

The Organic Voice

Organic Farmers Association – No. 21 • June 2026

Left Out to Dry

Drought has left Northeast organic dairies without hay and certification rules left them no way to substitute.

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Responding to New World Screwworm

As New World Screwworm reemerges, dairy farmers need clear guidance, coordinated action, and support.

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Chemical Trespass: Farmer Stories on Pesticide Drift and Resilience

How to prevent and deal with drift on your farm.

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- Organic Integrity & NOP Enforcement
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- Dismantling Corporate Consolidation
- Organic as a Solution to Climate Change



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From Our President

Farmers face so many issues in their occupation, it's hard to single out one or two as the most critical. In better times, most of us will point to the vagaries of weather and to inadequate prices for our products. Organic farmers may mention difficulties in certification and misunderstandings from non-organic producers. But in general, farmers aren't complainers, even when times are worse and the issues facing them become overwhelming.

We are in those worse times, and farmers are at risk.

Weather will always be inconstant and challenging, and that's well understood. But as weather extremes intensify with climate change, the challenge becomes greater and farmers' ability to cope is reduced.

Markets for agricultural products naturally rise and fall, and that's well understood and expected too. But when import markets are roiled by the sudden imposition of tariffs and export markets are shattered by retaliatory actions by trade partners, farmers get squeezed from both directions.

Laborers for farm work need to be experienced, reliable and available when needed. Finding enough farm labor has always been difficult in the U.S., but since 2025 the political climate has significantly shrunk the immigrant labor workforce, leaving crops without pickers and processors without workers.

Add to that the war against Iran, which has caused U.S. prices of diesel fuel and nitrogen fertilizers to jump by 50% in four months with little to no prospect for relief during the 2026 growing season. All but the smallest organic operations rely on diesel fuel, with no recourse but to pay the market price. And organic farmers are affected by the jump in fertilizer prices too, because as synthetic nitrogen becomes more costly, conventional farmers seek out and bid up the prices of manure and compost.

Farming has always been hard on the people who do it, requiring long days, often in isolation, with high injury rates.

I've written previously about the amazing resilience of farmers and ranchers, and still believe that farmers are the most resilient people I've ever met. But far too often, and especially when times are worse, that resilience isn't enough to keep coping. Every year more farmers and ranchers leave or stop working their land—often land that has been handed down for generations—and face losing reputation and identity in their communities. Some (too many) fall into depression and despair. In my state of Oregon, workers in agriculture, forestry and fishing had a suicide rate five times the state average,¹ and that was even before the current administration's trade actions and its war in Iran² compounded and intensified the issues facing farmers today.

Steady support from a healthy community is key to coping when resilience isn't enough. A local community of neighboring farmers provides that support for many of us. Organic farmers also get support from our customers who come to us for healthy food and fiber. And organic farmers comprise a national community that works to improve the American food system through education and advocacy.

Beyond your own communities of support, if you need mental health support, and especially if you are considering harming yourself, dial "988" to contact the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline immediately. In Oregon the AgriStress HelpLine at (833) 897-2474 is a free, 24/7 hotline for Oregon's agricultural and forestry communities, with operators trained to understand the unique stressors and situations of agriculture. Sincerely,




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



1. "Oregon Suicide Rates for Farming, Fishing and Forestry Workers Are Five Times the State Average", by Khushboo Rathore and James Neff, Oregon Journalism Project, May 22, 2026, <https://www.oregonjournalismproject.org/oregon-suicide-rates-farmer-rancher-logger>

2. "Suicide Deaths and Rates among People Aged 16 to 64 Years by Occupational Group, Oregon, 2018-2022", Oregon Health Authority, <https://visual-data.dhsosha.state.or.us/t/OHA/views/ORVDRS/Suicide>

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Summer Organic Policy News

By Lily Hawkins

As the midterm elections draw near, legislators are making moves to pass a new Farm Bill at last. But with high stakes and a polarized political climate, the outcome is uncertain. Meanwhile, work on annual Appropriations legislation and efforts to reorganize the USDA continue.

FARM BILL

With the passage of a House Farm Bill on April 30, attention is on the Senate Agriculture Committee. The committee can either take up the text passed in the House, or draft their own bill for introduction.

Leaders say they plan to introduce bill text in June and hope for passage before the August Recess, however, the Senate requires a difficult 60-vote threshold for passage. As the GOP pushes for a Farm Bill before the midterm elections, partisan friction remains over the same issues that took center stage in the House. Disagreements over funding for nutrition programs, pesticide preemption, and language aimed at counteracting California's Proposition 12 animal welfare policies will be sticking points in the current polarized political climate.

[Click here to urge the Senate to work for a Farm Bill that supports organic farmers!](#)

APPROPRIATIONS

Work on annual spending bills is underway, with 12 subcommittees working on spending bills that must pass by September 30 of this year in order to avoid a government shutdown.

The House passed its Agriculture-FDA spending bill this spring with a vote largely along party lines. The bill would cut USDA's funding by 3%, including cuts to fruit and vegetable benefits included in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women and Children (WIC).

At the time of publication, Senate appropriators had not yet met to mark up their version of the bill. Historically, the Senate has fully funded the cuts to WIC fruit and vegetable benefits, and left out some of the more controversial budget cuts proposed in the House funding bill.

USDA REORGANIZATION & PERSONNEL CRISIS

In April, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced upcoming moves in their massive reorganization aimed at shifting agency leadership and staff out of Washington, D.C. The announcement covered the move of two-thirds of Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) staff to Iowa and Georgia, while the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is being reassigned to St. Louis and various regional offices. Staff of the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) are being relocated to Kansas City, and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) facilities in Maryland are slated for closure, with research jobs to be dispersed across the country.

OFA is concerned that these orders to relocate could result in significant staff resignations, causing a loss of expertise and jeopardizing USDA ability to serve farmers.

While no announcements have yet been made about relocation for the National Organic Program (NOP), the agency has lost one-third of its staff this year alone, threatening organic integrity and the agency's ability to prevent fraud.

USDA CANCELS LAND ACCESS GRANTS – TAKE ACTION!

The Increasing Land, Capital, and Market Access Program, a \$300 million initiative funded by the American Rescue Plan Act, is under threat. Intended to support 50 five-year projects launched in 2023, these grants were designed to provide essential training and financial support for underrepresented producers—including Black, Indigenous, immigrant, and veteran farmers.

In a shocking move this March, the USDA cancelled 49 of the 50 active contracts. This follows a year of administrative delays under the guise of "DEI reviews." With the vast majority of farmland owned by non-farming landlords and prices continuing to skyrocket, these grants were a lifeline for the next generation of producers.



Urgent:
USDA Cancels Land Access Grants
Take Action! →

Click here to ask Secretary Rollins to reinstate the cancelled grants

And then click here to Ask Congress to Protect Farmer Contracts.

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.



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 >



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Left Out to Dry

By Anay Shah

Drought left Northeast organic dairies without hay and certification rules left them no way to substitute. Now farms built over generations face closure while transportation costs alone can exceed the price of the feed itself.



Image courtesy of Samantha Kemnah

A WINTER WITHOUT HAY

The hay that usually carries organic dairy herds through a Northeast winter never came in 2025. A drought hit New York early in the 2026 growing season, when organic pastures should have been building momentum. What didn't wilt in the heat simply never grew. By fall, organic producers who had managed through tight years before were facing empty barns and feed bills unlike anything they had seen. By winter, the problem had shifted from poor yields to a cash crisis, putting certified organic farms built over generations at risk of closing.

For conventional dairies, a bad hay year is painful but often survivable. For certified organic and 100% grass-fed operations, it can become a dead end. USDA organic standards prohibit non-organic feed, so when regional organic forage supplies disappeared, farms had to source certified organic hay from hundreds of miles away. Prices climbed, but transportation costs did even more damage. In many cases, delivered organic hay exceeded \$600 per ton, with trucking alone matching the cost of the hay itself.

For a typical 50-cow grass-fed organic dairy in the northeast, each cow needs about 2.3 tons of forage over five winter months. At current prices, that comes to roughly \$687 per cow for hay and another \$687 for trucking, for a total of nearly \$34,400. That is about \$6,875 per month for feed that, in a functioning organic system, would largely be grown on-farm or sourced regionally.

WHY THIS CRISIS ESCALATED

Ed Maltby, a longtime organic dairy advocate and leader in the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA), describes the crisis as both predictable and preventable. In a typical year, certified organic hay might cost around \$300 per ton. During the drought, prices rose modestly to \$350 or \$400. The real shock came from hauling certified organic feed long distances into the Northeast, which added as much as \$500 per ton. "You went up to \$350 to \$400 a ton," Maltby said, "but then you had an extra \$500 a ton."

Transportation, not production alone, turned a difficult organic growing season into a systemic crisis. A deeper issue made matters worse. Over time, fewer farms have been producing certified organic hay because demand in normal years was limited, leaving the organic feed system too thin to absorb a shock. When the drought hit, there was no resilient regional supply to fall back on.

Grass-fed organic farms were hit hardest. While standard organic certification allows limited supplementation with organic grain, grass-fed certification requires a 100% forage diet. That distinction became critical. When organic pasture failed, and local organic hay vanished, grass-fed producers had no flexibility within certification rules and were forced into the most expensive segment of an already strained market.

Image courtesy of Ed Maltby



RULES WITHOUT A SAFETY NET

This crisis exposed a structural problem within organic agriculture. Organic and grass-fed dairies operate under strict federal standards, but those standards do not adjust when organic supply chains break down. Conventional farms can substitute feed ingredients or shift rations. Organic farms cannot use non-certified feed without losing certification, which is the foundation of their market access. Grass-fed organic farms face even tighter constraints due to their forage-only requirements.

Some advocates briefly discussed requesting a temporary variance from organic feed rules, but the idea was quickly rejected. Samantha Kemnah, a New York grass-fed organic dairy farmer, explained the concern clearly: "If you bend the rules for a legitimate reason, they've been bent. You can't straighten that back out." In a political environment already pushing deregulation, weakening organic standards in a crisis could have lasting consequences for consumer trust and market integrity.

The alternative is to build organic-specific systems that allow farms to meet certification requirements even under extreme conditions. At present, those systems are largely absent.

Financially, many organic dairies were already operating under strain before the drought. A 2022 survey found average organic production costs at \$40.14 per hundredweight of milk, compared to an average organic pay price of \$33.27. That gap of nearly \$7 was being absorbed through equity and deferred risk.

In 2025, there was little federal support tailored to organic producers. Programs like Dairy Margin Coverage did not provide meaningful relief, and the Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program was inactive. New York, which leads the nation with more than 500 certified organic dairy farms, sits at the center of what has become an emergency in the organic sector.

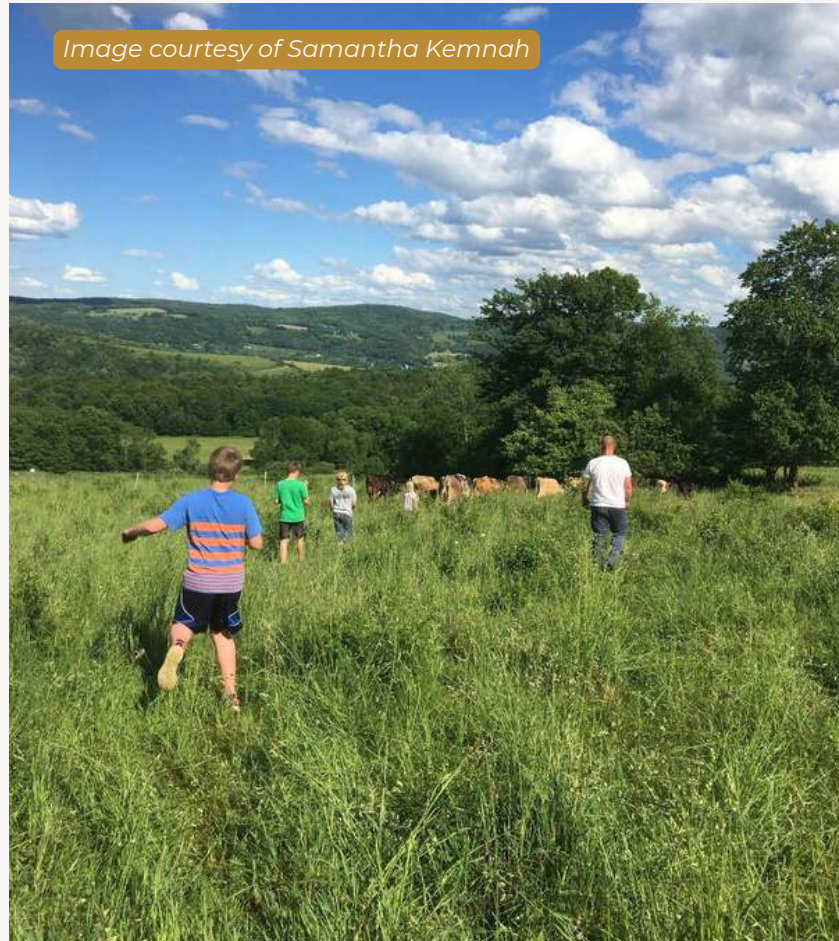
WHAT ORGANIC FARMERS EXPERIENCED

Kemnah runs a 50-cow grass-fed organic Jersey dairy in central New York and operates a farmer helpline for the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY). During the summer of 2025, she became the first point of contact for organic farmers trying to navigate the unfolding crisis.

The season delivered a double blow to organic pasture systems. Spring rains delayed grazing because saturated fields could not support livestock without causing damage, and then, in mid-June, the rain stopped entirely. Pastures dried out just as they were needed most. "This past year we were buying feed all year long to supplement," Kemnah said, "because we didn't have enough on pasture for them."

At the same time, organic hay production faltered. Late first cuttings reduced feed quality, and some farms never managed a second cutting, leaving certified organic winter reserves short before winter even began. Through the helpline, Kemnah saw how widespread the breakdown was across the organic network. Farmers began calling in August, asking where to find organic hay, but the answer was the same everywhere. "Farms that usually were selling were buying," she said.

Image courtesy of Samantha Kemnah



The regional organic feed system collapsed, forcing farmers to look as far as Colorado or Canada for certified forage. The issue was not simply the price of organic hay in those regions, but the cost of moving certified feed into the Northeast. "The transportation cost was more than doubling the cost of the feed," Kemnah said. "It's not that Colorado feed costs more than New York feed. It's getting it here." For many organic farms, especially smaller operations, there were no viable financial buffers to absorb those costs.

The crisis was not confined to New York. Mike Thresher works for Morrison Custom Feeds in Vermont, supplying organic farmers across the state and into northern New England. His view from the feed supply side confirmed how completely the regional network had broken down. Second cuts were sharply reduced throughout Vermont, third cuts barely materialized, and farms that had relied on seasonal harvests to stock their winter reserves came up short. Thresher began sourcing certified organic forage from wherever he could find it — including, ultimately, Oregon. As of spring 2026, he was still coordinating deliveries. "It's still an ongoing problem," he said. The forage shortage was compounded by a simultaneous collapse in organic grain supply: Quebec, a primary source of organic corn for the Northeast, was itself in severe drought. Corn prices rose roughly \$100 per ton, regional supplies had to be drawn from the Midwest, and Thresher says some operations resorted to importing organic corn from overseas — something he had not seen happen in the Northeast in many years. "I just don't see us recovering this year at all," he said. "We're going to be in very dire need of forages for the whole Northeast again."

POLICY GAPS AND WHAT COMES NEXT

New York's response to the organic dairy crisis has been limited compared to other Northeast states, some of which introduced feed transportation subsidies or emergency funds targeted at agricultural producers. Federal disaster programs also fell short of addressing the specific vulnerabilities of organic systems. The Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) could cover some feed transportation costs, but only 8 of New York's 62 counties qualified based on drought thresholds. Many organic dairies were left out, and the application window for 2025 losses closed in March 2026.

“The transportation cost was more than doubling the cost of the feed. It's not that Colorado feed costs more than New York feed. It's getting it here.”
– **Samantha Kemnah**

Even where programs exist, they are not well designed for organic participation. Staffing cuts at NRCS and FSA offices have reduced support for farmers navigating complex applications, and many organic producers rely on those offices for guidance. As Maltby noted, "Most of them will not necessarily be really conversant on what programs they need or can take advantage of." At the same time, a significant share of organic farms in the region are operated by Amish and Mennonite communities, who often do not participate in government programs and instead depend on community networks and fair market conditions.

Thresher's own attempts to access relief pointed to two specific failures worth noting. He suggested to the Vermont Farm Service Agency director a federally funded program designed to address forage quality and quantity losses—one that had been used effectively about a decade ago but has sat unfunded since. "That program is still there," he said, "it just hasn't been funded." For certified organic forages that had been harvested and inspected in 2024 on farms that subsequently changed ownership, their certification was stripped even though the feed itself had been produced to organic standards. An exemption from the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) in this case could have enabled relief for dairy farmers. Yet, this exemption from the NOP never came.

Regional organic organizations, including NOFA-NY and the Organic Farmers Association, have called on milk buyers to provide emergency market adjustments. Maltby puts the responsibility clearly: "It is the responsibility of organic milk buyers to support their farmer suppliers when natural disasters increase their already high costs for producing organic milk—both Organic Grass-Fed certified and Organic certified. There are no safety nets for organic dairies."



BE A PART OF FARMER-LED POLICY SOLUTIONS

JOIN A FARMER WORKGROUP THIS FALL

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.

- Crop Insurance Workgroup: Make crop insurance work better for organic and transitioning farmers during this monthly one-hour session by working to ensure crop insurance is fair and functional.
• 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.

The consequences of organic farm closures would extend well beyond individual operations. Organic dairy is not easily rebuilt. Once a certified herd is dispersed, re-entry requires years of transition and significant capital, with the three-year land organic certification process creating a structural barrier. At the same time, demand for organic milk continues to grow at about 4 to 5 percent annually, and organic now accounts for roughly 7 percent of U.S. milk sales. Buyers are seeking supply, but the certified farms that produce it are under severe strain.

Maltby frames this as a question of fairness within the organic marketplace. "If the milk buyer wants that product," he said, "then they have to pay the right cost for it." Kemnah underscores the broader role organic farms play in resilient food systems: "Small-scale farmers contribute to food security." As fuel and transportation costs rise, regional organic production becomes more valuable. Even if milk remains on store shelves, the loss of certified organic farms weakens the integrity and resilience of the organic system itself.

The Organic Farmers Association is urging Congress and the USDA to respond with organic-specific solutions, including covering the transportation costs of certified organic feed during emergencies and ensuring organic dairies are fully included in disaster programs. Organic dairy operates under a federal certification system with strict requirements. When those requirements make farms more vulnerable to supply shocks, policy must account for that vulnerability. Without targeted support, the system risks undermining the very organic farms it is designed to sustain.



Anay is a freshman at Georgetown University pursuing a B.S. in International Economics with a certificate in Global Development Studies. He is deeply interested in the intersection of economics and agriculture and sees organic farming as a powerful space for more equitable policy and resilient rural economies.

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**ORGANIC FARMERS
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New OFA Policies for 2026

By Lily Hawkins

The Organic Farmers Association champions the needs of domestic certified organic farmers in Washington, D.C. through a unique farmer-led, grassroots policy development process. See this year's policies nominated and voted on by organic farmers.

HOW OFA'S POLICY PROCESS WORKS

Each year, OFA initiates its policy work by surveying U.S. certified organic farmers and organic farm organizations. This comprehensive survey gathers crucial input on policy priorities and positions, ensuring a broad and representative range of farmer voices are heard from the outset. This intentionally inclusive process puts farmers at the forefront of OFA's advocacy efforts.

Next, the OFA Policy Committee meticulously reviews the survey results. OFA members then provide comments on these proposed policies, helping to refine and narrow down the focus to actionable and high-impact priorities. The final step in this democratic process involves OFA organic farmer members voting to accept or reject these policy positions.

ADOPTING NEW POLICIES

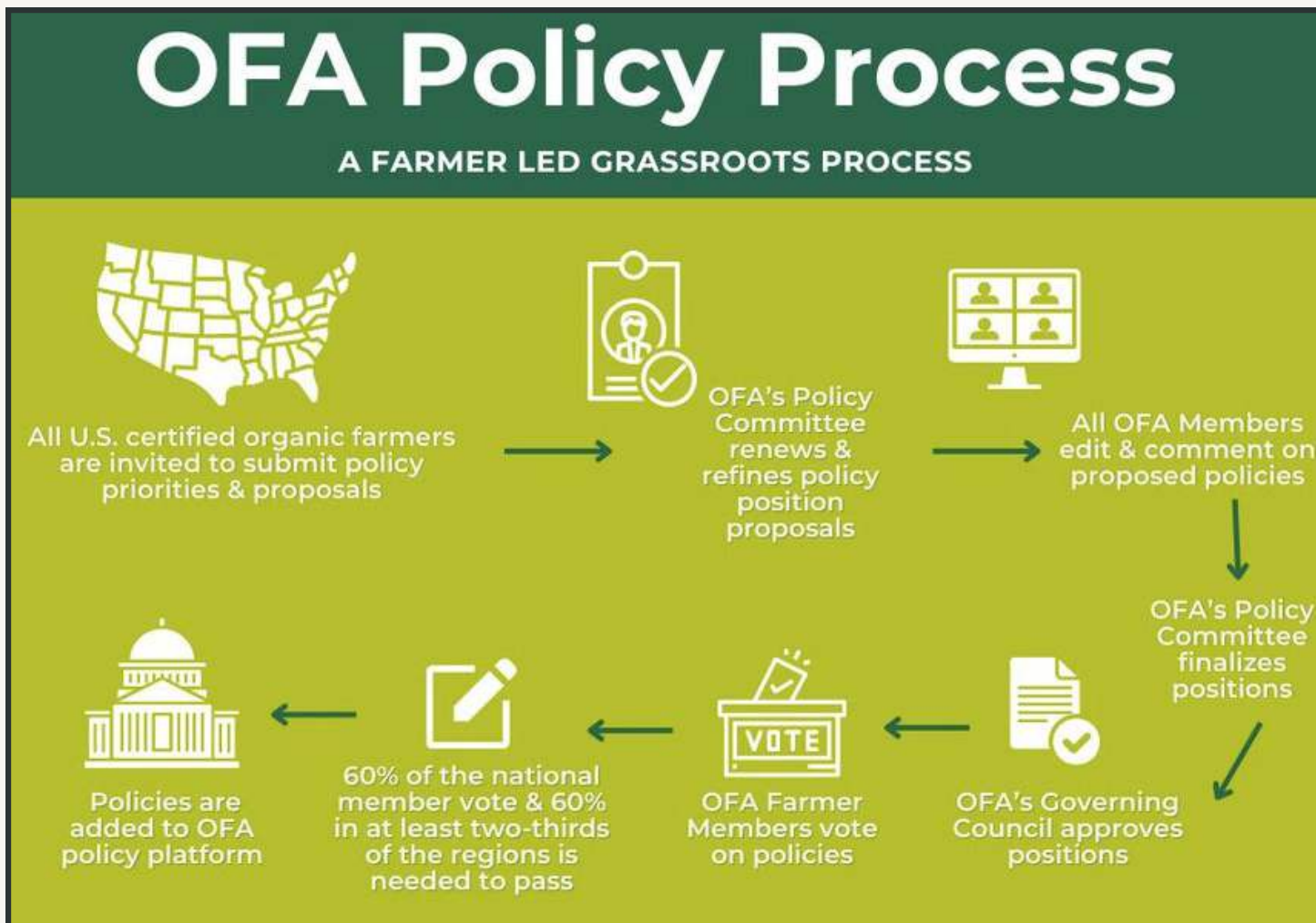
For a policy proposal to be officially adopted by OFA, it must achieve significant support: a 60% national farmer member popular vote and 60% popular support in at least two-thirds of the six designated regions. Once adopted or revised, these policies become integral to the OFA Policy Platform, guiding all of OFA's future advocacy work.

2026 POLICY OUTCOMES & FEDERAL ADVOCACY

This year, all proposed policies and revisions received the necessary votes for adoption. These newly approved policies will steer OFA's advocacy, particularly throughout this extremely extended Farm Bill cycle. While the future of the next Farm Bill is uncertain, OFA continues to advocate for its priority policies Washington D.C.

2026 TOP ORGANIC POLICY PRIORITIES

1. Making USDA Programs work for Organic Farmers (48%)
2. Organic Certification that is practical and affordable (47%)
3. NOP Enforcement to Ensure Organic Integrity (46%)
4. Prohibiting Certified Organic Hydroponic and Container Growing (43%)
5. Corporate Control and Consolidation in the Organic Market (40%)
6. Import Fraud (38%)
7. Organic Market Supply Chain Development (31%)
8. Organic Research (28%)
9. National Organic Standards Board Issues and Agenda (26%)
10. Beginning Farmer Issues (25%)
11. Climate Change and Conservation (21%)



BEGINNING FARMER & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

U.S. farmland values reached record highs in 2025, marking the 5th consecutive year of growth. The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) Direct Farm Ownership Down Payment loan program currently has a maximum loan amount not to exceed 45% of whichever is the lesser amount of: the purchase price; the appraised value of the farm being purchased; or \$667,000. Farm Ownership Loans offer up to 100 percent financing and are a valuable resource to help farmers and ranchers purchase or enlarge family farms, improve and expand current operations, increase agricultural productivity, and assist with land tenure to save farmland for future generations. With a maximum loan amount of \$600,000 (\$300,150 for Beginning Farmer Down Payment).

New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS increasing the FSA loan limit for farm ownership to reflect the average real estate and cropland values of farmland on an annual basis, as determined during the annual appropriations process.

CONTAMINATION (PESTICIDE & GMO DRIFT)

One of OFA's core values states: "Organic farmers have the right to farm without contamination from genetically engineered crops, synthetic pesticides, and other environmental contaminants." The PFAS and Agriculture Policy Workgroup, led by American Farmland Trust, has developed several congressional recommendations on PFAS.

New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS an immediate ban on the application of biosolids, also known as "sewage sludge," to farmland to avoid PFAS contamination.

ECONOMIC VIABILITY

Growth in domestic organic acreage has not kept pace with the rising national demand for organic goods. The main obstacle to entering the organic market is supply chain constraints, including processing infrastructure and transportation to reach potential organic buyers and consumers.

The U.S. is a net exporter of conventional commodities and a net importer of organic commodities. Domestic demand for organic products, particularly grains for livestock feed, has consistently grown over the past decade.

There are several Farm Bill marker bills aimed at addressing this issue. The Domestic Organic Investment Act (DOIA) aims to overcome this barrier, allowing more local producers to benefit from the economic potential of the expanding organic market by making strategic investments in the marketplace. The **Organic Imports Verification Act** would promote organic integrity and a level playing field for domestic organic producers by requiring the USDA to test high-risk bulk imports of organic feedstuffs for residues of substances that are prohibited in organic production.

New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS policies that prioritize and promote regional food systems and domestic organic production.

New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS policies and programs that facilitate and prioritize the inclusion of domestically-grown organic foods in public and institutional purchasing/procurement programs.



Farmers voted for a new policy under Pesticide & GMO Drift in 2026

NATIONAL ORGANIC STANDARDS BOARD (NOSB)

Approximately 60% of USDA-certified organic operations in the United States are crop and livestock farmers, with the remaining 40% consisting of processors, manufacturers, and other food-handling businesses. At times, farmer seats on the NOSB have been held by large corporations, and seat holders were not farmers.

Updated Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS strong farmer input into the NOSB process, and supports requiring that the farmer-seat on the NOSB must be filled by a certified organic farm operator (according to USDA-ERS definition), with a diversity of markets, geographies, and scales represented.

This revises: OFA SUPPORTS requiring that the farmer-seat on the NOSB is filled by a farm operator (according to USDA-ERS definition). (Adopted by the farmer membership 2019.)

USDA PROGRAMS (NRCS, FSA, RMA, ETC.)

Organic farmers have unique needs and circumstances that sometimes conflict with existing USDA programs, many of which were not designed for organic farmers. In 2026 Making USDA Programs work for Organic Farmers was the issue most frequently identified as the top priority for the first time, with 48% of survey respondents selecting it.

New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS stronger State and Federal programs that recognize that certified organic operations are regenerative and, per se, eligible for programs supporting regenerative agriculture.

New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS USDA should ensure all existing safety-net programs are applicable and accessible to organic and diversified producers of all sizes.

ORGANIC INTEGRITY

Organic farmers work hard to protect the integrity of the crops they produce and the label that consumers trust. Ensuring organic integrity is consistently a top priority of organic farmers.

Updated Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS giving NOP the authority needed, in coordination with Customs and Border Protection, to implement enhanced procedures to track organic imports and ensure that imported products fully comply with U.S. organic standards.

This revises: OFA SUPPORTS the Organic Farmer and Consumer Protection Act, which includes new Farm Bill requirements for USDA, in coordination with Customs and Border Protection, to implement enhanced procedures to track organic imports and ensure that imported products fully comply with U.S. organic standards. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2018.)

The revision eliminates an out-of-date bill from the policy.



Making USDA programs work for organic farmers was the top voted issue in 2026.

ORGANIC RESEARCH

Investing in organic research has significant benefits that help all farmers, not just organic farmers.

New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS increasing funding of federal organic agricultural production research to at least the same percentage represented by retail organic USD sales within the US marketplace. Funding should prioritize research conducted on working organic farms and include farmer-led research to ensure the research is practical for organic farmers.

This revises: OFA SUPPORTS increasing funding of federal organic agricultural production research to at least the same percentage represented by retail organic sales within the US marketplace. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2018.)

All these new and updated policies are a reflection of ongoing farmer policy priorities in the Farm Bill and beyond. To read more about the marker bills OFA is advocating for, follow our **Marker Bill Tracker**.

Lillian Hawkins is 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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Responding to New World Screwworm: What Dairy Farmers Need and Why It Matters

As New World Screwworm reemerges, dairy farmers need clear guidance, coordinated action, and timely support to protect animals and livelihoods.

By Lia Sieler

Over the past few weeks, New World Screwworm has been confirmed in multiple cases in the United States, including cattle in Texas and a dog case later reclassified to New Mexico. Investigations are ongoing, and USDA has said it will share additional information as it becomes available.

New World Screwworm is a serious pest that threatens livestock, pets, wildlife, and, in rare cases, people. Its larvae burrow into living tissue, causing severe wounds, animal suffering, and major economic losses. As of June 8, USDA had confirmed five U.S. cases and was continuing to test suspected cases. Dudley Hoskins, Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, urged animal owners to stay alert, check animals carefully, and report anything suspicious.

USDA and the Texas Animal Health Commission are using the following measures to contain the spread:

- Establishing and maintaining a 20km infested zone with quarantines, movement controls, and heightened surveillance around confirmed detections
- Increasing trapping along the border and outside the dispersal zone
- Conducting surveillance and management strategies in wildlife
- Implementing targeted outreach to local producers, veterinarians, and communities

USDA is also continuing sterile fly releases over and just beyond the infested areas. USDA has activated the sterile fly dispersal facility at Moore Air Base in Edinburg, Texas, to support faster aerial release operations in affected areas of Texas and northern Mexico near the border. USDA is urging animal owners in the area to watch for the following signs:

1. Draining or enlarging wounds
2. Maggots or egg masses
3. Signs of discomfort
4. Lesions in body openings (nose, ears, genitalia, umbilical area)

According to USDA officials, the U.S. food supply remains safe. New World Screwworm does not affect meat, fruits, vegetables, or other food products. If an animal were infected, USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service inspections would identify it, and no contaminated product would enter the market.

What is New World Screwworm? New World Screwworm (NWS, *Cochliomyia hominivorax*) is a highly destructive pest. The name comes from the larvae's feeding behavior: they burrow into wounds in a twisting motion, much like a screw entering wood. The maggots damage living tissue with sharp mouth hooks, and wounds can enlarge and deepen as more larvae hatch and feed. Adult screwworm flies are about the size of, or slightly larger than, houseflies and are identified by orange eyes, metallic blue or green bodies, and three dark stripes on their backs.

How does NWS infect animals? NWS larvae, also known as maggots, invade the tissue of living animals and can cause severe, sometimes fatal, injuries. The pest can infest warm-blooded hosts, including livestock, pets, wildlife, people, and birds.

How serious is NWS? NWS infestations can be devastating and often become life-threatening for affected animals if not treated quickly.

Why are sterile fly releases so important? Female NWS flies mate only once. If a female mates with a sterile male, she cannot produce offspring. Sterile flies can be released by air or ground, although aerial release is preferred when large areas must be covered.

In June 2025, USDA announced a five-pronged plan to address New World Screwworm.

1. Innovate our way to eradication
2. Protect the U.S. border by constructing a domestic sterile screwworm production facility
3. Prevent wildlife-assisted migration
4. Stop the pest from spreading in Mexico and ensure full partnership in eradication efforts

Keep U.S. food safety a top priority

ORGANIC TREATMENT CONSIDERATIONS FOR CERTIFIED PRODUCERS

APHIS provides guidance on detection and reporting, but organic-specific treatment recommendations remain very limited. Producers can review Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) listings to confirm whether a product is allowed and should also consult their veterinarian.

Routine insecticide use is generally not very effective against New World Screwworm because larvae can infest wounds in wildlife hosts. For that reason, control relies mainly on early detection, surveillance, and the release of sterile male flies rather than routine spraying.

Organic livestock producers may recognize moxidectin as a treatment allowed under USDA National Organic Program (NOP) rules for severe parasitism when preventive organic management is not enough.

Questions have recently come up about whether **moxidectin** could help manage New World Screwworm (NWS). Current FDA-authorized treatment and prevention options for NWS in cattle focus on doramectin products, including Dectomax. Some studies on Old World Screwworm (OWS) found that **injectable moxidectin** can provide strong protection against myiasis and reinfestation in cattle. However, those studies involved OWS, not NWS, so evidence for New World Screwworm remains limited. Injectable moxidectin would likely be more effective than a pour-on treatment, which may not circulate or act quickly enough to treat an active infestation. It is important to note that if a farm chooses to use Moxidectin it will be extra-label use and needs to be done through the farm's veterinarian.


For organic operations, moxidectin would likely be used only as a treatment when no other option is available and with an explanation to the certifier. It may also be considered at the time of wounding as a preventive measure when the risk of NWS is especially high. Even so, whole-herd injections are unlikely to be cost-effective or efficient, since the benefit may last only days to a couple of weeks.

PyGanic Specialty remains the only OMRI-listed livestock product referenced here for killing adult flies. It is labeled for animal contact and has long been used for adult fly control. It is not yet clear whether it is effective against larvae. A separate wound-treatment option is still needed, and moxidectin has been discussed as one possible area for further study.



Image courtesy of USDA

STEPS FARMERS CAN TAKE TO HELP PREVENT INFESTATION

- Watch livestock for signs of NWS. Detection, surveillance, & treatment are essential.
- Handle livestock carefully and inspect pens and equipment for sharp objects that can cause wounds, including barbed wire.
- Treat the umbilical cords of newborn animals and all wounds promptly with an approved product where appropriate. Consult your herd veterinarian and organic certifier about the best options for your operation.
- Protect livestock from other wound-causing parasites, such as ticks. Female NWS flies can lay eggs in even very small wounds, including tick-bite sites.
- Do not bring in animals from Mexico or Central America.
- Continued attention to regular fly and tick control and prevention as crucial.
- If you believe you have found a screwworm, report it immediately to your state animal health official and your APHIS office. Prompt reporting allows APHIS and its partners to respond quickly and eliminate screwworms before a population becomes established. More information about New World Screwworm is available at [Screwworm.gov](https://www.screwworm.gov). 



Lia Sieler is a third-generation farmer born and raised on her family farm in Galt, CA. Lia graduated from Chico State with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture. After graduating, she moved to the foothills of California where she lives now with her husband, Robert, and their baby boy, RC. Lia works for WODPA as the Executive Director as well as working part time for DairyWorks helping farmers with animal welfare certifications and documentation.

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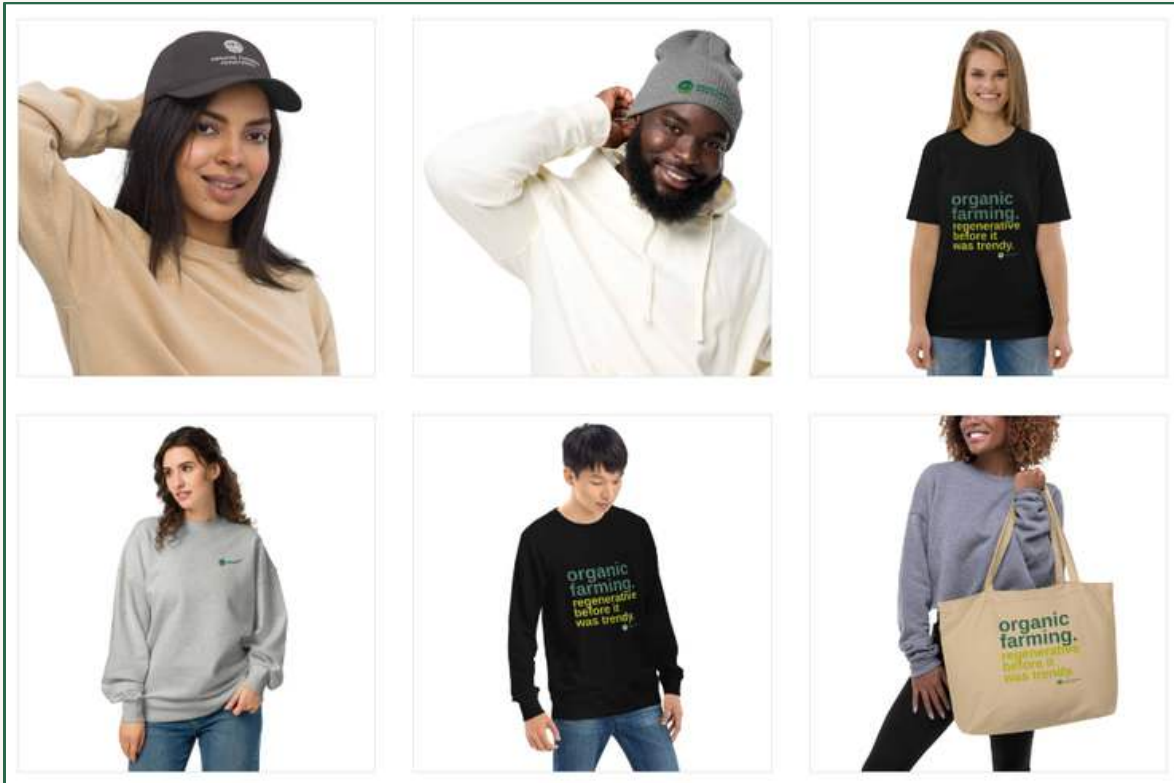
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Summary of Spring 2026 National Organic Standards Board Meeting

By Harriet Behar

The spring NOSB meeting was held in Omaha, NE, a few weeks later than usual and with fewer than the full number of NOSB members. Five new appointees to the NOSB were supposed to start their five-year terms in January 2026, but as of early June, they have not yet been appointed. The USDA Secretary of Agriculture has not yet appointed the 5 new NOSB members, scheduled to start in January 2026, and many public commenters and NOSB members expressed frustration and concern that the current board of 10 members is doing the work of 15 people. The NOSB is missing representation from two producers, two consumer representatives, and one certifier because of this delay. While this meeting was in person, the next meeting will be fully virtual in the fall. The date has not yet been set.

SPRING MEETING MATERIALS REVIEW

At every spring meeting, the NOSB conducts a preliminary discussion of the materials on the National List scheduled for relisting (“sunset”) as part of the five-year rotation. The Board votes on these materials at the fall meeting. For synthetic materials to be placed on the National List, they must be reviewed by the NOSB and receive a two-thirds vote of approval. The NOP does follow the vast majority of NOSB sunset recommendations, but has, at times, not agreed with the NOSB to remove a material, mostly for market disruption reasons. The NOSB discussion and public comments did not highlight any controversial materials during this rotation. Carrageenan is the exception. The NOP did not remove it after the last sunset vote. This board appears to be leaning towards relisting.

NOP UPDATE

The National Organic Program starts each meeting with a summary of its activities and priorities. Organic import oversight continues to be a focus, and the NOP has made progress by using data from new import-tracking systems to inform enforcement targeting. Testing at ports of entry is being done on a limited basis, on livestock feedstuffs and fresh produce. The NOP stopped \$15M of fraudulent organic products at the border in the past 6 months. Soy remains the highest-risk commodity, and beef from Uruguay and Australia is the highest-volume. The NOP sent auditors to these countries to review compliance and found that, in some cases, Uruguay was not meeting the Origin of Livestock rule, but no other significant issues were found.

A new “common Organic System Plan” was announced and has now been posted on the USDA website. The NOP is encouraging its use to streamline certification and reduce burdensome oversight. The Organic Farmers Association contacted numerous organic farmers to help with the review and development of the crop and livestock OSPs. After preliminary review, they incorporated many of the concerns farmers identified. A new common inspection reporting form will be the next document developed, and OFA is working to be part of the process as well. OFA believes farmers need to be consulted at the beginning of these regulatory reforms rather than at the tail-end.

CROPS


The crops subcommittee passed a proposal to add pear ester to the national list, excluding the microencapsulated formulation to avoid the dispersal of microplastics. Pear ester can be used in other formulations that are not sprayed. Crop sunset materials for 2026 include: calcium hypochlorite, chlorine dioxide, hypochlorous acid, sodium hypochlorite, copper sulfate (a slight annotation change is being considered), ozone gas, peracetic acid, magnesium oxide, and EPA List 3 inerts, as well as two prohibited naturals: calcium chloride and rotenone.

Organic seed was an important crop topic, focusing on barriers to increasing the percentage of organic seed used across all crops, activities to increase the volume of organic seed used, and growers' access to regionally adapted organic seed. Induced mutagenesis, a method that uses chemicals or radiation to induce mutations in seeds to develop specific characteristics, was discussed in detail by a panel of scientists. Some vegetable varieties currently in wide use (mostly in the brassica family) were developed with this technology. The NOSB discussed grandfathering these varieties for use in organic, banning the technology in the future, banning the method, or allowing the method. More discussion on these topics will continue in the fall.

LIVESTOCK

A proposal was passed that added to the annotation for chlorine, allowing its use in livestock drinking water, provided it meets Clean Drinking Water Act levels. Numerous groups expressed concern that implementing this rule could lead to burdensome, repetitive testing if a well is repeatedly shocked with chlorine over time. The NOSB plans to clarify the testing requirements in its final document to avoid this problem and specify that only treated wells need to meet the Clean Drinking Water Act. The Livestock sunset materials included: activated charcoal, calcium borogluconate, calcium propionate, calcium hypochlorite, chlorine dioxide, hypochlorous acid, sodium hypochlorite, kaolin pectin, mineral oil, nutritive supplements, propylene glycol, sodium chlorite acidified, and zinc sulfate.

The livestock subcommittee also discussed a possible change to the interval between manure application and harvest of tree fruit/nut and vineyard human-consumed crops. OFA initiated this discussion after receiving policy survey comments indicating that numerous fruit/nut growers wished to graze animals in their orchards and that the current 90-day interval prevented this practice. OFA discussed this issue with over 20 growers across the U.S. this spring, and numerous farmers submitted both written and oral comments to the NOSB on this subject. The subcommittee plans to develop a proposal for either guidance or rulemaking, with a focus on clarifying the difference between manure application (an intentional layer of many tons per acre) and a manure deposit (pounds per acre of manure left behind by rotated livestock grazing) on a vegetated understory. OFA farmers suggested a shorter interval, between 1-3 weeks, between a manure deposit and harvest of human-consumed orchard or vineyard crops. [Read more in the OFA written comments.](#)

OFA welcomes any farmer to be part of discussions on topics relating to NOSB work to [join our NOSB workgroup](#). Your voice can make a difference! 



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.

The Issue of the Moment: What Farmers Need to Know About ICE on Their Farms

By Rachel Armstrong

For many organic farmers, questions about immigration enforcement aren't abstract—they're personal. With a workforce that is often deeply rooted in immigrant communities, the stakes are high. What happens if ICE shows up? What are your rights? And how can you protect your land and the people who work it?

What many farmers don't know is that federal regulations actually prohibit ICE from coming onto a farm for immigration enforcement purposes without permission or a warrant. Specifically, under 8 CFR 287.8(f)(2), immigration officers may not "enter into... a farm or other outdoor agricultural operation" to question workers about their status unless they have consent or a warrant. That's a powerful starting place for any farm or agricultural operation to assert their rights.

Imagine this: Maria runs a small organic vegetable farm. One morning during harvest, a truck pulls up and a few individuals step out. They appear to be with ICE. Maria isn't there—but her crew leader, Luca, is. He's nervous, unsure what to do. The agents start walking toward the fields. At the entrance to Maria's farm was a clearly posted sign: "Private farm property. No entry for immigration enforcement without a judicial warrant. See 8 CFR 287.8(f)(2)."

Luca has been trained. He calmly steps forward and says, "Did you see the sign at the entrance? If not, here, I have one here. This is a farm. Section 8 of the Code of Federal Regulations says that ICE may not enter for immigration enforcement purposes without either a judicial warrant or permission. I am not granting that permission. Do you have a judicial warrant?"

The agents pause. Maybe they present a warrant. Maybe they leave. Maybe they ask questions. A sign doesn't necessarily or immediately resolve the situation. But it does give the farm owner or manager more power to steer the interaction so that it stays in accordance with the law.

Technically, the law is already on Luca and Maria's side. ICE does not need a sign to be bound by its own regulations. But in real life, things aren't always so clean. Farms are unique spaces. They're open, expansive, and often feel public—even when they're not. An ICE officer unfamiliar with the regulations governing the agency may not be aware of the limitation. The ICE officer may only have been taught that they must avoid private spaces, and might assume a field is fair game, especially given that other law enforcement agencies sometimes can enter "open fields" under constitutional law.



Example of a farm sign from The Land Stewardship Project

A sign reminds officers of the specific regulation limiting their authority while supporting employees in responding confidently and consistently to the possibility of immigration enforcement.

Now, this isn't to say that ICE and other immigration enforcement agencies can never enter a farm. The regulatory prohibition above is limited to questioning the occupants or employees concerning their right to be or remain in the United States. ICE can enter any farm to inspect forms I9. If ICE wants to see that the I9 processes are being followed, it needs to issue a "Notice of Inspection" to the business. Businesses then have three days to respond, during which time they may contact an attorney to assist them with the inspection.

During the delivery of notice and the inspection, ICE is allowed on a farm. In addition, immigration enforcement agencies have broader access when the farm is located near an international border or the enforcement activity concerns a vehicle. Those nuances which aren't discussed here.

You don't need to become a legal expert to protect your farm. Farms that hire people need to read and follow the directions on the Form I9 precisely. Small, practical steps like signage and staff training can make a meaningful difference when it comes to enforcement. In a moment of uncertainty, clarity is powerful. And sometimes, that clarity starts with a simple sign at the end of your driveway.

The Land Stewardship Project developed a yard sign, driveway sign and 2 fliers to help folks notify ICE of the appropriate regulations. You can find their graphics for printing as a link at the bottom of their [Best Practices and Considerations for Farm Tours & Field Days 2026](#), under Resources to Print. 🌱



Rachel Armstrong is the Executive Director and founder of Farm Commons, a nonprofit committed to making the law accessible to producers.

Do you have an ICE story to share?

If you have had an experience with ICE on your farm, please reach out to our Farmer Services Team. We're collecting stories to document cases. You can remain anonymous and we won't share your stories without your permission.

Call the HelpLine: (833) 724-3834
helpline@organicfarmersassociation.org

Chemical Trespass: Farmer Stories on Pesticide Drift and Resilience

By Amanda Ohnmacht

BUDDING MOON FARM

In August of 2021, as Jared Lukens-Black of Budding Moon Farm was preparing vegetables for a CSA delivery, he was suddenly struck by a strong whiff of chemicals. Leaving his wash-pack area to investigate, Jared discovered to his dismay, county operators spraying the rural roadside that abuts his farm property for weeds— an action that would have dire consequences for his farm.

As the farm is fairly isolated from other agricultural operations, Jared had never expected to fall victim to a pesticide drift event. Jared remarks, “I really hadn’t expected it to happen based on where we’re located, but despite that, I’ve also been registered on DriftWatch for a while.” Jared later discovered the offending applicator was also a registered user on DriftWatch.

Jared began to notice signs of drift damage throughout his production area, which were confirmed by residue tests revealing herbicide contamination.

With consumer health in mind, he made the tough decision to end the growing season early and dispose of all of the affected crops. Jared explains, “a big part of why I grow organic is for environmental health, but also for the health and well-being of all the consumers of my products... I don’t use any—even approved for organic pesticides—on the farm, so I definitely wasn’t going to be okay with exposing customers to non-organic approved pesticides.” This devastating decision cost the farm tens of thousands of dollars in lost produce and CSA sales while also depriving the surrounding community access to a source of local, healthy food.

Unfortunately, Jared’s struggles didn’t end there. When reporting the incident to the county, he was met with great resistance. “I contacted the county, and they wanted to deny that there had been any effect...I would say the county was not friendly, but hostile towards me as well as their insurance company, and the suppliers of their chemicals had the same sort of hostile responses,” he explains. After the county insurance company denied Jared’s claim for compensation, he sought legal assistance.

Photo: Budding Moon Farm

Jared goes on to explain that, despite having substantial evidence of drift damage and a strong case, his lawyer advised him that the county would most likely fight him to the end, resulting in sizable legal costs. After covering the initial legal and residue testing expenses and issuing refunds to CSA members, Jared decided to cut his losses rather than pursue further legal action. Fortunately, Jared has not experienced another drift event since. He continues to proactively communicate with anyone who would have reason to spray around his farm and believes that deciding to pursue legal action may have highlighted the severity of the situation to the county, dissuading them from spraying near his property again.

DriftWatch

DriftWatch is a free national registry site and mapping program where specialty crop producers and beekeepers can register their sensitive production areas. Pesticide applicators can use the tool to identify these areas before spraying and take steps to reduce the risk of pesticide drift. To learn more visit: <https://driftwatch.org>

JARED'S ADVICE FOR FARMERS?

Jared encourages farmers to run through a theoretical drift event like a "fire drill in their head." He advises farmers to preemptively compile educational resources on pesticide drift and contacts for pesticide residue testing and legal representatives. "Pre-educating themselves would be the biggest advice I would give, and communicating with neighbors." Communication and relationship building play a key role in Jared's protection strategy. "I do have neighbors looking out for me", Jared says. "So if anybody sees the county with spray equipment anywhere within a couple miles of us, I receive texts and calls immediately."

Right: Tomatoes harvested from plants affected by drift over 300 pounds harvested
Source: Instagram Budding Moon Farm



Pictured: Jared Lukens-Black and Anna Lukens-Black
Founded in 2018, Budding Moon Farm is located in Spearfish, SD and operates on roughly ½ acre. The certified organic operation provides mixed vegetables and fruits to the local community primarily through their CSA. *The event was before he had been certified, but he had been practicing organic standards. He pursued certification 3 years after the incident.



PRAIRIESUN ORGANIC FARM

In an effort to escape the drift issues her farm was experiencing in Iowa, Angela Jackson-Pulse relocated her family and farm to South Dakota— but she didn't know what she was up against. "Little did I realize that actually the problems were pervasively worse and the community at the time was very hostile to organic farmers," Angela explains.

Angela and her husband Glenn own and operate Prairiesun Organic Farm, a 20-acre certified organic farm producing mixed vegetables, berries, eggs, and poultry. Angela and her family farmed the property while living in town, eventually building a house and moving onto the farm. "We had no idea how bad [the spraying] was until we moved to the farm in 2015, and that's when all the problems began", she remarks. "My first summer on the farm, I was flabbergasted—it was a constant buzzing of spray planes over the top of the farm for days in July. It just never ended..."

Taking precautionary measures such as posting no-spray signs, registering on DriftWatch, and notifying neighbors of their farm's organic status was not enough to safeguard their farm against drift. Angela recalls their first major drift event— a crop duster spraying a neighboring field dangerously close to their property.

"It was July 2017...and I heard this plane—and it flew so close to the top of my house that my windows were rattling. Stuff was falling off the walls," Angela explains. Glenn waved a no-spray sign at the pilot, shouting for him to stop. Unphased, the pilot continued—making a descent straight towards their house. "He looked right at us, turned the booms on, and just sprayed," Angela said. "He just kept circling over our houses and spraying."

Angela's chickens quickly fell ill, accompanied by a massive bee death. Angela recalls, "bees just started dying in the field...thousands of them were dead. My chickens were eating the dead insects that were on the ground, and now they're sick. And it smelled like dead fish everywhere," noting that the farm borders a stream leading to the Vermillion River.

**"There were just dead things everywhere. Everything was dying, and it was a horrific smell."
— Angela Jackson-Pulse**



Angela Jackson-Pulse

"We introduced legislation multiple times trying to get reform to protect organic farmers and beekeepers from this horrific onslaught of chemicals...we wrote numerous reports, letters, and we testified before legislative hearings." Recalling the hostility met along the way, Angela explains, "I was not liked. I was called a lot of names, and it was hard for me to be attacked like that for my right to farm this way and for standing up for my rights to be an organic farmer." Angela reflects on her advocacy journey stating, "it's changed me as a person and that it's really made me aware of the injustices that organic farmers have to go through. It made me a fighter for everybody, not just for me, but for all organic farmers that have to go through this."

Angela is happy to report that her steadfast determination and advocacy have inspired the surrounding community to adopt more sustainable land management practices, such as no-spray methods and participation in the Conservation Reserve Program. No-spray signs are posted throughout the neighborhood, and spray planes no longer fly over their property. Angela adds, "It has been a complete turnaround. We went through a horrific story, but I want organic farmers to know, too, that there is a silver lining to this."

"If you stand up for yourself and you don't back down, you could be an influencer or a change agent for all your neighbors and people around you to understand that you do have a right to farm this way."

For more information on drift prevention and to hear Angela and Jared share their stories in webinar format, please check out OFA's online resources on drift prevention (in Spanish and English!). 🎧

Drift Resources for Organic Farmers

To prevent local, county, or state spray programs from treating your land, you must proactively contact your local public works department, county engineer, or vegetation management office to request inclusion on their "No Spray" list.

This usually involves signing a registry and marking your property boundaries with official "No Spray" signs.

[Here is a factsheet with more information.](#)

[The Pesticide Action Network has a toolkit](#) for dealing with pesticide drift.

[Organic No Spray Signs](#)



Amanda is a graduate student studying Sustainable Food Systems at Arizona State University. She holds a BFA in Ceramics with a minor in Applied Biological Sciences from ASU, along with a certificate in Sustainable Agriculture from Mesa Community College. With a passion for small-scale ecological farming, she is committed towards building sustainable and regenerative food systems.

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Save the date and look for more information in July on the OFA website when registration opens!

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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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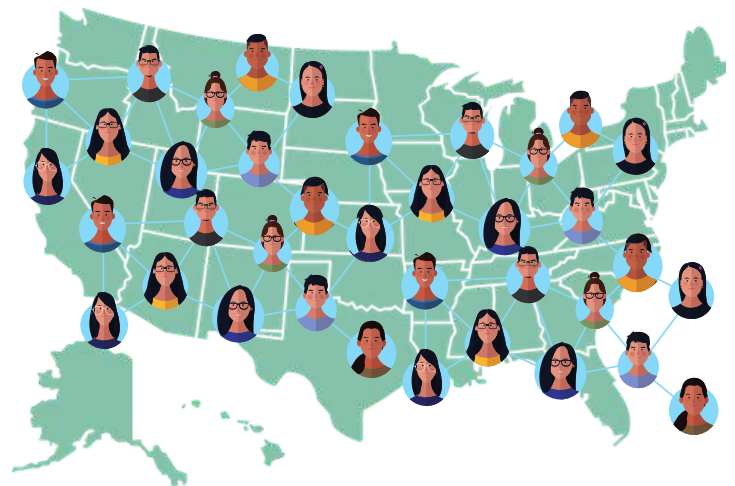
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One Year Later: Farmer Views of Strengthening Organic Enforcement

By Carolyn Dimitri

Trust in the organic label is critical for the organic industry to remain robust; because consumers and other buyers are unable to visually determine whether something is organic, the label is what conveys integrity. We are all aware of the many ways organic fraud is devastating to the sector: fraudulent products are less costly than legitimate organic products, which harms the business of the organic farmer. Consumers lose trust in organic when they learn about fraud from the news or their friends and may cease purchasing organic food. Much of the recent discussion has been about organic imports – grain (rice, corn, soy) in particular, although cases of domestic fraud have been identified.

The Strengthening Organic Enforcement Rule, implemented in March 2024, was designed to tighten supply chains, by increasing transparency along the supply chain, to reduce fraud in the organic system. This means that from any point in the supply chain, all organic products can be traced back to the farm, regardless of whether it was domestically produced or imported. There are several consequences of SOE for farmers: (1) certifiers are required to conduct surprise inspections of 5 percent of the operations they certify and (2) during the annual inspection, they need to conduct a mass balance audit (USDA AMS undated). Other changes included a new section to the Organic Systems Plan, where farmers prove that all of the purchased inputs were certified organic (Behar, 2023). Consequences of the increased workload for certifiers include an increase in certification fees, which has disproportionately impacted smaller-scale producers (Cornucopia, 2025).

How were the first 18 months of SOE, from the perspective of organic farmers? This is the first article reporting findings of a survey that examined farmer views of SOE.

The survey was conducted by me in partnership with the Organic Farmers Association (OFA). The survey was out in the field from November 2025 – February 2026 and was distributed to the OFA network, and offered respondents a chance to enter a lottery for a \$50 gift card. The number of farmers who filled out the survey completely was 188. This article focuses on farmer views of SOE and talks about why organic farmers chose to remain certified. Future articles will focus on different topics, such as how the process of certification and inspection worked for farmers.

FARMER PERSPECTIVES ON SOE

The introduction of SOE was difficult, and some farmers suggest it was implemented before the certifiers and USDA were ready. One farmer stated that SOE “...was poorly introduced, without adequate templates for proving compliance.” Another indicated that the changes were an “unpleasant surprise!” A different farmer reported that USDA and their certifier were not on the same page, which made the rollout a “disorganized mess.” And not all farmers were aware of SOE, as 16 percent of the farmers answering the survey were either unaware of the new regulation or did not receive communication from their certifiers. A sense of feeling personally attacked comes through from some farmers, as one stated “It appears to the farmers, that this Strengthening Organic effort is focused on the wrong entities. We are assumed to be the bad guys. We work organic everyday. It's our passion.”

Post-SOE, as reported by many farmers, record keeping became excessive and cumbersome, and documenting was stressful. The lack of flexibility in the system was noted by about half of the farmers, who consistently stated that SOE “...is a one-size-fits-all proposition.” Farmers suggested that templates for small-scale producers, that reflect the workflow on their farms, would simplify updating the OSP.

Templates would be helpful to keep track of clean out procedures, for example. A farmer called for a visual mapping template, stating I *“...planted over 15,000 seeds by hand... I know my field and how much is planted. Why is viewing the field and knowing the row feet less auditable than if I wrote down that I planted 462 basil plants or 622 thyme plants?”*

Meeting the new requirements for mass-balance and traceability is difficult for a small-scale diversified producer who does not have staff to take care of ensuring these requirements are satisfied. One farmer finds it challenging to *“...measure and track usage of feed and seed on a diverse operation where an estimated amount of grain is harvested, then used for feed, seed or sold..... there is shrinkage and spoilage.”*

In contrast, monoculture farms that sell a large quantity of one or two products have staff to keep such records. Thus, diversified operations, or producers with many small orders, struggle to meet the requirements. Small orders, which used to add to a farmer's cash flow, absorb so much time generating lot numbers and tracking that small orders have become cost prohibitive. Another mentioned that *“...we are small and the record keeping is excessive.”* A farmer suggested that a traceback audit rather than a mass balance of a low risk small scale highly diverse market farm is a better way to assess organic integrity.

The ways certifiers do business adds to the frustration felt by farmers. Customer service can be poor. At times, certifiers take a very long time to turn around a farmer's paperwork, with one farmer receiving notification of certification for 2025 in early 2026. The organic farmer suggested that certifiers have too much to do, with their workloads increasing, and that is why the turnaround time is so long. But a different farmer mentioned experiencing a negative impact of lack of certifier speed: the response to questions about allowable materials, can take too long, but farmers *“...need to implement solutions in a speedy manner.”* A different farmer questioned why their certifier needs to approve OMRI-approved inputs. One farmer mentioned that the people who work in the office who review and process paperwork often have no agricultural knowledge.

SOE mandates that certifiers conduct unannounced inspections of 5 percent of operations, and in addition, the organic farm is inspected annually. There were many comments about inspection and inspectors, and farmers had many differing views – likely because every farmer has had multiple experiences with inspectors. Fairness regarding which farms should be inspected, both annually and randomly, was mentioned. To one farmer, risk-based certification means that *“...surprise inspections for risky operations would be great.”* The need for an annual inspection was questioned by several producers, although some producers felt it was absolutely necessary but should take less time.

Those farmers who had inspectors with poor knowledge of organic farming systems felt they were *“training the inspector”* and received little benefit from the inspection. Many farmers mentioned that the timing of inspection could be improved, especially those whose inspectors want to come at the farmer's busiest time of year. The quality of inspectors varies, from those with no or little knowledge of organic farming to a former organic farmer, with deep knowledge of organic systems. Farmers with experienced and professional inspectors report having good experiences *“...Seasoned inspector this year familiar with our style of organic farming, which made things go a little more smoothly than usual.”* Thus, the farmer comments suggest that much of the farmer impression is related to the skill, professionalism, and preparation of the inspector.

“ We maintain our organic certification because we believe in organic and its contribution to the health of people who consume it... we have high integrity and work very hard to be honest to the organic label. ”

– Anonymous Farmer Submission

REMAINING CERTIFIED IS THE ONLY OPTION FOR SOME FARMERS

So why do farmers maintain their certification, given the challenges, stresses, and costs of organic certification? The reasons are wide ranging, and include access to market, consumer assurance, and personal beliefs. Farmers who sell to wholesalers or retailers such as Whole Foods are selling organic food and thus need to maintain their certification. Dairy producers are selling organic milk to processors, and are similarly required to be certified. One dairy farmer stated “We love our milk cooperative and the stability of the organic milk market.” Others are able to secure a higher price for their organic products. One farmer has a business model built on organic, and continues to maintain certification after having supplied customers for decades.

Some farmers choose organic when considering their consumers, and as one stated “I want my customers to fully trust the food... the certification means integrity, trust, accountability.” Another maintains certification to give their customers confidence, even as other neighboring farms and businesses claim to be organic but certified, recognizing these other farms are not organic, can't pass an organic inspection. To one farmer, “...certification was a stamp of authenticity. Now, it is a matter of authority, if that makes sense, a measure (in years certified) of my commitment to a still-countercultural approach. It has only ever been in small measure about access to markets.”

Passion and zeal drive other organic farmers. Some farm organically out of a commitment to the land, water, and human health. Another “...loves organic grazing.” Many farmers believe in organic, with several saying some variation of “I am dedicated to organic” or “...committed to organic” or “...I believe in organic.” And organic, in the view of one farmer, is far better than the alternatives, or “...while the current certification system is bad the alternatives... (like what we had before OFPA) are even worse.” Another farmer mentioned “We maintain our organic certification because we believe in organic and its contribution to the health of people who consume it... we have high integrity and work very hard to be honest to the organic label.”

REMAINING CERTIFIED IS THE ONLY OPTION FOR SOME FARMERS

The first article in this series shows that organic farmers face many challenges regarding SOE, which in its effort to provide much-needed tightening along the supply chain is creating additional burdens. Certifiers were not prepared with needed templates. An emotional undercurrent is evident in some of the farmer views: many express frustration with changes in the certification process, challenges with inspection, and changing rules for record keeping. At the same time, many comments were imbued with a strong sense that their way of farming is better for the land and for people. The next article will discuss farmer retrospective views of the impacts of SOE on their ability to do the paperwork, getting inspected and post-inspection communication. Stay tuned for more insights this fall! 🌱



Dr. Carolyn Dimitri is an applied economist who studies food systems and food policy, focusing on how food moves from the farm to the consumer. A common thread throughout her research is the role of governmental and private institutions in facilitating transactions between buyers and sellers, including how food labels transmit unobservable information about product quality to buyers and how policies support farmer income and consumer health.

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Highlights from an Oklahoma Field Day at Three Springs Farm

By Julia Barton

OFA collaborated with Three Springs Farm in Oaks, Oklahoma, to host a field day showcasing this two-person certified organic diversified vegetable farm run by Emily Oakley and Mike Appel.

Those names likely sound familiar to you. Emily Oakley served a full five-year term on the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) in the organic farmer seat and is known as a member of the “Soil Seven,” the group opposed to hydroponic production being certified as organic, in the 2017 vote in Jacksonville. Emily also contributed significant work on other issues, including organic agriculture’s impact on aquatic ecosystems through seaweed harvesting for fertilizer inputs.

Mike Appel serves as a farmer representative for the Southern Region on the OFA Policy Committee. In this role, he asks hard questions to make sure OFA policy reflects the needs of organic farmers in his region. Through participation in OFA’s annual Farmer Fly-Ins, he has built relationships with his elected officials, whose staff recently toured the farm to learn more about the needs of Three Spring Farm and other organic farmers in the state. In addition, Mike is President of the local Spring Creek Coalition, a group focused on protecting the waterway that runs through Three Springs Farm. The Spring Creek watershed has been significantly impacted by waste generated by multiple poultry barns constructed to meet processing demand in neighboring Arkansas.

Several takeaways from Three Spring Farm highlight what makes the farm operation successful:

2-person crew: Mike and Emily both run a crew, and ARE the crew, intentionally running a two-person, small farm operation, and supplying shares to approximately 300 CSA members through an app they co-developed, with about 150 members ordering weekly. They accomplish this through a careful work plan, mechanization, and consistent in-season hustle.

Intentional design: In addition to designing their scale to match their labor, Emily and Mike designed the farm to meet their needs over time. They began by planting a windbreak (now big and beautiful), and soon learned they needed a deer fence, which they then installed. When they needed equipment, they saved for it and purchased it to fit with their labor design, or built what they needed.

Homegrown fertility: Three Springs Farm GROWS its fertility, relying entirely on cover crops to feed its veggies. Mike and Emily started this practice as an experiment and have turned it into a regular practice that works at Three Springs. Field day attendees observed the rye/vetch winter/spring cover crop left standing in the field for demonstration purposes and heard the pollinators buzzing within it. The summer cover line-up includes sorghum sudan grass, sunhemp, soybeans, cowpeas, sunflowers, and safflowers.

Manage diversity: To manage native and cultivated plant diversity, Mike practices prescribed burning in select areas of the farm. During the tour, two botanists cataloged species on the farm, paying close attention to the area Mike recently burned in collaboration with the Oklahoma Prescribed Burn Association.



Farmer Mike Appel flail-mowing cover crops.

Mike’s involvement in this association has also fostered relationships with Oklahoma ranchers whom he typically doesn’t have the opportunity to collaborate with, but with whom he has found common ground in this cultural practice.

Relationships first: Emily and Mike build relationships at every turn– whether through activism, sharing the space and land with interested parties, or working with their community to preserve Spring Creek, which runs through their farm. These relationships have fostered new opportunities. Relationships with their CSA members have supported improved access to land and supported common efforts around farmland preservation and watershed management.

Work with what you’ve got: A fixer-upper turned beautiful home, horse-barn turned wash-pack shed and hand tool storage, purchased inputs turned homegrown fertility, and freezer turned germination-chamber– Emily and Mike demonstrated their creativity and craftsmanship all over the farm.

Oklahoma is not overrun with organic farmers, and Mike made sure to remind us of this fact as we co-planned the event to highlight their farm in a region where more organic farms are needed. But the experience was anything but isolating, drawing farmers from multiple directions: Extension, a nonprofit agricultural organization, and young, aspiring farmers just starting out. Featuring successful organic farms as living demonstrations for new and transitioning farms is essential to growing the organic community of support to expand organic practices in the South and throughout the nation. 🌱

To hear more about what’s going on on Three Springs Farm, check out these two radio pieces:

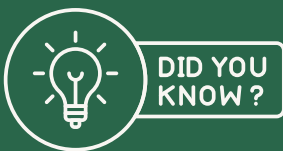
- Three Springs Farm Featured in Oklahoma Farm Report
- Three Springs Farm featured on Focus: Black Oklahoma. (Listen at 25:55)



Julia Barton loves working with farmers to identify challenges and find solutions! She has served as Farmer Services Director with the Organic Farmers Association since 2023. She, along with her husband and two boys, runs Octagon Acres, a small organic farm, and Northridge Blueberries and Chestnuts, both in Northeast Ohio.

Thank you to the Transition to Organic Partnership Program Plains Region, for its support of this farm tour!

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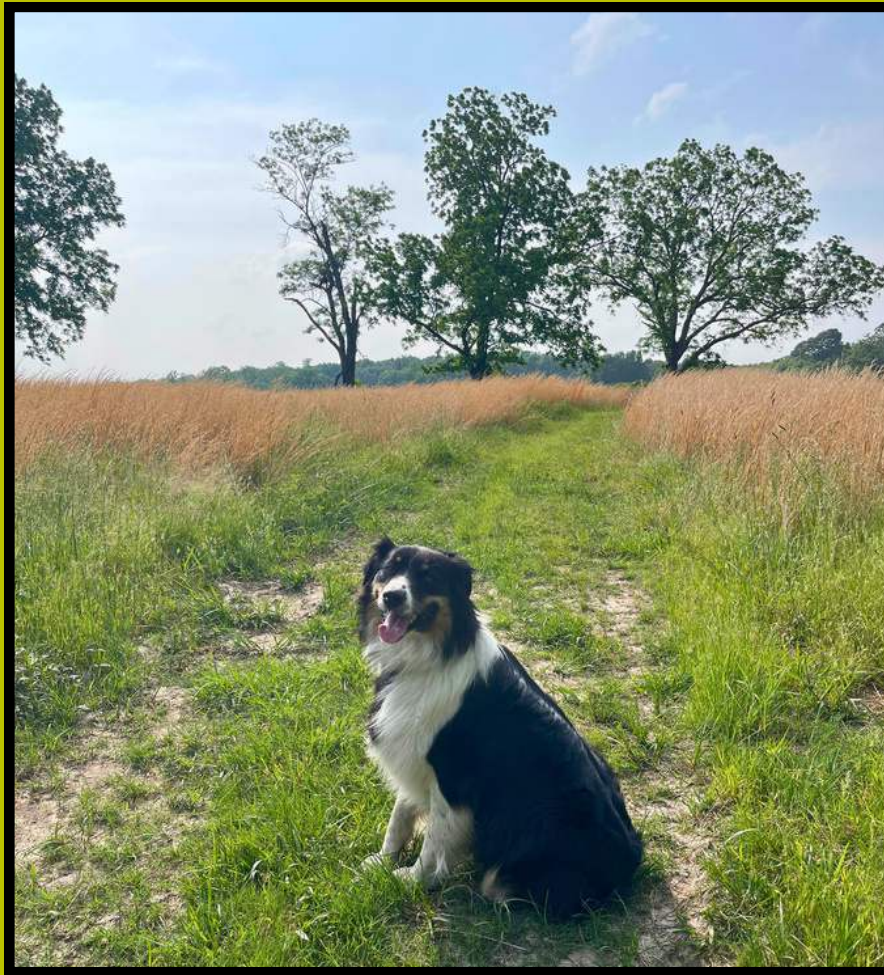
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Photogenic Farms

When the team travels, one of the last reminders they get before departure is *“Don’t forget to send photos of yourself on the farm!”* Sometimes what we get back are beautiful farm photos, farmers engaging with each other, photos of conversation practices...and zero team member photos. After the Three Springs Farm field day this is exactly what happened. But to this editor’s amusement, there were several photos of the farm’s loyal dog. So, we leave you with this happy face.

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