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2016 Annual Report

The purpose of this report is to document and review accomplishments and growth while providing inspiration for the emerging year of activity. Each year the Chairperson of the Board of Directors prepares an annual report to share with the Board and membership. This is my first opportunity to reflect and report on the past year's activities and accomplishments after four years of reporting by previous Board Chair John Hooper.

2016 was Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance's 24th year as a 501(3)c non-profit, statewide, organization. We continued to build on our long-standing commitment to education and outreach in pursuit of our mission of "*Promoting organic agriculture and the development and support of food systems that revitalize and sustain local communities*". MOFFA members can be very proud of their organization as a valuable contributor to the long term growth of healthy soils, healthy crops and livestock for food, and healthy people.

The need for food, feed, fiber and flowers raised, processed and marketed with a deep respect for managing living soil and the ecological balance of all living organisms has never been greater. The physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of human health are all integrated with our relationship with our natural world and our food.

While the sales of organic produce and livestock products continue to grow and we can celebrate the progress, we know that organic accounts for a fraction of the total agriculture and food system. We must also be aware of the apparent growing separation between people able and willing to support organic food production and the apparently growing number of people who are unaware of how food is produced and are able to focus only on food of any type needed to survive.

Awareness of changing weather patterns is increasing. Extreme rainfall events interspersed with longer periods of drought are beginning to be understood as a result of human impacts on our environment and home. There is progress toward an understanding that managing soil groundcover and below-ground organic matter to increase rainwater absorption and retention, and to move carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to the soil, has the potential to heal the damage and reverse the dangerous weather and climate trends.

What is organic farming? Why do we need organic farming? These are the questions that we need more and more people of all ages to be able to answer with confidence. Speaking up is one way we make a positive difference. Organic farming is clearly the way forward. The USDA may or may not continue to support and enforce long standing organic farming principles such as the essential nature of soil. But all of us as members of MOFFA can confidently share what we know. We can make a difference for our family, friends, farmers and local communities.

Board of Directors

The [Board of Directors](#) continued to grow and strengthen during 2016, in large part due to the long term efforts of prior Board Chair John Hooper to recruit new participants. Continuing members include: John Biernbaum (2009), Dan Bewersdorff (2015), John Hooper (2009), Vicki Morrone (2009), Dan Rossman (20015), Julia Studier (2014), and Dane Terrill (2012). New members include Emily Shettler, Emily Nicholls and Amy Newday, bringing the total to ten. Our board officers for 2016 were John Biernbaum, Chair; Dan Rossman, Vice-Chair; Dane Terrill, Treasurer; and Julia Studier, Secretary. Our goal is to keep the board at a minimum of 8 to 12 members and to have improved representation from each of the geographic regions of Michigan.



Emily Shettler

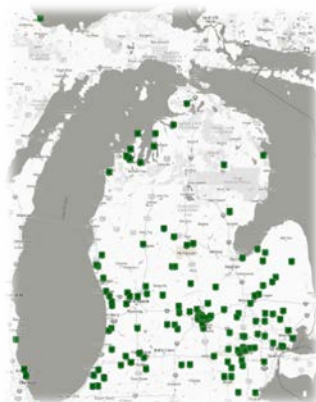


Amy Newday



Emily Nicholls

The Board was fortunate to have Julia Christianson fill the “very part time” Administrative Assistant position to work with the Board of Directors in 2013. Julia has continued to increase her responsibilities for record keeping, communication including the [website](#) and [Organic Connections](#) Newsletter, management of the [Organic Inten-sives](#) educational event, processing of financial and organizational information, and other roles. The otherwise all volunteer organization is indebted to her dedication and efforts that allow us to use our time to better serve the Organic Community.



Membership

Membership continued to grow from the 2015 total of 122 to 147 in 2016. The membership includes 64 individual or family memberships (\$40), 41 small business memberships (\$60) and 17 larger business memberships (\$100). We also added a membership category for students or those with limited resources (\$20). Total revenue was \$7,171 in dues with an additional \$644 of generous donations members included when paying membership fees, for a total of \$7,815. MOFFA members are well distributed across lower Michigan as illustrated in the figure at left. Although we can use some more yoopers!

Board Meetings

To facilitate involvement of members from across the state, the board of directors uses a combination of in person and conference call meetings. We have established a schedule of eight meetings per year with three in person and five conference phone calls. The annual meeting is held in the Lansing area during April. In July 2016 we revived a tradition of a meeting that includes a meal and social component. We enjoyed an afternoon on the patio at the Biernbaums' with a great pot luck meal. With several members from Southwest Michigan, we were fortunate to be the guests of Dane Terrill at the Crop Services International facilities in Kalamazoo for one of our fall meetings. A [schedule of meetings](#) for 2017 is available on our website.

During 2016 a component of our meetings was discussion about why we do organic farming and what organic means to a wide variety of audiences. This discussion included a review of past MOFFA projects, discussion of current board members' key values, and discussion of possible future goals. We reviewed and maintained the MOFFA mission statement and committed to updating the MOFFA vision statement in 2017.

Organic Connections Newsletter

The quarterly [Organic Connections](#) newsletter (electronic since 2012) continues to be a core method of connecting and reaching our membership and many more organic supporters. We had three instead of the normal four issues in 2016 as we adjusted our schedule to avoid the busy holiday times of the year. In recent years we have also identified topic themes. The priority for 2016 was the why, what and how of organic farming to align with the discussions taking place in board meetings. We benefitted from several articles by non-board member authors including Leah and Jessie Smith of Nodding Thistle Farm and MOFFA founding member Maynard Kaufman. We continue to request contributions from members and have proposed that in 2017 we will invite specific members to contribute articles. The archives of the newsletter is available on our website. The newsletter reaches over 1300 addresses on our group email list.

Website

The website has continued to grow into a reliable source of information about organic farming and gardening, local food and business related events and announcements. Historical aspects including past newsletters and annual reports are available. Education, employment, grant, and marketplace information is maintained up to date for the organic community.

Farm Guide

The MOFFA [Farm Guide](#), *A Guide to Michigan's Organic and Ecologically Sustainable Growers and Farms*, which is now available both as an electronic version on our website and as a printed book, continues to be a popular item. The listings grew

from 130 in 2015 to 144 in 2016. One of MOFFA's goals is the vigorous pursuit of growers and farmers to add in order to expand this offering to the general public.

Conferences and Meetings Attended

Michigan is fortunate to have a diverse and distributed array of organizations that support ecological and local farming initiatives and development of beginning farmers. While distributed systems are a hallmark of sustainability, to be more effective the organizations also need to be networked and responsive to each other. To that end, a standing MOFFA goal has been to be a trusted collaborator and partner that encourages sharing of information. In 2016 we continued to participate in the diversity of educational activities in Michigan where we could share organic ethics and methods. These conferences include:

- Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference (January)
- Michigan Family Farms Conference (January)
- MSU Organic Reporting Session (March)
- Organic Farmers of Michigan Field Day (August)
- Southwest Michigan Harvest Fest (September)
- Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit (October)
- Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Growers Expo (December)

An important contribution of MOFFA at these conferences is providing friendly conversation and answers to questions about organic farming and gardening and certification methods. A wide range of books is also made available to stimulate learning and discussion. In 2016 book sales totaled \$1,464. Our thanks to board member John Hooper who most often is the friendly face that conference participants greet at the MOFFA table.

MOFFA also worked with the organizing committee for bringing Dan Kittredge to Michigan. Dan is a farmer and organizer of the [Bionutrient Food Association](#). His goal is to help more people understand the relationship between soil life, soil fertility and food quality. MOFFA partnered with the Allen Neighborhood Center and the Lansing Food Bank and Garden Project to host one of Dan's three stops in Michigan in late September. We also helped publicize the two-day event in Ann Arbor November 12-13.

Education Programs

In 2015 the previously recognized "signature" Michigan Organic Conference event was reconfigured to the "Organic Intensives" (OI). The OI was modeled after the successful MOSES Organic University with the goal to allow more in-depth presentation and discussion of a smaller range of topics. In 2016 the second annual [Organic Intensives](#) was held on March 10th on the MSU campus. The topics included:

- Organic Certification for Field Crop Farmers
- Seed Saving
- Wild Edibles and Herbs

The OI is a project and event that most all of the Board of Directors work on together. It requires advance discussion and selection of topics and speakers. One goal has been to select topics that will include participation by larger scale field crop farmers and businesses, medium scaled diversified farmers and business, and smaller scale urban agriculture and homesteading farmers and gardeners. Participants provided positive comments and reviews of the 2016 event and speakers. We will continue to question the timing and location of the event to increase participation. But by the end of 2016 we had a good plan for three new presentations for 2017.



John Edgerton, Seed Saving, OI 2016

Another key component to the success of the OI is the sponsorship support from a variety of business and organizations. We would like to recognize the support of the following organizations in 2016:

North Central SARE	Eden Foods	Certis USA
Blue River Hybrids	Crop Services International	Organic Valley
Herbruck's	George and Anne Bird	Grice Farms
SunOpta	GreenStone Farm Credit Services	Cherry Capital Foods
Bay Shore Sales	USDA NRCS	

Policy Efforts

MOFFA is active as a member of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC). Julia Christianson (in her role as a MOFFA member and volunteer Chair of the Policy Committee) is the primary contact who participates in the calls and keeps the board informed of developments with the organization.

During 2016 Board member John Biernbaum was one of 16 members of the USDA Hydroponic and Aquaponic Regulations Review Task Force. John participated in the January meeting in San Diego and was also invited to present an update at the April meeting of the National Organic Standards Board in Washington, DC. The Task Force submitted their report in July and the NOSB and USDA are still working on the recommendations since no decision was made at the November NOSB meeting. Updates on details were provided in the [September](#) and [December](#) issues of the Organic Connections Newsletter.

Proposed rule changes for livestock regulations were released in 2016. Given the potential impact directly on Herbruck's Poultry Ranch Inc. in Michigan and indirectly on many Michigan field crop producers and members of Organic Farmers of Michigan who sell grain for livestock, this was a topic that the board discussed multiple times. Given the diverse perspectives on the issues, MOFFA requested input from the membership.

Grants and Projects

The MDARD High Tunnel Grant in cooperation with Michigan State University was completed in 2016 with submission of the final report. The report is available at our website at www.moffa.net/f/MOFFA_Final_Rpt_HighTunnel_Organic_Fruit.pdf.

We provided letters of support and partnership for four research proposals:

- An MSU project “*Lab to farm: integrating organic cucurbit science and production in the Midwest*” submitted to the Organic Research and Education Initiative (funded).
- MSU North Farm’s proposal “*Building Capacity for School Based Agricultural Education in the Food Insecure Region of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula*” submitted to the USDA SPECA Challenge Grant Program (funded).
- Dr. Sieg Snapp from Michigan State University and Jen Blesh, University of Michigan for the USDA Transition OREI proposal entitled, “*Putting biodiversity to work for farmers: optimizing management of cover crop mixtures*” (not funded).
- Dr. Liu and Dr. Biernbaum from Michigan State University for the USDA Transition OREI proposal entitled, “*Novel fungal composting for chitin, chitinase and lactic acid production with potential plant protection and soil pH control*” (not funded).



In 2016 MOFFA agreed to be the publisher of a book titled *The Organic Movement in Michigan* edited by Maynard Kaufman and Julia Christianson. Maynard was instrumental in starting MOFFA and has served on the board and as Chair of the organization. Julia has been the administrative assistant since 2013, and took on this project on a volunteer basis. Of the 15 authors, all of whom played a role in the development of organic agriculture in Michigan, almost all are MOFFA members. The book is scheduled for publication in May 2017. Understanding foundational historical perspectives is very important as organizations grow and move forward. The board would like to express our appreciation to

Maynard and Julia for inspiring and managing preparation of the book.

Financials

Total revenue for the year was \$26,850 (within 1% of budget) and total expenditures were \$20,194 (~28% below budget) resulting in carry forward for 2017.

Emerging Priorities for 2017

Priorities for 2017 include:

- Continuing the Organic Intensives program with possible regional events
- Completing a new vision statement for the organization
- Discussing sponsorship of MOFFA activities including the Organic Intensives
- Recruiting authors for the Organic Connections Newsletter
- Maintaining and increasing membership involvement

Respectfully Submitted by John A. Biernbaum, Chair