

FALL 2020

NEW FARM

THE MAGAZINE OF ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

**MAKE
YOUR VOICE
COUNT!**

TAKE THE POLICY
SURVEY p. 5



**COPING
WITH COVID-19**

**THE FIGHT
AGAINST FRAUD**

**PROTECTING
YOUR FARM**

GROWING DIVERSITY

*Why Organic
Farming
Needs People
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BY FARMERS.**

President's Letter

This year has brought some of the most complex challenges to our nation I have ever seen. As we struggle with a national health crisis and the realization that many of our people are not able to fully participate in our society we struggle to find solutions. I believe that a resilient farm economy that allows everyone access to healthy food, clean air and water is a big part of the answer. Organic farmers have shown this resiliency throughout the current pandemic. While many facets of our nation's food system failed this year, our nation's organic farmers shifted and retooled their marketing, production, packaging, and transportation to make sure people still had access to healthy food. Organic farmers know that a food system built to resemble our natural systems must also be nimble and able to diversify and change. The organic farming movement, built by hard working farm families, is incredibly important in modeling a sustainable future.

As our country struggles with the pandemic in 2020, the experiences and voices of organic farmers are incredibly important to lift up in Washington, D.C. to provide examples of what is working and what we must support as a nation rethinking our food systems, food security and climate.

Fortunately, Organic Farmers Association is here for us to make sure our voice is heard on Capitol Hill and at the USDA. In March, some of the last constituent voices heard in the halls of Congress were those of organic farmers during OFA's farmer fly-in. We have continued to make virtual connections to keep organic farmers' needs present throughout the stimulus negotiations and appropriations processes.

Organic Farmers Association began in 2016 after years of grassroots organizing by organic farm organizations recognizing the need for a strong independent organic farmer voice. In our first three years as Organic Farmers Association, the longtime organic leader, Rodale Institute, has generously supported us. It is fitting that one of the pioneering organic institutions in the U.S. helped OFA get on solid footing, and we are fortunate and appreciative of that partnership in our founding years.

Now, Organic Farmers Association will be taking the next step necessary for an independent farmer voice by becoming its own nonprofit in 2021. We look forward to

continuing a positive, supportive, and close partnership with Rodale Institute while we set our sights forward to the next phase of serving as an important voice for organic farmers.

In this next phase of Organic Farmers Association's growth, we need you to join us. Alone we can do little, but together we will create a strong voice for organic farmers. Organic Farmers Association is here to help bring your vision for a better food system to the people with the power to change. We unite our voices to ensure organic farmers thrive and drive our nation's food system forward while remaining rooted in organic farming principles.

Please join Organic Farmers Association and get involved this year! As a member of OFA, you are investing in the future of your farm and the organic farms across this nation. Our sliding scale membership allows you to join at a financial level that works for you. You can also participate in our annual policy development process by completing the survey on page 5 or online at bit.ly/2021policy. Completing the survey will give you a say in which issues OFA prioritizes this year. Emily Oakley of Three Springs Farm and National Organic Standards Board member on page 32 summarizes why OFA is so important, "Making sure that full-time farmers have a voice is critical to ensuring the organic label represents the people who created and built this movement." Make a strong impact for organic farmers this year by joining at www.OrganicFarmersAssociation.org.



Dave Colson
President, Organic Farmers Association
New Leaf Farm, Durham, Maine



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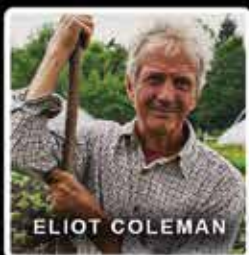
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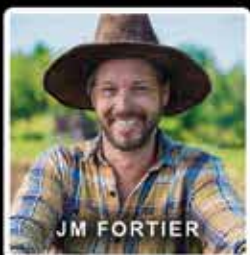
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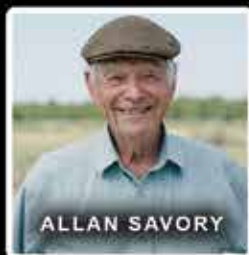
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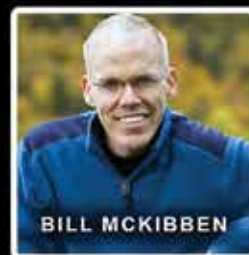
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The Oakley family of Oaks, Oklahoma.

COVER: A-dae Romero-Briones at Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation Tribal Farm & Ranch in Capay Valley, CA.
Photograph by Joan Cusick.

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Organic Farmers Association

2021 ANNUAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT SURVEY

Each year Organic Farmers Association asks all U.S. certified organic farmers and organic farm organizations to tell us your top policy priorities and positions. The OFA Policy Committee reviews the results, identifies the top priorities, and drafts policy statements from this broad-based solicitation to submit to all of our members for comment. These comments refine the draft policies, but only certified organic OFA farm members vote on the final policies. If you have not yet become an OFA farm member, please join today!

PLEASE SELECT THE OPTION THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOU:

- ☐ I am a **certified organic farmer**.
- ☐ I work for or serve in a leadership role with an **organic farm organization**.
- ☐ Other (please specify)

ARE YOU CURRENTLY A MEMBER OF ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

PLEASE SELECT THE REGION IN WHICH YOUR FARM/ORGANIZATION RESIDES:

- ☐ **CALIFORNIA**
- ☐ **WEST** (AK, HI, WA, OR, NV, AZ, ID, UT, NM, MT, WY, CO, KS)
- ☐ **NORTH CENTRAL** (ND, SD, NE, MN, IA, WI)
- ☐ **MIDWEST** (MO, IL, IN, MI, OH, PA)
- ☐ **SOUTH** (TX, OK, AR, LA, MS, AL, GA, FL, SC, NC, TN, KY, VA, WV, MD)
- ☐ **NORTHEAST** (NY, VT, NH, ME, MA, RI, CT, NJ, DE)

ONLINE OPTION

To complete this survey and submit it to Organic Farmers Association online, go to bit.ly/2021policy

YOUR POLICY PRIORITIES

PLEASE **SELECT THE TOP THREE** POLICY POSITIONS YOU THINK SHOULD BE THE HIGHEST PRIORITIES FOR ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION:

- ☐ Access to affordable land
- ☐ Animal welfare rule: reintroducing the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices (OLPP) Rule
- ☐ Beginning-farmer support
- ☐ Climate change
- ☐ Dismantling Corporate Consolidation within the Organic Market
- ☐ Crop insurance improvements for organic producers
- ☐ Expanded organic research
- ☐ Food safety (FSMA implementation)
- ☐ Increasing Organic Farmer Diversity (supporting more BIPOC farmers (Black, Indigenous, People of Color))
- ☐ Labor and immigration
- ☐ National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) issues and agenda
- ☐ NOP enforcement to ensure organic integrity
- ☐ NRCS: EQIP, CSP, CRP programs for extended organic support
- ☐ Organic certification cost share
- ☐ Organic dairy standards and enforcement (i.e., Origin of Livestock Rule and Pasture Rule)
- ☐ Organic import fraud
- ☐ Organic liaison at USDA
- ☐ Organic production and market data initiatives (ODI)
- ☐ Pesticide and GMO contamination
- ☐ Prohibiting containers in organic production (with the exceptions of transplants and plants sold in their containers)
- ☐ Prohibiting hydroponics in organic production
- ☐ Prohibiting sodium nitrate in organic production
- ☐ Public seeds and breeds research
- ☐ Water: clean water, access, etc.
- ☐ Other (please specify)

(over)



SUBMIT YOUR POLICY POSITIONS FOR THE POLICY COMMITTEE TO REVIEW

If you have identified a policy priority or change to an existing OFA policy you would like the OFA Policy Committee to consider, please submit your policy concern(s) below. Please **be specific**.

ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION POLICY PROPOSAL #1

Policy Topic/Title:

Recommended Organic Farmers Association Policy Position:

Example: "Organic Farmers Association supports [description]."

More information about why this policy is important:

Could Organic Farmers Association have permission to contact you for more information about this policy?

☐ Yes ☐ No

ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION POLICY PROPOSAL #2

Policy Topic/Title:

Recommended Organic Farmers Association Policy Position:

Example: "Organic Farmers Association supports [description]."

More information about why this policy is important:

Could Organic Farmers Association have permission to contact you for more information about this policy?

☐ Yes ☐ No

NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION

(Your policy positions and priorities will be kept confidential & only shared as a group. If you have expert knowledge of and passion for a policy position, OFA staff may reach out to you for more information.)

Name

Farm Name/Organization

Address

Town

State

 ZIP

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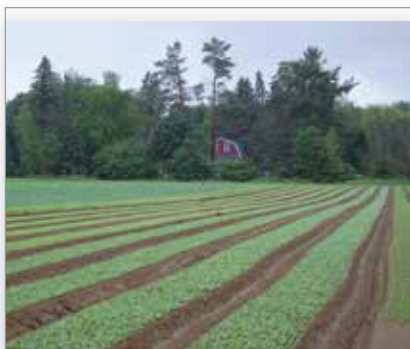


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Coronavirus: Opportunities & Challenges for Organic Farmers

Flexibility, Diversity & Direct-to-Consumer Sales Winning Strategies

Despite uncertainty at the start of the coronavirus outbreak in early 2020 — as restaurants, schools, and other institutions shuttered to a close — many organic farms have been bright spots of the COVID-19 economy. Nearly every organic category has seen year-over-year sales gains since March, and, with the pandemic radically reshaping consumer behavior, that growth could continue. Steve Lutz, senior VP of strategic insights firm Category Partners, says consumers are prioritizing immune health more than ever before, and he expects this newfound focus to have a “lasting impact” on their spending habits. Meanwhile, safety-conscious consumers are more wary about who is touching their food, driving direct-to-consumer sales. Even while COVID-19 has presented many challenges, these shifting consumer priorities have created new opportunities for farmers — particularly organic farmers, who can market themselves as a healthy choice, and has benefited farmers that can sell direct-to-consumer or had diverse markets already established.

Here’s how a handful of organic farmers from around the country have fared:



LAURA FREEMAN, MT FOLLY FARM, WINCHESTER, KY

FARM FACTS: Mt. Folly Farm sells organic grains, hemp, pastured beef, chicken and pork with “a local, shortened supply chain.”

EXPERIENCE: “The biggest challenge we had was shutting down our farm-to-table restaurant” mid-March due to COVID restrictions, Freeman says. Immediately, she recouped by turning the restaurant into a “farm grocery store” for her farm-to-table market products. “We took

out all the tables, put in coolers, and started selling beef and early spring crops.” Unlike many of her beef-farming neighbors, Freeman has “gone local,” which she says has made her relatively immune to processing chain disruptions. “We have a small USDA beef and lamb packer who is open, though now absolutely swamped,” she explains.

TAKEAWAYS: Freeman says going local has helped her “pivot” to meet COVID-era realities by “creating a food system we can watch and manage safely.” “We are small and committed, with a great team spirit,” she adds. Further buoying Mt. Folly, like many local organic farms, was its permanent staff of 25 employees, who “became cross-trained on all sorts of projects... from salesmen and saleswomen helping the distiller, to chefs working in the garden.”



KEN KIMES, NEW NATIVES FARM, SANTA CRUZ, CA

FARM FACTS: Kimes is co-owner of New Natives Farm, a microgreens, sprout and mushroom farm that sells through several channels including farmers markets and health food stores.

EXPERIENCE: “It was hard to understand at first what we should do around all of this,” says Kimes, who initially lost roughly 30% of his business when Silicon Valley tech campuses shut down, decimating his wholesale food service demand. Nonetheless, due to its relatively self-sufficient production process — they pack their own greens, for instance — New Natives has mostly weathered the COVID storm, and, with the help of the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), has retained its entire workforce. Kimes says it was “relatively straightforward” to apply for the PPP loan, but recommends applying to more than one bank, “having a good set of accounting books on hand,” and trying to get the loan from a local bank.

TAKEAWAYS: Kimes’ recommendations can be summed up by two words: “be nimble.” “An important thing,” he explains, “is that we sell to a lot of different channels,” many of which now demand rigorous food safety regimens to which New Natives had to adapt. “The more you can just embrace the new opportunities,” Kimes concludes, “the better it’s going to work out.”



DAVE BISHOP, PRAIRIERTH FARM, ATLANTA, IL

FARM FACTS: PrairieErth Farm is a 480-acre multigenerational, diversified farm that sells “a bit of everything” through various channels throughout central Illinois and Chicago.

EXPERIENCE: Bishop calls 2020 “interesting times, but good times as far as our business.” While their

restaurant sales rapidly contracted, PrairieErth has more than compensated by expanding its typically 150-member CSA to 300, with 100 more now on the waiting list. PrairieErth grows some feed crops like corn, but they feed it to their own livestock or sell to local rather than commercial feed mills, sparing them reliance on the now-deeply disrupted “commodity crop structure.”

TAKEAWAYS: Bishop credits PrairieErth’s resilience to its “diversified” crop selection, customer base, and marketing. “Diversity is not only critical in regenerative production systems, but in marketing systems. Grow lots of things and sell them in lots of places,” he recommends. Bishop particularly observes many other meat farmers who work with commercial processors struggling with processing chain disruptions. “What do you do with a 280-lb hog that’s soon going to be a 400-lb hog [because there’s no big processors open]?” he asks. “I mean, this puts you in a horrible position... that highlights very clearly that if something goes wrong, the whole (industrial food) system has no way to adapt.” Finally, he says, “nobody overrules the consumer, so that’s where the power lies... we’re on the road to developing a more resilient, local food system, and we—the public—need to support it by how we spend our food dollars.”



DAVE CHAPMAN, LONG WIND FARM, EAST THETFORD, VT

FARM FACTS: Long Wind Farm has grown soil-based organic greenhouse tomatoes, which they sell wholesale to supermarkets, since 1984.

EXPERIENCE: Chapman says Long Wind Farm was so well poised to meet the COVID-era marketplace that no marketing changes were necessary. “The main thing we’ve had to do,” he jokes, “is learn how to say ‘I’m sorry,’ because we just can’t fill the

[increasing] orders.” One challenge was finding enough workers to meet this surging demand. While some employees stayed home — especially the first month — Chapman managed to pay high-risk workers to stay home and give people “combat pay” for coming to work, with the help of the PPP. Chapman, one of the first wave of farmers to apply for a PPP loan, says he received it unusually quickly because he “worked with a local bank that was very committed to the process.”

TAKEAWAYS: “Surviving as a business is always a moving target,” Chapman says, which makes adaptability key. However, he thinks his existing business model is uniquely well suited for current conditions: “We sell into the wholesale market as a small regional producer, and we’re big enough that the stores like dealing with us.” While Long Wind Farm easily found enough seasonal workers for harvest season, Chapman has seen many farms that typically rely on immigrant labor — particularly H2A workers — having much more difficulty due to border closures. “It’s a pretty gripping commentary,” Chapman observes, “that a lot of [American agriculture] doesn’t work without a labor force that, by and large, doesn’t have a path to citizenship, that’s treated as second — or third — class citizens, and that doesn’t have legal protections, including the right to come to work.”



JUDITH REDMOND, FULL BELLY FARM, GUINDA, CA

FARM FACTS: Redmond is a co-owner of Full Belly Farm, a 360-acre northern California organic farm that produces vegetables, herbs, nuts, flowers, and fruit, which they sell both wholesale and retail.

EXPERIENCE: “The challenge was to reinvent the way we farmed, marketed, did farmers markets, harvested vegetables—everything,” Redmond says. “It was hard for us to cover all the demands for communication from the public. We also had to deal with the mental health side of things—many of our employees were very frightened to continue work. We had to make sure our employees understood that the shelter-in-place still applied to them as soon as they got home... it was very challenging, with many uncertainties.” Despite these challenges, Full Belly Farm has thrived, especially its CSA, which by July had over 2000 people on its waiting list.

TAKEAWAYS: Redmond credits Full Belly Farm’s resilience to its “diverse marketing structure, with CSA, farmers markets, stores and wholesale outlets.” “When our restaurant and food-service business ended, we were able to fill-in elsewhere,” she explains. “We already have an on-line presence, so people could find us and order CSA boxes using our on-line interface.”

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MARK MCAFEE, ORGANIC PASTURES DAIRY, FRESNO, CA

FARM FACTS: Organic Pastures Dairy milks 714 pasture-grazed cows on 400 acres and produces its own line of raw dairy products, including milk, cheese, butter, cream and kefir, which they sell to 1300 grocery stores nationwide.

EXPERIENCE: McAfee says Organic Pastures Dairy has “never had better sales or more enthusiasm.” He credits this success to consumers’ focus on immune system health, driving many to try raw milk for its probiotic richness. “That’s what’s driving our markets, because people don’t want to be a statistic in the ICU.” Because Organic Pastures processes its own raw milk, they have not been vulnerable to the conventional processing facility closures that have become commonplace due to the loss of food service market. Instead, they bottle their own milk, package it under their own brand, then deliver it to stores on their own trucks. This direct connection, McAfee says, enabled them to pivot when they realized, come late February, that their demand would outstrip supply. “We adapted literally within a day, and sometimes we would deliver our products to stores and they would say, ‘just put all of your products on all the entire shelf, and don’t worry about anybody else, because they’re not coming for another two weeks. And as a result, we picked up a lot of new customers.”

TAKEAWAYS: McAfee says the most important factor to COVID-era success is “a consumer connection.” “When you truly listen to consumers and adapt to respond to them, you’re winning. But if you’re not connected to them, how would you know how to respond? So social platforms, an email address, a 1-800 number... are very important.”

Where Do We Go from Here?

Most organic farmers seem to agree on one thing: that COVID-19 has exposed fundamental flaws in the food system status quo. Mark McAfee calls the pandemic “a national stress test on our food system [where] consolidated, huge industrial systems have failed” while local, organic, consumer-connected systems have thrived. While COVID-19 has been tragic, Bishop says, it has unexpectedly provided “a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity” to reevaluate our current food system and imagine how it might improve for the future, using the resilience and success of the many thriving local, organic farms as a blueprint.

Several farmers also recommended specific policy priorities, including:

- Enforcement of antitrust laws to combat meat/dairy industry concentration, which many have called “the root cause” of COVID-related processing supply chain disruptions
- Fixing the organic livestock enforcement loophole, which has tanked organic dairy prices
- Mitigating the farm workforce’s vulnerability to border closures by introducing a new longer-term farm worker visa for immigrants and an agriculture-centric path to citizenship
- Prioritizing local farms + disproportionately impacted communities when distributing stimulus money
- Making federal investments into organic sector development
- Revising eligibility restrictions for SNAP, creating incentives to buy fresh, local foods **NF**



As direct-to-consumer sales skyrocketed during the pandemic, farmers adopted new safety procedures, including wearing masks, for the health of their staff and customers. PHOTO BY JACK DEMPSEY

Absolute cleanliness is Godliness! Balanced food for body-mind-soul spirit is our medicine! Full truth or the God, half-truths are your enemy. hard work our salvation, unity our goal, Free Speech our soul, self-discipline the key to freedom, unity, love unites all-One above! For we're All-One! As teach for 6,000 years astronomers Abraham & Isaac "LISTEN CHILDREN ETERNALLY FATHERS ETERNALLY ONE!" "Be righteous eternally?" Absolute Honor!! So witness our fellow man your measure, take him at his best, with that love, lift him higher, overlook the worst!



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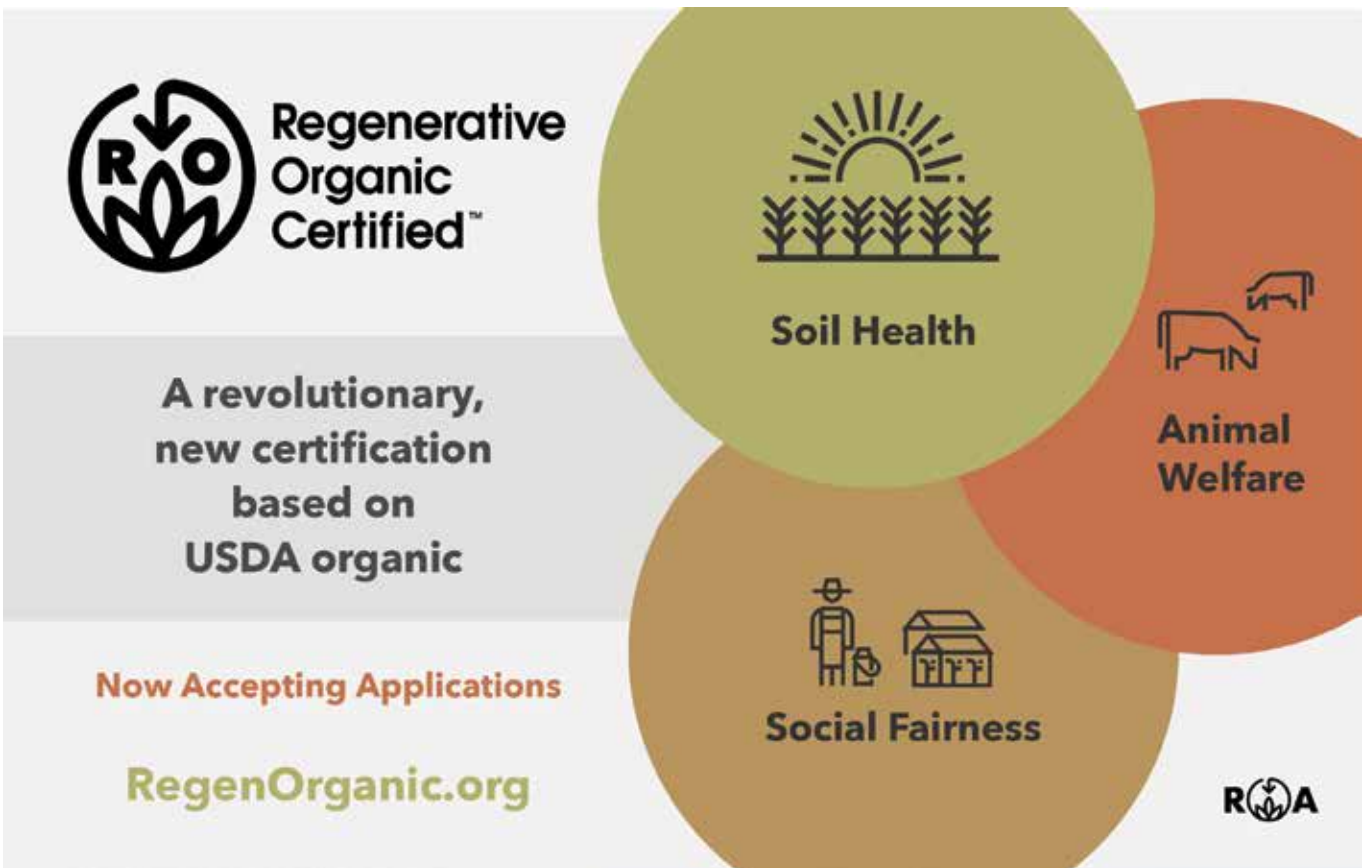


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A flexible tine weeder is a popular tool for blind cultivation, a method of weed management practiced by Rodale Institute in Kutztown, Pa.



Flying Blind

'Blind' Cultivation a Promising Method for Weed Management on Organic Farms

For as long as there have been farms, there have been weeds. For row crops, "blind" cultivation practices are some of the best mechanical weed management methods. Blind cultivation refers to cultivating the field without regard to the placement of the field rows, allowing the mechanical design of a rear-mounted flexible tine weeder to target shallow-rooted weeds.

When pulled along a field, the flexible tines move over the soil, disturbing the top layer and uprooting shallow weeds that have just begun to emerge. But blind cultivation isn't an exact science.

"Success is determined by the skill of observation and the agility to make the right decisions at the right time," say Klaas and Mary-Howell Martens, owners of Lakeview Organic Grain, in a 2005 article for *New Farm*. "Having the right equipment and the skills to make the right adjustments can help make the difference between success and a weedy field."

At Rodale Institute in Kutztown, Pennsylvania, a fundamental research goal is helping organic farmers identify the best methods of weed management. The Institute currently utilizes a precision spring-loaded tine weeder manufactured by Treffler, based in Germany.

On this model, tension on the tines can be adjusted hydraulically, allowing the tine weeder to be used on tender young seedlings without injuring them. The tension is gradually increased as crops grow bigger and more resilient to disturbance. This flexibility substantially increases the window of opportunity to control weeds, ranging from when they are almost invisible to long after emergence.

At Rodale Institute, three to five passes with the tine weeder are typically utilized, with the first pass completed before crop emergence. Subsequent passes are completed once crops are 3-4 inches tall, and stop when the crops are about 12 inches tall.

"It is best to have as few field passes as possible, but it is hard to get a good balance between the number of passes and weed control—so we do it as many times as we can still find weeds just beginning to emerge," says Dr. Emmanuel Omondi, Director of the Farming Systems Trial, Rodale Institute's 40-year-old comparison study of organic and conventional grain cropping systems.

For organic row crop farmers, blind cultivation may be the answer to getting a head start on weeds. Here's what you need to know about getting started:

PLANTING DEPTH: Most tine weeders are designed to penetrate soil to a depth at which many crops are commonly planted, ranging between 1 and 2.6 inches depending on crop species. Tine weeding is generally not recommended for shallowly planted crops, such as industrial hemp, that are typically planted at 0.5 inches deep.



“Several different types of equipment can perform blind cultivation, including tine weeders or rotary hoes.”

Blind cultivation is practiced on organic corn crops in Rodale Institute's Farming Systems Trial.

SUITABILITY: While larger-seeded crops like corn and soybean are best suited to blind cultivation, tine weeding is just as effective on almost all row crops and some vegetables. Blind cultivation is effective on broad-leafed weed seedlings like common lambsquarters, but not suitable for the control of annual or perennial weeds with extensive root systems. Therefore, blind cultivation should be coupled with other more aggressive cultivators, such as S-tine weeder, to effectively address a more diverse weed set if your farm has a larger weed base.

EQUIPMENT: Several different types of equipment can perform blind cultivation, including tine weeders or rotary hoes. Tine weeders, otherwise known as flexible harrows, are the most common tools for blind cultivation. Tine weeders vary in size and shape, from straight tines, forty-five-degree bent tines, or eighty-five-degree bent tines. The choice of weeder depends on your soil, with a straight tine weeder operating best in loose soft soil, while bent tine weeders are more suited to dry and compacted fields.

Blind cultivation can also be completed using a rotary hoe, which is best used when more aggressive machines would risk crop damage. However, stony soils can damage the hoe points.

TIMING: Blind cultivation needs to occur in a small window of time. “This window starts [on] the day you can see the white hair roots [of the weeds] when you scratch the soil surface,” say the Martenses. You may also see a “light reddish-green haze over the soil. Sometimes you can just see tiny weeds growing in soil cracks.” The first pass of blind cultivation will be most effective when row crops have not yet emerged, and the weather is hot and dry.

ADDITIONAL PASSES: A second or subsequent pass with a tine weeder or other machine should be done once the crops are well-rooted, with 3 or 4 leaves, but before the crop starts jointing or the weeds are too big to be uprooted by the weeder. Once the crops are well-established, the weeder can be adjusted to a more aggressive setting that will target more established weeds.

Weeds may be an ever-present concern for organic farmers, but with a little strategy and some blind cultivation, the job will be much easier down the line. **NF**

Rodale Institute has been the global leader in regenerative organic agriculture research for 70 years. Access their science at RodaleInstitute.org.



How to Protect Your Farm from Power Plays

What to Know When an Energy Project Is Proposed to Run Through Your Farm

On a crisp fall day, you could be thinking about your next farm chore while having your noon meal, and hear a knock at the door. A nice person informs you that your land will be needed for a natural gas pipeline, and they are here to survey the property and have you sign an agreement. They might have an aerial map and show you where the pipeline will be placed, and perhaps offer you some monetary compensation. They could make it seem that you do not have any choice, and that you might as well sign an agreement now so you can get on with your day. In this scenario, you can replace “natural gas pipeline” with “electric transmission line” or with other types of energy infrastructure. These conversations are becoming increasingly common in many areas of the country and many organic growers have had to fiercely advocate to protect their organic land.

HERE'S WHAT TO KNOW TO PROTECT YOUR FARM:

- **You have options.** You could fight the proposed route, or offer a different route (use a field edge rather than through the middle). Some, but not all, states allow companies “*eminent domain*,” which could restrict your ability to deny land access to the company. However, *eminent domain* still provides “*fair treatment and just compensation*,” which will be negotiated between you and the company.
- **Don't be intimidated to decide quickly.** You have time to do the research needed, and to determine what placement and compensation you are willing to accept for both the short and long term. There is no need to panic, even if the company tells you this is urgent (it is not). Don't sign anything until you have done the research or hired an attorney to help you modify the company's agreement so your interests are included.
- **Finding the information will take some time.** You may need to hire a lawyer familiar with your state's rules and precedents. Your neighbors may wish to contest or modify the route and/or compensation proposed. If there are numerous landowners working together, this strengthens your case and shares the cost of legal advice.



Most of the new energy infrastructure being proposed is overseen by your state, not by the federal government. The state provides public information on these projects. This public information includes the specifications of the infrastructure, the timeframe, and any proposed plans to mitigate the damage caused by construction. Agricultural lands are significantly impacted by energy infrastructure activities, with biological and organic farmers affected more deeply and long-term than farmers who rely on chemicals for fertility, weed and pest management. Most companies have more than one proposed route, and knowledge of other route options can help make a case that your certified organic land is special and should be avoided altogether.

• **Prevention of damage is better than dealing with the problems after they happen.** For biological and organic farmers, the long-term investments in building ecological balance on your land, as a basis for your farm's productivity, cannot be easily rebuilt in a short amount of time. This should be communicated to the company. Protection of your market premiums and your ecosystem (both above and below the soil line) through proactive agreements are essential when dealing with energy companies. Do not underestimate the cost and time of rebuilding of your land after construction. Make sure your compensation agreement includes one to five years of mitigation costs, as well as losses due to lowered productivity.

CONSIDERING COMPENSATION

For digging or drilling where soil is to be disturbed, keep in mind there will be significant settling, possible erosion

A pipeline traverses the land of Clover Meadow Farm, an organic dairy operation owned by third-generation farmer James Yoder in Northeast Ohio. The pipeline transports natural gas from fracking from Ohio to Canada, and crosses through 11 acres of Yoder's farm.

and compaction from heavy equipment. There will also be an impact to water infiltration and capillary action. The weather, slope of the land, soil type(s) and other factors will influence the amounts of compaction or erosion. New and more numerous weed seeds will germinate, perhaps weeds you haven't seen for decades! Healthy, diverse and well-managed pastures will take numerous years to regain the biomass and palatability compared to before the construction. When topsoil is put back on top after digging is completed, these areas do not have the same soil horizons, drainage and nutrient movement as before the disturbance. Use of herbicides and chemical fertilizers can lessen the loss of crop yields, but those who rely on healthy soil biology and tillage for productivity, will suffer for numerous years until the land heals. Compensation which pays for the intensive use of diverse cover crops to improve the soil can be included in your agreement, as well as other soil-building techniques you identify.

Wetlands, meadows and other lands not specifically growing crops or pasture can provide pollinator and beneficial insect habitat, biodiversity, and protect water quality. If the infrastructure is proposed to go through these lands, make sure your agreement includes compensation for the value lost and time and mechanism to repair.

GETTING IT ON PAPER

Organic farmers should develop a Mitigation Plan Agreement with the energy company that covers all aspects of organic integrity. This should also be shared with your organic certifier. Some negotiations included in the agreement could include: Equipment cannot have residues of nonorganic soil and should be removed from the organic land for refueling and storage

Pesticide and herbicide drift can be a big problem for organic farms.



every evening and on weekends to avoid accidental leakage of oils and fuel. Tarps should be used during construction to prevent foams, welding flux and other materials from falling on and contaminating the land. When reseeding, no prohibited seed treatments, fertilizers or other materials are allowed, including bringing in nonorganic soil to deal with settling. A trained organic inspector should be hired at company cost, to oversee construction and to have the power to stop activities if there are issues. There is zero tolerance in the organic regulations for the application of prohibited materials on organic land, and if the company applies a "historically persistent" material (i.e., hydraulic fluid, diesel, persistent pesticides, etc.), the land could be de-certified for more than 3 years.

These type of energy infrastructure agreements include electric powerlines that have been around for almost a century and newer types of energy infrastructure such as wind turbines, solar farms and cell towers that are more recent additions to the landscape. On-going management of these energy infrastructures typically present a problem with restricting the use of herbicide, since these utilities do not want brush or trees interfering with the infrastructure or access to it. Landowners can work with utilities by having a No Spray Agreement spelling out whose responsibility it is to maintain the area under and around power lines and other infrastructure to prevent the risk of service loss. Many electric companies have no spray agreements that mandate landowner maintenance under powerlines to the utility's satisfaction, and if not done, then the utility will spray.

Landowners can provide an addendum to the No Spray Agreement that requires the utility to provide notification and give the landowner at least 30 days to cut the offending brush before a spray is used. For organic fields or pastures that have utility lines, spray prevention is essential. Signage on all field entrances and/or along roadsides, stating no sprays are allowed, can notify contracted applicators to avoid this area. When there is an agreement and signage, but the land is sprayed by the utility, you are more likely to receive compensation for lost productivity and crop/livestock market premiums.

Many states work with Field Watch (fieldwatch.com), which provides a free registry for beekeepers, specialty crop producers (including hemp) and row crop growers to register their fields for free. Applicators can then review these locations and are aware to avoid spraying that land.

Takeaway: Even though the energy companies are large and powerful, landowners have many options to protect their land. Be proactive, organic farmers have been successful in getting energy routes changed after strongly advocating for protection of their organic status. **NF**

Harriet Behar owns Sweet Springs Farm in Gays Mills, Wisconsin. She is an Organic Farmers Association Governing Council member.

An aerial photograph of a person wearing a straw hat and a blue and white checkered shirt, crouching in a field of green plants. The person is holding a camera up to their eye, as if taking a picture. The field is filled with rows of green plants, and the ground between them is dark and cracked. The title 'The Fight Against Fraud' is written in a large, white, serif font across the top half of the image.

The Fight Against Fraud

Recent Scandals Shake Consumer Confidence in Organics.
So What Can We Do About It?

by Harriet Behar

The organic market has enjoyed decades of growth, reaching \$55 billion annually in U.S. sales in 2019. It is one of few labels that has a strong meaning and a system of federal oversight to provide a consistent definition from farmers markets to grocery store aisles across the country. However, trust in the label has been shaken by recent high-profile, mass-volume fraudulent sales with malicious intent — a tragedy for the both the farmers and consumers who have relied on the organic label for their livelihood and as an important choice of food and fiber for themselves and their families. Organic sales are booming, but unfortunately it seems, so is fraud.

It is no surprise that those willing to make a fast buck would seek to relabel conventional crops as organic, which fetch a higher price. Numerous cases of organic fraud have come to light in recent years, mostly centered on organic commodity crops like corn and soybeans, although produce and other sectors are not immune to phony organic products. Both domestic and imported grains have been found fraudulent. The scale and elaborate nature of the fraud over the past decade spans hundreds of truckloads, numerous large ocean-going vessels, and hundreds of millions of dollars.

The vast majority of organic farmers are not fraudulent and view their organic certification as an achievement. There are many organic certificates framed on the wall next to the family pictures of children, graduations and weddings. Organic farming typically relies on more management, planning, and labor than growing the same crops conventionally. Maintaining documentation on activities, inputs, and rotations is necessary under the law. Sharing this information with certifiers and inspectors adds an extra burden, somewhat compensated by the higher organic price received in the marketplace. Both anger and sadness are felt by the organic community when nonorganic products are scammed as organic. Real organic producers have experienced large economic losses due to their legitimate crops being replaced by

“ORGANIC INTEGRITY FROM FARM TO TABLE, CONSUMERS TRUST THE ORGANIC LABEL”

– SLOGAN USED BY THE USDA'S NATIONAL ORGANIC PROGRAM

questionable grain at cheaper prices. Many share the sentiment of Dave Campbell, longtime organic farmer from Illinois; “I have been positive about the organic marketplace for the many decades I have been growing organic corn and soybeans, but the recent fraudulent organic sales by both domestic and foreign operators has lowered my optimism.”

Farmers and businesses had provided numerous tips to certifiers and to the National Organic Program (NOP) illustrating both domestic and import fraud activities. Did the tips lead the NOP to require enhanced oversight and subsequent enforcement actions against these operations? Why has it been so difficult for the National Organic Program and the USDA to find and stop this fraud? To many organic farmers, it does not appear the USDA has made protection of the organic label a top priority.

FRAUD IN THE AMERICAN HEARTLAND

The scale of one recent (2019) case of domestic fraud is astonishing. According to the Department of Justice in the Northern District of Iowa, a well-respected man in his community, Randy Constant, admitted to \$142,433,475 of “organic” grain sales, the vast majority of which were fraudulent. During the years of 2010 to 2017, he sold over 11,500,000 bushels of grain (this volume is estimated to fill 3,600 rail cars or 14,375 semi-trailers), with more than 90% of it falsely marketed as organic.

How did this happen? David Glasgow, Associate Deputy Administrator of the National Organic Program, stated “people who commit this kind of fraud are often well-known and trusted in their community. It is hard for good people to believe bad things about someone they know, which can allow the criminal activity to go unseen for years.”

Glasgow preferred not to share the various methods Constant used to gather and market his phony organic grains as he does not want to provide “a roadmap for future offenders.” Members of the organic community did submit complaints to the NOP about Constant over the years. There was at least one complaint against Constant submitted to the NOP from a competitor who was concerned by the volume of sales moving through Constant’s Ossian, Iowa-based brokerage, Jericho Solutions. His lower-than-standard prices gained him buyers, drove down prices and stole sales from his legitimate organic competitors. Another complaint stated organic soybeans sold by Constant in 2007 were grown from genetically modified seed (prohibited in organic). Glasgow would not comment on these complaints stating that the USDA, like all government agencies, will not discuss actions on specific complaints until they have been settled. However, Glasgow did confirm the “NOP has worked with other enforcement agencies with international reach to develop tools that help us identify higher risk activities in the marketplace and rapidly increase surveillance, build the case, and take action.”

In some cases, industrial grain commodities were sold as organic.



As a result of increasing pressure from the organic community, Glasgow explained the USDA has strengthened “the partnership between the NOP and other law enforcement agencies including the USDA’s Office of the Inspector General, Food Safety Inspection Service, and the Animal and Plant Inspection Service; as well as the Justice Department, Federal Trade Commission, and Customs and Border Protection.” These agencies have deeper resources for investigation and the ability to charge an individual with criminal activity, an authority the NOP does not have. The NOP fines for mislabeling a product as organic are not as strong as criminal penalties that can be brought by these other agencies. The NOP explained that, “fining someone who is facing prison time and multimillion-dollar asset forfeiture is a much steeper penalty than NOP’s authority to issue a civil penalty.” Furthermore, the NOP does not have the authority to “stop sale” of fraudulent products.

The U.S. justice system requires strong evidence to bring a case to criminal court. In the Constant case, even though there was covert surveillance of the illegal activities, until the government was able to get testimony of witnesses who were involved in the movement and false labeling of the organic grain, and they had a concrete false communication for a wire fraud charge, there was not a strong enough criminal case to bring Randy Constant to justice for his substantial crimes.

SENTENCING

Three additional farmers from Overton, Nebraska were also found guilty in the Constant crime. They admitted in court that they produced nonorganic grain and knew that Constant planned to fraudulently sell it as organic. These farmers received over \$10 million from Constant for their collaboration. It seems these farmers rationalized the dishonest dealings by believing they were not the person actually selling the crops as organic, yet the court proved otherwise. During the sentencing, their attorney asked for leniency because no one was hurt. United States District Court Judge C.J. Williams felt differently, calling their activity “massive fraud, perpetrated on consumers over a long period of time” that “caused incalculable damage.”

The Nebraska farmers received sentences, from 3 to 24 months in prison, and Constant was sentenced to 10 years. All were given stiff fines totaling over \$120 million. Three days after sentencing Constant committed suicide in his garage, bringing his case to a tragic end.

ORGANIC FRAUD FROM ABROAD

This recent domestic fraud case comes on the heels of years of suspected international organic import fraud from ocean freighters carrying grain labeled as organic from high-risk foreign markets. Countries such as Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Moldova and the Russian Federation were identified by the European Union in early 2018 as high-risk areas for organic fraud and the E.U. limited imports from these countries. These shady businesses then focused on the lucrative U.S. organic market with less scrutiny at the border. In March 2018, a shipment of “organic” grain from these countries was found to be fraudulent and 25,000 metric tons of corn was refused entry into the U.S. However, this refusal was because it was whole seed and not cracked corn (only cracked corn is allowed from these countries,) rather than its organic status.

Even though the NOP issued a memo in July 2018 to organic certifiers to be wary of these high-risk countries for grain fraud, little was done at the border to ensure their grain was actually organic. “Although organic farmers were complaining to the USDA about suspected organic grain fraud from imports since 2015, it took a high-profile

story in the Washington Post and a lot of pressure on Congress to get them to act,” said John Bobbe, former Executive Director of the Organic Farmers Agency for Relationship Marketing (OFARM). “Organic farmers need more protections from the National Organic Program.” The Strengthening Organic Enforcement Rule is one result of the action from Congress asking for more focus on this issue from the NOP.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

With pressure from the press and organic community, the NOP has responded with various efforts to improve their oversight of organic fraud. In 2018, they began facilitating a tighter working relationship with Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Since the NOP does not have any authority to control commerce at the border, the first step was educating CBP about organic. There were some easy improvements to make such as educating CBP employees about organic status. CBP also now knows to flag any incoming organic products that were fumigated with prohibited substances by APHIS at the border because of invasive pests. The CBP also knows to inform the NOP and prevent those commodities from being sold as organic.

The NOP has recognized that certifiers are on the front lines of protecting organic integrity. They are sharing their improved analytical tools that identify risky behavior with the certifiers and asking certifiers to implement more consistent complaint documentation and follow-through. The NOP has the authority to take away a certifier’s accreditation, yet even with some questionable certifier actions this



tool has been used sparingly. Instead, certifiers are told to improve when they are doing poorly in the oversight of the organic label, but have been allowed to continue in the organic certification business.

Additionally, the NOP has improved their complaint review process and are now encouraging more complaints from producers and consumers to identify fraud. The complaint form can be found at organic-compliance.ams.usda.gov.

STRENGTHENING ORGANIC ENFORCEMENT

The NOP released a proposed rule, Strengthening Organic Enforcement, in July 2020 to deal with many necessary changes to more effectively protect and enforce organic integrity.

To deal with fraud, this rule proposes the U.S. implement an import certificate requirement, requiring the certifying agent to approve the specific import sale of an operator shipping a product into the U.S. This would provide tighter oversight on the volumes being imported, by providing certifiers the info they need to track sales in real time, rather than just once a year at the inspection. The European Union has used this system for numerous years, which has proved to improve traceability and fraud detection.

The rule requires organic inspectors and certification personnel to demonstrate the necessary knowledge and skill needed to perform their jobs through quantifiable requirements and ongoing continuing education. Specific auditing activities will also be required on every inspection to ensure the volumes of outgoing organic products match sufficient incoming organic products.

Additionally, the rule will require certifiers to share compliance-related information with other certifiers and perform a percentage of unannounced inspections each year on operations considered “high risk.” High-risk spot inspections should shed light on suspicious activities and lessen the avenues for hiding illegal dealings.

The rule proposes that all organic operations will have a uniform organic certificate generated through the NOP database to reduce inconsistencies, making it easier to understand if the operation has recently been certified, or is about to be re-inspected for continued certification. Certifiers will be required to keep this publicly searchable database current, whereas they currently are only required to update it on an annual basis.



David Glasgow, Associate Deputy Administrator of the National Organic Program, spoke to the USDA's efforts to reduce organic fraud.



John Bobbe, former Executive Director of OFARM, has spent his career raising awareness of fraudulent organic grain imports and demanding action.

STRENGTHENING ORGANIC ENFORCEMENT RULE: FAST FACTS

WHAT IS IT?

A rule proposed by the USDA that would expand the National Organic Program's enforcement and oversight capabilities to combat organic fraud. It proposes to standardize organic certificates, increase inspector qualifications, increase data reporting, and more.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The public comment period closes October 5, 2020. The USDA will review the comments and develop a final rule. The timeline for this process is unknown.

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD

Ask your elected officials to urge the USDA to finalize this rule as soon as possible. American farmers deserve fair competition and a market without fraud.

The NOP-proposed rule appears to have included the suggestions both required by Congress and brought forward by many in the organic community. However, more needs to be done to boost the investigative and punitive capabilities of the NOP. The system within the NOP to scrutinize complaints and bring cheaters to justice must become more robust, with the capability to stop the sale and commerce of fraudulent products. The deterrent to criminal behavior relies not only in tight oversight from certifiers and inspectors, but requires the quick hand of enforcement by government as well. The great majority of U.S. organic farmers are doing an excellent job and uphold the integrity we all depend on for a successful organic market. It is very frustrating to see the integrity of the label damaged by bad actors and a lack of enforcement. While the NOP is implementing some improvements, they continue to be under-resourced and try to implement 20th century tools for oversight of the 21st century organic supply chain. We must all continue to work to demand more protections of organic products from fraud. The National Organic Program must do better to live up to their slogan, “Organic Integrity from Farm to Table — Consumers Trust the Organic Label.” **NF**



Mislabeled overseas imports have been a problem area for the organics industry.

Harriet Behar farms organically on Sweet Springs Farm in Gays Mills, Wisconsin, producing bedding plants, fresh and dried herbs, vegetables, grains, eggs and honey. Harriet serves on the Organic Farmers Association Policy Committee and has been involved with federal, state and local policy advocacy for over 30 years. Harriet has worked as an educator with MOSES, the International Organic Inspectors Association and the University of Wisconsin. She is an active member of the National Organic Coalition, Wisconsin Organic Advisory Council, and most recently served as Chair of the National Organic Standards Board. She has been an organic inspector since 1992 and has visited more than 2200 organic farms and processing facilities around the world.

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BRINGING EQUITY TO ORGANIC

First Nations leader outlines plan for
increasing Black, brown and indigenous
farmers and consumers

by A-dae Romero-Briones Photographs by Joan Cusick Photography

Tribal Nations have grown food systems for millennia.

In deserts. Along coastal and inland waterways. In low mountains. In high mountains. And in some of our most fertile and infertile lands across this country. Today — despite massive loss of land (which, ironically, some of which is certified organic farmland now), loss of animal and plant diversity and limitations on access to traditional hunting and gathering grounds — Indigenous people continue to grow their food systems. And yet, we see few in the organic community. While Black, Indigenous and other people of color make up nearly 40% of the U.S. population, according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, 95% of our nation's producers are white. Only 3.3% are Hispanic, 1.8% are Indigenous, and 1.3% Black. And while the USDA doesn't specifically report data on race on certified organic farms, of the approximately 19,400 farms listed in the USDA Organic Integrity Database, there are less than 10 Tribal farms listed, and industry experts report that representation reflects national farming statistics.

◀ The author, A-dae Romero-Briones, is photographed at the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation in the Capay Valley, CA. "Yocha Dehe is an independent, self-governed tribal nation that was devastated by California history—from the missionary period to the Gold Rush to being displaced by agriculture," she said. "They were forcibly removed from their traditional homelands in the Capay Valley to a small, barren and dry reservation. But through foresight, perseverance, hard work, and sheer intelligence and strength, they purchased back their homelands—now home to the thriving Yocha Dehe farm and ranch operations."

Admittedly, the organic community is but a small part of a larger national, and global, food system that has its roots in the exploitation of Black, brown, and Indigenous communities. In 2020, we should be well aware of those historical wrongs, or at the very least, we've been observing the mass protests and toppling of historical markers that glorify these wrongs — markers that essentially served to create a status quo that serves but a fraction of our society. In many ways, the organic movement has always challenged the establishment. The organic movement has deep roots in combating extractive capitalism and corporate domination of our food system, lands and rural community. We are the people's food system; the alternative to chemical farming and mass production that leads to exploitative practice. In the organic community, we do purport to know and do better, to be more responsive, to be more inclusive and to offer better food (and lifestyle) choices for consumers and society. But are we?

First, when I speak of organic, I am referring to the little green label that designates a product as grown and produced according to practices sanctioned under the USDA National Organic Program. To many in the organic community, organics is much more than that. It is a lifestyle. It is a promise and a representation of what our food world should be. While I agree we are much more than our labels, it is clear we are limited by them. The limitations and weaknesses of our capitalist markets are embodied even in organics. We are only as strong as our roots — which in the case of organic agriculture includes exploitation, exclusion and an undercurrent of hyper-individualism. All shared markers of the dominant American retail food system.

In accordance with market values, organic certification is aimed at individual land owners. In dominant food systems, this individual land ownership is extended to corporations recognized as persons. Even the most basic of understandings of agriculture and food systems begins with inequality — land ownership. Discussions in the organic world revolve around the practices of individual farmers, their certifications and inspections, and their place in the organic marketplace. From 2012 to 2014, white people comprised over 97 percent of non-farming landowners, 96 percent of owner-operators and 86 percent of tenant operators. They also generated 98 percent of all farm-related income from land ownership and 97 percent of the income that comes from operating farms. Organic farming is almost a mirror reflection of the mainstream food system in terms of ownership and operation. As a result, conversations in the organic community are centered on white landowners' understanding of farming practices and their anthropocentric worldview. Yet, human dominion over land is the pedagogical base that is failing us and our environment. How do we become an organic community that is inclusive, responsive and in better relationship with our environment, given the limitation of capitalism?

In the organic world, we often think about our food system in binary conversations — organic agriculture and conventional agriculture. Yet, there are many communities, people, consumers and producers, who are systematically omitted from each of those conversations, intentionally and unintentionally. On the consumer side, there are conflicting studies on who eats more organic food. But, in a study of

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Yoche Dehe owns one of the most diverse farming operations in Yolo County and is one of the few tribes with expanding agriculture in California. Of their 3,000 acres currently being farmed, 250 acres are certified organic. More than 1,200 acres of the Tribe's land are in permanent conservation easements. The Tribe also runs 700 head of cattle on 12,000 acres of rangeland, following a sustainable grazing program.

While Black, indigenous and other people of color make up nearly 40% of the U.S. population, according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, 95% of our nation's producers are white. Only 3.3% are Hispanic, 1.8% are indigenous, and 1.3% Black.



SEKA
HILLS
TASTING ROOM





organic consumers, the Economic Research Service of the USDA reported that African American households are less likely than Caucasian households to buy organic. Additionally, one of the primary consumer considerations in the purchase of organic products was the percentage of household income spent on food. Households with lower incomes were least likely to buy organic products. Considering that many federal feeding programs, such as the commodity supplemental food program which serves seniors, the WIC Program (Women, Infant and Children), or the summer lunch program, serve households with lower incomes, organic produce should be offered in these programs allowing access to households with lower incomes. Currently, organic products are not eligible for federal procurement in many institutional programs, effectively excluding access to the organic community by virtue of income — often excluding Black, brown or Indigenous people. In short, the organic consumer is most likely white.

When we think about what is required for organic certification — from the certificates that give an individual person dominion over their plot of land, to the application for paperwork that begins the process of certification, to the markets where these products are sold, and even the consumer who seeks out the little green seal at that market — we are operating in a food supply chain that leaves out a large groups of people in this country and serves a privileged few. I count myself as one of those privileged. How can we change this? How do we increase the number of Black, brown and Indigenous organic producers and consumers? And why is this important?

One, the organic community has its roots in challenging the status quo. Without the will and determination of organic leaders like J.I.

The conversations and infrastructure development in marginalized communities is not easy, but then again, those who find themselves in the organic community understand any action worth undertaking takes care, time, and a whole lot of work.



Rodale challenging nationally accepted industrial production systems, and many others who lend their time to fight for organic, we would not have an alternative to corporate agriculture. Imagine lending that same fight and passion to challenging anthropocentric agriculture altogether. This means lending time and passion to critically examining land ownership, its benefits to both conventional and organic agriculture, and the continued exclusion of Indigenous, brown and Black people owning land. In conversation with a farmer in Appalachia, she said, “If you only hang out with people who agree with you, you’re never going to grow as a person or a farmer.” Similarly, if we are a nation or community of white landowners, we can’t really expect for organic agriculture to reach more than just our small community of organic advocates.

Second, infrastructure directed at marginalized communities is needed to participate in our existing organic system. Grower group certification (included in the most recent USDA rule, Strengthening Organic Enforcement) would create a path to infrastructure development for not only many Indigenous/Tribal growers, but for marginalized small-scale growers. Grower groups are meant to create centralized management, marketing and inspection systems for smaller groups of growers that have a geographic

On all their land, Yocha Dehe prioritizes sustainable farming practices including the use of beneficial insects, cover crops, mulching, drip systems and careful crop rotation cycles. 250 acres of their production is certified organic.

HOW IT WORKS: **GROWER GROUP CERTIFICATION**

Pursuing organic certification can be complicated. Upfront costs and paperwork can create barriers to small farmers, communities of color and other marginalized groups. However, grower groups, clarified in the recently proposed USDA Strengthening Organic Enforcement rule, may be the solution to increasing organic farmer diversity.

HERE’S HOW IT WORKS:

- **WHAT IT IS:** A grower group is a farming operation with multiple growers, organized and certified as one operation, all producing the same crops in the one general geographical area.

- **WHY IT EXISTS:** Grower group certification was developed in the 1990s as an incentive for small-scale farms and those in developing countries to enter the organic market. Today, they are mostly found outside the United States and used to import organic coffee, cocoa, bananas, and other commodities. One grower group is certified in the continental U.S.

- **HOW IT CAN HELP:** A grower group shares the costs of certification and inspection, reducing the individual cost to small farmers and widening the availability of organic certification. Participating in a grower group also centralizes recordkeeping, marketing, and selling to reduce the labor demands on individuals.

- **WHAT HAS CHANGED:** The new proposed USDA rule specifically defines grower groups and provides more detail about documentation and inspection requirements. This aims to strengthen the oversight of organic supply chains by standardizing and streamlining grower group eligibility.

Expanding grower groups in the United States could increase access to organic markets for marginalized communities that have historically faced disinvestment and disenfranchisement, particularly in agricultural resources. Increasing the certification options is key to diversifying the organic farming community.

In spring 2012, the Tribe launched the Séka Hills line of premium agricultural products produced from the Tribe's homeland that includes olive oil, wine, and honey. They operate two tasting rooms, welcoming visitors to see how their olives are milled and selling their world-class agricultural products. "It is important to develop an understanding of the things we eat and where they come from," said Chris Gates, Marketing Manager.



In the organic world, we often think about our food system in binary conversations — organic agriculture and conventional agriculture. Yet, there are many communities, people, consumers and producers, who are systematically omitted from each of those conversations, intentionally and unintentionally.



If we are a nation or community of white landowners, we can't really expect for organic agriculture to reach more than just our small community of organic advocates.



Yocha Dehe's certified organic production includes asparagus, which is pickled and available in their tasting rooms, clubs and website, and wholesaled fresh. The land became certified organic in 2009.



continued from page 27

proximity and uniformity of product. Appalachian Harvest, based in Duffield, Virginia, is one of the only certified organic growing groups in the United States. With no prohibition on grower group certification within the U.S., domestic organic certifiers site lack of guidance on applicability to livestock or produce, limitations of number of growers within the group and inspection expectation of grower members as some of the reasons there is reluctance to certify grower groups. A focus or willingness from one certifier to embark on more grower group certification in the United States could carry this conversation and certification into marginalized communities — expanding the reach, and hopefully, diversity of organic growers. The conversations and infrastructure development in marginalized communities with producers is not easy, but then again, those who find themselves in the organic community understand any action worth undertaking takes care, time, and a whole lot of work.

It is these values that have called us all in some way to improve our homes, our bodies, and our relationships through the organic movement. We constantly argue for the betterment of the land, biodiversity and community (microbial, animal, and human). While we want to talk about the microbial communities that make up healthy soil and determine what chemicals are weakening and killing the beneficial communities, we are shy to talk about who ultimately owns the land, how those land deeds begin in the first place and why the organic community remains largely white. If we value biodiversity, we should be a reflection of that in our own meetings and conversations, in our own certified operations, and human community. If we want to expand the reach and breadth of the organic movement, we must start by including those who have been systematically left out. **NF**

A-dae Romero-Briones (Kiowa/Cochiti), J.D., LL.M., was born and raised in Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico and comes from the Ware Family from Hog Creek, Oklahoma on the Kiowa side. Mrs. Romero-Briones works as Director of Programs—Native Food and Agriculture Systems for First Nations Development Institute and currently serves as a Public Interest/Consumer Interest Representative on the National Organic Standards Board.

No. 04 | NEW FARMERS

EMILY OAKLEY, MIKE APPEL, LISETTE OAKLEY (DAUGHTER)
Three Springs Farm * Oaks, Oklahoma

Three Springs Farm

FARM SIZE: 3 acres

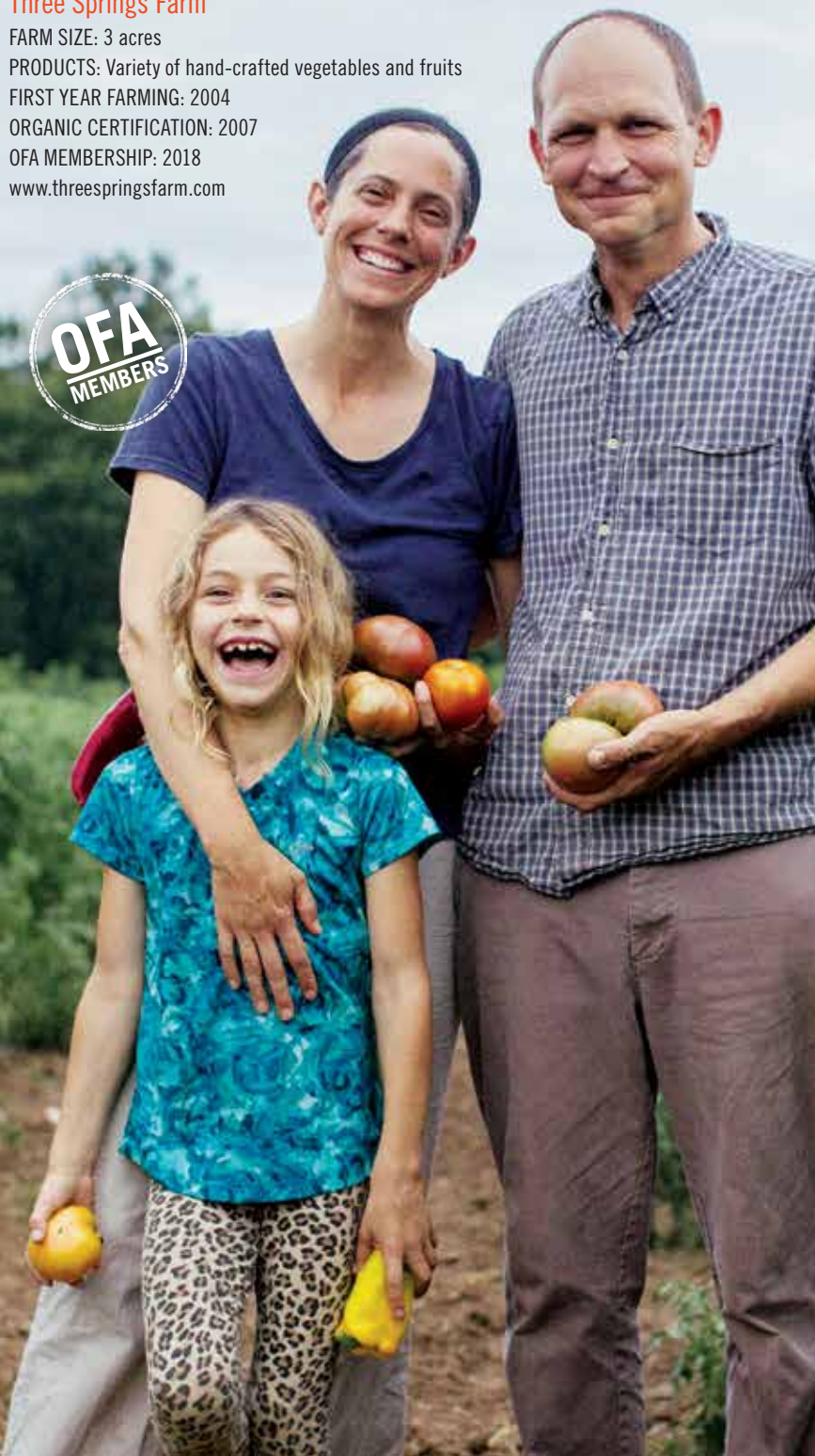
PRODUCTS: Variety of hand-crafted vegetables and fruits

FIRST YEAR FARMING: 2004

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION: 2007

OFA MEMBERSHIP: 2018

www.threespringsfarm.com



Why did you become a farmer?

Farming gives me the chance to “be the change I wish to see.” Organic farming brings together my beliefs about environmental protection with the lifestyle of growing healthy food. Surely there are more farmers around the world than any other profession, and I feel a sense of solidarity in doing this work. Plus, who wants to sit at a computer all day when you can be listening to birds, feeling the breeze on your skin, watching the seasons unfold, feeling the awe of a seed you planted grow into food someone will eat!

Why did you choose to be certified organic?

I advocate strongly for certification because without it, organic can mean anything to anyone. Despite the challenges of having a national label, it's still the only way to verify that we're doing what we say we're doing. Organic certification protects not just consumers but farmers as well.

What are the toughest challenges you face as an organic producer?

I see the two biggest challenges in organic farming as building and maintaining soil fertility and weed management. But each of those challenges also represents what is best about organic, the fact that we don't look for quick fixes but take the long view. Organic farmers aren't farming for that particular season but for 10, 20, 30 years from now.

What are the most valuable lessons you've learned since you started?

Persistence, adaptability, and resilience. That's true both for farmers and for the agroecosystems we shepherd. As an admitted control-freak, there's nothing like organic farming to teach both humility and release. Farming has shown me how to let go of so much that I can't control — weather, pest invasions, market changes--and to celebrate the small pleasures throughout the day.

What is most rewarding about being an organic farmer?

I get to work outside, with my body and my mind, with my family, doing something I deeply believe in. I receive so much more than I give, from the hummingbirds flying over my head as I harvest tomatoes, to watching my daughter pretend to be a cheetah in our cover crop, to being nurtured by the customers who've supported our farm and created community.

Why did you decide to serve on the NOSB?

I was at a point in my life in which time opened up for me. After a brief hiatus in serving on boards after becoming a parent, I felt ready to take on a new effort. Why did I apply to the NOSB in particular? As farmers, we rely on the label to communicate our practices and values to other farmers and our customers. I'm a big believer in community service, when life affords the opportunity, and this felt like a chance to be a part of upholding organic integrity.

What impact do you feel you have had during your 5-year term as a farmer-member on the NOSB?

As a full-time, small-scale farmer I hope I've been able to bring the voice of the producer to my time on the board. I'm one of only a few folks on the board who experiences being out in the field, knows what it's like to depend on your farm for your living, and relies on the decisions the board makes to produce the food I grow. Making sure that full-time farmers have a voice is critical to ensuring the organic label represents the people who created and built this movement.

Why did you decide to be involved in Organic Farmers Association?

While serving on the NOSB, I saw how much representation large farms and corporations have at board meetings, but there was an obvious missing voice in the room: farmers. Every time OFA presents public comments to the board, I feel proud to be part of an organization that speaks on behalf of farmers, that articulates our concerns, and is so keenly in touch with the needs and beliefs of organic farmers on a national level.

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Emily Oakley, Mike Appel and Lisette Oakley run Three Springs Farm. Emily Oakley has served in an Organic Producer seat on the National Organic Standards Board since 2016.



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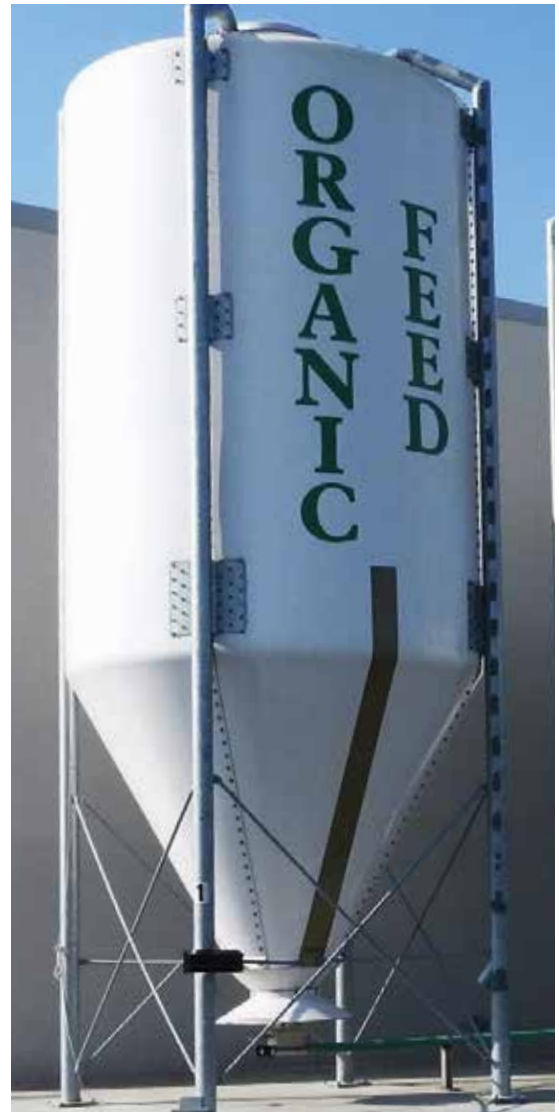
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