another question that I had.

I'm as much as possible into keeping things simple, despite my many years of education and many years as an academic, and trying not to reinvent the wheel which it seems like we do a lot in academia. It's like when I listened on the hydroponic task force, and listen to some of the other things Dave Chapman was talking about, and others about the IFOAM standards, we kept talking about, well, IFOAM already requires all the processes we want. What am I missing? What is the stumbling block to being more part of the IFOAM family of standards? The question is what are the opportunities to just build on the IFOAM standard and not make new standards? They've done so much work on the principles and getting other people involved, and it seems consistent with what we're all talking about. Is there something that I'm missing? Or a roadblock there I don't know about?

Moyer: Well, you know, the devil is always in the details. IFOAM is really an amalgamation of many standards. We don't have to adhere to what IFOAM talks about in their standard. Every nation can basically set up its own standard. Unfortunately, in this political climate we tend to be quite imperialistic in the United States—and I would say other countries are as well, we can't just blame ourselves—but the USDA is very adamant that their standard is the only one that's acceptable in the US. IFOAM doesn't agree with that; IFOAM would say that there are other standards that are equally good. And of course USDA has worked diligently over the years to find reciprocity and agreement among standards to allow for more useful international trade, but—a good example is where the European Union (EU) has just said that hydroponics would not be allowed as part of an organic standard within the EU, yet you can

grow crops hydroponically in the EU and sell them as organic in US, but you couldn't sell them as organic out of your farm gate in the EU. So there's all these different pieces of detail that make that kind of universal standard, in the short term at least, virtually impossible. We just don't agree on the details of things. We agree on the philosophy of

The devil is in the details ... We agree on the philosophy of things, maybe, but not on the detail.

things, maybe, but not on the detail. That makes it challenging. Which is why what we're doing with the Regenerative Organic standard is that if you want

to sell in the US you must adhere to USDA's version of organic to be part of our standard. However, our standard is an international standard so if your'e marketing in the EU, or Japan, you would have to follow those organic standards and then add the pillars that we designed to that to make sure that we're managing and taking care of the soil, that we're putting animal welfare at the forefront of our decision making process, and that social justice is also part of the picture. So that you can't market a Regenerative organic product on the back of labor that's somehow not treated fairly. That doesn't meet consumer expectation in any way, at least not here in the United States.

Biernbaum: As you said we can share the philosophy, but how to get the job done is just going to continue to be diverse ...

Moyer: That's just human nature. I'm not suggesting in any way shape or form that what we're talking about here with food production as organic or regenerative is as powerful as religion. But just look at what happens—how many denominations do we have in the Christian faith alone, that really all are one book, but all are interpreted differently. So there's all these different pieces that tend to differentiate themselves. It's a big difference to individuals, it's important to them to stand on that ground and it's still hard to find a completely unified voice around this.

Biernbaum: That sounds like a reasonable analogy to me. So we shift gears here a little bit to thinking about as we put out this newsletter, what are we asking people to do? What can they do? Considering this a call to action, we can put organic farming issues in this larger context. We can remind ourselves there are so many different issues that are competing for our time and attention now—everything from racial and gender issues, to the extreme economic disparities, to climate change and human

health. Is food perhaps a unifying theme or topic that would allow these and other topics to be addressed at one table?

Moyer: I certainly think food is, I also would say that we're seeing that soil health is also. Because there isn't a farmer in the world, let alone in the United States, that isn't concerned in some way with the health of their soil. No farmer gets up in the morning and says, I really hope I can somehow diminish the health of my soil today. That's not their goal; everybody wants to increase the health of their soil. Now we have different pathways to that, but I think if we can just get people to focus a little on soil health—and I'm realizing that customers and consumers and the general public—which is over 98% of us—don't understand or think about soil health; but they do think about food. I think food is the hook that we use to entice them into the conversation. But as practitioners we really need to begin to find common language around the issue of soil health so that we can help our conventional neighbors move in a positive direction as well as organic farmers.

We really need to begin to find common language around the issue of soil health so that we can help our conventional neighbors move in a positive direction as well as organic farmers.

Biernbaum: I just ran into someone at a class that I was taking, unrelated to agriculture, and she said that she was thinking of me because she'd been reading news stories about soil. It's good to see that more people are getting to hear about soil in the news.

Moyer: If we can focus on soil health, something as simple as cover cropping, which is one of the most cost-effective tools we have as a society to increase soil health. If every acre in the United States was planted with a cover crop at the end of the cropping season, wouldn't that be a fantastic step? Being led of course by the organic industry, because we've been doing that and working on those tools for decades and generations. So we think we could have a positive impact on all of agriculture, if we set a high bar standard, and hold ourselves to that standard, we can move the needle for everybody.

Biernbaum: So organic farmers as we know are very busy just being farmers, and in some sense they're already activists because activism exists in everything they do. What can you see that we can be asking farmers in the context of being activists or

evangelists of this larger movement? What can we ask them to be doing more of maybe that they're not doing now, or how do we get them more involved?

Moyer: Well, you're right on so many fronts there. My brother is an organic farmer. Every time he talks to my daughter about doing something she says, oh I'm too busy. And he says, you're too busy? If I can find time anybody can find time, I'm an organic farmer, talk about being busy. I know exactly what you're saying, you have a farm at home. That's one of the reasons that we went to work and initiated the creation of the Organic Farmers Association. We really believe it's time that organic farmers have a voice that can be heard on policy decisions, and that individual farmers clearly don't have the time or in many cases the political clout to go to Washington and sit down with politicians and try to make a difference in the way policy impacts their daily lives on their farms, as we know that it does. For a long time, we had an Organic Trade Association and we've had an Organic Consumers Association, but we've not had a real national voice for organic farmers, an Organic Farmers Association.

I realized early on when I was on the National Organic Standards Board that whenever an industry organization or a certifying group or whatever came to the podium to speak, after three or four years on the board I could have given their speech for them, or at least certainly hit the highlights. Yet when a farmer came up to the podium to speak, or for that matter a consumer, that was an individual who took time out of their very busy and hectic life to come and speak to the board, you could have heard a pin drop in that room, and everybody there hung on every word that farmer had to say.

So you know that farmers' voices are powerful, they're respected, and they're needed, and that's why we came up with the Association. So I would say that what organic farmers should do is join the Organic Farmers Association. Rodale Institute doesn't make a penny out of the Association; we spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to make it happen. So it's not about that, it's about giving farmers a powerful voice—the voice of organic farmers, not the voice of Rodale Institute or the governing committee—it's about farmers for farmers. And I think it's time for us—our industry is mature enough, certainly it's large enough, and clearly it's diverse enough that we need to have our voices heard if we ever expect policy to go our way and help our industry to grow. And ultimately help consumers get the food they not only need but that they deserve while we improve the soil. I think we can only do that by uniting. We are about 19,000 of us, we're spread across the country, in diverse operations, with our heads down and our hands and feet physically

working, and it's hard to find time to have your voice heard.

Biernbaum: That's a great answer, I just know that that question comes up about what can we do with the time that we have, with people being busy. I think you focused it well. We'll see what we can do from the other perspective of the consumers, again there's a lot more of them out there, and in growing numbers, which is good for us. And it's what can consumers do—when I think of it, it's that we know that our choices are important, our actions are important, and what we can we do with our time and our voice, and that we have this ability to give things depending on what we have available to us. What's emerging here is how do we get consumers working as a team perhaps on this issue of helping organic food access evolve?

Moyer: Again, my answer is somewhat similar in that we know that organic consumers are also busy, and I think what they really want, beyond the food that they're buying, I think they really want to help organic farmers. The group that helped build the OFA created a supporting membership opportunity. Those supporting members don't get to vote on the issues relevant to organic farmers and they don't get a voice on the policy, but what they do get is a voice for the organic farmer so they can better give farmers a message of what they're trying to get across. Most farmers never talk to the consumers who eat their food, and here's an opportunity for those consumers at large to have a conversation with organic farmers and point out what's important to them. And then for organic farmers to take that information, when they get surveys they fill them out so their voice really is heard so you can say this group really represents them—and I understand what my customers want. We need to have more of a dialog and more of a conversation so that we feel connected.

One problem we have of course is that nationally and globally we have an aging farm population. As farm managers, according to USDA statis-

According to USDA statistics, there's six times as many farmers over the age of 65 as under the age of 35.

tics, there's six times as many farmers over the age of 65 as under the age of 35. If you look at any industry—the medical profession, engineers, carpenters, you have to have a growing pool of young talent moving into the industry or the long term prognosis is very very scary. So you know that those young people want to get into agriculture; you have to give them a voice, you have to give them a

positive industry to get into. And consumers are helping to drive that. The other problem we have of course is that farmers are an aging population and consumers are a young population.

The largest consuming body now is millennials, who are about 89 million in our nation, and the greatest buying power is now in the hands of the 19-35 year old people, and yet they're a group that many farmers don't know, they don't understand, and in some cases if you're over 65 you probably don't even like 'em. So it's really hard to market into a population that you don't understand; we have to open our ears and listen and hear what consumers are saying. And there's multiple roads to that but I think that getting more people involved in our organizations so we can hear what they're saying to us, I think it's important. Because we expect them to support us down the road either by buying our products or in policy decisions they make when they vote. We're small, 19,000, and there's 89 million consumers, and not just millennials. They say that 82% of American households purchased something organic in the last six months. And they bought that deliberately so you know they feel connected somehow to us. We need to understand that connection and build on it.

Biernbaum: That's helpful to me. Just as an aside, in Michigan we had OGM as one of the first certifying agencies, then MOFFA came along 20 years later to be more consumer oriented, but when OGM didn't continue, MOFFA has tried to pick up helping farmers and working with consumers, and we may have just hit on something—as we're looking this year at doing more priority setting—and that was being a conduit for connecting this small number of farmers and helping consumers know about more of the challenges but also letting their voice be heard. So I appreciate that comment in particular.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Moyer: I guess I would invite all the readers to join the conversation here at Rodale Institute. As a non-profit we are here to serve and to help farmers but also customers and consumers. We want to see the right message delivered in the right way, and we'd love to have more people paying attention to our website as well. We invite visitors to come and visit us any time to carry the conversation to the next level.

Organic represents about, in this country, only 1.5% of the production and 5-6% of the market share. If any industry had 95% of the market share and 99% of the production, and the other 1% or 5% fragmented across the whole spectrum of products that are sold, why would they even care, unless they knew that the other way of producing is right. And then

you have to fight it every chance you get. And that's what they're doing, and you have to add this to confusion in the university system, at the USDA, across the board, those people didn't really want to have a conversation about soil health and yet it's being driven by the organic community and by the consumers who buy those products, so they have to. We're in the driver's seat; the minority is pushing the majority and sometimes that doesn't feel good. We understand that, but eventually we'll all be the same because organic is the future. We're not talking about the past; we're talking about the future here. We did talk a little bit about history, but just to give it context. We're really talking about the future, and organic is the future.

Biernbaum: That's how I present it—we're not going back; we're going forward with a plan. If I was going to identify an issue in the US, particularly in the universities, it is that they're still holding onto a vision that they have to feed the world. The goal is not to feed the world; the goal is to help people feed themselves. It's how you go about that, it's the access, the resources, the water and seeds. This incorrect or incomplete vision of trying to feed the world is the way they justify all the damaging things that they're doing with GMOs and pesticides and treating the soil like hydroponics. Someday if we can help set the "feed the world" vision aside, and replace it with a more regenerative vision, then I think we really will have a better chance.

Moyer: I think you're right, that same mentality or reluctance to change philosophies exists in the medical profession as well. We're seeing hospitals beginning to reach out to us asking how can we actually showcase what some doctors already believe, that soil management impacts human health. That's really exciting to us here at Rodale because we've been saying that for a very long time. But there is again a real reluctance for any physician to say, change your diet and you won't need the prescriptions I generally write. Change your lifestyle. We saw that in our own backyard, with one of the folks that works on our son's dairy, a young man who's complaining always about how his stomach doesn't feel good and he's missing some work, so he went to the doctor. The doctor's prescription was, stop chewing tobacco and eat more vegetables. He said no and no. The doctor said then there's nothing I can do for you. I mean you have to change, and there's a reluctance to change and I understand that; people are comfortable with what they're used to. But the whole world is changing. Medicine's changing, agriculture is changing and that's scary to many many people. But we're on the right track because we are—well, I already said it—organic is the future.

Biernbaum: Sounds like a good place to end. I'm confident that while I get frustrated at the pace of things I just don't have any doubt that we're moving in the right direction.

Moyer: You and me both. We're both getting older and the pace isn't fast enough to suit me but you're right, we're moving in the right direction.

Jeff Moyer has been Executive Director of Rodale Institute since 2015, after four decades at the Institute helping countless farmers make the transition from conventional, chemical-based farming to organic methods. Jeff is a past chair of the National Organic Standards Board and is active with many other organizations working toward a regenerative future.

Certification Confusion...Mine!

by Leah Smith

I have recently been researching the specifics of various certification labels that I find on the food I buy—Fairtrade Certified, Direct Trade Certified, Rainforest Alliance Certified, and many others. Though I felt I had a general idea of what most of these certifications mean, I wanted to better understand everything that each label stood for, how they compare with one another, and hopefully if these certified products have a good reputation in terms of adhering to their label certification rules.

Here is a little of what I learned:

- As recently as the nineties, the use of child and slave labor was prevalent in many West African countries in the farming of cacao. This, in part, helped to spur the creation of the **Fairtrade Certification** label, as adherence to child labor laws is one of the guidelines for certification.
- The **Non-GMO Project Verified** label is not the only eco-label that forbids the use of GMOs, it is simply the only one that proclaims it so obviously. The lack of the presence of GMOs is also the case for any products labeled Fairtrade or Rainforest Alliance Certified and, of course, Certified Organic or Certified Naturally Grown.
- **Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)** Certification is, in fact, a fairly weak label, though I wish it weren't. RSPO members are allowed to clear cut forests and use forced and child labor for their palm production.
- **Fairtrade**, the darling of eco-labels, doesn't always achieve its goals for its certified members. The objective of achieving an improved income for certified members is sometimes derailed by the high audit and certification fees that are part of the system. There are instances of comparable farms outside the Fairtrade system maintaining a higher standard of living than those within it. Not only this, but also note that products in the United States can have as little as 11% Fairtrade cocoa in them and be labeled as Fairtrade chocolate. In

some cases even non-cocoa ingredients are counted for certification qualification.

- **Rainforest Alliance Certification**, which can, of course, be found on agricultural products, is also available for tourist industries. That is right, tourism can harm the environment when framed on an irresponsible business model. (Also, they do certify palm oil and their certification has real merit, so buy Rainforest Alliance Certified palm oil if you can.)

I've shared this with you not only because it is interesting and important but because it also shows how these labels have become part of the way we learn more about the products we buy. In this newsletter, we are discussing, once again, what is new in organics, with a secondary emphasis on relationships in farming. This discussion is still relevant due to the changing reality of organics in the business world at large that has made it necessary for those who are philosophically organic (and not just economically organic) to create new methods and approaches to maintaining truly organic standards. And that is where the relationships come in to it. As individuals already deeply involved in this change, are we worried about weak Certified Organic labels for ourselves? Not really. We are actively paying attention to the situation. You don't consume "compromised organics" when you grow it yourself or know the farmer who produces it. You know the level of commitment there. We also watch for the information put out by watchdogs like The Cornucopia Institute to learn the authenticity of larger-scale organic operations. Such people are not likely to be taken advantage of.

But what about committed Certified Organic farmers, both large and small-scale, who are trying to establish a relationship with customers and are having it undermined by organic products that are cheaper and easier for their customers to come by? What about the customers who think they are promoting good agricultural practices with their financial support but aren't getting what they pay

for? At farmers' markets, I see a number of young families buying organic for the sake of their children's health, being told that organic is better. Do they think of checking with the watchdogs? Do they understand the unpopular moves being made by the NOSB? Will they be tempted to buy organic produce from stores and markets that is priced more favorably, believing that the producers are simply good at business and not that they have taken what could be described as officially sanctioned short-cuts? You bet they will. There is a need for us to protect each other and protect the public. To keep our relationships safe.

You might worry that if one labeling system is being partially hijacked (that being organic), that the creation of add-on labeling may simply lead to further hijacking down the road (good-bye Real Organic). Or that further labeling may turn off a portion of the public as they deem these "certification wars" too confusing. Or maybe add-on labeling will serve to highlight the state of organic farming in the U.S. and get the whole system the attention it deserves.

For our part, as members of the farming and certification communities, we need to keep on

putting the information out there. Label add-ons and additional certification labels are a visible way to do this. At the least, they could make the customers wonder what all of this labeling means and hopefully they will become curious enough to find out. I kept on seeing the different eco-labels. Eventually I became curious enough to have to know all of the differences. I needed to be a better consumer. I needed to be fully informed, to understand the full motivations behind the labeling, and to see if the products met these goals. To understand what the challenges of coffee or cacao farming are, which is a world separate from mine but which is never the less important to me. In the same way, we need better organic food consumers as well. They need to care enough to ask the questions, too. A new label could start this conversation.

Perhaps the label "Certified MOREGANIC" will be coming soon to a store or farmers' market near you!

Leah Smith is the new MOFFA Newsletter Editor and a Michigan State alumna (B.S., Crop and Soil Sciences). She works at her family's farm, Nodding Thistle, is a freelance writer, and is also very excited to be taking part in the OEFFA Begin Farming Mentorship Program as a mentor with a mentee in Parma this year.

MOFFA Sustainable Farm Tour Series

For 2018 MOFFA has arranged a series of three Farm Tours, in collaboration with [OEFFA's collection](#) of more than 30 farm tours, workshops, and special events. We hope you'll join us! More information at moffa.net/farmtours-2018.html.



Transitional Stone Milled Flour & Diversified Family Farm

[Westwind Milling Co.](#)

Swartz Creek, MI

Sunday, July 15, 2:00 - 5:00

\$10 per person includes farm luncheon



Certified Organic Orchard, Grain, Berry, Vegetable & Cut-Flower Farm

[Plymouth Orchards & Cider Mill / Gateway Farm](#)

Plymouth, MI

Thursday, August 30, 2:00 - 5:00

No cost



Diversified Vegetable Farm with Commercial Kitchen

[Zilke Vegetable Farm](#)

Milan, MI

Sunday, Sept. 16, 2:00 - 5:00

No cost

Farmer to Farmer: Spreading the Seeds of Success

by Kelly Henderson, Begin Farming Program Coordinator, OEFFA

What happens when you mix young and beginning farmers with experienced farmers? Often times, very beautiful things! I was thinking back to a field day last year when I took a group of aspiring farmers from OEFFA's Begin Farming Apprenticeship Program on a tour of farms in Fredericktown, Ohio. Long-time farmer Ed Snavley of Curly Tail Organics met with us on a hot summer morning to talk grain farming, soil fertility, and crop rotations. While not all of the apprentices had a particular interest in



Ed Snavley with apprentices

becoming grain farmers, the wealth of knowledge that Ed was able to share can't be found in a book, such as real life examples of how his farm has changed through soil building and crop rotations. When we consider the impending number of retiring farmers in this country, and the need to get new farmers on the land, we often do not recognize the importance of retaining the deep agricultural knowledge ingrained in experienced farmers and ensuring transfer of skills and expertise.

Through apprenticeship programs, we can start to crack this very tough nut in more formal ways. It's not without challenges, but, through farmer-to-farmer sharing at field days, skill-sharing opportunities, mentoring, and informal networking events, we can start to truly build community relationships and support around budding farmers.

It is not only new farmers that need support, though. I have been watching the recent downturn of the farm economy, and can't help but think about the importance of continuing to weave the fibers of community and social support around all farmers. Farming is one of the most risk-based careers one could choose, and farmers always have to be ready to adapt and change plans based on weather, soil conditions, diseases and pests, fluctuating markets, and a whole host of other factors. Sometimes those factors are within the control of the farmer, but often they are not.

Farming is such a tough and isolating profession that sometimes I have to ask, "What keeps you going?" In addition to the sun and soil, or plants and animals, many farmers have shared with me that it is their network of peers and mentor farmers that help motivate them to get up before dawn and milk the cows or work the earth. Being a farmer is more than being an entrepreneur, it is an identity. It is an identity that connects people to something that is bigger than them, and for that reason farmers rely on each other to share success stories, commiserate about the challenges, and to break bread after a long day of helping a fellow farmer put up her hoop house.

So more than just the opportunity to learn from someone else, farmer networks enable people to feel connected to their work and each other, and to rejoice in building communities and relationships of all kinds.

As I think back to the final stop of the field day last July at Sweet Grass Dairy, I recall touring the pastures and listening to the owner, Jacob Coleman, talk about the natural cycles on the farm and how they impact the nutrients in the grass and forage that the animals consume. As we walked out into the herd, there was an overwhelming sense of quietness that swept over the group. If you have ever stood out in a field with such large and majestic creatures, you may understand the need for such humbleness. After spending their days working in vegetable fields, and my days in the office, it was a welcomed change to witness the grace and calm nature of Jacob's herd. It was also an opportunity to embrace gratitude for the relationships between the soil, the forage, the animals, the farmer, and the consumer. It is these relationships that connect us to each other and the earth, and what keeps us from unraveling after a hard day of work.

As we work to train the next generation of farmers, it is important to recognize the wealth of knowledge



Cattle and apprentices at Sweet Grass Dairy

existing within our farm communities, among both experienced and budding farmers. Farmers are known for growing food, but they are also knowledge keepers, educators, and community builders.

We have so much gratitude for the farmers who train, support, and share with new farmers! So, as you head out to

get started with your field work, remember the importance of connecting with other farmers and



Sweet Grass poultry

think about ways to start spreading the seeds of success through relationship-building opportunities on your farm and in your community.

OEFFA currently coordinates a new formal mentorship program, though there has always been informal mentoring happening within the broader regional farmer network. If you find yourself seeking a mentor, or willing to offer your own farming knowledge to a beginner, consider applying to participate in OEFFA's Mentorship Program. To learn more, go to www.oeffa.org/q/mentor or contact Kelly Henderson, Begin Farming Program Coordinator, at kelly@oeffa.org.

The Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA) was founded in 1979 and is a grassroots coalition of farmers, backyard gardeners, consumers, retailers, educators, researchers, and others who share a desire to build a healthy food system that brings prosperity to family farmers, meets the growing consumer demand for local food, creates economic opportunities for our rural communities, and safeguards the environment. For nearly 40 years, OEFFA has used education, advocacy, and grassroots organizing to promote local and organic food systems, helping farmers and consumers reconnect and together build a sustainable food system, one meal at a time. For more information, visit www.oeffa.org.

Falcon-Friendly Farming Bears Fruit: Enhancing Agricultural Landscapes With Nest Boxes to Attract Natural Predators of Crop Pests

by Catherine Lindell

Natural predators can contribute to pest management, with associated economic and environmental benefits. In our research over the last several years we have investigated the effects of American kestrels, North America's smallest falcon, on pest birds in cherry orchards. Here is what we have found, ways to employ this pest management tactic, and potential challenges.

Since at least the late 1990s, fruit growers in Leelanau County had been putting up kestrel nest boxes, hoping to attract the birds because they eat many rodents. I had heard that blueberry growers in the Pacific Northwest had been employing the same tactic to deter pest birds. I was initially skeptical about kestrels reducing pest bird activity because their diet consists primarily of insects and mammals. However, with funding from the U.S.D.A.'s Specialty Crop Research Initiative to investigate pest bird deterrence, our research team decided to give this tactic a shot. On an extraordinarily warm day in March 2012, I and Tom Comfort, who engineered

and built our first systems, installed eight boxes on hinged, 18-foot towers in Leelanau County.

Enter Megan Shave, a graduate student from Brockton, Massachusetts, who decided to focus her



Megan Shave holding an American kestrel

dissertation research on the kestrel project. Megan began monitoring those eight boxes in 2013 and, to our great surprise, all eight were occupied by kestrel pairs and all eight successfully fledged young, an average of 4.25 fledglings per box. These results were encouraging, to say the least.

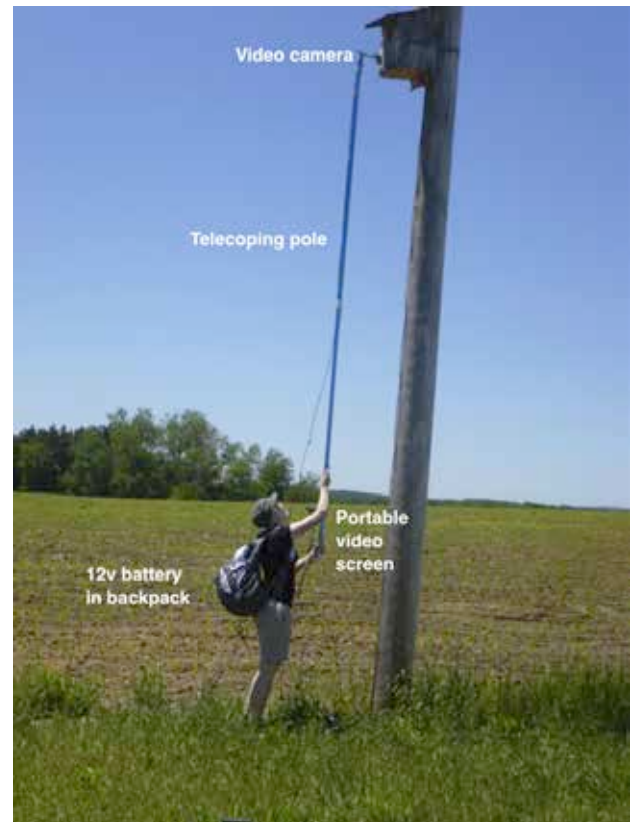
Megan is innovative; she regularly designed contraptions to facilitate the work, like a telescoping pole system so we could peer into the boxes without having to take down the tower, and a camera system to document what types of prey items the adult kestrels brought to their young. Megan worked like a demon over several years and documented that the kestrels had excellent reproductive success in our boxes, that the boxes attracted kestrels to particular places in the landscape, and that kestrels eat many crop pests, including voles, grasshoppers, and European starlings.

At the same time Megan was pursuing her projects, my colleagues at Michigan State in the Department of Community Sustainability, Drs. Phil Howard and Chi-Ok Oh, along with graduate student Zachary Herrnsstadt, were investigating consumer responses to various pest bird management techniques. Their work showed that consumers prefer techniques that they view as natural, which includes attracting kestrels with nest boxes, and are willing to pay more for fruit produced with these types of tactics.

Given the mounting evidence that kestrels could be a real plus to fruit production, we proposed additional research that was funded by the National Science Foundation's Coupled Natural Human Systems Program. Megan collected additional data showing that pest bird abundance was lower in sweet and tart cherry orchards with kestrels compared to orchards without kestrels. We also enlisted Logan Clark, an MSU undergrad who is a real outdoorsman, to spend numerous hours observing pest birds in sweet cherry orchards to document how many cherries they eat per minute. These data allowed us to estimate how many fewer sweet cherries are eaten by pest birds in orchards with kestrels compared to orchards without kestrels. We gave these data to our economist colleagues at U.S.D.A., Dr. Stephanie Shwiff and Julie Elser, to calculate the potential effects on the Michigan economy of widespread kestrel box installation in sweet cherry orchards. They estimated that, if all sweet cherry growers in the state installed kestrel boxes and had similar kestrel occupancy rates to those we measured in Leelanau County, Michigan's GDP would be increased over \$2 million and between 46 and 50 jobs would be created over a 5-year period. This regional economic modeling approach takes into account that the agricultural sector of the economy has effects on other sectors.

For example, increased cherry production may result in increased spending at local businesses, generating more employment. This increased income among workers then leads to further spending. Capturing these ripple effects helps estimate the total impact a change in one sector has on the entire regional economy.

The extent to which our results apply to other fruit-producing regions in Michigan is likely to vary. We



have been installing kestrel nest boxes in blueberry fields in Van Buren and Allegan Counties for several years and see lower rates of kestrel occupancy; about 1 in 3 boxes are occupied by kestrels rather than the 80-90% occupancy we see in Leelanau County. The difference may have to do with the more open nature of cherry orchards compared to blueberry fields and greater amounts of short, grassy areas in Leelanau County compared to western Michigan. This question awaits resolution.

Another issue to think about when considering kestrel nest boxes as a pest bird management tool is the degree to which kestrel nesting activity overlaps the period when the crop is most susceptible to pest birds. Kestrels in Michigan lay eggs in April and May. The eggs take approximately 30 days to hatch; then the nestlings are in the nest for another 30 days before they fledge. The fledglings stay with their parents about three weeks after they fledge, initially

near the nest box and then further away. They migrate out of much of Michigan in August and September. So generally May, June, and July are peak kestrel activity months, when they will be focusing their activities around their nest box. This timing coincides well with sweet cherry ripening and for some varieties of blueberries that ripen in the first half of the summer. For later-ripening blueberries and fruits that ripen in the fall, there will not be much overlap. Kestrels eat many insects and small rodents that may be problematic before fruit ripens so that is a bonus even in crops that ripen later in the season.

Given that kestrels reduce pest bird activity and that consumers like this type of pest management technique, we encourage growers who successfully attract kestrels to let their consumers know about it, on farm websites or through flyers or conversation. An additional point of interest is that, although kestrels are North America's most common falcon, their numbers have been decreasing for several decades. So, installing nest boxes may not only reduce pest bird activity, it may also help a declining species. A growing body of evidence indicates that many wild bird species, for example bluebirds and barn owls, contribute to pest management in agricultural systems. Figuring out how to enhance our agricultural landscapes to encourage the activities of these species, while reducing activities of fruit-consuming species, will result in economic and environmental benefits for growers, consumers, and society as a whole.

Installing kestrel boxes

To maximize the likelihood boxes will be occupied by kestrels, they should be placed in open areas.

For example, we often place them where a tree is missing in a cherry orchard. If they are too close to a wooded area, the box may be occupied by European starlings, which are invasive and consume fruit. Boxes should be installed at least 0.5 miles apart. They should be mounted on towers (or utility poles) 10-20 feet tall and face the southeast. Wood shavings should be placed in the bottom of boxes and boxes should be cleaned out each fall if they have been occupied. Installation and cleaning of boxes should be done in the fall because kestrels start scouting for nest cavities as early as March. Kestrel boxes can be ordered online. Additional information is available at www.nestboxbuilder.com/nestbox-article-spartan.html. Additionally, please feel free to contact me, lindellc@msu.edu, with questions. I can also provide articles with our research results.

Note: We are very grateful to the many Michigan fruit growers who have provided access to their properties (and pulled our truck out of the mud when needed) for the studies described above.

Catherine Lindell is an Associate Professor in the Department of Integrative Biology and the Center for Global Change and Earth Observations at Michigan State University. Dr. Lindell has been working for the past decade in Michigan fruit production systems to improve methods to reduce damage by birds. She also studies how to enhance the attractiveness of agricultural landscapes to natural predators.

Policy Corner

by Julia Christianson

In 2016 Congress enacted legislation on the labeling of GMO (Genetically Modified Organism) ingredients in our food, legislation which is popularly known as the DARK Act (Deny Americans the Right to Know). In spite of the fact that an ABC poll in 2015^[1] indicated that 93% of the American people believed that GMO foods should be labeled, the final legislation, referred to as the Stabenow-Roberts Compromise, denies states the right to require labeling of food containing GMO ingredients, provides for weakened "labeling" via QR codes readable only with smartphones, and establishes no enforcement mechanisms or penalties for non-compliance.

Now the USDA has released new draft rules for the labeling of GMOs—but instead of calling them

GMOs, it uses the term "BE", for "bioengineered foods", in a clear effort to make them seem less threatening. The proposed symbol tries to make these ingredients, which are banned in 300 regions around the world^[2], seem benign and even friendly. The rules also propose to exempt "highly refined" ingredients containing GMOs such as sugars and oils—this would exempt up to 70% of the GMO ingredients in our food.



The public has an opportunity to comment on the proposed rules, and the “BE” icon, from now until July 9th. Please take the time to go to regulations.gov/document?D=AMS-TM-17-0050-0004 and let your voice be heard on this issue. Suggested points to emphasize include:

- The symbols proposed by the USDA are not value neutral and are disparaging to non-GE products.
- The term “bioengineered” is confusing and a departure from the terms genetically engineered (GE) or genetically modified organism (GMO) understood by the public.
- The USDA should recommend the text used to state “Produced with genetic engineering” or “Partially produced with genetic engineering” or use a neutral symbol.

- The USDA should label all “highly refined” GE products like cooking oil, high fructose corn syrup, and the like.
- Say NO to confusing QR codes and text messages that would make shopping trips longer, be costlier, and discriminate against those with less resources.

More information on the draft rule and GMOs in general can be found at www.nongmoproject.org/.

Julia Christianson is MOFFA's "very part-time" Administrative Coordinator, and in her capacity as a MOFFA member serves as the volunteer Chair of MOFFA's Policy Committee.

From the Editor

Hello Newsletter Readers. As the new editor of MOFFA's Michigan Organic Connections Newsletter, I find I have a few remarks to make. Firstly, I would like to reiterate the thanks that John Hooper expressed for us to Dr. Biernbaum. Thank you for the past, present, and future you have helped to shape. Thank you to all who contributed to this inaugural newsletter under my editorship; for bearing with me and helping me off to a memorable start.

I wanted to reemphasize my excitement about the OEFFA Beginning Farming Mentorship Program. I believe it is a wonderful approach to the teaching of farm know-how and personally am looking forward to a year with a mentee.

Lastly, in case anyone out there is a stickler for details, you may have noticed that some of our contributors have referred to this issue's theme as “relationships in agriculture,” while others have highlighted “current issues and changes in organics.” Why the discrepancy? Why, because there isn't one. The movements and programs and

organizations that are taking off in organics right now involve a strengthening of the various relationships in agriculture. Portions of organics have gotten big or vague or confused or even dishonest, and this can all make one lose sight. There will always be that core of individuality in the farmer, that contrary soul standing alone in a field and wondering why the world is the way it is. But on the other side (everyone has at least two), we must hold on to our relationships with others all the more dearly to keep them strong. Whether it is the relationship between human and human, human and soil, human and certifier, etc., there are commonalities to all relationships we must keep in mind as we move forward. Your role in a relationship, no matter the relationship, must be recognized and accepted, understood, and worked on to make the relationship as a whole a success.

Leah Smith
MOFFA Newsletter Editor

MOFFA News

Farm Guide – MOFFA's Guide to Michigan's Organic and Ecologically Sustainable Growers and Farms now lists 149 farmers and growers; 97 of them are certified organic. The guide exists primarily online, but the 2018 paper version has just been published and will be available for purchase within the next few days at moffa.net/farm-guide-book.html.

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's Annual Meeting was held on Tuesday, April 10, in Lansing. The board

elected officers for 2018: Emily Nicholls as Chair and Jessie Smith as Vice-Chair; John Hooper and Dane Terrill will continue to serve as Secretary and Treasurer, respectively.

Organic Connections Newsletter – We are pleased to announce that the newsletter has a new Editor! Leah Smith of Nodding Thistle Farm has been an active contributor to the newsletter for some time now, and with this issue she takes on the task of determining the theme and gathering content for each issue. We continue to be 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 Leah](#). 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.

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.

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

