



Michigan Organic Connections

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In This Issue:

A Message from the Chair	1
Report From NOSB	3
Fraudulent Imports, Urgent Action.....	4
MOFFA at 25!	6
Organic Intensives—January 6 th	7
GLEXP0 — This Year With Even More Sessions on Organic Production	9
Policy Update.....	12
MOFFA News	13

A Message from the Chair

What is the Vision?

Do you find your inner voice asking the question: What's next? I routinely hear this question, and it seems that many family and friends are also hearing it. Be in the moment is also routinely there. But living with a sense of passion, morality or love in our current social climate is cause for looking beyond the moment for a healing vision.

One of the outcomes of updating and doing a much needed purge of our home of 20 years is that many of the books that I have enjoyed as sources of inspiration over the decades were in crates in a back room for the past year. They came back out this summer to be reorganized and reviewed on an updated set of shelves. I ended up re-reading some of the stories that set me on a new path over 20 years ago. The messages are as relevant now as 20 years ago.

But I find myself developing a new lens or perspective. Decades ago I started out with a desire to help change or “save” people and the planet. I learned about social change and how it can be accomplished, often one person at a time trying to implement a vision. I tried to do what I could to make a difference. I practiced forming a vision and



bringing it to life. In current times I find myself asking a new question of when do you decide to

stop trying to change or save people and the planet and just decide to “walk away” and protect your family and friends? Is there a point where you ask if things are broken beyond the point of repairing? Maybe the path forward is through failure?

One piece of advice from author Daniel Quinn is that the type of change we need now cannot be accomplished by “programs” or changes in programs. A case in point is the National Organic Program and how I just spent many weeks over the last few years investing in the process to protect organic farming, only to see it weakened and diminished by neophytes.

What Quinn proposes as an alternative to programs is to find a new “vision”. In his books *Ishmael*, *The Story of B*, and *My Ismael*, he reminds of us of the “Great Forgetting” and how that influences our current view of agriculture. The Great Forgetting in short is the perception that humanity started with the emergence of totalitarian agriculture in the Middle East some 10,000 years ago.

The majority of our history and science focuses on this one form of agriculture and the perception that as there are more people, we have to make more food. Totalitarian Agriculture is based on the principle of food and agriculture as power and “locking up the food”. Produce the most food possible and eliminate anything that stands in the way of making more food. Limit access to food, so people have to work to get it. Because there are more people, we must make more food. The vision of this (our) culture has been summarized as: The World was made for certain humans—these humans were made to conquer and rule it. Humans were destined to build and live in the “civilization” we have now.

What we know and mostly choose to hide or ignore is that humans have existed on the earth for well more than a million years and *Homo sapiens* for at least 100,000 years. Humanity ate food and survived for all that time without totalitarian agriculture. During that million plus years that have mostly been forgotten as part of human history, there were many methods of agriculture or obtaining food. Perhaps we can call that diverse mixture of forms of obtaining food “Integral Agriculture”. We don’t have written records of what it was like, but a possible guiding principle of Integral Agriculture was/is that food and agriculture are gifts, given to us to share with all of life. The Law of Life that has guided the development of infinite biological diversity is a good way to live. We can live as part of the Oneness, in the hands of the gods. There is not just one God, and we are not it. We are not broken and

do not need salvation or to be saved. A proposed vision of this culture is: Humans were made for the World—The World will care for Humans.

Integral Agriculture includes an understanding that humanity is subject to the same biological or ecological rules as all other life on our planet. If there is more food, the population will grow. If there is less food, the population will stabilize or shrink. The basic law of life. Population grows in response to food availability. A future vision must include the concept of limits on population.

I like the proposal that we need a broad vision, not a program or set of rules. We need a vision as the foundation of developing broad cultural laws about how humans live.

A message of organic agriculture has been an emphasis on the living soil as the foundation to plant, animal and human health. But the general lack of understanding of soil is so serious that people think that organic nutrients in water is a form of organic agriculture. I wonder if we need to step back a bit further? In my summary of the NOC and NOSB meetings I share that there is an emerging emphasis on “Regenerative” Organic Agriculture. Not just protecting the soil and soil biology, but building the soil and soil biology. But is this somewhat expanded view of organic agriculture enough? Is this the larger vision many of us need growing forward?

Any method of agriculture that does not address the need to limit the human population is still primarily Totalitarian Agriculture. Changing the definition of organic agriculture so organic food is accessible to more people is not an answer. We need a broader vision as a starting point, one that makes food a gift and not about power.

Perhaps permaculture is moving in the direction that needs to be considered? My perception is that permaculture is not really practical as a large scale production method that can feed many more people than those investing in it—and therefore I have questioned the long term viability and how much to emphasize it. But I am beginning to think that focusing on an agriculture practice by and for a specific community of invested people in a specific place is likely a good vision going forward. This method will not feed the growing population or even the current population so heavily concentrated in cities. But should we try to save a system that does?

Is the future developing a program with rules and boundaries? Or is the future developing and sharing

a vision that needs no rules and boundaries? A vision needs to be simple, rooted in history, and able to provide a lasting foundation for the future. The current vision is often how to produce more food. Does the new vision need to be how to not produce more food? Totalitarian agriculture is not the solution to famine, it is the cause of famine. The response to damaging population growth and climate change is not more food and technology.

The MOFFA Board of Directors have been talking about the why and what of organic agriculture. We also have been trying to develop an organizational vision. I hope we can complete this vision development process in the months ahead, before

my time as Chair ends in April. At the moment, perhaps the message is not the why and what of organic agriculture? We don't need a new "Program", we need a new "Vision".

**Humans were made for the World—
The World will care for Humans
if we follow the Law of Life.**

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.

Report From NOSB

by John Biernbaum

Thanks to a travel grant for airfare from [Lady Moon Farm](#) I was able to attend the National Organic Coalition (NOC) and the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) meetings in Jacksonville Florida October 30 to November 1. While my primary interest in attending was the handling of the hydroponic issues, I learned about other important issues facing the USDA National Organic Program (NOP). I also got to experience long term organic farmers who worked to formulate early regulations and eventually craft the NOP trying to defend what they so passionately believe in, only to be disappointed by people with limited knowledge of organic farming being in the positions of power.

A key agenda item for the NOC meeting was the Regional Farmer Updates. Approximately 15 to 20 of the 75+ people in attendance were farmers. Each farmer was given the opportunity to summarize current farming issues using the framework of concerns raised at a previous meeting in Denver. These concerns included:

- Unfair competition due to lack of enforcement of organic integrity
- Low prices (farmers new to organic doing what they had done before)
- Genetic contamination of grains, also herbicide contamination
- Multiple certifications and certification burdens
- Labor (Immigration)

One of the conditions of the NOC meeting is that there is no formal record of what is specifically said by who, so that participants are more likely to speak

freely. I can summarize my pages of notes by saying that the consumer demand for organic products continues to grow rapidly, which should benefit long time organic farmers. Instead most of the farmers present are feeling detrimental impacts from practices and perspectives of those recently jumping on the bus. The newcomers seem to have visions of dollar signs dancing in their heads and little or no knowledge of why organics is working; and how typical agriculture practices will soon put an end to the value that exists.

Some other key topics addressed over the day included:

- The [Organic Farmers Association](#) Policy Priorities
- [Accredited Certifiers Association](#) to support education and consistency among certifiers.
- Strengthening Organic Enforcement Domestically and Internationally
 - The stagnant \$9 million in annual funding for NOP under conditions of rapidly growing demand and markets is inadequate and a key problem
 - Very large fraudulent organic grain shipments were identified about 2 weeks prior to arrival in US so steps were taken to turn away the shipments. The huge quantity of grain on just one of these ships can have a major impact on availability and prices.
- A report of [IFOAM North America](#) activities
- Washington Organic Policy Update with appropriations and funding priorities

- Discussion of Regenerative Organic certification initiatives

A Summary of Key Outcomes of the NOC meeting provided by NOC is available here: <http://www.nationalorganiccoalition.org/news-items/key-outcomes-from-jacksonville-nosb-meeting>.

The NOP report Tuesday morning also addressed the issue of organic integrity. We were told that of the approximately 39,000 certified operations, about 400 were investigated for fraud with many revoked certificates, primarily for fraudulent claims of organic. An emphasis to protect organic integrity going forward is on reporting and accuracy of numbers related to acreage and other measures and greater use of technology and software to monitor accreditation and certification.

The Office of Inspector General review of the AMS/NOP identified four key negative findings involving the need for greater cooperation between federal agencies including the Customs and Border Protection and APHIS. It was tough keeping up with all the acronyms and agencies.

At the lunch break, a rally for "[Keep the Soil in Organic](#)" included a short march to a nearby site where many well-known names in organic farming offered their perspective of why hydroponic should not be allowed as part of organic certification. The event, and t-shirts with the message "Protect Organic" were funded by Lady Moon Farms and perhaps other sources. Only a few NOSB members, those already in support of soil, attended the rally.

The afternoon session was exclusively public testimony, with each person having 3 minutes to speak. The statements were almost exclusively in support of not allowing hydroponic systems to be certified organic. The last two speakers were employees of Driscoll's who made their case for why container production with peat-based media fertilized regularly with water soluble approved organic inputs should continue. It certainly appears

that the whole movement is about Driscoll's very large income from organic berries being supported by [CCOF](#) and [OTA](#).

I realized on the trip home that the reasons given for supporting the use of hydroponic: a) increased production and access to organic food, b) increased use of modern technology, c) production where suitable soil is not available, and d) water saving benefits, are all the same reasons that one would use to support the justification of GMOs as part of organic farming.

My conclusion was similar to the one I made after attending my first NOSB meeting in April of this year. My confidence in the organization regulating organic farming is not what it once was. It became pretty obvious to me that a very small number of people, some with limited understanding of the history and principles of organic farming, are making important decisions about the future of organic farming.

The meeting started with 7 NOSB members (the soil seven) trying to prevent the organic certification of hydroponics and aquaponics. It appears that all the testimony from webinars prior to the meeting and public testimony during the meeting did nothing to change the views of the 8 NOSB members supporting continuing hydroponics and Driscoll's. It appears the effort to prevent any change in the hydroponic practices was done by the NOP in the time since the 2010 NOSB recommendation to stop hydroponics. The "work" involved allowing enough delay in time to get the necessary people on the NOSB that would support hydroponics. The task force, which appears to have been designed from the start to support the use of hydroponics was little more than a smokescreen.

What is the future of Organic agriculture? As the demand grows, so too do the opportunities for cheating and weakening the regulations. One way to weaken a program is to not provide adequate funding for review and enforcement. This seems to be what is happening.

Fraudulent Imports, Urgent Action

Will the USDA Heed the Call for More Stringent Regulations?

by Anne Ross, JD

*This article is reprinted by permission from the Fall issue of the [Cornucopia Institute's](#) newsletter, the *Cultivator*. We are including it here because fraudulent shipments of "organic" grain is one of the issues of greatest concern in the organic regulatory space at present, along with improper certification of "factory" dairy farms and the hydroponics/aquaponics issue.*

On July 18, Cornucopia submitted a formal request to the National Organic Program, petitioning the USDA to enact, on an expedited basis, critical regulatory changes to halt the entry of fraudulent organic grain into the U.S.

Cornucopia's request calls for amending existing regulations to require new audit-trail protocols, mandating that importers trace grains back to overseas farms.

The petition also requests the USDA, in coordination with other governmental agencies, implement testing of all bulk imports of organic grain.

To ensure integrity throughout the supply chain, the USDA must immediately require certifiers to deploy inspectors to conduct unannounced pesticide residue testing on overseas farms located in known high risk countries.

While the petition awaits USDA review, the staggering losses to domestic organic grain producers continue to mount. Massive quantities of organic grain imports began to increasingly impact the market in 2015 and 2016. The rise of organic grain imports over the last two years, even by conservative estimates, has resulted in losses exceeding \$250 million for American organic grain farmers who can't compete with the cheap prices of suspect imported grains. In 2016, imports of organic corn were up over 80% from 2015. Organic soybean imports, already the majority of the market in the U.S., increased almost 20% over the same time period.

The U.S. is only growing a fraction of the organic grain needed by domestic markets. In fact, only about 60% of domestic organic corn and 10-30% of organic soybean demand is being met by U.S. farmers. American production has been held down by the inability to compete with the imports on price. As questionable imports increase, consumers are left skeptical of organic authenticity amidst documented evidence of fraud.

The USDA has taken some incremental measures to address cases of documented fraud, but a wholesale review of the regulatory framework is necessary to prevent fraudulent imports from crossing U.S. borders. On June 1, the USDA revoked the organic certification of Beyaz Agro, a Turkish grain handler identified in a Washington Post investigative report published in May, which exposed massive shipments of fraudulent organic grain. According to The Post and NOP documents,



Beyaz Agro exported conventional, fumigated soybeans from the Ukraine, represented as organic Russian soybeans. The soybeans may have never entered the U.S. market had each entity in the supply chain been required to conduct the audit-trail protocols that Cornucopia has petitioned the USDA to implement.

While regulatory revisions are critical for change, citizens can exercise their voices politically and in the marketplace. Organic stakeholders should call legislators and demand that importers, traders, and brokers who handle organic grains be certified under the USDA's organic program. Additionally, citizens should insist the USDA increase testing of shipments of organic grain presented for entry into the United States.

Much of the grain imported into the U.S. is used for livestock feed. If the animal feed is not organic, the beef, dairy, or eggs ultimately do not qualify for organic labeling. Consumer pressure on livestock producers, processors, and retailers to buy domestic certified organic grains simultaneously increases demand for domestic product while decreasing demand for dubious imports.

Cornucopia is preparing scorecards for consumers and wholesale buyers that will highlight exemplary organic brands firmly committed to using domestic grain. Those brands that use imported organic grains will be red-flagged.

Increasing pressure for regulatory change, and demand for domestically grown organic grain through marketplace education, can only help farmers like

Bob Joos, whose powerful story, depicting how he was unable to sell his crops after becoming certified

organic, was featured in the last issue of the Cultivator. Recently, Mr. Joos let us know that "much more is at stake than simply my ego, my family farm, or a profit or loss statement. Don't forget the health risks and damages to the consumers who have been defrauded. It's time for the USDA to step up and implement real change."

The staggering losses to domestic organic grain producers continue to mount.

MOFFA at 25!

by John Hooper

A seminal event for all of us occurred in 2017—the remarkable 25th anniversary of your Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance. Remarkable indeed—for all the hours, days, and years of dedicated work by many to further the mission of

Promoting organic agriculture and the development and support of food systems that revitalize and sustain local communities,

MOFFA has had a profound and positive influence. And the journey continues, the dissemination of information and life-lessons and anecdotal advice to inspire and educate will be always relevant and welcome.

With the perspective of looking forward as we remember, perhaps a glance at 2017 and the present would provide good foundation for understanding what has transpired and how we envision evolving.

A dedicated board, which continues to expand—now with 13 individuals—is the instrument that has been and continues to be the nexus of this all-volunteer organization. We seek to add additional board members to increase our diversity and geographic representation.

The signature annual event for MOFFA has become our Organic Intensives. This past March, held during ANR (Agriculture and Natural Resources) Week, bookended by the Farmers Market conference and the Organic Reporting Session, OI was a day of insightful knowledge sharing. The impact and connections established with a roomful of individuals for 7 plus hours is amazing. One of MOFFA's strategic plans involves expanding these sessions regionally in varying formats but with the same all day concept.

Embracing and balancing our technological world with the concept of “beyond” organic agriculture is a challenge but one we accept full-on as realists. This quarterly newsletter which now reaches 1450 mailboxes (99% electronic but still gladly mailed via post to members desiring such) has become MOFFA's main communication tool. Cannot express adequately the quality and depth of information and vision found here. All past issues are archived on [the website](#). The 2017 version of our website has been vastly upgraded and if you have not been there

of late please do so as it is the thread that truly connects all of our work together.

Policy direction and activity have always been foremost in the MOFFA mission since our inception. This early work culminated in the late 90's and early 2000's with the formation of the National Organic Program under the auspices of the USDA. While far from an ideal format the advocacy for improvement continues the discussion toward getting it right. Our endeavors waned slightly in the ensuing years, but the imperative fragility of our world's future today allows for no hesitation in standing up for the principles that were core to our founding. Thus in the past couple of years we have become more outspoken and proactive, especially to stem the tide of roll-back and the diluting of rules and regulation so vital to principled organics. In 2017 MOFFA partnered with [National Sustainable Agricultural Coalition](#) (NSAC), [National Organic Coalition](#) (NOC), [Organic Consumers Association](#) (OCA), [International Federation of Agricultural Movements](#) (IFOAM), [Cornucopia](#), [Michigan Environmental Council](#) (MEC), [Crosshatch](#), [Rodale](#), and other organizations to speak with a loud unified voice against injustices to our worldwide farming and growing community. With an IRS audit (surprise, surprise!!) came validation of the role MOFFA can play as a 501(c)(3) organization. (If you have not done so already please read John Biernbaum's report on the Fall National Organic Standard Board's meeting, from his perspective as a member of the NOSB Hydroponic and Aquaponic Task Force).

The indisputable highlight of 2017 was the publication of [The Organic Movement in Michigan](#), the vision of Maynard Kaufman who along with the volunteer effort of Julia Christianson, MOFFA's administrative staff (who works 10 hours a week for MOFFA and volunteers twice that many!) brought this wonderful informative account to print. Maynard, one of the founders of MOFFA, has been an inspiration to countless individuals and organizations for the better part of five decades. We have an unlimited supply of this wonderful collection of



essays so please [contact us](#) as to how to acquire one.

Two thoughts moving forward:

🌱 2018 Organic Intensives on Saturday Jan. 6, new date, new location, new sponsorship protocol, and new topics to jump start the 26th year! Read all about them here in this newsletter as well as the website.

🌱 Throughout these last half dozen years or so every conceivable form of request for your support—either solely through membership or membership combined with a proactive role—has been employed!! We have new members joining and others not renewing and I am constantly perplexed. There are no new enticing words. It is for me a humble honor to have been a member of MOFFA and for the last nine years of the MOFFA board of directors. The good work we do is satisfaction plenty. So join or rejoin or join again after a 5 or 10 year absence—never has it been more imperative.

One can always defer, our lives are filled ... but as a species our days could be numbered, so damn, let's do some good stuff!

So many people have been an integral and instrumental factor in Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance's 25 year story I would be remiss to begin the list for fear of omission. We are a collective of people from many generations and many backgrounds and many paths. The one common thread is the belief in our mission and doing our small share daily to fulfill this belief. Community will sustain us.

Thank you. Namasté. JWH

For 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 2011-2015.

Organic Intensives—January 6th

MOFFA's major educational event for 2018 is less than six weeks away! Saturday, January 6th, is the day, the MSU Plant and Soil Sciences building in East Lansing is the place, and the time to register is NOW ... the earlybird registration discount ends December 15. We have three information-filled sessions planned ...



Diverse Grain Options for Farms and Homesteads

If a truly sustainable and resilient food system requires a rich diversity of food crops, then it follows that small grains should be an important

component of that diversity. Small grain rotations coupled with legumes can contribute significantly to the soil health of our gardens and farms. This organic intensive on small grains hopes to encourage the growth of this localized grainshed through skill building, exploring marketing strategies, and building networks.

The morning sessions will feature John Sherck of Sherck Seeds in Bristol, Indiana. John's focus will be on the backyard garden/homestead model of growing small grains. He has done remarkable work

with many heritage and landrace varieties of rice, wheat, rye, and barley, among others. John's model points out the vital role small-scale growers can play by trialing these varieties and increasing seed supply. Most importantly, he insists that we will not save this genetic diversity until it is fully re-integrated into our local food system. Essentially, we need to eat these crops to preserve them.

After lunch, Tom and Vicki Zilke will team up with Megan Phillips Goldenberg of Growth Associates and Macon Creek Malthouse. Tom and Vicki run a CSA and farmstand and have used small grains in their rotations. They will talk about their organic oat project and the challenges of producing food-grade grains. Megan has organized a niche grain workshop to encourage networking between grain growers and local markets. Their project is an important model for supporting small grain growers and connecting them with local niche markets.

Later in the afternoon, Ashley McFarland, coordinator of the Upper Peninsula Research and Education Center will focus on their organic grain project. They are trying to encourage more organic production of food grade grains and livestock feed in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Ashley has also done a great deal of work helping to encourage the growth of small grain production across the entire state.

If we take note of the phenomenal growth of craft breweries and distilleries in the state, that model teaches us that all parties must have a seat at the table to ensure ongoing success. In that light, we encourage gardeners, homesteaders, farmers, artisan bakers, brewers, millers, and maltsters to attend this workshop and play a significant role in promoting small grains in our local economy. The last part of the afternoon will feature a roundtable of participants, including some MOFFA board members, which will focus on strengthening this network of collaboration.

For further questions about this workshop, please contact John Edgerton at jbledgerton@gmail.com or 269-870-0152.

—John Edgerton



Small to Medium Scale Livestock for the Integrated Farm

Several years into managing an organic vegetable farm without grazing animals, I started to wonder if animals could help us with some

of our fertility and pest issues. We have plenty of weeds and insect pests, as many organic farms do, and we were using organic compost and fertilizer produced off-farm for nearly all of our nutrient needs. The more I read and observed, the more it seemed that animals could help close the loop for us: they could eat weeds & weed seeds and help control insect pest issues, all while fertilizing our fields and possibly even producing something else of value: eggs, meat, and companionship!

Having only worked on vegetable farms without animals I felt nervous about incorporating animals into our rotation. However, after attending Aaron Brower's workshop on pastured hens at the NMSFC, I felt I had the knowledge I needed to try grazing 35 laying hens in one of our fields. I am very pleased with the results—we have managed the weeds in the field better than most years, and our eggs sell out at every market. Our mobile coop, inspired by his designs, held up perfectly all summer. I think this step is only the tip of the iceberg on the farm I manage, and there are so many ways vegetable crops and animal husbandry can work together to make a small farm more sustainable, productive, beautiful, and fun!

On January 6th at our 4th annual Organic Intensives workshop, we are excited to host Aaron Brower, along with Leah and Jessie Smith, who have years of experience in animal husbandry on a small organic vegetable farm, and Jeff Mattocks, an expert in humane livestock care and feed formulations. They will work together to provide a strong foundation for incorporating or expanding your farm's livestock population. Our experienced team of farmers and educators will make sure you leave with the resources you will need to feed, house and rotate them humanely, all while maintaining a "whole farm" perspective.

—Emily Nicholls



Organic Transplant Production: Secure a Successful Season with Succession Starts

Quality transplants are a key foundational practice

for vegetable, flower and herb farming. The requirements for use of organic seed and only allowed inputs, together with a desire to have particular crop varieties and the need to minimize importing insect and disease problems with purchased transplants also support on farm production. The reality is that currently there are few transplants available for purchase that can be used in an organic systems plan. And high tunnel growers typically need transplants at earlier times when they are not available for sale.

Whether you are new to farming or a long term practitioner, you can always improve your transplant production practices. I have been teaching transplant production for 30 years, the last 15 as organic. Course materials will include the 100+ page manual used by MSU students.

Co-presenter Collin Thompson has years of transplant experience to share from previous farms where he has worked and from the Upper Peninsula Research and Education Center North Farm. He has spent the last three years developing a variety of transplant systems from growth rooms, to a heated chamber in a high tunnel, to a heated transplant greenhouse. He also has valuable experience in microgreen production and marketing. Microgreens are a great crop for year round use of transplant production facilities. Transplants for sale

to other farmers and gardeners are another method of generating farm income that will be discussed.

Some other key topics will include:

- Production Planning and Scheduling
- Indoor and Greenhouse Growing Areas
- Lighting and Temperature Management and Systems
- Seeding and Growing Systems
- Media and Fertility Management with an emphasis on compost

The early January time is perfect for those preparing for the coming year of transplant production. We can get you thinking about finishing up your seed orders. With the change in venue we have a great opportunity to use the facilities at the Plant and Soil Science Building to allow hands on demonstrations. We know that seeing and doing can be a step up from hearing and reading. I am looking forward to sharing some comparisons of transplants grown with different growing media and compost based fertilization techniques.

But because hearing and reading are also valuable, we also will provide access to Self or Home-Study course materials available on-line. Adam Montri and I have provided online High Tunnel training over the past several years. I have similar recorded presentations and online materials that will be made available to the Organic Transplants OI course participants for use after the in-person session.

Please join us for the Organic Transplant session. And bring a fellow farmer or gardener to share the trip and experience. Don't forget to check our scholarship options for students, teachers, Master Gardeners and agriculture professionals.

—John Biernbaum

For more details and to register visit www.moffa.net/oi-2018.html. A limited number of scholarships are available; please [email us](#) if you would like to apply for one.

Great Lakes Fruit and Veggie Expo — This Year With Even More Sessions on Organic Production

By Vicki Morrone

Can you believe it?? The Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Expo is upon us already. This year's program looks better than ever, really. In addition to a packed Thursday of educational sessions that focus on organic certification, organic production and building markets, throughout the 3-day event there are many additional sessions that are very relevant to organic production, such as Soil Health offered on Wednesday afternoon, after the Large-Scale Organic Transition session. To see the full agenda and register visit GLEXPO.com. Good news! There is a reduced price if you attend only on Thursday of \$55 (vs \$105 for all 3 days). In this article, I'm sharing about sessions that are specifically aimed at organic production and organic markets. Please join us for these and others that are of interest.

Wednesday Morning—Large Scale Organic Transition

Are you planning to transition a large piece of land to organic or start a new organic farm on several acres? This year, we have a new organic session being held on Wednesday morning entitled Large-

Scale Organic Transition. This session was initiated by Zack Hayden, an MSU alumnus and new MSU professor in the Department of Horticulture. He was a post-doc with Dan Brainard, also in the Department of Horticulture at MSU and now engaged with organic and sustainable vegetable production research and teaching. This session will provide information and experiences from the practitioners; certification by the CEO of GOA certification agency, managing nutrients presented by Zach Hayden, and a session on weed management with smart cultivation offered by Dan Brainard and grad student Sam Hitchcock-Tilton. Then, a special guest and very experienced organic farmer and business owner, Jim Sattelberg from Everbest Organic in Munger, MI, will share his knowledge and experiences on building soil to meet organic crop needs through good soil management. If you are considering expanding your organic acreage or transitioning your current large scale farm (a farm that is dependent on mechanical cultivation) you definitely should plan to attend this session, Wednesday morning at the GLEXPO!

Large-Scale Organic Transition Wednesday morning 9:00 am MI Recertification credits: 1 (COMM CORE, PRIV CORE) CCA Credits: NM(0.5) CM(1.5) Moderator: Zachary Hayden, Horticulture Dept., MSU	
9:00 am	Why You Should Consider Organic Certification Betty Kananen, President, Global Organic Alliance, Bellefontaine, OH
9:30 am	Managing Nutrients in Organics: What Changes? Zachary Hayden, Horticulture Dept., MSU
10:00 am	Mechanical Cultivation Tools Daniel Brainard, Horticulture Dept., MSU Sam Hitchcock-Tilton, Horticulture Dept., MSU
10:30 am	Success in Large-Scale Organic Farming Jim Sattelberg, Everbest Organics and Bay Shore Farms, Munger, MI
11:00 am	Session Ends

9:00 am	Spirit of Walloon Market Garden Start-Up and Growth over the First Four Years Rachel Cross, Spirit of Walloon Market Garden, Boyne City, MI—Primarily a sustainably-produced vegetable farm, but we also grow strawberries, raspberries, mushrooms, perennial herbs, and cut flowers. We focus on an ecologically and biologically based production system that prioritizes soil health, as well as plant and insect biodiversity.
10:00 am	Zilke Vegetable Farm: Diverse Production and Marketing for the Local Market Tom and Vicki Zilke, Zilke Vegetable Farm, Milan, MI—A family-owned and operated farm, raising a diverse selection of vegetables and herbs in a sustainable and transparent manner on 40 acres. Dedicated to providing our community with food grown simply and sustainably.
11:00 am	Session Ends

Thursday Morning—Market Opportunities

Are you ready to expand your markets or invest in a new market approach? At the GLEXPO Organic Opportunities and Markets Session, Spirit of Walloon Market Garden farmers from Boyne City, MI, will share their experiences from the time they started four years ago till now to establish a diverse and profitable fruit and vegetable farm while maximizing their sustainable farm management practices. Hear how they have chosen and built their markets integrating less common (and challenging) crops including perennial herbs, berries and mushrooms in addition to their high-quality vegetables on a mere 1.5 acres.

In the second presentation of this session, Tom and Vicki Zilke will share how they are expanding their vegetable farm beyond selling to Work Place Wellness Markets and their CSA customers as they build a multi-faceted farm business, constructing a food kitchen, not just growing produce but also processing some of their crops such as oats into oatmeal and selling at their own retail market and other wholesale markets.

Organic Opportunities and Markets Thursday morning 9:00 am Two experienced diversified vegetable farmers will share their organic production and marketing experience, highlight key farm practices, and answer questions. MI Recertification credits: 2 (1B, COMM CORE, PRIV CORE) CCA Credits: PM(1.0) CM(1.0) Moderator: John Biernbaum, Horticulture Dept., MSU

Thursday Morning—Intro to Organic Production

Are you undecided whether to certify your production system? Are you considering transitioning to organic, or trying to figure out if it is worth certifying as an organic farm? Wonder what do you need to make that transition? If you answered YES to one or more of these questions then these sessions may be the right ones for you to attend on Thursday morning. The first session, I will offer a check list of things to consider when considering a transition to organic along with some tips to help you determine your direction. Then the third presentation in this session will share farmers' accounts of how they managed to transition land on their farms to grow fruit (trees) and vegetables. The Organic Michigan farmers; Julie Studier, Tom Rosenfield and Aaron Molter all grow fruit and vegetables for local and wholesale markets. Hear how they make their decisions and choose their markets, and you are invited to ask them questions during the Q&A session which will be part of their presentation. These farmers with farms certified for less than 10 years will share their stories how they transitioned their new farms to organic or transitioned an established conventional farm. They will share their experiences from choosing the right root stock to sourcing good trees in addition to knowing what was permitted in the NOP world.

Are good organic transplants for your farm or to sell a real challenge to source? Without good transplants, the chance of having a good harvest is slim. Matt Kleinhenz from Ohio State University and Rebecca Titus from Titus Farm in Mason, MI will share with you their expert advice and experiences how to grow high quality organic transplants, whether to plant on your farm or sell to other organic

farmers. This may be an opportunity for a new enterprise, to grow custom organic transplants for sale, especially if you have access to high tunnels that you can supplement with a little heat. Since organic transplants are required in certified organic production all organic farmers seek them, and the higher the quality and the chance to request a specific variety, the better the business. You will not want to miss this session if you plan to grow or want to improve your transplant production techniques.

<p align="center">Organic Production—Where to Start? Thursday morning 9:00 am MI Recertification credits: 2 (1B, 1C, COMM CORE, PRIV CORE) CCA Credits: CM(2.5) Moderator: Vicki Morrone, Outreach Specialist for Organic Fruit and Vegetable Growers, MSU</p>	
9:00 am	<p>Is Organic Certification for You? Vicki Morrone, Outreach Specialist for Organic Fruit and Vegetable Growers, MSU</p>
9:20 am	<p>Organic Transplants - Growing Your Own and Even for Others Matt Kleinhenz, Extension Vegetable Specialist, Horticulture & Crop Science Dept., The Ohio State University Rebecca Titus, Titus Farms, Leslie, MI</p>
10:00 am	<p>Transitioning Apple Orchards: A Round Table Discussion Julie Studier, Tower Hill Farm, Sodus, MI Tom Rosenfield, Earth First Farms, Berrien Center, MI Aaron Molter, Molter Family Orchards, Benton Harbor, MI</p>
11:30 am	Session Ends

Thursday Afternoon—Organic Fruit Production

Calling ALL organic fruit growers! Given this growing program, you really need to come to this session, on Thursday afternoon of GLEXPO! Annie Nielsen from Rutgers University will give us the latest on the current most unwanted import, the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug. Just correctly identifying it can be challenging but now you need to figure out how to ORGANICALLY manage the pest on your fruit. This insect is becoming a pest on many crops in Michigan and region which means it has many opportunities to feed and reproduce!

Of course, if you are controlling pests on your trees you need to plan how you will apply the organic pest sprays. Come and hear Matt Grieshop from MSU along with Jacob Emling share their research and experiences using air-blast sprayers and getting the most out of them.

<p align="center">Current Issues in Organic Fruit Production Thursday afternoon 1:00 pm MI Recertification credits: 1 (1C, COMM CORE, PRIV CORE) CCA Credits: PM(1.0) Moderator: Matt Grieshop, Entomology Dept., MSU</p>	
1:00 pm	<p>Update on Organic Pest Management Tactics for the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug Anne Nielsen, Entomology Dept., Rutgers Univ.</p>
1:40 pm	<p>Getting the Most Bang for Your Buck: Optimizing Air-blast Sprayers for Organic Pest Management Products Matt Grieshop, Entomology Dept., MSU Jacob Emling, Organic Pest Management Lab, Entomology Dept., MSU</p>
2:20 pm	Session End

Thursday Afternoon—Organic Market Vegetable Production

If you are established as an organic vegetable grower you will not want to skip this program, even if it is on Thursday afternoon! Topics shared are diverse but all critical to organic vegetable growers in the Great Lakes region. I'm sure you have heard about grafting eggplant to tomato to get a more vigorous and disease resistant crop, or have you? Maybe a better understanding of the value of grafting vegetable transplants will be useful to you! Join us for this session as Matt Kleinhenz from Ohio State University offers the scoop about what it takes and the value of grafted vegetable transplants. Ok so now you have your transplants for next year figured out now how will you manage those key pests? Whether you will be growing cukes (or any of their relatives) or any of the numerous crops in the Brassica family be sure and attend the next 2 sessions: Dan Brainard from MSU will speak with his graduate student, Marisa Benzle on smart organic management of weeds in cucurbits. This session will be followed by a presentation on a very important pest found on Brassicas, the Swede midge. Christine Hoepfing from Cornell University will give us an update of best management practices for organic production. Ok, so we have the transplants, the weeds, insects—now comes post-harvest. You can have the nicest crops on the vine or in the field but if you do not have a good system to store them until they are delivered their value will quickly diminish. Chris Callahan from University of Vermont will share some cost-effective approaches to store vegetables to increase their shelf-life. If you implement any or all of these practices I am sure you will have greater success and thus can have a positive impact on the bottom line.

Organic Market Vegetable Production Thursday afternoon 1:00 pm MI Recertification credits: 1 (1B, COMM CORE, PRIV CORE) CCA Credits: PM(1.0) CM(2.0) Moderator: Vicki Morrone, Outreach Specialist for Organic Fruit and Vegetable Growers, MSU	
1:00 pm	Vegetable Grafting: What Small to Midscale Organic Growers May Want to Know Matt Kleinhenz, Extension Vegetable Specialist, Horticulture & Crop Science Dept., The Ohio State University
1:45 pm	Organic Management of Cucurbit Crops: MSU Research Update Daniel Brainard, Horticulture Dept., MSU Marisa Benzle, Horticulture Dept., MSU
2:30 pm	Swede Midge: What Organic Brassica Growers Should Know Christine Hoepfing, Cornell Vegetable Program, Albion, NY

3:15 pm	Postharvest Handling and Storage Solutions for Smaller Farms Chris Callahan, Agricultural Engineering, Univ. of Vermont
4:00 pm	Session Ends

I look forward to seeing you at the GLEXPO, and feel free to visit with any of the presenters after their session if your questions were not answered. We are here to share information to improve organic farming in the Great Lakes Region.

Vicki Morrone is organic field crop and vegetable outreach specialist with the Center for Regional Food Systems at MSU, and has been a MOFFA board member since 2009.

Policy Update

by Julia Christianson

Many of you may have heard about a new organization sponsored by the Rodale Institute: The Organic Farmers Association. The mission of the organization is to provide a strong and unified national voice for domestic certified organic producers. With the purpose to build and support a farmer-led national organic farmer movement and national policy platform by:

- developing and advocating policies that benefit organic farmers
- strengthening and supporting the capacity of organic farmers and farm organizations
- supporting and collaborating leadership among state, regional, and national organic farmer organizations

The organization will be the only voice in Washington solely dedicated to organic farming issues—a voice that, given the multiple threats to organic farming that we are currently faced with, is critical. Their website says, "Policy is our priority. ... Policy impacts every step of an organic operation from farm to market, and it's important for organic farmers to be represented. Today, organic is a \$47 billion industry in the United States, and while farmers are busy running their operations, Washington, D.C. never sleeps."

The OFA policy process is intended to be transparent and farmer-focused. The policy committee includes both farmer and organizational representatives, but only the farmers are voting members. MOFFA member and Michigan farmer Michael Adsit was recently named one of the 12 voting members of the committee.

Membership is open to farmers, organizations, and other stakeholders, but voting membership is restricted to certified organic farmers, one farm one vote. MOFFA members are eligible for a 25% discount on membership.

MOFFA is a member of the Organic Farmers Association, and we look forward to hearing their voice both on Capitol Hill and in keeping us apprised of issues relevant to organic farming in Michigan. This is especially true in this year of threats to the structure and function of the National Organic Standards Board, and of the farm bill, which is hugely important to the stability and growth of organic and sustainable farming as we know it.

Julia Christianson is the volunteer Chair of MOFFA's Policy Committee.

MOFFA News

Board – We are pleased to announce the election of another new member to MOFFA's Board of Directors. John Edgerton joined the board in November, bringing the number of board members to 13. John brings a lifetime of experience in market gardens, preservation gardens, and community gardens; he is well known to participants in Organic Intensives the past two years, and is coordinating the session on grains for 2018. (See John's picture and a bit more about him and the other members of the board at www.moffa.net/board.html.) We are still actively seeking a member from the southeastern area of the state, ideally someone who is involved in urban agriculture. If you are a MOFFA member who would be interested in serving on the board, please let us know.

Sponsors – Beginning in 2018, and continuing for the long term, we hope, MOFFA is accepting Sponsorship from organizations and individuals who are willing to demonstrate their support of our mission with a financial contribution. The change from soliciting sponsorships 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 below and let them know you appreciate their sponsorship. If you are interested in becoming a sponsor for 2018, please email us or view the sponsorship page on the website.

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.

Membership – MOFFA relies on the support of its members, and January is membership renewal time. For those who'd like to get a jump on the new year, we will consider any memberships received in December will be active through December 2018. Please take a minute 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. We'd like to express our thanks to the 16 people and organizations who have already joined for 2018.

MOFFA Sponsors 2018

