

ORGANIC VOICE



ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

NO. 5 • JUN 2022



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President's Letter

Okay, it's June and I'm behind. I can't blame it on the weather, we've had a pretty mild spring, maybe could have used a little more rain. Things seem to be growing well and I actually got to pruning all the trees in my orchard; we don't have that many but it always seems like a big task. Maybe that's part of it, focusing on getting a job done often requires delaying another task. Actually, I usually have many projects going at once but we always have to keep the big picture in mind.

Farmers are used to multi-tasking. There's generally too much to do not to. That's why it bothers me when the folks at USDA and the National Organic Program can't seem to get to the important tasks before them. Of course, they need to work on specific rulemaking, overseeing organic certifiers, and all the things running a program requires. What I'm talking about is addressing the bigger questions implied in ORGANIC FARMING. Things like: should non-soil production be allowed in organic, what is the role of organic in climate change mitigation, and how to change modern agriculture to provide nutritious healthy food without destroying the soil, water and environment we all depend on? I know these are things we discuss around our dinner table, and I expect you do as well.

These things are all part of the big picture we need to be looking at in order to be relevant in today's world. From what I'm hearing from farmers around the country and what I'm seeing here in our community is that these are the questions young farmers are asking. And they're increasingly frustrated with USDA Organic's inability to address these issues. Because of that, new and young farmers are deciding to develop their farms to address these big issues and not aligning with the organic agriculture movement, which is how we thought of it before the USDA got involved. Organic farming needs to change, develop and grow; but it also needs to be a forum for a discussion on the bigger issues and how



organic fits into the larger scheme of things. If it doesn't, it will eventually devolve into just another label and the truly adaptive, creative farmers will move on to something else.

When the National Organic Standards Board was created as part of the Organic Food Production Act, many of us hoped it would be the place and forum where these discussions would happen. I hope the USDA will understand the need for this and allow the NOSB to be the place where these discussions happen and where the organic community comes together to ask the questions needed. Being too busy to take on this task should not be an excuse not to do it. It should be a warning that maybe we're not focusing on the right task.

I look forward to having these discussions and to hearing the creative ideas the organic farming community has to make our world a better place. I hope you'll join me in this at your dinner table within your farming community and with the Organic Farmers Association. Let's make our voices heard! Now I'd better get back to work...

Sincerely,

David Colson, President
New Leaf Farm, Durham, Maine



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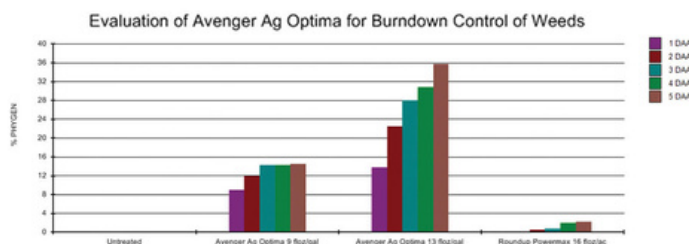


Figure 1. Evaluation of percent total weed damage in plots from 1 to 5 days after application.



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SPRING LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By, Patty Lovera, Policy Director

A WIN FOR ORGANIC INTEGRITY

Good news! After years of work from the organic community, the USDA finally released the Origin of Livestock final rule, closing loopholes that will level the playing field for organic dairy farms. Organic Farmers Association has been pushing the USDA for a strong final Origin of Livestock Rule since we were created in 2016. This issue has been at the top of our farmer-identified priority list every year. On March 29, USDA finally released the final rule!

THE NEW FINAL OOL RULE

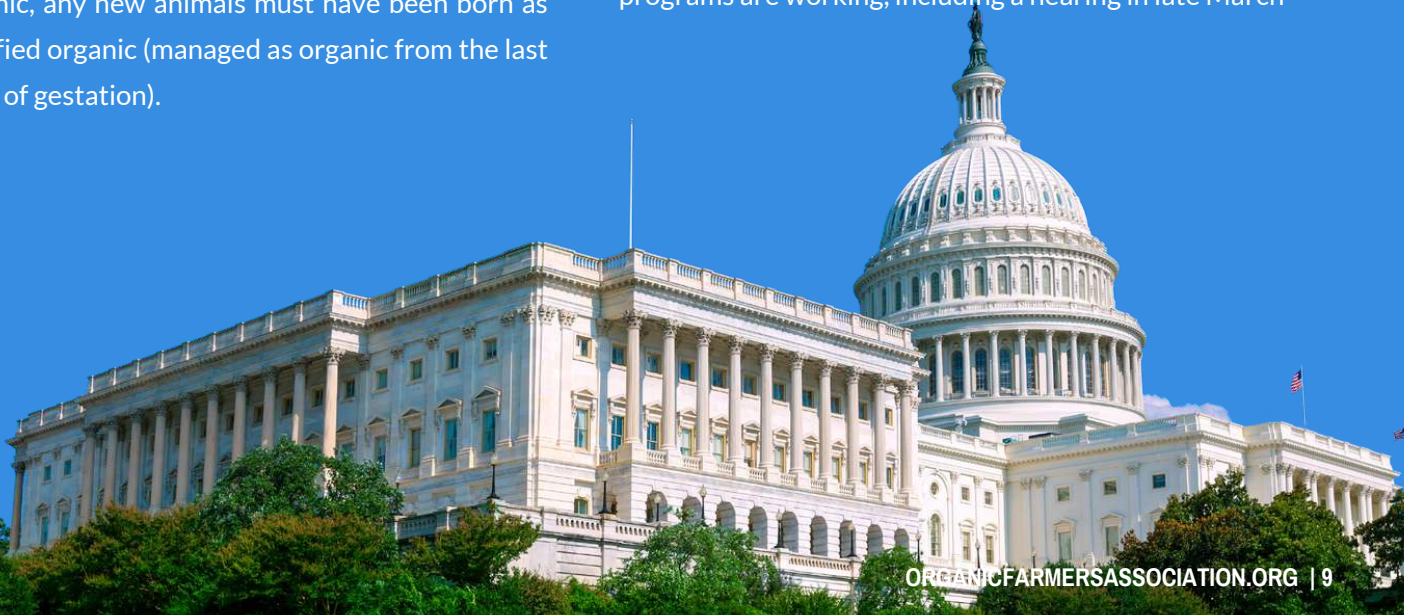
- Specifies that a dairy livestock operation transitioning to organic, or starting a new organic farm, is allowed to transition non-organic animals ONCE.
- Prohibits organic dairies from sourcing any transitioned animals. Once a dairy is certified organic, any new animals must have been born as certified organic (managed as organic from the last third of gestation).

This win would not have been possible without the support and action from so many organic farmers, organic farm organizations, and organic consumers who signed on to letters to Congress and USDA asking for support for organic dairy farmers with clear Origin of Livestock Standards.

Now that we have a final Origin of Livestock rule that clarifies the standards for organic dairy transition and growth, we will need to make sure that the USDA's National Organic Program is requiring organic certification agencies to enforce this rule uniformly.

SETTING ORGANIC PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT FARM BILL

The current Farm Bill expires in 2023, and Congress has started to take the first steps in the process of developing the new version. The House Agriculture Committee has kicked off a series of hearings to examine how USDA programs are working, including a hearing in late March



in the subcommittee that covers organic issues. The hearing covered a range of topics, including the release of the final rule on Origin of Livestock and ways to streamline application to USDA conservation programs. In early May, the Senate Agriculture Committee had its first Farm Bill hearing in Michigan, home to the Chair of the committee, Senator Stabenow. The lineup of witnesses included several organic farmers, who talked about the potential they see for growth in organic agriculture and how increased research on organic methods and other USDA programs like organic certification cost-share could help.

This summer, OFA will be working with our allies in the organic community to refine our Farm Bill proposals, on fixing organic certification cost-share, supporting organic research, tackling fraud in organic supply chains and other issues.

DELAYED ORGANIC REGULATIONS

Now that the Origin of Livestock final rule has finally been released, we still need USDA action on several other critical issues. The Office of Management and Budget, a division of the White House that signs off on federal regulations, continues to review the Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards rule. After the OMB finishes its review, the USDA will have to make any changes required by the OMB and can then release the OLPS proposed rule for public comment.

ASSISTING NORTHEAST ORGANIC DAIRY FARMERS LOSING HORIZON CONTRACTS

In late April, Danone held its annual shareholders' meeting in France. Danone North America owns Horizon Organic, which notified 89 farms in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and parts of New York that it will be dropping their contracts in early 2024. OFA and other regional organic farming groups worked with a shareholder advocacy firm called Trillium Asset Management, which asked Danone management questions about this situation at the annual meeting. Specifically, Trillium asked Danone about their lack of communication with the 89 farms and whether a promised increase in pay price for their milk during the last portion of their contracts had gone into effect yet. The company gave unsatisfactory answers at the annual meeting, so we will be working with Trillium to meet with Danone officials to continue to advocate for the impacted farms. We are also working with the regional farm groups to make sure that USDA's investment into the Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center as a response to this situation actually yields concrete assistance for the impacted farms. 🌱

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.



GET INVOLVED: EDUCATE YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS ABOUT ORGANIC THIS SUMMER!

WRITTEN BY: PATTY LOVERA, POLICY DIRECTOR

As discussions about the next Farm Bill ramp up, this summer is an important opportunity to share policy priorities for organic farmers with your members of Congress. **A good way to do that is to try to meet with your elected officials while they are back home more often during the summer.** During periods when Congress is not meeting in Washington, DC, legislators spend time at home in their districts, and you can arrange a meeting with them or their staff there.

For tips on setting up a meeting in your legislator's district office:

CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO ON OFA's WEBSITE.



Thirteen Mile Farm (MT) has invited Senator Tester to their farm for a few different events, and it's always a positive experience that helps to keep his ears tuned to organic issues in D.C. and Montana.

When you do get a meeting set up, here are some of OFA's top priorities for the next Farm Bill:

Organic Certification Cost Share

In the next Farm Bill, Congress should:

- Increase the reimbursement level to 100% (up to \$1500 per scope) to make organic certification free for small producers.
- Streamline the program to make it more accessible for farmers and reduce the up-front cost of certification instead of reimbursement.

Organic and Climate

Organic must be included in whatever climate programs are developed for agriculture, and the USDA must make sure that organic is the gold standard for climate-smart agriculture by prohibiting hydroponic production in organic and enforcing organic regulations to make sure livestock are raised on pasture.

Stronger Standards for Organic Integrity

USDA needs to finish long-delayed improvements to the organic standards, including the Strengthening Organic Enforcement rule to prevent fraud and stronger animal welfare standards.

You can get more background on these topics in the [March 2021 issue of Organic Voice](#) (page 38.)





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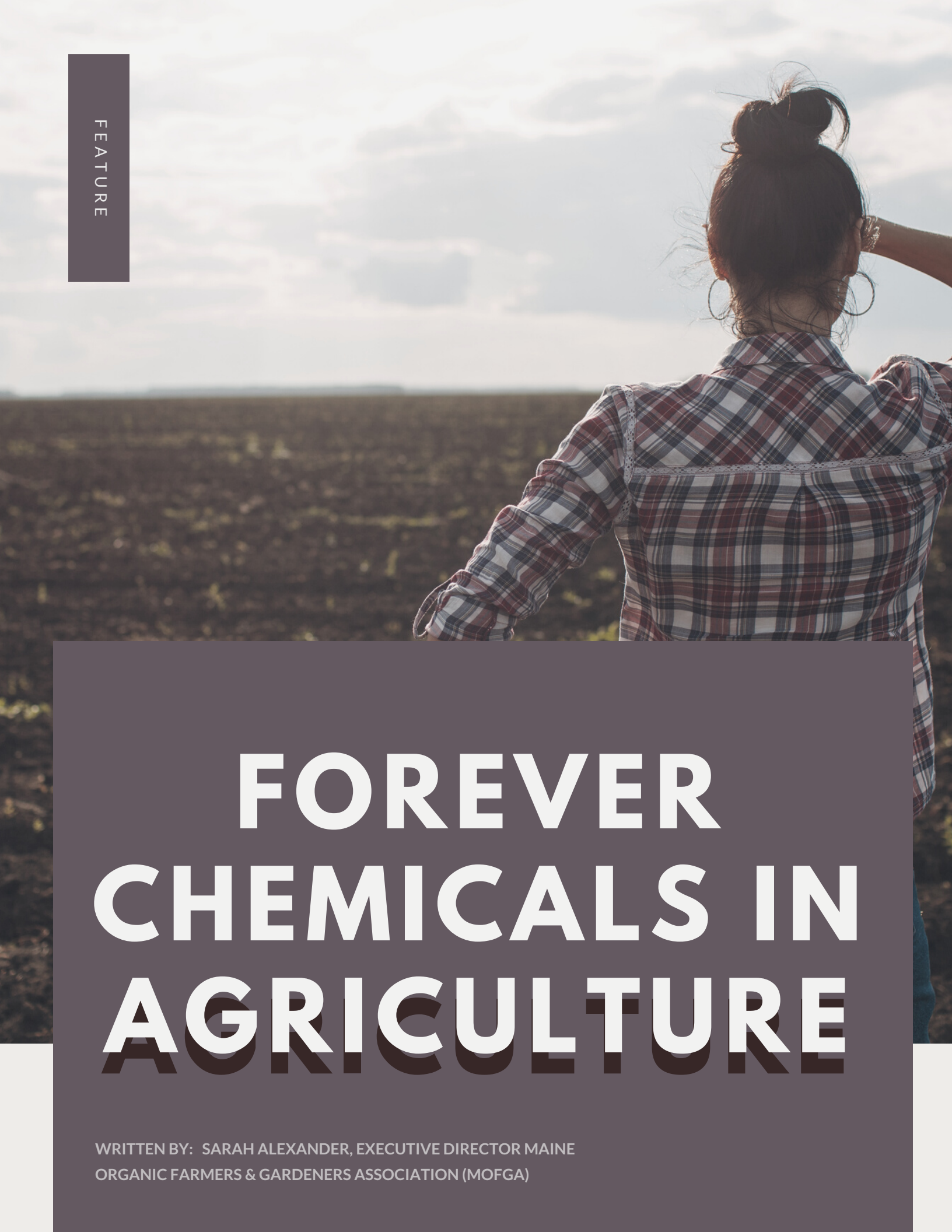


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A woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a red and white plaid shirt, stands with her back to the camera, looking out over a vast, dark field under a cloudy sky at sunset. The scene is captured in a warm, golden light.

FEATURE

FOREVER CHEMICALS IN AGRICULTURE

WRITTEN BY: SARAH ALEXANDER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAINE
ORGANIC FARMERS & GARDENERS ASSOCIATION (MOFGA)

The chemicals known

as per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) continue to come to light as contaminants in agriculture. In Maine, this issue first emerged in 2016 when testing on a dairy farm returned results indicating incredibly high levels of PFAS.

WHERE DOES PFAS COME FROM?

We're all exposed to PFAS everyday through stain- and water-resistant coatings that are widely used in products ranging from food packaging and non-stick pans to clothing and carpeting. Exposure to some PFAS compounds is linked to a wide range of health issues, including increased cholesterol levels, changes in liver enzymes, decreased vaccine response in children, decreased birth weight, thyroid disease, increased risk of high blood pressure or pre-eclampsia in pregnant women, and increased risk of kidney or testicular cancer.

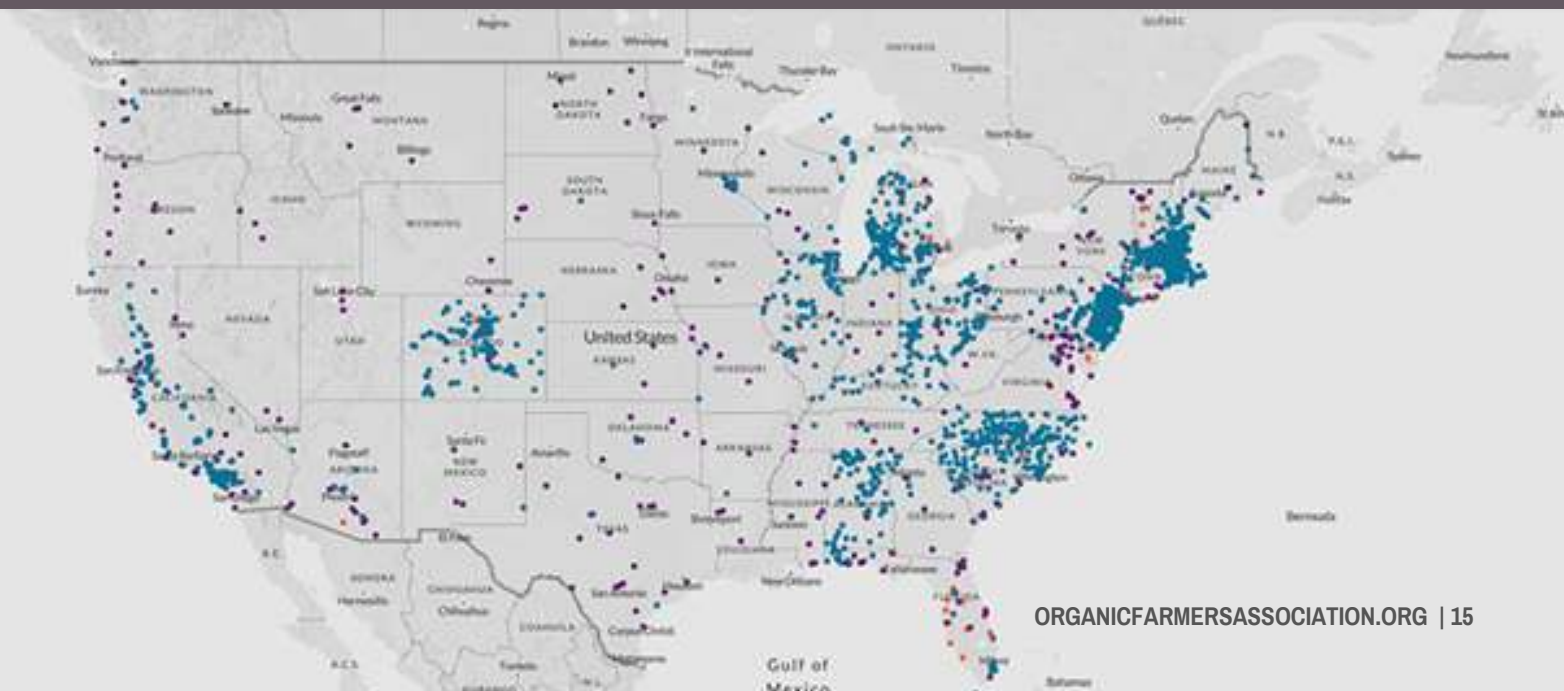
Manufacturers of PFAS and products containing PFAS are linked to significant contamination in parts of the country. In addition, PFAS-containing firefighting foam, which is used at airports and military sites among other places, is a source of contamination. The below [resource from the Environmental Working Group](#) maps PFAS contamination across the United States.

PFAS & AGRICULTURE

In Maine PFAS have been used in the manufacturing of paper products and have contaminated soil and water largely through the application of biosolids, some of which were mixed with waste from paper manufacturing. PFAS-contaminated sludge has been spread on farmland in Maine since the late 1970s, a practice approved by the state's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) as a way to help farmers obtain fertilizer and simultaneously provide a low-cost waste disposal option for

The Environmental Working Group manages an interactive map where you can search via zip code. Currently the map shows PFAS contamination in 2,854 sites in 50 states and two territories. The number of U.S. communities with confirmed PFAS contamination is growing at an alarming rate. The latest update of this interactive map documents PFAS pollution in public and private water systems. [Visit the map here.](#)

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municipal waste treatment plants and pulp and paper factories. The state of Maine passed legislation this year to ban the spreading of PFAS-contaminated biosolids and compost. The DEP now estimates that costs to address the impact of PFAS contamination in the state will soar to \$10-\$20 million annually to cover the cost of contaminated wells, and the state just passed a \$60 million PFAS farmer relief package to provide income replacement, testing, research, health monitoring, infrastructure investments and farm buyouts.

Since that initial discovery, the state legislature required the DEP to identify and map potential spreading sites throughout the state, prioritizing soil and water testing. This process will take years and instead of waiting for the state, many Maine farms – conventional and organic – are increasingly testing water, soil and crops for PFAS contamination. Though spreading of biosolids is not permitted in organic production, organic farms have not been immune from this problem and in Maine, organic farmers have been on the forefront of testing and sharing results, sometimes with devastating outcomes. The 36-month transition period required from the last application of a prohibited substance to harvest of an organic crop is not meant to address this type of environmental contamination. These “forever chemicals” that persist in the soil and groundwater are not used in agriculture, but are from industrial contamination.

This problem is not specific to Maine, or the paper industry, as these chemicals are used in hundreds of industries throughout the United States.

Farms testing with high levels of PFAS contamination are now having to decide whether or not their products should remain on the market. This is a conundrum that no farmer should have to face, yet it's increasingly happening. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not established tolerances for PFAS in any food crops. This has left Maine's Center for

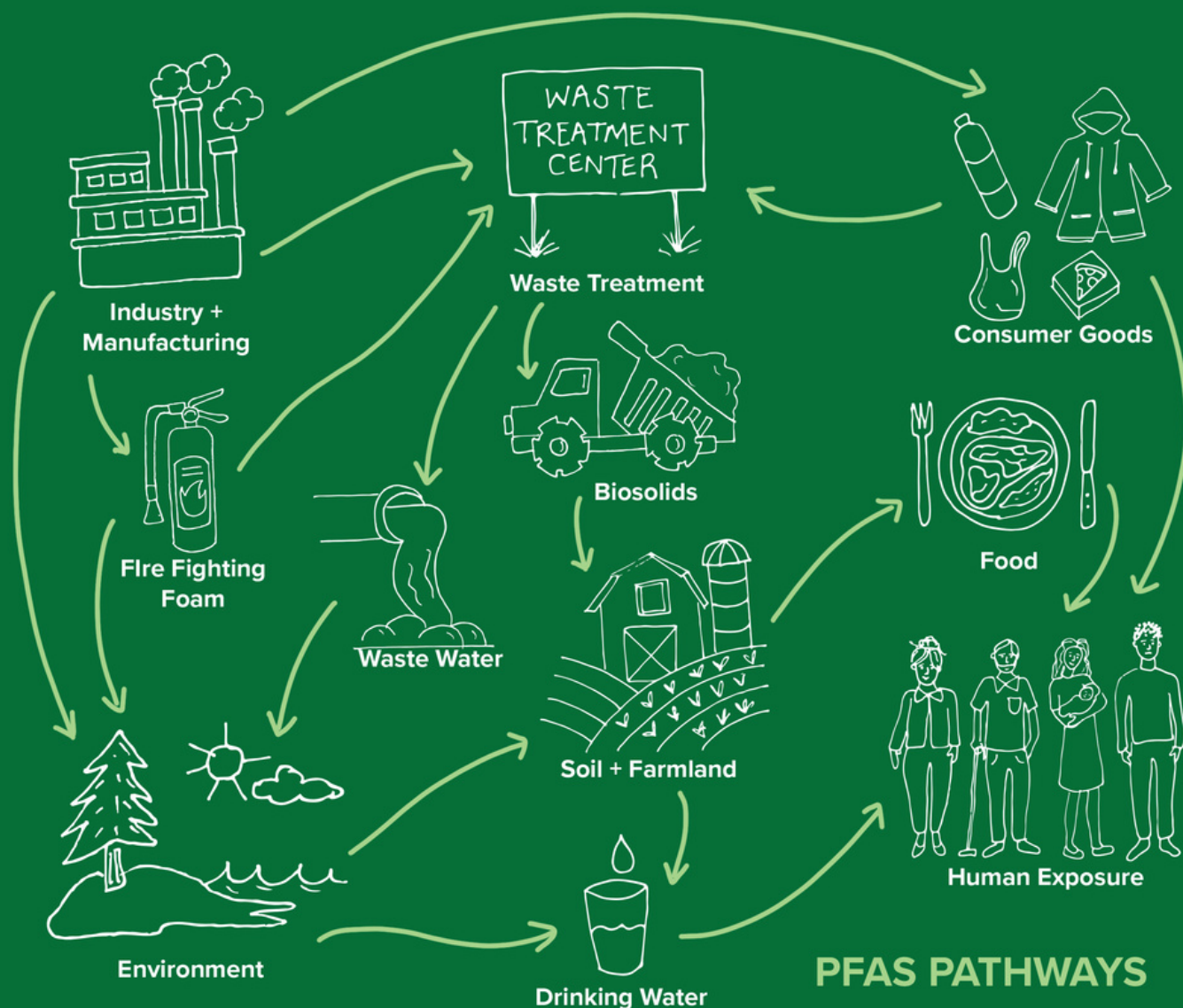
HOW DOES A FARM TEST FOR CONTAMINATION?

The University of Maine Cooperative Extension has compiled PFAS resources for both farmers and consumers.

The first step to determine whether PFAS may be a risk on your farm is to determine the application history dating back to the 1980s. Maine Department of Environmental Protection has created [resources to help farmers determine possible application to their land](#). Check if your state will assist you in obtaining application history. Not all states required license requirements for legal application, so this may not be enough to eliminate risk.

If you know or suspect that residuals were applied to your land, you may want to sample soil, water, animal forage, produce, or any combination of these. Maine Cooperative Extension recommends samples be collected by a field technician trained in PFAS sampling. Testing costs are expensive, \$250-450 in lab analysis fees with additional costs for sampling in some cases. So, prioritizing sampling efforts is important. The State of Maine has compiled a [list of nationwide labs approved for PFAS analysis](#). Maine DEP has published a helpful [guide to interpreting PFAS lab results](#).





Disease Control in a position to establish its own thresholds, which informs the actions of other state agencies in their work with farmers. This process takes time and leaves farms in a tenuous situation. Federal leadership is needed to create guidance for farms across the country as this will undoubtedly be a nationwide issue.

In the absence of guidance on safe food levels, we've seen multiple instances of farmers voluntarily pulling food from sale until they can address the sources of contamination or sort out the next steps.

REMEDIATION

There is evidence that remediation steps can be taken to address contamination. For example, organic dairies have been able to resume production by changing feed and water supplies and dumping milk for a period of time. PFAS accumulates in different parts of plants and so affected farms may be able to grow some crops that often present lower levels of contamination. Fruits, grains and some root crops can be grown in areas where other crops, such as leafy greens, may present higher

levels of contamination. Again, because tolerances aren't established at the federal level, high and low contamination levels are subjective and based on a burgeoning field of information. Much more research is needed to fully understand PFAS uptake by crops and how growing conditions may impact it.

IMPACT ON ORGANIC FARMS

By voluntarily pulling products to ensure a safe food supply and maintain consumer trust, organic farms have opened consumers' eyes to this growing concern and at times the issue may have been viewed as specific to organic. Some consumers have been upset that the organic food they've been purchasing may be contaminated, but the point that needs to be emphasized is that this issue is not specific to organic production — and, furthermore, no farm should have to face the ramifications of PFAS contamination. Farmers, farmworkers and their families, and neighbors who interact with the soil and ingest the water every day are most at risk of very high levels of contamination in their bodies. They are the human collateral of corporations putting profits before people. The manufacturers are aware of the risks of these compounds and continue to produce them, and the government has been asleep at the wheel in terms of properly regulating PFAS to assure human safety.

Maine farms are at the unfortunate forefront of this emerging issue, the effects of which are likely to be felt nationwide. The [Environmental Working Group map shows PFAS hotspots in every state](#), and earlier this year

a [farm in Michigan pulled beef with elevated PFAS levels from the market](#). A groundswell of support will be needed to make sure that farmers across the United States can both test products to ensure the food supply is safe as well as offer safety nets for farmers who are impacted by contamination through no fault of their own. At the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA), we've recently partnered with Maine Farmland Trust to offer an emergency grant fund for testing, income replacement and mental health support for farms, but this is just a small fraction of the funds and effort needed to address this issue. The Maine state legislature is currently considering a farmer safety net of \$100 million to help farms address contamination and ensure their farms have a future.

By working collaboratively and creatively and pushing for needed changes at the federal level, we can ensure that the nation's food supply is no longer being contaminated with PFAS and that there's a vibrant future for organic farming for years to come.



Sarah Alexander is the Executive Director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). MOFGA is creating a food system that is healthy and fair for all of us. Through education, training and advocacy, MOFGA is helping farmers thrive, making more local, organic food available and building sustainable communities.



PFAS UNDER THE POLICY LENS

WRITTEN BY: PATTY LOVERA, POLICY DIRECTOR



In response to the crisis of PFAS contamination of farmland, the state of Maine has acted on several fronts, including financial help for impacted farmers and limits on how PFAS chemicals can be used. But the practices that led to this contamination are not unique to Maine, and it's clear that states across the country are also going to be dealing with this problem. And there are pieces of this puzzle that are difficult for state governments to handle on their own. There are several parts of the federal government that have critical roles to play.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

The EPA is ultimately responsible for regulating how and if PFAS chemicals are used in the U.S. The EPA is also responsible (and has been shamefully slow) for setting standards for PFAS in drinking water.

FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

The FDA is responsible for regulating PFAS in food packaging (which could be a major source of PFAS exposure) and for setting standards for acceptable PFAS levels in many foods. The FDA has also been extremely delinquent in addressing this issue, leaving states and individual farmers to try to figure out what to do when they find PFAS contamination in their products.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Several USDA officials have told OFA that they are aware of this situation and working to figure out how various USDA programs can help. The National Organic Program needs to provide guidance to certifiers and certified farms about whether PFAS contamination puts a farm's organic certification in question. The Farm Services Agency is responsible for various disaster programs for farms – but at this point, the only disaster program available for farms impacted by contamination is for dairy farms. And the Natural Resources Conservation Service has provided some guidance for farms about practices for dealing with contaminated livestock and soil.

"the practices that led to this [PFAS] contamination are not unique to Maine, and it's clear that states across the country are also going to be dealing with this problem."

The list of what needs to be done to respond to PFAS contamination is quite long, and it will take pressure from Congress to get various federal agencies moving quickly enough to help farmers on the front lines. Stay tuned for updates from OFA on using the annual spending bills and the upcoming Farm Bill to get more federal help to address PFAS contamination.





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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

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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**SPRING
MEETING
APRIL 2022**

NATIONAL ORGANIC STANDARDS BOARD

NOSB Spring Meeting Highlights for Organic Farmers

By, Harriet Behar

The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) met for their spring meeting, with two days of virtual public comment and three days of virtual NOSB discussion and voting. Typically, they discuss the numerous materials that are up for “sunset” during the spring meeting, and then vote in the fall whether or not these materials should remain allowed for organic producers and processors for another five years. It appears most will be renewed in the fall.

The National Organic Program also gives an extensive presentation on what they have been doing for the previous 6 months and previews their upcoming work. They were happy to report that Origin of Livestock was finally put out as a final rule, after more than 12 years of waiting. They also discussed what they have heard from the organic community on the backlog of proposed regulations and the NOP is reviewing which ones will move forward. Promoting organic seed use, review of hydroponic and container production and eliminating the incentive to destroy native ecosystems were three areas that many commenters wanted prioritized.



NITROGEN FERTILIZERS

The NOSB voted unanimously to recommend this be added to the regulation in §205.105: Nitrogen fertilizers with a C:N ratio of 3:1 or less, including those individual components of a blended fertilizer formulation, are limited unless the use is restricted to a cumulative total use of 20% of crop needs.

This follows the previous NOSB meeting vote to prohibit naturally derived ammonia extracts. The Organic Farmers Association agrees with both of these votes and is eagerly awaiting the NOP’s rule-making on these two NOSB proposals.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO NOSB MEMBERS

The NOSB also discussed a proposal to provide more technical assistance to NOSB members, which would make serving on this board more attractive to those who cannot spend many hours doing detailed research on the wide-ranging topics that come before this board. Most public comment agreed that this is a good idea, with more clarity on how this can be accomplished to be coming in the fall.

RISK MITIGATION & SUPPLY CHAIN TRACEABILITY

Risk mitigation and supply chain traceability were also discussed in detail and will be further clarified in the fall.

EXCLUDED METHODS (GE)

The NOSB continues to review a variety of technologies as either excluded or as an allowed method in organic. At this meeting, they voted to



Compost falls above the 3:1 C:N fertilizer mark, unlike other soluble nitrogen which will require documentation of no more than 20% of crop needs' use.

recommend that cell fusion and protoplast fusion when the donor and recipient cells are outside of taxonomic families and when either is derived through in-vitro nucleic acid recombinant DNA technology should be excluded, but when they are within the same taxonomic family and not produced through in-vitro nucleic acid recombinant DNA technology, cell fusion and protoplast fusion methods can be allowed in organic.

NEWLY PETITIONED CROP MATERIALS: MORE IN FALL

A few newly petitioned crop materials will be discussed and perhaps voted upon at the fall meeting including tall oil, carbon dioxide as a pH adjuster for irrigation water, potassium sorbate and potassium hydroxide.



NOSB 2022 FALL MEETING

Public Comment Webinars

Tuesday, October 18 @ 12-5 pm Eastern

Thursday, October 20 @ 12-5 pm Eastern

NOSB Public Meeting in Sacramento, CA

October 25 - 27 from Noon - 5:00 pm Pacific

[CLICK HERE FOR USDA's WEBSITE TO REGISTER TO TESTIFY!](#)

***FARMER VOICES ARE IMPORTANT!**

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.



WHAT IS THE NATIONAL ORGANIC STANDARDS BOARD?

4

Farmers

3

Consumer/
Public Interest

3

Environmentalists
/ Resource
Conservationists

2

Processors

1

Retailer

1

Scientist

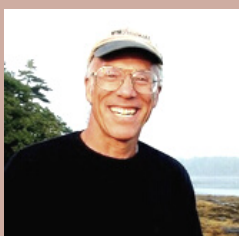
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Certification
Agent

CURRENTLY 6 ORGANIC FARMERS SERVE ON THE BOARD



Nate Powell-Palm (MT)



Brian Caldwell (NY)*



Amy Bruch (NE)



Logan Petrey (GA)



Liz Graznak (MO)*



Javier Zamora (CA)

*Brian serves in the Consumer/Public Interest seat and Liz serves in the Environmentalist / Resource Conservationist seat.

The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) is a Federal Advisory Board to the USDA National Organic Program (NOP). The NOSB was established by the 1990 law, Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA), to represent the organic community in the public-private partnership between the USDA NOP and organic community. The NOSB consists of 15 public volunteers with designated seats representing the diversity of the organic community. While 4 seats are reserved for organic farmers, two additional farmers currently serve in other categories.

The NOSB has been meeting since 1992 and helped develop the framework for the National Organic Standards and National Organic Program at USDA. The NOSB considers and makes recommendations on a wide range of issues involving the production, handling, and processing

of organic products. The NOSB has statutory powers over the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances.

Each NOSB member is appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture for a term of one to five years. USDA publishes a call for nominations each Spring, and newly appointed members begin service in January of the next year.

The NOSB meets twice a year at a public meeting, typically in April and October, to discuss the items on its work agenda, vote on proposals, and make recommendations to the Secretary. These meetings invite public input via submitted written comments and virtual and in-person oral comments. All meetings are free and open to the public.

If an NOSB proposal receives a decisive vote (2/3 majority) by Board members in favor of the proposed motion, it becomes a recommendation to the USDA Secretary and the NOP.



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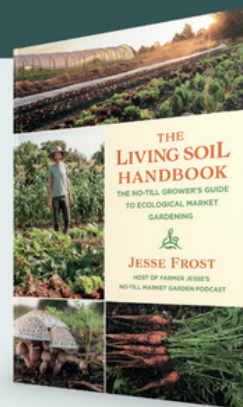
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GROWER GROUPS

UPHOLDING ORGANIC INTEGRITY WHILE KEEPING STANDARDS FAIR FOR SMALL PRODUCERS

WRITTEN BY: MERIAM ZEGEYE



Editor's Note: The USDA included grower groups in the Strengthening Organic Enforcement Rule, released for comment in 2020 and currently in clearance at USDA, waiting to be sent to the White House Office of Management & Budget. A Grower Group is a farming operation with multiple growers, organized and certified as one operation, all growing the same crops in the same geographic region. Most certified grower groups exist in other countries where very small farmers work together in cooperatives to grow crops like coffee, cacao, bananas, etc. There are only a few domestic grower groups, but the model does show promise domestically for small growers-especially tribal communities and small farm collectives.

It is important to ensure that more and more consumers have access to nutritious, chemical-free food, grown under the most environmentally sustainable conditions. Organic certification ensures a production system that provides this nutritious food and verification of growing practices, yet we do not want to grow organic at the cost of losing small producers—who have been the heart of the organic farming movement.

There are real barriers that make obtaining organic certification challenging for many small producers, especially as the cost of certification increases due to the need for more enforcement of integrity.

The cost of organic certification can put it out of reach for some small producers domestically and in the global market. “Grower groups” allow small producers to cooperate with other growers or farming cooperatives to pursue a group certification and share the cost, farming decisions, and synchronize organic recordkeeping. This dramatically reduces the financial barrier, creating an incentive for small producers to pursue organic certification and reducing the intimidation of the organic certification process because a group of producers undergoes the process together. While grower groups are most commonly used in under-developed nations, they may be a mechanism for domestic small growers to enter the organic certification.

Grower groups ensure organic integrity by instituting an internal control system to standardize and synchronize recordkeeping, ensure compliance and maintain quality among the members. These internal controls often serve

as internal audits for each producer in the group to ensure they are operating according to the grower group organic system plan. A grower group works best the more similar the growers are in production, size, and geography. But challenges can arise, especially if there is a range of farm sizes and resources within a grower group, which can make it difficult to establish equitable standards and ensure equal execution of the organic system plan by all members of the grower group in the same way.

Any practice that compromises the integrity of the Organic label is faulty, yet there is real value in the grower group model because it includes small producers otherwise excluded from the organic label. The solution is not to abandon grower groups for domestic small farmers, but instead to find ways to ensure they are limited to small producers, well organized and run, can be easily inspected to ensure uniform compliance, and uphold organic integrity while not being overly burdensome.

The organic marketplace is market-driven, reflecting consumer preferences, but corporate buyers and supply chains are often the drivers of production, consumption, and inclusion in certification. Organic certification beneficial to small producers must offer the price premium for the guaranteed quality as well as give the farms negotiating power with buyers committed to supporting small-scale farmers.

SMALL PRODUCERS SYMBOL (SPP) IS 100% FARMER DRIVEN

A helpful model to consider partnering with in domestic grower group organic certification comes from the Fair Trade arena called the [Small Producers Symbol \(SPP\)](#). This certification, created by the Latin American and Caribbean Coordination of Fair Trade Small Producers in 2006, is an initiative by and for small producers.



The SPP logo signifies the intensive small organic producer program, and can accompany other labels like fair trade or USDA organic.

SPP certification is limited to small producers' organizations under small farmer control that also carry an organic certification, most likely grower group organic certification.

HOW SPP WORKS

A group of small producers forms into a Small Producer Organization (SPO) that meets defined parameters for farm size and farm products. The SPO owns the fair trade and organic certification, not the buyer. SPOs can apply to the Support Fund for Small Producers (FASPP) every two years for a grant to help cover the SPP certification or membership fee. A percentage of this fund is supported by the income of the body of governance, the Foundation of the Organized Small Producers, which collects fees from buyers for rights to use the SPP label. To display the label on the packaging, these buyers must commit to purchasing at least 5% of their total purchases under SPP and increase by 5% after their second year of registration until reaching at least 25% purchasing from small producers.

The most common products that have used the SPP label have been sugar, bananas/plantains, fruit for processing, coffee, cocoa, mango, honey, quinoa, herbs, and peanuts. Most Small Producers' Organizations are found in Latin America, primarily Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, and Guatemala but also extends to Asian countries like India and Indonesia. Collectively the

label supports 68, 779 producer families around the world. The label is also represented through registered SPP companies located in Canada, France, the USA, Italy, the Netherlands, and several Latin American countries. Members on the SPP Board of Directors represent SPOs and final buyers in their designated regions.

The SPP label aims to work with buyers and cooperatives whose primary mission is fair trade and values the economic, social, and environmental contributions of its producers. Ownership of the certification means that small producers are not at the mercy of buyers or corporations to maintain the valuable asset of certification. The buyer requirement of minimum commitment provides assurance to small producers that they will have a buyer for their certified products.

This add-on SPP label could be a required addition to U.S. domestic grower groups to ensure the integrity of the grower-group certification for small farmers and better support these farmers in the marketplace. SPP ensures small farmer ownership and participation because a large grower cannot join the group and gain inequitable power in group decision-making. The group certification preserves the benefit of spreading the cost of both organic and SPP certification, while the greater uniformity in size and a governance body made up of small producers ensures that the structure works in the favor of those it was originally created to serve.

Meriam Zegeye just completed her sophomore year at Georgetown University, majoring in Global Health with a minor in Psychology. She interned with Organic Farmers Association this Spring.



FAO. 2014. Impact of international voluntary standards on smallholder market participation in developing countries – A review of the literature. Rome.

SPP. 2016. SPP General Presentation. SPP.COOP

GET REIMBURSED FOR YOUR 2022 ORGANIC CERTIFICATION FEES

Two USDA programs cover organic transition, certification fees, & other expenses incurred from October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022. **Deadline to apply for both is October 31, 2022.** See more about each program below.

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION COST SHARE PROGRAM (OCCSP)

This is the standard Organic Cost Share program that reimburses farmers and processors up to 50% (max. \$500) for each certification category (Crops, Livestock, Wild Crops, Processing). If you are certified for multiple categories you can be reimbursed up to \$500 for each.

All FSA county offices will process this program & some certifiers or state agencies process this program. You must provide a receipt of your certification fee payment and proof of organic certification. Once you have had your inspection, contact your certifier for the needed documentation.

[**CLICK FOR MORE INFO**](#)

ORGANIC AND TRANSITIONAL EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATION PROGRAM (OTECF)

This program will reimburse up to 25% (\$250) per category (Crops, Livestock, Wild Crops & Processing) for 2022 certification fees AND reimburse for education (did you attend a conference?), soil tests, and myriad costs related to organic transition.

This program is only available at your FSA office. FSA recommends submitting ONE application to OTECF, so wait until you've completed your 2022 expenses (10/1/2021 - 9/30/2022) & then apply before Oct 31. You will need to provide receipts for reimbursement.

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MEET NORMAN —

Farming has changed a lot in the **75 years** he has been farming. As a kid, Norman always wanted to be picked up from school so he could plow fields or help his dad do custom baling. After high school, he enrolled in the Army but couldn't stay away from the farm. He eventually moved back home and helped expand the farm operations. His dream was to own 50 acres and farm with a team of horses, but in today's world, going organic is about as close as he can get. Norman believes crop sprays are getting more dangerous and weeds more resistant. When given the opportunity to transition to organic, Norman said it was an easy decision.

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"I want to save the soil and bring it back to its natural life." Norman is a proud participant in the Bell & Evans U.S. Organic Grain Initiative, working closely with Cargill and Rodale Institute through his successful transition to organic production.



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ORGANIC INTERNSHIP HIGHLIGHTS



By, Alice Runde

We recognize that access to the organic and “good food” movements, and to organic certification, has not been equal across all communities and groups. Systematic racism has kept our movement from reaching its full potential, and we need to challenge ourselves, as an organic community, to change this. Organic Farmers Association (OFA), the National Organic Coalition (NOC), IFOAM North America, the Accredited Certifiers Association (ACA), and the International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA) are collaborating on a project funded by USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, National Organic Program (NOP), to support building a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable organic movement.

For farmers who are seeking organic certification, their first point of contact is often a service provider, a certifying agent, and/or an organic inspector. There is a critical lack of racial diversity of organic certifiers, organic inspectors, and in the staff of organic farm organizations providing much of the nation’s organic technical assistance and educational programming. Organic organizations (including certification agencies, service providers, and education agencies) have mentioned the desire to hire “more diverse staff”, but identified relevant recruitment strategies as a challenge.

One of the goals of this project is to build a culture of inclusivity in organic organizations by training organic professionals staffing these organizations. Another goal is to identify ways to increase the diversity of staffing throughout the organic community so that more Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) inspectors, certifiers, and educational staff support organic farmers. Through this project, five students were offered paid internships with organic organizations for the spring/summer of 2022. While most of them had not considered an organic career before these internships, by the close of the semester, they all expressed interest in pursuing a career within the organic movement. Their profiles are highlighted on the following pages.

Through the internship process, we learned how to make recruitment strategies more effective, started building networks and connections for more career pipeline opportunities in the organic field, and held important conversations about how to keep organic careers relevant for talented students. Lessons learned will be shared with organic organizations in a report this summer.



The interns hired through this project came from various educational backgrounds (biochemistry, political science, environment, education, global & public health), highlighting the fact that there is no single path to an organic career.

Though recruitment efforts focused on “traditional” expertise areas (targeting outreach to 1890 & 1990 Land Grant Universities with organic agriculture programs), several key stakeholders of the organic industry have suggested thinking outside the box when recruiting staff, beyond the obvious areas of expertise. For instance, some important skills for organic certifiers may be found in individuals with a background in compliance in other sectors (environment, public health, healthcare, or even housing).

Only two interns came from a farming background. This aligns with what we know of organic agriculture careers, which, for many reasons, seem to attract more people from non-farming backgrounds than conventional agriculture. As the organic industry looks for a more diversified workforce, they must acknowledge the severe land-loss that people of color have suffered in this country, making the on-farm experience less common.

We cannot emphasize enough that though recruiting a more diverse staff is an important step towards a more equitable organic movement, it cannot be taken without other important, and more structural changes. We look forward to continuing working on this as an organic movement.



ONYEKACHUKWU AKAEZE, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIC INSPECTORS ASSOCIATION



Onyekachukwu Akaeze was born in Benin City, Nigeria. After graduation from the University of Benin with a degree in Crop Science, he obtained a master's degree in Crop Protection (Phytopathology) from the University of Ibadan (Nigeria).

For the next three years, he worked as a Research Assistant at the Plant Pathology Laboratory of the Department of Crop Science, the University of Benin. In this role, he was involved in many experimental studies, particularly those that involved non-chemical control of plant diseases. In 2018, he was admitted into the doctoral program in Biological Sciences at Tennessee State University, where he was offered a Research Assistant position at the Organic Agriculture Production Laboratory. From 2018 to 2021, Onyekachukwu conducted dissertation research titled “yield performance, nutritional, and sensory qualities of watermelon (*Citrullus lunatus* [Thunb.] Matsum and Nakai) influenced by humic substances in organic production system” at the Certified Organic Farm of Tennessee State University. During this time, he attended organic certification workshops and witnessed three annual certification exercises of the farm he conducts his research. These sparked his interest in someday pursuing a career as an organic inspector. And now he is on his way to becoming an organic inspector or working at a certification agency!

KENNEDY GULLATTE, NATIONAL ORGANIC COALITION



Kennedy's interest in organic agriculture stems from her passion for environmental issues. Prior to her internship with NOC, Kennedy interned at the World Bank's environmental department, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). After a study abroad opportunity led Kennedy to live, work, and take classes on an organic farm in Monteverde, Costa Rica, she realized she wanted to forge a career blending environmental studies and agriculture. During her internship with NOC, Kennedy supported NOC's National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) recommendation process for the Spring 2022 NOSB meeting. Kennedy is a senior at Florida A&M University, majoring in Environmental Studies with a minor in International Relations.

FLORENTINA RODRIGUEZ, ORGANIC SEED ALLIANCE



Florentina started her community's first seed library in response to increased interest and concerns over food security during the pandemic. Her vision for a Community Seed Program was recognized by the Village of Yellow Springs Climate Action and Sustainability Plan. Florentina's father is a native Chamorro and her seed work also focuses on how BIPOC communities use seeds to reclaim and preserve

their biocultural heritage. She was drawn to OSA's internship opportunity because of their commitment to fight for equitable food, seed, and farming relational pathways while tackling systemic injustice issues in agricultural practices and regulatory policies. Florentina earned her Masters in Human Services Administration (MHSA) in 2021 and is currently pursuing a Doctorate of Education (EdD) degree in Environmental and Sustainability Education at Antioch University.

MERIAM ZEGEYE, ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION



ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

Through her study of Global Health, Meriam has come to value the role of nutrition in preventing illness and promoting overall well-being. However, for its value to be translated into long-term impact, public health efforts need to take a community-based approach. OFA's emphasis on organic farmers guiding the priorities and conversations around Organic exemplifies this grassroots approach. Meriam's time at OFA has given me an appreciation for the central role of local organic farmers in securing access to healthy food and contributing to community development. She is excited to continue exploring how to advocate for these communities and the growers that serve them. Meriam is a sophomore at Georgetown University, majoring in Global Health with a minor in Psychology.



Alice Runde is the Coalition Manager of National Organic Coalition, a national alliance of organizations providing a "Washington voice" in organic agriculture.



2 New Important ORGANIC REPORTS



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National Organic Research Agenda

This report from Organic Farming Research Foundation outlines pressing production and non-production challenges, technical assistance needs, & other organic farming concerns.



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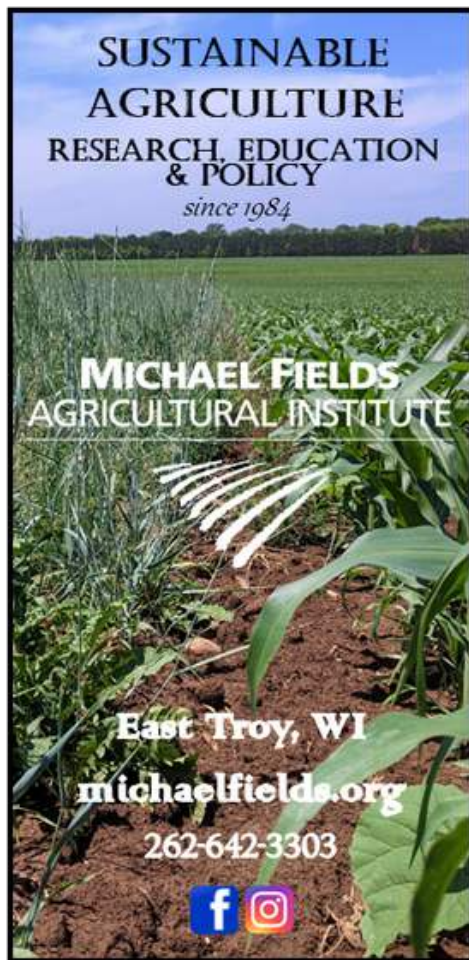
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OFA 2022 Policy Positions

Each year, Organic Farmers Association solicits input on policy priorities and policy positions from all U.S. certified organic farmers and organic farm organizations.

The OFA Policy Committee reviews the results and OFA members make comments on the drafted policies. Farm members of Organic Farmers Association vote on these policy positions.

For a position to become adopted, it must have 60% of the popular national vote and 60% popular support in at least two-thirds of the six regions. Each year, newly adopted policies become part of the Organic Farmers Association Policy Platform.

OFA Policy Process

How OFA annual policies are made.



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proposals



All OFA
Members edit
& comment on
proposed
policies



Policies are
added to OFA
Policy Platform

60% National
vote & 2/3 of
regional votes at
60% is needed to
pass



OFA Organic
Farmer Members
vote on policies



Policy Committee
finalizes edits

Governing
Council
approves

OFA 2022 New Policies

The 2022 New OFA Policies were passed in late May after a 30 day ballot period open to OFA certified organic farm members. These policies were passed by at least 60% of the popular national vote AND 60% popular support from at least two-thirds of the six regions. These policies will become part of the Organic Farmers Association Policy Platform available [here](#).

BEGINNING FARMER & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

OFA SUPPORTS programs that facilitate the creation of and technical and financial support for certified organic small and mid-scale farmer production, processing, and marketing cooperatives. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2022.)

CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

OFA SUPPORTS funding mechanisms that reward farmers and land managers for scientifically proven long-term contributions of both early and recent adopters to ecological health and carbon sequestration, sometimes referred to as Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES). (Adopted by the farmer membership 2022.)

CONTAMINATION

OFA SUPPORTS efforts by state and federal agencies to help farms cope with contamination of soil and water by per-and poly-fluoroalkyl (PFAS) chemicals, including assistance with soil and water testing, technical assistance for determining whether farm operations can safely continue, and compensation for lost production and lost farm value due to contamination. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2022.)

CROP INSURANCE

OFA SUPPORTS recognition by the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) that any practice approved in a farmer's Organic System Plan by a USDA-accredited certifying agent as compliant with organic production standards must be recognized and approved as a "Good Farming Practice" as defined by the RMA. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2022.)

OFA SUPPORTS the creation of new crop insurance tools that serve the needs of diversified organic growers serving all types of markets, including direct sales. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2022.)



ECONOMIC VIABILITY

OFA SUPPORTS an expansion of food and nutrition assistance programs to include additional funds to provide expanded access to organic foods. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2022.)

OFA SUPPORTS mandatory country of origin labeling for meat, poultry, dairy, fruits and vegetables, seafood, and nuts. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2022.)

OFA SUPPORTS right to repair legislation that would allow farmers and independent mechanics to access diagnostic software, information, and other tools necessary to repair farm equipment. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2022.)

ORGANIC INTEGRITY

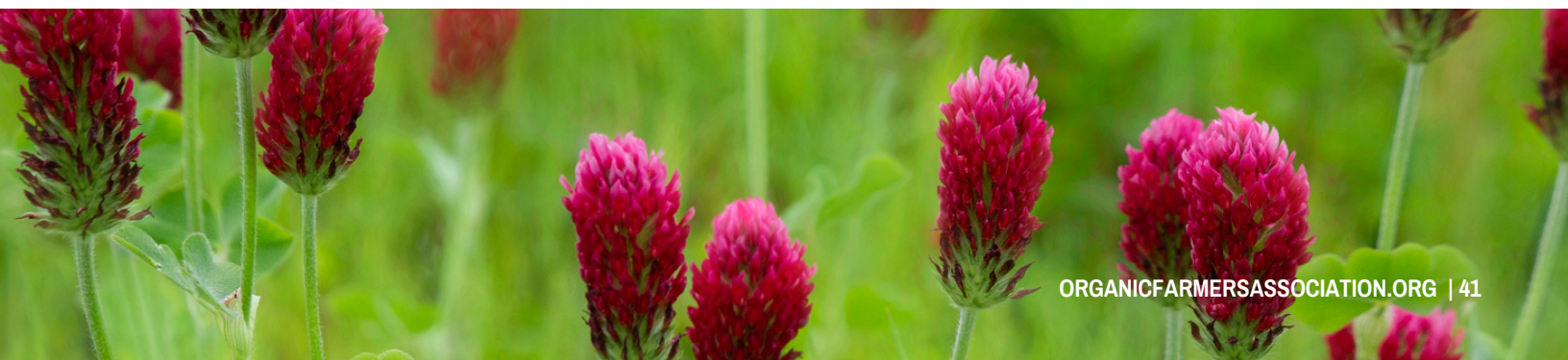
OFA SUPPORTS expanded funding for both the National Organic Program and the Department of Justice to protect the organic market from domestic and foreign fraudulent use of the organic label. Improved systems should be federally funded and implemented to keep compliance costs affordable for both organic producers and certifiers and avoid implementation costs being passed on to the consumer in the organic marketplace. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2022.)

OFA SUPPORTS limiting the use of highly soluble nutrients (including the prohibition of Ammonia Extract and Sodium Nitrate) for use in organic production because such use is incompatible with OFPA and good soil health practices. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2022.)

OFA SUPPORTS adding to §205.203 (f) a ceiling of 20% of crop needs on the use of nitrogen products with a C:N ratio of 3:1 or less. This policy prevents the excess use of soluble fertilizers while also prohibiting the stacking of different soluble sources. It is also worth noting that obtaining the C:N ratio of a material is much easier than getting information about the solubility or nitrogen availability of a material. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2022.)

OFA SUPPORTS the NOSB 2021 vote petitioned listing of Ammonia Extract in § 205.602 (Non Synthetic substances prohibited for use in organic crop production) in the National list as well as the listing of a standardized definition of Ammonia extract in § 205.2 (Terms defined) of the NOP regulations. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2022.)

OFA SUPPORTS prohibiting the use of ammonia extract for use in organic production because such use is incompatible with OFPA and good soil health practices. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2022.)





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\$

click to
JOIN
ONLINE

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#:

OFA is a 501(c)(5) nonprofit organization. Donations to OFA may be used for lobbying activities and do not qualify for charitable gift tax deduction. If you'd like charitable gift tax deduction, you donate to OFA through our fiscal sponsor, Rodale Institute, a 501(c3) nonprofit. Your donation to OFA will be designated in a restricted fund & used for OFA education work in line with Rodale Institute's charitable mission. Charitable donations are ONLY accepted by check. Checks must be made out to Rodale Institute, and include "Organic Farmers Association" in the check's Memo Line.