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Greetings Friends,

Welcome to the autumn issue of the Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance newsletter. As the bittersweet berries sparkle in the lessening daylight; so too does the bittersweet nature of the change in season focus our attention on the innumerable, yet enjoyable, tasks before us. Replete in this Michigan beauty, we desire for all, a bountiful harvest and fulfilling transition to winter.

MOFFA and your board of directors are working on many fronts this fall as is evident by the articles that follow.



Our focus as always is on continuous education and outreach through all avenues available. A couple of projects though have dominated the summer months – our guide to ecologically grown food, development of a loan policy and sources for funding of this endeavor, and discussion about changes in MOFFA structure.

We have also continued to have conversations in regard to furthering a broader coalition of organizations throughout our state whose mission and function parallel our own. One of the prime goals of many in our “sustainable agriculture” sector is to speak with a more unified and powerful voice. MOFFA, with its prime objective of promoting organic agriculture, can and will be an important and necessary cog in the development of just and inclusive food policy and food systems. Our members continue to speak often and convincingly with Senator Debbie Stabenow, chair of the senate Agriculture Committee. Her work championing the diversified organic farmer and their place within the 2013 Farm Bill should not go unnoticed.

MOFFA attempts to have a presence at all events and conferences whose focus aligns with our work. While it is not physically possible, with a volunteer board, to be at all venues, we hope to change this with a broader outreach to our membership - seeking volunteers to assist and promote.

The MOFFA annual meeting for 2013 will be held at the Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference “GLExpo” the second week in December, in Grand Rapids. This is a three day event with the last day Thursday, Dec 12, focusing on Organic Agriculture and Farm Markets. A notice and descriptor is in this newsletter and other notices will follow. The meeting will have a short business segment but the emphasis will be on communication, networking and how to actively involve more members in the organization.

It is noteworthy that our first on-line version of “Eating Organically” is now active on our website www.moffa.net. Tremendous effort by our administrative asst. Julia Christianson, went into this ongoing resource. I would encourage anyone, any group, any farm that embraces the principles of the [farmers pledge](#) to list their growing operation, no matter the size or scope, on this site. This guide is a work in progress with many fine listings; but so many more of you could make it the “go to” site for the Michigan consumer/buyer interested in wholesome, nutritious ecologically sustainable food. Please if you have not submitted an application take a few moments to do so and we will almost immediately have you on-board!!

Enjoy – life is good with family and friends and MOFFA as your partner. We will continue to strive forward to do what we are able to make this world a saner and healthier place for all.

Thanks, John H.

Interested in What's Happening with the Farm Bill?

To keep up, please visit and connect with these organizations. By responding to their action alerts and making phone calls to Congressional legislators, you can help make a big difference in the outcome of the final farm bill.

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

MOFFA is a member group of NSAC and regularly participates in their policy development process. You can sign up for their very informative policy updates (and calls to action) on their website, <http://sustainableagriculture.net>.

National Organic Coalition

MOFFA's membership with the NOC was instrumental in helping us to secure the Organic Cost Share Program for Michigan. Check out their website to see the latest happenings with organics in D.C.: <http://www.nationalorganiccoalition.org>.

Organic Farming Research Foundation

MOFFA and OFRF met with Senator Stabenow to discuss funding of organic programs, particularly organic research in 2012. OFRF is one of the leading forces in organic advocacy in Washington D.C. in addition to their funding of organic specific research projects. <http://ofrf.org>.

How Important is the Cost Share Program to the Organic Farmer?

Organic farming traces its roots back thousands of years in its methods of planting and producing quality food. It's all about growing produce and raising animals for markets while using ethical, sustainable practices that care for the environment. As an organic farmer, I place great importance on practicing the most sustainable growing methods that are permitted and beneficial to organic production. These methods need to not only produce organic food but also care for the health of humans, wildlife and the overall community. The Cost Share Program is essential to assisting the small organic farmer who wants to be certified organic.

Becoming a certified organic farmer meant spending the winter months filling out detailed documents, paying a significant amount of money to have a certifying agency travel to our farm and spend hours going over the papers and walking the property and evaluating the soil, water, seeds, fertilization and pest practices.

From a grower's perspective being an organic farmer requires more physical work to minimize carbon inputs, and requires a greater amount of time to manage crops fertility and effectively manage pests using organic practices. This practice increases the cost to me as I am not mono-cropping and applying chemicals to the plants, soil, water and

air but addressing the crops' needs through a system approach, certification process. As it stands now all organic farmers were cut from the USDA Farms Bill and must pay to be organic, while large conventional farms are subsidized for using chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

As stated in the "[Organic Farming: PRICELE\\$\\$](#)," documentary, in order to use the word "organic" to market a product, a farmer or processor must meet strict regulations to be certified organic. Although less than 1% of America's cropland is farmed organically, there are now more than 14,500 certified organic farmers in the United States and demand for organic food is growing. By 2015, the number of organic farmers required to meet projected demand must triple to at least, bring the total to 42,000 organic farmers. To gain certification, a farmer (of cropland, pasture, or livestock) submits an organic system plan to a certifier accredited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Organic Program (USDA/NOP) each year. This documents how the farmer adheres to the national organic standards implemented under this program and certifies organic farms and processing facilities under annual inspections to verify that they are meeting the standards. Organic inspectors examine all elements of a farm's operation to ensure it adheres to the standards, and verify that the farm is being managed according to the farmer's organic system plan.

As a certified organic farmer, the support available to help operate a farm in a sustainable manner, made through the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program (NOCCP), truly made a difference, reimbursing farmers up to 75% of the cost of annual certification to a maximum of \$750 per certificate, since some farms are certified for more than one type of operation.

Customers are looking for organic produce at a farmer's market. They support the organic farmer and bring a sense of involvement in the community. The community benefits from having organic farmers at the farmer's market as it positively affects their local economy. Local restaurants buy produce from organic farmers. I would like to see the cost share program reinstated into the USDA Farm Bill. Without this, many small organic farmers may opt out on being certified organic and choose other options. As the USDA Farm Bill drags on and Organic Cost Share is currently not included in the bill some farmers have already opted out of recertification for the upcoming year. Is this really what we want to happen?

— Linda Torony

Southwest Michigan Harvest Notes in Brief—

In the areas surrounding Eaters' Guild Farm in Bangor, greater than average rainfall and lower than average temperatures for the summer has taught this farmer some new ways to describe differences between how conventional and organic systems yield in adversity. Since we grow "specialty crops" its rare that we get to compare our crops and cropping systems to other systems in our area because we never drive by other bok

choy, butter lettuce or kale fields, for example. But this is the first season we have raised field corn. It's mainly to be fed to poultry though some is for the table as tortillas and cornbreads so we paid pretty good attention to growing it. We plowed an old hayfield in spring and, seeing little alfalfa, we spread 2 tons/acre dried poultry manure from an organic egg laying operation. This contributes a modest amount of nitrogen--about 160 lbs. The soil in this field is sandy so we figured on a shy yield and were glad for the extra rain this year.

The corn in this area is generally on lighter soils and despite the zone 6 season yields tend to be lighter than in other cooler areas of Michigan with heavier soils. This year a lot of corn got in late and generally seemed to grow slower from the saturated soils and cooler temps. The conv. fields showed the usual green jump after ammonia application but then many fields started yellowing around tasseling from the continued rains. The fields were not holding water in mid-summer causing anaerobic soil conditions but rather the highly soluble nitrates and ammonia fertilizers were leaching out of reach of the corn (likely into ground and surface waters). Our corn was deeply green until the ears matured because nitrogen was slowly made available through the lives of microbes and so long as they weren't drowned by the rain were well served by the extra rainfall this year. Yields are definitely off on many conventional fields as the nitrogen starved plants whimpered up small ears. My sense is that there is a lot more stalk in the fields than in last year's historic drought but there may not be much if any more corn in many of these fields.

As the breadth of seasonal weather adversity expands it is important that growers adopt and expand growing practices that yield over the greatest possible range of conditions. Organic farms with their emphasis on increasing the amount and diversity of organic matter in the soil grow their buffer against extremes while they grow this year's crop because some part of the compost, manure or covercrop plowed down for fertility remains in the soil organic matter bank. So while conventional yields may be better in ideal years, organic yields make it up when averaged over periods of decades and may show an even greater advantage in a future when more weather adversity is the norm. Talk to your neighbors, use whatever creativity or angles you have to get people to understand this. Someday our yields might actually have something to do with how hungry we are that next spring...

— Lee Arboreal

October is Non-GMO Month!

As an internet retailer, and a Food Hub developer, I find that in recent years more people are curious about GMO's from a consumer point of view. People are hungry to understand the meaning and science behind this technology, as well as, the assurance that the organic products they want to buy is truly, Non-GMO. This can be a long discussion on the intricacies of the industry, seed preservation, heirloom varieties, and

usage of USDA certified seed, yet I'm delighted to support and to put on your radar that October has been designated as "GMO Awareness month" by leading health-food retailers and wholesalers.

Back tracking to 2008, upon hearing Jeffrey M. Smith speak at a conference for healthy living in metro-Detroit, I believed it was fitting for Mr. Smith, Founder and Director of the Institute for Responsible Technology, to be part of the MOFFA conference as a keynote speaker. I was delighted when our Board agreed, and we moved swiftly to secure Mr. Smith to be part of our weekend in East Lansing. As THE leading global spokesperson on GMO's, many attendees were touched by Mr. Smith's vast knowledge of the bio-tech global industry, the research that presents multiple dangers to animal and human beings, and most notably, the devastation to soil biology. As a reference, here's Jeffrey's list to help your family, circle of friends, or customers understand the reasons to avoid GMO's. Keep spreading the news!

10 Reasons to Avoid GMOs

(Permission from the Institute for Responsible Technology)

1. GMOs are unhealthy.

The American Academy of Environmental Medicine (AAEM) urges doctors to prescribe non-GMO diets for all patients. They cite animal studies showing organ damage, gastrointestinal and immune system disorders, accelerated aging, and infertility. Human studies show how genetically modified (GM) food can leave material behind inside us, possibly causing long-term problems. Genes inserted into GM soy, for example, can transfer into the DNA of bacteria living inside us, and that the toxic insecticide produced by GM corn was found in the blood of pregnant women and their unborn fetuses.

Numerous health problems increased after GMOs were introduced in 1996. The percentage of Americans with three or more chronic illnesses jumped from 7% to 13% in just 9 years; food allergies skyrocketed, and disorders such as autism, reproductive disorders, digestive problems, and others are on the rise. Although there is not sufficient research to confirm that GMOs are a contributing factor, doctors groups such as the AAEM tell us not to wait before we start protecting ourselves, and especially our children who are most at risk.

The American Public Health Association and American Nurses Association are among many medical groups that condemn the use of GM bovine growth hormone, because the milk from treated cows has more of the hormone IGF-1 (insulin-like growth factor 1)—which is linked to cancer.

2. GMOs contaminate—forever.

GMOs cross pollinate and their seeds can travel. It is impossible to fully clean up our contaminated gene pool. Self-propagating GMO pollution will outlast the effects of global warming and nuclear waste. The potential impact is huge, threatening the health of future generations. GMO contamination has also caused economic losses for organic and non-GMO farmers who often struggle to keep their crops pure.

... the list continues at responsibletechnology.org/10-Reasons-to-Avoid-GMOs.

Also, in a few short years, the organic industry embarked on the Non-GMO Project Verified campaign, which calls for more food companies to be transparent with sourcing potatoes, grains, and sugar, for their food ingredients.

A good resource to educate yourself and others about GMOs is [GMO FAQs](#), a tri-fold brochure prepared by the [Non-GMO Project](#).

As more consumers become aware of GMO's, and demand that labels signify the validity of an organic product, we'll get the assurance of Non-GMO Food. You have the right to know!

— Yvette Berman

Successful Specialty Crop Block Grant

MOFFA collaborated with MSU researchers to apply for a Specialty Crop Block Grant early this year and the proposed project was one of 20 funded. The intent of the project is to enhance the feasibility and competitiveness of Michigan organic raspberry and sweet cherry production by developing organic management approaches that integrate high tunnels for critical climatic modification, novel and biological strategies to control pests and diseases, soil-building strategies for root and plant health and nutrient cycling efficiency, and evaluating cultivars and rootstocks, and training systems that are most suitable for organic fruit production in Michigan. The funding supports continuation of the organic high tunnel fruit project previously funded by the Ceres Trust for organic research in the Midwest and the USDA Organic Research and Education Initiative.

— John Biernbaum

Farm Guide Update

The seventh edition of the [MOFFA Guide to Michigan's Organic and Ecologically Sustainable Growers and Farms](#) went online in early September. At present, there are 96 farms in the listings, 77 of which are Certified Organic.

If your farm is not listed, please take a moment to [submit an application](#), or [contact us](#) to request an application packet. Please note that we "started fresh" with this edition, so even if you were listed in the 2008 edition, you will need to submit a new application, or contact us to let us know if you'd like to pick up the listing from the prior edition.

We want to make this a useful guide for people who are looking to buy local, sustainably grown food. We encourage you to spread the word to farmers you interact with; you can also "[nominate a farm](#)" and we will contact them to invite them to join the guide.

Over the winter we will be adding processors, retailers, and other related businesses—look for the announcement in mid-December. We will also be adding .pdf files for individual regions of the state for those who wish to download and print them, and hope to publish a complete copy of the guide on paper for the 2014 growing season.

Annual Hoophouse Gala

The fifth annual Hoophouse Gala at the MSU Student Organic Farm was held on September 29 with about 200 in attendance, including a number of MOFFA Board members. Campus chefs used produce and pork from the SOF and other Michigan farms to prepare amazing appetizers and an extraordinary six course meal. The event generated approximately \$30,000 for scholarships and support for the preparation of future organic farmers. Several participants in the Organic Farmer Training Program and MSU students were presented with scholarships from funds raised previously. In addition a fundraising drive was launched by members of the event planning committee to support development of a building and classroom at the Horticulture Teaching and Research Center. They proposed securing and moving a historic barn to the site.

— John Biernbaum

Organizational Issues to be Addressed at the Annual Meeting

In July, MOFFA conducted a survey of both members and non-members on the question of whether to change its organizational status from a "membership organization" to a "directorship organization". A small number of people responded, just 24 members and 13 non-members, but those who did respond made thoughtful and insightful comments on the question.

Of MOFFA members responding, 58% were in favor of changing the organizational status to a directorship, 21% were opposed, and 21% said they had no opinion one way or the other. (Among non-members, the numbers were 54%, 8%, and 38% respectively.)

The primary concern among those who voted against a change was that an organization which relies on a small group of directors can become insular and fail to respond to the needs of its members. The board takes this concern seriously, and has discussed a number of initiatives to enhance communication between MOFFA's

members and its leadership. And as always, there are many opportunities for those who are interested in helping guide the organization, including volunteering for committees and expressing interest in joining the board.

Factors cited by both those voting "yes" to change and those with no opinion tended to view a greater ability to respond to issues and opportunities in a timely manner and with less time spent on organizational issues as the primary benefits to be gained by making the change.

The vote on the change from a membership to a directorship will take place at the

MOFFA Annual Meeting
at the Great Lakes Expo in Grand Rapids
Thursday, December 12, 3:30 - 5:00 p.m.
Gallery Overlook Room G-H, DeVos Place Convention Center (upper level)

There will be a time for comment and discussion before the vote is taken.

Prior to the annual meeting, we will send all the dues paying members of record (as of November 1, 2013) a ballot that can be mailed in for members who will not be in attendance at the meeting. The proposed changes to the bylaws will be included with the ballot and will be sent out electronically to MOFFA's larger e-mail list as well.

We look forward to seeing you on December 12th!

— Julia Christianson, Chris Bardenhagen

Pesticide Drift

The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is reminding certified organic farmers to continue registering their organic farm sites in DriftWatch at <http://www.driftwatch.org/>. Commercial certified applicators must also register in DriftWatch in order to automatically receive information regarding location of certified organic farms.

Questions regarding DriftWatch can be directed to Antonio Escobar, Michigan's DriftWatch specialist, at 800-292-3939.

Seeking Volunteers

MOFFA is a 99% volunteer-run organization, which means we survive on the effort and dedication provided by members who take on a portion of the work required to maintain the organization and keep it focused on its purpose.

At the moment, we are in particular need of someone to serve on the Policy Committee. This post involves keeping up to date on issues affecting organic farmers, educating legislators and others regarding the impact of these issues, and reporting the results of those activities to the Board and the membership on a regular basis.

We are also in need of volunteers to help with the MOFFA booth at conferences around the state—most immediately at Bioneers in Detroit on October 25-27, and the Great Lakes Fruit & Vegetable Expo in Grand Rapids December 10-12.

We also need someone who has graphic design talent to assist us with the website, newsletter, and other publications, and someone who is interested in editing the quarterly newsletter.

If you have the time and would like to become involved, please [email us](#) or sign up through our website at www.moffa.net/volunteer.html.



Tuscola Project RED

The ninth annual Project RED (Rural Education Day) program took place in mid-September at the Tuscola County Fairgrounds. More than 600 third grade students took part to learn what life is like on a farm. MOFFA participated by providing seed packets containing organic spinach seed to each student.

Educational Opportunities

Check out the latest addition to the MOFFA Webpage (www.moffa.net), a listing of [educational opportunities](#) of interest to organic farmers. Links are provided to Michigan Conferences that are providing programming on a variety of topics including organic farming. The Great Lakes Fruit and Veggie Expo has several presentations scheduled in organic farming sessions on Thursday, December 12. Board member Lee Arboreal (eatersguild.com) will be presenting along with Joe Scrimger of Bio-Systems and Mike Bollinger from Four Season Tools and River Root Farm (www.riverrootfarm.com).

The Board of Directors has also discussed the potential of working with MOFFA members and organic farmers to organize a charter bus trip to the MOSES Organic Conference in La Crosse Wisconsin in late February. The conference is the largest organic conference in the US and is a great opportunity to experience a wide variety of presentations. It is about an 8 to 9 hr trip from Lansing. If you are interested in helping to organize transportation please contact Julia at moffaorganic@gmail.com.

— John Biernbaum

FSMA Webinar

One of the items featured on the new [educational opportunities](#) webpage is a webinar taking place this Thursday, October 10th, at 4:30 pm concerning the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). The webinar is presented by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition ([NCAS](#)) and participation is free, but registration is required.

From NCAS: "The US Food and Drug Administration has proposed new rules this year that will have a huge impact on how fresh fruits and vegetables are grown and processed in the US. This is a big deal for farmers and eaters! Everyone has a role in ensuring safe food from field to fork – but FDA's new proposed rules as written will unfairly burden family farmers, target sustainable and organic farming, and reduce the availability of fresh, local food in our communities. Right now, we have a chance to tell FDA that this is unacceptable – and we need your help to do it."

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

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