



Michigan Organic Connections

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A Message from the Chair

Reflection on Perspective

For my final "Message from the Chair" for 2020, I decided to reflect and share ideas addressing the topic of "Perspective." Perspective is defined as a particular attitude toward something or a way of seeing or regarding it. It may be a partial view. A true understanding of the relative importance of things often requires a sense of proportion.

I have anticipated writing about the importance of perspective for some time, in part because it has been so important to how I approach learning. Understanding perspective, the ability to see things in more than one way based on personal experience and knowledge, to me is one of the more important concepts for working together with people of diverse experience and knowledge. I embrace the challenge of being able to look at things from another person's perspective. How we see things is influenced by our experience and knowledge, so our perspective often changes over time as our knowledge and day to day activities change. In life, we may try to separate ideas into black or white, or fact and fiction, but



experience teaches us that there often is grey area that can be addressed as “perspectives.”

My experience of organic farming and gardening over the past 25 years has been one of change and development. Like many others introduced to organic farming as a new experience later in life, I started with the idea of how an organic label could increase the economic value, worth, or sale price of food crops and livestock. As I read more about the history of organic farming and gardening, I learned about the connection of soil health and soil biology to plant health and animal health, including human health. As I attended my first organic conferences I learned from organic practitioners about the importance of respect for natural systems, and managing crops and livestock with locally available and on-farm resources rather than synthetic, energy-intensive, manufactured products. As I visited organic farms, I learned about the economy and food security aspects of local food systems. As I started gardening and farming with methods approved for organic certification, I learned from my own experience how a variety of strategies can work depending on the situation.

My past 40 years of career and personal life have been largely guided by the intention of seeking to understand diverse perspectives and how and why people have them. I practice starting out by accepting a person’s “truth,” even if it is not consistent with my own, and trying to understand why they have their perspective and how I can find common ground with my knowledge base. Often I can verify or validate the observation or experience of another person, and offer an alternative explanation that puts the observation in a different context. The other person is not wrong. Their knowledge base requires them to explain what they see based on what they know. I may “know” something different that explains the observation in a different way.

An early part of the process is to first discuss the observation and to make sure we are seeing the same thing. Sometimes we are, and sometimes not. If someone asks me what is wrong with a particular plant, for example, I share what I see. Often I find that the person is seeing something quite different that concerns them. What they see may be a small or insignificant concern to me, and likewise they may not have seen what I see as a significant problem. The observation phase is open to the variance of perspective, and through this first meaningful dialogue phase it is possible to discuss and come to common ground about the observable issue or issues. That common ground might be agreeing that there is not just one, but multiple issues that need to

be considered and addressed. This step might have to include some testing or analysis to see things not visible to human eyesight. Sometimes there is not a test or analysis available to measure what we want to measure, so we can agree to “speculate” about possibilities.

A second phase of problem-solving discussion and investigation involves exploring the possible “whys?” or explanations that can put the observations in the context of current knowledge. Finding common ground may be more difficult in this phase because of diverse experiences and knowledge backgrounds. Our diverse life experiences may result in different explanations for the possible cause of an observed condition.

Science is often defined or explained as a technique of problem solving and seeking truth. The definition I was taught early on, particularly for the definition of a scientist, also includes the essential importance of pairing the investigation and conclusion drawing process with having a “great body of knowledge” to provide context and guidance. A detective or researcher that knows problem solving techniques and how to ask questions, but lacks extensive knowledge, is not a scientist under this definition. A researcher who wants to genetically modify the DNA of a bacterium for some purpose without considering the possible outcomes, risks, and unintended consequences in a very broad and deep context is not a scientist.

The nature of my career has allowed me to test ideas that I learned and have taught to others as truth or fact. I have had the opportunity to experimentally demonstrate that ideas I was taught and taught to others are not true when viewed in a new light. I have had to “unlearn” ideas/facts that I was taught as true. In these cases, I could usually speculate why previous researchers or observers came to the conclusion they did based on their experience, observations, and knowledge base, and why I was now coming to and offering a new conclusion. I was able to see the situation from a different perspective with additional information.

As a person who was taught to rely on evidence as a foundation for perspective, I had to accept that there is more than one way to see things. I had to cultivate the ability to put myself in the place of the other, and ask what are they seeing and why? I also had to learn to value wisdom that comes from personal experience.

Recent times and events have given each of us the opportunity to experience just how widely diverse perspectives of organic farming and the human

condition can be. Recent times and events have led me to consider addressing something in my reflection on the importance of perspective, that I originally did not consider. I feel the need to differentiate a line or boundary between respecting perspective and differentiating “delusion.” A definition of delusion is a peculiar or individual belief or impression that is firmly maintained despite being contradicted by what is generally accepted as reality or rational argument.

Seeing things based on your life experience and condition does not include a right or opportunity to perversely, knowingly, and recklessly mislead, or “lie” with no credible basis of information or knowledge. This includes a responsibility to not repeat something that we heard or read that was presented as fact, but is likely a delusion. We are each responsible for checking the information we encounter and making a concerted effort to test the validity of statements before accepting, repeating, or sharing them. Lying is not the same as having a different perspective or alternative understanding. Wishing something to be true and repeating it over and over again without evidence is lying. Lying can be very destructive to individuals, families, tribes, cultures, and society. A definition of the noun “lie” is an intentionally false statement, used in reference to a situation involving deception or founded in a mistaken impression.

I recognize the need for caution when it comes to differentiating between perspective and delusion. I respect that new ideas, that might initially be identified as a “delusion,” may eventually be shown as a new perspective or accepted reality.

While I am a proponent of exploring a personal “gut” feeling or intuition, we are each responsible for considering the risks associated with sharing our intuition before first testing the validity and possible unintended consequences of embracing that intuition. This requires critical thinking and evaluation, a characteristic that seems to need more emphasis in our education system and culture. I was taught to clearly identify ideas as “speculation” or “proposition” when introducing a new idea with limited validated observations of support.

Organic farming and gardening requires critical thinking, knowledge, experience, and courage. Observing our natural system and how it works, and then using those principles to identify management practices, is more difficult and requires more critical thinking than using a poison to eliminate something we do not understand. Addressing soil health, droughts, flooding, extreme weather, food security, and unexpected or previously not experienced insect

infestations or pathogen infections all require critical thinking and some context of knowledge and experience. Diverse biological systems (nature) work within conditions of harmony and synchronicity. Division and unbalanced competition, along with monocultures, lead to weakness. Critical thinking usually requires team work and communication that can rely on diverse experiences, knowledge bases, and perspectives.

There are some perspectives or ideas in life on which we may jointly conclude that we can or must “agree to disagree.” There are other perspectives or ideas that we must challenge and not acquiesce to “agree to disagree.” To know which is which and what is what requires critical thinking, knowledge, and experience. To speak up and challenge a lie requires courage and care. Through meaningful dialogue, however, common ground can be discovered and used to build a foundation for future progress.

I know from personal experience and observation that there are clearly severe limitations and risks from overthinking or over-intellectualizing our decisions and daily experience. It is also painfully obvious and equally dangerous to eliminate critical thinking and have an anti-intellectual approach. Our responsibility is to find the balance between these two extremes. We need to talk together to seek the difference between perspective and delusion, and be willing and able to help others to seek and find the difference.

Principles of Perspective

- Most ideas have some value.
- Many ideas are incomplete.
- Any idea, no matter how good, can become pathological if taken to an extreme.
- Seek balance in thought and actions.

Side note: If you are looking for a good read for the short solstice days that incorporates some of these ideas, I recently read the book “[The Overstory](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/12/02/magazine/tree-communication-mycorrhiza.html)” which in part shares how trees in a healthy forest work together. The story resonated with my inner tree hugger/nature lover. Some of the ideas in the book can be found in this recent New York Times article: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/12/02/magazine/tree-communication-mycorrhiza.html>.

—John A. Biernbaum

Dr. John A. Biernbaum is finishing 35 years as a Professor of Horticulture at MSU at the end of 2020. He is looking forward to spending more time at Pear Tree Farm growing

food, flowers and herbs, being healthy and helping others find health. He has been a member of MOFFA for over 15

years, and served as MOFFA's Chair from 2015 to 2018, a position he is now returning to.

C-A-R-E

By John Hooper

Care—where do these simple 4 letters lead your thoughts? Perhaps it was one of the first words to elicit a subjective, perceptive response in the beginning of your world as a young being! Affection, support, worry, diligence, courtesy—which direction? When first conceptualizing the word in the context presented by IFOAM, precaution and responsibility stood out. Which in a literal sense conveys the message defining this Organic principle. The entire summation of this fourth principle is produced here in the newsletter, articulated completely with much wisdom.

As the word Care began to occupy an inordinate amount of time on the subconscious; the breadth and scope of this most common of words was amazing. What word in our language has a more significant meaning in our lives? It seems to flow out from itself to become a sensory experience. Just to enunciate it conjures an aura of lightness, warmth, and well-being. Care touches everything.

There can be little doubt that as a species, we humans are at a critical tipping point in this Anthropocene era on the planet; and obviously not just for ourselves but for all life riding on spaceship earth. There are no guideposts or user manuals as we navigate a pandemic and an unprecedented, decades in the making, ecological cataclysm. And we all Care, even the naysayers. (I've often found it mildly disingenuous when someone responds to a situation with the "I don't care" phrase, for if they truly did not, no response would be necessary!)

We, farmers, gardeners, and eaters, tenders of Mother Earth's bounty and beneficiaries of this life-sustaining gift, are aware of an obligation to Care. But do we Care enough and do we translate that Care beyond the organic principle?

An awareness of the necessity to provide a more accentuated level of Care should be evident with one's increased access to knowledge. Those of the "fortunate ones" for whom life's path has not been strewn with landmines can devise ways to do more within the context of daily life. Many, many are self-sacrificing, some to the point these last months to Care enough that they have made the ultimate sacrifice with their lives.

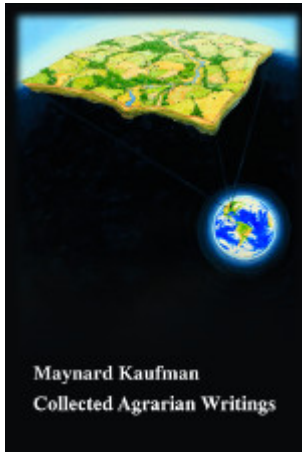
Assume that anyone reading this has a serious connection and love for growing, distributing, sharing, and appreciating food, fiber, and flora—are we the vanguard to saving (is that too presumptuous?) our world? We tend the land with a caring touch to give example and we teach as we grow and we grow as we learn. Our voice and concern and Care can arise above the din because we have avenues to reach the world stage. People listen to those with their hands in the soil and their time spent distributing sustenance to others. We need to use this platform we have created to show others how to Care as we do, not solely to rescue the planet but to emancipate one another.

This diatribe may be an exercise in self-motivation, but there is a strong belief to Care holding the key to our survival. Real Care has no downside. Just adding the word to our daily thoughts will amaze us as to the small tasks that make a difference. Each of course will view the word through a different lens but the collective actions will reverberate... lifting the level of consciousness. Define it as you determine best—but keep the word present on the tip of your tongue and most assuredly in your heart. All the world is grateful.

Care for one another and Care for yourself. Fairness and Care – how righteous and compassionate will our legacy be?

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.

Maynard Kaufman's Latest Book Available



The essay below by Maynard Kaufman was written in 2014, and is included in his latest book. This collection of essays, titled *Collected Agrarian Writings*, is available through [Amazon](#). With pieces dating from the late 1960's to the present, there is much in it that reflects a concern for the principles of Fairness and Care, as does the following essay.

The New Argument for Tree Crops

By Maynard Kaufman

In 1929, J. Russell Smith, a geographer with the USDA, published a book called *Tree Crops: A Permanent Agriculture*. Smith's book began with the old argument for tree crops: trees, as perennials with



deep roots that hold the soil, would reduce, or even eliminate, soil erosion. Almost all of our traditional food crops, such as corn, wheat, or oats, are annual grasses that put their energy into producing seed, but their roots are barely big enough to make the plant grow unless competing weeds are removed. This is done

by cultivation, by tillage, so that the soil is loose and subject to erosion. On rolling land the result has been deep gullies and the loss of topsoil. Because they focus on producing seed, annual grains have provided abundant food so that the human population could grow, but they are destroying the soil on which these crops could continue to grow. Thus, Smith argued, "corn, the killer of continents, is one of the worst enemies of the human future." We are beginning to see that corn is another four-letter word.

Smith's argument, and his book, had been ignored for over forty years, partly because corn is now increasingly raised with no-till or reduced tillage methods using herbicides to control weeds. Corn seeds can be purchased from Monsanto that are biologically engineered to make corn plants resistant to the herbicide it sells. The long-term ecological effects of genetic engineering and herbicide use are not yet fully known, but we already know that some weeds are evolving resistance to herbicides. Now, with the market for ethanol, corn has become a profitable monoculture.

Around the mid-seventies, along came permaculture, a restatement of a permanent agriculture dependent on tree crops. Many articulations of permaculture, however, are limited to the homestead scale, producing for home use rather than for sale. This is illustrated by Ben Falk's beautiful book of 2013, *The Resilient Farm and Homestead*, and it is especially important in a suburban American context where 30 to 40 million acres of lawn could be converted to tree crops.

In *Tree Crops*, however, Smith expressed the hope that tree crops could replace annual grains to feed the world, and he took pains to compare the yield from tree crops to conventional annual grains. Smith's hope is embodied in a new book called *Restoration Agriculture: Real-World Permaculture for Farmers*, by Mark Shepard. In this book, also from 2013, Shepard describes how an

agriculture based on a polyculture of perennials can emerge on a worn-out corn farm in a hilly part of Wisconsin. He shows that when different sized species of trees and shrubs are planted next to each other, as in wide hedgerows, there is often an “overyield,” higher than what a single species could produce in the same area. Shepard lists the perennials that thrive in the oak savanna biome, which includes our area: nut bearing trees, apples, hazelnuts, stone fruits, cane fruit, and down to mushrooms and grasses for grazing livestock. All can produce food for humans as well as feed for livestock.

The new argument for tree crops is emerging in the context of a changing climate. Like other permaculture books now being published, the two mentioned above are very consciously written with an eye on climate change. A warmer climate, with more storms and uncertain weather patterns, will require changes in how food is raised. With their deeper roots perennials can withstand droughts or violent rainstorms which would otherwise increase soil erosion. And they can slow the process of climate change as they sequester more carbon in the soil. Trees also thrive with less tillage so that less carbon dioxide is emitted.



The industrial food production system emerged and grew in a time of cheap fossil fuel energy, and it will most likely resist a shift to tree crops in order to preserve its capital investment. But as the cost of

fossil fuel continues to rise due to shortages, or if a tax on carbon to curtail global warming makes the cost of fuel unaffordable, the industrial food production system will change. And if this happens in a time of continuing economic recession and growing unemployment, workers would be available for planting and harvesting tree crops.

In our competitive society, however, it will be the greater yield and profitability of tree crops that will motivate farmers to begin giving up annual grains. The high yields of corn in past years will be hard to maintain as the corn belt suffers more droughts in a time of global warming and needs more costly fertilizer. Tree crops, on the other hand, can reach for more moisture with their deep roots and collect more sunlight as branches reach higher. They can increase the amount of farmland with less costly equipment as they are planted on hills that would erode by tillage for annual crops. By leafing out earlier and holding leaves later, they extend the growing season. Regular farm livestock is compatible with tree crops and can be fenced in to consume the various products in-season. This is in contrast to the current system in which annual grains are shipped to confinement livestock operations. Above all, tree crops can help to preserve a healthy environment.

Maynard Kaufman was a founding member of both Organic Growers of Michigan and MOFFA as well as a professor of Religion and Environmental Studies at Western Michigan University, and ran the School of Homesteading at his farm in Bangor during the 1970s and '80s. He was an organic farmer from 1971 to 2003, when he retired and sold most of his land to three young organic farmers.

Can You Be Fair?

By Jessica Smith

Can you be “fair” to a person 3000 miles away? How far does your “care” reach? This year has been difficult for many, but in some locations the chain of events brought about by a pandemic and the shutdown of economies as we know them has brought unbelievable realities. As grocery stores began to run out of products, suppliers turned to different sources to try to meet the demand. No place has this series of events been more easily observed than in the supply of beef. Shut downs in American meatpacking houses lead to shortages

from “normal” channels while too few, small slaughter houses were overwhelmed with orders on a local scale. The food was here but we lacked a system that would get it to the people who wanted it. Therefore, to meet the American demand for beef, without going outside an obviously flawed system, suppliers turned to imports from other countries. In one of those countries the pursuit of meeting that demand has come at too high a price. Nicaragua reached the position of third highest importer of beef to the U.S. this year. This has led to the expansion

of cattle ranches into lands commonly used by communities of indigenous peoples and in one tragic instance homes were burned and four men were killed as indiscriminately as the trees that were being cut down and as automatically as the cattle they were replaced with will be slaughtered for export to a grocery store near you ([see the original PBS NewsHour story here](#)). Will the remaining people be able to stand up to armed men the next time? Or will they acquiesce to leave their land simply so they won't be killed? This is not the only country where small scale farmers are being pushed to the edge of existence. In Peru, the cradle of the potato, where the peasant farmers provide 70% of the country's food, the lockdowns and resulting weakening of the economy has many of those peasant farmers wondering if it will be worth planting again. Aid from a government that defines profitable farming by area (at least 20 hectares), goes to just 3% of their farms, the exporters ([Franklin Briceño Associated Press](#)).

These are just two stories to emerge this year demonstrating that globally, there is still room for improvement in our relationships to each other and our environment, and that government still hasn't grasped the importance of locally produced food, irrelevant of scale. From turning the tables for those who have been abandoned by community and agency to prioritizing an agriculture that improves our environment and strengthens a fragile food system, it is clear that there are opportunities for improvement everywhere you look.

Our fourth newsletter of 2020 (rather than focusing on our Organic Intensives topics, which sadly we did not require this year) has been changed into a second opportunity to address the IFOAM principles of Fairness and Care. How appropriate that a newsletter centered around Fairness and Care should occur during this season. A season of giving and sharing. A time when we are concerned with bringing happiness and joy to our family. Also, a time when the world (in the northern hemisphere) is actually turning towards its darkest point, a physical manifestation of what this unforeseen year has been

for many. Another aspect of this yearly event, the darkest days, is not only the opportunity to appreciate the closeness and comfort of family and home but also a chance to draw inward, to meditate, and to absorb what we have seen in the past year and use it to grow in the next.

As you drop your spare change from a food purchase into a red bucket, remember that where you dropped the first part can also make a difference in the world. Buy local. Support use of Country of Origin Labeling (COOL). Look for those little labels that say Fair Trade. Look for farms that are Food Justice Certified (FYI – [OEFFA is the newest Food Justice Certification certifier](#)). Don't forget the livestock. We can be fair to them, too (<https://foodanimalconcernstrust.org/food-labels/>).

The IFOAM Principles were developed to guide choices made in organic agriculture, but each one of them relates back to mankind and the importance of maintaining the health of the systems we live in, environmental and societal. As you turn back towards the light this holiday season remember how large your "family" is and how capable you are to bring that health, ecology, fairness, and care to people you will never see. The experiences of this past year were unexpected, unplanned for, and unwanted, but have brought to light many new lessons. Though we will be glad to move on, don't let this opportunity slip away with the turning of the calendar. Does the story of how COVID affected us end here or does it start here?

Jessica Smith is a long time member of MOFFA. Raised on her family's organic farm in Michigan, she attended Michigan State University and completed a Bachelor's of Science in Crop and Soil Sciences and a Masters in Entomology. She has recently moved to Indiana where she continues to raise chickens and garden organically. Her close ties to Michigan keep her an active member of MOFFA.

Seed to Kitchen Collaborative



Started in Wisconsin by Julie Dawson at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the [Seed to Kitchen Collaborative](#) connects plant breeders focused on organic systems to

the end users of their products; farmers and chefs. In this way the project seeks to focus on the characteristics that are important in small scale, local food systems such as flavor and fresh market quality. Now with funding from [Organic Valley – Farmers Advocating for Organic](#), the project has expanded to Michigan at the North Farm, part of MSU's Upper Peninsula Research and Extension

Center. This unique project starts in the fields where the growers rate the selected trial varieties on traits such as disease resistance and germination then moves to the cooperating chefs for evaluation of flavor and desirability. The [data collected](#) from the 2019 growing season and the previous seasons, is available on the Seed to Kitchen Collaborative website, and are presented in a way that growers and chefs can view useable results. (Photo of

broccoli heads at Nodding Thistle. Photo used with permission)

For a more detailed report on this project see the MSUE publication at: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/seed-to-kitchen-collaborative-comes-to-michigan>

Life in the Stable

By David Kline

[This piece is being reprinted with permission, and was written by David Kline a few years ago. I wanted to include it here for a few reasons. Firstly, it is about winter, the season before us. Secondly, it is charming and very real, as David's writing always is. Thirdly, this newsletter is about Fairness and Care, and animals are included in that equation. "Life in the Stable" is a little snapshot of one way of farming and of life in which the two are one and the same. Animals are almost an extension of the family. Decisions about farming aren't just business decisions, separate from the rest of one's life. Farming is life.]

We are at that time of the year when the animals assembled in the barn remind us of the manger scene so long ago. While perhaps not displaying the love and companionship of the animals in that little Judean inn stable, ours have gotten along reasonably well, except for the winter we had a goat running with the dairy herd.

The pygmy goat, Bill, was bought as a kid by our son and daughter-in-law sometime during the summer for their children's enjoyment. As things tend to turn on farms, at least ours, Bill grew into adulthood and became a part of the cowherd. And over the course of the winter he became my pet.



At that time our herd was kept in loose housing; very loose I used to call it and it took tons of straw to keep them clean. It was always my job to bed the shed (threshed straw) every evening and morning. Before our children reached adulthood they took turns helping me. Each had a turn for the full winter. But by the time Bill came to live with us our children were grown and I

was back to doing it on my own, that is, until Bill became my friend.

Up until Christmas Bill remained aloof; while he followed me around with my eight-tined-fork full of straw, he stayed a good ten feet away. I longed to pet him and not until I got down on hands and knees and we looked at each other eye to eye, did he come closer. Finally he got the courage to nibble my hat brim and then he allowed me to scratch his head and our friendship was sealed.

For the rest of the winter, he was always by my side, tight against my leg, as we strawed the forty by eighty-foot loafing area. The goat was my guardian. If a cow got too close or in our way, he would butt her in the ribs and he would remember for several days to give the transgressor a head butt or two. I found out that goats not only get mad but they get even.

As the winter progressed, Bill became a bit quarrelsome with the other animals in the barn. He jumped into the feed boxes of the calves and horses, then leapt out and darted between the horses' legs and was long gone by the time the Belgian's hoof lashed out. He enjoyed harassing the cats and dogs, especially while they were drinking milk. If the dogs gave chase, he hopped up on the box stall wall and with those strange yellow eyes stared down the dogs.

Sometime the next spring or summer Bill found a new home and left our farm. While we don't have a goat to liven up this winter's barn, it is far from a dull place. Cats come and go, a new Jack Russell—with the help of the grandchildren—now has run of the milking stable and keeps the cats annoyed. All but one—Old White, our best rat-killing cat; she is fearless and if the dog gets too close she gives him a good clawing and that's that. The stable din settles and the barn becomes a peaceable kingdom for a while.

Winter barns are wonderful with their animal smells and sounds and as an Alberta Clipper bears down on us it is nice to have the beasts comfortable and cared for and as we leave, close the doors against the arctic blast. It is akin to quietly closing the door of the bedroom after having covered the child with a warm blanket and we all settle in for a long winter's night.

David Kline is a naturalist, writer, and semi-retired farmer. He and his wife, daughter, and son-in-law farm 150 acres and operate a 50-cow organic dairy near Mt. Hope, Ohio. David and his wife, Elsie, have five children, all married and all are involved with organic dairy farming. David is the author of four books, Great Possessions (1990), Scratching the Woodchuck (1997), Letters From Larksong (2010), and The Round of a Country Year (2017). They also publish Farming Magazine, a quarterly publication supporting small-scale family farming.

A Multiplicity of Mulches

By Dan Rossman

[This article contains information presented by Andrew Mefferd during his 2020 OI presentation this past January. The use of mulches is primary in many organic and natural farming systems, including (of course) no-till. In a newsletter focusing on the common environment and protecting the health of people now and in the future, what would be more fitting than to spend some time reading about the useful practice of using mulches?]

Two methods that fall within the non-biodegradable mulches that are removed for production are solarization and occultation. Solarization uses clear plastic. It works quickly (24 hours – a few days) during the warm and sunny part of the year to kill (bake) weeds. Occultation uses opaque plastic such



as landscape fabric or plastic silage covers to smother the weeds. It works more slowly (months needed) but can be used most any

time. Both require some planning and require large tarps or pieces of plastic. Be sure to secure them in place to avoid the wind from removing them for you. After they are removed there may still be a need to suppress weeds during the growing season with an applied organic mulch.

Mulch grown in place involves the use of cover crops. The method that has drawn a fair amount of interest is the roller/crimper method. This method has been researched and demonstrated by Jeff

Moyer at Rodale and also studied and put into practice by others including the organic team at MSU's Kellogg Biological Station. One common utilization of the roller crimper method is to plant a cereal rye cover crop in the fall. The rye is left in the spring until it reaches the head stage and then it is roller/crimped and no-till seeded directly to soybeans. This requires a lot of planning, the right equipment, and correct timing. A good cover crop stand is also necessary. For more information a book by Jeff Moyer titled, *Organic No-Till Farming*, is suggested.

The third category utilizes mulches that are left in place during production. This might be more familiar and common among organic producers. Typically, either a plastic mulch is rolled out or a deep organic mulch is applied. Organic mulches could include straw, compost or cardboard. Actually, mulches can be most anything that are cheap or free organic by products available near you. Be sure to check with your organic certifier to make certain it is allowable before you use it. Organic mulches can be applied quickly and planted on the same day. Applying mulches could also be time consuming depending on your methods. Weed suppression can be excellent and the organic mulches will break down and contribute organic matter to the soil. Light colored mulches may cool the soil.

(Photo of potatoes mulched with hay at Nodding Thistle used with permission)

Dan Rossman is an organic farmer and retired extension specialist. He has been on the MOFFA board since 2015.

Fairness and Care: IFOAM Principles

The IFOAM principle of Fairness:

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



Fairness is characterized by equity, respect, justice, and stewardship of the shared world, both among people and in their relations to other living beings. This principle emphasizes that those involved in organic agriculture should conduct human relationships in a manner that ensures fairness at all levels and to all parties—farmers, workers, processors, distributors, traders, and consumers. Organic agriculture should provide everyone involved with a good quality of life, and contribute to food sovereignty and reduction of poverty. It aims to produce a sufficient supply of good quality food and other products. This principle insists that animals should be provided with the conditions and opportunities of life that accord with their physiology, natural behavior, and well-being.

The IFOAM principle of 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.



Organic Agriculture is a living and dynamic system that responds to internal and external demands and conditions. Practitioners of organic agriculture can enhance efficiency and increase productivity, but this should not be at the risk of jeopardizing health and well-being. Consequently, new technologies need to be assessed and existing methods reviewed. Given the incomplete understanding of ecosystems and agriculture, care must be taken. This principle states that precaution and responsibility are the key concerns in management, development, and technology choices in organic agriculture. Science is necessary to ensure that organic agriculture is healthy, safe, and ecologically sound. However, scientific knowledge alone is not sufficient. Practical experience, accumulated wisdom, and traditional and indigenous knowledge offer valid solutions, tested by time.

Policy Corner

The presidential transition is underway and the news that Tom Vilsack will resume his role as secretary of agriculture, the position he held under the Obama Administration, has reached us. This was a bit of a surprise as the two lead contenders were thought to be former Senator Heidi Heitkamp from North Dakota and Ohio Representative Marcia Fudge. Fudge was being hailed as a proponent of progressive views in agriculture and had been endorsed in a letter from a group of agricultural organizations, including our neighbors at OEFFA. However, the Ohio Representative has instead been tapped for Housing and Urban Development while the world of agriculture has been anointed once again with a man from the other side of the same old coin.

The National Organic Coalition (NOC) has also sent a letter to the transition team detailing priorities to “put organic agriculture back on solid footing now and in future years.” The priorities they have pointed out include enforcing the Origin of Livestock rule,

finalizing the Strengthening Organic Enforcement Rule, and restoring full reimbursement rates to the Organic Certification Cost Share Program, a change that was just made this past August. The full letter can be found on line at:

<https://app.box.com/s/nr1tf7igrxh3k6k9j7p9vv7uu6iy03mi>

The NOC has also endorsed the [Justice for Black Farmers Act](#). Introduced by Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) the act is intended to end discrimination in the USDA and redress losses of land and income to black farmers that have occurred as the result of those discriminatory practices in the past. The act has also been endorsed by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) and many other partner groups. More Information can be found on [Senator Booker's website](#).

On the physical and environmental side of agriculture, dicamba has been approved for use for

5 more years by the EPA. The increase in glyphosate resistant weeds in soybean and cotton production has increasingly caused conventional producers to turn to dicamba resistant seeds and the chemical for control. However, extremely volatile, the resulting off site damage caused by chemical drift, was significant and broad spread enough to cause the EPA to limit use in the 2017 and 2018. Now the

name brand chemicals that were canceled have been re approved with control measures meant to reduce off site damage. The EPA's reasons for this decision can be read in their press release here:

<https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-announces-2020-dicamba-registration-decision>

See our Website!

If you haven't been to our website lately, here's what you have missed:

Researchers at Virginia Tech and North Carolina State University are assessing the impact of COVID-19 on farmers markets nationwide. They are seeking input from farmers market managers and vendors on business practices implemented in response to COVID-19. If you have 10 minutes to spare, please [fill out their survey](#).

[Educational opportunities](#) are added weekly. As many conferences will be occurring virtually this year, you can enjoy the networking and sharing of information without the hassle of travel in winter weather. This season the [OEFFA conference](#), the [Real Organic Symposium](#), the [Growing Stronger Collaborative Conference](#), are all online. Many other webinars are also available online and often if you register you can access a recording afterwards too.

If you are looking for a job, Eden Foods might have a position for you. Checkout our [Employment and Internships page](#) to see what they are looking for. The Can-Do Kitchen of Kalamazoo also recently posted a vacancy.

If in this world of virtual conferences and online meetings, you are also searching for web based information sources, be sure to look at our [Organic Resources](#) page. The topics cover organic practices, legal and business issues, certification, and many others. Even if you aren't looking for a resource in particular, take a scroll through and tell us what we might be missing. We will happily accept suggestions.

Remember to come back to our page often as we work to build a stronger resource for the Michigan organic farming community of consumers, growers, and educators.

Real Organic Symposium

Please look into attending this upcoming event! We're excited to attend and for you to hear these interviews with these advocates for soil health and organic farmers this January at the Real Organic Project 2021 Virtual Symposium!



Don't miss their limited release compilation of interviews and real-time gathering of over 60 prominent organic farmers, scientists, and climate activists who hope to answer "Can real organic farming be saved?"

Who else is speaking? Al Gore, Vandana Shiva, Paul Hawken, Alice Waters, Dan Barber, Paul Muller, Leah Penniman, Allan Savory, Chanowk Yisrael, Bill McKibben, Jennifer Taylor, and of course - a LOT of farmers. Plus networking breakouts and panelists to present LIVE each week!

All funds raised through this symposium further the work of the Real Organic Project to offer their add-on certification to USDA certified farms at

no cost so join us January because #WeAreRealOrganic and you are too!

Learn More Here: <https://www.moffa.net/educational-opportunities.html#ROPsym>

Ready to buy tickets? Use this link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/real-organic-project-virtual-symposium-can-real-organic-farming-be-saved-tickets-123691000111?aff=ROP2021PARTNER&afu=121478106697>

OEFFA Mentorship Program is Back in Michigan!

The window is now open to apply to take part in the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association



(OEFFA) Mentorship Program. Through the partnering of experienced and rookie farmers, this program helps those new to farming achieve such goals as scaling up production, developing a farm business plan, transitioning to organic

production, improving marketing, and any additional areas the team wishes to tackle. Mentorships last for eight months and require monthly communication and at least one physical visit. Placement not guaranteed; partnerships assigned based on mentee needs and mentor expertise (as well as geographic proximity), so matches are not always possible. Modest fee required from mentee, and honorarium paid to mentor. Applications are available online. [Learn more](#), and let's get sharing!

From the Editor

The two IFOAM principles of Fairness and Care make a second appearance as we wind up another year of Michigan Organic Connections newsletters. And what a year it has been! This shuffling of themes, I have to admit, is partly due to the cancellation of the MOFFA OI's that will sadly not be held this coming January (and so didn't require having a newsletter dedicated to them). But, on the other hand, don't these principles really deserve two newsletters? I was very pleased with the articles we were able to assemble that highlight these ideas, each in their own way (and I thank all who contributed). Stewardship of the land. The humane treatment of animals. Environmentally sound farming practices. Consideration for the future. And, of course, good quality of life, which seems to take the

form of happy people more often than not. We aren't there yet; there is a lot of work to be done. But hopefully, if we can create more happy gardens, happy animals, happy ecosystems, it will naturally lead to more happy people who can really feel the value and the connections and the community, and see the beauty. Happy winter!

— 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 – Our series of newsletters for 2020 have corresponding themes, which all focus on the principles of IFOAM. But, 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. The change to soliciting sponsorships generally, rather than 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 at the end of this message, and let them know you appreciate their sponsorship. If you are interested in becoming a sponsor for 2021, 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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