

# ORGANIC VOICE



ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

NO. 4 • MAR 2022



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# President's Letter

A number of years ago when our farm was actively marketing farm-grown vegetables and herbs we would end the fall season with a bang selling to one of our biggest customers. This was an Inn with two restaurants and a banquet hall that always did a large spread for Thanksgiving. This was a big deal for them and gave us a nice shot of income at the end of the growing season. The thing was that the Executive Chef at the Inn, and her staff, generally dreaded all the work that went into putting on this spread and jokingly wouldn't allow us, or her staff, to utter the "T" word until after the first of November. We, and a number of other venders, knew that we'd be selling products for the banquet and planned accordingly, even planting and storing more for late fall knowing that T-day would be coming.

Mention the US Farm bill to most Ag policy folks, whether an Ag Committee member, business entity, or NGO and you'll get a similar reaction "I don't want to hear about the Farm Bill until it's happening!" Like our Chef friend, this is often said as a joke but the reality is that the Farm Bill is a massive piece of legislation with multiple titles and sets the framework for federal spending on agriculture and nutrition for the next 5 years. And like our work with the Inn at Thanksgiving we need to begin thinking about what's in the current Farm Bill, what we'd like to change, and where we'd go if we as an organic farming community were writing this legislation.

In order to facilitate this discussion and have some consensus in the organic farming community the Organic Farmers Association and the Organic Trade Association have partnered on a process for gathering ideas and concerns from organic farmers in order to approach the upcoming process with positions expressed by our community.



There are three ways to get involved in this process. First, OFA and OTA have a [survey that we encourage every organic farmer to participate in](#), whether you joined other discussions or not this is a great opportunity to get your concerns recorded. Second, we supported local and regional organizations in hosting regional meetings with their constituents to make recommendations based on their region's unique situation. Check with your local organic farming organization to see if there's a listening session you can attend. And third, we hosted a National Organic Farmer Meeting on March 2, 2022, with organic farmers across the country. A report will be coming out later this Spring that will identify national organic farmer priorities. Stay tuned!

We may feel overwhelmed by the size and scope of the Farm Bill, like our friend the chef, but that shouldn't keep us from planning what we want when the day finally arrives!

To find out more about the Farm Bill, its titles, and processes our friends at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition have put together a great [overview](#).

I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "David Colson".

David Colson, President  
New Leaf Farm, Durham, Maine





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Ed Maltby, Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA)  
Sam Malriat, Rodale Institute

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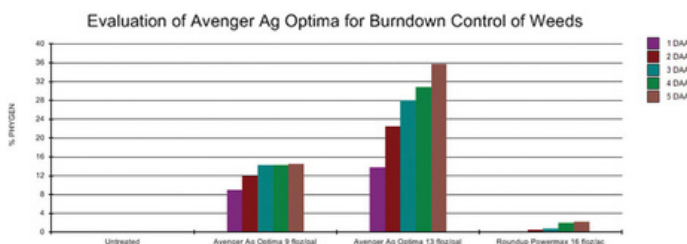


Figure 1. Evaluation of percent total weed damage in plots from 1 to 5 days after application.



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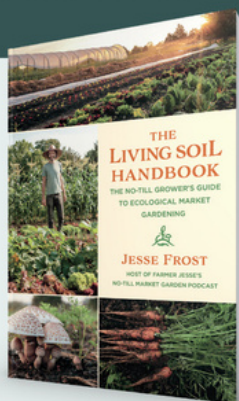
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# Spring Policy Update

By, Patty Lovera, Policy Director

Each year, OFA seeks input from U.S. certified organic farmers and organic farm organizations on our policy priorities. The results for 2022 are in and show similar results as previous years, with the top priorities of increasing USDA's enforcement of the organic standards, prohibiting hydroponic operations from being certified organic, reducing fraudulent organic imports, and addressing consolidation in organic markets. This spring we expect to see progress on several of these critical issues.



## FARM BILL

The process of writing the next Farm Bill has started in Congress and will continue throughout this year. The Farm Bill is a large package of legislation that governs most of the programs run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and normally it is revisited every five years.

The current Farm Bill was passed in 2018 and expires in September 2023. Congress has started to take the first steps in the process of developing the next Farm Bill. The House Agriculture Committee has kicked off a series of hearings to examine how



USDA programs like conservation and commodity programs are working under the current Farm Bill. And many members of Congress will start to do events like listening sessions or other meetings to gather input about the Farm Bill during their recess periods this spring and summer. OFA is working this spring to gather input from organic farmers through a survey, a virtual meeting and working with regional organic organizations to identify the top priorities for organic in this process.

## ORGANIC REGULATIONS

Two long-awaited regulations needed to increase the integrity of the organic standards are finally moving through the rulemaking process. The Office of Management and Budget, a division of the White House that signs off on federal regulations, is reviewing USDA's Origin of Livestock rule and the Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards rule (animal welfare standards). OFA and our allies have met with the OMB about both of these rules to make the case that stronger rules are desperately needed to ensure a level playing field for organic farms and ensure the integrity of the organic label. After the OMB finishes its review, the USDA will have to make any changes required and can then release the OLPS proposed rule for public comment and the final version of the OOL rule.

## CONSOLIDATION IN AGRICULTURE

The problems caused by lack of competition in very consolidated agriculture markets has been receiving some long-overdue attention recently. The Biden Administration has focused on the high levels of market share held by large meatpacking and poultry processing companies, dedicating several White House press events to this topic and pledging action from the USDA on enforcing the Packers and Stockyards Act as well as closing loopholes in the definitions for voluntary country of origin labeling for meat. And in January, the Antitrust Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee conducted a hearing on the state of competition and supply chains in the food system. OFA and our allies working on organic dairy issues in the Northeast [submitted testimony to the subcommittee](#) outlining how lack of buyers for organic milk in the region made farmers more vulnerable when one buyer decided to leave the region.

## CLIMATE-SMART COMMODITIES

In February, Agriculture Secretary Vilsack announced that the USDA would spend \$1 billion on grants for pilot programs that create market opportunities for U.S. agricultural and forestry products that use climate-smart practices and include ways to measure and verify greenhouse gas benefits. [You can read more about this new program here.](#)



Patty Lovera is Policy Director of Organic Farmers Association. She makes sure that the policy priorities of certified organic farmers are represented in Washington, D.C.





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# DYNAMICS & CHALLENGES IN THE ORGANIC MILK MARKET

WRITTEN BY: JILL SMITH, WODPA & ED MALTBY, NODPA





Organic dairy producers nationwide are facing unique challenges further escalated by the increased consolidation of the organic dairy industry. The management of organic dairy farm milk contracts is a national problem not confined to small and mid-size operations in the Northeast but has been pervasive over the years throughout the West and Midwest as well.

Consumers have high expectations for organic dairy and expect organic milk to come from family farms managing cows on pasture. While the great majority of organic dairy producers meet these consumer expectations, corporations and cooperatives lack transparency on the volume of milk purchased from large-scale operations leading to a misrepresentation of how the organic dairy market truly functions.

## WHERE DOES YOUR ORGANIC MILK COME FROM?

Processing consolidation has come about due to a lack of investment in necessary local and regional infrastructure, lack of federal oversight of consolidation in the organic market, and lack of NOP enforcement of the pasture rule and Origin of Livestock.

Most organic dairy processing now uses Extended Shelf Life (ESL) or Ultra-High Temperature (UHT) pasteurization to prolong milk shelf life and reduce distribution challenges of a perishable product. UHT is a relatively new technique and many regional dairy plants cannot process it. Consolidation of processing to large plants with UHT capability means organic milk doesn't have to be local. Now, the east coast has store-brand milk produced and packaged in Colorado while west coast stores stock milk from as far away as New York.



### FIPS State Code #

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02-Alaska  
04-Arizona  
05-Arkansas  
06-California  
08-Colorado  
09-Connecticut  
10-Delaware  
11-D.C.  
12-Florida  
13-Georgia  
15-Hawaii  
16-Idaho  
17-Illinois  
18-Indiana  
19-Iowa  
20-Kansas  
21-Kentucky  
22-Louisiana  
23-Maine  
24-Maryland  
25-Massachusetts  
26-Michigan  
27-Minnesota  
28-Mississippi  
29-Missouri  
30-Montana  
31-Nebraska  
32-Nevada  
33-New Hampshire  
34-New Jersey  
35-New Mexico  
36-New York  
37-North Carolina  
38-North Dakota  
**39-Ohio**  
40-Oklahoma  
41-Oregon  
42-Pennsylvania  
43-Puerto Rico  
44-Rhode Island  
45-South Carolina  
46-South Dakota  
47-Tennessee  
48-Texas  
49-Utah  
50-Vermont  
51-Virginia  
53-Washington  
54-West Virginia  
55-Wisconsin  
56-Wyoming



## CHECK WHERE YOUR MILK IS PROCESSED

A code near the expiration date tells you the location of the plant where the milk was processed. Though this code identifies the processing plant, it does not tell you where the milk was produced.

We checked six large retail outlets in Hadley, MA and only one-half gallon carton was processed in New England. We also checked a large retail outlet in Washington state, which showed cartons processed in Utah, Colorado, and New York. Without consolidation and centralization, milk would not be able to travel from coast to coast.





Processing consolidation has been coupled with changes in milk sourcing. In 2021, 135 northeast organic dairy farm contracts were terminated between July and November, marking the largest regional U.S. family organic dairy contract loss in history. In 2017, a large group of Humboldt County, California organic dairy farmers' contracts were terminated where picturesque, grass-based dairies, and high-quality milk production embodies consumer expectations for organic milk. In both cases, processors cited trucking costs and carbon footprint as reasons why they were pulling out. These milk buyers were directing milk to centralized processing plants, distanced from the farms, which increased the miles milk needed to travel to the processing plant making trucking too expensive (or inconvenient) to pick up from many family dairies.

## **PRICES TO FARMERS ARE TOO LOW**

For the past five years, farmers have been paid less than their cost of production, debunking the concept that the premium pay price organic dairy families receive supports a viable economy for organic dairy farm families. Though a premium price is commanded at retail stores, organic farmers only receive about 30% of

the retail price. In 2021 and in early 2022, producers reported a nearly 15% growth in their cost of production, yet pay price has remained stagnant since 2018, a year when pay price fell back to 2012 rates.

Low pay prices are driven by low-cost organic milk being sold under store-brand private labels. Generic, store-brand organic milk is now the leading seller of retail milk. Many stores source their private label milk from mega “organic” dairies, and that drives down the price of all private-label milk—including that packaged by farmer-cooperatives for other retail stores.

## **CONSOLIDATION = TOO LITTLE COMPETITION**

Is there collusion in the organic milk industry? The fate of organic dairy farm families rests primarily in the hands of a few multinational companies and one cooperative. Across the U.S., farmers are offered roughly the same pay prices, with the same increases or decreases, and similar market incentives set by the small group of buyers. While the federal government has timely and detailed reports on the source, quality, and utilization of risk management tools for the conventional milk market, this public information is not available for organic milk. The few organic milk buyers hold power over producers. Cooperatives can peremptorily impose milk quotas and change milk prices, and corporations include contractual clauses that allow them to restrict milk volumes for which they will pay and cut pay prices as they choose.

## **MARKET SECURITY?**

Processors' ability to terminate contracts at will has created an unsustainable environment for organic dairies. Reasons for termination have ranged from a lack of demand, milk quality issues, farm access, inadequate milk volumes, expensive trucking costs, etc. While organic dairy contracts have always suffered some risk of instability, as the number of



organic buyers decreases, farmers have fewer buyers to turn to if they lose their contract, making the risk of instability even greater.

Dairies are unique in that cows must be milked daily to stay in production. Milk is a perishable product requiring immediate processing. Dairy farms are financially dependent on continued production and milk sales. A dairy farm cannot sit on a tank of milk until the pay price increases, they must empty it so they can fill it again. Their bargaining power is minimal, and farmers' contracts constrict their ability to stand up to unfair conditions for risk of termination.

Organic dairies have long been dependent on their direct relationships with processors, but these connections are eroding with the distance increasing between the buyers and producers. The national market is moving towards the use of brokers to buy and sell organic milk, which further distances the processors from long-term and personal relationships with organic dairy farm families.

## WHAT IS NEXT?

Is there a future for independent organic dairy farms? With the processing and distribution of organic dairy in the hands of so few buyers, is it possible to make changes toward a more regional system?

For organic dairy producers to succeed, we need a market made up of less consolidation and more regional brands of milk, where control of all levels of production rests with the community stakeholders and the producers.

Success stories like [Straus Family Creamery & Dairy](#) in Marshall, California show that it can be done. Straus processes their own farms' milk and 11 other local organic dairies. They offer a greater pay price and prioritize relationships with these farms.



At a larger regional scale, forming pools of milk from farmers within a region, processing it in that region by regionally-owned processing plants, and then selling the milk in the same region, might be a formula for success. Federal support for regional infrastructure and increased competition in the organic dairy industry, capital investors, State and Federal loan guarantors, and socially-motivated investors can help pave the financing path to bring everything together. It will take time to rebuild northeast regional processing; to keep the recently terminated 89 organic dairies in business, they will need support through state, federal, or private-grant programs until infrastructure is secured. As milk buyers leave regions, we ask them to support their terminated producers' transition to other markets with meaningful financial assistance and help with the establishment of more infrastructure. This will demonstrate gratitude to the decades of service organic dairy farm families have provided to build their brands and consumer support.

Nationally, organic dairy farms now face the same challenges and must come together with a united voice to bring about change within the organic milk industry. Otherwise, the image and bucolic delights of cows grazing the hillside, as our consumers expect and processors market, will fall to the wayside. Not only are the futures of organic family farms across the country at stake but so are consumer trust and the integrity of the organic seal. Now is the time for farmers to demand change.



**Jill Smith** is Executive Director of Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (WODPA), representing 285 dairies in the Western U.S.



**Ed Maltby** is Executive Director of Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA), representing 830 dairies in the Northeast U.S.





# WHAT WE CAN DO FOR DAIRY

OFA is working with regional organic farm organizations and the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance to identify options for the organic dairy farms in Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire and New York who are losing their contracts.

## SEVERAL TYPES OF RESPONSES ARE NEEDED



**Investment** in new infrastructure for processing organic milk in the region (which could come from private investors as well as federal and state governments).



**Improving the enforcement** of the organic standards so that producers all over the country are following the same rules, specifically by USDA releasing a strong final rule on Origin of Livestock as soon as possible.

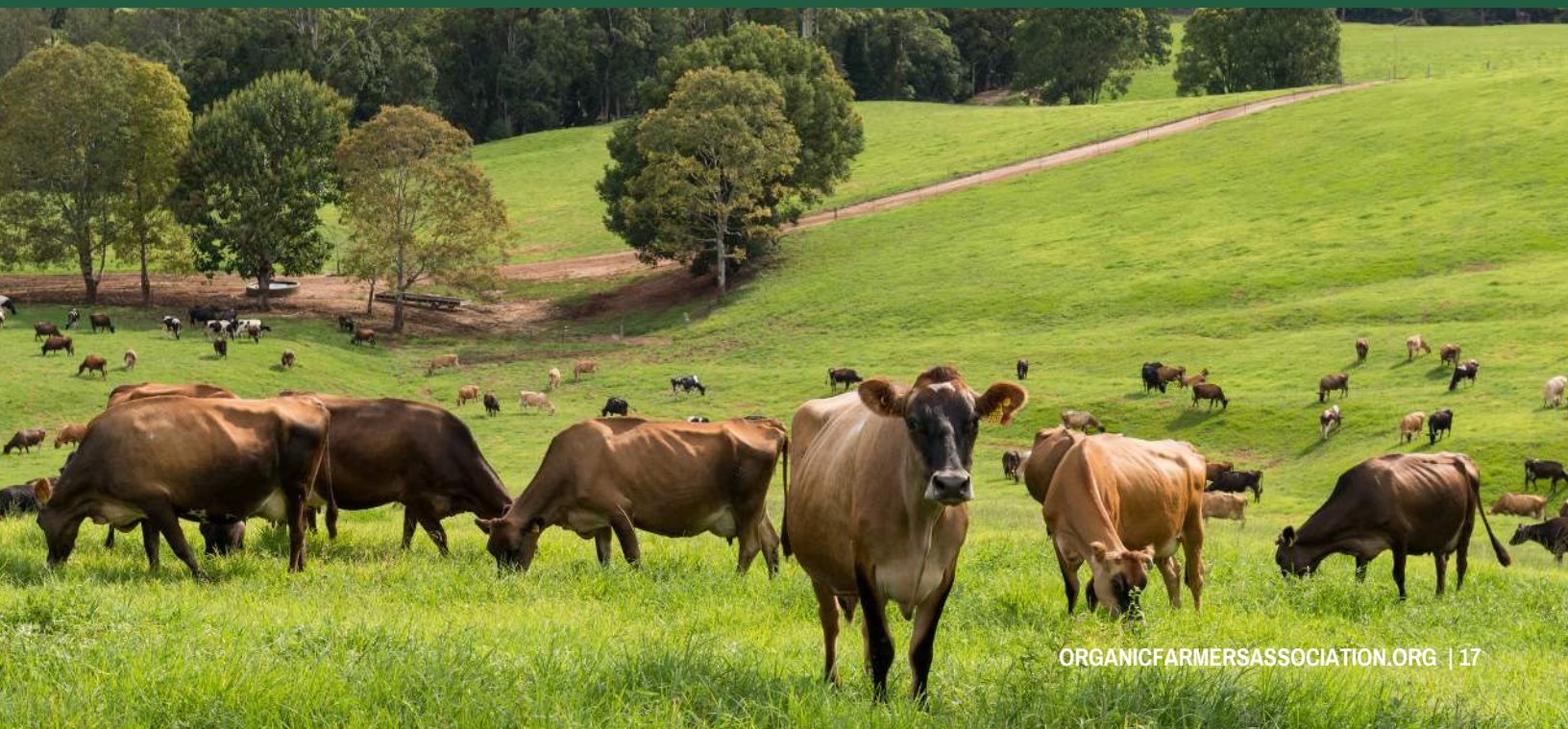


**Financial assistance** for impacted farms to stay in business (and farm organically) until new buyers come online.



**The Department of Justice should investigate** the effect of lack of competition in New England and eastern New York in light of Danone's decision to exit the region, and propose new remedies to restore competition in the region.

OFA and other farm organizations participated in a task force organized by the USDA that offered a long list of recommendations for steps USDA could take. When asked by members of Congress during a hearing about the status of these recommendations, Agriculture Secretary Vilsack said he expected to be making some decisions soon. We will continue to push USDA and other government agencies to respond.







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NODPA provides education, resources, advocacy and discussion for organic dairy family farmers throughout the Northeast.

For more information about NODPA, NODPA Field Days, Odairy discussions, what's happening in Washington, and other resources available for organic dairy family farmers, visit [www.NODPA.com](http://www.NODPA.com)

### ***The integrity of the USDA Organic Program is in a precarious position***

The futures of organic family farms across the country are at stake, but so is consumer trust and the integrity of the organic seal. No matter the miles between our dairies, the challenges are the same. NODPA will ensure there is consistent implementation of organic regulations to ensure a fair and level playing field for all dairies.



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# DENMARK ORGANIC LESSONS FOR U.S. FUTURE

WRITTEN BY:  
HARRIET BEHAR,  
SWEET SPRINGS FARM

While the growth of organic in the U.S. is mostly market-driven, other governments around the world have chosen to use their policies and tax dollars to aggressively grow organic agriculture and food purchases. Denmark has led the way in organic planning with astounding success. Many European countries have seen the benefits of the Danish model and have integrated similar activities. We in the U.S. can learn much from these policies and the positive results.

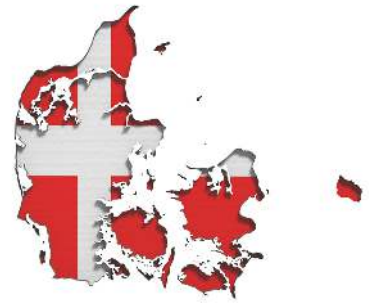
Organic food purchases in Denmark have the highest market share of any country in the world, at 12.8 percent in 2020 (U.S. organic food sales were just under 6 percent in 2020). Ninety percent of the citizenry can specifically name organic practices and why they are beneficial. Eighty percent of the people buy organic food, with fifty percent buying organic on a weekly basis.



Denmark's numerous organic products are exported to nearby countries where eager consumers trust the Danish organic label. Almost ten percent of the agricultural land is certified organic. This organic success was achieved through a concerted effort by the Danish government with many non-governmental partners playing pivotal roles in building the capacity and demand to make this happen. This country of 5.8 million people implemented an Organic Action Plan in 1995 and has consistently met its targets for growth as Denmark continues to set new goals for the future. One Danish organic promoter stated that over a five-year period, the Danish government has invested an equivalent of \$10 per person in organic agriculture.

## **PESTICIDE CONTAMINATION MOTIVATED CHANGE**

Denmark is a small country, about twice the size of Massachusetts. It is composed of a long peninsula surrounded on three sides by the North Sea as well as a series of islands. All drinking water is sourced from wells tapping into the groundwater under the landmass. In the early 1990s, wells were becoming contaminated with pesticides and the Danes became alarmed. Instead of digging deeper wells, or trying to desalinize the ocean, they decided to stop the source of the contamination and encourage the transition to organic production. They spent five years developing their first plan and relied on many non-governmental agencies to partner with them to encourage farmers and consumers to welcome organic, as well as build appropriate marketing strategies and infrastructure that aid organic agricultural growth.



**"Denmark is a small country,  
about twice the size of  
Massachusetts."**

## **SUCCESSFUL SOLUTIONS WERE HOLISTIC**

The Danes approached the issue holistically. They felt it was important to have a stable market and that everyone should have access to organic food regardless of income. When they started to implement their Organic Action Plan, they knew farmers would need both financial and technical help during the transition to organic. Cooking, processing, packaging, storage, and distribution of organic foods would need to be modified to maintain the freshness and integrity of the organic foods. Consumers would need to be educated about how organic food is produced and its numerous benefits as well as help in purchasing higher-priced products.

Twenty-five years ago, my husband and I spent 10 days in Denmark visiting organic farmers, educators, processors, and policymakers. One of the first dairy farmers we visited had newly transitioned to organic and I asked him why he made that choice. He answered that he could not lose the farm on his watch. I asked what he meant by that and he explained his family had lived on that farm since the mid-1600s. He saw himself in a long line of family members, both past and future, and he needed to do his best for all of them. **To help him succeed in his organic transition, the government provided him an organic transition subsidy, funded by the government by taxing pesticide sales and giving that specific tax to transitioning farmers.**



## EDUCATION & TRAINING BEYOND FARMS WAS NECESSARY

During our visit, we visited numerous educational institutions. In the late 1990s, organic processed foods were much less common and organic foods tended to be fresh--not frozen or highly processed. To preserve the nutrition and flavor for this fresh product, a new set of skills needed to be taught. One institution focused instruction on fresh food handling for food service workers in institutional kitchens (hospitals, schools, daycare centers, retirement homes) and restaurants. They were taught how to purchase, cook, store and present organic foods.

The Danish government supported the purchase and use of organic foods in institutional kitchens called “public kitchens,” which provided a quick and stable market for the growing number of organic farms.

## CHANGING CONSUMER PURCHASING

In order to encourage Danish consumers to also adopt an affection for organic foods, the government incentivized a change of purchasing by sending most Danish citizens coupons in the mail that could only be used to lessen the cost of organic foods they purchased in their local stores.

This government subsidy was very popular and many organic foods sold out quickly in the early part of the month when everyone had their coupons. This effort helped to equalize access to organic food while at the same time providing a strong market, which encouraged more farmers to transition.

**"Organic certification in Denmark is free because the value of the ecological services of organic production far outweighs the certification costs."**



## FREE ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

From the beginning, Danish government officials reached out to farmers to identify barriers to organic transition, and farmers stated they wanted the cost of organic certification to be free.

To this day, the Danish government manages organic certification free to all producers. Organic certification in Denmark is free because the value of the ecological services of organic production far outweighs the certification costs. The government also continues to encourage the transition to organic by providing a day-long consultation with an organic expert to help them understand the changes and opportunities resulting from organic production on their individual farm.

Research and innovation are deeply embedded in the Danish organic plan. From agricultural production to developing new food products and processing techniques suited to organic, Denmark has become an important global leader in visioning and building the infrastructure, policy examples, and public support that can be replicated to create an organic world.



**Harriet Behar** runs organic Sweet Springs Farm in Gays Mills, Wisconsin. She serves on the OFA Governing Council and Policy Committee and has been involved with federal, state and local policy advocacy for over 30 years.







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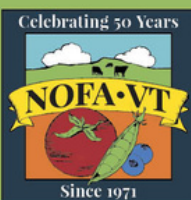
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# DENMARK'S PANDEMIC RESPONSE PROPELS ORGANIC

WRITTEN BY: JONATHAN MATHEW MATHEWS

The COVID19 pandemic has disrupted economic and health systems across the globe. In Denmark, where extensive organic agriculture policies already exist, the government made a notable effort to supplement national crisis pandemic management with ambitious green initiatives, including organic. Danish policymakers argued that economic crisis management and sustainable development spending needed to go hand-in-hand. In response to the unique and urgent needs of the economy, Denmark launched the Danish Recovery and Resilience Plan (DRRP) in April 2021 to foster a strong recovery and prepare the economy for future challenges.

The DRRP provides needed stimulus to the staggering economy while simultaneously constructing more sustainable systems of production. The more supply chains reflect sustainable practices, the easier it is for entire economies to transition to green economies. Denmark has taken proactive steps towards converting conventional agriculture into organic systems for the last two decades[1], and the DRRP continues this commitment with a reinvigoration of green transition policy.

## GREEN TRANSITION OF AGRICULTURE

Although the DRRP encompasses a wide range of investments and reforms, its central mission prepares Denmark to face necessary adaptations for future technology and green transitions. Having made binding and ambitious commitments to cutting total emissions by 70 percent by 2030[2], the Danish government will again focus on transitioning more land to organic production as a tool for cutting emissions and promoting sustainability. It has always been Danish policy to approach organic growth through demand-based interventions and innovative research-based solutions. The DRRP continues this policy by pursuing three main initiatives.

**"It has always been Danish policy to approach organic growth through demand-based interventions and innovative research-based solutions. "**

[1] Over 11% of agricultural farmland in Denmark (280,000 ha) is certified organic, almost twice as high as the European Union (EU) average. Most organic farmland is in Jutland, the Northern continental part of Denmark. Last year, an additional 34,000 ha were converted to organic.

[2] <https://www.fas.usda.gov/data/denmark-government-introduces-climate-action-plan-agriculture> and <https://climate-laws.org/geographies/denmark/laws/the-climate-act>





### 3 DANISH ORGANIC INITIATIVES IN 2021

#### 1 Increasing Organic in Public Institutional Kitchens:

This intervention increases previous efforts to convert domestic public kitchens to healthier and climate-friendly organic meals in thousands of schools, hospitals, retirement homes, ministries, and military bases. Addressing both public health and environmental sustainability, this national reform will increase organic food in all public kitchens to 90 percent by 2030, finance education for kitchen workers, add climate emissions to Organic Cuisine Labels, and provide technical assistance to help kitchens transition. Denmark has committed \$10 Million (M) DKK (\$1.51 M USD) per year to this initiative.

#### 2 Organic Research and Development:

In order to support continual improvements, research and development is highly emphasized in the Danish model. The Innovation Centre for Organic Farming will support farmer information exchange, research, experiments, and organic education for the general public. The government has allocated \$40 M DKK (\$6.07 M USD) to the program for the next four years.

#### 3 Increased Funding for Transitioning Farms:

The aim of these measures is to encourage more farmers to transition to organic farming because of the positive & quantifiable environmental services that organic management achieves.[3] To support this growth in the marketplace, Denmark aims to double domestic consumption of organic products by 2030. In order to meet this consumer demand domestically, the country has allocated \$45 M DKK (\$8.1 M USD) per year to support transitioning farmers. This subsidy directly addresses the major concerns of farmers regarding loss of revenue and the steep learning curve during organic transition.



Organic Farm, Skyttes Gartneri, Dømmestrup, Denmark

Despite the Coronavirus's global disruption, Denmark's organic model has capitalized on economic decline and recovery to **build back production systems and consumer demand in a manner that accelerates sustainable development**. The Danish model provides a straightforward model for replication to accelerate the consumption and production of organic goods as a means to mitigate climate change and pollution concerns. The positive relationship between the government and the agricultural sector increases the well-being of farmers and rural communities. We can look to the successful Denmark example for how federal policy and organic sector partnership can support the growth of organic agriculture to achieve better environmental and health outcomes for the whole community. 🌱

Jonathan Mathew Mathews is a senior at the Georgetown University Walsh School of Foreign Service. Bachelors of Science in Foreign Service 2022.



[3] EU quantified environmental services: [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/knowledge/ecosystem\\_assessment/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/knowledge/ecosystem_assessment/index_en.htm)  
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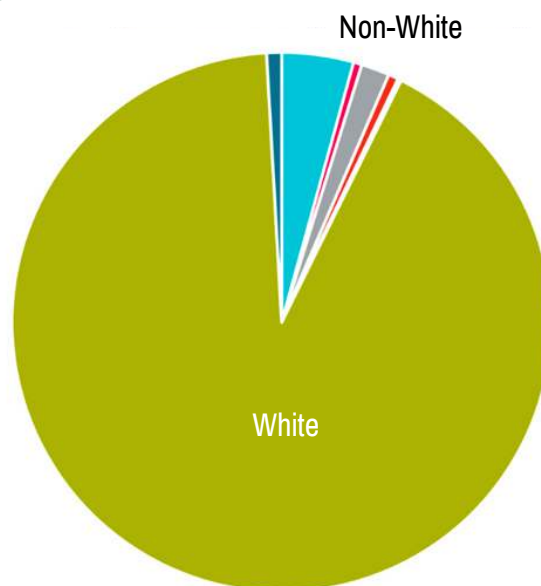
# CREATING MORE SUPPORT FOR ORGANIC DIVERSITY

By, Kate Mendenhall & Abby Youngblood

The Biden administration has shown a commitment towards supporting more organic transition. In June 2021, Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack said the department plans to take “several hundred million dollars” and create a pilot program “so that we could learn how best to provide a level of transition assistance that would allow folks to be able to make that transition [to organic].” The USDA’s Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program (OTECP) program, introduced in November 2021, put \$20 million of pandemic assistance money towards supplementing reimbursement for certification expenses for organic farms and education/soil testing expenses for transitioning farms, and we expect to see more support for organic transition this year. Who will be transitioning to organic, and is this an important question to ask?

**"WHO WILL BE  
TRANSITIONING TO  
ORGANIC, AND IS  
THIS AN IMPORTANT  
QUESTION TO ASK?"**

## U.S. ORGANIC FARMERS BY RACE & ETHNICITY



## ORGANIC FARMER DIVERSITY

Diversity has always been an important value of organic, which farmers make an effort to embed into the fabric of their farms by integrating practices to promote biodiversity. Organic farmers understand that a rich mix of plants, animals, and microorganisms is necessary to create healthy soil, resiliency, and a system that does not rely on toxic chemicals. Yet, the U.S. organic farming movement in many ways lacks racial diversity. In the same way that on-farm diversity is essential to create a healthy farm, racial and cultural diversity is essential to ensure



the knowledge, wisdom, and energy to transform our food system. Many practices that are foundational to organic farming, such as crop rotations, cover cropping, and the use of nitrogen-fixing legumes, as well as cooperative farming models that may be key to shifting to more sustainable and equitable food system, were developed over centuries and perpetuated by Indigenous and Black farmers. The [2017 Ag Census data](#) shows that Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) are underrepresented in farming, including organic farming. While over 13% of the US population identifies as Black or African American, fewer than 1.4% of all U.S. farms are owned by Black or African American farm owners (down from 14% in 1920). 98% of agricultural land is owned by white landowners. According to 2017 agriculture census data, 92% of organic farmers identify as white (94% of conventional farmers) but fewer than 1% of organic farmers identified as Black or African American, and 0.5% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native. Policies informed by systemic racism have led to today's inequities and we must consider as an organic community how to support organic values of justice and care in future policies.

## DIVERSITY OF ORGANIC SERVICE PROVIDERS

Mirroring the demographics of organic farmers, there is a critical lack of racial diversity among the organic professionals that support certified organic farmers including organic certifiers, inspectors, and staff of organic farm organizations providing much of the nation's organic technical assistance and educational programming. The U.S. organic community ensures and encourages on-farm diversity, and we must expand this commitment from the soil, plants, and animals to



the farmers and people supporting the organic movement as well. Diversity brings sustainability and strength to our farms and will also bring this same critical stability to the future of the organic movement and market. As the current administration designs support for more farmers to transition to organic certification, we need to be ready to welcome and support a more diverse cohort of organic farmers nationwide.

## COMMUNITY RESPONSE

For farmers who are seeking organic certification, their first point of contact is often with a certifying agent and an organic inspector. In order to be better equipped to welcome a more diverse farmer community, our organic service providers need training to better serve all farmers and help them successfully enter the organic market. In response to this need, Organic Farmers Association (OFA), the National Organic Coalition (NOC), International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA), Accredited Certifiers Association (ACA), and IFOAM-North America began a collaboration in 2021 to support organic professionals in their work to create a more diverse and inclusive organic community.



We received funding from the USDA National Organic Program in September 2021 to begin to provide resources for organic professionals. In December 2021, with project funding, 415 organic professionals took part in training about systemic racism in agriculture, and an additional 449 have since watched the training online. The goal of the training was to foster a common understanding of why we see such inequity in land ownership and within the farming community. In February 2022, 38 organic certifier agency staff and inspectors took part in an in-depth, 2-day training led by Cambium Collective, which provided information about concrete actions that organic professionals

can take in their work to foster diversity and inclusion. We plan to hold another training for organic farm organization staff later this Spring (see below).

Farmers created our organic label and movement and it's up to us to push forward a future that is sustainable, just, and equitable for all. We hope that more USDA recognition of the importance of organic farming will support a wide spectrum of organic farmers and help to bring a diversity of organic farmers into the organic market. 🌱

**Kate Mendenhall** is Executive Director of Organic Farmers Association, representing the 19,500 domestic certified organic farmers in Washington, D.C.



**Abby Youngblood** is Executive Director of National Organic Coalition, a national alliance of organizations providing a "Washington voice" for farmers, ranchers, environmentalists, consumers and industry members involved in organic agriculture.



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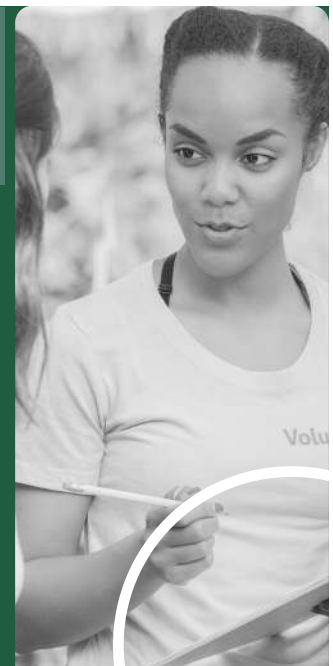
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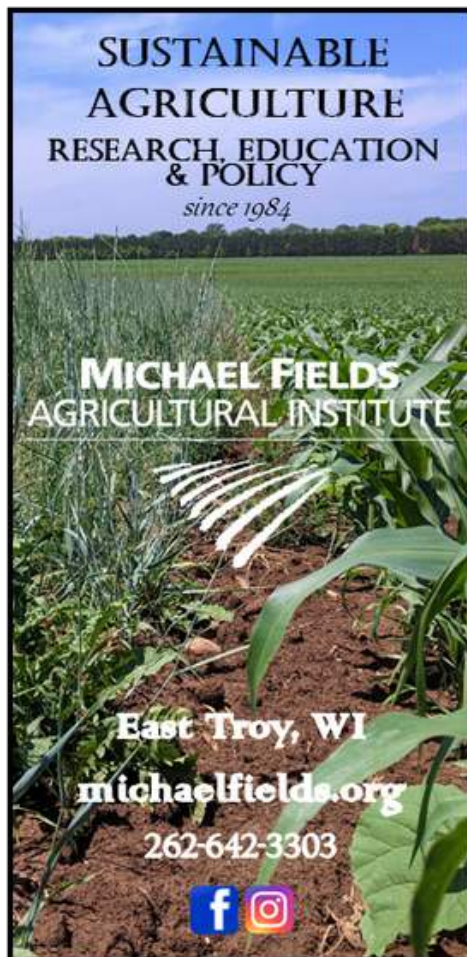
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## THE HESCOCK FAMILY ELYSIAN FIELDS LLC SHOREHAM, VT

**OWNED & OPERATED BY:** Joe and Kathleen Hescock and their daughter, Tirzah Hescock

**FARM SIZE:** 1389 acres

**PRODUCTS:** Bulk milk, beef, wheat berries, honey, balage (wrapped bales), barley, clover, corn, corn silage, ear corn, hay (dry round bales), haylage, millet, oat hay, oats, pasture, peas, sorghum, straw, sudan grass, wheat.

**COWS MILKED:** 325

**FIRST YEAR FARMING:** 1989

**YEAR CERTIFIED:** 1998

### *Why did you become farmers?*

Joe grew up on a small farm and was always the last one to come up from the barn. He has always loved caring for animals. After college, he realized that his real calling was animal husbandry and growing crops. His passion for farming proved to be contagious and Kathleen embraced the dream of dairy farming wholeheartedly. Tirzah was born into farm life, and after college and a brief experiment with living and working off the farm, realized that she, also, was a farmer at heart.





### ***Why did you choose to be certified organic?***

We wanted to take our farm to the next level and join a developing milk market that was willing to pay us for our extra effort.

### ***What are the toughest challenges you face as organic producers?***

Finding and retaining skilled labor has become a big issue. It takes extra labor to farm organically. Another challenge has been that in the past few years, our milk buyer has not recognized that extra cost associated with the extra labor.

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

We are amazed by the resilience of nature when we work with her instead of against her. Increased crop

yields, better soil health, healthy animals, etc., have all been benefits of farming organically.

### ***What is most rewarding about being an organic dairy farmer?***

We really love being around the cows and watching them grow from calf to heifer to mature members of the herd. It is incredibly satisfying to see them out on pasture throughout the year!

### ***What do you see for the future of your farm?***

As committed organic milk producers, we are looking forward to joining a new milk buyer who believes in, celebrates, and values organic dairy farming as much as our family does.







**ORGANIC FARMERS  
ASSOCIATION**



# 2022 PRIORITIES OFA ADVOCACY DAYS

The mission of the Organic Farmers Association (OFA) is to provide a unified national voice for domestic certified organic producers. OFA is building a farmer-led national organic farmer movement and national policy platform by developing and advocating for policies that benefit organic farmers; strengthening and supporting the capacity of organic farmers and farm organizations; and supporting collaboration and leadership among state, regional and national organic farmer organizations. Each year, we coordinate an Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C. to bring organic farmer voices to Congress and USDA. In 2022, our advocacy days will be held virtually due to the pandemic primarily during the week of March 7, 2022. These are the priorities OFA organic farmer members will be sharing with their elected officials. Contact OFA if you would like to meet with your Representative or Senator this Spring.



## Restore & Expand Organic Certification Cost Share Program Reimbursement

The federal government has historically reimbursed up to 75% of organic certification fees paid by organic farms and businesses, with a maximum reimbursement of \$750 per certification scope (crops, livestock, or handling). The cost share program is particularly important to small, mid-sized, and beginning organic farms.

In August 2020, USDA's Farm Services Agency cut reimbursement rates to 50%, up to a maximum of \$500 per scope. FSA provided inaccurate carryover balances to Congress, resulting in a shortfall for the rest of the Farm Bill cycle. Using American Rescue Plan Act funding, in November 2021 the USDA announced that an additional amount of reimbursement (through a second application process) would be available for FY 2020, 2021, and 2022. But we don't yet know if reimbursement levels in FY 2023 will return to the 75% rate.

### WE URGE CONGRESS TO:

- Increase the reimbursement level in the next Farm Bill.
- Streamline the cost share program. The organic community is discussing ways to improve the program and our surveys reveal that farmers are interested in making the program function differently – to reduce the up-front cost of certification instead of reimbursement.

## USDA Rulemaking to Protect Organic Integrity

The integrity of the organic label continues to be organic farmers' top priority. Consumers expect the organic label to be the gold standard. If the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program (NOP) does not adequately enforce the organic standards, consumers will lose trust in the integrity of the organic label. The organic market has grown so rapidly that the NOP's enforcement capacity has not kept up with a \$50 billion industry with global supply chains.

### Preventing Fraud

Too many times, shipments of fraudulent organic grains have made it into the U.S. organic market, hurting both organic farmers and consumers. Organic farmers need full and consistent enforcement of the USDA organic standards and increased capacity at the NOP to detect and prevent fraud in organic supply chains.

### THE USDA NOP MUST:

- Complete and implement the final rule on Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) to better track imported organic products, as required by the 2018 Farm Bill. (Proposed rule comment period was completed in Fall 2020.)
- Continue to coordinate with other USDA agencies as well as U.S. Customs and Border Protection to increase awareness of organic commodities that are likely to be imported (and the potential for fraud) and to leverage other agencies' inspection resources at ports of entry.





## Organic Dairy

Organic dairy farmers have not escaped the economic crisis faced by dairy farmers across the country. A driving force behind the problems in the organic dairy industry is a lack of enforcement of the organic standards by the NOP. The lack of enforcement has allowed large-scale dairies to undermine organic farms that comply with the intent of the standards on access to pasture and Origin of Livestock.

### THE USDA NOP MUST:

- Finalize an enforceable rule on Origin of Livestock (OOL) as soon as possible. This rule must close loopholes in the organic regulations that are being exploited by large-scale dairy operations that continuously cycle animals in and out of organic production. This rule is long overdue and is necessary for consistent enforcement to create a level playing field for all organic dairy producers.

## Animal Welfare

The Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards (OLPS) rule is another long-overdue measure to strengthen the organic standards, which was delayed and ultimately withdrawn by the Trump Administration. The rule would allow the NOP to consistently enforce stronger animal welfare standards on organic farms and close loopholes being taken advantage of by some large operations. The rule was discussed and vetted in the organic community for more than a decade and has widespread support. Animal welfare is an issue of critical importance to organic consumers, and these standards must be tightened to retain consumers' confidence in the organic label.

### THE USDA NOP MUST:

- Finalize the OLPS rule as quickly as possible.

## Organic as a Climate Solution

Organic farming can play a critical role in fighting climate change. Organic regulations require certified organic farmers to implement beneficial carbon sequestration practices by eliminating chemical soil disturbance through the prohibition of synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, and other crop protection chemicals. The standards require organic farmers to adopt tillage and cultivation practices that "maintain or improve" soil conditions. But, strengthening several organic standards would make organic even more meaningful as a climate-friendly practice.

### ORGANIC STANDARDS NEEDING ATTENTION INCLUDE:

- Prohibiting hydroponic (require organic products to be raised in soil)
- Enforcing the pasture standard for organic dairy
- Finishing Origin of Livestock (OOL) and Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards (OLPS) rules

### IN THE NEXT FARM BILL, CONGRESS SHOULD:

- Require any climate program to work for all types of farms - organic, diversified, small.
- Increase funding for organic research methods.
- Include the Agriculture Resilience Act, which would use existing USDA programs to make progress on climate.



**ORGANIC FARMERS  
ASSOCIATION**

**INTERESTED IN MEETING WITH YOUR  
ELECTED OFFICIALS? Contact us!**

PATTY LOVERA, POLICY DIRECTOR  
[Patty@OrganicFarmersAssociation.org](mailto:Patty@OrganicFarmersAssociation.org)







# JOIN

## ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

BUILDING A STRONG ORGANIC FARMER VOICE

### PRIMARY CONTACT INFORMATION

**Name** (Primary Contact)

**Farm Name:**

**Address:**

**City:**

**State:**

**Zip:**

**Mobile #:**

**Other Phone:**

**Email:**

**Email 2:**

**Website:**

### ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

This Annual Membership is a:

☐

New Membership

☐

Renewal

#### MEMBERSHIP TYPE

☐

Certified Organic Farmer

☐

Supporter

☐

Organization (\$250)

#### ONE TIME GIFT

This Annual Membership Option will expire in one year.

☐

\$25

☐

\$50

☐

\$75

☒

\$100

☐

\$250

☐

\$500

☐

Other\$

☐

Check here to Auto-renew so that your membership is always valid

#### MONTHLY PLEDGE

This membership will ensure your membership is always current.

☐

\$10

☒

\$15

☐

\$20

☐

\$25

☐

\$30

☐

Other\$

### PAYMENT

**MEMBERSHIP**

**DONATION**

**TOTAL**

**MAIL TO:** Organic Farmers Association  
PO BOX 709  
Spirit Lake, IA 51360

☐

CREDIT CARD

☐

CHECK ENCLOSED (Payable to: Organic Farmers Association)

**CC#:**

**Exp:**

/

**CVV#:**

click to  
JOIN  
ONLINE

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