

The Organic Voice

Organic Farmers Association – No 15 • November 2024



Finding Balance in the Field

Balancing the demands of farming with farmer well-being and wellness

Page 8

Building Resilience on the Farm: Strategies for Managing Farmer Stress

The warning signs of negative stress for farmers

Page 14

Organic Grain Farming Resilience Through Co-Ops

How co-ops make the organic community stronger

Page 20

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Contents

QUARTERLY UPDATES

01 President's Letter

04 Fall Policy Update

YEAR-END EDITION FEATURES

8 Finding Balance in the Field

14 Building Resilience on the Farm:
Strategies for Managing Farmer Stress

20 Organic Grain Farming Resilience
Through Co-Ops

DON'T MISS THIS

12 Focusing on Farmer Wellness: Young
Farmers and Cultivemos

18 Farmer Mental Health Resources

24 Farmer Resources for Before & After
Natural Disasters

28 NOSB Fall 2024 Meeting Report

34 How to File a Complaint to the NOP

38 OFA Annual Policy Survey

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Organic Farmers Association

From Our President

Farmers have to be the most resilient people

I've met. As a whole, no other group demonstrates adaptability and tenacity the way my farmer friends and acquaintances do. And that's because farmers necessarily must be resilient as they face disruptions and adversity in weather, in markets, and even in their communities. Every year, every season, there's a new problem or a continuation or worsening of an old one. Even the good years—and especially the really good ones—require resilience to position the farm to weather the not-so-good years that inevitably follow.

To organic farmers, because we don't have the crutch of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers to lean on, the importance of resilience is even greater. We keep our soils healthy, hosting a broad diversity of microorganisms and species, in order to better deal with heat waves, flooding, and new invasive weeds and pests. We rotate crops through cycles of years and even decades to limit the establishment of diseases and pests and to diversify our sources of income in the face of market conditions beyond our control. You might say that resilience is baked into the bones of organic farmers, and that organic farming increases the resilience of the American food system.

Community is one of the fundamental ways that we humans create resilience. Aphorisms like, "No one is an island," and, "There is strength in numbers," teach the importance of working together for the common good. Farmers of all types and styles know this and tend to be intensely supportive of their communities—both communities of location and communities of interest.

The Organic Farmers Association was established to provide a national organization and community focused on the needs and interests of organic farmers. Its staff, volunteers and members are remarkably effective in delivering programs and advocating for changes that will strengthen organic farming. If you can, I encourage you to join OFA as a member and to contribute to its continued work and growth.

Another community-building effort comes through the USDA's TOPP mentorship program, which pairs folks going through the transition period with more experienced, certified organic producers. I have the privilege of mentoring three transitioning producers—Aaron, Dave and Jordan—and it is tremendously rewarding to talk and visit with them.

By sharing experiences and ideas we are actively building a small community of organic farmers—in my case, grain growers in the Pacific Northwest. If you are a certified organic producer I encourage you to sign up as a mentor in your regional TOPP program. By offering the benefit of your experiences to folks currently in the organic transition period, you will help strengthen your local, organic community and in doing so will help increase the resilience of the American food system.

Resilience is the ability to bounce back; to adapt in the face of adverse conditions; to respond to, absorb or avoid, and recover from damage in a disruptive event without suffering complete failure. Our communities, neighbors, and friends would all benefit from adopting the amazing resilience that organic farmers demonstrate every day.

Take care.
Be well.
Do good.

Sincerely,



Pryor Garnett
OFA Governing Council President
Garnetts Red Prairie Farm
Sheridan, Oregon





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Congress Approves Continuing Resolution But Fails to Extend Farm Bill

By Lily Hawkins

Earlier this fall, lawmakers returned to Capitol Hill following their summer break to face impending deadlines for both the Farm Bill and annual appropriations bills. In order to prevent a government shutdown, Congress passed a short-term funding measure, known as a continuing resolution (CR), that will keep the government operating at 2024 levels until December 20, 2024. Despite some speculation that Congress would extend the Farm Bill as part of that CR, the farm bill extension passed last fall was allowed to expire.

While most Farm Bill programs will continue to operate until the end of the year, there is a growing urgency to pass a new Farm Bill or another extension as soon as possible. If negotiations fail to yield agreement on a new bill, lawmakers may consider a temporary emergency assistance package in conjunction with another extension of the Farm Bill. Next steps will likely depend on how the balance of power in D.C. changes after the November election.

ORGANIC COST-SHARE MUST BE PROTECTED

After payment reductions in 2020, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced in 2023 that they would restore reimbursement rates for the Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) to 75% of the certified organic operation's eligible expenses, up to a maximum of \$750 per scope. This brought the amount of funding back up to the maximum allowed by the 2018 Farm Bill.

Because OCCSP is a very small program, cost-share does not have "permanent baseline" funding status. When the 2018 Farm Bill was extended last November, the extension was crafted in a way that preserved

funding for cost-share and other so-called "orphan" programs, programs without mandatory baseline funding.

If the current Farm Bill is again extended, provisions must be included so that cost share funding is maintained. While 2024 cost share funding is seemingly secure, an extension of the current Farm Bill needs provisions to guarantee continued cost-share funding for 2025 and beyond.

TAKE ACTION!

Please visit usa.gov to contact your members of Congress and urge them to:

- 1 **Renew funding for the organic certification cost share program in any Farm Bill extension**
- 2 **Modernize cost-share and support the Opportunities in Organic Act in the Farm Bill**

URGE YOUR U.S. SENATORS TO SUPPORT THE WEATHER ACT

This season has brought unprecedented extreme weather events. Current federal crop insurance options do not cover many small, diversified, and organic farms impacted by disasters such as Hurricanes Helene and Milton.

The Withstanding Extreme Agricultural Threats by Harvesting Economic Resilience (WEATHER) Act of 2023 ([S. 3401](#)) is a bill that calls for the development of an index-based insurance policy that would better support farmers facing income losses after extreme weather events by reducing administrative hurdles and ensuring that insurance payouts are based on agricultural income losses.

The policy would likely function similar to the Pasture, Rangeland, and Forage Insurance program which provides financial payments to farmers quickly after a disaster.

Send a message to your Senators asking them to include the WEATHER Act in the next Farm Bill!

OFA ENDORSES SAFE SCHOOL MEALS ACT

Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) recently introduced the Safe School Meals Act (SSMA) to address the presence of harmful chemicals in school lunches. The bill aims to limit heavy metals, ban certain pesticide residues, and reassess the safety of food additives and packaging materials.

The SSMA seeks to establish higher safety standards for school meals by supporting organic and regenerative farming practices and incentivizing the use of non-toxic ingredients and packaging.

Most organic and small farms have not traditionally had access to school food purchasing programs, and this legislation would open new markets for organic foods and help make organic certification affordable for small farmers.

Key provisions of the SSMA include:

- Free certification for small producers and manufacturers to sell to the school meal program
- Grants for manufacturers to switch to toxic-free packaging and for producers to remediate land
- Expanded organic certification support to cover 100% of costs (up to \$3,000)




USDA PROVIDES FUNDING TO ASSIST ORGANIC DAIRY PRODUCERS

The USDA recently announced two programs to support organic dairy producers. The USDA announced the availability of \$58 million in funding for organic dairy producers through the Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (ODMAP) on September 26. This program aims to help producers offset marketing costs incurred in 2024.

The ODMAP program was first launched in 2023 with \$104 million allocated, but less than half of those funds were distributed in the first round of disbursements. This was partially due to a lack of data collection about organic dairy marketing by USDA. Improvements to the program for 2024 include an increased the payment rate to \$1.68 per hundredweight (from \$1.10) and raised the eligible production level to nine million pounds (from five million). These improvements address the needs of organic dairy producers and provide much-needed relief.

Producers can apply for ODMAP until November 29 at their local USDA Service Center. To be eligible, applicants must provide documentation of 2023 production, proof of organic certification, and complete an application form.

On October 28, the USDA announced a new program, the Organic Dairy Product Promotion (ODPP), allocating \$15 million to expand access to organic dairy products in educational institutions and youth programs. Funded by the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), the program will help children and young adults access organic dairy products while also creating new markets for small and mid-sized organic dairy farmers. The program will be administered nationally through the four regional Dairy Business Innovation Initiative (DBI) regions. These regional centers may sub-award these funds directly to organic dairy businesses, educational institutions including K-12 schools and colleges/universities, and other organizations able to implement the program.

OFA will continue to work for **policies that support organic dairy producers in the upcoming Farm Bill.** 

Lillian Hawkins is the Policy Director of Organic Farmers Association. She ensures the policy priorities of certified organic farmers are represented in Washington, D.C.



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FEATURED STORY

Finding Balance in the Field

By Tianna Neal

Eight years ago, I embarked on a journey that had always seemed out of reach for me. It was my very first visit to a farm that inspired me to take on a role in this demanding work of food production. Welcomed to the land by an elderly couple that had owned and operated a certified organic vegetable farm in my community, I fell into deep admiration for the hands behind our food. From there on, this experienced couple became my teachers, taking me under their wings and showing me the ways of organic vegetable farming. I continued to dive deeper into the realm of agriculture, pursuing a degree in agribusiness, working community gardens, training other aspiring farmers, and taking on positions in land conservation.

I was once oblivious to how food was produced and all of the elements involved in sustaining a food system, but through this immersion the extensive issues present in our food systems began to gradually reveal themselves to me. I began noticing the discrepancies that have more than likely contributed to my ignorance of agriculture in my youth, such as the inequitable access to quality produce, the lack of education in agriculture, and the inadequate recognition of farmers.

My farm business, Starlit Roots, was established with the mission to (1) sustain the food system and (2) sustain the land. We achieve this by growing food for our community using practices that restrict the use of synthetic chemicals, conserve natural resources, and prioritize our environmental impact. Our USDA Organic Certification is only a small representation of the value of our crops, which are deeply rooted in respect for the land and the people. While the mission is unwavering and the standards are easy to uphold, the real challenge is presented in the execution of our business model.

Once production began, I realized that I could not grow enough to fulfill the needs of all the households, the markets, and the interested buyers seeking more vegetables. There was a constant demand that I failed to supply every season. Driven by my passion to sustain the local food system, I imposed upon myself the responsibility to resolve the shortage.



Starlit Roots - Burke County, Georgia

I kept setting goals for myself to produce more, attend more markets, and secure new buyers. When there is an increase in production, there's an increase in inputs. When we reflect on the inputs that go into food production, we immediately consider the tangible resources such as seed, fertilizer, equipment, fuel, etc. However, the intangible resources required for such an increase tend to hold the greatest value, yet they come at an unquantifiable cost.

In the first three years of operation, I failed to value myself as a resource. Much of my energy was focused on tending to a workload that never met completion. As with most newly established businesses, no profit was generated and I had to rely on off-farm jobs to make a living wage.

Like many other aspiring and beginning farmers, I had to juggle the demands of my business, my career, my family, and my personal life, without losing my grip. It was embedded in me that if I were to “lose my grip” in any of these fields, I’d be a failure to those who I serve.

I was the entire team for Starlit Roots—the owner, manager, laborer, accountant, marketing specialist, equipment operator, and every position in between. The farm simply did not run without me, so the pressure I put on the business was solely pressure applied to myself. I called upon help during the times I needed it most, such as a large planting or harvest. However, I was not yet profitable enough to pay workers consistently and build a team that I could delegate my workload to.

Through a farm business development program that I was recently accepted into, my very supportive and insightful consultant asked me the most daunting question. She wanted to know if I consistently paid myself. I’d been asked this question by consultants in the past, and I’d always let out a laugh that probably sounded like a cry for help. However, this most recent ask wasn’t humorous. It revealed to me that, as long as I’m failing to compensate myself for the time, energy, and labor spent, then the business is unsustainable. I am the most valuable resource in this operation, therefore, when I am depleted, I am incapable of contributing to the business in my greatest capacity.

Depletion doesn’t appear harmful when it is in the name of service. I often say that if I were farming to make a profit, I wouldn’t be farming. This statement is backed by my determination to be a reliable source of organic produce for the community. I am farming to feed people. It is this same determination that led me to increase production beyond my means. I’ve witnessed the same determination in the elder farmers that trained me in this work, for they too have depleted themselves in the name of serving our community. By the end of each summer, they finally catch their breath and question whether they can afford to produce at this scale again next year. It is the intangible costs in question—whether they can afford the mental and physical stress associated with the level of production.

Like many other aspiring and beginning farmers, I had to juggle the demands of my business, my career, my family, and my personal life, without losing my grip.

Starlit Roots - Burke County, Georgia

In our late season conversations we'll speak on our hardships, and they'll inform me that they will slow down production the following year and only plant crops that are easily manageable. Yet from my perspective, it appears they grow even more than the year prior, and the pattern persists year after year. While our common motive is rooted in being of service, we are unfortunately creating an environment of self-neglect and undercompensation across generations of farmers.

Agricultural history reveals to us that even in the face of oppression, farmers have maximized the resources available to them to feed their families and communities and keep their farm businesses in production. The downside to this narrative is that many of these farmers ran themselves into a hole in efforts to keep producing.

Due to the high prevalence of stress among farmers, we must recognize it as a collective challenge in our food system. Concerning ourselves with how farmers deal with stress is one approach; however, an approach that is more within our sphere of influence is minimizing stress.

Organizations that provide farmer support have been successful in their support because they have listened to the needs of their farmers and created funds to target specific needs. Examples include emergency funds, labor assistance, infrastructure grants, financial education, and business consultation. In providing equitable access to these resources, these organizations have created opportunities for farmers that have been historically underserved, and are contributing to the success of the next generations of farmers. Many of the organizations providing support are nonprofits and are reliant upon grant funding to keep these programs functional. Considering that these organizations have become critical in providing farmer support, they need our continued support.

"Depletion doesn't appear harmful when it is in the name of service."

Additionally, we must advocate for further governmental support towards reducing farmer stress, as they are also committed to securing the national food system. In establishing policy that addresses the identified threats to farmer stress, then we are directly stabilizing food production. We have the resources needed to relieve farmers of their stresses and enable them to continue growing, it is now a matter of how we will allocate these resources. In sustaining the health and well-being of our producers, we are sustaining the food system that remains forever dependent upon them. 🌱



Located in Burke County, Georgia, Starlit Roots, LLC is a farm committed to growing, producing, and distributing organically grown, seasonal vegetable crops. Embedded in the heart of Starlit Roots is Tianna Rose, an organic farmer, educator, and steward of the land, that is driven by the sustainability of our food systems.

Focusing on Farmer Wellness: Young Farmers and Cultivemos

Agriculture is an economic and social bedrock of the United States, yet for decades, farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers have endured growing challenges that increase their levels of stress. After years of grassroots organizing, the 2018 Farm Bill established the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) to develop a network of service providers dedicated to wellness for agricultural workers. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), a branch of USDA, awarded funds to the [National Young Farmers Coalition](#) (Young Farmers), alongside Farm Aid, Farm First, Migrant Clinicians Network, Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, and University of Maine Cooperative Extension, to carry out farmer wellness programs across the Northeast. Together these six organizations, in partnership with over 90 other organizations and service providers, are known as Cultivemos.

“Cultivemos” is a Spanish word meaning “we cultivate.” Together this network is dedicated to advancing the well-being of agriculture producers, workers, and their families through accessible and effective mental health care and assistance programs. From hosting events, creating resources, fostering connections with service providers, and publishing podcasts, Cultivemos has spearheaded a variety of projects that address the unique mental health needs of the agricultural community. The network services communities in Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C.

A highlight of the work Cultivemos has done is the [Farmer Resource Network](#), which is a free online search tool that can be used to find organizations and resources that are useful for farmers, agricultural service providers, farmworkers, farm communities and farming families across the U.S. Whether someone is looking for support amidst a financial crisis or a natural disaster, seeking a lawyer, or in search of tools to address farm stress and mental well-being, the Farmer Resource Network provides easily accessible and equitable access to much-needed resources.

Many people and communities have been historically marginalized and discriminated against within services for farmers and farm workers. Young Farmers envisions a just future where farming is free of racial violence, accessible to communities, oriented towards environmental well-being, and concerned with health over profit. And as a network, Cultivemos recognizes that discrimination increases both individual and systemic stress and weakens our food and agriculture system. Addressing language barriers by providing access in both Spanish and English, the primary languages of the communities with which Cultivemos works, is one example of how the network aims to make resources more accessible and inclusive of the diversity that exists without our food system. Other examples of the work Cultivemos has carried out over the years include:

- [Cultivating Resilience](#), a six-part podcast all about skills and stressors in farming life, with many personal stories from farmers. Topics covered include succession, community, climate anxiety and farm finances.
- [Stronger Together](#), a training to support all members of the agricultural community to engage in proactive support of mental health concerns in their daily work.
- A Farmer Advisory Board, made up of farmers from around the Northeast region who are paid for their time and ensure that Cultivemos meets the needs of those it serves.
- The formation of Cohorts who have been awarded funding to carry out specific projects, such as the Mental Health and the Queer Farmer Cohorts.

NIFA, through the 2018 Farm Bill, also supported the formation and efforts of other networks similar to Cultivemos across the country. Other regional providers include [Southern Ag Exchange Network](#), [Western Regional Agricultural Stress Assistance Program](#), and the [North Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center](#).

This work is supported by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) project 2019-70028-30464 and 2020-70028-32729.



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Grassroots Grown, Organic Strong

This movement cannot
grow stronger on its own.

*We need your help to
gear up for 2025!*

OFA'S 2024 IMPACT



Bankruptcy
Clawbacks



Safe School
Meals



Organic Dairy
Support

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And help OFA deepen its
grassroots efforts and grow
stronger in 2025!





FEATURED STORY

Building Resilience on the Farm: Strategies for Managing Farmer Stress

By Keisha McClish Coutts

The life of a farmer carries a lot of stress, as the risks included in this occupation are so often out of the farmers' control. The faces of farming include beginning farmers, generational farmers, rural and urban farmers—all working hard to produce a harvest. The demand for food for both large and small communities is on the rise. The increase in the demand for local food from local farmers has put a higher demand on farmers and their families. I have heard from local farmers that the weightiness of stress and responsibility to produce for local families and communities can be heavy.

Stress can be a determining factor for a farmer. I am a 5th-generation farmer and a mental health specialist, and I have seen my grandfather, uncles, and farm friends have a concern about a seed that has been put in the ground and have no idea what the harvest will yield. Farmers often face unique stressors, such as unpredictable weather, financial instability, isolation, long working hours, the challenges of running a business, and raising families, all of which can lead to mental health issues. However, many farmers are demonstrating resilience and finding ways to manage stress and maintain mental well-being.

Stress can be both positive and negative. Stress is any change that causes physical, emotional, or psychological strain.

Stress is feeling overwhelmed or unable to cope with mental or emotional pressure. Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. Two different types of stress can positively or negatively affect a person.

Positive Stress

- Good stress, or eustress, is stress you feel when you're excited.

Negative Stress

- Negative stress or distress is a type of stress that can have negative physical and mental health effects. It's caused by chronic, overwhelming pressures and strains that make it hard to relax and de-stress. Negative stress often leads to mood swings, anxiety, and even depression.

WARNING SIGNS

Stephanie Weatherly, chief clinical officer for Psychiatric Medical Care says the rate of suicide is higher in rural communities. "I think some of the biggest misconceptions are that people think when other people stop working or if someone is thinking of harming themselves, those are the only signs to watch for. And we know that's not true. A lot of times the community around this person is surprised when the person's life has ended. So, we have to be looking at subtle clues."

Warning signs of negative stress can include a change in demeanor, words, and behavior in the context of what is normal for a given person.

- Changes in emotions: Show little enthusiasm or energy for the future, anxiety, loss of spirit, depression, loss of humor.
- Changes in attitudes and cognitive skills: Become more frequently critical or agitated over small things, lack concentration, and have trouble making decisions.
- Changes in behavior: Become quieter than usual, have trouble sleeping, do not join friends for coffee or other gatherings, miss meetings with farm staff, suppliers, or the banker.
- Changes on the farm or ranch: Reduced care given to farm animals, machinery or fields, or themselves, increase accidents.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Struggling with mental health challenges can be isolating. You might feel like you are the only one experiencing symptoms, but the data says otherwise. Researchers noted in *Farming And Mental Health Problems And Mental Illness*.

“The rate of suicide among farmers is 3.5 times higher than the general population. It’s a startling statistic and a sign of the daily stress of farming. It is estimated that 1-in-4 people worldwide experience issues with their mental health annually.

Globally, there are more than 570 million farms, of which approximately 550 million are family-run. With a conservative estimate of two-member families, this would mean that every year, roughly 225 million farmers worldwide may struggle with their mental health. This number is likely an underestimate when considering the evidence that farmers experience mental illness at a higher rate than the general population.”¹

But despite these staggering statistics of farmers experiencing mental health challenges, farmers do what they always do: continue to build resilience in the face of these challenges.

1 - Fraser C. E., Smith K. B., Judd F., Humphreys J. S., Fragar L. J. and Henderson A., “Farming and mental health problems and mental illness,” *Int. J. Soc. Psychiatry*, vol. 51, no. 4, pp. 340–349, 2005. 10.1177/0020764005060844

Building Resilience

Here's how farmers are building resilience, along with some potential solutions to help manage stress:

1. Acknowledging Mental Health Challenges

- Recognizing the importance of mental health and breaking the silence is an important first step toward healing.

2. Peer Support and Community Building

- A sense of community and shared understanding helps reduce feelings of isolation and offers emotional relief.

3. Farmer Support Networks and Helplines

- Having easy access to professional mental health resources helps farmers manage stress in moments of crisis.

4. Engagement in Wellness and Self-Care Practices

- Incorporating wellness practices into daily life allows farmers to manage stress proactively.
- Prioritizing self-care can help prevent burnout and improve mental well-being.

5. Diversification and Risk Management

- Diversification and smart financial planning help reduce economic pressure, which is often one of the biggest sources of stress.

6. Technology and Innovation

- Technological innovation helps mitigate the unpredictable nature of farming, thus reducing stress levels.

8. Faith and Spirituality

- A strong sense of faith or spirituality can provide farmers with emotional support and a broader perspective on their challenges.

In agriculture, many of us share a belief that if we just work harder, things will get better, but some challenges we face require someone with a different skillset to help us get over the hump. The question that I ask and what farmers are asking is where we go from here and what tools are given to the farmer and their family to live and prosper.

The stress and pressure of feeding people will not diminish; however, our government and mental health specialists must provide the tools necessary to combat the stressors that farmers and communities are feeling. 🌱



Keisha McClish Coutts resides in Park City, KS close to the land where Keisha's grandfather started the first urban farm in Wichita, KS. Mrs. Coutts offers most of her time as a Mental Health Specialist and Mental Health First Aid Responder to farmers in rural and urban areas.

Farmer Mental Health Resources

Farmers face unique challenges like unpredictable weather, market fluctuations, long working hours, difficult management decisions, and isolation that can affect their mental health. Addressing mental health is vital for sustaining farmer's well-being and the health of their communities. Farmers aren't an exception when it comes to mental health challenges. By utilizing these resources and staying connected, we can help ensure that farmers receive the care and support they need to maintain their mental well-being.

SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES

- Persistent sadness or anxiety
- Loss of interest in activities
- Increased fatigue or sleep disturbances
- Difficulty making decisions
- Feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

If you or someone you know is experiencing any or all of these signs, consider reaching out to the resources listed below.

NATIONAL RESOURCES

- **Farm Aid Hotline**
 - 1-800-FARM-AID (1-800-327-6243)
 - Offers support specifically for farmers, including mental health services and financial counseling
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Hotline**
 - Call 1-800-950-6264
 - Text "HELPLINE" to 62640
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
 - 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)
 - Provides 24/7, free, and confidential support for people in distress
- **Crisis Text Line**
 - Text "HOME" to 741741
 - Free, 24/7 text line for anyone in crisis
- **American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) Farm State of Mind**
 - Provides resources focused on farmer mental health, like counseling services & hotlines

REGIONAL RESOURCES

- **AgriSafe Network:** Provides health and safety programs for farmers, including mental health resources. Specific programs vary by state.

- **Cultivemos:** Provides resources to improve behavioral health awareness, literacy, access and outcomes for farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers
- **Rural Resilience Training:** Free online training provided by the Farm Credit Council to help individuals recognize signs of stress in themselves and others
- **State Extension Services:** Many states offer mental health resources, like workshops, support groups, and counseling referrals

ONLINE RESOURCES

- **Rural Health Information Hub:** Offers a guide to mental health resources available to rural residents, including farmers
- **National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Farmers' Mental Health:** Provides research and resources specific to mental health in agricultural communities
- **Farmer Toolkit:** State's Department of Agriculture offer mental health and financial counseling programs for people working in agriculture
- **Farm State of Mind Toolkit (AFBF):** A collection of tools to help farm communities navigate mental health challenges

HOW TO HELP A FARMER IN NEED

- **LISTEN** without judgment: Create a safe space
- **ENCOURAGE** Professional Help: Suggest they speak to a counselor or call a helpline
- **CONNECT** with regular check-ins: Provide support and reduce feelings of isolation
- **EDUCATE** Yourself: Learn about available resources



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FARMER CIRCLES

Collective Circles

Our Farmer Circles are virtual community spaces that meet to give farmers, farm workers, and land owners support on specific topics

21
NOV

CROP ROTATION PLANNING

Improve your paperwork and make it easier/more useful for future planning

19
DEC

PREPARING FOR SPRING LIVESTOCK BIRTH

Hear success stories of using NRCS funds on their land

SOIL & SOUL

Soil & Soul is a workshop series designed for BIPOC and queer farmers, farm workers, and land owners who are organic curious, in transition, or certified organic.

14
NOV

HONORING ANCESTRAL WISDOM IN MODERN ORGANIC FARMING

12
DEC

HARVEST REFLECTION WRAPPING UP THE YEAR WITH SOIL & SOUL

Join organic educators, Harriet and Nancy



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A person wearing a bright yellow raincoat is holding a large bundle of freshly harvested green onions. The onions have long, vibrant green stalks and white roots. The person is standing in a field of similar green onions. The background is a soft-focus field of green plants under a pale sky.

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Organic Grain Farming Resilience Through Co-Ops

By Ed Reznicek

Due to widely varying weather and market patterns affecting organic grain field crops in recent years, organic grain farmers are feeling economically vulnerable. Facing low organic grain prices, organic farmers are asking how to build greater economic and agronomic resilience into their farming operations. There is no one factor that can guarantee adequate farm ability to withstand or adjust to challenges. Greater resilience will be a result of multiple factors. In this article, I will focus on one main factor—cooperation. How can increasing the levels of cooperation with our peer farmers and within our larger communities increase the resilience of our farms and communities? This is a challenge we will face for years to come.

Cooperation in the market and social economies, as compared to competition and individual effort in addressing commonly shared problems or challenges, is a topic few of us have read or heard about. In actuality this topic has been widely studied in the social sciences. However, the results of these studies are not widely reported or understood.

In his book, *The Cooperative Movement: Globalization from Below*, author Richard C. Williams includes a chapter titled, “Comparing Cooperation, Competition and Individual Effort,” which reviews the outcomes of many studies researching this comparison. The outcomes from a majority of these studies show that cooperation among people most often outperforms competition and individual effort in achieving commonly shared economic and social goals.

What is more, cooperative efforts result in greater individual knowledge and capacity improvements compared to individuals engaged in competitive and individual approaches. This is not to say that problems or destructive tendencies do not occur in cooperative efforts, because they can. The point is, based on many studies, cooperation has a strong record in helping people meet their common needs and goals.

Organic farming developed and occurs in a broader context of agro-capitalism, in which monopolistic corporations dominate farms on both the input and marketing sides of their operations. The early development of organic agriculture was in part an effort by farmers to escape this corporate domination, along with addressing health and environmental concerns. The same is true with the early development of cooperatives. Farmers, consumers, workers, craft guilds and others organized cooperatively to retrieve some level of economic autonomy in the face of exploitative capitalist forces. Today, organic farmers and consumers face rising levels of large corporate influence in organic farming and food systems, reducing farmers’ net margins and capturing larger shares of economic surplus. Thus, we see rising concern about the sustainability and resilience of organic farming and food systems.

Cooperatives have a strong record of increasing the economic and livelihood resilience for members and the communities in which they are embedded.

This increased resilience stems from the exercise of cooperative principles and values, chief among them that cooperatives place service to, and well-being of, members above increasing the return on capital investment. During economic downturns, natural disasters, and other social crises, cooperation among those affected helps them confront the crisis and then better recover afterwards. At the business level, cooperatives generally are less inclined to speculate and more inclined to hold financial reserves. And if they serve their members well, cooperatives can better draw on the members for extra economic or financial support during hard times, or to increase diversification and expansion of member services.

My understanding of how an organic grain marketing/bargaining cooperative strengthens the resiliency of member farmers comes from my over 30 years of experience working with Central Plains Organic Farmers (CPOF) cooperative, and with a cooperative supporting marketing agencies-in-common, Organic Farmers Association for Relationship Marketing (OFARM).

Many organic farmers transitioned to organic to improve their farming resilience by reducing purchase of expensive inputs and related operating debt, improving ecosystem services and soil health of their farms, and by accessing premium markets with the overall goal of increasing long-term productivity and net financial returns.

Farmers making this transition must acquire much new information, knowledge, management capacity, and farming skill. Joining a cooperative of farmers, some of whom are making this transition and others who have already done so, can accelerate and better ensure the success of the organic transition.

Marketing organic grain is as complicated as successfully producing organic crops. A marketing/bargaining cooperative is structured to serve as the marketing agent for the member farmers. This differs significantly from the commonly understood model of the grain storage elevator, fertilizer and chemical supplier/applicator, and general farm supply co-op. The marketing/bargaining cooperative is not an “arms-length” buyer from the farmer, but instead acts as the farmer’s agent in the marketplace.

A marketing/bargaining cooperative such as Central Plains Organic Farmers (CPOF) assists member farmers in many ways to support and improve organic grain marketing. Staff marketers are engaged daily with buyers, member-farmers, truckers and other “supply web” participants. This allows marketers to develop detailed information on current and emerging market trends. Building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships between organic grain buyers and suppliers is an important feature of resilient organic grain markets.

Compared to individual farmers, a cooperative is better able to build multiple long standing relationships with buyers. Member-farmers then have the option of engaging with several of these buyer relationships. In this sense, the co-op gives member-farmers access to more buyers and markets. Informed farmer-members, organized cooperatively, can better negotiate sale and price terms than they can individually. This is not necessarily about always getting the highest price, but about getting the market price, having some influence on the market price, getting better and more secure payment terms, and getting and keeping access to more markets.



Marketing organic grain comes with some expenditure of time and money. Marketing cooperatively reduces these costs for member-farmers because as a group they share in these expenditures. The cooperative structure also provides a framework for raising needed capital for the marketing services and provides an income stream to maintain the business.

Robust cooperation and increased familiarity among co-op members stimulates additional forms of cooperative work, often of a more informal character. Some examples are production and on-farm processing of seed and feed, sharing equipment and labor, developing and managing grain storage facilities, sharing responsibilities for training and organizational governance, and more. These types of activities and cooperation generally stimulate creativity, problem solving and coordination, key elements in building resilience.

Cooperatives and their member-farmers soon learn that they share a common interest in each other's success. The more skilled, capable and resilient each and every farm and staff member is, the more successful all will be. This means that cooperatives need to invest in the continuing education of their members, staff, and leaders.

As organizations with a social purpose, organic cooperatives also need to invest in building collaborative relations with other organizations working on public policy, education and other areas related to organic and sustainable farming. Cooperatives can help their members participate in these initiatives.

The world of organic farming and food systems is changing rapidly. We face growing challenges with climate variability, economic uncertainty, and social conflict. Establishing strong cooperatives is a critically important task for cultivating greater resilience on our farms, in our organizations and communities as we confront these challenges. 



Ed Reznicek and his wife operate a beef cattle, organic grain and forage farm in northeast Kansas. Ed recently retired as general manager for Central Plains Organic Farmers and currently serves on the board of OFARM.


Questions for Ed?
Reach out!



Edward P. Reznicek
Retired General Manager
Central Plains Organic Farmers
Board Member, OFARM
edwardreznicek@gmail.com

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT AG CO-OPS

- › 2 million farmers are members of more than 2,100 co-ops in the U.S.
- › Globally, there are more than 1.2 million agricultural co-ops
- › U.S. farm co-ops generate about \$6.5 billion in net income each year
- › 250,000+ people are employed by farmer-owned co-ops
- › Most agricultural cooperatives are based in the Midwest, especially Iowa and Minnesota
- › Common Co-op examples include: Organic Valley, National Co-op Grocers, Florida's Natural, Land O'Lakes, Ocean Spray, Blue Diamond



NRCS Organic Practice 823 Resources for Farmers

- ✓ 823 Farmer Factsheet
- ✓ 823 Producer Pre-Office Visit Checklist
- ✓ Watch a webinar led by farmers on 823
- ✓ NRCS New Practice for Transitioning Land (pg. 10)
- ✓ Unlocking Funding for Organic Practices (pg. 34)
- ✓ Do you have more to say on this topic? Join OFA's monthly Farmer Workgroup.

The National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has many programs to help farmers convert to organic farming operations, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) conservation program.

Under EQIP, Organic Transition Initiative 823 (OTI) is specifically meant to help those transitioning to organic operations through cost-sharing and providing technical support on such practices.

This program is relatively new and can be used by many farmers. Use OFA's resources to learn more, and reach out with your questions.

CONTACT OFA

Call for Support
(833) 724-3834

Email the Team
helpline@organicfarmersassociation.org

Farmer Resources for Before & After Natural Disasters

The effects of climate change are real, affecting areas that are not historically vulnerable to extreme weather conditions. Hurricanes Helene and Milton in the southeastern U.S. have been devastating for individual farmers, numerous communities, regional food systems and the environment. There are both short- and long-term activities and alliances that can be accessed and developed to aid in recovery and build resilience.

IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE

There are numerous government and nonprofit groups like FEMA and the Red Cross that help with immediate needs like food, clothing and housing. Your State Department of Agriculture will usually have some options to help with agricultural focused needs, such as dealing with livestock and rules for harvesting/selling produce around flooding events. Most of these offices also offer financial and mental health services. Dealing with the overwhelming issues from the loss of your livelihood, home and perhaps livestock is difficult and having a professional lead you through ways of coping and moving forward is extremely useful. (See OFA's mental health factsheet on page 18)

DOCUMENTATION

Take photos of the damage and write down what has been lost before you start any cleanup. If you have crop insurance, the adjuster must see the damage before you do any mitigation. Planting a cover crop as soon as it dries up can be useful for soil health, but it might negatively affect your crop insurance. The USDA Farm Service Agency has low interest loans and disaster relief programs, there is an office in every county. Storage areas, harvest equipment and more could be eligible for these funds. If you have loans that you cannot pay due to lost income, contact your lender immediately, they are usually sympathetic especially when the disaster is fresh in their minds, not three months later.

COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL HELP

Your local municipalities, nearby villages and cities, may have volunteers to help with cleanup. Many natural foods co-ops and private stores collect monies from their customers, specifically targeting farmers in their region. There are also many non-governmental ag-focused organizations in every region, as well as churches and civic organizations. These groups tend to organize help and dollars for those affected by natural disasters.

CONTAMINATION RISK

If there might be a risk of contamination to your land by prohibited materials from flood water or mud, contact your organic certifier with information on your situation. The time of year of the incident is important, since many herbicides and fertilizers are applied in spring and not fall. What is upstream of your farm, how close is land that has had prohibited materials applied? How long was the flood water present on your land, two hours or two weeks can make a big difference. What are the crops that were affected? Provide as much documentation as you can to your certifier.

LONG-TERM MITIGATION & DISASTER PREVENTION/REDUCTION

Lastly, take a walk around your land, are there areas where you feel vulnerable to erosion or flooding? Is there something you can do such as widen a dry wash or improve a levee before the creek over tops its banks? Does your barnyard get flooded from the rain coming off the barn roof? These are some examples where the NRCS has practices to help fund improvements to lessen or even avoid catastrophic water events on your farm.

FUTURE SUPPORT FOR FARMERS

This season has brought unprecedented extreme weather events. Current federal crop insurance options do not cover many small, diversified, and organic farms impacted by such disasters. The Withstanding Extreme Agricultural Threats by Harvesting Economic Resilience (WEATHER) Act of 2023 (S. 3401) is a bill that calls for the development of an index-based insurance policy that would better support farmers facing income losses after extreme weather events by reducing administrative hurdles and ensuring that insurance payouts are based on agricultural income losses.

Tell your Senators to include the WEATHER Act in the upcoming Farm Bill!

CALL OFA'S FARMER HELPLINE



OFA's Farmer HelpLine is here to help farmers curious about organic, farmers transitioning to organic production, and certified organic farmers. We can talk through your options, connect you with other farmers, and guide you through the organic certification process.

**HELPLINE:
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Farm Bill Marker Bill Tracker

Watch OFA's Farm Bill Marker Bill Tracker to keep track of marker bills that may impact organic farming in the next Farm Bill. Check the OFA website regularly for updates as Farm Bill conversations continue in D.C.

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NOSB Fall 2024 Meeting Report

By Harriet Behar

The National Organic Standards Board met in Portland, Oregon October 22-24, 2024, with two days of virtual public comment the week before. This Board's regulatory responsibility includes the approval of all synthetics that are present on the National List, with both natural and synthetic materials reviewed every five years, which is called a "sunset" review. Each year, different items reach their sunset review time frame, to spread out the review of the many crops, livestock, and handling items used in USDA organic production. All of the materials currently on the list that were reviewed, were kept on the list, and two new materials were voted to be added.

NEW MATERIALS ADDED TO NATIONAL LIST

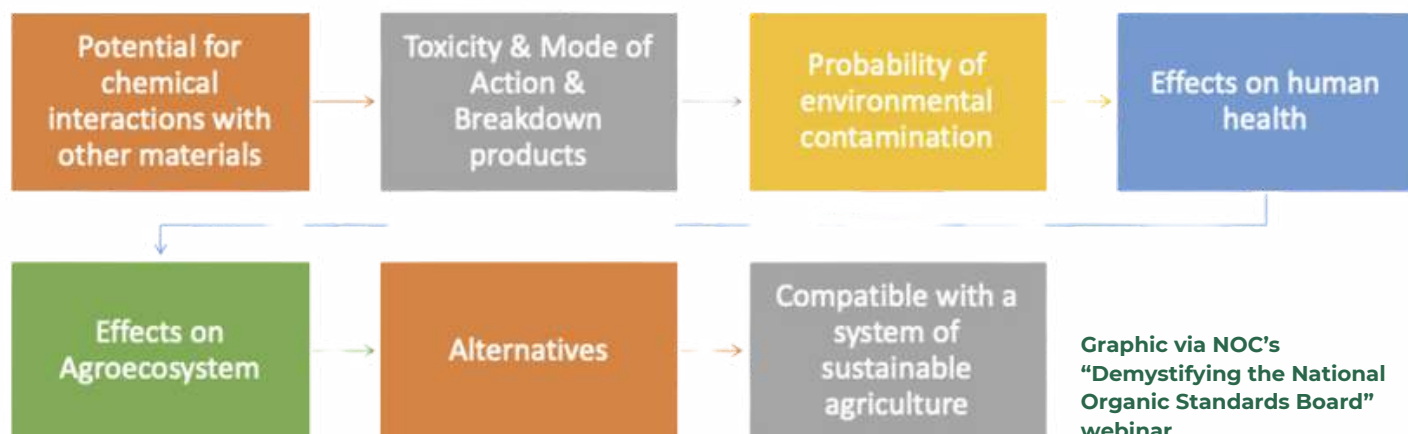
In crops, carbon dioxide was voted to be added to the list to be used to enhance production in greenhouses, but only when obtained as a by-product of burning fossil fuel. CO2 generators were not approved. Using the CO2 instead of releasing it in the atmosphere was seen as a climate smart use of this exhaust. OFA commented that use of renewable energy sources is another way to lessen the release of CO2 into the atmosphere.

In livestock, meloxicam, a pain medication, was also voted to be approved for use, with the original proposal's annotation changed from only addressing a withdrawal time for meat to both a meat and milk animal withdrawal time to twice the withholding time required by the FDA for this drug. Farmers see this material as especially beneficial when dehorning calves and castrating young livestock. Meloxicam must be prescribed by a veterinarian for use.

LIVESTOCK MATERIALS RENEWED

This year the Board reviewed 13 livestock materials that had reached the 5-year sunset, and voted to keep all 13 on the National List for another five years: Atropine, hydrogen peroxide, iodine, magnesium sulfate, fenbendazole, moxidecton, peroxyacetic/peracetic acid, tolazoline, xylazine, oxalic acid dihydrate, DL-methionine, trace minerals and vitamins. Two of these items, DL-methionine and iodine had petitions to change or add an annotation that describes and/or limit the specific use.

FRAMEWORK FOR SUBSTANCE EVALUATION



Graphic via NOC's
"Demystifying the National
Organic Standards Board"
webinar.

The restrictions to the amount of DL-methionine to be fed in the life of the poultry was voted to be removed and iodine used in organic production was voted to be restricted to iodine produced without the use of alkylphenol ethoxylates.

These annotation changes and the inclusion of CO₂ and meloxicam on the crops and livestock approved lists will not become effective until these go through the NOP rulemaking process which can take about two years. Organic certifiers will alert producers when these are final and approved for use.

CROP MATERIALS RENEWED FOR USE

In crops, the sunset materials that will stay on the National List for another five years include: Hydrogen peroxide, ammonium soaps, horticultural oils, pheromones, ferric phosphate, potassium bicarbonate, magnesium sulfate, and hydrogen chloride. The two natural materials that are not allowed in organic crop production that remain on the National List are ash from manure burning and sodium fluoaluminate. Pear esters for use in pest management will be voted upon at the Spring 2025 NOSB meeting.

HANDLING MATERIALS RENEWED FOR USE

All of the sunset handling materials were approved for five more years. A material of interest to farmers in the handling scope is ethylene, for use to prevent onions and potatoes from sprouting in storage. This will be further discussed and voted upon in the spring.

Photo via NOC: Mike Menes, True Organic, oral testimony during fall NOSB meeting



COMPOST DEFINITION

The definition of compost (§205.2 Terms Defined. Compost) was changed at the meeting, to remove the specific time and temperature requirements required in the definition and replaced with, “The product will have undergone mesophilic and thermophilic temperatures, which significantly reduce the viability of pathogens and weed seeds and stabilize the carbon such that it is beneficial to plant growth.” The Board also changed compost feedstocks (§205.203(c)(2)) with the addition of, “May include permitted synthetic compost feedstocks.” This would continue to allow the use of newspaper in compost production, but not allow other synthetics until they are approved for use as a compost feedstock. These changes will not become part of the organic regulation until NOP rulemaking is complete and NOP notifies certifiers of these changes.

DISCUSSION: RISK-BASED ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

A discussion document on risk-based organic certification received many public comments, from producers, certifiers, inspectors, and other stakeholders. Many farmers have noted an increased burden of paperwork and aspects of their annual inspection which do not fit with the scale and type of operation, adding significant time and expense.

The NOP organic regulation will have been in effect for 25 years in 2026, and it is time to review what we currently have as a “one type of certification fits all,” to perhaps a certification model that takes into account different types of operations based upon the type, scale and risk of the operation to overall organic integrity.

Organic Farmers Association has a workgroup on this subject, and would like to hear both issues and solutions from organic farmers. If you are an organic farmer interested in participating in this work group, let us know here!

PROPOSAL FOR RMA: CLIMATE INDUCED FARMING RISK AND CROP INSURANCE

The NOSB passed a proposed detailed document highlighting the needs of organic farmers for improved crop insurance options. This NOSB proposal is a road map for the Risk Management Agency (RMA) of the USDA to understand what is needed by organic farmers and why. More information on this proposal can be found in the meeting materials.

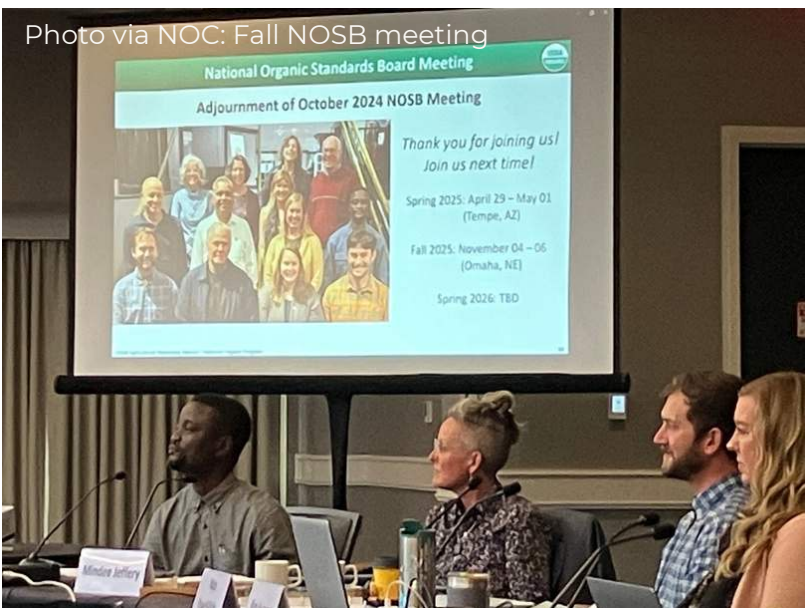
Many of the farmer-driven suggestions submitted by the OFA crop insurance workgroup and the Ohio Ecological Food and Farming crop insurance group were included.

DISCUSSION: RESIDUE TESTING FOR A GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN

There was significant discussion on residue testing of imported organic livestock feedstuffs, which will lead to a proposal at the spring NOSB meeting. There are still some issues on the logistics of how this will be accomplished, but the need for it is clear to all involved.

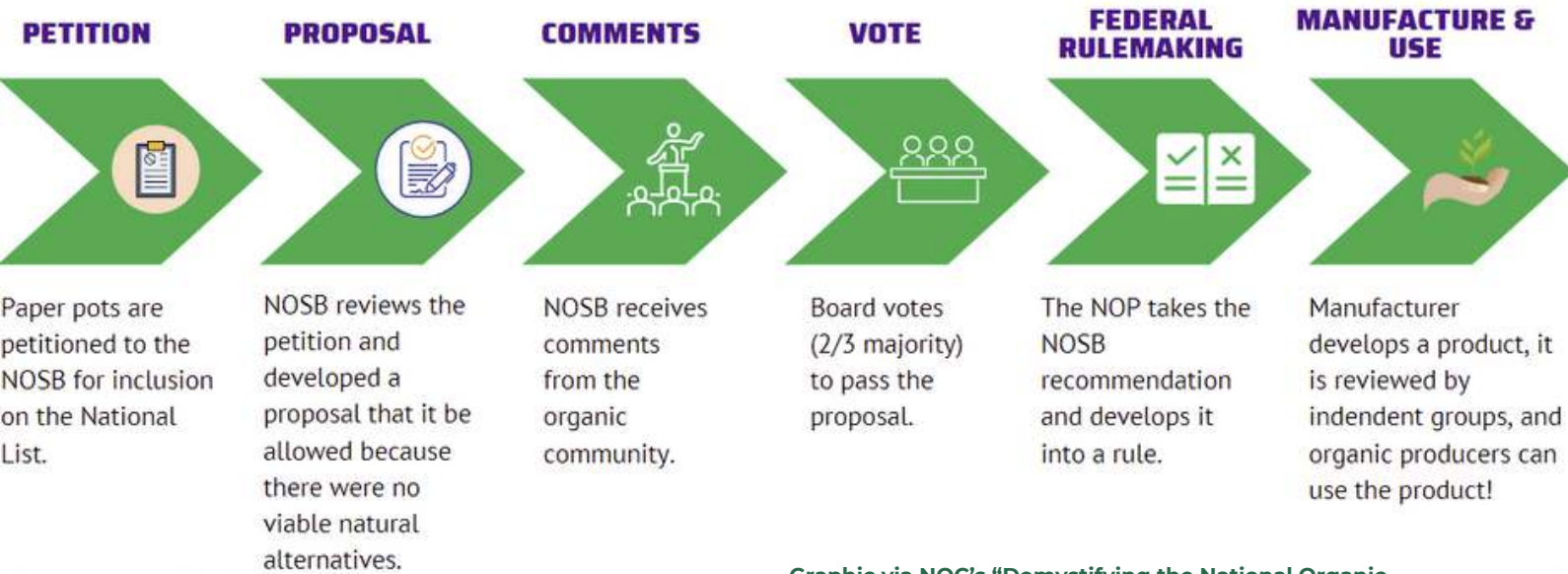
DISCUSSION: CONSISTENCY IN ORGANIC SEED USE

The Board discussed how to increase organic seed use. Currently, countries in the European Union have lists of seeds that must be organic when used in certified organic production.



The U.S. is not close to this type of mandate, but the use of organic seed is stagnant, even as more acres get planted to organic. Having an easy-to-use website for producers with up-to-date information on what seed varieties and characteristics of each variety of organic seed are available and from where would be extremely useful in helping organic farmers find the seed they need for their region and markets. With more genetic modification and gene-editing of nonorganic seed, the use of organic seed is an important part of protecting the organic integrity of all types of crops. There will be a proposal on this topic in the spring.

EXAMPLE OF A MATERIALS REVIEW



Graphic via NOC’s “Demystifying the National Organic Standards Board” webinar.

PROPOSAL: INERT INGREDIENTS IN PESTICIDE PRODUCTS

The issue of inert ingredients used in pesticide formulations had a proposal with two options:

1. List inert ingredients individually on the National List. Review each inert individually and by class of material and have this reviewed every five years at sunset.
2. Use the stagnant EPA “inerts ingredients” list and have exceptions to it when the NOSB finds things that are not acceptable.

The Board voted to accept the inerts proposal and will provide a cover letter to the NOP with a recommendation for a hybrid approach of option 1 and 2. The NOP will move this to rulemaking, at which point the public will have another chance to give comment.


DISCUSSION: EXCLUDED METHODS & INDUCED METAGENESIS

The NOSB discussed whether or not the process of induced mutagenesis through the use of chemicals or irradiation should be considered to be an “excluded method,” and not allowed in organic. Currently there are organic crops that have been developed through this method, such as ruby red grapefruit. The Board discussed whether they should grandfather these in but not allow new ones in the future, ban all, or accept all? There will be a proposal for a vote next spring.

BOARD CHANGES

Five members of the NOSB will be leaving the Board in January, and five new members (not yet announced) joining at that time. Nate Powell Palm, Jerry D’Amore, Kim Huseman, Mindee Jeffery and Wood Turner have put in many hours of dedicated work and we thank them for their service.

OFA NOSB WORKGROUP

Thank you to the OFA NOSB Workgroup that discusses the various items before each board meeting and informs OFA’s written comments and to the six farmers who provided oral comments to the board at this meeting. If you have an interest in learning more about providing input on organic regulations, **join our Spring NOSB Workgroup next February!** 



Harriet Behar is OFA’s Farmer Services Consultant, and was one of OFA’s founding members. She has been involved with federal, state, and local policy advocacy for over 30 years. She runs organic Sweet Springs Farm in Gays Mills, Wisconsin.

What’s Next? Spring 2025 Agenda Items

- Pear esters for use in pest management vote
- Ethylene use to prevent sprouting in storage vote
- Induced metagenesis vote
- Proposal for Residue Testing for a Global Supply Chain
- Proposal for Organic Seed Use

Farmer Voices Make an Impact on National Policy



National Organic Standards Spring Board Meeting

NOSB's spring meeting will
be in Tempe, AZ
April 29-May 1, 2025.

The meeting is free, open to
the public, no registration is
required, and will also be
broadcast live via Zoom.

Stay tuned for comment
deadlines and agenda
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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.



Suspecting Organic Violations? How to File a Complaint to the NOP

By Harriet Behar and Sancha Gonzales

An enduring concern of organic producers is the fraudulent use of the USDA organic label in both the wholesale and retail marketplaces. Organic farmers support strong regulations and expect effective enforcement from the USDA organic certification program in order to protect organic integrity. In recent years, we've seen an increase in organic fraud, mostly at the wholesale level, which has resulted in significant price fluctuations and an unstable organic market for our domestic organic producers.

In response to this growing concern, the National Organic Program (NOP) improved their [online complaint portal](#). The main goal of this virtual service is to make it easier for anyone to report violations of the USDA organic regulations. Violations include:

- Marketing any bulk or retail product using the organic label that has not met the organic regulations from seed to sale. This includes buying nonorganic items and reselling as organic, or using prohibited materials in the growing or handling of products to be sold as organic.
- Labeling issues include using the USDA organic seal or label without being certified organic.
- Using the USDA organic seal or label on a multi-ingredient product that contains a small amount of organic ingredients, or using the word organic that does not meet the labeling regulation.

However, only reporting suspicious behavior is not enough to have your complaint fully investigated by the NOP. Think of the NOP as a prosecutor trying to convict a criminal. For the NOP to be able to effectively conduct an investigation, the NOP needs to have evidence to prove that someone is participating in organic fraud.

These investigations are within our legal system and if the NOP doesn't have evidence, they cannot prove a violation even if there could be fraud occurring.

The Organic Farmer Association recommends providing as much information as you can when first filing your complaint. The more evidence there is, the quicker the NOP will be able to follow up on your complaints.



SUSPICIOUS BEHAVIOR RELATED TO FRAUD

As organic products have become more profitable, organic fraud has become increasingly more common. Here are some cases of suspicious behavior that may indicate some sort of organic fraud: If a business is offering a significant volume of organic commodities at a cheap price when there's a shortage in the market.

- If you see a sprayer in a field that you believe to be organic, look for information on a truck or other machinery to help you determine the custom applicator.
- If you see dead weeds in the field, take photos (do not trespass), and provide the day, time and location in your complaint.
- In order to ensure that organic regulations are protected, all of us can contribute to combating organic fraud.

PROVIDING EVIDENCE

When the NOP portal first opened, people raised questions about what qualifies as evidence or how much evidence to give. NOP staff have stated they receive complaints they can't act upon because of a lack of evidence provided. When confronted with suspicious behavior, OFA has a couple of recommendations on what evidence to gather and how to gather it.

Evidence to Get Before Submitting a Complaint

- Brand name of the product being sold that is suspicious
- Certifying agent of the product
- Any lot number (or best/before by dates) on the product
- Detailed explanation of the identified regulatory violations when known
- Actual product package or copy of the product labeled

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More Evidence to Help NOP Agents

- Price of the product vs the market value
- Who the product is being sold to
- Phone number of the operation in question
- Address of the operation in question

Recommendations for Gathering Evidence

- Take photos of the bad practice in the marketplace (labels in a store) or activities in the field
- Provide exact locations, dates, or names of the entities involved
- Ask others who may know useful information you can use to file a complaint

Work with the Certification Agency

- File a written complaint with both the NOP and the certification agency of the business if known
- Certifiers are mandated to follow up on complaints and do their investigations very quickly whereas it may take the NOP longer to act upon your complaint



Harriet Behar is OFA's Farmer Services Consultant, and was one of OFA's founding members. She has been involved with federal, state, and local policy advocacy for over 30 years. She runs organic Sweet Springs Farm in Gays Mills, Wisconsin.

Sancha is a rising senior at Wellesley College pursuing a double major in American Politics and American Studies. She is passionate about fostering equitable and inclusive communities and is driven by the belief that effective policy and community engagement can inspire real political action.





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**100 YEARS & JUST
GETTING STARTED**

2025 ANNUAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT SURVEY

For Organic Farmers, By Organic Farmers

Make
Your
Voice
Count!

This survey is available online, or you may print these two pages & mail to OFA by January 26, 2025.

PLEASE SELECT THE BEST OPTION:

- ☐ I am a certified organic farmer.
- ☐ I am an "exempt" organic farmer (less \$5K/yr)
- ☐ I work for an organic farm organization.
- ☐ Other (please specify)

ARE YOU AN OFA MEMBER? ☐ Yes ☐ No

PLEASE SELECT YOUR FARM'S/ORG'S REGION:

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

SMALL/LOW-RISK FARM CERTIFICATION: As the NOP and certifiers implement the SOE Rule to reduce fraud, paperwork has increased for farmers. OFA is concerned small diversified farmers are carrying a heavier burden from this increased paperwork. Please provide us with more information as we work on this issue:

Do cert. costs & recordkeeping burden cause you to consider dropping certification?

☐ Yes ☐ No

What % of your farm income goes to cert. fees before cost-share reimbursement? _____

Have you been asked something at your inspection, you felt was beyond necessary?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Should inspection cost and length be tied to complexity of the operation?

☐ Yes ☐ No

RISK-BASED CERTIFICATION: Would you be willing to work with OFA on this topic in a working group?

☐ Yes ☐ No

click

FOR
ONLINE
SURVEY



The online survey is more comprehensive.

YOUR POLICY PRIORITIES

Please **SELECT THE TOP FIVE** policy issues you think should be the **HIGHEST PRIORITIES** for Organic Farmers Association:

- ☐ Access to Affordable Land
- ☐ Affordable Certification Solutions for small & mid-size low-risk operations
- ☐ Animal Welfare
- ☐ Beginning Farmer Support
- ☐ Climate Change
- ☐ Contamination (Pesticide, PFAS, GMO Drift)
- ☐ Crop Insurance Improvements for Organic Producers
- ☐ Demanding Written Standards if the USDA insists on certifying hydroponic production
- ☐ Dismantling Organic Corporate Consolidation
- ☐ Ensuring the Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) Rule does not burden small farmers
- ☐ Expanded Organic Research
- ☐ Increasing Organic Farmer Diversity (Supporting more diverse farmers)
- ☐ Labor & Immigration
- ☐ National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) issues and agenda
- ☐ NOP Enforcement to Ensure Organic Integrity
- ☐ NRCS: EQIP, CSP, CRP Programs for extended organic support
- ☐ Organic Certification Cost Share (increasing support)
- ☐ Organic Dairy Standards & Enforcement
- ☐ Organic Import Fraud
- ☐ Organic Liaison at USDA
- ☐ Organic Production Market and Data Initiatives
- ☐ Prohibiting Hydroponics in Organic Production
- ☐ Prohibiting Sodium Nitrate in Organic Production
- ☐ Public Seeds & Breeds Research
- ☐ Strengthening the Requirement for Organic Seed Use
- ☐ Water: Clean Water, Access, Etc.
- ☐ Other (please specify):

SUBMIT YOUR POLICY POSITIONS FOR POLICY COMMITTEE REVIEW

If you have identified a new needed policy position or a needed change to an existing OFA policy for the OFA Policy Committee to consider, please submit your policy concern(s) below. Please be specific.

POLICY PROPOSAL #1

Recommended OFA Policy Position (Example: *OFA SUPPORTS strengthening USDA import inspection, review, and testing protocols to ensure organic label integrity.*):

This policy is important because:

I have more ideas about this. Please contact me so I can help!

☐ Yes

☐ No

POLICY PROPOSAL #2

Recommended OFA Policy Position

This policy is important because:

I have more ideas about this. Please contact me so I can help!

☐ Yes

☐ No

NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Your policy positions and priorities will be kept confidential and only shared as a group. If you have expert knowledge for a policy position, OFA may reach out to you for more info.

Name

Farm Name/Org

Address

TownStateZip


Email

Phone

My preferred way to communicate is: phoneemail

RETURN COMPLETED SURVEYS TO:

Organic Farmers Assoc.
PO Box 709
Spirit Lake, IA 51360

ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION



BE A PART OF FARMER-LED POLICY SOLUTIONS

JOIN A FARMER WORKGROUP

Farmer Workgroups are a space for farmers to work together to identify problems, brainstorm solutions, and amplify the voices of OFA farmer members.

[Sign up to join a workgroup today!](#)

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PREP**

NRCS 823

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3. **Are you a dairy farmer? Advertise for free on our site, RealMilk.com.** (At the bottom of the homepage is a link to add a listing.)

For a list of how we can help farmers and food producers, go to: westonaprice.org/farmhelp



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Certification agencies that support OFA believe in a strong organic farmer movement. Click below to learn more about each.



And find ads from OFA certifier sponsors CCOF (pg. 26) VOF (pg. 36)!



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February 5-6, 2025
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DECEMBER 3, 2024
2 - 7:30 PM
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KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Ashley Dulaney - Communications Director, OFRF
"Organic is Regenerative"

GET TICKETS AT IOWAORGANIC.ORG/ANNUALMEETING

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36TH MARBLESEED ORGANIC
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LOCAL FOOD REVOLUTION

Feb. 20-22, 2025

LEARN MORE AT:
MARBLESEED.ORG/CONFERENCE



SAVE THE DATE

Spring 2025 Pre-NOSB Meeting

Tempe, Arizona
Monday, April 28, 2025

Learn more here:
www.nationalorganiccoalition.org/events



NOFA-NH'S 23RD ANNUAL WINTER CONFERENCE
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Sunday, February 16, 2025
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Building a Stronger Organic Farmer Voice

PRIMARY CONTACT INFORMATION

Name (Primary Contact):

Farm Name:

Website:

Address:

City:

State:

ZIP:

Phone (Mobile):

Phone (Other):

Email (Primary):

Email (Other):

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

This Annual Membership is: ☐ New Membership ☐ Renewal

Membership Type: ☐ Certified Organic Farmer ☐ Supporter ☐ Organization (\$250)

Monthly Pledge: ☐ \$10 ☐ \$15 ☐ \$20 ☐ \$25 ☐ \$30 ☐ Other

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FALL PRE-NOSB MEETING

Twice a year, prior to the NOSB meetings, the National Organic Coalition (NOC) hosts a Pre-NOSB meeting open to all organic community members to discuss topics of interest. This fall, OFA Executive Director Kate Mendenhall co-hosted a farmer panel during the event to discuss farmer experiences on farmland access, labor, pest management, and markets.

(L to R) Christina Bentrup, Ben Larson, Inder Sing, Stewart Kircher, Kate Mendenhall, Alice Runde (NOC)

For ORGANIC FARMERS. By ORGANIC FARMERS.



ORGANIC FARMERS
ASSOCIATION