

The Organic Voice

Organic Farmers Association – No. 20 • March 2026



The Work Is Ours: Year of the Woman Farmer

What women in organic agriculture are building, fighting for, and refusing to let go

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Women's Farming Wisdom

How women organic farmers are incorporating conservation activities on the farm

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Market Gaps in Organics

Current organic market gaps and how to close them

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From Our President

What makes a farmer? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "make" in dozens of ways. One meaning is to "form the essential being" of something. In this sense, "clothes make the man" and "boots don't make a cowboy," Similarly, make can mean "the physical, mental or moral constitution of a person," as in "officers of her make are rare."

So, what is the essence of being a farmer? It's not just owning a farm or ranch, because plenty of land owners leave the work of farming or ranching to others. And just as "boots don't make a cowboy," what makes someone a farmer isn't what they wear, or drive, or say, or look like. I believe that what makes someone a farmer is much deeper and more fundamental. Farmers deeply love and are committed to the act of growing things from the land. The make of a farmer is how they work their land. And few farmers work their land with more care and passion than organic farmers.

Make also means "to bring into being" or "to cause to exist," and "to develop into." In this sense the question, "What makes a farmer?" asks how farmers are created. For decades, the trend in American farming has been one of shrinking numbers of farms and farmers, and increasing ages of farmers. One small bright spot in the 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture showed the numbers of young producers and of new and beginning farmers increasing! Because if we want more farmers—if we want to eat foods and have fibers that come from the land instead of from industrial factories—then we have to sustain the conditions that raise up and nourish future generations of farmers.

How does a person develop into a farmer, and how can we as a society make more farmers? There are many different pathways to becoming a farmer. Some, like me, come to farming later in life often after years in other careers or disciplines, and especially after military service. We learn from our neighbors and mentors and the many sources of knowledge for beginners. And we discover that profound satisfaction that comes from working with the land.

But by far the most common way to become a farmer is to grow up on a farm or in a farming community. Farm kids understand the work and the attractions of farming far earlier in life, and far better. Nothing matches the learning-by-doing that happens on a farm family. And the Future Farmers of America (FFA), 4H, and other agriculture education organizations focus on teaching those children all aspects of agriculture, and do it very well. While some farm kids leave the farm for other pursuits, those who stay have a leg up on the rest of us who want to be farmers.

Right now in my state of Oregon we're having a lively debate about what other activities farms can do on farmland without running afoul of land use laws designed to protect farmland from urban sprawl and development. It's a delicate balance between protecting farmland from industrialization and urbanization, and providing opportunities for family farms to earn enough to thrive into future generations. Here, and across the nation, we need to find ways for more farms to sustain families to own and operate them. Because in addition to raising crops and livestock, family farms "make" farm kids, and if we want more farmers, then making more family farms is a great way to do that.

The Friends of Family Farmers works tirelessly on behalf of family farms in my state. I invite all of you to be friends of family farmers, wherever you are across the country, in whatever you can do to support family farms. Because to make more farmers we need to make more family farms, and to make them thrive.

Sincerely,



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



*1 "Examining the Latest Agricultural Census Data," NSAC's Blog, March 8, 2024
<https://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/examining-the-latest-agricultural-census-data/>

*2 Friends of Family Farmers,
<https://friendsoffamilyfarmers.org>



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Spring Organic Policy News

By Lily Hawkins

Each March OFA and leadership members travel to Washington, D.C. for a Farmer Fly-In. This event is a time for OFA to take the policy priorities of all our members to decision makers and to advocate for programs that organic farmers need to succeed.

As you read this, over 30 OFA farmer and organization members from 19 states will be attending meetings with their legislators, House and Senate Ag Committees, and USDA staff to discuss organic farm policies. In order to better share with all our members what progress was made during the Farmer Fly-In, we're releasing a special edition of The Organic Voice.

The Fly-In edition will be published in April and will share key takeaways from members' meetings, next steps and action alerts you can support, and stories from organic farmers' time on Capitol Hill. Please watch your inbox in April!

FARM BILL

On February 13, House Agriculture Committee Chairman G.T. Thompson (R-PA-15) introduced the **Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026** (H.R.7567). This bill is intended to reauthorize the 2018 Farm Bill that originally expired in 2023, but has since been extended several times and now through September of this year.

While a new Farm Bill is essential for the functioning of our food system, the legislation as introduced contains several missed opportunities and harmful measures.

First, the bill represents a missed opportunity to fully invest in the domestic organic sector's growth. By maintaining funding at the same level for organic research, certification cost share, and technical assistance stagnant, the bill fails to keep pace with both rising consumer demand and the challenges faced by organic producers.

One major concern involves the provisions regarding pesticide preemption. As written, the bill shields chemical companies from liability and preempts the authority of state and local governments to regulate pesticide usage or limit pollution. This is a direct overreach that leaves communities vulnerable. OFA is advocating for the Pingree "Protect Our Health" Amendment, which would restore the ability of local communities to protect themselves from chemical exposure and maintain their own public health standards.

OFA also opposes measures designed to nullify state-level animal welfare standards, such as California's Proposition 12, by prohibiting states from setting production standards for livestock raised outside their borders. This move ignores the 2023 Supreme Court ruling and threatens the very market premiums that high-standard organic farmers rely on to remain profitable. It is the right of states to implement the animal welfare standards their consumers demand.

Lastly, OFA is strongly opposed to proposed reductions in conservation funding. According to CBO calculations, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) faces a budget authority cut of approximately \$1 billion over the next four fiscal years. At a time of increasing environmental volatility, reducing this funding restricts the ability of farmers to implement essential conservation practices. This makes it significantly harder for producers to transition to or maintain organic certification, and ultimately weakens the resilience of our entire food system.

The Farm Bill should be a vehicle for progress that empowers farmers and protects our natural resources. As the legislative process continues, we will advocate for a Farm Bill that supports a robust and healthy future for organic agriculture.

Take action here to urge your representative to oppose harmful measures in the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026.

Farm Bill Marker Bill Tracker



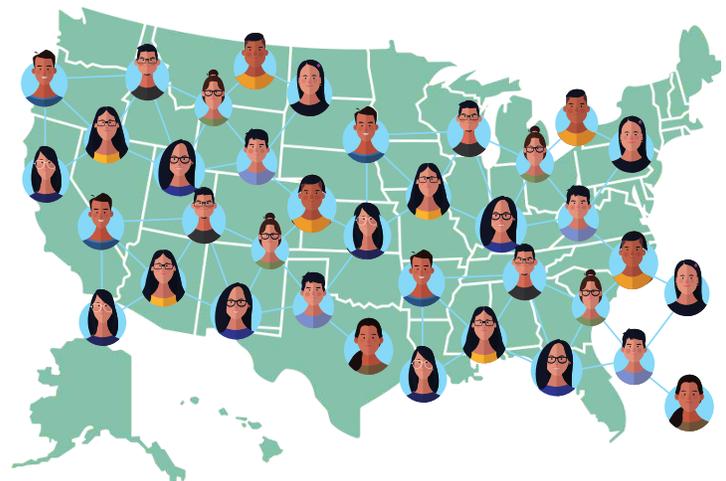
Legislators of the 119th Congress are beginning work to introduce and reintroduce Farm Bill marker bills. (Bills that OFA supported last year need to be reintroduced in the new Congress.) These bills are not intended to pass on their own, but are a vehicle to introduce ideas and build support for policies in hopes that they'll be included in the next Farm Bill. Keep track of organic policies in our tracker!

[View the Tracker >](#)

ORGANIC EDUCATION EVENTS ARE NOW EASIER TO FIND!

EVENTS FOR FARMERS ALL ALONG THE ORGANIC JOURNEY

- 1 Visit OFA's National Organic Farming Education Network
- 2 Browse events OR filter by keyword, region, or event type
- 3 Review events for full details and links to register with hosts
- 4 Subscribe to email alerts for events that match your interests



EXPLORE EVENTS HOSTED BY
ORGANIC ORGANIZATIONS
organicfarmersassociation.org/events



Organic Farmers Have Policy Power: You can make a positive change!

It may seem that your elected officials are out of touch with your needs. Many lack knowledge of agriculture, and even fewer legislators understand what it takes to run an organic, family-scale farm. But you can bring about policy change through clear and concise interactions with the local, state, and federal elected officials.

As a constituent and a voter, politicians are interested in knowing what motivates you to support a candidate. Very few government offices receive constructive feedback on pending legislation or specific issues with clear suggestions. No need to join a political party or attend meetings; instead, emails, and phone calls can build a relationship. Over time, you may find it worthwhile to visit their offices in person or invite your congressman to your farm! By working with the Organic Farmers Association and our organization members, we can provide you with the tools to contribute to the change you want to see!

WHAT MOTIVATES YOUR LEGISLATOR

What issues did they highlight in their campaigns?

- Improving the economic situation for their constituents?
- Enhancing the vitality of rural areas for businesses and to attract young families?
- Environmental concerns and sustainable infrastructure for the future?
- Fighting for families to have a chance at success?
- Using taxpayer dollars where they can have the most direct positive effect in their districts/states
- Improving health outcomes for constituents?

PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERACTION

- Find your legislator's office [here](#). Every legislator has staff that relays information to them. Building a relationship with them can help get your opinion heard and acted upon. Call the legislator's office and ask for the name and email of their agricultural liaison.
- Depending on the type of communication, you can prepare "talking points" and methods to increase your effectiveness. Review the policy you want to promote, and be prepared to discuss how it can benefit your farm or community. Tie your solutions to the policy priorities that your legislator has championed.

- Always include your name, address, and email to illustrate you are a constituent; these carry more weight.
- Be polite, yet firm and concise in what you are asking to be done. Don't say they might consider supporting a bill or policy, state you need them to support the bill, and you are willing to help them understand how it meets their legislator's own priorities. Always thank them for listening to you, especially when they respond to your request.

Email

Use this communication to advocate for a specific policy. Keep it short; they have many emails to read.

- Put the policy request in the email subject line so the staff can find it later. Use the email you want them to respond to.
- State your name and the type of farm you manage. Add a sentence about yourself or your farm. Include boards you serve on and any awards your farm has won.
- State what policy or bill you are supporting and how it directly affects your farm and community in two or three sentences. Let them know you are available to serve as a resource and ask for a response.
- Thank them for their response. If there is no response after a week, call or send a second email.

TAKE ACTION!

Send an email to your legislators
using OFA's current Action Alerts!

START NOW

Phone Call

Use this communication to support a policy that needs quick action.

- Ask for the agricultural liaison; if they are not available, speak with the receptionist.
- If no one answers, leave your phone number and ask for a return call.
- Give them a one-sentence summary of who you are, where you live, and why you are calling.
- Prepare to ask for support for a specific bill or policy currently being discussed in the legislature.
- Have a few talking points stating why this is an important policy or law for your own farm. Use your own words, even if following an organization's action alert. These personal communications have the best impact.
- Send the agricultural liaison a short follow-up email, stating you called the office about a specific policy.
- The staff keeps track of their constituents' support of pending legislation. Not many people call, so your communication can have a significant impact! Make sure they can reach you if needed.

Letter

Use this method to describe a detailed issue or a specific problem your farm is having with the current law or a USDA agency. Use this for important and detailed personal issues.

- Very few people send hand-written letters, and these have a personal touch.
- This provides a chance to provide extra information on a subject and to become a known and trusted resource on a subject.
- Be specific about what the problem is and what you feel the solutions might be, especially those issues that are currently being discussed in the legislature.
- Be descriptive of your farm and explain how the requested policy is needed for you and your community.
- If you have a friendly legislator, ask if their staff is willing to draft a policy to help solve your problem, or set up a conversation with USDA or state agency staff to solve the problem (NRCS, crop insurance, FSA, Ag Dept., etc.).

In-Person Visits

Visiting your legislator or staff builds a relationship. They may reach out to ask your opinion! Attend town halls or other meetings and/or set up an in-person office visit, and bring a specific issue to discuss.

- Make an appointment in advance and ask to speak with both the staff and the legislator. Your visit will be about 15 minutes. Often, the legislator is busy but may have just enough time to snap a photo. Share the photo with the local newspaper; the office will be happy to see the photo in the local press.
- Practice your talking points with friends or family (3-5 issues) so you can be clear and concise. Make sure you have a strong understanding of these issues so you can answer questions.
- If you can't answer a question, say you will get back to them—and do that. Never make something up.

On-Farm Legislator or Staff Visits

This type of communication builds long-term relationships.

- Once you have a relationship with staff and a legislator, arrange a visit to your farm when they are "in-district".
- Showcase something special you have done on the farm, such as unique crops or growing methods, conservation projects using government funding, you can include issues that address the legislator's policy agenda. OFA can help you plan and prepare for this visit!
- Invite other local organic farmers for a specific policy discussion. Invite the local press. Work with organic advocacy groups to set up this short farm tour and discussion. Expect it to take 60-90 minutes.
- Often, an on-farm visit can make a strong impression on a legislator, leaving them with a fond memory of organic farming. This will make them more likely to support organic issues that are important to farmers like you!

BE A PART OF FARMER-LED POLICY SOLUTIONS

Farmer Workgroups are a space for farmers to work together to identify problems, brainstorm solutions, and amplify the voices of organic farmers in the policy space.

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NORTHEAST ORGANIC DAIRY PRODUCERS ALLIANCE

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

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

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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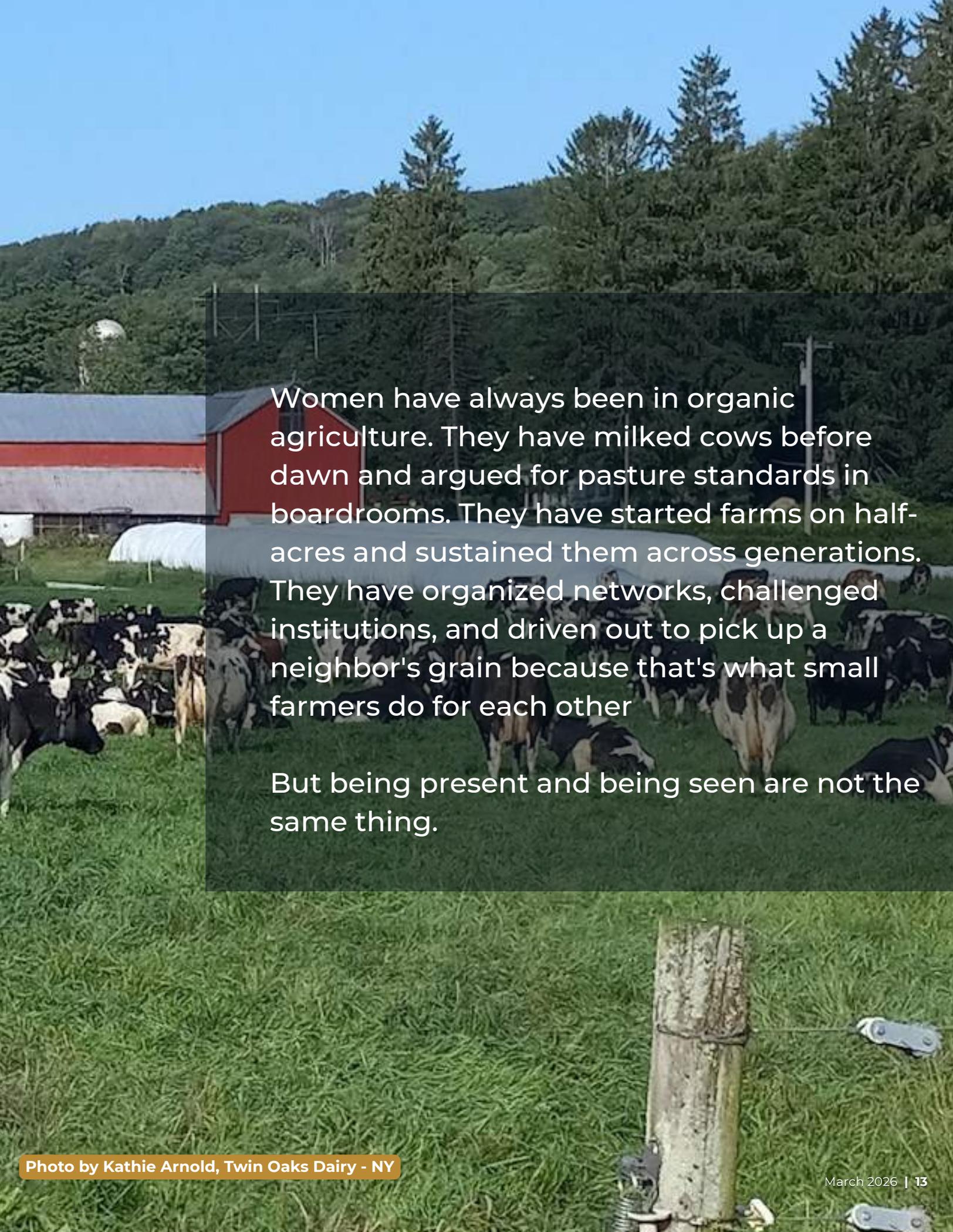
Jerry Moran
Kansas

FEATURED STORY

The Work Is Ours

What women in organic agriculture are building, fighting for, and refusing to let go.

By Rachel Witte



Women have always been in organic agriculture. They have milked cows before dawn and argued for pasture standards in boardrooms. They have started farms on half-acres and sustained them across generations. They have organized networks, challenged institutions, and driven out to pick up a neighbor's grain because that's what small farmers do for each other

But being present and being seen are not the same thing.

Women in agriculture still navigate spaces where their knowledge is overlooked and their authority is earned twice—once through the work itself, and again through the perceptions of everyone watching. The specifics shift depending on who you are and where you farm, but the pattern persists.

The four women profiled here span different regions, production styles, generations, and fights. None of them tells the whole story of women in organic agriculture, and none of them should have to. What they share is less a common experience than a common insistence that this work is theirs, that they have earned their place in it, and that they are not going anywhere.

THE LONG GAME

Kathie Arnold has been farming for 46 years, but she didn't start out expecting to. She grew up on a farm in the 1950s and 60s, when the division of labor was clear: her brothers worked outside, and she helped in the house. It wasn't until the summer after her freshman year at Cornell that something shifted. "I grew up on a farm but I'd never even milked a cow," she says. "So I told my dad I wanted to work on the farm that summer, and that I'd start at 5 a.m. like he and my brother did. He said, 'Okay, if that's what you want.'"

That summer changed her trajectory, with her older brother as her main mentor. Back at Cornell, she loaded her electives with ag courses and became the first female teaching assistant in the university's farm carpentry class, though not without resistance. When she first asked the professor, he turned her down. "He said, 'No, no, we've got that covered!' Then the next semester he called me: 'Would you still be interested?'" She took the position, and the welding TA role after that.

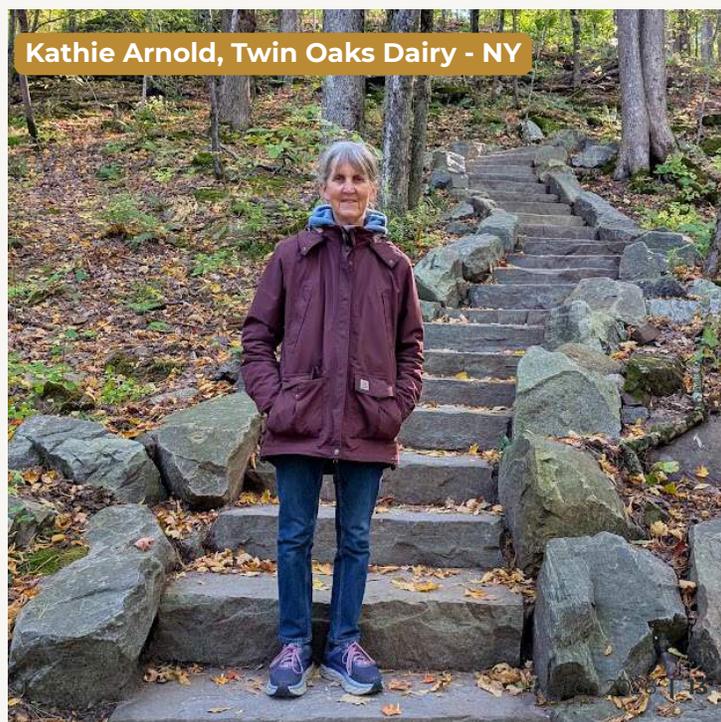
On January 1, 1980, Kathie entered a partnership with her husband Rick and his brother Bob on their family's dairy in Truxton, New York. They started with 70 cows. By the mid-90s, they'd shifted to management-intensive grazing, giving the milking herd fresh pasture after every milking. In 1998, they began shipping organic milk before USDA organic regulations even existed.

But the path to where Twin Oaks Dairy is today came through loss. Both Rick and his brother Bob were diagnosed with neurodegenerative diseases and both tragically passed away in 2015. Prior to that, the family had completed their farm transfer arrangements in 2010 when Kathie and Rick's son Kirk assumed ownership and management at 22.

"We can't really prepare for the heartache and loss that life brings us," Kathie has written. "But through planning and preparation, we can avoid crises and unnecessary turmoil." She means it practically—she's an evangelist for partnership agreements, living wills, powers of attorney, and farm transfer planning, the unglamorous legal work that kept Twin Oaks running when everything else was falling apart.

Today, Kathie and Kirk milk about 150 cows. She has long argued that organic's credibility depends on rigorously enforced, meaningful standards, particularly around pasture access. She worries about grain fraud, and about the ongoing drought in the Northeast that left farms scrambling for forage last summer. But she's also clear that right now is a good time for organic dairy: demand is outpacing supply, and buyers are actively recruiting farms to transition.

And Kirk, who helped design their new facility around the pasture system rather than the other way around, says he wouldn't want to farm any other way. After 46 years and more loss than most operations survive, that might be the best measure of what Kathie Arnold has built.



"THIS IS FARMING"

Katy Dickson didn't plan on coming back to the dairy farm she grew up on in Wisconsin. She never even really saw herself as a farmer or had the framework for it. Growing up, the women around her were "farm wives," not farmers. Her mother even got a magazine called Farm Wife.

Fast forward, and Katy and her husband were on the Navajo Nation, finishing their master's degrees and expecting their first child when something shifted. "Just with the thought of feeding this new person," she says. "A switch flipped, and I realized—we have to grow stuff." Her family had land, and her parents wanted their grandchild close. They moved back to Wisconsin and started with one acre across the road from the dairy where she'd grown up.

That was eighteen years ago. Today Christensen's Farm—named for Katy's maiden name—grows seven acres of diversified organic vegetables outside Madison, Wisconsin. She's the operation's full-time farmer while her husband teaches during the school year and joins her in summer. They've scaled deliberately, dropping a 500-bird pastured poultry operation when it pulled them away from what they loved. "Our love is vegetables," she says.

Even so, people called her a gardener, not a farmer. At CSA coalition gatherings and farmers' markets near progressive Madison, male farmers would talk past her about tomato blight and the season, then redirect the conversation when her husband showed up. "I would have to intentionally point out: I have tractors. I have equipment. This is seven acres of vegetables and this is farming."

That friction drove her toward other women. She co-founded Soil Sisters, a Wisconsin organization that for nearly a decade brought people onto farms through tours and workshops on topics like chicken butchering, meat cuts, and planting days. The group eventually evolved into a Women in Sustainable Ag listserv spanning the Midwest: part mutual aid, part knowledge exchange, part "does anyone know who fixes Allis-Chalmers tractors?" The range runs from full-time farmers to homesteaders to city dwellers with raised beds, but all the women involved believe in sustainable agriculture, and everyone's connected to the land.



Katy Dickson, Christensen's Farm - WI

Katy now also works as an organic crop inspector for handling and processing facilities, a role she took on from her belief in what the organic label stands for. As an inspector, she has a front-row seat to how much more paperwork falls on farmers than on the larger companies and processors that profit from the same certification. She sees how bigger processing companies have dedicated compliance staff, while the farmer is the grower, the planner, and the recordkeeper all at once.

She doesn't sugarcoat where things stand. "I really feel like being a woman in ag—I hate to say it—but it is still a battle. And in most landscapes." But she's watching. At the Practical Farmers of Iowa conference this winter, the young people showed up. An older Iowa farmer bragged about his first year growing no corn on 400 acres, his rotational grazing finally dialed in. "If that guy is spreading the word of growing no corn in Iowa," she says, "that is something to be really excited about."

SMALL FARMERS HELPING SMALL FARMERS

Alexis Dragovich grew up on her parents' homestead in northeast Ohio, did her time in 4-H, and got out. She chased a corporate career, but a decade in, she burned out and she quit. With no other plan, she went home for the summer to help her dad on the farm.

Ten years later, that summer has evolved into a full fledged partnership with her father, Alex. Mud Run Farm Organics, a certified organic operation where they grow heritage grains—wheat, spelt, rye, oats, einkorn—and mill them into flour on the property that they then sell direct to consumers at farmers' markets. It's an unconventional operation: they work with draft horses, they tap maples. These days, Alexis keeps a small herd of goats that's entirely her project. "The grains, that's my dad's and I'm his partner," she says. "But this is something that's solely for me."

When she first came back to the farm, Alexis and her father were growing vegetables together. She hated it. "Nobody appreciates you," she says. "You have people trying to bargain with you at the market, and the amount of time crawling around on my knees to weed—I just didn't feel like the rewards were there." A farmers' market manager saw their acreage and suggested grain, which they trialed and fell in love with. Then, when the nearby Amish mill couldn't turn around small batches on their timeline, they built their own mill: a 24-by-24 building fitted with a stone mill and an Osttiroler.

The goal was never scale. "We don't want to be Ohio's number one mill," Alexis says. "We just want to mill for us and our neighbors." They buy grain from a couple of nearby organic farms and drive out to pick it up themselves. Small farmers helping small farmers.

What keeps Alexis up at night isn't the work. It's what she doesn't know yet and where she'll learn it. She describes attending a women-in-agriculture conference at her state university and finding sessions on meal preservation, stress management, and incorporating kids into farm life. Those topics matter to some women, but they were all that was on offer. "Nobody's teaching you practical skills," she says. How to fix a chainsaw, how to change the oil, how to dress a millstone. "All of that stuff can be lost in one generation, and then how do you learn any of it?"

Her dad is the reason a lot of doors open. He's gregarious, respected, deeply rooted in their community. Alexis doesn't romanticize what that means for her. If Alex walks into a store and says he needs to weld something, "they'll tell him what he needs." If she does the same, "I think they'd be like, I don't think you can do that."

Every year, Alexis and her father check in with each other. *Are you still having fun? Do you still want to do this?* The answer keeps being yes. They grow sunflowers some years just for the joy of it. And when the work feels enormous, Alexis goes back to something her father told her when she was a kid, staring down a 300-foot row of beans in the heat: "Don't look down the row. Just look right here at this plant in front of you."



Alexis Dragovich, Mud Run Farm - OH

A DISRUPTOR IN THE BACKYARD

When visitors walk through the gate at Little Lighthouse Farm in Phoenix, Arizona, the first thing they notice isn't the rows of greens or the chickens—it's the temperature. The air drops, noticeably, immediately. That's the soil, Rachel Opio will tell you. That's what regenerative organic agriculture does.

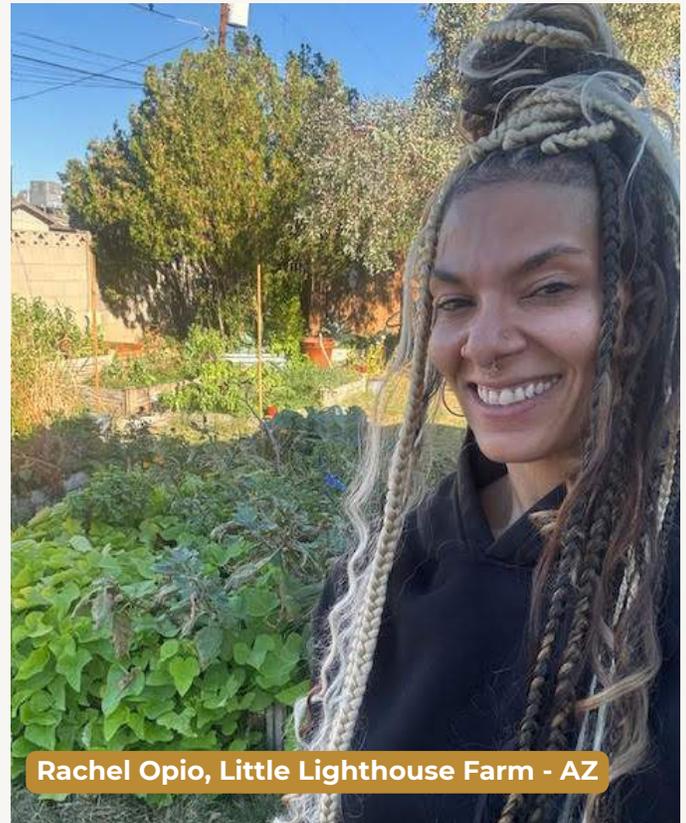
Rachel farms a half-acre on the property of her childhood home, in the same yard where her mother once grew vegetables she never cooked, just to have bragging rights at church. When her mother passed away in 2020, Rachel let the garden go. Grief made the space unbearable. But eventually, neglect started to feel like disrespect, so she went back outside. She cleaned up the original garden and started thinking bigger and planting more. Could I grow enough to feed my family? Things continued growing until, "enough food for her family" turned into "enough for her neighbors" turned into a whole farm. In 2022, she founded Little Lighthouse Farm, named for her mother's favorite symbol and the kind of person she was.

Opio came to farming from corporate tech, where she'd spent years as an analyst. She brought that energy with her. When told a backyard farm had never been certified organic, her response was simple: "Try me." Now, she proudly hangs a "certified organic" sign on her backyard farm. When the federal government questioned whether a farm at someone's house could accept SNAP, she asked to be shown the rule that said she couldn't. That rule didn't exist, and now Rachel accepts SNAP payments, helping to feed her community. "I am a disruptor," she says. Rachel has challenged USDA programs built for large-scale operations and refused every gatekeeping mechanism that couldn't cite its own rules.

She traces that drive partly to her ADHD brain—"it takes me down some pretty gnarly rabbit holes"—and partly to a deeper realization. Studying Dr. George Washington Carver's soil research, she recognized regenerative agriculture not as a trend but as ancestral knowledge, systematically severed from Black communities. "This is in our DNA," she says. "We were brought here for this because we know how to tend the land."

At a farm conference at Tuskegee a couple of years ago, thousands of attendees were asked to identify the women farmers in the room. Nine people stood, and Rachel was one of them.

She keeps going anyway. "Farming is healing," she says, "and healing doesn't always feel great, but it's necessary. And the only way to do it is through it."



These four farmers are part of a much larger community of women in organic agriculture: women milking, growing, milling, organizing, inspecting, mentoring, and showing up in every corner of this industry. Most of their stories won't make it into a magazine, but every year there are more of them. They're in it. And they're not alone. 🌱



Rachel Witte writes about sustainable agriculture, food systems, and environmental topics for organizations and businesses from her home in Santa Cruz, California. She believes good food and healthy ecosystems go hand in hand, and loves helping others communicate that connection. Find her work at rachelwittecreative.com.

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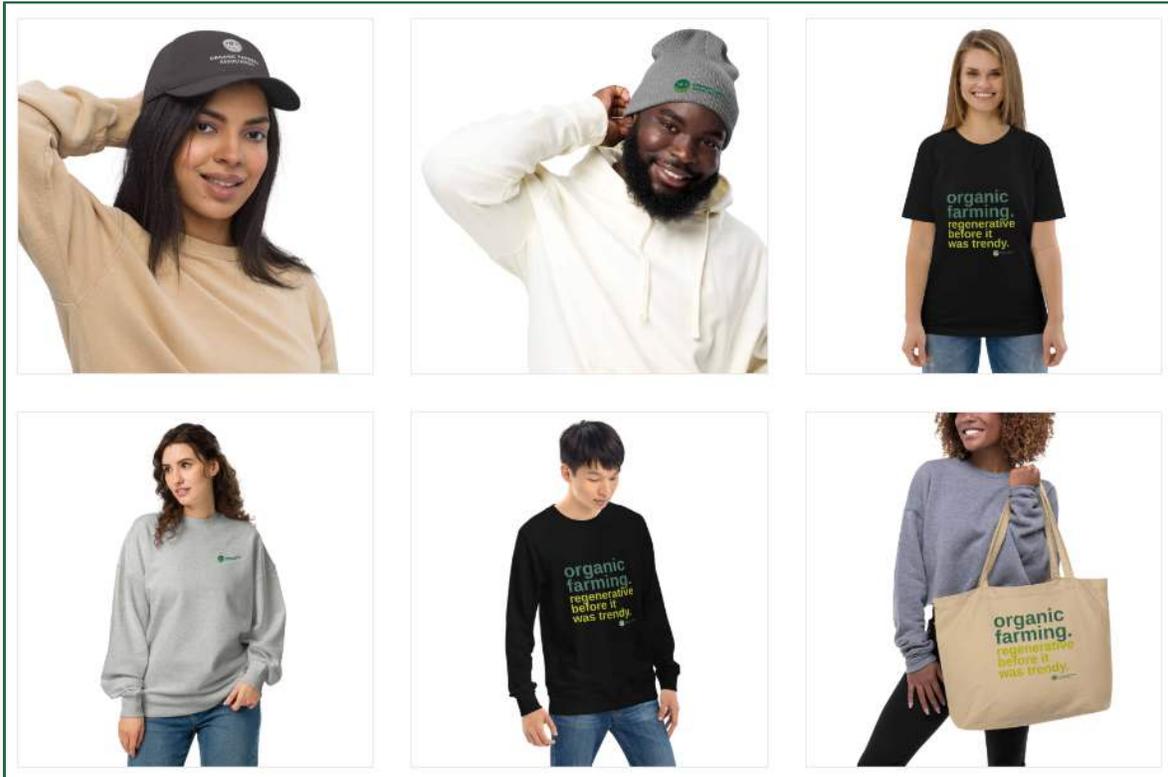
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Women's Farming Wisdom

By Harriet Behar

Julie Johnson, Tres Sabores

2026 is the United Nations' International Year of the Woman Farmer, recognizing women's essential role in agriculture across the globe. The U.S. 2022 census of agriculture listed nearly 1.2 million female producers, representing 36% of all domestic farmers. 58% of all farms had at least one female decision-maker managing 407 million acres and generating \$222 billion in agricultural sales. Women tend to be heavily involved with smaller animal livestock, greenhouse, and specialty crop operations, although they are active on all types of farms.

While every farmer has their own approach to their operation, women tend to see their role as more nurturing, incorporating conservation activities into their production planning. This has led all of the women interviewed for this article to farm organically. While making a living is necessary to remain on the land, with careful planning and intent, this can be done while reaping the multiple benefits of a productive farm along with a resilient ecosystem.

Across the United States, there are regional, state, and federal "land trusts" that oversee conservation easements on land. These in perpetuity agreements between the landowner and trust protect agricultural land and its important ecosystems and habitat from development. While this can lower the resale value of the land, many organic farmers have entered into these voluntary conservation easement agreements so that the investments they have made in their farms' productive capacity and overall environment will remain in place for future generations.

WOMEN WORKING THE LAND

While men are the dominant gender in farming, women have found their niche in agriculture. Becky Weed of Montana stated that her mother was a doctor, not a usual profession in her day, and Becky "wasn't afraid to do things that were not necessarily women's jobs, the key is to put your head down and do the work." Wendy Johnson wishes more women would get involved in farming, and she has experienced the "beauty of working with her family in the farm business." She has aided other father/daughter pairs, making this a successful model for farm succession.

WOMEN WORKING WITH COMMUNITY

Julie Johnson started a California group in 1990 called Women for Wine Sense. Women winemakers focus on their work/life balance, as well as improve their skills in growing and processing grapes, and find time to enjoy the pleasures of sitting around the table with a glass of wine. Hannah Doyle in Vermont has found it challenging to raise young children and be the main person working the farm. However, she has found her role as a mother and caretaker brings a "whole system of living" viewpoint to her farm management. Jane Saiers of North Carolina sees being a woman farmer opening many doors, not closing them.

All of these women have found that working with others in their region on production issues and through marketing cooperatives is important to their personal and financial well-being.

with community cont.

In addition, each farm uses a diversity of production and marketing activities to build economic and environmental resilience. Many have utilized USDA cost-share funding and technical assistance through their county conservation departments, the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs like EQIP, CSP, and CREP, the Farm Service Agency CRP program, and the Rural Development Agency program Rural Energy for America Program (REAP). These programs have been invaluable when engineering and implementing a variety of activities.

FARMER PORTRAITS

Julie Johnson - Tres Sabores Vineyard and Winery in California

This compact-scale vineyard and winery celebrates being small among many large operations in the Napa Valley of California. On her 35 acres, she grows grapes, olives, pomegranates, and lemons. She also produces infused vinegars and olive oils with herbs from her garden. Sheep and guinea hens



provide pest and weed management in the vineyards, as well as fertility. With short grasses and brush control provided by the grazing livestock, there is less risk of wildfire, the “serendipity factor!” Since there is no need to mow with the tractor, there is less compaction. Cover crops in the production areas, hedgerows, songbird and raptor houses encourage the biodiversity she seeks for pest management, as well as providing a welcoming place for wine tasters to relax. Julie relies on layering various natural systems rather than inputs, noting that “biodiverse farms have a leg up on monoculture operations..”

Hannah Doyle - Bone Yard Farm; Vegetables, Sheep, Beef, and Pork in Vermont

he 180 acres of mostly wooded land has a great diversity of production, all sold direct to consumers through a small CSA, farmers' markets, and an on-farm market stand. Raising a 3-month-old and 3-year-old along with developing a farm was a challenge for Hannah, who is the primary farmer in the family. She has enjoyed finding ways for the kids to be



helpful and engaged, even with their short attention span. Being a mother has influenced her approach to land stewardship; all planning is done to benefit the land and her family for the long term. Hannah uses integrative strategies to improve the natural resources on the farm, manage pests, and improve soil health. Rotational grazing livestock and the use of minimal tillage (tarping to control weeds) on their raised bed vegetable operation are two strategies implemented to improve soil health. They also plant pollinator meadows, manage woodlands, seed living pathways in the vegetable fields, manage riparian buffers along the streams, and construct beaver analogs in the stream to lessen flooding downstream. The farm is held in a conservation easement with the Vermont Land Trust to protect this ecological investment for her kids' future.. Hannah also produces value-added products like wool yarn cleaned and spun nearby, jams and chutneys, pickles, dehydrated red pepper and frozen roasted tomatoes.

Julie Johnson, Tres Sabores



Wendy Johnson - Jóia Food & Fiber Farm; Sheep, Beef, Poultry, and Kernza in Iowa

Growing up on a conventional row-crop farm in Iowa instilled in Wendy a love of farming. When she and her husband started their own farm, they were attracted to keeping the land covered and gravitated to grazing sheep, cattle, chickens, and turkeys.



Wool breeds finish better for lamb, and they work with a fiber shed group in IA and MN to provide raw wool to the Joia Sheep Bedding Company, started by Wendy. The perennial grain Kernza has a strong organic market and provides palatable forages for livestock both before and after harvest. It can be difficult to keep the kernza grain productive year after year, since it tends to “smother itself out,” but when sheep graze in the early spring until late May, and then again after grain harvest in late August until late fall, this lessens the density of the kernza stand. Wendy has been able to harvest grain three years in a row with this system, providing multiple markets from the same piece of perennially covered land: grain, meat, and wool. The riparian area adjoining the stream running through their land was planted with 5,000 trees: some apricots, persimmons, and hazelnuts, providing a windbreak and shade for the sheep as well as wildlife habitat. Strangers have stopped and asked to walk among the welcoming trees in her region of mostly industrial agriculture.

Becky Weed - Thirteen Mile Farm, Sheep and Pasture in Montana

Control of predators is a challenge in Montana rangelands, and Becky has been working on a variety of methods, including guard llamas, a burro, and a variety of guard dogs. Her favorite crossbreed dog can deal with the wily mountain lions. Rotational grazing, good fences, and



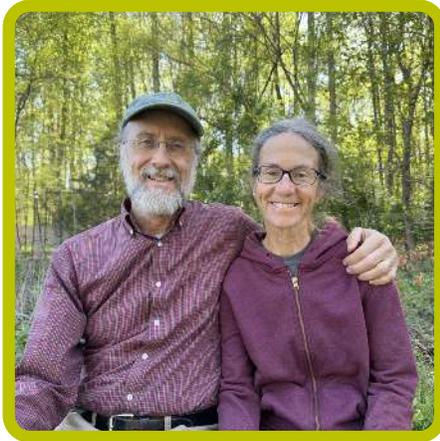
bringing the sheep closer to the buildings during lambing have, over time, helped reduce losses. “Farming is a journey” with change as the only constant. She used to run her own renewable energy-run woolen mill that did everything from hot water washing to carding the fleeces, but she recently sold it to someone down the road who has the same infrastructure. Her land is under a conservation easement to protect against development encroachment and to retain the beauty of open land for wildlife, pollinators, and future generations. Protection of the streams and ground water are also a focus, with a recognition that “agriculture is one of the most profound activities we can do to the land, both for good and ill.” Being in touch with the natural systems within their environment led her to organic farming as a better way to farm.

Wendy Johnson & other local farmers



Jane Saiers – RambleRill Farm; Fruits, Vegetables, Mushrooms, Herbs, Laying Hens, and Goats in North Carolina

Jane Saiers' 28-acre farm has a diversity of production: 2.5 acres of annual vegetables, 4 acres of chestnut, persimmons and chestnut trees, rotated pasture for 100 laying hens, and shitake mushrooms grown on logs at the edge of the woodlands. Located near Raleigh, Chapel Hill, and Hillsborough, these urban centers offer ready markets for products. Conservation benefits the land, but Jane also offers people the healing of being in and a part of nature. Forest bathing walks are offered both on the farm and at other locations, horticultural therapy helps people slow down and reduce anxiety, and the chickens and Nigerian goats provide entertainment and a chance to interact with other very friendly species! The farm hosts a farmers' market once a month, inviting other farmers as vendors to build community. Jane brings in a significant amount of leaf mulch from the urban areas to mulch the vegetables, focusing on minimizing tillage, planting cover crops, and incorporating carbon. Beneficial insect habitat, crop rotation, and a diversity of leguminous and flowering crops contribute to reduced pest pressure and improved soil health. Her land is in a conservation easement, and she is delighted to share the land she cherishes with others. 🌱



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.



ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

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- **Grain Grower Workgroup:** This workgroup meets monthly for one hour to address ongoing organic farmer concerns regarding issues of concern to grain farmers, such as fraudulent organic imports, and generate strategies and solutions.
- **Mixed Vegetable Grower Workgroup:** This workgroup meets monthly for one hour to address concerns raised by mixed veg farmers such as market consolidation to generate strategies and solutions.
- **Public Procurement Workgroup:** Join OFA Organization Members and farmers working together to get more organic food in institutions like schools and hospitals. This workgroup will meet monthly for one hour.
- **NOSB Workgroup:** A short-term, targeted workgroup that will meet ahead of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) meeting to form comments for the board and prepare members to also to share comments.

Complete a Workgroup Interest Form Now

OFA 2026 LEADERSHIP

We are pleased to announce this year's cohort of OFA leaders, including four newly elected members (denoted with *) of OFA's Policy Committee and Governing Council!

The Governing Council serves as the governing body of OFA, and the Policy Committee directs the policy process. Each region is represented by two certified organic farmers and one regional organic farm organization. Elections are held yearly each fall and OFA members are eligible to vote.

Governing Council

California Farmer Seat: Sara Tashker
Green Gulch Farm, Muir Beach, CA

California Organization Seat: Rebekah Weber
Policy Director, California Certified Organic Farmers, Santa Cruz, CA

***Midwest Farmer Seat: Dave Bishop**
PrairieErth Farm, Atlanta, IL

Midwest Organization Seat: Jacquelyn Evers
The Land Connection, Champaign, IL

***North Central Farmer Seat: Joe Borgerding**
Borgerding Dairy Farm, Belgrad, MN

West Farmer Seat: Pryor Garnett
Garnetts Red Prairie Farm, Sheridan, OR

South Farmer Seat: Jesse Buie
Ole Brook Organics, Inc, Brookhaven, MS

South Organization Seat: Brooke Gentile
Organic Association of Kentucky,
Executive Director, KY

***Northeast Farmer Seat: Michael Glos**
Kingbird Farm, Birkshire, NY

Policy Committee

California Farmer Seat: Zach Cahill
Cahill Organic Dairy, Ferndale, CA

California Organization Seat: Grace Jackson,
Community Alliance with Family Farmers,
Program Manager, Sonora, CA

Midwest Farmer Seat: Harold Wilken
Janie's Farm, Danforth, IL

North Central Farmer Seat: Andrew Olson
Prime Pastures Organic Dairy, Lewiston, MN

North Central Organization Seat: Margaret Smith
Iowa Organic Association, Board Member,
Des Moines, IA

West Farmer Seat: Linley Dixon
Adobe House Farm, Durango, CO

South Farmer Seat: Michael Appel
Three Springs Farm, Oaks, OK

Northeast Farmer Seat: Doug Murphy
Murphy's Grass Farm, Sherman, NY

***Northeast Organization Seat: Bill Pluecker**
MOFGA, Public Policy Organizer, Unity ME

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**Organic Education
Resources**



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Whether you farm organically or support those who do, your voice is critical right now as we shape policies that will define the future of organic farming.

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Collective power – Your membership isn't a donation, it's your seat at the table. Together, we're building a grassroots movement to create real change for organic farmers and the food system.

Advocacy rooted in real experience – OFA was built by organic farmers, so our policy work reflects the realities of the field. Your membership ensures decisions are informed by those who actually do the work.

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How Women Farmers are Shaping Rural America

By Denise O'Brien

Fifty years ago, when I became a farmer, I was shocked to find out that most women in agriculture called themselves farmer's wives. I was raised in a small rural town in the rolling, Loess hills of southwest Iowa. A few friends of mine lived on farms, but I never considered that farming was an occupation for women. I was a town girl who left at age 17 to explore the wider world. Eventually I returned to my roots, met a handsome farmer guy and did a full body plunge into the world of Iowa agriculture.

I successfully completed a two-year self-imposed apprenticeship to learn every aspect of farming from delivering baby pigs to raking hay in order to become a full fledged organic farmer, not just a farmer's wife.

Economic and political decisions that included a grain embargo, high interest rates and low commodity prices of the 1970s converged to turn the world of family farming upside down, the Farm Crisis of the 1980s. As my husband and I began farming using organic practices in the late 1970s, we were aware that Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butz, was implementing a disastrous policy of "get bigger or get out". Policy and technology were changing the face of farming and Butz exacerbated this change by his callous alignment with agribusiness corporations to destroy the family farm.

The crisis was too widespread to ignore. Our neighbors and community were in real trouble. That's when I went on the road to work with nonprofits, labor, and churches to assist families in distress. I went to people's homes, public meetings and protests to do what was necessary to call attention to the destruction of rural Iowa.

As I traveled the dusty gravel roads, it became clear to me that women on the farm were intimately involved with farm operations. They managed the chicken flock that provided eggs and meat for the table and contributed to the farm income. Many were the accountant for the farm, keeping track of money in and money out.

When the debt of the farm became greater than the income, they sounded the alarm. Many farmers did not like what they heard, tried hard to deny it, but the numbers did not lie. When local banks started refusing to turn over the debt to the next year, men became angry and depressed. The high rate of domestic abuse and suicides document this tragic time in farming history. The long-term effects of this crisis are still felt in many communities today.

Family life patterns on farms changed drastically from the post war decades of the 50s and 60s when families worked as an economic unit, sometimes with cousins, aunts and uncles who lived close by.

The economic insecurity of the Crisis found many women taking jobs in town as teachers, secretaries, sales clerks, waitresses, usually low paying but their jobs put food on the table. Women were still unrecognized for their economic contribution to stabilize the family farm.

I sat at many kitchen tables listening to stories about the tensions created in their once peaceful homes. Accepting "welfare" in the form of food stamps and how embarrassing that was in small towns when the clerks at the stores were your friends or neighbors. Women also told me stories of participating in protests, testifying in Congress and answering crisis hotlines.



Denise O'Brien's Farm

It wasn't until 1993 that I discovered an Economic Research Service (ERS) study that revealed women in the United States owned nearly 50% of the rentable farmland. This study, [Women As Agricultural Landowners, What Do We Know About Them?](#) was the most substantial collection of data in my months-long search.

It wasn't until 2002 that the Ag Census started to count multiple partners, including women, but still designated one person as the principal producer. In 2017 changes in the Census enabled families to list multiple members, including women, as active participants in farm management. The purpose in listing multiple members was to capture the roles of women and younger generations more effectively, reflecting their contributions to farming that had previously gone uncoun-

ted. Currently, In the United States, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that in 2022 there were 1,139,675 farms operated by female producers. Reportedly, 366,741 of the farms range in size from 10 to 49 acres ([U.S. Census Bureau, Table 57](#)).

Based on these figures, over 1.2 million women are actively farming across the nation. Despite their growing presence, they remain underrepresented in leadership roles within agriculture.

Many of these women operate small, diversified farms, which are often less profitable compared to larger productions. It's important to recognize that women are not absent from larger-scale operations because of a lack of capability, but rather due to systemic barriers such as limited access to land and ongoing gender-based discrimination.

We need to build a better system that supports small food producing farmers. Women do not receive the same support as men farmers do. In rural areas, growing vegetables is gardening, not farming. Growing food for people to eat is a high priority, and farming is a career that should have a high status. Women grow healthy, nutritious food for the health of their families and their communities.

A better system includes buying from a local farmer at farmer's markets or joining a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm that has boxes of fresh vegetables weekly from spring to winter.

The nonprofit, FairTrade International supports gender equity, helps the consumer identify fairtrade products and has a list where fairtrade products are sold. An excellent resource [Fairtrade](#). 



Denise O'Brien is a farmer and community activist from Atlantic, Iowa. She has farmed with her husband, Larry Harris, for 50 years. They raised three children and are now enjoying eight grandchildren. Denise is currently writing a memoir of her decades long commitment to women's issues.



GUEST STORY

Growing Forward: The Women, Food and Agriculture Network

By Jennifer Studebaker, Executive Director of the Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN)

“WFAN is back!” That’s the sentiment I heard from our members at the increased communications and program offerings we introduced last fall, and we are just getting started. Founded in 1997, the Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN) has been an active presence in the lives of women in Iowa for decades, and in recent years, our membership has expanded across the Midwest and nationally. That growth has led us to ask how WFAN best fits in the broader agriculture and food systems landscape when it comes to education and advocacy.

We will be tackling that question and the bigger one of how to best serve our members in our strategic planning this year. We are looking forward to welcoming feedback in that planning process through a community survey, interviews, and listening sessions this spring. If you aren’t already getting our monthly newsletter, [make sure to subscribe](#) if you would like to be a part of those conversations.

What I have heard from our community over the past year is a love and appreciation for our core programs:

Harvesting Our Potential is our mentoring program, which pairs a beginner farmer with a more experienced farmer for a season to work on a specific set of goals. This program is open to women and other gender non-conforming individuals, recognizing that finding peer mentors in the agricultural world can be challenging.

Our program is unique in that we provide stipends to support participation for both the mentor and mentee to help defray the costs of participation and increase the accessibility of this program. This program has been offered on and off for over 20 years, and we are looking to welcome one of our larger cohorts this season with 21 pairings. The federal grant supporting this program will end this year, so we will be actively seeking support to keep it going and potentially add a winter season focused on the business side of running a farm.

Women Caring for the Land is our land stewardship program, which engages women landowners, operators and non-operators, in being advocates for conservation and sustainable agricultural practices. This program includes education on the practices and resources available for those wishing to improve the overall health of their land. This year, we will be offering a mix of virtual sessions and in-person workshops with topics like water quality and managing tenant relationships. We are seeking support for an update of our award-winning curriculum, “Improving Conservation Outreach to Female Non-Operator Farmland Owners,” since a lot has changed in the last 15 years, but the need for this type of engagement has not diminished. In fact, the demand has likely increased with the increasing age of the average U.S. farmer and the inheritance of farmland by family members.

TAKE ACTION!

Plate to Politics is our leadership development program, which encourages women to pursue leadership positions in their communities to advocate for sustainable agriculture and just food systems. This may include running for public office, joining a board, starting a non-profit, or other types of grassroots organizing. We restarted this program last year with the launch of our monthly Advocacy & Policy 101 webinar series, which features guest speakers from across the country doing exciting work to fight for our safety and rights when it comes to food and agriculture. You can expect to see the most change here as we figure out how WFAN can best contribute while amplifying the great work our peer organizations are already doing.

Land access and transition cross through all of our programs. WFAN is proud to be a current partner with The Farmers Land Trust on their innovative Blue Rock Farmland Commons project, which was recently featured in the BBC Storyworks “Unearthing the Future” video series. If you would like to get more involved, please consider joining WFAN as a member or attending one of our events. We will be adding to our events calendar throughout the year, which also features partner events, with the goal of hosting a gathering this fall. As we grow our team’s capacity, we will also be looking for more ways to welcome volunteers into our work.

Women have always been a part of farming and food production, and their recognition as leaders and innovators is long overdue. We are looking forward to celebrating the International Year of the Woman Farmer this year, but if we are being honest, it is always the Year of the Woman Farmer at WFAN. 🌱



Jennifer Studebaker is the Executive Director of the Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN) and an anthropologist based in Kansas City, MO. In addition to her work with WFAN, she volunteers her time as a co-chair of the Anthropology Career Readiness Network



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- Protect Federal Funding for Farm and Food Programs
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Thank you, Organic Dairy Farmers

Our mission is to sustain family dairy farms in the North Bay region of California by producing high quality and minimally processed organic dairy products for consumers to enjoy. Amidst great challenges to the industry, our purpose is more important than ever. We are grateful for the tremendous partnership and personal relationships we have with our network of dairy farming families. Thank you to the Straus, Tresch, Hughes, Correia, Silacci, Spaletta, Moretti, R. McClelland, Nosecchi and Bordessa family farms for your incredible organic land stewardship and positive contributions to our local community.

Learn more about our 2030 carbon neutral dairy goal and structured commitment to economic resilience for dairy farms at www.strausfamilycreamery.com

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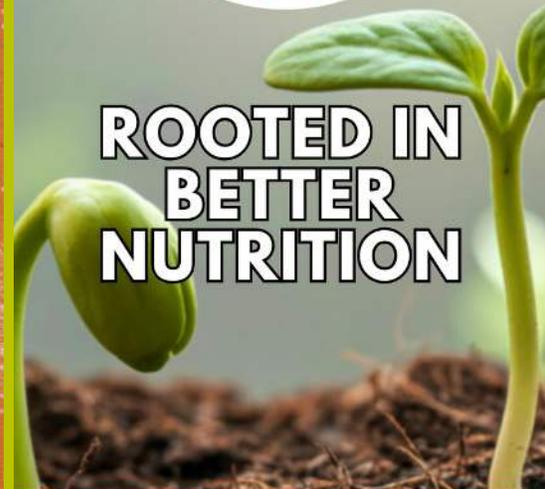
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Market Gaps in Organics

By Sharon Raszap Skorbiansky

A market gap exists when consumers want a product but it is unavailable in their preferred form, quantity, or quality. In the organic sector, these gaps persist despite strong consumer demand and clear environmental benefits. According to the Organic Trade Association, retail sales for organic products surpassed \$71 billion in 2024 (OTA, 2025). Notably, 2024 marked the first year since 2020 in which inflation-adjusted organic retail sales increased year over year.

This growth followed the pandemic-era surge when consumers shifted their purchasing behavior toward at-home consumption (McLaughlin et al., 2022) and allocated more of their food budgets to fruits (Okrent and Zeballos, 2022). Despite continued consumer interest in organic products, less than 1 percent of total U.S. farmland has transitioned to organic agriculture. Canada has converted approximately 2% of total farmland, while Mexico has transitioned 0.5% of farmland. However, some countries have achieved significantly higher adoption rates, including Australia with 15% of farmland and Liechtenstein, a small European country nestled between Switzerland and Austria, with 45% of farmland.

Organic agriculture internalizes what economists call “negative externalities,” costs imposed on society that conventional agriculture does not reflect in market prices. These hidden costs include water pollution from pesticide and fertilizer runoff, soil degradation, biodiversity loss, and greenhouse gas emissions. By adopting organic practices, farmers can significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, water and air pollution, and soil erosion. While preventing negative externalities benefit communities, it typically leads to higher costs of production (Gillespie et al., 2024). As a result, organic producers need higher prices than conventional producers (an organic premium) to offset the higher production costs. This economic reality makes clear the need for significant investment to overcome bottlenecks standing in the way of organic growth.

The European Union recognized this challenge and set ambitious targets to reduce negative externalities as part of its Farm to Fork Strategy and Biodiversity Strategy, aiming to reach 25% of agricultural land under organic farming by 2030. While the EU has increased its percentage of organic farmland, as a whole it is off track to meet this target. By 2023, 10.8% of agricultural land had transitioned to organic production due to insufficient funding, policy gaps in member states, technical challenges, and market obstacles. On the other hand, it is remarkable that some countries are close to meeting the goal. By 2022, Austria, Estonia, and Portugal had more than 20% of their farmland in organic, and Italy and Sweden had reached almost 19% in 2023. Producers considering the transition need assurance that markets exist for their products, while consumers sometimes lack trust in organic certification when inconsistencies appear in production and animal welfare practices (European Environment Agency, 2025).

In the United States, imported organic products reveal current market gaps. We import organic food for a variety of reasons:

Unsuitable for domestic production. Some crops cannot be grown domestically to meet demand. For example, we import organic bananas, a tropical fruit unsuitable for U.S. production. In 2024, Ecuador provided 51% of organic banana exports to the United States. This type of import does not constitute a market gap, though it does often point to our dependence on imported comfort foods (such as coffee and cocoa).

Seasonality. We import certain crops to maintain consistent supply during the off-season, such as blueberries from Peru and Mexico.

Insufficient land transition. The last category is products that the United States could grow to meet consumer demand, but does not.

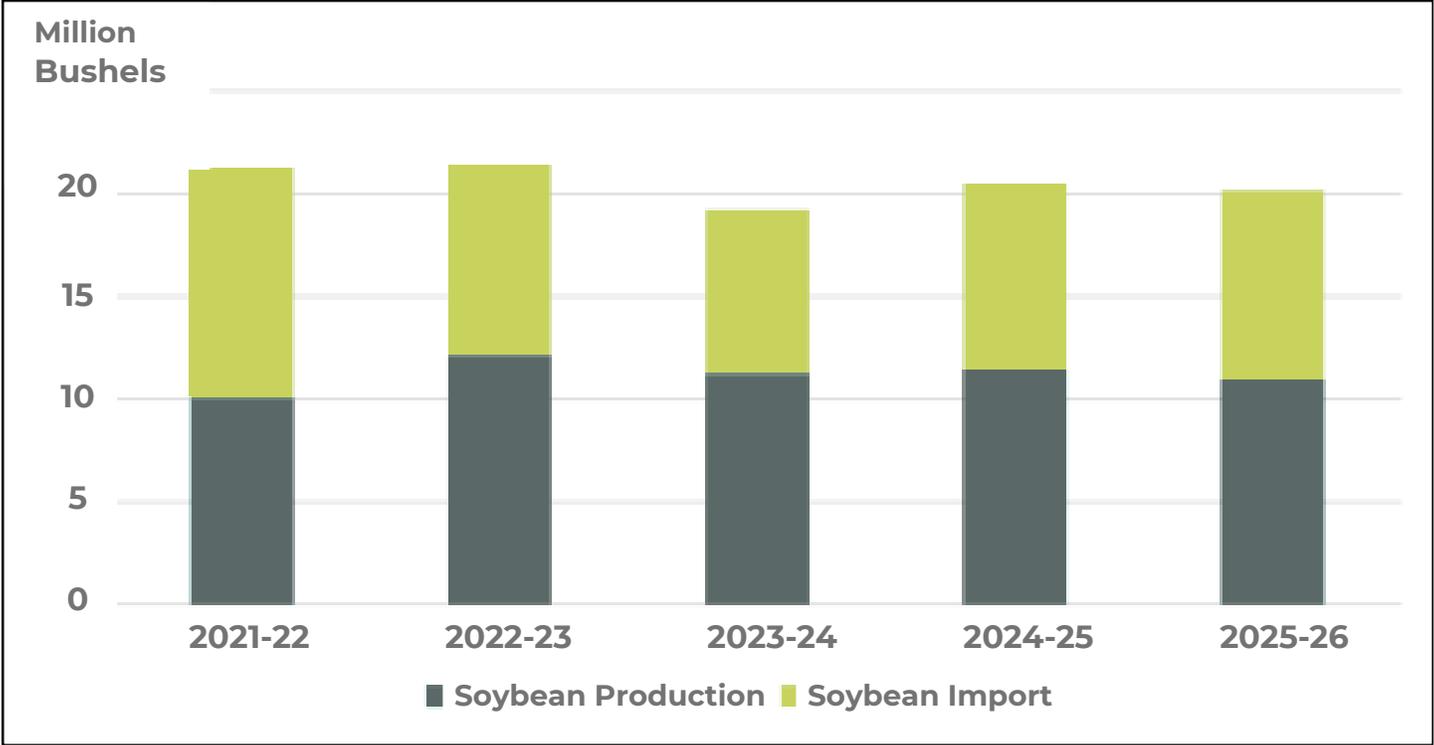
Feed crops exemplify the third category most clearly. Despite being a global corn and soybean producer and exporter, the United States imports significant amounts of organic feed, particularly soybeans, to support its organic animal industry. Argus estimated 2025-26 domestic soybean production at 10.96 million bushels while imports reached 9.24 million bushels. In other words, imports constituted at least 46% of total soybean supply. This figure represents a lower bound of total organic soybean imports because it excludes organic soybean meal imports (410,000 short tons) but also any imports of organic soybeans that are imported in other forms not marked as organic in the trade system (figure 1).

Multiple factors influence these import patterns, but the biggest issues from a buyer’s point of view boil down to availability and price competitiveness. Figure 2 compares organic soybean prices, showing U.S. Corn Belt spot prices against Cost, Insurance, and Freight (CIF) prices in dollars from Argentina and Turkey, two large organic soybean exporters.

Domestic availability faces several obstacles preventing producers from transitioning to organic production: lower yields relative to conventional farming, weed management challenges, the cost of undergoing USDA organic certification (McBride et al., 2015), and import competition. Price competitiveness in exporting countries may stem from relative advantages in organic production, such as lower land and labor costs.

Some low-priced organic imports may result from illegal activities in exporting countries, including fraud and dumping (Raszap Skorbiansky et al., 2021). Fraud in organic corn and soybeans can occur for various reasons, ranging from simple misunderstandings of organic regulations to missing compliance documentation (Ferreira et al., 2021). But high organic premiums themselves can also create incentives for deliberate fraud. Research has shown that when organic corn and soybean price premiums rise above equilibrium levels (meaning that they deviate from their typical relationship with conventional prices), organic prices gradually adjust downward as imports enter the country (Raszap Skorbiansky and Adjemian, 2021).

Figure 1. Domestic production and imports of organic soybeans



Notes: Imports of organic whole soybean imports. Import numbers do not include organic soybean meal imports or organic soybeans imported in other forms. Source: Author using data from Argus.

The mechanism in which that happens is through increasing imports when domestic prices are high, thus pushing prices down. This pattern underscores the critical importance of supply chain integrity. While trade can benefit markets, fraudulent organic imports depress domestic prices, which can be a deterrent for domestic entrants into the organic market, break consumer trust, and beyond all fail to deliver the ecological benefits of authentic organic agriculture.

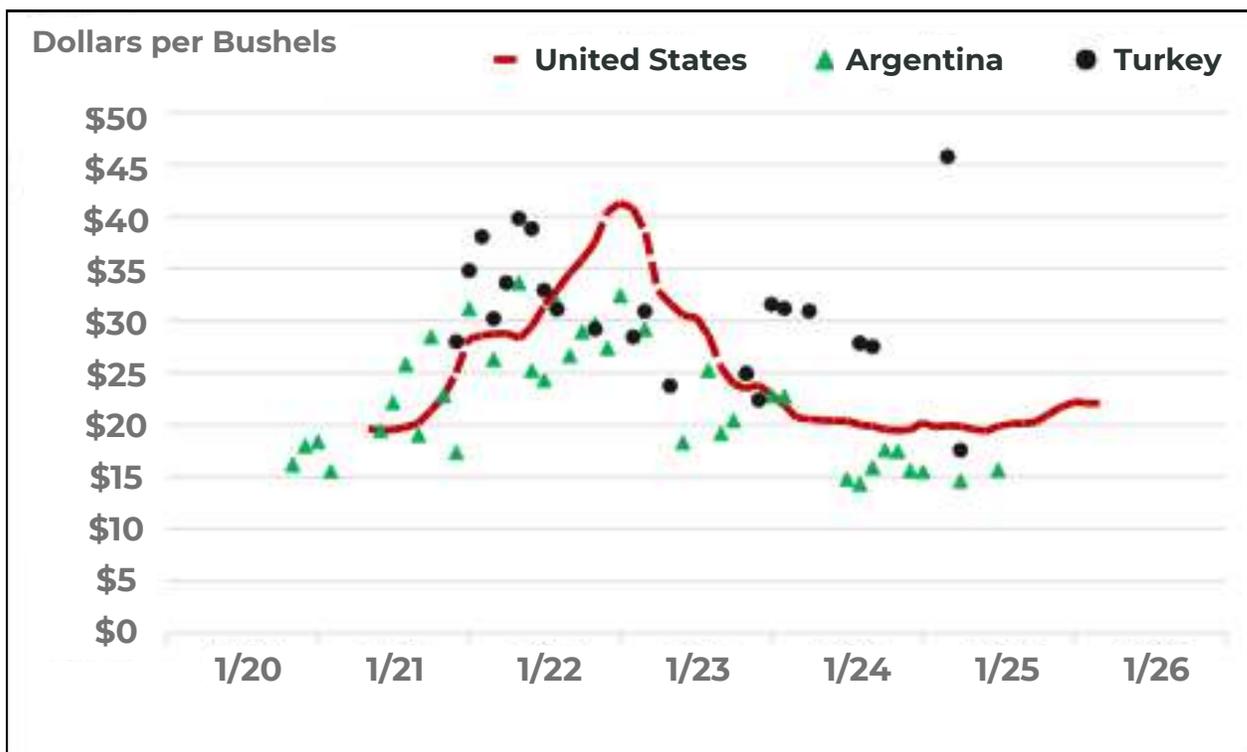
In 2022, the USDA recognized the significant challenges to organic agriculture growth and created the Organic Transition Initiative (OTI), a \$300 million effort to help farmers overcome transition barriers and address critical gaps. While this was an ad hoc program rather than permanent funding, it represented an important step in documenting areas requiring assistance. The initiative included help in key areas:

1. Technical support and knowledge sharing through the USDA, Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS), and the USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service Organic Partnership Program (TOPP). Organic management is different from conventional, and producers need information on best practices and expectations on yield and production. TOPP also helped transitioning producers connect with mentors and other growers, as sometimes organic producers may be the only ones in their county.

2. Risk management through the Risk Management Agency (RMA). While all crops face risks, organic crops face organic-specific risks, including production and marketing risks. The RMA program provided premium subsidies during the 2023 reinsurance year for transitioning producers, organic grain and feed crop producers, and producers with whole-farm revenue policies.

3. Critical gaps in markets through the AMS Organic Market Development Grant (OMDGM) program. This program recognized that, despite both consumer and producer interest, a lack of current infrastructure makes it difficult for successful markets. Grants from this program largely helped expand processing and distribution capacity for a more robust supply chain.

Another critical obstacle in organic agriculture is the lack of data and price transparency. Data collection efforts for organic agriculture are limited, and existing data are published infrequently. For example, USDA NASS publishes annual reports on organic soybeans and other major crops, updating estimates as harvest season progresses. However, organic crop acreage data from NASS are published only after the Census or on an ad hoc basis. NASS has published organic acreage data in 2008, 2011, 2015, 2016, 2019, and 2021.



Notes: Argentina and Turkey soybean prices are CIF, while U.S. prices are Corn Belt spot prices. Source: Author using data from Argus.

The next survey will cover 2025 acres and will be released October 2026. Price data are equally scarce. Organic commodities are often contracted to guarantee a steady supply for buyers and stable prices for sellers, but this practice makes market data more obscure. Readily available data enable producers to make more informed decisions about entering or exiting markets. Producers considering a transition to organic must anticipate whether demand will support prices high enough to justify the upfront transition costs, additional production expenses, and potentially lower yields.

Closing market gaps in organic agriculture requires coordinated efforts across multiple fronts: sustained investment in transition support, improved supply chain infrastructure, enhanced data collection and transparency, rigorous enforcement of organic certification standards, market growth, and continued research. Only by addressing these interconnected challenges can the United States build an organic agriculture sector that meets consumer demand while delivering environmental benefits. 🌱



Dr. Sharon Raszap Skorbiansky is an agricultural economist. Her research focuses on production practices and markets that can improve the way that we interact with each other, our environment, and animals, with a keen interest in organic farming. She previously served as the organic research economist for the USDA, Economic Research Service. She is now a Senior Lecturer of Economics at Lincoln University, New Zealand in the Faculty of Agribusiness and Commerce.

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The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont & Vermont Organic Farmers thank OFA for bringing farmers' voices to the national conversation.



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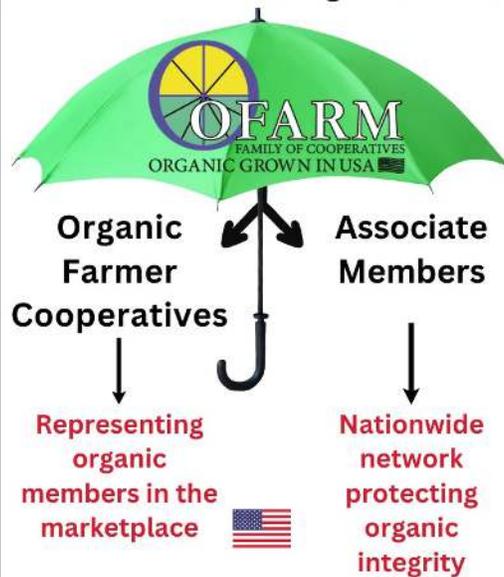


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National Organic Standards Board Meeting Summary

By Harriet Behar

The National Organic Standards Board held its fall 2025 meeting virtually on January 13-14, 2026. This delay was due to the government shutdown in November. Key aspects of the meeting covered compostable polymers, discussions of pear ester for insect management, chlorine used in livestock drinking water, integrating livestock with agroforestry, research priorities, consistency in organic seed use, e-commerce organic labeling, sunset review efficiency, and updates to the NOSB policy and procedures manual, which was postponed until the spring 2026 meeting. The NOP has not yet announced the dates for the spring NOSB meeting.

COMPOSTABLE POLYMERS (BIODEGRADABLE PLASTICS)

The NOSB voted against adding compostable polymers (biodegradable plastics), used as compost feedstock on organic land, to the National List as an allowed synthetic. The door remains open for petitions to add a specific item, such as leaf collection bags or fruit stickers. The board did approve a definition for compostable polymers. See OFA's position on these topics in our written comments.

SUNSET MATERIALS

Crops

- The board did not remove any materials scheduled for sunset in 2027.
- The following will remain on the National List for another 5 years: potassium hypochlorite, soap-based algicides, ammonium carbonate, insecticidal soaps, sucrose octanoate esters, Vitamin D3, aquatic plant extracts, lignin sulfonate, fatty alcohols, sodium silicate, EPA list 4 inerts, paper-based crop planting aids.
- Both arsenic and strychnine remain as prohibited natural materials in crops.

Livestock

- The board did not remove any materials scheduled for livestock sunset in 2027.

- The following will remain on the National List for another 5 years: Butorphanol, flunixin, magnesium hydroxide, oxytocin, poloxalene, formic acid, sucrose octanoate esters, EPA list 4 inerts, and excipients.
- Strychnine remains as a prohibited natural for livestock.
- The board voted to change the annotation for oxytocin; this will take effect once the NOP publishes the change in the Federal Register in 18-24 months.

“for use in post parturition therapeutic applications within 3 days of birth. It may not be administered to increase an animal's milk production or for milk letdown.”

Handling

- The NOSB voted to remove cornstarch from the list of nonorganic agricultural products allowed in organic foods. This will take effect once the NOP publishes the change in the Federal Register in 18-24 months.
- The board did not remove any other materials scheduled for handling sunset in 2027. The board had a robust discussion about agricultural food colors derived from nonorganic fruits and vegetables that have sufficient organic production, but the Board did not achieve the required two-thirds vote to remove non-organic natural colors, so NOP will not require certified organic colors.

REGULATORY PROPOSALS

- The NOSB passed the proposal for requiring testing of commodities in the global supply chain, which provides specific details for establishing a testing regime. In the future, the board will continue discussion on notification of fraud within the supply chain, and Unavoidable Residual Environmental Contamination (UREC).
- The board supported a proposal with definitions and future training opportunities for certifier staff and inspectors to focus certifier scrutiny on high-risk operations. This item will remain on the work agenda.
- The NOSB postponed other regulatory agenda items for discussion or vote at the spring meeting.
 - The spring agenda will include: Pear ester for insect management, chlorine used in livestock drinking water, integrating livestock with agroforestry, research priorities, consistency in organic seed use, e-commerce organic labeling, sunset review efficiency, and updates to the NOSB policy and procedures manual.
- The NOP is still reviewing past NOSB recommendations on ammonia extracts and highly soluble fertility inputs. The EPA did not identify negative impacts from these materials, but the NOP is still considering the NOSB vote to prohibit these products.
- Update on TDA: The NOP removed the accreditation of the Texas Department of Agriculture's organic certification program three years ago. TDA repeatedly appealed multiple court decisions; during the 2025 NOP accreditation review, NOP found that TDA had addressed the compliance concerns and re-approved their accreditation. 🌱



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.

NATIONAL ORGANIC PROGRAM UPDATE

- Import Certificates: Certifier-generated import certificates have been successful in identifying and preventing fraudulent imports, with over 300,000 generated since March 2024.
 - Still some loopholes: 30% of import certificates go through the EU or Canada under their equivalency agreements with the NOP, reducing NOP oversight.
- Top Imported Organic Commodities in 2025
 - \$850 million of beef from Uruguay and Australia
 - \$450 million of avocados from Mexico
 - \$250 million of bananas from Ecuador
 - \$500 million of coffee from Peru and Honduras
 - \$600 million of whole and processed organic soybeans imported from various countries
- Blueberries from Peru, strawberries and raspberries from Mexico were also in the top 10 Challenges: Difficulty tracking the country of origin for imported processed soybeans and other commodities due to the fact the country-of-harvest is not maintained on the audit trail.

SUBMIT YOUR COMMENTS TO THE NOSB THIS SPRING

Once the spring NOSB meeting is scheduled, OFA will again launch its NOSB Farmer Workgroup to help farmers prepare written and verbal comments on organic topics important to their farms.

Complete an interest form here:

organicfarmersassociation.org/workgroups

The decisions made by the NOSB directly affect the regulations governing organic production and commerce. Individual organic farmers, as well as OFA, can have significant impact with comprehensive comments based upon our personal experiences and shared discussion. **Join us!**



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On the Road Again

OFA Farmer Services Director Julia Barton has been on the road lately meeting farmers to learn about their challenges, wins, and needs (just like she does through OFA's Farmer HelpLine). You may have spotted Julia at the MOA, OEFFA, and PASA conferences sharing information and resources on organic.

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