



Michigan Organic Connections

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A Message from the Chair

Winter is a changeable season in both the unpredictable weather and the way it makes us in northern latitudes feel. At the start we look forward to the rest that the shortening of days brings. The time to recover and store up what we have learned in the previous year. As we near the end we feel like we have been resting too much and begin to long for activity, the smell of a spring breeze, the greening of the grass, and the wonder of a new growing season. Despite a few blasts of sub-freezing temperatures in the past month, and a few more to come, the end of winter is approaching. Already the quality of the mid-day sunlight has changed. The birds, though not possessed of Gregorian calendars, always seem to change their songs on February 1st. Perhaps they sense that change sooner and the quiet, survival phase of winter life is suddenly replaced with the need to come out of hiding and make the most beautiful song they can. On freezing mornings, they sit in the tops of trees and sing to the sunrise and the world, letting us know that though the season we are in appears endless, they can see tomorrow already.

Unlike the birds, for many of us the ability to see tomorrow is a choice. We can easily go about our



everyday lives without consideration of the future. We can simply make choices to answer our immediate gratification and not consider what the consequences of those choices are because they are far off in the future. If you pay attention to weather patterns you may believe that we have reached that future and we are starting to see those consequences in our lifetime. If you remember the arguments about the development of resistant weeds and the increase in gallons of herbicides sprayed that went before the coerced acceptance of field crop seeds resistant to herbicides, you may feel that future came sooner than we expected. Also, unlike the birds, we can make reasoned predictions of what tomorrow will bring if we choose to. The next step is to then choose to do something about it. We hope that if you are reading this you are one of those who lives with a thought about tomorrow. It has been said many times already but it can't be said enough: now more than ever regenerative agriculture is crucial to our future. The improvement of soil health and the increase of carbon sequestration through the use of cover crops, reduced/no-till practices, and animals on pasture instead of in feed lots, can make a significant impact on CO² levels in our atmosphere. Crops can easily be grown without the chemicals that we have allowed into our food stream for years, chemicals that are starting to show impacts on our health. When you consider how large the world is, these changes seem insurmountable. An individual's impact seems so insignificant; but look what individuals have done already. Remember the changes Rachel Carson's book started or the time not so long ago when a farmers' market may have had one organic farmer. The impacts of a few have made significant changes and banded together we can make more changes.

Everything seems possible in the springtime and this renewal of energy encourages us to take on new projects in the coming year. Here at MOFFA it is time for our membership drive. We have a goal of increasing our membership to 200 this year. Two hundred individuals banded together. What will we be able to do? To start, your membership will make it possible for us to carry on with our customary educational events, to start a new one, and to

support events of other like-minded organizations. We will be able to continue to update and publish our Farm Guide, an important resource for farmers and consumers alike. We will be able to continue to improve our webpage, a source of community in the form of educational events, jobs and funding opportunities, organic resources for all, and available land, to name a few points of interest. Most relevantly, your membership simply continues to increase our impact in everything we do.

For the year 2020, MOFFA plans for the quarterly newsletters to reflect the principles of IFOAM, the international umbrella organization for the organic world. This first newsletter of the year encompasses the principle of ecology and the belief that "organic agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them, and help sustain them." The definition of ecology is a simple phrase: the relation of organisms to one another and their physical surroundings. When you consider how many organisms there are in the world and all the separate physical portions there are to relate too, ecology can start to look less simple and take on its actual ponderous size—and yet all those separate parts work together so seamlessly in undisturbed portions of the environment where predator and prey populations balance each other and no portion is overrun with disease. Clearly it is something nature has worked out to the benefit of all who participate. With this in mind, perhaps my evaluation of the birds and their song is wrong and they may hold a more far-seeing eye than we know. They have declared that they will participate, will you?

—Jessie Smith

Jessie Smith was raised on her family's organic farm in Barry County, Michigan. She attended Michigan State University and completed a Bachelors of Science in Crop and Soil Sciences and a Masters in Entomology, where she studied nematode community structure under Dr. George Bird. After working on the family farm for 20 years, she has moved to Indiana where she continues to raise chickens and garden organically. Her close ties to Michigan keep her an active member of MOFFA. She was elected Chair of MOFFA's Board of Directors in April, 2019.

What is IFOAM?

By Julia Christianson

In discussing themes for the newsletters of 2020, we once again gravitated to "What is Organic?" as an important part of fulfilling our education mission. A

related question that many of us hear is "Is organic really better?" For some people this means "Is organic better for my family's health?" For others,

the primary reason organic is better is that it honors the natural processes of growth and renewal and reverses decades of treating the soil as merely a physical substrate. And some embrace the organic way of life because of its concern for food justice and stewardship of the land, and the planet, for future generations.

It's not a coincidence that these values form the basis of the four principles of organic agriculture as formulated by [IFOAM](#), the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements:



The Principle of Health.



The Principle of Ecology.



The Principle of Fairness.



The Principle of Care.

IFOAM was started in 1972, around the same time that MOFFA's predecessor organization Organic Growers of Michigan was coming together in Southwest Michigan. It has since grown to encompass more than 700 affiliates in over 110 countries across the globe.

IFOAM brings together organic growers from many different environments, and one of its most valuable functions is to formulate answers to questions like "What is Organic?" In 2008, after several years of deliberation, the organization ratified the following definition:

"Organic Agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems, and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity, and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic Agriculture combines tradition, innovation, and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved."

This definition was developed after, and based upon, the four [principles of organic](#)—

Health: Organic Agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animal, human, and planet as one and indivisible.

Ecology: Organic Agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them, and help sustain them.

Fairness: Organic Agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities.

Care: Organic Agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the

health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment.

Here in the United States, producers must meet the standards of the USDA [National Organic Program](#) in order to use the word "Organic" to describe their products. The USDA standards were developed over the ten-year period 1992-2002, and in some respects meet the IFOAM definitions in the areas of Health and Ecology. The NOP does not address the principles of Fairness and Care, although these ideas have been part of the understanding of the organic way from its beginnings.

Before the NOP, organic growers in each state or certification area came up with their own definition of "certified organic," but standards varied from state to state. The Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 arose from a desire for a national standard to facilitate trade in organic food between states, and resulted in the creation of the NOP. Today, a similar situation exists between countries, and there is a movement to develop standards that can be applied for global trade. IFOAM has developed a [certification standard](#) which certifiers in any country may use to directly certify operators globally, subject to IFOAM fees and regulations. They have also developed a [set of toolkits](#) for governments to use in evaluating their certification programs, and there is a check sheet known as COROS (Common Objectives and Requirements of Organic Standards) which has the objective of facilitating multi-lateral, rather than bi-lateral, agreements between nations as to the answer to "What is Organic?"

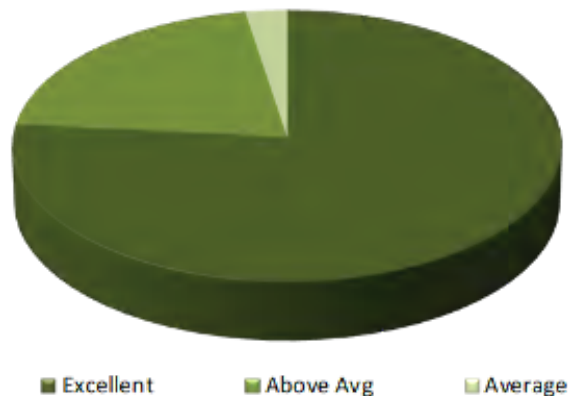
We can hope that in future years our government will show more interest in bringing our regulations into line with those adopted in most other areas of the world, particularly in the areas of hydroponic production and animal welfare practices, as well as going farther toward incorporating the principles of Fairness and Care. Meanwhile, new organizations with add-on certifications ([Real Organic Project](#), [Regenerative Organic](#)) have formed in the United States to give producers who are truly organic—who actually follow the IFOAM principles—an opportunity to identify their products as having been produced in the true organic way—beyond "Organic" as currently [incompletely] defined by the USDA NOP.

*Julia Christianson has served as MOFFA's "very part-time" Administrative Coordinator since 2013, and has been gardening organically since the early 1970s. With Maynard Kaufman, she co-edited *The Organic Movement in Michigan*, published in 2017.*

MOFFA Organic Intensives 2020: Final Report and Participant Evaluations

On January 11th MOFFA held its sixth annual Organic Intensives. All three presenters were nationally known experts—Michael Phillips, Andrew Mefferd, and jim mcdonald. More than 110 people registered, but owing to the weather providing challenging driving conditions, only 76 were actually able to attend. Those who did make it participated in in-depth educational sessions on one of three topics: Successful Biological Orchardring (41), Organic No-Till Farming (19), and Local Organic Herbs for Health (16).

**MOFFA Organic Intensives 2020
Participant Evaluations of
Content and Presenters**



Participants were asked to evaluate their experience at the end of the day, and 83% responded—88% of those in the orcharding session, 74% in the no-till session, and 81% of those attending the herbs session.

This year we offered a larger discount on the registration fee for MOFFA members, and 80% of those registering took us up on the offer by becoming MOFFA members or renewing their membership. Just under half of those registered identified as farmers, 18% identified as gardeners, 18% represented a food or farm related business or non-profit organization, 12% were educators (including MSUE and Conservation District personnel), and the remaining 5% fell into other categories.

As in years past, participants overwhelmingly felt that their time was well spent. The chart at left

shows ratings for various aspects of the program, across all three sessions.

Rating "Excellent" or "Above Average" Across All Sessions	
Content / Information	97%
Presentation / Presenters	98%
Handouts	86%
Venue / Facilities / Location	95%
Registration Process	91%
Lunch	98%
Value (return on investment)	98%

Our favorite comment this year was "This is my favorite winter educational opportunity the year —> thank you!" But there were multiple comments along the lines of "I like the relaxed environment," "What a wonderful class!" "Love the no-judgment free-flow of information," and "Wonderful, very very informative," and lots of people just said "Thank You!" Some participants helped us to see a lack of gender and cultural diversity in our selection of presenters, and offered suggestions for future presenters who could increase diversity. We took these comments to heart and will be making a greater effort to bring in presenters who are representative of all the different farmers and farms who contribute to Michigan's vital organic agricultural sector.

We made a particular effort this year to provide an all-organic lunch with plenty of offerings for vegetarians, vegans, and others with dietary restrictions, and apparently the effort was appreciated as the evaluations of the lunch offerings were significantly higher than in prior years.

Session Reviews

Successful Biological Orchardring

The weather conditions did not deter attendees from spending a day listening to Michael Phillips of Lost Nation Orchard about his experiences, knowledge, and successes in biological orcharding. Over forty orchard enthusiasts took in Michaels very pragmatic approach to farming. The foundation of his presentation was focusing holistically on the farm as

an ecosystem driven with healthy soil and healthy crops. Starting with an overview of basic plant and soil functions, Michael explained the needs for a fungally dominant, minerally balanced soil to support fruit production and how to achieve that. He enlightened the audience with some of the tools, products, and most importantly a schedule of applications to reduce insect and disease pressures and grow nutritious fruit. His experiences and ideas



about marketing rounded out the seminar. Michael did a masterful job of introducing not just what he does on his

and on his clients' farms ... but WHY!

Organic No-Till Farming

Andrew Mefferd, the editor of *Growing for Market* magazine, and the author of *The Greenhouse and Hoophouse Grower's Handbook* and, most recently, *The Organic No-Till Farming Revolution*, was the presenter for this intensive. Andrew shared the findings of what he learned from his own farm experience in Maine and from a year and a half of visiting and interviewing almost 20 no-till farmers.

Andrew started by discussing the issues we face with tillage. He described tillage as like an earthquake, tornado, or other devastating event to the world of microorganisms. It also burns up organic matter and brings up weed seeds from below the soil surface as well as requiring labor, time, fuel, and equipment. He also shared that tillage is bad for the soil structure, soil chemistry, and soil biology.

No-till has intriguing advantages. It helps increase the organic matter and water holding capacity of the soil, reduces the need for machinery and fossil fuel, sequesters carbon, reduces soil erosion, increases soil biodiversity, and can be a marketing advantage to set your produce apart from others. In addition no-till can help use space more efficiently, get you in the field earlier, speed up succession plantings, and lowers the equipment and land barriers to start farming on a small scale. It can also have some disadvantages. In a no-till system perennial weeds may become a problem as there is no way to quickly

cultivate them out. A mulched soil may warm up slower in the spring. Slugs can be an issue with high residue systems. The no-till systems can take time to be established and may be hard to scale up to larger acreage.

A basic requirement for no-till systems is some form of a mulch. Andrew organized the no-till technique into three broad categories: non-biodegradable mulches that are removed for production (tarping), mulch grown in place, and mulches that are left in place during production.

Andrew has observed that most growers utilizing no-



till techniques are using more than one method and some of the methods function as both soil prep and weed suppression.

Andrew suggests from his own experience of using combined pieces of various methods that you, too, should take approaches used by other growers and change them around to work within your own situation of crops, soils, and resources to come up with a system that will work best for you.

Local Organic Herbs for Health

jim mcdonald (lower case at his request) was our presenter for our *Local Organic Herbs for Health* session. jim's goal was to connect some important human health opportunities and how they can be addressed using herbs as part of our diet. He helped us consider that rather than asking what the best herb is for this or that ailment, that we think of herbalism as a process that considers the constitution and needs of an individual, along with the diverse characteristics of the many edible plants we can harvest from the landscape or grow in our garden.

The importance of bitters (like radicchio or arugula) in our diet was the first example that jim used. That

bitter flavor that many of us tend to avoid, and has been bred or selected out of many of our leafy greens and other crops, serves an important health role that often is not being met in our body. He made the case for why we need to eat plants with bitter flavors.



For the second key topic area, jim shared how we can use plant teas to support our gut health and gut microbiome. That included helping us to better understand the role of biology and bacteria in our digestive system. We learned about drying or moist (damp) actions, warming and cooling actions, and constricting or relaxing actions common in the energetics balancing aspects of western herbalism.

For the third key topic area, jim focused on eight common and readily available plants that can be used in our diet to help with digestion, reducing inflammation, and providing minerals and phytonutrients. In the final session, we got ideas about a variety of preparation methods for using herbs extracted with water (teas, decoctions), oils (salves, ointments), or alcohol (tinctures).

A unique value of the Organic Intensives is the course materials compiled for each participant. Presentation power points and supplemental reading materials were provided to maximize the learning in and after class. We appreciate the work our presenters did to help us make this information available. This year we offered participants in the Orcharding session their choice of Michael Phillips' books *Mycorrhizal Planet* or *The Holistic Orchard*; participants in Andrew Mefferd's session got his new book *The Organic No-Till Farming Revolution*; and those in the Herbal session received a collection of

jim mcdonald's writing on specific herbs as well as classes of herbs used for various purposes. As part of the evaluation, we asked participants to identify knowledge or techniques they learned that they plan to put into practice, and over 69% of the respondents in Orcharding, 79% in No-Till, and 92% in the Herbs session took the time to do that. The information they provided will help us improve our future offerings.

We received many, many suggestions for future Intensives. Sixteen names were suggested for possible future presenters, the highest number to date. The four topics mentioned most often were permaculture, dealing with pests ranging from undesirable fungi to rabbits and deer, improving the soil with particular emphasis on the specifics of the soil food web, and homesteading and beginning farmer basics.

In addition to participant fees, the program was made possible by our Sponsors for 2020:

Whole Foods
 North Central SARE
 Preferred First Insurance
 Morgan Composting
 Blue River Organic Seed
 OnMark Certification Services
 GreenStone Farm Credit Services
 Northern Naturals
 Ruesink Organic Farms
 The Fertrell Co.
 Plymouth Orchards

Twelve people were registered with full-coverage scholarships made possible by a SARE mini-grant, and eight received registration fee subsidies of \$90 each thanks to a generous donation from George and Anne Bird as well as our other sponsors.

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 2021. 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 9, 2021.

No-Till Farming: a Possible Key to a Regenerative Future

by Tony Browne

As most of us mosey through an incredibly mild winter, one cannot help but think about what role climate change is playing. We might wonder what role we play? What role our farming practices play? Are we, as farmers, a part of the problem or a part of the solution?

Many farmers have found solace in no-till farming when facing their environmental impact. No-till farming is, simply, the practice of farming without ploughing the soil. No-till farming is nothing new. We have long understood frequent tillage compromises soil integrity. We see structural degradation which leads to soil erosion, nutrient run-off, and the release of carbon dioxide. Many farmers that have switched to no-till or incorporated some no-till into their systems have generally done so with soil structure and soil health in mind. Carbon sequestration may be a novel way to approach the discussion around no-till and regenerative farming.

Research still does not outline a clear path or the right way to utilize no-till methods for carbon sequestration. However, some signs seem to indicate there is potential in a multi-faceted approach that incorporates crop diversity, no-till, and a cover cropping system. Unfortunately, we likely

won't have concrete answers or a clear consensus from researchers. That's the nature of a system with two strong and differing ideologies.

The point is we need to continue to ask ourselves if we can do better with our own farming practices. Tillage can be done in ways to mitigate or even avoid all the above mentioned issues, but those choices often follow these questions. We can't stop asking ourselves these questions no matter what our system is. The climate will continue to change, so we must continue to proactively be involved asking the tough questions and compelling these ideas and conversations that will follow.

Tony Browne is the co-owner and founder of Highwater Farms LLC (2016). The farm focuses on the production of rare and historical flowers, produce, and fruits, with an additional emphasis on nutrition. Tony and his wife Sarah vend their farm wares at several farmers' markets in the Lansing area, as well as run both a flower and lettuce CSA. Tony was elected to the board in April, 2019.

Farmers—Familiar with the Real Organic Project?

Your customers would like to be. The involvement of the national government and big business in organics (and all that has meant) has brought several reactions from "Deep Organics" camps, one of which has been the creation of the [Real Organic Project](#) (ROP). It takes aim specifically at "organic" hydroponic and input-dependent confined animal operations. The ROP seeks to grow people's understanding of foundational organic values and practices. It offers an add-on label to USDA organic certification to recognize farms which follow truly

organic soil health and animal welfare practices; there is no paperwork involved, and there is no fee.



The logo for the Real Organic Project features the word "real" in a small, dark, sans-serif font above the word "Organic" in a large, bold, green, serif font. Below "Organic" is the word "project" in a smaller, dark, serif font.

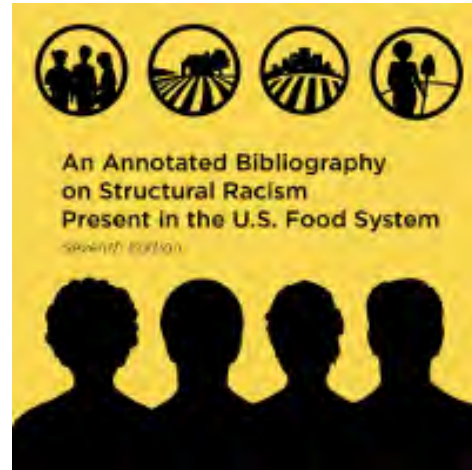
The fourth [ROP Symposium](#) will be hosted at Dartmouth, New Hampshire on April 3 and 4, 2020. Attendance is free for ROP certified farmers and farm crews. For information about travel and attendance scholarships, [contact Dave](#).

To read about what happened when members of the ROP attended and voiced their opinions about the certification practices of the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) at this year's annual board meeting, [have a look](#) at Dave's report. As he says, "The meeting was limited to CCOF members, and the CCOF leadership asked not to be recorded when they spoke. Their request sums up a big problem that the organic community faces. Trust is in short supply. Can we speak openly as a worldwide movement about our mistakes and challenges?" The fact that they're talking at all, and the rationale they give for continuing to certify hydroponic and confined animal feeding operations (!) make this important reading for anyone who cares about the future of organic in this country.

Expanded Annotated Bibliography on Structural Racism Now Available

The latest Annotated Bibliography on Structural Racism Present in the U.S. Food System (Seventh Edition) is now available from the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems; it contains 56 new annotated references, for a total of 250 publications and 29 videos, and is available at foodsystems.msu.edu/annotatedbib. Many of the new references are concerned with food sovereignty; in total, it deals with racism across the national system and in specific food system sectors. Available to all, this collection may be of particular use to food systems practitioners, policymakers, researchers, educators, scholars, and students. The references are also compiled in a [Zotero group library](#) to make it easier for users to access and cite the sources. Zotero is a free citation management software. For more information, contact Rich Pirog,

Center for Regional Food Systems,
rspirog@msu.edu.



What's New on the MOFFA Website

By Jessie Smith

The webpage is always being updated. Educational events, new internships, organic resources; all are added as they come to our attention. If you haven't had a chance to click over our way lately, here are some new items you may find interesting and will perhaps want to check out:

- If you use [greenhouse film](#) and have struggled with how to dispose of it, be sure to fill out the survey from Michigan Recycling Coalition. Wouldn't it be great to be able to recycle it?
- [Organic dry bean growers](#) will want to fill out a survey for the Cornell University Plant Breeding and Genetics Section. They are seeking input from organic and specialty dry bean growers on current growing practices, agronomic challenges, and needs for variety improvement.
- There is a new resource of note for farmers looking for land on our [Organic Resources page](#). The National Young Farmers Coalition has created a course on finding farmland and a "unique mortgage calculator designed to teach farmers about their financing options and creditworthiness when buying

farmland." These resources are free and also available in Spanish.

- Several [internship and job opportunities](#) have been posted this month, as we all start to plan for the next growing season. Farm interns and market managers/coordinators are needed in Clayton, Lansing, Kalamazoo, and the Detroit area.
 - As we near the end of conference season there are still many valuable [educational opportunities](#) in this region. From a farm safety course in Northern Michigan to the Indiana Small Farms Conference, most every subject is on the map. And if you feel like taking a trip beyond our region to Bozeman, Montana this spring, we have even included a link to the Soil Health Innovations Conference.
 - If you are looking for someone producing a certain crop or a fellow farmer in your area with experience to share, search through our [Farm Guide](#). For those of you that are listed in the Farm Guide, click over and read your listing to make sure it is up to date. ATTENTION: We will be publishing an updated paper version of the Farm Guide this spring.
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Farm Tours 2020

We are currently in the planning stages for farm tours in 2020. If you are interested in hosting one of these on your farm, please let us know: moffaorganic@gmail.com.

Push for Agricultural Plastics Recycling by the Michigan Recycling Coalition

Do you use Agricultural/Greenhouse and/or Marine Film Plastics or know a business owner/landowner that does? It would be great to see recycling programs for these products available throughout the State. This is a well-needed program that would

be able to divert a great deal of material from being burnt onsite, stockpiled long-term, or sent off to the landfills. Please take a few minutes to [complete this survey](#) if you use these plastics, and/or forward this information onto those that you know who do!

AmeriHemp Seeks Organic Farmers for Futures Contracts Program

[AmeriHemp](#) is an organic hemp farm in Gladwin, Michigan owned by a father and son who are 4th and 5th generation farmers. They have started a futures contracts program for organic hemp growers in Michigan. Through this program farmers can purchase hemp seed from AmeriHemp and also get a purchase order for their entire crop. They need about 5,000 acres of hemp biomass this year to run

through their processing facility. "Our program would not only help farmers by giving them a guaranteed purchase price of their crops, but also ensure that we are getting local, quality organic biomass for our products." If you are interested in this opportunity, contact Sara Woodruff by [email](#) or via phone [(912) 659-6370] or good old-fashioned mail (4950 M61, Gladwin, MI 48624).

Policy Corner

Policy Reminders and Items of Note:

- With the new year comes the appearance of the USDA's new bioengineered label. This is only one of four ways that manufacturers can choose to notify the shopping public that there are GMO ingredients in a product, as they are required to do. Note the change of GMO to bioengineered. Will the Non-GMO Project now need to change their label?
- In their continued work to gain recognition of the role of agriculture in the mitigation of climate change, the Members of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) are inviting individual farmers and ranchers to sign on in support of the Farmer Letter on Climate Change Solutions in Agriculture. The letter will be sent to Congressional members and leaders in the USDA in the spring of 2020. The letter does not endorse specific policy proposals but broadly calls for investments in agricultural solutions to the climate crisis, including soil health, farmland conservation, on-farm renewable energy, sustainable livestock production, and more. [Sign the NSAC letter here](#).
- The NSAC also coordinated a "national comment campaign to make sure that farmers (and the broader public) [had] an opportunity to weigh in [on] the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Interim Final Rule." The rule, as released by NRCS, "fails to prioritize soil health and climate resilience, while also creating a new, unfair payment limit loophole." The last day for comments was February 18th but if you want to see what it is all about visit this link to the [NSAC's Blog](#).
- The National Organic Standards Board has [5 new members](#). The newly elected will serve 5-year terms and fill 2 handler, 1 environmental protection and resource conservation, 1 retailer, and 1 farmer seat.

- In the same vein, the Organic Farmers Association is welcoming a new policy director. Read about Patty Lovera on [OFA's website](#).
- The struggle to remove the approval of hydroponics from and to emphasize the prominence of soil in organic agriculture continues. At a recent board meeting of the California Certified Organic Farmers, the role of CCOF in advancing the acceptance of certified organic hydroponics was discussed, and defended. The main point of that defense was that the NOP required it, and in a now sad truth of the world of certification, if these operations do not continue to get certification they will sue the offending certifier. This makes changes to the approval of hydroponics difficult to say the least though several reputable certifiers have already decided to not provide certification. The CCOF board meeting was well attended by several farmers who have been involved with

the organization since it's beginnings and who echo the current CEO's statement that, "To address the climate crisis today, we must build on what we know works. Organic farming, with its tremendous capacity to pull carbon out of the atmosphere and store it in soils, is a known solution." However, meeting this statement may prove difficult as the mushrooming of hydroponics is now pushing out the soil-based farmers that were in a position to do this; but other avenues are open to them, such as integrity-in-animal-welfare and organic hydroponics labeling, both of which will improve the position of the soil-based farmers by adding clarity for consumers. This is an important discussion that continues and deserves the attention of all, growers and eaters. Read the [Real Organic Project's post](#) about the CCOF board meeting, and help spread the word.

From the Editor

It is spring once again; for those who work the land (personally and professionally), it is the time of year to be getting back work. Well, if you had any time off to begin with! But even if your winter months were busy as well, there is nothing like being out of doors when spring is on its way. Every plant and animal, piece of sun and piece of soil, breath of wind and glimpse of the bright blue sky seems to be stirring itself up and getting into motion. It is time to get back to the essentials, and so I am personally looking forward to this year's series of Michigan Organic Connections newsletters. IFOAM's principles of Health, Ecology, Fairness, and Care are to be the themes; these are the components of true organic farming. No matter the label you prefer to identify with, it is essential that each of these has its place within the framework. It is time to see, once again, if

we can successfully realize these goal with the soil, in the marketplace, and (perhaps the greatest challenge) within a society that includes those for whom the word "organic" is nothing but seven letters put together for their advantage; some who claim to engage in organic agriculture don't need these four principles to guide them. All they need is the empty word. So really on all fronts of the organic arena, it is time to get back to basics and back to work.

— Leah Smith

Leah Smith is the MOFFA Newsletter Editor and a Michigan State alumna (B.S., Crop and Soil Sciences). She works at her family's farm, Nodding Thistle, and is a freelance writer.

MOFFA News

Michigan Organic Connections Newsletter – As always, we are interested in featuring new voices in the newsletter. If you are interested in contributing, or if you have a suggestion about future content or can recommend someone who would be interested in contributing, please [contact Leah](#), our newsletter editor. 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 – MOFFA is now accepting Sponsorship from organizations and individuals who are willing to demonstrate their support of our mission with a financial contribution. Please take a moment to view the logos of those who have already pledged their support at the end of this message, and let them know you appreciate their sponsorship. If you are interested in becoming a sponsor for 2020, 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. Join online at <http://www.moffa.net/membership.html> or call 248-262-6826.

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