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**A Glance Back — 2012 Annual Report**

The year 2012 began with the Board of Directors, fortunate and respectful of the privilege to be elected to lead the Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance into its third decade, seeking to resolve some key questions. Our focus this last year, in addition to the education and outreach that is constantly ongoing, was to determine how best we could serve the organic community in Michigan in the ensuing years. While the direction seems clearer at this moment the implementation remains a work in progress. This should not reflect unkindly though on the enthusiasm and positive outlook exhibited within the board and throughout the entire the organization!

A comprehensive survey crafted by Carolyn Lowery, Melissa Hornaday and John Biernbaum was sent electronically to our membership and beyond; the results of which were shared in a newsletter in late spring and in the program for our Nov. 10th event. This information is also available at our new web address [www.moffa.net](http://www.moffa.net). The bottom line was that there are moments when the relevancy of an organization is questioned, as needs and events change in our lives. In short the board needed reassurance that in the era we find



ourselves MOFFA had a viable role. The positive response and number of respondents encouraged us enormously and allowed us to forge ahead with renewed optimism.

2012 began with the arrival of our electronic newsletter. We had been without a tool to communicate with the MOFFA membership for a number of months as we made the transition from a paper to electronic media. As an all volunteer entity we just no longer had the resources or time to create then mail 400 plus paper copies. Now MOFFA is able to reach at least twice the number and our time can be spent more judiciously. Anyone wishing to receive a copy via snail mail is welcome to contact us to arrange this delivery.

Late in 2011 the MOFFA board made a decision to change the date of our annual event (known previously as the Michigan Organic Conference) to mid-autumn in the midst of the harvest. To celebrate 20 years as an organization we re-imagined the MOC to an event that would capture the main goal of the board for 2012 which was to ask the difficult questions of how best we could serve our organic community. "Bridging the Gap – A Conversation, A Collaboration, and A Celebration" was born! Flint was chosen as a new venue site for a host of meaningful reasons, we enlisted the assistance of Stephen Arellano to coordinate the event and with the gracious and totally necessary partnership with all in the Flint area food community a new event was born! Great ideas, constructive (and at moments contentious –which is at times necessary and understandable) dialogue, new relationships, work groups, music, laughter as well as a sumptuous feast were the result! Although attendance was not what we had hoped for with all the new variables we definitely consider the day a success.

MOFFA last year through a series of circumstantial acts lost our domain name [moffa.org](http://moffa.org). Sparing the details, this accidental lapse caused a great deal of consternation and was a huge issue especially because of the timing just weeks prior to our Nov. 10th celebration. To reiterate we are now [www.moffa.net](http://www.moffa.net) and can be reached at [moffaorganic@gmail.com](mailto:moffaorganic@gmail.com) or 248-262-6826. Work is underway to reacquire the .org

MOFFA continues to remain attuned to our Mission Statement – "Promoting organic agriculture and the development and support of food systems that revitalize and sustain local communities." We strive to educate, question, listen, and learn from one another to grow not only as an organization but as individuals. MOFFA sponsors, partners with and exhibits at many conferences and events each year to bring awareness to and a presence of organic agriculture. In 2012:

- MIFFS Family Farms Conference
- Northern Michigan Small Farms Conference
- Everybody Eats, Cultivating Food Democracy
- The Organic Reporting Sessions
- MIFMA Farm Market Conference
- Healthy Trade Network Conference
- Southwest Michigan Harvest Fest
- Bioneers , Traverse City

- Bioneers, Detroit
- Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable and Farm Market Expo (GLEXP0)

as well as our own event were all participatory venues.

In the board's efforts to chart a course for the ensuing months a prime area of focus is the beginning farmer and realistic access to farm land. A wide brush is necessary to cover all the many facets of this work. Beginning farmer is an all inclusive category which speaks to the young and old alike, gender, urban and rural, ethnic diversity, field production and ½ acre hoop house growing, etc. One exciting project involves collaboration between The Student Organic Farm, the Michigan State Federal Credit Union and MOFFA to establish a loan program for incoming students to be able to attend the intensive, nationally recognized organic teaching program at the SOF. We have been thoughtfully and prudently formulating this program over the last number of months. We will report our progress in future issues of the Organic Connection.

As a six member Board of Directors in 2012 – all involved in pursuing a livelihood and living the dream with family and friends as well as dedicating considerable time to MOFFA – our plates have been very full! Now with the addition of three new board members and a very competent, very part-time administrative assistant (all introduced in this newsletter) we are tremendously energized for 2013. Please contact us with thoughts or concerns or helpful information. Our website has tabs for employment opportunities, land for sale, equipment, announcements of all variety of organic agriculture topics, potential collaborations and much more.

We need your support both in the spirit and as members. You will also find on our website an application to [renew your membership](#) or [join MOFFA](#) for the first time. Every penny goes toward creating a better planet through organic agriculture and the myriad systems of life benefiting thereof.

Ah Spring! Enjoy, John H.

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## **Growers and Farms!**

One of the more valuable resources that MOFFA has produced in the last two decades is a publication titled "Eating Organically." A workgroup has been formed to update this guide, which will ultimately appear as both a hardcopy edition as well as an online version.

This first version will focus solely on growers. Future appendices will list and describe other resources i.e. farm markets, restaurants, retail outlets, distributors, suppliers, etc. We encourage all, members and non-members, to submit a Grower Information Form for inclusion in the new guide. Our website contains [more information](#) about the new Guide to Michigan's Organic and Ecologically Sustainable Growers and Farms, as well

as both a copy of the [Grower Information Form](#) which you may download and print, and an [interactive form](#) which can be filled out directly on the website.

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## **Organic farmers join forces with Michigan State University researchers to identify needs**

East Lansing, Mich. – Organic farmers in Michigan have technical needs, just like any other business professionals. They may have even more questions than the average business, given that they work in a system that includes unpredictable elements such as Michigan’s weather, of particular concern in recent years as climate change impacts weather patterns.

During the Michigan Organic Reporting Session, an annual event hosted by Michigan State University, organic farmers came together to discuss such issues and share priorities for future research projects with MSU faculty and staff. Farmers were given the opportunity to identify their most challenging needs for their farm businesses in the Organic Priority-Setting Session.

Vicki Morrone, the organic farming specialist at MSU’s Center for Regional Food Systems, created a forum for Michigan’s organic farmers to convene and identify areas of greatest need in this session. Thirty-seven farmers joined MSU researchers, staff and students to consider many possible research questions and identify one that addresses mutual needs of the participants in each group.

Participants formed eight groups representing various farming systems: high tunnels, fruit, compost and compost tea, soil quality, grains, diverse vegetables, value-added, and livestock. Each group settled on a single question around which they would benefit from more research. Outcomes of such projects would likely enhance operations for the group’s participants as well as potentially benefit farmers outside Michigan. The discussion notes will be shared with MSU researchers and event participants for use in planning future work.

Some possible funding sources to address research needs through on-farm research are Michigan State University’s Project GREEN, the Organic Farming Research Foundation, or the Ceres Trust. If the 2012 Farm Bill offers any funding support for organic, the Organic Research Extension Initiative USDA program may offer some grant dollars as well. The farmer working groups are being encouraged to continue discussion and some may even work on a grant initiative together.

Next year’s Michigan Organic Reporting Session will dedicate time to sharing progress on the questions identified during the 2013 program. Notes from the working groups are available at the Michigan Organic Farmers Exchange website ([www.MichiganOrganic.msu.edu](http://www.MichiganOrganic.msu.edu)) where you can share your thoughts on research needs for organic farming

Those interested in contributing to future conversations will find information on the 2014 session at the same website early next year; please plan to join us and have your voice heard in March 2014.

The Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems unites the applied research, education and outreach expertise of faculty and staff members at MSU to advance understanding of and engagement with regional food systems. CRFS organizers envision a thriving economy, equity and sustainability for Michigan, the country and the planet through food systems rooted in local regions and centered on food that is healthy, green, fair and affordable. These are big goals, but together we can make them a reality.

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## New Board and Staff

MOFFA welcomes three new members of the Board this spring, Lee Arboreal, Linda Torony, and Dane Terrill, as well as a new Administrative Assistant, Julia Christianson. Lee Arboreal, along with his wife Laurie and two children, steward the Eaters' Guild Farm in Bangor, MI.



**Lee Arboreal** — "We have lived here and worked this farm since 2003, transitioning it from the care of Maynard Kaufman and Barbara Geisler who called it The School of Homesteading. Prior to getting on 'the farm' we ran the Eaters' Guild from around Mt. Pleasant, MI while helping manage the food co-op there and serving on the board for several years. The strengths I hope to share with MOFFA as a farmer board member come from time spent observing living change, broad consideration of large slow processes, and the feeling I get from being a fairly



**Linda Torony** is committed to regenerative, sustainable land practices. She has a BS in Horticulture and an MS in Agriculture Extension Education from MSU. Taught Agriscience at Technical Centers in Macomb and Oakland Counties for over 20 years. Her students participated in Rural Education Day, FFA, Harvest for America, "Plant A Row for the Hungry" and environmental community projects.

Linda is an organic farmer working on her USDA Certification growing heirloom herbs and vegetables on 10 acres in

experienced, aging youth. I'm now solidly between the neophyte greenhorns and the generation of farmers I'm most indebted to for sharing time and tools to let me learn. Many interns have passed through this farm and gone on to their projects. I've been uniquely situated to share experiences of the 'ever-learningness' of farming and a coming to know land. I imagine there is some way I can help MOFFA expand the use of organic practices in the region and deepen the benefit our farms can be for land and ourselves."



**Dane Terrill** is the Director of Sales and Marketing for Flowerfield Enterprises in Portage, MI. Flowerfield Enterprises has been a leader in the small scale vermicomposting industry for over forty years. Eight years ago, Flowerfield diversified to the manufacture of Flowerfield Compost Tea which is used in the organic lawn care business. Dane has accepted the task of educating organic and conventional growers on the value of returning bacteria, fungi, protozoa and nematodes through the application of compost and compost teas in order to build healthy soil. Flowerfield consults with farmers, superintendents and greenhouse growers, teaching the benefits of healthy soil thereby reducing

Metamora. She is Certified MAEAP (Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program), and Certified Naturally Grown. She markets her produce at Clarkston Farmer's Market and has a CSA. Her focus is to support urban and rural organic farmers.

Why did I become a member of MOFFA? To learn, to share, to promote organic farming and to have a voice in eating healthy food.

Enough said.



**Julia Christianson** was hired in late January to be MOFFA's part-time Administrative Assistant. She has spent the majority of her working life with non-profit organizations, most recently as Administrative Director of an organization providing individualized support for people with severe disabilities to assist them in becoming fully integrated, contributing members of their communities. She and her husband moved to southwest Michigan in 2010 and found themselves in possession of a greenhouse business, which is currently operating on a small scale, growing vegetable and herb starts on a subscription basis. She joined MOFFA soon after arriving in Michigan in order to connect with a community of

or eliminating the need for inorganic fertilizers and pesticides.

like-minded people committed to sustainable growing practices.

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## Adaptive Organics

By Lee Arboreal in dialogue with the soon to be published essay "Raising Food in a Changing Climate" by Maynard Kaufman

Organic farmers, gardeners and allies have been somewhat aside the self-blame and/or blame shifting that goes on around fossil fueled climate change. As agrarians of a keen and powerful species, even we organic folks must see where we make more heat than humus. Our fields were likely once forests and our tilled or spaded beds belch CO<sub>2</sub> when we beg them to make veggies from seed, sun and water. The truth is we need to squeeze more from less land to feed our many human lives and lifestyles. We do this in organics too — we're mechanized, we move around a lot of materials in composting and harvest, we cultivate plenty. Still organic farms have figured out ways to grow food with less energy than conventional because of our use of soil carbon to energize our fertility. (Much of the energy budget for conventional is for petrochemical fertilizers and biocides.)

Some fairly recent developments have convinced some that organics can become a model for "carbon negative" practices. Two practices stand out among a few that make growing food a climate solution instead of one of the worst drivers of climate change. To be carbon negative a practice or culture must sequester more carbon from the atmosphere than it makes into CO<sub>2</sub>. Also, in the case of soils, practices can add more or less NO<sub>2</sub>, methane or greenhouse gases other than CO<sub>2</sub>. The practice of no-till mulch gardening has been around a while but advances in understanding and machinery have made it possible to get consistent crops from broad acreage under mulch without herbicides or chemical fertilizer. The New Farm at the Rodale Institute has led in this development, and we as growers need to spread this approach around adapting it to our farms. The carbon in this system tends to accumulate as active organic matter near the soil surface and can be lost to future tillage. Some small fraction becomes hard carbon, or "young coal" as Wes Jackson calls it, that will remain as humus for millennia. Still, pulling as much carbon out of the air as possible each growing season while getting a full crop can be a new standard for best organic practices.

A more ambitious seeming project is small to geo-scale production of biochar. While there are new ways of producing it, it's just charcoal — the black, cubic unburned pieces after a wood fire. This form of carbon is highly stable, resisting decomposition and return to the atmosphere as CO<sub>2</sub>. And just as it has a gas-reducing, moderating effect on our digestion, it enhances the productive qualities of our soils while reducing NO<sub>2</sub> and methane emissions. The structure of biochar harbors bacteria, fungi and water without being consumed by them. In this way it can nurse life back into conventionally managed soils and enhance the effects of soil positive practices on

organic farms. Of course, land is needed to grow trees to be made into biochar but this process can produce more energy than is invested while sequestering up to half of the carbon fixed by the tree. Let's keep our senses and prospects open to projects like these in the works. Organic farmers and gardeners know how to handle bulk materials and don't mind getting dirty so we can make it work when material like biochar comes available. There are small kilns that can be made or purchased that can heat a greenhouse or shop while producing biochar for the soils so try to consider it among your options.

It must be said that most of the efforts we make now to adapt organics to climate change will not accrue their fruits to us. Knowing how hard it is to raise a crop and a family in the extreme weather glimpses we've had in the past decade gives us the heart to try to prevent worse conditions for future peoples. Our work can pay off in better soils now that stand up to drought and flood better, but our inspiration can come from the air—taking from the air what's best put back in the soil. This we do for others we will never know. Soils are a place for carbon that we know enough to use well for ourselves and for those that will need them later.

MOFFA can be a gathering point for education and the creation of policy to serve farmers seeking carbon negative options. Let us know what you think about this and how we can support your ways of growing food on less fossil energy.

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## **An Acre Per Minute**

**More than  
an acre of  
precious  
farm or  
ranch land  
is lost  
every  
minute.**

Recently, I came across this campaign, American Farmland Trust, and was quite surprised by the facts.

Here's a short message from their website: "No Farms No Food." The message is simple and couldn't be clearer—America's farms and ranches provide an unparalleled abundance of fresh, healthy and local food, but they are rapidly disappearing.

Ninety-one percent of America's fruit and seventy-eight percent of our vegetables are grown near metro regions, where they are in the path of development. And America has been losing more than an acre of farmland every minute. That's why supporting local food and farms is more important than ever!

Sign the petition to show your support to protect local farms and food! Visit the website [www.Farmland.org](http://www.Farmland.org).

—Yvette Berman, Co-Founder, Harvest Michigan, Inc.

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## MOFFA's 20th Anniversary: "Bridging the Gap"

MOFFA would like to thank everyone who participated in our November 10, 2012, 20th anniversary celebration: "Bridging the Gap: A conversation, collaboration, and celebration." Our goal for the event was to reach out to MOFFA members, and the greater Michigan organic community, to forge a new path forward for MOFFA – so we can ensure the importance and relevancy of our work for the next 20 years.

The event was held at the Sarvis Center in Flint instead of the traditional location in East Lansing for a number of reasons: 1) there have been a number of conferences/educational events that have emerged, however, the Eastern part of the state was one region lacking access to educational and networking conferences; 2) with the theme of the celebration being "Bridge the Gap" MOFFA felt it would be beneficial to reach out to the young urban farmers in the Eastern Metropolitan region. The goal of the event was to forge a new path forward for the next 20 years, and today's young and emerging farmers are going to be pivotal to MOFFA's success over the next 20 years, so we wanted to ensure they were well represented. We had over 100 participants – largely from the south central part of the state, but people came as far away as Traverse City.

A number of issues were raised during the event that made us really reflect on the needs of the community we are representing. While the organic and sustainable farming movement has for the most part spoken with a unified voice on important issues, we are a diverse group of people, with diverse needs, agendas, and differences in opinions. Examples include:

- Beginning and well-established farmers.
- Urban and rural farmers
- Certified organic and non-certified

### **Summary of Event Program:**

The goal of the morning sessions were to facilitate learning and discussion on topics designated by our partners in Flint to be educational priorities for the urban agriculture community, which include: 1) Building Markets: both collectively and individually; 2) Respecting the commons: gaining access to land for urban farming; and 3) Keeping the organic in urban.

We started the afternoon with a panel discussion between a number of different farmers, including: Linda and Lee Purdy, Sandee and Bernie Ware, Deb Lentz and Richard Andres, and Joanna Lehrman and Roxanne Adair. These new and experienced farmers shared their experiences, trials and tribulations, as well as their visions on the challenges that lie ahead. We followed the panel discussion with a visioning dialogue, with the goal being to gather input on the key priorities in the organic community, as well as the actions necessary to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

The following working groups were generated from this discussion:

- Advocacy for young farmers
- Certification of organic farms
- Eating organically in Michigan: developing an eating organically guide to local farmers

We ended the evening with a 20th Anniversary Celebration Dinner, followed by a 'Taste of Michigan' social hour with music and drinks.

**A note of thanks:**

MOFFA would like to thank the following organizations for their generosity:

- SunOpta
- Herbrucks-Green Meadows
- Ruth Mott Foundation
- Organic Bean and Grain
- Farm to Ladle
- Center for Regional Food Systems
- Graham's Organics
- Flint Farmers Market
- Zingerman's
- Eat Local Food
- Rodale Institute
- Seedway
- Organic Valley
- Harvest Michigan
- Bio-Systems

We would also like to thank the many people who helped make this event a success:

- Stephen Arellano
- Erin Caudell
- Holly Lubowicki
- Joanne Lehrman
- Roxanne Adair
- Lindsey Scalera
- Alexis Bogdanova-Hanna
- David Derby.

It is an honor to be part of the MOFFA Board. Saw a lot of good exchanges taking place at the 20th Anniversary Celebration in November. This conference made me realize that we are a voice that needs to be heard.

Love getting out into the field growing healthy, sustainable organic food for families in Lapeer and Oakland County. This is the fastest growing sector in Agriculture and we need to create awareness. Bringing sustainable agriculture into the Rural/Urban classrooms will plant the seeds of change in our agricultural practices. Adults and children need to engage in the "Field to Food" concept and appreciate what an Organic Farmer does. One person came out to work with me for one day and had a different outlook on the environment and food. She said: "This kind of food can't come out of vending machines, what can I do?" Told her to call her Michigan US House of Representative and Senate to pass the Farm Bill. Go to her local newspaper and write an article on her experience promoting local Organic Farming and Farmer's Markets.

Our environment and health is a priority. Lets treat them with respect.

— *Linda Torony*

We would also like to thank the many farmers who supplied food for the event!

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Keep up with MOFFA on our website: [www.moffa.net](http://www.moffa.net), or email us at [moffaorganic@gmail.com](mailto:moffaorganic@gmail.com).