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Greetings—

For all the temperamental false starts we have experienced this season of rebirth and renewal these past few weeks have comprised one of the most trying in memory. Ever the optimist though, and regardless of the volatile distress signals of climate chaos, the fact that the sage, ageless turkey vultures have returned is, for me, the truest indicator of balmy days ahead. So welcome to spring 2015!

MOFFA is constantly evolving and forging ahead as we embark on our 23rd year. Case in point: a very successful first Organic Intensive Day recently accomplished—please read the accompanying articles in this newsletter.

As we look ahead to new endeavors, we pause for a moment to reflect on 2014, our first year as a directorship organization. Although the calendar year defines our structure, the seasons dictate our lives! We continue to make optimum use of the Fall/Winter conference season to engage with the membership and public at large through sponsorship and a presence at many, many events. Our focus recently has been on establishing active and participatory committees to accomplish the real work – volunteer, policy, education, loan committees are extremely active as are special event stand-alone councils.

The volunteer committee was brought to the fore this past year with special emphasis on recruiting MOFFA members to participate on special projects without the commitment of our nine board meetings per year as well as daily decision making. We strongly encourage and seek those that can allot whatever time possible to promoting organic agriculture and community food systems to voice your willingness to assist!



This past year partnerships continued to blossom: as fiduciaries of grants, supporters of a wide-range of research projects, partners in loan programs, investors in CSA mobile kitchens, and most importantly as lead presenters at events throughout the Midwest educating and promoting the MOFFA mission.

The MOFFA website www.moffa.net/ continues to be our most effective tool for dissemination of information and updates. We constantly post items there of the most pertinent nature from employment to land access to upcoming happenings, etc. We especially welcome submissions from the community at large, member and non-member alike. (moffaorganic@gmail.com)

The addition of new board members in 2014 and 2015 has energized our leadership. We welcome Julie Studier, Dan Bewersdorff, and Dan Rossman. Biographies and photos are on the website.

Again this year, as in 2014, special emphasis is being directed to our “Guide to Michigan’s Organic and Ecologically Sustainable Growers and Farms”. If you are a grower and meet the criteria (organic certification or sign-on to the farmer pledge) we highly encourage you to take a few minutes to submit farm/grower information for inclusion. This is a wonderful tool but there are many great producers of food, flora and fiber not listed!

Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance is your organization. If you adhere and believe in the [mission statement](#), small contributions can have significant impact on the lives of those near and dear as well as the community as a whole. Lend some of your passion for a life-affirming existence through/with MOFFA.

Look skyward and enjoy, J

First Organic Intensives A Success

The first MOFFA Organic Intensives was a great example of the success that follows from team work and determination. Hosting day long workshops focused on a specific topic in a format modeled after the MOSES Organic University has a goal of the MOFFA Board of Directors for several years.

Some take home messages:

- Over 115 participants and presenters.
- Of 102 participants, 80 submitted workshop evaluations - a great help to the Board for planning future events.
- About 40% of those submitting evaluations were MOFFA members; many of the not yet MOFFA members were interested in becoming members.
- Approximately 95% of evaluations listed session content, presenters and the workshop value (return on investment) as excellent or above average.
- Many participants noted that they wanted to take more than one topic.
- We were able to keep costs down by using MSU facilities during ANR week and having lunch at the Brody Market Square.
- Spiral bound handouts provided to participants.
- Evaluations were very positive and supportive.



The MOFFA Board is willing and interested in hosting a similar event at other locations around the state and at other times of the year. We believe a key is identifying cost efficient venues and meal options, and perhaps local groups that can host and partner with MOFFA. Another key is identifying high quality presenters that can carry the day. A good list of potential topics follows.

Important ground work was put in place such as publicity methods, registration methods, coordinating multiple speakers in a session and compiling handouts and power point presentations in advance; etc. that will support future efforts.

Future topics of interest include:

1. repeats of this year's topics for those that wanted to attend more than one;
2. vegetable production tips and scheduling; <5 acre diversified veg production, vegetable crop specific growing sessions
3. market details such as CSA, farm stands, farmer's markets, Institutional options, food hubs;
4. Biodynamic farming practices and Demeter certification
5. organic fruit production - either small fruit (berry) or tree fruit
6. pasture based livestock / rotational grazing.
7. field crop intensive: transitioning, weed control, soil health, soil biology, marketing
8. nut tree production
9. maple syrup: harvesting, processing, marketing
10. mushroom growing and marketing
11. flowers 201 or 301, hands-on bouquet making, planting schedules, harvest info; more detailed cut flower information
12. food storage: root cellar, coolers/cold storage, fermentation, drying
13. organic sheep production
14. bee keeping and honey harvesting and marketing
15. profitability/making a living, farm economics and business skills
16. post-harvest handling/food safety/wash station design, employee management/ training, scaling up/infrastructure
17. native habitat to support pollinators other beneficials, birds
18. social media
19. aquaculture in combo with edible water plants
20. urban homesteading; small scale agriculture for urban areas; SPIN farming; rain barrels & rain catching, especially for urban areas.

— John Biernbaum

A Lot of Miles ... A Lot of Worthy Information

As a road warrior, this writer had the opportunity to travel 18,000 miles in the past three months as an exhibitor and presenter at most every Organic/Sustainable conference this side of the Mississippi. The common goal for every Organic conference is to educate and share experiences. The benefits of attending each of these thirteen conferences are the opportunities to exchange ideas, network, and communicate with sustainable/organic operations of every size. The 1,000 square foot gardener and the 5,000 acre row cropper have the same goals: to grow healthier food for their families (and others), and their livestock, and to leave the soil healthier for the next generation.

Generation to Regeneration...our generations need to “regenerate” our soils while producing the sustenance required for current (and future) plants, livestock and human existence. These conferences are highlighted with numerous educational tracks, seminars, and speakers who are doing just that. Using proven concepts, these advocates are successfully regenerating their soils using ideas of permaculture, cover and intercropping, composting and reduced tillage among many others. Some are incorporating tools like foliar feeding, compost/vermicompost and teas, biochar, and beneficial insects to accomplish this regeneration in a more expedient fashion considering weeds, disease, insects and pests (signs of unhealthy soils). Regardless of the selected tools used, a common outcome with this “Regenerative” farming generation is the reduction of those pests as their system gets healthier.



Dane Terrill presents at Organic Intensives

MOFFA makes every effort to cover these and similar topics throughout the year. At the Organic Intensives (spearheaded by John Biernbaum, MOFFA Board Member and Professor of Horticulture at MSU) on March 12,

attendees had the choice of one of three intensives (two covered elsewhere in this newsletter). The Compost, Vermicompost and Compost Extracts and Teas Intensive covered the topics of on-farm composting, vermicomposting and tea production. Utilizing these tools, many operations here in the “Mitten” and across the world, are regenerating soils by applying those to lawns, landscapes, gardens, row crops, vineyards, orchards and pastures. Evidence shows that compost and compost teas will increase organic matter and increase biological diversity. By integrating the other tools: cover-cropping, intercropping, companion planting, etc. soils are being regenerated with less pressure from insects, diseases and pests.

Through the miles and thirty-one nights in motel beds, it was inspiring to meet and collaborate with a fun, dynamic group of people at these conferences. The Organic Intensives proved the same. Collectively, the attendees, presenters and exhibitors are joining forces to grow healthier food for their own use, for their and our livestock, and food to feed their communities all while regenerating soils.

— Dane Terrill

Cut Flowers for Profit and Diversification

MOFFA had the good fortune to present a daylong session on Cut Flowers for Profit and Diversification led by three women with an incredible combination of knowledge, wit, common sense and charm. Lynn Byczynski of Growing for Market, Pooh Stevenson of Owosso Organics, and Jen Tutlis of Meadowlark Farm, all with over 20 years of experience in flower production, filled the day with images befitting the anticipatory fervor of an early spring day. The lives of these three growers extraordinaire involve many ancillary pursuits (CSA’s, photography, authorship, local activism, musicianship, large-scale vegetable production) so that their diversified farms reflect community and sustainability; which in turn was deeply integrated into their discussion of the growing of beautiful flowers.

The atmosphere of the day was light and enthusiastic as would be expected in a room filled with flower growers of all skill sets. Our range of topics was extensive as all three women took the lead on a couple of sessions with the other presenters offering pertinent additions toward the end of each hour. Questions of course cascaded from the audience.

As befitting an intensive workshop, in-depth information involving the topic of production was highlighted; with emphasis on seed starting in the greenhouse/hoop house, field production basics and high tunnel production apropos to our climate in Michigan. Growing principles and good agricultural practices as well as succession plantings were discussed. A session addressed an overview of the local flower market; here organic certification, market opportunities and revenue expectations were talked through. An additional session spoke of the physiological considerations in choosing the best flowers for high tunnel production as well as how to get started, best cover crops, scheduling, and record keeping. Harvest, storage and post-harvest handling along with bouquet making accented the late afternoon. And of course each presenter had their top ten list of favorite flowers; the power point presentations contained more beautiful photographs than imaginable as all three women had extensive and stunning compilations.

The collective spirit of the 60 people who spent an Organic Intensive day together was infectious. New bonds were formed, relationships renewed and all felt a deep satisfaction with being at an event where our natural world was the “honoree”. Of course we were there to learn and many to value-add to their livelihoods, but often at events like these just being really present is enough. Of course there were a few miscues by the organizers and the evaluations, which gave the highest marks to our session leaders, pointed out where some constructive changes needed to take place. These we will definitely address! But we, the MOFFA board, believe the construct of a viable method to bring together ecologically, “beyond organic” folks in a conducive, amiable environment has begun. Stay tuned!



— John Hooper

Edible Landscaping and Permaculture Design

Permaculture is an ecological/sustainable principle that is catching on quickly around the world. Mark Angelini, Trevor Newman, and I were able to condense a lot of information into six hours of intense education for Organic Intensives. Our backgrounds in regenerative land planning, edible landscaping, homesteading, uncommon fruits, whole system designs, organic farming, and permaculture, made for an easy assimilation of knowledge.

We talked about ecological and regenerative systems, how to build a soil, synopsis of permaculture, ecological design, site analysis and assessment, schematic working plan, home and small scale systems, water harvesting sheet mulching, raised bed, season extension, agroforestry, and perennial shrub/tree/ herbs for the home/homestead/ farm viability. The presentation was finished with a case study on a recently designed urban homestead. For those wanting to dig further into Permaculture, David Holmgren's [Permaculture Principles](#) website is an excellent resource.

We also took an in-depth look on how permaculture is changing people's lives and the communities around them. People are adopting these permaculture principles and are becoming common in many communities.

When the specific topics were discussed, people in the audience were spurred into conversations that spilled over into the break sessions. Many of the participants were taking pictures of the presentation. Mark passed a paper around to have the people put their emails so that we could send them the total 6 hour presentation. There were permaculture designs done on properties that the audience were poring over to see if they could incorporate into their homestead. The participants were asking for recommendations for specific books to order, and there was an extensive resource list in the handouts. The audience asked if they could have directions to come and look at the case study in Lake Orion, MI.



Case study, Lake Orion, MI

— Linda Jackson

The Michigan Organic Reporting Session: A Conversation with Farmers and Researchers

For the eighth year, the Michigan Organic Reporting Session brought organic farmers, beginning farmers, and extension researchers together to share and discuss organic production practices for field crop, fruit and vegetable production. The program, held on March 13, was a little different this year, supporting an overall theme of **weed management and soil health**.

The two research presentations were delivered by Dr. Erin Hill and Dan Kane, both from the Department of Plant, Soil and Microbial Sciences (formerly the Dept. of Crops and Soil Sciences). Erin shared a presentation based on her research entitled, "**From seeds to weeds: Factors influencing organic weed management throughout the lifecycle**". Her work showed the value of red clover as a cover crop to compete against weeds germinating in the field as well as increasing weed seed mortality. Rye was also compared but did not fare as well, reducing seed germination for spring weeds only and not having a significant effect on weed seed mortality. Note that medium red clover, fondly called Michigan Red Clover grown by many organic farmers in Michigan is really impacting soil, not only contributing to organic matter and nitrogen (remember it's a legume) but also being a true competitor against weeds in the field.

Dan's talk was entitled, "**Spatial differences in turnover of ridge tillage systems improve nitrogen synchrony**". Ridge tillage is a reduced tillage system that can be done in field or vegetable crops. It creates a

ridge that the crop is planted on and cover crops grow between the rows in sloped furrows. This type of system can contribute to the soil and the crop in several ways: maximizing soil cover, adding organic matter to the soil when the top of the ridge is sliced off to remove vegetation in preparation for the seeds to be planted, and capturing water during heavy rainfall in the furrows. To see these presentations visit www.MichiganOrganic.msu.edu.



Dan Rossman

Following the research sessions we had a farmer panel. They explained how they manage weeds in different systems: field crops, vegetables, and fruit. Several innovations were shared to manage weeds from

increasing crop population through narrower rows to undersowing multiple types of cover crops. Of course it was reinforced the value to be able to manipulate tool bars on tractors to get maximum weed management. The farmer panel included Dan

Rossman from Rossman Farms in Pennington, MI, Fred Monroe from Monroe Family Organics in Elwell, MI, Aaron Keilen from Hi-Lo Acres in Portland, MI and Jeremy Moghtader, MSU Student Organic Farm Manager .



Fred Monroe



Aaron Keilen

After a great lunch at Brody Café we reconvened to discuss what are research priorities around the topic of weeds and soil health in organic farming. Each person chose the group they wanted to work with, to potentially develop a research grant that may have on-farm research. The groups included

- alternative energy systems for greenhouses and hightunnels such as geo-thermal
- aquaponics and water nutrient relations—looking at water contamination and leaching impacts on our bodies of water
- carbon and nutrient sequestration (and many other soil aspects that are included in this topic); plant nutrient: insect pest relationships, e.g. What attracts aphids to plants and how can we manage them with this knowledge
- compost tea's role in nutrient supply and pest management and
- one that all see the need for but never sure how to address it; establishing a farm incubator program for new farmers that is sustainable and useful



Jeremy Moghtader

The plan is to continue the discussion based on input from each group. We hope to develop research and/or extension programs as a collective team, with input from farmers, researchers and extension educators from private agri-businesses and MSU Extension.

It was a great day and the 50+ in attendance went away with new ideas, new friends and a plan to expand our organic farming knowledge. This is an annual event during Agriculture and Natural Resource Week if you would like to join us in the future. This program is for organic farmers and educators across the state to enrich and expand our knowledge and ability to produce more organic food. Join the team and let's work together to build these great opportunities.

— Vicki Morrone

Two for the Price of One: Flowers Working Harder for You

Flowers are essential for every yard and garden, and for the market gardener they offer a special opportunity to add another dimension to their sales table. The flowers profiled below can be harvested for both fresh-cut and dried flower bouquets, depending on your needs at the time. These are species with which we have had repeated success growing and selling at farmers markets for over 30 years, and hopefully you will as well.

Cockscomb (*Celosia argentea cristata*) – We grow a number of *Celosia* plants. As well as the cockscomb or crested varieties, we grow feather and wheat types for fresh-cut bouquets, for which we find them too useful to save any for drying. The cockscomb types, however, add real grandeur to both fresh-cut and dried bouquets. You will find them in maroon, red, orange, and yellow colors. Picking these annuals for fresh-cut bouquets is easy, but timing for drying is a little more tricky. They must be mature enough to hold their color after they dry, but not so old that they have begun to discolor prior to picking. Be sure, even if the central leader flower doesn't have a stem long enough for a bouquet (unless it's a tussie mussie), that you remove it to stimulate the growth of the side shoots. Also, cockscomb *Celosia* seed is available for a range of prices. We have always had success with Chief Mix, which is one of the more economical packets.

Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) – Though now available in red, orange, yellow, and white, we remain faithful to the purple species of *Echinacea*. A perennial plant, coneflowers are reliable and without difficulties to grow. Harvest them once their petals are out to make the most of their fresh-cut vase life. For drying, wait for coneflowers to be a bit more mature (their centers should be “cone-ing”), remove their petals, and once dried add their architecturally dynamic structure to bouquets.



"Gomphrena 'Strawberry fields'" by Kelvinsong. Licensed under CC BY 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

Globe Amaranth (*Gomphrena haageana*) – Wet or dry, customers always seem to be delighted by round flowers! You will generally find globe amaranth of two species available, either *G. haageana* or *G. globosa*. If you are growing for bouquets, stick to the *G. haageana*. They have longer stems and are much better suited for the purpose. The colors available to you will be red, orange, and carmine. Give these annuals plenty of space to grow, as they produce an airy, branching plant. When you are picking flowers to dry, make sure they are mature enough by testing the rigidity of the stem just beneath the flower head. You want this perfectly stiff so that the head will not flop in your bouquet. For fresh-cut picking, they are a little more forgiving.

Larkspur (*Consolida ambigua*) – This annual can be a bit fussy for us, and may require some extra attention to be a great producer. However, it pays handsomely by producing very elegant blooms, in shades of blue, purple, pink, and white, on stunning spikes. Larkspur has a nice branching habit, contributing to its usefulness in cut-flower production. Picking should be done for fresh-cut bouquets when one-third of the flowers on the spike are open, but wait until all the flowers on the spike are open if you intend to dry them. The imperial type larkspur is said to be the best for drying and also excellent for fresh-cut bouquets, a statement with which we agree.

Nigella Pods (*Nigella damascena*) – Also known as Love-In-A-Mist, this beautiful plant produces lovely flowers, though ephemeral ones. Their real value is in their balloon-like seed pods. Fresh-cut or dry, they are a great way to add character and dimension to a bouquet. Also, they are a plant that is easy to grow. *Nigella* is an annual, though if allowed to self-seed they will readily produce volunteer beds of flowers (and seed pods).



Nigella arvensis pod by Luis Fernández García, Creative Commons BY-SA 2.1 es

Statice (*Limonium sinuatum*) – Ubiquitous in dried flower arranging, statice plants are annuals and prolific growers. Happy plants will produce a bumper crop before the year is out. Just be sure that you don't have them planted in ground that is too wet, because they won't be happy. Statice should be started in trays in a greenhouse and transplanted out. Available in many colors, all perform well in fresh-cut or dried bouquets, though yellow varieties are a bit more sensitive to handling and will lose a few flowers to shattering when used dry. As a compensation for growers, though, in their fresh-cut state these yellow varieties have a delicate and sweet, if fleeting, smell present only long enough for those who get to know the plants intimately.

Strawflower (*Helichrysum bracteatum*) – Other common names include golden everlasting and paper daisy; your choice of which common name to use could affect customer reaction to them. Fresh-cut or dried, I have always found them an endless delight to the sense of touch. Dried, we prefer to pick these annuals before their papery bracts open up to reveal their pillowy yellow center, as this darkens during drying. For fresh cut bouquets, they can be picked at the opened or closed stage. Available in pinks, reds, yellows, and whites, they are excellent



Xerochrysum bracteatum (strawflower) by Carl Lewis Licensed under CC (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/#>)

producers of side shoots. Caution must be taken, when drying strawflowers, to prevent their stems from doubling over, so give them long stems and tie bunches for drying at the very bottom.

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) – Low in maintenance and high in possibilities, yarrow is an essential perennial to have. It is available in a multitude of colors and can provide you with wonderfully detailed filler, fresh-cut or dry. Wait to pick them just as the pollen is beginning to show on the flowers. This level of maturity will ensure the flower heads remain erect and don't flop over, and will also give you the longest vase life possible for fresh-cut bouquets.

These are some of our absolute favorite flowers for both fresh-cut and dried bouquets. They are prolific, reliable, and give you options. Try them, and I am sure you will love them, too!

— Leah Smith

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

The Healthy Food/Healthy Bees Connection

Looking For an Organic Farm to Place Your Bees?

Looking for Bees for your Organic Farm?

The Healthy Food/Healthy Bees Connection is here!

The Northern Bee Network is partnering with MOFFA to bring together organic farmers and beekeepers. Some beekeepers don't have the space to keep the number of hives they want to, and the majority of organic/sustainable farms in Michigan do not have bee colonies, so this is a win-win situation for all – healthy bees for healthy food!

We will be matching interested beekeepers with local organic/ecologically sustainable farms interested in being a home for the season to a colony or two or three of bees. To sign up visit the Northern Bee Network's [Healthy Food/Healthy Bees](#) page. Fill out the simple form and we will make the Healthy Food/Healthy Bees Connection for you! Please feel free to call me if you have any questions at 734-576-8427 days or 517-721-1384 evenings.

For the bees and good food,

Barb Barton
Lansing, Michigan

Can Hydroponic Systems be Certified as Organic?

Keep the Soil in Organic!

There is an important story that is developing that organic farmers and advocates need to be aware of and following. In this "international year of soils", there is challenge of the current practice of calling hydroponic growing systems with no living soil or organic matter component suitable for organic certification. Doing so has important implications for future certified organic greenhouse crop production. The National Organic Standards Board developed a recommendation that hydroponics not be certifiable due to the lack of soil in the production system. While crops can be successfully grown in water culture systems using fertility inputs approved for organic systems, doing so does not meet the definition of and intentions of organic



production in living soil or organic matter/compost based systems. Apparently the USDA has chosen not to accept the NOSB recommendation and some certifiers are still certifying hydroponic systems. The US is one of the few countries to allow certification of hydroponics. You can learn more and potentially support one of the positions at the links below.



This summer I was able to visit the Vermont organic tomato operation owned by Dave Chapman, a grower cited in one of the articles below. He was doing a great job growing organic tomatoes in a compost based growing medium. We have also been growing culinary herbs, leafy greens, tomatoes and cucumbers in 100% compost that contains some soil on the MSU campus in a system certified organic by OEFFA. There clearly is an acceptable alternative for greenhouse crop production that supports the recommendation to not certify hydroponic growing systems. Please consider signing the petition to keep the soil in organic.

—John Biernbaum

Related Links:

International Year of Soils: <http://www.fao.org/soils-2015/en/>

Cornucopia White Paper: <http://www.cornucopia.org/HydroponicsWhitePaper.pdf>

More details: <http://www.cornucopia.org/2015/03/hydroponics-organic/#more-15481>

Sign the petitions: <http://www.keepthesoilinorganic.org/>

MOFFA News

It's membership time again – The MOFFA membership year runs from January 1 to December 31, so if you haven't renewed your membership for 2015, we hope that you will take a minute to do that now. MOFFA relies on dues from its members to pursue goals such as the Organic Intensives event, ongoing public education, and keeping our members up to date on state and national policy issues. You can join online at www.moffa.net/membership.html, or send a check to us at P.O. Box 26012, Lansing, MI 48909. The cost of membership hasn't risen in this century – still just \$30 for Individual/Family membership, \$50 for businesses bringing in less than \$50,000 per year, and \$100 for larger businesses.

Farm Guide – If your farm is listed in the Farm Guide, please take a minute to check your listing and make sure it says what you want it to say. If your farm is not listed, please join more than 125 Michigan farms who have submitted their listing. Even if you don't do retail sales, you can benefit from a listing – we frequently get requests from businesses in our region that are looking for organic inputs for their products. Listing will also put you in touch with other farmers in your region for networking and shared problem-solving. Contact us for more information, or sign up online at www.moffa.net/grower-information.html.

Newsletter – The next issue of this newsletter will focus on preserving and improving our soils, and how farmers are uniquely qualified to assist in slowing the pace of global warming as well, through carbon sequestration. If you'd like to contribute an article please [let us know](#).

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

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