



Michigan Organic Connections

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A Message from the Chair

Welcome to the “Harvest” edition of Volume XXII of the Organic Connections Newsletter! This is No. 3 for the year, one less than normal due to our planned shift in the publication schedule. We are slightly behind our intended November release, perhaps due in part to the long warmer fall season and more time spent outside. Or perhaps other things. I have been having more than usual difficulty getting this Message from the Chair pulled together and am holding up the process. Many concerns and not enough clarity. My sense is that I am not alone.

This issue includes three more heart felt perspectives related to our theme of exploring the what and the why of organic agriculture. As a visitor to my office this week shared, until we stop defining organic farming as what it is not (or allowing it to be defined by what it is not), and start clearly defining what organic agriculture is, we are destined to continue down paths that allow questionable choices about what should and should not be allowed within organic certification. Another update on organic hydroponics in this issue is a specific example of what can happen when we are not clear about defining organic.



Please check out the update on a recent educational event and others on the horizon including the Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Expo Organic Session in Grand Rapids this coming week. I am happy to report that the Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference will include three Farmer to Farmer sessions for the first time. Modeled after the successful farmer to farmer sessions at the Northeast Organic Farming Conference, participants are seated in circles of chairs and share either questions, answers or recommendations with each other. A facilitator will guide the session. I am looking forward to facilitating a session on soils and hope to see you there.

In the weeks ahead I will need to prepare an annual report for 2016 to share in our next Organic Connections Winter (January) Issue. Some quick thoughts about 2016 and for predictions for 2017 include:

- **Participation.** The MOFFA Board of Directors and membership have continued to grow and strengthen in numbers. I am looking forward to 2017. The MOFFA Board continues to invite people to our table and talk about how we can provide service with the resources available. Expect more invitations to be a part of MOFFA. We want your support.
- **Progress.** Work on the Farm Guide, our Web Page, education programs, sponsorship of education programs and other activities have all contributed to our outreach and impact.
- **Purpose and Process.** As the MOFFA Board of Directors continued to clarify our shared understanding of our purpose, mission and vision – the foundation of a sustainable organization. This clarity is essential for how we move forward in 2017 and beyond.
- **Honoring the Past.** 2017 marks 25 years since the initiation of MOFFA. We have a unique opportunity to reflect on our past activities and how we have grown together. Part of that is the writing of the history of the Organic Movement in Michigan that is in process and on schedule to be released next year.
- **Partnerships.** If we look at sustainable biological systems, we know that they are diverse, distributed and connected (networked). Michigan has a distributed system of diverse farmer and food systems support groups. My

perception, that seems to be shared by others, is that we lack the networking and sharing of information that are characteristic of healthy biological systems. We all need to work on our networking for the future.

If you have thoughts to share with the Board as we reflect on 2016 and plan for 2017, please share them with MOFFA moffaorganic@gmail.com or me directly mailto:biernbau@msu.edu or 517-282-8752.

I will close with some information that I have debated about whether and or how to share. You may have seen recent announcements about the MSU Student Organic Farm (SOF) changing the format of the Organic Farmer Certificate Program or hiring a new farm manager. I feel responsible to let the organic farming community know that after more than a decade of guiding the emergence and growth of the SOF based on students' desire to learn about organic farming, I am no longer involved in any way with the management of the SOF. Two years ago, during a process to review the management of the SOF, I was told by the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR) administration that I was not competent to be involved in and no longer allowed to participate in the direct management of the SOF and its programs (I still teach the organic farming principles and practices course). I was told that the basis for the decision had to do with statements made by people in the SOF program, but I have reason to suspect there was more to the story. While I have bits and pieces of information, the best I can say is that I still do not know for sure what happened. In early 2015, I decided to take a wait and see approach for the sake of my own personal health and well-being. I continue to teach and have moved on to my composting work and working to support organic farming with MOFFA and other methods.

Best wishes to all of you in the short-daylight season. The need for what you do related to food, farming and community health has never been greater. I think I can speak for all of the Board of Directors and say that we are happy to be working with you and looking forward to the new year.

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

Evolutionary Acceptance

by John Hooper

Seeking a path forward in these unsettling days requires drawing on the accumulated knowledge of the many teachers whom good fortune has presented, in all manner of guises, through the decades. Original thinking was that this short piece on the evolutionary perspective would be succinct and easily assimilated into any discussion of defining our organic selves. Events of the last few weeks have actually strengthened this belief!

Underscoring the acceptance of our evolutionary journey is one prime observation – The human is not a very highly evolved creature and certainly not as far down the path of consciousness as we collectively believe ourselves to be. It is fair to state that there is only a 50/50 chance we will attain any social benevolence before we become our own demise. Witness in point the chaos widespread on the planet and our fine example of discourse and compromise at home!

So focus on this – mother earth has been rolling around the starry skies for 4.5 billion years – our current manifestation emerged from the soupy cauldrons in comparison just a few years back. No matter the consequences of our actions and fate, existence will exist, with or without human presence.

There is no questioning of the countless fine example of our ingenuity and abilities; both in word and deed the creations of humans are remarkable. We have the power to fashion a life better for all, yet we have not done so to date for the vast majority.

We live in a world of incomprehensible beauty and intricacy. The setting offers itself; and bestows the opportunity for all to prosper and grow. Unfortunately, the pressure of unabated assault by 8/9 billion of us leaves an immense print.

The interpretation of the word organic and the debate continuously raging assaults our common sensibilities. It misses the essence. What we possesses as fellow travelers, on this planet hurtling through space, is a world that has evolved through millennia, and which will allow a continuous and sustainable path forward if ... if we respect our ecology with one wonderful principle, borrowed from a sage mind – “First, do no harm”. Not advocating a luddite approach to existence, but many wise

individuals, both contemporary and not, have echoed the sentiment that by allowing nature to reveal its truth we can then make just choices. Observation – a prime characteristic of the most highly evolved – cannot be overstated as the most desirable of attributes. The frantic human must always feel in command – the things we can determine are the insignificant ones, until they adversely affect. Tracing a historical timeline reveals that most attempts to control or take control have most often spelled dire consequences.

Reluctance to bring forth these thoughts stems from the unmistakable fact that countless others have stated, in much more elegant and thoughtful words, this concept of acceptance. Not advocating setting aside our highly evolving minds when we are the catalysts to crafting a world of less suffering and more abundance and good health. Yet stilling the debate and accepting the fact that we humans are not as important as we believe ourselves to be would further the evolution of the planet in a more positive direction than all of us attempting to steer the ship. We just have to realize that in the scope of the infinite universe our significance is insignificant but in our own backyard nothing is more important to the health and wellness of each microbe.

Knowing immense satisfaction and peace issues forth when that “good night kiss” is laid on the land and the earth sighs because another caring soul has accepted its worth. It is good to recognize our place.

Have been really touched by some of our contemporaries and their writings as of late and would like to share a couple of titles: Desert or Paradise – Sepp Holzer, Living at Nature’s Pace – Gene Logsdon, One Straw Revolutionary – Larry Korn, The Hidden Life of Trees – Peter Wohlleben, What are People For – Wendell Berry, Beyond the War on Invasive Species – Tao Orion, and Will Bonsall’s Essential Guide to Radical, Self-Reliant Gardening.
Enjoy, John H.

For 40 years John Hooper has been an advocate and practitioner of the organic method of food production. He joined MOFFA’s Board of Directors in 2009 and served as Chair from 2011 through 2015.

An Organic Landscape

by Jessie Smith

I was once briefly interviewed by an FFA member about organic farming. It was at least 10 years ago and the one question I remember being asked was, "Do you ever think, 'I wish there was an easier way to do this?'" I replied, "No, we have only farmed this way [organically] and I don't consider any other way of farming [namely conventional farming] as an option." Upon reflection I see how deficient my answer was (it was a hurried and automatic response), though now I have also considered the preconceptions underlying this question from a Future Farmer of America. Obviously, she considered organic farming to be harder (more work) than conventional farming, and that everything would be easier for us organic farmers if we just farmed conventionally, too. I presume that the incomplete thought that we should all look for something to make life easier, no matter the cost, was responsible for the question and that this person must have been imagining (or been told) all sorts of terrors about organic farming like plants overrun with insects because you can't pick them all, weeds out of control, and organic sprays that don't work effectively.

I must admit there are times, when faced with a hatching of insect pests, that I think about my hopes for the growing season. I hope everything works together this year so we can keep their impact down to tolerable levels. I hope for consistent rain so the plants can grow to outpace them. I hope for temperate days and nights to help the plants grow well, too. I hope for good populations of beneficials with which to oppose them. Which must be what every farmer thinks. Beneficials! As I

stood in the garden this past summer, spreading well rotted cow bedding, I allowed myself a few moments of

awe at the sheer amount of life in each forkful that I moved. Large brown spiders, sowbugs, centipedes, and even toads came tumbling, out of the skid loader bucket. Not to mention all the life invisible to the unaided eye. Bacteria and fungus that would enhance the soil that it was incorporated into. All that life was made possible by one low population cow barn. What would it be like if every other house around here had a cow barn and a similar pile decomposing in the back? Think of the greater number of toads and the control they would help exert on insect populations. So now I have a question of my own, what would it be like if all those

acres and acres of conventional farmland were organic?

We can surmise that all the documented benefits of organic agriculture would be magnified. Increased soil organic matter levels is a good place to start. If the SOM increased in all the farmland, just in this country alone, think of all the carbon we would be sequestering (I know the numbers are out there). That would have to have an impact on the atmosphere and probably our extreme weather systems. Not to mention the increase in water infiltration and holding capacity. If the water infiltrates more instead of running off, would this slow some flooding further down stream? Slow algal blooms in the Gulf? If the soil holds more water, will there be less need to irrigate and pump the aquifers dry? Will soils be more drought tolerant?

The Environmental Working Group has found upwards of 400 chemicals both known to or likely to cause cancer in the human body.¹ Would less chemicals in our food help to bring these numbers down? Would it bring down the number of people with cancer? Honeybee populations have been on the decline, in part due to the rising amount of neonicotinoids in use. Would honeybee populations increase? Increasing the diversity of pollinators increases cotton production.² What other yields would be affected? Would the use of fewer insecticides foster populations of other beneficials, as well? Song birds need food, too. As do toads and snakes. Would fence rows return, too, to shelter the populations of these beneficials and slow wind erosion of topsoil?



Organic agriculture also has a documented economic impact. The Organic Trade Association has released research that shows, in part, an increase in median household incomes and a reduction of poverty levels in regions with high levels of organic agricultural activity (production and attendant business).³ Though this increase may be able to be achieved if there were simply more small farms, organic or not so organic. I know that my

¹ Acres, U.S.A. "Eco-Update: Cancer-Causing Chemical Onslaught." August 2016 Issue 542: 7.

² Acres, U.S.A. "Science on your Side: Supporting Pollinators Pays Off." August 2016 Issue 542: 11.

³ Acres, U.S.A. "Eco-Update: Organic Hotspots." August 2016 Issue 542: 9.

own hometown used to have three implement dealers in it. There must have been the farmers around to support them, not to mention the two grocery stores.

As I worked in the garden I thought about these things. We will always have hardships in this world, but an ideological change in the way we treat our farmland would have a far reaching impact, and probably for the better. If I could change my answer I would like to say, "No, I don't wish for an easier way because what is easier?" I hope that my answer to that question, as inadequate as it was, at least allowed the questioner to consider that more

goes into these choices than what is easiest for the individual and that the problems, as they are, aren't so bad as to send a person begging to embrace an alternative no matter what it is. However, an organic landscape. Wouldn't that be easier?

Jessie Smith is a Michigan State University alumna (B.S., Crop and Soil Sciences; M.S. Entomology) and a MOFFA member. She works at Nodding Thistle, her family's farm, that has a history of organic gardening and farm marketing since 1984. She, like her sister, is hoping to make agricultural writing part of her way of life.

Developments on 'Organic Hydroponic'

by John Biernbaum

In our last newsletter I provided some perspective on the debate regarding certification of organic hydroponics and my experience on the Organic Hydroponic Task Force. Since that time the NOSB Crops Subcommittee released their report to the full NOSB with the recommendation that organic hydroponic not continue to be certified.

The 10 page Report of the NOSB Crops Subcommittee can be found here: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/CSHydroponicsBioponicsProposalNov2016.pdf>.

There was significant positioning prior to the NOSB meeting from both sides of the issue. The pro hydroponic crowd has a well-funded coalition that is promoting organic hydroponic as better than soil. They claim it is essential to continue to expand organic methods and options for organic food to be available to more people. The pro soil side has continued to present the case for maintaining a definition of organic that is in line with the history of organic and the rest of the world's organic certification systems.

- Keep the Soil in Organic Description of Rally and Positions Presented:
 - <http://www.keepthesoilinorganic.org/>
- Interpretation of the NOSB Crops Committee report with a slant towards pro-hydroponic
 - <http://urbanagnews.com/blog/national-organic-standards-board-crops-subcommittee-releases-recommendation-to-eliminate-hydroponics-from-usda-organic-certification/>

- A Cornucopia article on the situation:
 - <https://www.cornucopia.org/2016/11/usda-allowing-illegal-organic-produce-production/>
- NPR All Things Considered – short article
 - <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/11/16/502330731/some-growers-say-organic-label-will-be-watered-down-if-it-extends-to-hydroponic>

I am not aware of a published summary of the outcome of the NOSB meeting, but based on my recent phone discussion with one of the NOSB members, the outcome is that four of the NOSB members that were finishing their three-year terms claimed that the issues were not clear and they wanted to postpone the vote. More importantly, the Director of the NOP stated that the information from the Crops Subcommittee was not presented with the necessary detail needed for a recommendation so that it was not possible to have a vote. So the process is back in the hands of the NOSB Crops Subcommittee that is now working on preparing the specifics of the exact language and specifically where it will go in the existing regulations.

Indications are that at least some of the methods, particularly those that have the majority of the nutrients routinely applied in a liquid form, will not be allowed. It is also likely that some type of container growing will be allowed, but just how it will be "contained" or defined is still not clear.

Remember that once there is something to vote on, and a vote, there will still be the opportunity for public comment. And it is not the NOSB that gets to

make the final decision, it is the USDA NOP. There are some very large operations with lots of money invested that want the organic standards to be broader and to include either water culture methods or methods that use peat-based media that is routinely fertilized with soluble fertilizer (Driscoll's

berries and blueberries for example.) This is one of the places that you can choose to be involved and speak up for organic. We have recently been reminded that those that get out and vote often get to make the rules.

What Do You Stand For?

by Leah Smith

The definition of organic farming probably came easily to whomever worded it for the dictionary in the computer I am typing on. "Organic farming is food production without the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides or other artificial agents." That seems quite simple; perhaps too simple. Organic farming really goes beyond that definition in many ways.

Consider these points. One of the frequently stated objectives of organic farming is to create a sustainable food system for generations to come. This implies the presence of a few constituent parts. Healthy soil, for one, that doesn't require heavy chemical fertilizer inputs and has a water holding capacity which can offset the need for intense irrigation through most of the season. This sustainable soil is created with compost, cover crops, crop rotations and carefully managed tillage, among other things. Organic farming aims to operate without the constant need for costly inputs. Costly to the farmer and to the planet that has to support the production and use of these artificial means, and their byproducts.

Agriculture (all agriculture) requires soil and the need to keep land in farming, another objective of organics. Some years ago when I was in college and urban sprawl was a big topic, I had a conversation with a young woman who came from a rural community, was raised on a farm and was pursuing a degree in agricultural communications. Her view of the selling of farmland for housing developments or other non-agricultural purposes was different from mine. "Can you really expect farmers to have an uncomfortable retirement when they could sell their land for housing and make a packet of money?" As if the timing of their retirement means that the land they had been lucky enough to work would no longer be needed for farming purposes in the future. As if they have no obligation to future generations to see land stay in agriculture. Land ownership, not land stewardship. The aforementioned objective of organic agriculture

tries to make this distinction clear and encourage the latter.

Another tenet of organic agriculture is the fostering of a healthier environment for all. As well as water and soil quality, directly affected by field work, this includes air quality. Air pollution can occur on the farm, of course, but also as produce travels to you. This is why the local food movement has been closely tied to organic agriculture, or at least the brand of organic agriculture that I believe in.

Lastly, no discussion of organic agriculture can fail to mention seed saving and seed companies. Organic agricultural practices have frequently encouraged the saving of your own seed. At the very least, you should buy certified organic seed wherever possible. Further, our farm does not buy or use any hybrid seeds that are owned and sold by multinational seed companies that engage in genetic engineering and the manufacturing of neonicotinoids. The big seed companies (the small ones are largely gone) are moving more and more towards genetic modification and seed patenting so that anyone, from the truck farmer to the backyard gardener to the little old lady with a few tomatoes plants on her porch, will be breaking the law if they save seed for next year's planting. These seed companies should not be given our financial support, no matter how small. Seed patenting is putting true organic agriculture in real jeopardy. How can a system be sustainable if every seed has a price tag attached to it, and those who desire to cannot select and save and create a seed bank for the future, tailored to their region and soil?

How you farm organically is made up of many decisions and not just a matter of following one set of rules. It is much more than the simple definition at the beginning of this paper. I think farming is an art. It is not just about what you have or haven't used. It is about what you have created. What you choose to include and what you then produce. I have read that many people believe organic agriculture as they

practice it is based a philosophy of independence, not dependence. Your physical labor, your seeds, your knowledge of your farm ecosystem, your healthy food. Versus dependence on large-scale farm equipment, seed companies and their hybrids, chemical solutions to farming challenges and lastly the doctor's chemical solutions to what ails your body.

What does organic farming mean to me? It means concern for the future as well as the present, and a passing along of your efforts with seed and soil. Judging your actions based not only on how they affect you but the entire community, community being extended to global, non-human and future aspects. It is an act of creation, of fulfillment, of art. But remember, they say art isn't easy. So bear these words of Herbert Hoover in mind, as I do, when you are feeling the pressures of organic agriculture weighing heavily on you, as they probably were this past growing season!

"What do you stand for? — I do not choose to be a common man. It is my right to be uncommon...I want to take the calculated risk, to dream and to build, to fail and to succeed. I refuse to barter incentive for a dole. I prefer the challenges of life to the guaranteed existence, the thrill of fulfillment to the stale calm of utopia...It is my heritage to think and act for myself, enjoy the benefit of my creations, and to face the world boldly and say, 'This I have done.'"

—Herbert Hoover

Leah Smith is a MOFFA member and a Michigan State alumna (B.S., Crop and Soil Sciences). She works at her family's farm, Nodding Thistle, which has a history of organic gardening and farm marketing beginning in 1984, and is also a freelance writer.

Looking Forward to GLEXPO

A reminder that the Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Expo (GLEXPO) is just around the corner. If you're thinking of going to Grand Rapids, be sure to plan

on being there Thursday, December 8th. The full day of organic-related content:

Organic Production - Where to Start? Thursday morning 9:00 am	
Moderator: Vicki Morrone, Outreach Specialist for Organic Fruit and Vegetable Growers, MSU	
9:00 am	Knowing Your Place: Combining farm specific knowledge with scouting to form organic integrated pest management plans: Adam Ingrao, Vegetable Entomology Lab, Entomology Dept., MSU, and Jason Matlock, Entomology Dept., MSU
9:45 am	Understanding what your soil test says: Thomas Bjorkman, Horticulture Dept., Cornell Univ.
10:15 am	Experiences from the Field: Getting certified organic: Eric Pawowki, OEFFA, Jim Monroe, Monroe Family Farm, Pooh Stevenson, Owosso Organics, Owosso, MI
11:00 am	Session Ends

Organic Vegetable Production and Management Thursday afternoon 1:00 pm	
Moderator: Vicki Morrone, Outreach Specialist for Organic Fruit and Vegetable Growers, MSU	
1:00 pm	Ecological Weed Management in Organic Vegetables: Eric Gallandt, Weed Ecology and Management, University of Maine
1:40 pm	Permanent Beds in Organic Vegetable Systems: Mark Hutton, Extension Vegetable Specialist, Univ. of Maine Cooperative Extension
2:05 pm	Tarping Soil of Permanent Beds for Pest Management: Ryan Maher, Beginning Farmer Professional Development Coordinator, Ithaca, New York
2:25 pm	Biopesticides for Organic Production—Their effectiveness and how they work: Krista Coleman, Biopesticide and Organic Support, Food and Crop Grouping-IR-4 Project, Rutgers Univ., New Jersey
3:05 pm	Session Ends

Organic Opportunities and Markets Thursday morning 9:00 am	
Three experienced diversified vegetable farming couples will share their organic production and marketing experience, highlight key farm practices, and answer questions. Moderator: John Biernbaum, Horticulture Dept., MSU.	
9:00 am	Large Scale CSA Farming in Northern Michigan: Ryan and Andrea Romeyn, Providence Organic Farm, Central Lake, MI
10:00 am	Training and Retaining Great Farmworkers: Katie Brandt and Tom Cary, Groundswell Community Farm, Zeeland, MI
11:00 am	Growing Our Farm to Feed Our City: Tomm and Trilby Becker, Sunseed Farm, Dexter, MI
12:00 noon	Session Ends

Current Issues in Organic Fruit Production Thursday afternoon 1:00 pm	
Moderator: Matt Grieshop, Associate Professor of organic pest management, Dept. of Entomology, MSU	
1:00 pm	Organic Pomme Fruit Candidates and Trials and Tribulations of the Nursery Industry: Tom Callahan, Adams County Nursery, Aspers, PA
2:00 pm	Update on Organic Firelight Management: George Sundin, Plant, Soil and Microbial Sciences Dept., MSU
2:30 pm	Update on Organic Spotted Wing Drosophila Management: Matt Grieshop, Entomology Dept., MSU
3:00 pm	Session Ends

And While You're at GLEXPO ..

Be sure to visit the [Field & Fire Cafe and Bakery](#) at 820 Monroe Avenue in Grand Rapids. The folks at Field & Fire are sponsoring a fundraiser for MOFFA which will last into the new year, featuring art by [Dania Grevengoed](#). They are distributing MOFFA membership brochures, and a portion of the revenue from artwork sales will be donated to MOFFA to support our ongoing operations.



Organic Intensives 2017 Topics Announced

Please hold Thursday March 9, on your new 2017 calendar and save some of your conference / education budget for the Third Annual MOFFA 2017 Organic Intensives. We are working on three in-depth sessions to be offered in East Lansing at Michigan State University from 9:00 to 5:00.

Topic 1: The Changing Face of Organic Field Crop Marketing

Large scale organic grain and bean crops are in high demand and Michigan's organic farmers, including members of the Organic Farmers of Michigan Marketing Cooperative, are responsible for managing a large part of Michigan's organic crop land. Keeping these farms profitable includes being aware of shifting organic markets and market expectations. This session is being developed as a

follow up to the successful 2016 session that provided organic, transitioning and non-organic grain and bean producers with valuable information about organic production methods. Organic farmers and buyers will share the most up-to-date information with session participants. Thinking about the future of your farm? Please join us!

Topic 2: Organic Weed, Insect and Disease Management for the Diversified Vegetable Farm

Successful diversified vegetable production depends in part on having a well-developed organic pest management plan before the start of the growing season. Several MSU faculty members working with other Midwest institutions were awarded an Organic Research and Education Initiative grant to develop organic pest management strategies and farmer

educational materials for cucurbit crops (cucumber, squash, pumpkin). The project researchers and the farmer advisory panel will start with specific pest management strategies for cucurbit crops and also share general vegetable pest management strategies for the diversified organic vegetable farm with a focus on small and medium scale systems. This will be a unique opportunity for organic farmers to learn from organic vegetable farmers and researchers working with organic farmers.

Topic 3: Set Up Your Organic Garden for Success - Addressing the Need for Fresh Nutritious Vegetables with Changing Climate Conditions

The signs are as clear as ever regarding the benefits of the physical activity of gardening and eating fresh vegetables. We want to continue to support back and front yard gardeners, community gardeners and the growing number of school gardens with recommendations from experienced organic gardeners. We are working on a day of useful presentations such as soil and fertility management, crop planning, scheduling and cultivar selection, strategies for attracting pollinators and beneficial insects, season extension and crop protection methods, water wise gardening and irrigation and more

High Bionutrient Crop Production Workshop Report

by John Biernbaum

On Saturday and Sunday November 12 and 13 approximately 60 participants with diverse farming and gardening experience gathered at the Washtenaw County MSU Extension Offices to hear from Dan Kittredge about his experiences with organic farming, the principles of biological systems, and the Bionutrient Food Association (BFA). All the seats were full and the venue worked well for Dan's style of sharing concepts and responding to participant's questions using the whiteboard and markers and without the use of projected pictures or information. (Although I heard others saying what I was thinking that it would be nice to see pictures of Dan's farm.) While there was a published agenda, the topics covered were often free flow.

I was happy to see the attention and excitement of the audience that reflected the presenter's enthusiasm. The audience also asked a wide range of questions in response to the wide range of topics presented. We even survived doing some mathematics when it came time to evaluate our soil analyses and estimate the quantity of nutrients that needed to be added.

As many of us have learned, organic farming needs to be about more than adding organic matter from cover crops, manure and compost. While adding organic matter and depending on soil biology to increase nutrient availability are important, in many cases soil analysis can indicate if specific minerals are depleted and need to be supplied from off farm resources. An array of tips and tricks were shared to get the job of remineralization.

If there was an overarching theme it was likely the importance of providing plants with the necessary conditions to be resistant to or tolerant of pests or diseases and growing the highest quality food possible in order to have the largest impact on our health. Dan developed the relationship that Daphne Miller also presented at the Northern Michigan Small Farms Conference 11 months earlier – our gut or digestive system needs to be alive with microbiology (biome) that assist with nutrient absorption into the body much the same way the root rhizosphere microbiology assists with nutrient absorption into the root. He also discussed the concept of measuring "brix" in our plants using a refractometer to provide an estimate of plant quality that may relate to flavor and the complexity of the phytonutrients present.



There was much more, including the importance and role of building soil organic matter to address global water cycles and climate change issues, and discussion of important contributors over the last decades to our concepts about plants and how we as humans and farmers interact with our natural world.

And of course I need to say something about the lunches. We were treated to wonderful local food lunches prepared by local chefs both days. Thank you to the workshop organizers! I look forward to following the impact of the workshop on the farmers, gardeners and eaters present. My perception was

that the workshop was a beginning of greater things to come. I can also share that the two day workshop was recorded and likely will be available for free at the Bionutrient Food Association website at some point in the future (<http://bionutrient.org/>) along with the videos and information already present there.

Seek Out Your Congresspeople

by Julia Christianson

MOFFA belongs to the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition ([NSAC](#)), which "advocates for federal policy reform to advance the sustainability of agriculture, food systems, natural resources, and rural communities."

As a member of MOFFA's Policy Committee, I participated in a conference call last week with members of the Coalition. NSAC's long-time Policy Director Ferd Hoefner spoke to some of the issues we will be facing in 2017, including at least initial work on the Farm Bill, and emphasized that the most important thing we can do right now is to form relationships with our state and federal congresspersons, especially newly elected ones, to let them know that we exist, and that issues involving sustainable agriculture and local food systems are

important to us. Ideally, we can form ongoing relationships that will result in our representatives contacting us when legislation affecting organic-and-sustainable is in process.

NSAC is also asking that we help them connect with Michigan's newly elected representatives in Washington, Rep. Jack Bergman (R-MI-1) and Rep. Paul Mitchell (R-MI-10). If you have an existing relationship with either of these men and are willing to work with NSAC to help them get acquainted, please [let us know](#).

Julia Christianson has been a MOFFA member since 2010, MOFFA's "very part time" Administrative Assistant since 2013, and is currently Chair of the Policy Committee.

MOFFA News

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

Facebook – New MOFFA Board Member Emily Nicholls has agreed to help us have a greater presence on social media by maintaining our [Facebook page](#). Thanks, Emily!

Membership – In 2016, 147 individuals, families, and businesses expressed their support for the MOFFA mission through membership — significantly more than in any year since we began calendar-year memberships in 2010. The membership year begins in January, but if you'd like to get a jump on it, any memberships we receive during December will be considered to extend through December 2017. It's easy to join or renew [online](#), or if you prefer you can [download a membership form](#) and send it along with your check to P.O. Box 26102, Lansing, MI 48909.

Keep up with MOFFA on our website: www.moffa.net, or email us at moffaorganic@gmail.com.

Write to us at: Michigan Organic Food & Farm Alliance
PO Box 26102
Lansing, MI 48909