

MOFFA: A Brief History

Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance Inc. (MOFFA) is a non-profit corporation organized to ***promote the development of food systems that rely on organic methods of food production and that revitalize and sustain local communities.***

It received its formal 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization status in January of 1992 under the name of Michigan Organic Growers Advancement Project (MOGP). MOFFA evolved from the Organic Growers of Michigan (OGM), a business cooperative that had eight chapters in the 1970s. The Charter Board Members were Maynard Kaufman (Chair), Pat Whetham (Vice Chair), John Valenti (Treasurer), Merrill Clark (Secretary), Laura DeLind, Norm Engel and Grey Larison. Following a number of strategic planning sessions in 1993, the name was changed to MOFFA.

The By-Laws of MOFFA were amended in January of 2008, and reflect the following five purposes and powers of the corporation:

- A. To promote awareness of the environmental advantages of organic farming with respect to soil, air and water quality.**
- B. To provide a forum for the exchange of organic farming information among members and to provide such information to the public.**
- C. To educate eaters about problems with the corporate food system and to promote local food systems.**
- D. To encourage and aid in the formation of organic farmers' organizations in Michigan.**
- E. To provide financial resources and help in carrying out the foregoing purposes of this organization.**

During most of MOFFA's history, communication with members has been through *Michigan Organic News* and the subsequent Michigan Organic Connections with Laura DeLind, Pat Wetham, Merrill Clark, April Allison and Gail Campana providing editorial leadership for these newsletters. Laura's creative talents provide MOFFA with its local food logo. In accordance with today's cyber technology, communications is provided through www.moffa.net.

MOFFA's first Michigan Organic Harvest Festival was held at Washtenaw Community College in 1997. The festivals resulted in evolution of several popular regional organic festival organizations. From 1993

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through 2011, MOFFA sponsored an *Organic Day* at the Michigan State University, Agricultural and Natural Resources Week, which became the Michigan Organic Conference. The 2001 conference had a major Michigan Department of Agriculture involvement in recognition of the *National Organic Standards*. The tradition was continued in 2012, with the Organic Research Day, under the leadership of Vicki Morone and the annual conference being moved to today's location and date, under the leadership of Board Chair, John Hooper.

Throughout the years, MOFFA has sponsored a significant number of organic initiatives and been responsible for approximately \$250,000 in grant resources. Among these projects are the several editions of *Eating Organically: A Guide to Michigan's Organic Food Producers and Related Businesses*, with the first one published in 1995. Laura DeLind, Susan Smalley, Pat Whetham, Nancy Keiser-Jones, Jim Bingen and Suzanne Smucker assumed the responsibilities for this major activity. In 1998, MOFFA received a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Grant for the purchase of a mobile organic food processing kitchen. The trailer has been used to assist a number of organic enterprises with their activities throughout Michigan.

MOFFA is the only organic advocacy organization in Michigan. It has cooperated with MASA (Michigan Agricultural Stewardship Association), MIFFS (Michigan Integrated Food and Farming Systems), MSU (Michigan State University) and MDARD (Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development) on issues of significance to the organic community. One example is that in 2010, MOFFA assumed one-year of responsibility for Michigan's part of the National Organic Cost Share Program. Recent landmark events within the Michigan organic community include development of the Student Organic Farm, under the leadership of John Biernbaum and Laurie Thorp and the associated annual Hoop House Gala, designed to assure a next generation of organic farmers. As recently as October 25, 2012, a MOFFA delegation had an organic advocacy meeting with the Director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

MOFFA annually recognizes highly deserving members with its Lifetime Achievement, Public Service, Community Service and Volunteer of the Year awards. It is anticipated that some of the individuals attending their first MOFFA annual conference today will be future recipients of these accolades.

Additional information about MOFFA can be obtained from:
A History of MOFFA, 1991-2003 by Maynard Kaufman. By-
Laws of Michigan organic Food and Farm Alliance, Inc.
(amended January 1, 2008)

Dr. George Bird prepared this history of MOFFA. Dr. Bird has himself been very instrumental in MOFFA's continuance and achievements. In addition to being a lead organizer of many of the Michigan Organic Conferences and helping to cultivate new board members, George has served as Board President and Treasurer and with wonderful generosity George and Ann Bird have consistently provided scholarships for the conference over the years.