The Organic Voice

Organic Farmers Association – No. 23 • November 2026



Preparing for Certification Inspection

Ideas to reduce stress for first timers and pros looking to improve the process

Page 11

Big Changes Could Be Coming to Your Organic Certification Application

A new common Organic System Plan is now available for farmers

Page 23

A Farmer's Place as an Active Certification Participant

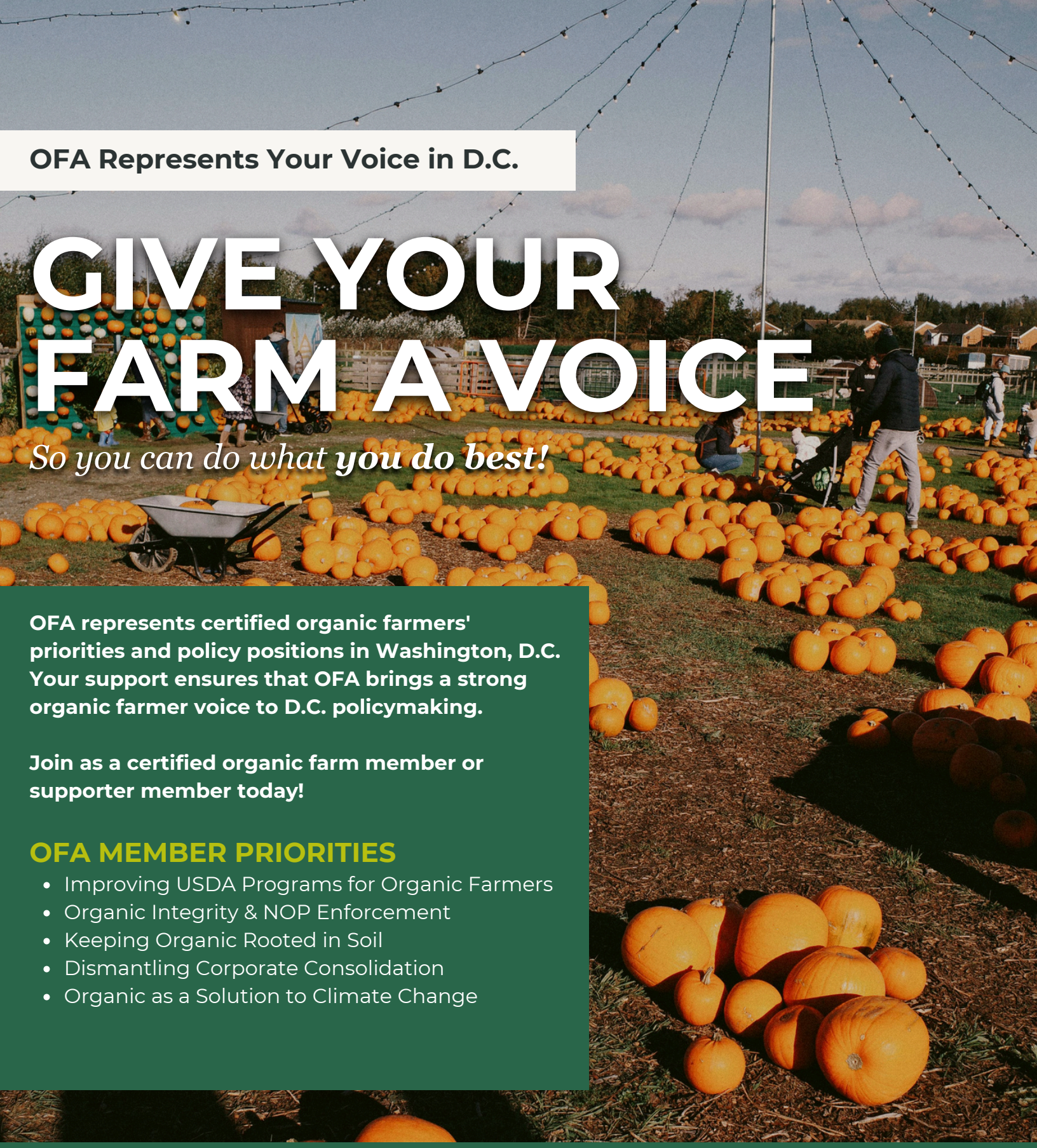
Farmers have options to advocate for themselves

Page 30

For ORGANIC FARMERS. By ORGANIC FARMERS.

Providing a strong and unified national voice for domestic certified organic producers.

ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION



OFA Represents Your Voice in D.C.

GIVE YOUR FARM A VOICE

*So you can do what **you do best!***

OFA represents certified organic farmers' priorities and policy positions in Washington, D.C. Your support ensures that OFA brings a strong organic farmer voice to D.C. policymaking.

Join as a certified organic farm member or supporter member today!

OFA MEMBER PRIORITIES

- Improving USDA Programs for Organic Farmers
- Organic Integrity & NOP Enforcement
- Keeping Organic Rooted in Soil
- Dismantling Corporate Consolidation
- Organic as a Solution to Climate Change

OFA ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

JOIN OFA TODAY!

OrganicFarmersAssociation.org



Your Dedication and Support Pays Off

OFA MEMBER BENEFITS

Enjoy Exclusive Perks from the Community

HIGH MOWING Organic Seeds

DripWorks Quality Drip Irrigation

Osborne Quality Seeds

ROW 7

red ants pants

Johnny's Selected Seeds

CT GREENHOUSE Structures & Supplies DESIGN // BUILD // GROW

GRAPEVINE Local Food Marketing

TILMOR A Marketplace for Small Growers.

OHIO EARTH FOOD

agritrak

HUDSON VALLEY SEED CO

The Weston A. Price Foundation for Wise Traditions in Food, Farming and the Healing Arts Education • Research • Activism

OFA ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

BUILDING A STRONG ORGANIC FARMER VOICE!

OrganicFarmersAssociation.org

ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

GOVERNING COUNCIL

Farmers (Voting)

Sara Tashker, Green Gulch Farm, CA
Ken Kimes, New Natives Farm, CA
Dave Bishop, Lily Lake Farm, IL
Jenn Halpin, Dickinson College Farm, PA
Matthew Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald Organics, MN
Pryor Garnett, Garnetts Red Prairie Farm, OR
Steve Ela, Ela Family Farms, CO
Shawn Peebles, Peebles Organic, AR
Jesse Buie, Ole Brook Organics, Inc, MS
Joe Borgerding, Borgerding Farm, MN
Kaitlyn Kimball, Sunset Farm, NY
Michael Glos, Kingbird Farm, NY

Organization Representatives (Advisory)

Rebekah Weber, California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)
Ben Bowell, Oregon Tilth
Lori Stern, Marbleseed
Jacquelyn Evers, The Land Connection (TLC)
Brooke Gentile, Organic Association of Kentucky (OAK)
Samantha Kemnah, Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY)

Staff

Executive Director, Kate Mendenhall
Policy Director, Lily Hawkins
Project Manager, Ryann Monteiro
Membership & Outreach Coord., Amber Lippon
Communications Manager, Madison Letizia
Farmer Services Director, Julia Barton
Farmer Services Consultant, Harriet Behar

Contributors

Lily Hawkins, Harriet Behar, Julia Barton, Bailey Jo Kelly, and Kendal Thomas

Editor: Madison Letizia
Editor-in-Chief: Kate Mendenhall

Cover Photo:

Copyright 2026 by Organic Farmers Association

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

Send comments & inquiries to:

Organic Farmers Association
PO BOX 709, Spirit Lake, IA 51360 USA
202-643-5363 | info@OrganicFarmersAssociation.org

OFA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

Contents

QUARTERLY UPDATES

1 President's Letter

4 Winter Organic Policy News

WINTER ISSUE FEATURES

11 Preparing for Organic Certification Inspection

23 Big Changes Could Be Coming to Your Organic Certification Application

30 A Farmer's Place as an Active Certification Participant

MORE STORIES & RESOURCES

6 The Distressed Borrowers Assistance Network

7 2027 Annual Policy Development Survey

15 Requesting a Temporary Variance from the USDA National Organic Program

19 End of Year Tips to Ensure Your Farm's Financial Health

35 Recap of the Fall 2026 NOSB Meeting

39 How One Organic Orchardist's Crop Insurance Will Keep Him Farming

SUPPORT OUR MISSION

STAY UP TO DATE WITH ORGANIC ISSUES & NEWS

Subscribe to OFA's Email Updates
OrganicFarmersAssociation.org/subscribe

@OrganicFarmersAssociation

Organic Farmers Association

Organic Farmers Association

@OrganicFarmersAssociation

From Our President

As you read this, the results of November's midterm elections should be becoming clear. But as I write, 15 days before Election Day, those results are uncertain and the changes they will bring are unknown. What is known is that change of some kind will come. In a country guided and governed by laws, politics is inevitable. In the Organic Farmers Association we recognize and accept this, and keep our time and attention laser-focused on influencing policies that affect organic agriculture while remaining emphatically non-partisan when it comes to politics.

So regardless of what the results of this election bring, the OFA is going to be working hard to bring about policy changes—and policy continuations—that improve organic agriculture and the lives and livelihoods of organic farmers. This issue of The Organic Voice focuses on issues relating to organic certification, which is the biggest interaction that most organic farmers experience with government regulatory programs. Seemingly small changes in certification rules can make organic farmers' lives easier (for example, the new Common Organic System Plan) or harder (for example, supply chain fraud prevention procedures). OFA staff and members, especially those on the Policy Committee, spend hundreds of hours every year analyzing proposed changes to organic inspection, production and certification rules, and then developing policy positions that we can present to the USDA's National Organic Standard Board (NOSB) and advocate for on Capitol Hill.

We do this policy work because organic policies, when accepted, become organic laws and regulations. And those in turn cause changes in farming practices. And those practices are what put healthy, organic food on our plates and fiber in our homes, and what help regenerate depleted, conventional soils into vibrantly healthy ones.

In this country, change in agriculture has to happen both locally and nationally. The local part is up to you and your neighbors, in your purchases from nearby farms and at farmers markets, and in your conversations with friends and relatives. The national part is where OFA performs its roles, and there are three major ones.

First, when the NOSB meets twice a year, OFA staffers and members testify on the record about proposed changes to organic regulations as recommended and voted on by organic farmer members. Second, every March we gather dozens of farmers and staff in Washington, D.C. to meet with elected officials (politicians), their staff and USDA personnel to explain to them in person why certain policies are good or bad for organic farmers. Third, throughout the year we coordinate with other organizations in the organic industry to develop consensus on organic policy changes and jointly work to achieve them.

In all our work, OFA presents organic policy positions that will make organic agriculture the basis of a strong food and agricultural production system in the U.S. We do that without regard for political party or persuasion, so that whatever changes an election may bring, the voices of organic farmers are heard. If you share that vision, please help support our work by making a donation to OFA this year.

Sincerely,





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

We know the way you grow food is challenging *and* critically important



Life insurance for people who believe in organic food

Learn more at bluestonelife.com or call us at 802-428-4411

bluestone®

Certified B Corporation

1% FOR THE PLANET


NATURE'S PATH
ORGANIC
Thank You For
Seeding A Better
FUTURE WITH
ORGANIC
Together, We Make A
DIFFERENCE
Let's stay connected!
www.naturespath.com @naturespathorganic



POLICY UPDATE

Winter Organic Policy Outlook

By Lily Hawkins

POLICY UPDATE

As the 2026 legislative calendar winds down, the future of several agricultural policy vehicles remains uncertain. With Congress largely absent from Washington, D.C., critical decisions surrounding long-term farm policy, annual appropriations, and emergency producer support have been deferred to the post-election period. However, some administrative actions and emergency programs are still moving forward.

FARM BILL AND ELECTION TIMELINE

Congress spent the majority of the quarter out of D.C., driven by the standard August recess followed immediately by the pre-election break. Over the past 12 weeks, the Senate convened for just four weeks. The House operated for only two, following Speaker Johnson's decision to cancel late-September legislative sessions and dismiss members until after the midterms.

Legislation on the long-overdue Farm Bill remains stalled despite incremental committee progress, forcing leaders to consider alternative legislative paths.

The Senate Agriculture Committee successfully advanced its version of the Farm Bill (S. 5526) on September 16. However, the bill has stalled due to unresolved partisan disputes surrounding Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) cost-share rules, where Republicans propose a one-year implementation delay while Democrats are holding out for two years.

Active discussions are ongoing between Senate offices and leadership to hash out potential SNAP compromises and lay the groundwork for a viable lame-duck package. And unless this disagreement is resolved, getting the 60 votes required to pass the bill will be difficult. Given the tight timeline, leadership may bypass standard floor votes and amendment processes altogether. Options under consideration include bringing a negotiated conference bill directly to the floor during the lame-duck session, attaching key farm bill policies to must-pass spending bills, or passing another temporary extension.

The extension of the 2018 Farm Bill officially expired on September 30 without an immediate replacement or new extension in place. Major program impacts of this expiration will be felt at the end of the year.

Debates regarding a supplemental emergency farm aid package have been pushed into the upcoming lame-duck session, keeping disaster and economic relief on hold.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING & APPROPRIATIONS

Federal funding continues to move forward on a temporary basis, leaving long-term agricultural budgets unconfirmed.

In September, Congress passed a continuing resolution (CR) that keeps the federal government funded through early December. Final Fiscal Year 2027 appropriation, including full-year budgets for USDA programs and agricultural agencies will need to be addressed in the lame duck session before the stopgap funding expires.

USDA REORGANIZATION INJUNCTION

A major legal dispute is playing out over the major USDA Reorganization proposed by Secretary Rollins. The U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California has issued a temporary injunction halting the Trump administration's sweeping USDA reorganization.

The order specifically bars the department from using congressionally appropriated funds for office relocation expenses, facility closures, and associated restructuring costs. However, because underlying appropriations statutes expire in under two months, long-term relief from the ruling may be limited. Furthermore, the injunction does not block Washington, D.C.-area office moves, property sales (such as the USDA South Building), or regional staff transfers such as those proposed for the National Organic Program.

A notable side effect of the injunction is an immediate freeze on standard USDA hiring processes and routine internal staff transfers.

FUEL RELIEF & SPECIALTY CROP OUTREACH

Rising diesel costs have prompted a new federal relief effort, but gaps remain for non-commodity producers.

The proposed Harvest Fuel Relief (HFR) framework calculates proportional relief for 2026 crop losses using Farm Service Agency (FSA) planted acreage, Economic Research Service (ERS) cost data, and World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) price and yield metrics.

Because the formula was designed for Title I commodities, specialty crop and livestock operations will be left out unless changes are made. Non-Title I, specialty crop, livestock, and organic dairy producers are being encouraged to submit verified cost data directly to HarvestFuel@usda.gov.

MIDTERM ELECTIONS AND THE LAME DUCK SESSION

This article was written prior to election day, with polls predicting gains for Democrats. It is important to remember that newly elected officials will not take office until mid-January. The time between the election and the inauguration is known as the lame duck session. This time is often used to pass unfinished "must-pass" legislation. The ruling party may push through controversial legislation if the election results in a shift in power, or, because the outgoing members will not face election consequences, legislators may sometimes vote against party lines.

Whatever the outcome of elections, you can contact your newly elected officials as soon as the election results have been declared by emailing their campaign. Sending a message of congratulations and introducing yourself and your farm is a great way to begin developing a relationship and educating them on organic farming. Consider including OFA's Organic 101 and your State Factsheet in the email.

For any questions please contact OFA Policy Director Lily Hawkins at lily@organicfarmersassociation.org.



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.

OFA Annual Policy Survey

Each year, the Organic Farmers Association asks all certified organic farmers to tell us their top policy priorities and policy positions.

Start the Survey

The Distressed Borrowers Assistance Network (DBAN)

A NEW SUPPORT SERVICE FROM OFA

The Distressed Borrowers Assistance Network (DBAN) builds the capacity of farm support organizations across the United States, like Organic Farmers Association, to provide assistance to farmers in financial distress, and connect farmers to helpful resources. A collaborative effort organized by Farm Aid, Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI) and Farmers' Legal Action Group (FLAG), and funded funded by USDA-FSA, this network strives to connect farmers with one-on-one, personalized support and technical assistance to help them:

- Recover financially;
- Achieve stable and healthy financial futures; and
- More easily access beneficial resources, including USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) farm loans and other USDA benefits related to conservation, disaster, crop loss and income loss.

DBAN offers practical trainings, useful resources and thoughtful network facilitation to help individuals and organizations strengthen their capacity to reach and serve financially distressed farmers. It creates a supportive community where direct service providers from across the United States can share what works and what doesn't, learn from one another, and find more effective ways to help farmers facing financial distress.

The network's trainings span a wide range of topics– from financial, technical and interpersonal skills – employing approaches that respect each farmer's unique situation and needs.

When farmers and ranchers contact DBAN directly, the network refers them to service providers in the network, as appropriate.

When farmers contact OFA directly, and need support beyond our reach, we, in turn, connect them to other members of the network who are better equipped to serve them. Sometimes, organizational members of the Network work together long-term to make sure the farmer's needs are met.

By referring farmers to high quality service providers, DBAN helps financially distressed farmers:

- Get a clear picture of their financial situation and explore their options;
- Connect with helpful services and resources that can improve their financial health and stability; and
- Build stronger and more resilient farming operations for the long term.

You can connect to the DBAN network through the OFA HelpLine: (833)724-3834 or helpline@organicfarmersassociation.org).

You can also connect to DBAN organizations and many resources through the Farm Aid Farmer Resource Network, or by calling the Farm Aid Hotline at 1-800-FARM-AID (1-800-327-6243). Farm Aid assistance is available to all farmers regardless of scale or production.

If you are an organic organization or service provider and want to learn more about assisting other farmers in your area, please access the DBAN training materials here!

ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

2027 ANNUAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT SURVEY

For Organic Farmers, By Organic Farmers

MAKE YOUR VOICE COUNT!

This survey is available online, or you may print these two pages & mail to OFA by January 24, 2027.

PLEASE SELECT THE BEST OPTION:

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

_____

ARE YOU AN OFA MEMBER? ☐ Yes ☐ No

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

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

CHANGES IN FEDERAL PROGRAMS: Over the last two years, there have been significant changes at the Federal level, from staffing reductions and major reorganization plans at USDA to the Farm Bill's expiration and a government shutdown in 2025. We want to know how you've been impacted. Please answer the following questions to provide us with more information as we work on this issue.

How has the term regenerative affected your farm and markets?

_____
_____
_____
_____

One criticism regenerative supporters have of organic certification is that it is not measuring soil health impact/outcomes. We are curious what sustainability measurements (like soil health) you are already taking. Please tell us below!

_____
_____
_____
_____

click FOR THE ONLINE SURVEY



The online survey is more comprehensive.

YOUR POLICY PRIORITIES

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

- ☐ Animal Welfare
- ☐ Beginning Farmer Issues (Access to affordable land, credit, mentorship, etc.)
- ☐ Climate Change & Conservation
- ☐ Contamination (Pesticide, PFAS, GMO Drift)
- ☐ Corporate Control & Consolidation in the Organic Market
- ☐ Making USDA Programs work for Organic Farmers (Crop Insurance, Disaster Assistance, NRCS, FSA)
- ☐ Organic Market and Supply Chain Development
- ☐ Prohibiting Certified Organic Hydroponic & Container Growing
- ☐ Labor and Immigration
- ☐ National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) Issues and Agenda
- ☐ NOP Enforcement to Ensure Organic Integrity
- ☐ Organic Research
- ☐ Organic Certification that is Practical and Affordable
- ☐ Import Fraud
- ☐ Other (please specify):

_____

What is the biggest challenge facing your farm business?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

SUBMIT YOUR POLICY POSITIONS FOR POLICY COMMITTEE REVIEW

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

POLICY PROPOSAL #1

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

_____

_____

This policy is important because:

_____

_____

_____

I have more ideas about this. Please contact me so I can help! ☐ Yes ☐ No

POLICY PROPOSAL #2

Recommended OFA Policy Position

_____

_____

This policy is important because:

_____

_____

_____

I have more ideas about this. Please contact me so I can help! ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

CONTACT INFORMATION

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

Name_____

Farm Name/Org_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Email_____

Phone_____

My preferred way to communicate is: phone ☐ email ☐

RETURN COMPLETED SURVEY TO:

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

ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

CERTIFIED ORGANIC HANDLER

LET US MOVE YOUR FREIGHT!

MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

WWW.RFGLOGISTICS.COM | SALES@RFGLOGISTICS.COM

Pure Food & Everyone's Happy

Rare, authentic organic food from vital soil and artisan farmers. Pure Food Tastes and Nourishes Best.



EDEN FOODS

cs@edenfoods.com • edenfoods.com
Clinton, Michigan • 888.424.3336



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, Bordessa and Camozzi 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



FEATURED STORY

Preparing for Organic Certification Inspection: First Timers and Pros Looking to Improve the Process

By Bailey Jo Kelly

Inspection is arguably the most stressful step in organic certification. During your certification inspection an inspector hired by your USDA accredited certifier visits your farm and takes a firsthand look at your operations to ensure they comply with USDA regulations. But there are ways you can help yourself feel more prepared going into your next (or first!) inspection, as it can feel tedious and vulnerable to be evaluated on what seems like each and every little aspect of your operation.

START WITH THE INITIAL REVIEW LETTER

The Initial Review begins the annual inspection cycle as the first formal compliance check of an applicant's Organic System Plan (OSP) and application materials by a certifying agent before their on-site inspection is scheduled. The reviewer lets farmers know what questions they should prepare for and provides a checklist of what they need to have on hand for inspection day in the initial review letter. So, reading the initial review letter from your certifier is a great place to start preparing.

UPDATE YOUR OSP

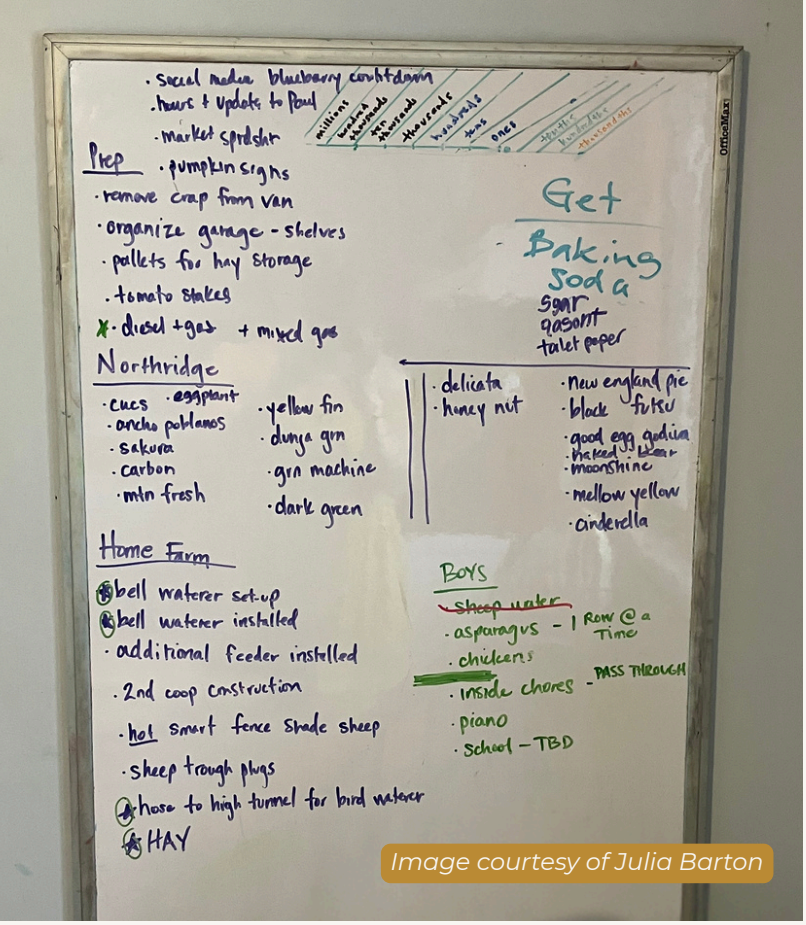
Inspectors are responsible for making sure USDA organic products meet the organic standards. They do not make any final decisions about your organic certification, they verify your Organic System Plan and report what they observe on the farm back to the certifier.

In preparation for inspection, it is important to go over your application and see if there are any changes to make before the inspector arrives. Take a look at your OSP and make sure it is up to date and current according to your actual farming practices and plan for the season.

RECORDKEEPING: YOU HAVE OPTIONS

You can't manage what you don't measure. Effective and lucrative operations as well as seamless certification inspections grow from detailed and consistent documentation. Clear, consistent, concise documentation goes a long way in benefitting you as the farmer, both in preparation for inspection and in managing your farm. Keep track of harvests, storage records, sales records, and every significant date (even if it feels insignificant!) on a written or electronic platform. You can design a system that works for you, as long as your documents can be easily reviewed and audited by the inspector, but it doesn't have to take any specific form other than that—so you have options.

Some farmers who are digitally inclined, or who work on larger teams, use shared documents, texts, or apps to keep track of their recordkeeping. Electronic records such as these can be readily shared with the certifier or inspector ahead of the inspection, or in follow-up, should there be additional questions.



Others prefer paper, so keep clipboards or notebooks in key areas of production (the truck, outside the walk-in or bin, etc.), then gather and organize them prior to inspection to help save your time and your inspector's.

TRACKING SEED TO SALE

It's important to keep some sort of planting records including what you planted, where, and when. The organic inspector is going to track seed to sale or backwards from sale to seed, including where it was stored, when it was harvested, and what happened to it while it was growing. Farmers need to show proof of seed purchase in the form of invoices, actual seed tags or packets, or the seed catalogs where they were purchased. As long as you can prove what was planted and that it wasn' treated with any prohibited substances or genetically modified, you are good!

This also demonstrates proof of enough seed to cover all acres that should match up with yield records from past years, the current year, and your sales. The standards state that you must purchase organic seed unless you cannot source organic seed in the quantity, quality, or variety that you want.

In the case that you used non-organic seed, show the inspector your documented seed search, noting at least three sources that carry organic seed, when you checked, and whether or not the seed was available. It can also be helpful to verify your organic seed in the Organic Integrity Database, which is run by the NOP, by searching for your seed seller in the database.

PRODUCTION AND STORAGE RECORDS

Storage records should indicate where crops come from, when they were harvested, and when they were loaded in and out of the storage container. Mass balance audits are based on your inputs, production, and sales which can be documented using production records and harvest records. A mass balance audit can also help with future farm planning.

DOCUMENTING FIELD ACTIVITIES

Documents of farmstead map, field maps, field histories, seed records, input records, and labels should have been included in your OSP at the time you submitted your application. Supplement these documents with a field activity log, harvest records, and sales records for your inspection. Some farmers write their field activities, manure or compost applications, and pest management inputs on the back of their field maps. Bring these with you when visiting fields with your inspector.

Various certifiers offer templates to document crop and livestock inputs. They also have forms available to document date, rate, and location of all off farm manure and bedding applications as well as soil amendments. While you're not required to use their forms, these templates can help you make sure you get the appropriate information listed in your own records.

Include:

- labels, containers, and/or invoices of pest management inputs if applicable
- no spray agreements or adjoining land use documents if you have any
- buffer zones and buffer zone crop
  - proof that you harvested and stored buffer zone crop separately
  - proof of equipment cleaning between organic and nonorganic use
- soil test documentation that is less than three years old if you have them, or if you use inputs requiring a documented deficiency



Image courtesy of Julia Barton

VALUE-ADDED PRODUCTS

Input/output audits are used for any value-added products you may sell such as salsa or jam. This includes purchase records of everything you added to the product but did not grow, recipes showing amounts, processing records showing total amounts used, and the finished product made.

LIVESTOCK AND ANIMAL PRODUCTS

This is the same for livestock. How much did you sell in the past year by enterprise, in dollars, and how much did you produce? Keep records of birth, health care, housing, pasture, and clear documentation of how many animals of each species you maintain. You must be able to prove feed is organically grown on-farm or purchased from an organic producer (keep a copy of their certificate) and your feed records must indicate sufficient amounts to feed all animals of all ages on your farm.

The slaughter operation you utilize must be certified organic and you should keep periodic track of inventories in the cooler, freezer, or other storage alternative. Keep egg and milk production records, as well as sales records, invoices, weight tickets, and each bill of lading if you use shipping services to deliver products.

Be the first to evaluate your operation through an inspector's lens prior to inspection day and keep documentation of each aspect discussed in the paragraphs above to improve your inspection process and certification outcome. Some major certifiers bill a technical, hourly rate, which applies to the time an inspector spends physically walking your fields and facilities as well as the time it takes them to write up a final audit report. Having records and documents ready to go saves the inspector time and reduces your inspection costs. It also serves you and your farm to practice consistent, organized record-keeping.

As always, our Farmer Services team is here to help you prepare for inspection, set-up or update your recordkeeping system, or set up some standard operating procedures. **Call or email the OFA Farmer HelpLine: (833)724-3834 or helpline@organicfarmersassociation.org.**



Bailey Jo Kelly is the fall OFA Farmer Services intern. Bailey Jo is a firm advocate and strong believer in organic agriculture and localized food systems, and sees food as medicine and has continually found healing in approaching eating and farming this way. Bailey Jo holds a Bachelor's Degree in Human Nutrition and Food Science from Colorado State University.

OFA MEMBERSHIP



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.

What your membership delivers:

Influence in Washington D.C. – We're educating Congress on the issues that matter: why organic farming deserves recognition and support, how it differs from other methods, and why growing consumer demand requires policy that keeps pace.

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.

Join OFA Today

Already a member? Share this magazine with a farmer or friend and ask them to join

OFA STORY

Requesting a Temporary Variance from the USDA National Organic Program

By Julia Barton

As certified organic producers, we choose to comply with the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) regulations, and we design our Organic System Plan (OSP). But sometimes things just don't go as planned! As extreme weather events become more frequent, unforeseen circumstances beyond our control may make compliance with certain organic requirements temporarily impossible. To address unforeseen circumstances that prevent farmers from complying with a specific rule, the USDA NOP can issue a temporary variance. But what is a temporary variance, and how do we request one if we need one?

Severe drought in Colorado this year brought this issue to the fore in the organic dairy industry: big organic dairies requested and were granted a variance on grazing requirements, but small- and mid-scale family dairies didn't even know how to request one. OFA, NODPA (Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance), and WODPA (Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance) worked with the NOP to nail down the process and share it with you, because all farms should have access to this information, not just those with office staff.

WHAT IS A TEMPORARY VARIANCE?

A temporary variance is a temporary allowance to deviate from certain, specific USDA organic requirements because of circumstances beyond a farmer's control. The farmer requests the variance from their certifier, who then sends the request to the NOP for final review.

The NOP may grant a temporary variance only for specific reasons identified in the organic regulations.

These reasons include:

- Natural disasters declared by the Secretary of Agriculture.
- Damage caused by drought, flooding, excessive moisture, wind, hail, tornado,earthquake, wildfire, or other business interruption.
- Research: practices used for the purpose of conducting research or trials of techniques, varieties, or ingredients used in organic production or handling.

WHAT DOES NOT QUALIFY FOR TEMPORARY VARIANCE?

Variances apply only to certain parts of the organic standards and cannot be granted for prohibited practices or materials, including using prohibited substances or feeding nonorganic feed to certified organic livestock. They cannot be granted to fix a noncompliance, nor can they be used for cost or size reasons.

WHEN SHOULD YOU CONTACT YOUR CERTIFIER?

This is the tricky part—ASAP! Contact your certifier as soon as you become aware that an event or prolonged weather situation (i.e., drought or flooding) may prevent your operation from complying with an organic requirement.

Unfortunately, you cannot request a variance after you have been unable to meet the regulations. Instead, that would be a non-compliance. So, communicate early and often with your certifier when you think a problem is afoot. Do not wait until your annual inspection or the end of the production season if compliance is already being affected. The NOP has made it clear that it will deny a petition submitted after the grazing or growing season has passed.

WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD BE INCLUDED?

First, contact your certifier to see whether they require specific paperwork or have their own application form. If your certifier does not have a specific worksheet available, our guide and worksheet will walk you through the process. A complete, detailed request will help your certifier evaluate the situation and ensure the National Organic Program (NOP) has the information needed to review and decide on the variance request. More documentation will save you time in the end. Photos and local weather data are helpful.

HOW DOES THE TEMPORARY VARIANCE PROCESS WORK?

The general process is:

1. Producer or handler submits a written request to their certifier describing the situation and providing supporting documentation. (We have a worksheet to help with this part!)
2. The certifier reviews the request and determines whether it supports recommending a temporary variance. They may ask the operation for more information to support the request.
    a. If the certifier has received multiple variance requests from a county or region, they may submit a "Blanket Request" on behalf of many operations. If there is a common regional need, inquiring about a blanket temporary variance for specific counties (or a whole state) may be the most efficient and equitable option. If you need help making that case, we're here for you.
3. If the certifier deems the request appropriate, they submit a written recommendation to the National Organic Program including supporting documentation.
4. The NOP reviews the recommendation within 5 business days of receipt for completeness and contacts the certifier for any needed supporting documentation or information.
5. Within 10 business days of receipt, the NOP evaluates the certifier's recommendation against the allowed reasons for a variance. The NOP then recommends a decision to the AMS Administrator to grant or deny the temporary variance.
6. The certifier notifies the operation of the NOP's decision.
7. The NOP publishes the temporary variance to the NOP web page.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU RUN INTO TROUBLE?

Keep your records and call OFA for help. Even if you anticipate requesting, or have already requested, a temporary variance, continue maintaining complete records throughout the challenge. Good documentation supports both your variance request and your ongoing compliance with the USDA organic regulations.

ORGANIC FARMERS HAVE RIGHTS

With a changing climate and more extreme weather events, it is difficult to know what to expect on the farm from year to year. We know it is easier for larger operations with teams of office staff to request variances, and we saw that play out this summer.

OFA wants all farmers to have an equitable market and playing field, and advocates for high organic integrity and strong organic standards. Temporary variances help keep organic farms in business during extreme circumstances. We share this information widely so you, as an organic farmer, regardless of scale, understand your right to request a temporary variance when faced with an untenable situation. You deserve to know your rights and how to access them. If you find yourself in a sticky situation, you don't have to handle it alone. We're here to support you. Call the OFA HelpLine (833) 724-3834, and we will walk you through the process.



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.

Connect with organic farmers and sustainability-focused consumers

When you sponsor OFA, you're doing more than advertising, you're investing in the future of organic agriculture while connecting directly with the farmers and consumers who need your products and services.

Your Support Powers Real Impact

- Supports farmers advocating for organic at the federal level
- Educates farmers on critical policy issues affecting their livelihoods
- Builds a stronger, more profitable organic marketplace for everyone

Your Business Gains Meaningful Visibility

- Reach thousands of certified organic farmers through the Organic Voice magazine advertising
- Logo placement on the OFA website, emails, and monthly member communications
- Exclusive opportunities to offer member promotions and incentives

LEARN MORE



ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION







Thanks to the generosity of OFA sponsor,

bluestone®

all Giving Tuesday donations will be matched to double your support for OFA for *THE THIRD YEAR!*

Mark Your Calendars for Giving Tuesday on December 1!







YOUR GIFT on December 1st can amplify farmers' voices on Capitol Hill!

Giving Tuesday is the largest single day of giving in the U.S., and for the last two years OFA raised $10,000 on this day thanks to Bluestone Life's matching gift!

ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION



SPONSOR STORY

End of Year Tips to Ensure Your Farm's Financial Health

By Kendal Thomas

You spend years cultivating soil health and stewarding your land to build a farm that takes care of your community for generations to come. Your finances deserve that same devotion. Healthy finances don't just protect your operation; they set up you, your family, and your farm to thrive. We asked three experts for practical steps you can take right now: Aryn Young of Ambrook, Sharlene Brown of TPV for Agricultural Impact, and Nathan Irons of Bluestone Life. Their advice can free up the one thing every farmer is short on: time to run your farm and make confident decisions about your business.

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

According to Aryn Young, an account manager on the product operations team for Ambrook, the most important thing you can do this year to improve your farm's finances is "to have a home for every transaction of your business." Young is in a Product Operations role for Ambrook, a financial platform made to help farmers centralize their finances and organize bookkeeping, payments, receipts, and reports in one place.

The platform is built for farmers and other independent business owners, with mobile tools that help them manage their finances whether they're in the field or at their desk. "You're not having to look at paper receipts, look at your financial software, and then maybe go to your bank to pay your bills. We've designed it so that you can do everything in one place, whether you're at your computer or at your phone. Operators are not having to keep track of so many moving pieces," Young described.

Young explained how important it is for farmers to organize their finances using a practice that is realistic to maintain over time.

There are many different approaches farmers can take while centralizing their finances. For some, sitting down weekly and sorting paper receipts works, while others prefer to sort transactions immediately.

Having centralized and organized finances gives farmers back time to operate the farm, make strategic and informed decisions, or get much-needed rest. "I've had producers say this has given them their nights back so they can spend time with their family, and I've had producers tell me that this has allowed them to spend more time actually running their business."

Young provided concrete steps to organizing your finances, emphasizing the importance of establishing a manageable system before tackling a backlog of transactions. "I know that getting a bunch of transactions tagged for 2026 taxes, for example, can feel really overwhelming, but focus on 1) categorizing the transactions and 2) establishing a system you can maintain moving forward," Young explained, "Whether that's receipts in an envelope, snapping a picture of the receipts, start today. As you get confident in that system, you can work on the overwhelming piece of previous months. It's gonna make everything coming forward so much easier."



Heat map image courtesy of Ambrook

BUILD A PLAN

With clear awareness of where your numbers stand, you can more easily plan for long-term financial goals. Sharlene Brown, Financial Health Coach with The Prosperity Village (TPV) for Agricultural Impact, explained how understanding your personal relationship to money is central to building a plan for your future. Financial resilience is the goal, and Brown explained that you can achieve this goal through healthy budgeting and planning.

When analyzing your farm business's finances, you must also look at your household finances, as the two are often intermingled. To get your finances in order so you can build for the future, Brown recommended breaking down the household and farm monthly expenses. "Small businesses, including farm enterprises, are co-mingling the personal and the business. So one of the first things that we do is build a household budget. And then we're going to build the business budget." With clarity over these numbers, Brown advised that farmers can then act accordingly. This may mean picking up a part-time job during the slow season to pay bills, or having the clarity to properly plan to use slower months as efficiently as possible.

"If you can wrap your mind around those two numbers, then you begin to move on this journey towards financial health. And that's what our work is about. If you get folks to be financially healthy, they can be resilient. And resilience is simply about being able to bounce back from a crisis."

Brown compares financial health to human health, it requires exercise, practice, and community to avoid the sedentary isolation that can make farming so challenging at times. Brown's coaching takes a holistic approach, "I think a lot of times when we see programs that support farmers, it only focuses on one component. And we're trying to get to the bigger picture. To make sure that the farmer can be healthy and then resilient." To chart your path towards resilience, Sharlene recommends yearly, or twice-yearly analyses of your financial bottom line, with both your household leaders and farm operation leaders at the table.



Lori Hylton and Sharlene Brown, TPV for Agricultural Impact

PROTECT WHAT YOUR INCOME AND WHAT YOU ARE STEWARDING

What better way to secure financial resilience than having the right safety nets in case of crisis. Nathan Irons, founder of Bluestone Life, illuminated the importance of life insurance that secures the future of your family farm while aligning with your values as an organic farmer.

Bluestone offers life, disability, accident, and critical illness insurance to provide peace-of-mind for the unpredictability of life. In doing so, both family and farm can be covered. Life insurance can be a useful financial tool that supports several priorities at once, like replacing income for family members, acting as collateral for a loan, paying off debt, and providing estate liquidity to balance family and farm priorities.

Bluestone's mission of protecting families, strengthening communities, and safeguarding our planet, is brought to life with their *Premiums with Purpose*® program. This means philanthropic investments in high-impact nonprofits like OFA, premiums being invested in initiatives that support clean energy, affordable housing, and community development, and at claim a benefit payable to the nonprofit of your choice.

Bluestone also offers no-cost tools to get you started on a path to a more secure financial future. One of these is a no-cost will, which Irons explained is critical because it outlines what will happen with most of your assets. It can determine what happens to your land, equipment, and residences, which is often a more complex situation for a farm owner than the average household. When shopping for life insurance to secure your financial legacy, Bluestone offers a no obligation consultation, and an opportunity to stay consistent with organic farming principles.

It may seem overwhelming, but picking one element to tackle this year to strengthen financial health. It will have an immediate impact on your ability to grow your farm in the present and secure your loved ones in the future. “Start where you are today,” Young from Ambrook recommended. Young, along with Brown and Irons, explained how having a clear picture of your finances allows you to make better decisions for your short term and long term goals. Whether that be buying more equipment or investing in a life insurance policy, it all begins with true awareness of your current finances. From there, you can build goals towards financial resilience, ensuring that even through difficult moments, your loved ones and farm will remain secure.



Kendal is a recent graduate of American University, with a degree in Communications Studies and a Minor in American Studies. Having grown up in rural Pennsylvania and now living in Washington D.C., Kendal has a deep passion for regenerative agriculture, food access, and community building. She is curious about the relationship between farmers and consumers, exploring how to better connect us all to our food system and the earth.

bluestone®

Thank you to Bluestone Life.

An OFA Premium Sponsor and the 2026 Giving Tuesday matching gift sponsor.

Sponsor dedication is one reason we can create this magazine for organic farmers and supporters.
Learn more about Bluestone Life’s values and products:
www.bluestonelife.com

NEW!

OFA Merch

New merch for 2027 is now in the OFA store



Order your OFA Member merch to show your support for organic food, farms, and farmers!

Browse the Store

And OFA Farmer Members, be sure to order your member farm sign here!



FEATURED STORY

Big Changes Could Be Coming to Your Organic Certification Application

By Harriet Behar

Organic certifiers have existed since the 1970s. When the organic law was written in 1990 (the Organic Food Production Act), it introduced a new concept: every operation needed to have an "Organic System Plan" (OSP). This requirement recognized that organic operations of all types rely more on **systems** such as crop rotation and pest and disease prevention than on inputs to manage operations and meet organic requirements. Organic certifiers active before the law changed their certification applications to follow the law's OSP requirements and, eventually, the national organic standards implemented in 2002.

Each certifier developed their own OSP, some with checkboxes, others with questions and narrative answers written by the operation. Many had a mix of both. The OSP information was similar but not identical across certifiers, depending on their priorities, client spectrum, and regional needs. Later, certifiers developed electronic forms and linked the information to their databases so they could track their clients over time, acreage, inputs used, etc. If you've switched certifiers, you have experienced the differences and difficulties in transferring information between the two OSPs.

DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMON OSP

For years, organic advocates, especially educators helping farmers transition to organic, have found it clumsy to share so many different OSP forms with new operations, since operations can choose any certifier.

These challenges, along with outdated OSP template forms on the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) website, prompted the NOP to ask community members to develop a suite of updated, Common OSP forms that complied with the new Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) rule. Quick Organics, a private online organic certification recordkeeping software company, volunteered to take on the task, and in July 2026, a "Common OSP" was adopted by the National Organic Program. Quick Organics worked with five certifiers across the country and the NOP to develop the comprehensive OSP for anyone to use. OFA and other organic organizations (NODPA and WODPA) organized farmer reviewers of draft Common OSPs to ensure farmer feedback was incorporated. While Quick Organics and the NOP were supportive of farmer feedback on the new OSP, farmer feedback was not designed into the creation process.

DO I HAVE TO USE THE COMMON OSP?

The new Common OSP is available on the NOP website, along with various supporting documents. Operations can continue to use their certifier's application/OSP, or they can elect to use the Common OSP with their current certifier. The NOP's website states, "The NOP strongly encourages certifiers to adopt and use the Common OSP to improve consistency, support efficient oversight, and help the organic sector meet the needs of a growing and increasingly complex marketplace."

The NOP hopes this new form will standardize content, remove outdated forms, and clarify expectations for how an operation would comply with USDA organic regulations. New organic regulations under Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) require certifiers to share information along the supply chain, and a uniform OSP is expected to make information sharing more transparent, resulting in more effective and efficient interactions with certifiers.

DOES QUICK ORGANICS OWN THE COMMON OSP?

While Quick Organics developed the open-source Common OSP forms for the USDA, you do not need a subscription to Quick Organics to use them. Any certifier can adopt the Common OSP forms and amend them with additional questions. Any farmer can choose to use the Common OSP instead of the OSP offered by their certifier, accessible for free at the NOP website. The National Organic Program does not mandate certifiers to use the Common OSP.

WHAT IS QUICK ORGANICS' ROLE NOW?

Quick Organics' organic recordkeeping software provides the Common OSP forms, as well as additional recordkeeping forms, to help you track the documentation you need to maintain for organic certification. A subscription for this service starts at $150 annually. Some certifiers are working with Quick Organics and have waived the fee for their clients for the first year, but you will likely need to pay for a subscription the following year.

ONE FARMER'S EXPERIENCE USING QUICK ORGANICS AND THE NEW COMMON OSP

One farmer/handler said switching to the Common OSP with Quick Organics' recordkeeping software took time, partly because he is less tech-savvy than others and was adjusting from a paper recordkeeping system to online forms. The terminology differed from what he was familiar with in his certifier's OSP, and it didn't offer a plain-language option, but he found the staff at Quick Organics helpful. The forms were clear and understandable, although the new OSP was just as long as his previous one.

The farmer shared that, with practice, using the Common OSP and tracking forms has gotten easier. Although he was reluctant to give up the paper-filled binders he previously used for organic recordkeeping, he is getting used to the electronic certification documentation provided by Quick Organics. He likes the idea of everyone having similar documentation so they can help each other with questions and improve information sharing. He acknowledged that organic paperwork is essential to facilitate the government oversight needed to maintain organic integrity.

A CERTIFIER'S EXPERIENCE

One certifier who adopted the Common OSP through a contract with Quick Organics said the timing was perfect, since some of their current forms were outdated and this saved them the cost and staff time of creating new forms. The transition took about a year to implement, with clients needing to fill out the new forms and staff needing time to get accustomed to reviewing them. They modified a few questions but did not add or remove any. This certifier chose to use only the new crop and handler Common OSPs because they recently updated their livestock OSP, but they anticipate moving to the common livestock form in the future. They found it fairly easy to integrate the Common OSP information with their current database by archiving the previous information and activating the new forms within their computer software.

This certifier completed the transition for over 1,100 clients in a year and encouraged farmer-clients not to be intimidated by the new OSP; completing a fresh OSP can be a useful opportunity to assess your operation. Their clients needed help completing the unfamiliar forms, but Quick Organics helped over 80 clients navigate the new format and questions. While the switch required extra work, they feel the transition will be worthwhile because it creates a more uniform set of information for every NOP-certified operation. The certifier also modified their inspection reports to more closely follow the new Common OSP.

WHAT'S NEXT?

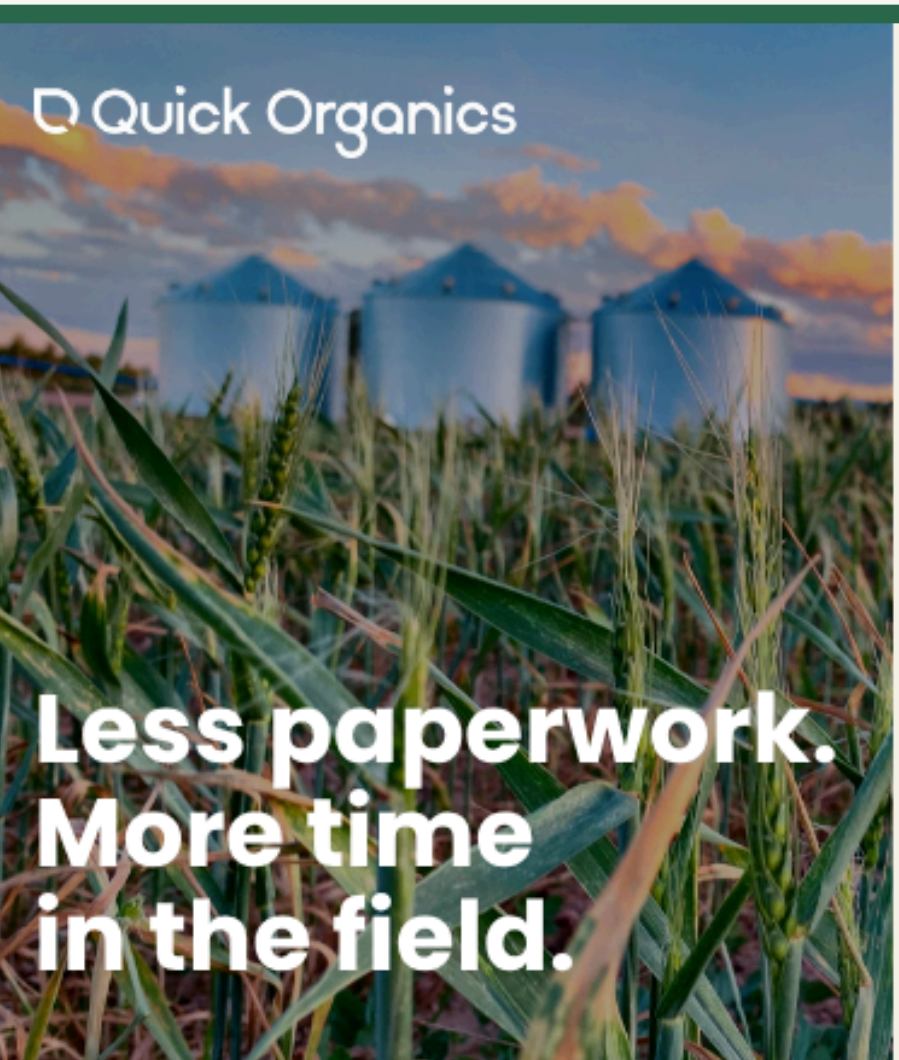
Certifiers will need to be prepared for 1) switching to the Common OSP, 2) offering the Common OSP as an alternative option to their existing OSP, 3) switching to the Common OSP and adding additional questions they need for consistency with how they process documentation. They should plan for the transition, be prepared to help clients who elect the Common OSP, train staff and inspectors on the new forms, and expect the initial OSP reviews to take a little more time the first year it is used. With more operations using the same forms across the supply chain, the hope is that tracking certification compliance will reduce the many clarification communications between certifiers and save time and resources.

The Accredited Certifiers Association (ACA) is currently working on Common Inspection Forms that align with the Common OSP. ACA is also developing a process and procedure to keep the Common OSP forms updated.

They will remain a "Common OSP" only if they are administered the same way by all certifiers. A procedure outlining WHO updates the Common OSP and HOW OFTEN will be important to its relevance and longevity. Organic Farmers Association would like to see farmers integrated into this process to ensure that the Common OSP remains accessible to all farmers.



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 SYSTEM PLAN
Built on the NOP Common OSP

ACTIVITY TRACKER
Record activities as they happen

DIGITAL FILING CABINET
Renewal & inspection ready, all year long

Start your free trial today
quickorganics.app

SCAN ME

quickorganics.com
hello@quickorganics.com
970-698-8371

ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

FARMER STORYTELLING RESOURCES

Access tools and support to help you tell your farm's story, connect with customers, and share the value of organic.

- VIRTUAL WORKSHOPS
- WORKBOOKS & GUIDES
- INTERACTIVE KNOWLEDGE BASE
- 1-ON-1 OFFICE HOURS

Sign up for fall workshops now and find all the resources & tools on our website:

organicfarmersassociation.org/organic-farmer-storytelling-project



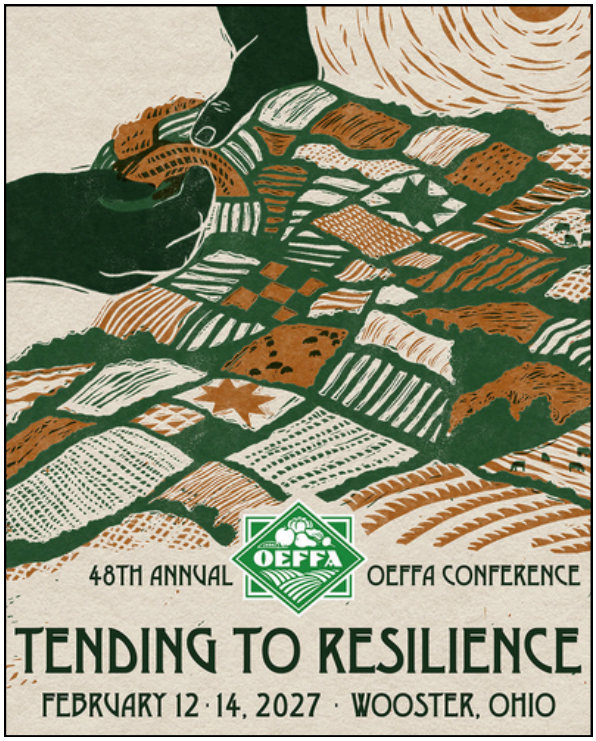
Organic Winter Conferences

Explore a range of exciting conferences and events designed for organic farmers! These events offer opportunities for networking, skill-building workshops, insightful panel discussions, and time to collaborate with others this winter. Explore more organic events from organic organizations: **organicfarmersassociation.org/events**

Click to learn more











Organic Winter Conferences

Click to learn more













Thanks to These Organic Certification Agencies for Supporting OFA

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

Certified CCOF Organic

VERMONT CERTIFIED ORGANIC — VERMONT ORGANIC FARMERS

Global Organic Alliance, Inc.

PCO CERTIFIED ORGANIC











FEATURED STORY

A Farmer's Place as an Active Certification Participant

By Julia Barton

Organic farming is a choice, and organic farmers choose each year whether to continue to certify. It's more work, for sure, but many of us believe ecological food production is a healthier and more sustainable option for our farms, families, and communities. Then we start thinking about certification, the cost, the hassle, the time, and the energy it requires. In the best-case scenario, certification feels like a partnership. The parties—the farmer, certifier, and inspector—all come prepared, meet deadlines, bring the appropriate knowledge to the table, and remain flexible and respectful.

Some parts of certification can be tough, though. On the OFA Farmer HelpLine, we field calls from farmers with concerns about communication with their certifiers, the qualifications of their organic inspector, increased and sometimes repetitive paperwork, and the cost of certification. Some farmers think they just have to work with the organic certifier and take what is given, like a price-taker in a commodity market. Just as we can choose how to farm, and whether to certify, we also have options to advocate for ourselves within the certification process. After all, the squeaky wheel gets the grease, so here are some thoughts on squeaking.

WHAT DOES A CONCERN OR A NOTATION ON AN EXIT INTERVIEW MEAN?

If an inspector notices something during an inspection that doesn't seem right, they can list it as a concern on the exit interview. The exit interview is one term for the summary document shared with the farmer at the end of the inspection.

In addition to noting the concern, the inspector must cite the relevant organic standard (Code of Federal Regulations) and explain it to the farmer or handler before seeking their signature. If the inspector doesn't identify a concern in the exit interview document but notes it elsewhere in the inspection report, the inspector made a mistake. Inspectors are human, and mistakes happen. If a concern is identified and the inspector doesn't cite the standard, that's a problem because the farmer cannot tie the concern back to the regulations they are held accountable to and read them for clarification. In short, you have a right to know both what the concern is and where in the regulations you can reference the related standard. You also have the right to have the inspector explain the concern and the related standard before you sign the exit interview. Make sure your inspector leaves you with a copy.

WHEN DOES SUCH A NOTATION TURN INTO A NONCOMPLIANCE?

Noncompliances can arise in both pre- and post-inspection reviews. Often, the certifier issues noncompliances after the post-inspection review, once the inspector has had a chance to check any issues that may have arisen in the certifier's pre-inspection review. The certifier sends a letter explaining what the certifier or inspector noted, which regulation it relates to, and what the farmer needs to do going forward.

Usually, the farmer must submit a plan to “fix” the noncompliance within a certain amount of time, and then the inspector checks up on the status of the “fix” at the next annual inspection. If the inspector reports that the noncompliance has been addressed, the certifier then sends an email or letter “resolving” the noncompliance, which means the matter is closed.

WHAT IS A NONCOMPLIANCE?

A noncompliance is an area (either production or paperwork) in which the farmer is perceived to be not following the organic standards set out in the Code of Federal Regulations. Of course, people wrote the code and people interpret it, so there are some grey areas. While certifiers are used to navigating grey areas in certification processes, farmers may not be as familiar with their options, so this article highlights a few.

WHAT IF I DISAGREE WITH THE NONCOMPLIANCE I HAVE BEEN ISSUED?

If you disagree with the noncompliance you have been issued, you have the opportunity, in your response to the certifier that is requested in the letter or email sent to you, to refute the noncompliance. An erroneous noncompliance could result from a misunderstanding by one of the parties or from a lack of understanding of your production or record-keeping system. It could also be that the certifier is making requests over and beyond what the standard requires of you.

There are many ways to meet the standard. You don't need to use your certifier’s specific forms. If you can convince the certifier that your system can be audited and that you comply with the regulation, they should resolve the noncompliance. If you have a production system that is not well understood by the certifier or inspector, it can be helpful to provide descriptions and citations in your response. It can also be helpful to copy a supervisor at the certification agency, or an ag service provider, like a member of OFA’s farmer services team, if you are having a hard time getting a response.

HOW TO PREVENT NONCOMPLIANCE

Good recordkeeping throughout the year
We focus on farming, but good recordkeeping is a good business practice whether we are certified organic or just trying to keep track of our inputs, activities, harvests, labor, and sales. Strong standard operating procedures (SOPs), training protocols for anyone employed on the farm or helping out, and good communication with our certification agencies can really help avoid unnecessary compliance issues.

Updating your OSP as Changes Occur
The Organic System Plan is a living document. Certifiers know it changes over time with weather, farm labor needs, and other unforeseen circumstances.

As farmers, it's our job to update the OSP periodically so it reflects what’s actually happening on the farm. This update can help protect us as farmers if something unexpected happens (such as energy infrastructure developments, pesticide drift from a neighbor, or extreme weather), and it can also help us communicate effectively with our certifier to stave off misunderstandings and errors.

ANTICIPATING INPUT NEEDS AND GETTING CERTIFIER APPROVAL EARLY

Many certifiers have their own materials review staff, and they're especially busy at certain times of the year, just like farmers. If we can anticipate what inputs we will need and submit the paperwork requesting review and approval when it’s not a rush, this will support our sanity and give the certifier time to do their due diligence before approving a material for use in organic production. Typically, planting season in your region is the biggest rush, so try to plan ahead and submit material review requests three months before this timeframe.

STRONG COMMUNICATION & TIMELY RESPONSES TO REQUESTS

It's easier said than done, but if we can return to viewing our certifiers and inspectors as partners in the certification process, we will want to give them the same timely communication that we want from them. Responding within deadlines and with complete information, or picking up the phone to talk when something's not accurate, can save you and your certifier time in the long run.

OFA IS HERE TO SUPPORT YOU IF YOU NEED BACKUP

The squeaky wheel gets the grease, and sometimes those situations with more people watching get more attention as they move through a process. You don't have all of the power in your relationship with your certifier and inspector, but you can be an active participant in your own certification experience. You can set up systems to make the annual process easier, communicate effectively, and seek help when you need it.

As always, OFA's Farmer Services team is at your service. We can help you set up recordkeeping systems, SOPs, or prepare for inspection. We're happy to help should you receive a noncompliance in error, or should there be a misunderstanding about your production system. We know you are already juggling a lot– you don't have to do this alone. **Call the OFA Farmer HelpLine (833) 724-3834 or email helpline@organicfarmersassociation.org, and we'll be ready to help.**



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.

ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

BE A PART OF FARMER-LED POLICY SOLUTIONS

JOIN A FARMER WORKGROUP

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

- **Crop Insurance:** Make crop insurance work better for organic and transitioning farmers by working to ensure crop insurance is fair and functional.
- **Diversified Producer:** This group meets to address concerns raised by small scale, diversified growers and grazers. This is a great group for beginning farmers to connect with and learn from more experienced diversified producers and access support.
- **Grain Grower:** This workgroup meets to address ongoing organic farmer concerns of grain farmers, such as fraudulent organic imports, and generate strategies and solutions.
- **Public Procurement:** Join OFA Organization Members and farmers working together to get more organic food in institutions like schools and hospitals.
- **Dairy Producer:** Join organic dairy producers to share information on organic dairy production, policy, and markets.
- **Mixed Vegetable Grower:** This workgroup meets to address concerns raised by mid-scale mixed vegetable farmers accessing wholesale markets such as market consolidation.

Complete a Workgroup Interest Form Now

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

Promoting organic practices to build an economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially just agricultural system.

nofavt.org | vermontorganic.org

ORGANIC GRAIN *Marketing*

HOW TO AIM FOR SUCCESS

INDIVIDUAL FARMERS



ONE COOPERATIVE FAMILY

OFARM FAMILY OF COOPERATIVES ORGANIC GROWN IN USA

CENTRAL PLAINS ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION CPOFA

ONE HAPPY BUYER



AND MANY HAPPY FARMERS

Relationship Marketing at its BEST

www.OFARM.org

Marketing@Ofarm.org

ORGANIC seed ALLIANCE

Save the Date!



ORGANIC SEED GROWERS CONFERENCE

JOIN US

MARCH 24-27, 2027 | ASHEVILLE, NC

MARCH 30-31, 2027 | VIRTUAL

Learn more at seedalliance.org/conference

CCOF is a partner in the organic movement to almost 5,000 operations across North America.

Certified CCOF Organic

www.ccof.org

Get certified organic with CCOF and help make organic the norm!

CENTER FOR FOOD SAFETY

TELL EPA TO BAN GLYPHOSATE



SIGN OUR PETITION HERE

MCIA™
ORGANIC SERVICES
Serving the Upper Midwest



ORGANIC CERTIFICATION:

- Crops
- Livestock
- Handlers & Processors
- Wild Crops

USDA ORGANIC

Minnesota Crop Improvement Association
1900 Hendon Ave, Saint Paul MN 55108
855-213-4461 • www.mciaorganic.org



STRONG SEED FOR A STRONG AND DIVERSE ROTATION

Our wide range of farm-proven seed includes Blue River organic corn, soybeans, and alfalfa; Viking conventional non-GMO corn, soybeans, and alfalfa; and a strong lineup of organic and conventional small grains, cover crops, and forages. Work with your local Albert Lea Seed dealer for the expertise and solutions you need for a successful organic crop rotation. Visit **alseed.com** or call **800.352.5247**.

ALBERT LEA SEED | BLUE RIVER ORGANIC SEED

INDEPENDENT. JUST LIKE YOU.

unwrap the truth about

Butter



*

Clear Skin

Vitamin A

Digestive Health

Supports hormones

Regulates inflammation

Butter provides vitaminAneededforgrowth, repair, hormone productionandmineral assimilation.

Butter provides butyric acid,neededfor thyroid anddigestivehealth.

Butter supports fertility.

Butter provides arachidonic acid, for making feel-good chemicals.

Butter from grass-fed cows provides conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) which has cancer-fighting abilities.

westonaprice.org/butter

The Weston A. Price Foundation

OFA STORY

Recap of the Fall 2026 National Organic Standards Board Meeting

By Harriet Behar

At the beginning of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) meeting, the National Organic Program (NOP) reported on activities achieved over the past six months, focusing on fraud reduction. The Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) Rule, implemented a few years ago, has given the NOP more data and tools to oversee imports. The origin of questionable imports is more transparent, and the NOP has visited numerous African countries, finding uneven certifier performance, weaknesses in grower group oversight, and missed compliance problems, with enforcement actions coming soon. The number of complaints received by the NOP has been rising, but even with a 30% staff reduction (reduced from 82 to 57), 85% of complaints were resolved within six months. In the past year, the NOP prevented $8.9 million worth of imported products from entering the U.S. We have seven organic equivalency agreements with countries and the entire European Union; this is an area the Organic Farmers Association identified where domestic producers compete unfairly with foreign products because of significant differences between our regulations and theirs. The NOP said it is reviewing this issue.

Fourteen members of the NOSB attended the fully virtual meeting, which included two public comment sessions and three days of board discussion and votes. The five new members were very engaged in their first meeting. The NOSB reviewed allowed and prohibited materials, as well as USDA organic regulatory improvements. An overarching theme was that the market for organic products in the United States continues to grow, but production within our country is stagnant if not shrinking. Most organic beef and pork sold in the U.S. come from South America and Canada, respectively.

Organic soybeans and soybean meal are another large area of imported commodities that we can produce quite easily here. Coffee, bananas, and other crops are not as easy to grow here, but others in the top 10 imports, such as avocadoes, blueberries, maple syrup, and strawberries, do not face significant production challenges for our U.S. farmers. The board also discussed increasing requirements for organic seed and improving regulatory oversight to encourage more organic seed use, especially for organic seed grown in the U.S. Many on the NOSB said organic consumers would support both organic seed use and domestic production if they could identify these issues at the point of purchase with a secondary label.

All materials reviewed at their five-year sunset for crops and livestock were approved to remain on the list. One handling material, carrageenan, was voted for removal. The NOSB also voted to remove it in 2016, but the NOP did not act on this recommendation. The NOP plans to hold more public comment before deciding whether to accept or deny this NOSB removal recommendation. The board approved one new material, chitosan, for addition to the crop list for disease management and as a soil amendment.

The board voted to allow Ivermectin for emergency treatment of New World screwworm in dairy cows, with a 90-day milk withdrawal. More work will be done to find a better parasiticide with fewer negative side effects and perhaps a shorter withholding time, as well as a solution for other species, including slaughter stock, by the Spring meeting. The NOP raised caution about the FDA's support for Ivermectin use for NWS and will share the board's recommendation with the FDA. One commenter also said ticks are becoming a significant problem.



2026 NOSB Board Members

A commenter raised concerns about the lack of U.S. organic standards specific to apiculture and domestic honey production, as well as possibly contaminated "organic" honey being imported. At this time, apiculture is not on the NOSB work agenda, and the NOP did not seem eager to address this issue, noting that bees can be certified organic under USDA standards as livestock; however, only five U.S. apiculture operations are certified organic.

The NOSB approached integrating grazed livestock into organic orchards by suggesting changes to the current NOP contamination avoidance guidance document, rather than regulatory changes for agroforestry. In the spring, a proposal will be introduced to help certifiers understand the strategies these operations use to reduce food safety risks. Protocols should be flexible enough to recognize that different livestock, crops, and grazing systems present different pathogen risks. This is similar to the certifier determining the size of required buffer zones based on local conditions.

Three seats are open on the NOSB: a farmer, a scientist, and a consumer interest stakeholder. The application deadline is December 28, 2026, and the five-year term starts in early 2027. Contact OFA if you are interested in serving on the NOSB and would like to learn more: harriet@organicfarmersassociation.org.

And you can also reach out to Harriet if you're interested in any of the topics in this article or have other areas of the organic regulations you feel are impractical or need improvement. OFA wants to hear from you, we can bring positive change!



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.

A TOPP RECAP FROM THE MEETING

At the meeting, regional lead organizations reviewed the TOPP (Transition to Organic Partnership Program), which will end in December.

Over the four years of TOPP:

- **3,234** events were held around the country
- **5,520** agricultural professionals received training to help their clients with organic
- **7,423** new operations were certified
- **600,681** new organic acres were added
- **Hundreds** of mentors and mentees worked together to build high-quality, sustainable organic operations.

OFA is proud to have contributed to these numbers and delivered more services to organic farmers over the last four years.

Turner Farm
Indian Hill, Ohio
Certified Organic Produce



Connecting people and the land that feeds them in body, mind, & spirit.

REAL ORGANIC PROJECT · ORGANIC · USDA ORGANIC

JANIE'S MILL
Stone Ground
GRAIN ARTISANS

From Farm to Mill to You
Stone Milled Certified Organic Grains in Ashkum, IL

Taste the difference

janiesmill.com

USDA ORGANIC

NF Organics
Group Marketing for Organic Grain

*Our Market Knowledge Means Pricing Power
*Price Negotiators Assure You the Best Price
*We Offer Better Contract Terms

National Farmers
Helping Producers Profit More Since 1955

Call Mike Schulist
715.496.3956

WENDT
CROP INSURANCE

Your Partner in Organic & Conventional Farming

Thinking about transitioning to organic? It's a big step—and we're here to help.

At Wendt Crop Insurance, we specialize in personalized crop insurance for both organic and conventional farmers. From paperwork to protecting your crops, we've got your back.

- Coverage for both organic and conventional crops
- Tailored plans to fit your unique operation
- Service you can trust, expertise you can count on
- Support through the multi-year organic transition
- Specializing in Whole Farm Revenue Protection & other specialty crops

We proudly serve a wide range of farmers. Let's grow together—with insurance that understands your farm.

Contact us today to learn more!
515-491-7915
wendtcropins@gmail.com

80 YEARS
Fertrell
SINCE 1946

PLAN AHEAD. FARM SMARTER. NEXT SEASON STARTS NOW

Fertrell's natural and organic products give your soil, crops, and animals the balanced nutrition they need for a healthier, more productive season ahead.

NATURAL AND ORGANIC FERTILIZERS, FEED SUPPLEMENTS, LIVESTOCK NUTRITION & AGRONOMY CONSULTING

The Fertrell Company · PO Box 265, Bainbridge, PA 17502
800-347-1566 · www.fertrell.com

CERTIFIED ORGANIC BY MOFGA

Maine's USDA Accredited Organic Certifier

Certifying to all NOP Scopes in Maine, NH and Northeastern MA

CERTIFIED ORGANIC BY MOFGA
MOFGA Certification Services



207-568-6030
certification@mofga.org
mofgacertification.org

NODPA

NORTHEAST ORGANIC DAIRY PRODUCERS ALLIANCE

NODPA:
The Independent Producer Voice for Organic Dairy Family Farms

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.



OEFFA

OHIO ECOLOGICAL FOOD AND FARM ASSOCIATION

Using certification, education, and advocacy to promote local and organic food systems.



oeffa.org

(614) 262-2022 - oeffa@oeffa.org



How One Organic Orchardist's Crop Insurance Will Keep Him Farming Another Year

By Harriet Behar

Steve Ela and Regan Choi own and operate Ela Family Farms near Hotchkiss, Colorado. The 90-acre orchard suffered a total tree fruit crop loss this Spring when early bloom and a late hard freeze killed all the fruit blossoms. Even with large propane-run fans designed to stir up cold air and prevent frost, the 21-degree temperatures caused catastrophic loss. Ela Family Farms typically sells nearly 1 million pounds of quality fruit through farmers' markets, CSA members, and wholesale markets. In peak season, Ela drives his semi-truck over Rocky Mountain passes to Denver several times a week to sell to his direct to consumer and wholesale accounts.

Beyond the crop loss from the hard freeze, the farm has been managing ongoing orchard care during a severe drought. On June 4, 2026, Colorado Governor Jared Polis declared a statewide drought emergency to unlock state resources, coordinate the Colorado Drought Task Force, and direct state facilities to reduce water use. The snowpack that feeds Ela Family Farms' irrigation water was only 65% of normal, and many neighboring orchards suffered the same fate. Fruit production accounts for most of Ela Family Farms' business income. Even with no fruit, the orchard still requires labor and financial investment to maintain tree health and future fruit quality. Necessary maintenance costs include irrigation, pruning, mowing, and installing insect netting or spraying to prevent pests from laying eggs for next year.

While crop insurance is expensive and can feel like a gamble, it was definitely worthwhile this year. The farm carried three types of federally subsidized crop insurance with different payment schedules, which helped maintain income throughout the year to cover ongoing farm expenses.

NAP (Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program) through the Farm Service Agency (FSA) covered about 12% of the farm's losses. Multi-Peril single commodity crop insurance and Whole Farm Revenue Protection for diverse crops through the Risk Management Agency (RMA) covered enough of the farm's losses to keep the farm and family going for another year.

All types of crop insurance mentioned here must be purchased before the crop season and for annuals, before it is planted. NAP has a fairly low cost and pays for losses within the crop year. Managed through each county's FSA office, this is basic catastrophic coverage for crops not usually covered by the RMA managed multi-peril crop insurance including fruits, vegetables, herbs, aquaculture, flowers and nursery, honey, mushrooms, forages, grazing land and more. Cost is $325 per crop covered, with a maximum paid of $825, but payouts will be less than 15% of the income lost.

Multi-Peril crop insurance pays once the crop season ends, and covers between 50%-85% of the income lost based upon larger scale county average commodity crop yields and prices. There are special allowances to insure an organic price and/or contracted price. This is the most widely used crop insurance in the U.S.

Whole Farm Revenue Protection pays based on revenue losses after you file your Schedule F with your income taxes, usually in the early months of the following year. This RMA insurance covers the revenue of an entire farm operation under one policy and can include livestock. The amount insured is typically a five-year income average with some exceptions for beginning or veteran farmers with a choice to insure between 50%-85% of the income.



Steve Ela speaks to farm tour visitors in October

There is also a scaled down version called Micro-Farm for operations with less than $350,000 in yearly income. Premiums paid by farmers with a more diverse crop list are lower than those with less crops. If a commodity is covered under multi-peril, that income is removed from the Whole Farm Revenue Protection coverage.

The greater community has been very supportive, based upon the long running relationships that have been built. Steve and Regan offered refunds to their CSA members and many chose to not take the money, saying they wanted to invest in the farm and keep it going. The farm is diversified and grows tomatoes in high tunnels and in the field, as well as on-farm processed dried and canned fruit products. The farm strives to sell high-quality table fruit and tomatoes and has built a loyal following at the numerous farmers markets they attend in Denver. They hire market staff who live in Denver to staff the multiple markets they may attend each day, handling sales, sampling and consumer questions. Ela Family Farms was able to attend some farmers markets with the tomatoes and processed products in 2026, just so their customers do not forget them for next year.



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.

DIG DEEPER: CROP INSURANCE



CROP INSURANCE FOR ORGANIC FARMERS

Every farm deserves a safety net. In light of recent and ongoing extreme weather events, many organic farmers who haven't previously engaged with crop insurance recognize the need to have a safety net that works for everyone.

OFA even has a dedicated Farmer Workgroup engaging with these issues and building relationships with agencies and elected officials to educate them about organic farmer realities and needs. Browse OFA's resources to learn from others' experiences and ideas, as well as information regarding Risk Management Agency programs and how they might be part of your farm's strategy for resilience in the face of extreme weather events.

Browse OFA's Crop Insurance Resources



MENTORSHIP SUPPORT

PRODUCER PARTNERSHIP

TAILORED GUIDANCE

FIELD DAYS, WORKSHOPS AND OTHER EVENTS ARE HAPPENING NOW.

SEE THE LIST OF EVENTS AT ORGANICTRANSITION.ORG

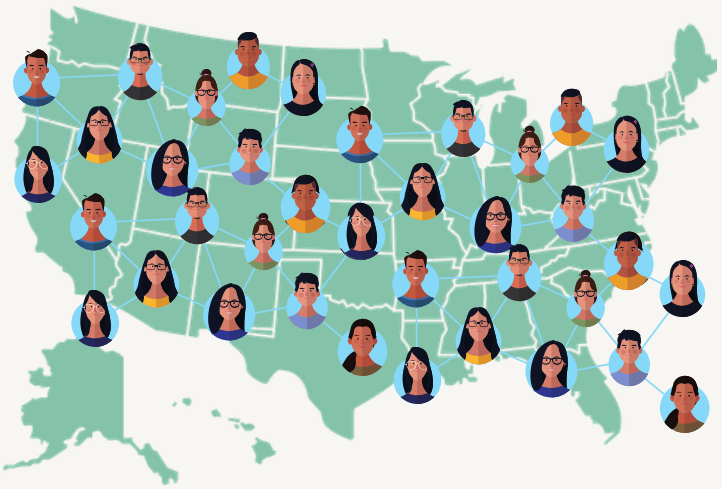
Scan to learn more about Northwest TOPP events.

The Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) is a network assembled by the USDA's National Organic Program to support transitioning and organic producers with mentorship and technical assistance.

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


Federal policies impact your farm
Become a Member & Have Your Voice Heard
OrganicFarmersAssociation.org/member-benefits

Join the Organic Movement

Building a Stronger Organic Farmer Voice

PRIMARY CONTACT INFORMATION

Name (Primary Contact):

Farm Name: **Website:**

Address:

City: **State:** **ZIP:**

Phone (Mobile): **Phone** (Other):

Email (Primary): **Email** (Other):

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

This Annual Membership is: ☐ New Membership ☐ Renewal

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

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

One Time Gift: ☐ $25 ☐ $50 ☐ $75 ☐ $100 ☐ $250 ☐ $500 ☐ Other

☐ Auto-renew annually to keep my membership valid

Or Join Online Right Now: organicfarmersassociation.org/#join

PAYMENT

Membership: **Donation:** **Total:**

Payment Type: ☐ Credit Card: ☐ Check Enclosed

Credit Card#: **Expiration Date:** **CVV#**

Please make all check payable to:
Organic Famers Association

Please mail check to:
Organic Famers Association
PO Box 709
Spirit Lake, IA 51360

Organic Farmers Association is a 501(c)(3) organization. Your gift is tax-deductible to the extent allowable by law.

Federal Tax ID Number: 85-1249281