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**From the Chair**

**Year End Reflections—A Call to Action!**

On this winter solstice morning the view of a surrealistic ice-encrusted landscape honors nature's beauty and strength while confirming our fragility and brevity upon "Mother Earth".

In this time of overzealous scrutiny, reactionary policy places burdensome and unnecessary regulation and obligations on those in the agricultural society whose methods and approach best offer the planet an opportunity to heal itself—and thus ensures healthy food, living soil, pure water and clean air.



Now more than at any time since the coalescing of the organic community and the modestly successful attempt to define itself at the turn of the century we need to speak loudly and en masse.

The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), which MOFFA has issued critical and thoughtful comment on (see below), and the 2013(14?) Farm Bill, which congress has to date been unable to enact a fair and just version of, are the two most prominent issues. There are others!

Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance membership is gradually growing but there are many past, inactive, and potentially new members whose insight would be highly valued. It would be outstanding if many could just join us in 2014 to assist in determining our level of activism and the degree of partnership we foster with other like-minded organizations.

As a 501(c)3 non-profit we have legal limitations but led by an astute delegation our policy committee can have real world impact. MOFFA's education and outreach in the last two decades has defined and more than justified our existence, touching countless farmers, growers and consumers. A major personal goal is to begin the process of crafting a similar effective and meaningful voice through a proactive policy group. Herein may lie a vehicle for tapping into all the wisdom of one generation, the knowledge of a second and the unbounded enthusiasm of a third.

Discard the reasons "why not to" and offer just a little time. Please go to our website and click on the [Volunteer](#) tab or email us at [moffaorganic@gmail](mailto:moffaorganic@gmail.com) or phone 248-262-6826

May the New Year bring prosperity and joy to your life and to all those near and dear.

— John H.

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## **MOFFA's Response on the Food Safety Modernization Act**

What follows is a comment submitted to the FDA by MOFFA on behalf of our members and allies. Please read it to understand some of the kinds of policies we stand for and against. This is a small example of some of the advocacy work that is possible with the amplified voice of a group like ours.

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MOFFA is a board run membership organization that advocates for Michigan Organic farmers and eaters. Our members and farmer allies in the state of Michigan will be broadly affected by the proposed FMSA rules. It is in concert with the many other voices doing ecological and organic food production that we submit these comments.

Our most general comment and the umbrella for all our specific comments is that growers have options, using their discretion and in a way commensurate to their scale and market reach, to seek certifications for food safety as requested or required by their customers. Many of our member farmers are certified organic, a process that covers much of the regulatory territory of the FSMA proposal. The USDA organic standard as a regulatory process has improved food safety on farms of all scales while remaining a voluntary market driven approach. Other farms that produce food that is normally consumed raw can request, pay for and comply with other certifications like "GAP" in order to gain access to markets demanding that compliance. We ask that FSMA reconsider its role as a new total standard and consider instead augmenting the efforts already being made in the market towards food safety and accountability.

Many of our member farmers engage in direct-to-consumer arrangements for selling their produce. In doing so, they have had ample dialogue around food and farming issues. We are hearing from them that none of their customers are asking for food safety regulation around CSA's, farmers' markets or roadside stands. Our sense is that the citizens who are buying directly from farms are quite comfortable with the arrangement and indeed have sought it out to regulate for themselves their risks around food. We ask that the final rule be clear in exempting the minor processing or aggregating activities done in direct-to-consumers arrangements from the regulation as "manufacturing facilities".

The USDA organic standards and the practices encouraged by the NRCS promote the known benefits of biodiversity on farms both to enhance wildlife habitat and to encourage an ecology that can help control pests and diseases without pesticides while harboring beneficial insects like pollinators. Our farmer members and their customers are convinced that farm-enhanced biodiversity makes Michigan's farms more beautiful, more sustainable and ultimately safer. If the final FSMA rule ends up encouraging a "scorched earth" policy anything like the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement farmers may be forced to undermine the longterm safety and security they have in their biodiversity in order to keep farming by the new rules of today. We ask that the FDA defer to the on-the-ground expertise of American farmers and the extant and proven track record of the NRCS when it comes to adapting farms to and growing food in our country's ecosystems.

In closing it appears that the markets and citizens calling for FSMA scale regulation are buying from producers that already have FSMA-like food safety checks in place. These same large-scale producers and processors are inviting the regulation in part because their market has already convinced them that they need the safety checks and they have invested in them accordingly. Customers of small and organic farms assess their food safety risks face-to-face and almost daily. They are not asking for FSMA-like regulation and their farmers certainly aren't. We ask that the FSMA final rule give real standing to exempt small operations making sure that a high standard of proof of harm be met before they are subject to FDA inspections and forced to comply with FSMA rules. This is a time when we at MOFFA and many others feel that bottom-up

innovation needs to be encouraged in agriculture to bring a new generation onto American farms. Guidance from the FDA and other information resources along with market feedback should be all the regulation American farms need to do best by their customers, their homes and their country.

— Lee Arboreal

Apparently the comments that the FDA received in November from farmers and organizations like MOFFA were heard. The FDA announced last week that new draft rules would be issued this summer. From Michael R. Taylor on the [FDAVoice](#) blog:

"You spoke. We heard you. [...] because of the input we received from farmers and the concerns they expressed about the impact of these rules on their lives and livelihood, we realized that significant changes must be made, while ensuring that the proposed rules remain consistent with our food safety goals. For that reason, we are planning to revise language in the proposed rules affecting farmers and plan to publish it in the Federal Register for public comment by early summer."

The release of new draft rules will be followed by another public comment period. We encourage everyone to take advantage of the opportunity to weigh in on rulemaking that will affect us all in the years ahead.

More information on the proposed rulemaking may be found [here](#) and [here](#).

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## MSU UPREC to Focus on Soil Health and Local Food Systems

During 2012 I had the pleasure of being a member of a group of MSU faculty asked to review the activities of the MSU AgBioResearch Station located at Chatham in the Upper Peninsula (about 20 miles from Munising).

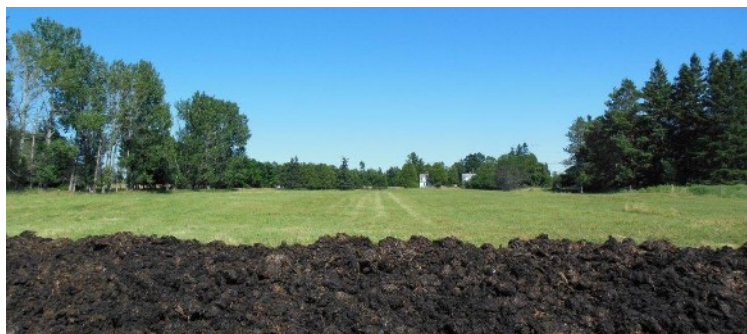
The committee gathered information from the station personnel, stakeholders and others and provided a set of recommendations for future directions. Those recommendations were accepted and have started to be implemented over the past year. The renamed Upper Peninsula Research and Extension Center (UPREC) is heading in some new directions with the guidance of a team of MSU faculty members. 2014 looks to be an exciting year for the Center. MSUE personnel will be doing more UP programming at the Center. In addition a stake



holder's advisory committee is being developed to strengthen the connections with the community.

A six page article about the UPREC and the new directions was recently published in the MSU AgBioResearch Futures Magazine. The article is available at the MOFFA website ([here](#)). There are three main goals that have been identified to guide work at the Center:

1. Improve soil health
2. Integrate crop and livestock systems
3. Strengthen local food systems



*Compost and Future Vegetable Production Site at the UPREC*

The Upper Peninsula is a great place to test principles of building soil health and the impact on crop, animal, personal and community health. The soil types, climactic conditions, and general low soil organic matter content provide an opportunity to make a difference in many ways.

The UPREC has traditionally had a live stock focus which will be expanded to include the integration of crops and livestock as a method to improve soil biology and health. An experiment has already been initiated that includes diverse cover crop mixtures and cash crops that will be rotated with cattle grazing. The work is tied to other cattle grazing management research at the Lake City Research Center.

The original North Farm site and barns have not seen much activity since new research buildings and barns were developed about a mile away several decades ago. In response to stakeholder holder requests a major new emphasis is to develop a teaching and outreach farm based on programs at the MSU Student Organic Farm. The latitude is similar to the northern most parts of Wisconsin and Maine so may provide some new challenges. Ground has already been prepared for a 30' x 144' hoophouse that will be constructed with an "educational build" once the ground thaws in the spring. In addition about four acres were cultivated in 2013 and planted to cover crop. Plans are also underway for transplant production facilities. Based on initial announcements just last week, a competitive USDA grant has been awarded that will provide funding for a farm manager who will be housed at the farm to help launch the program. A variety of intensive educational opportunities are planned, including some type of incubator farm program. This is going to be a lot of work with plenty of opportunity for partnerships. Let us know if you want to be involved.

<http://agbioresearch.msu.edu/centers/uprc>  
<http://agbioresearch.msu.edu/centers/lakecity>

— John Biernbaum



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## Upcoming Events

As part of our outreach, we sponsor and exhibit at conferences throughout the state. In the next three months, look for our booth at ...

- The [Michigan Family Farms Conference](#) on January 18th in Battle Creek
- [Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference](#), February 1st at the Grand Traverse Resort in Acme
- [Everybody Eats](#), February 8th in Lansing
- [Michigan Farmers Market Conference](#), March 4-5 in Lansing.

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## Organic Survey 2014

Attention Organic Farmers!... Please take the Organic Production Survey from MSU

Keep a look out for the Organic Production Survey that will be sent out in the mail on February 1, 2014. The goal of the survey is to gather information on the current practices utilized by organic farmers, so researchers at MSU will be able to better tailor research to the needs of organic producers.

The survey is designed for field crop and vegetable producers. A primary focus of the survey is to gain a better understanding of the tillage, weed management practices, and nutrient amendments currently used by growers, so that we may further research on organic practices that are more profitable and sustainable.

We strongly encourage all producers to participate. Results will be summarized over the summer and made available by Fall 2014.

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## Importance of Farm Bill to Organic Research in Michigan

Much of the research and extension focused on organic production since 2002 has been funded by one of the exclusively organic programs within the USDA. The researchers and educators committed to addressing the challenges and needs of the organic community in Michigan rely on this funding, and are greatly limited in the work they can do until the House and Senate pass a farm bill that restores funding for organic research and extension.

Exclusive organic research funding programs within the farm bill include:

**Organic Farming Research and Extension Initiative** is the major competitive grants program funded within the USDA that is exclusively organic. It was first initiated in 2002, and funding was increased in the 2008 farm bill. However, the OREI program was not included in the 2012 extension. The objectives of this program are broad and diverse, including improvement of organic production practices, plant breeding, development of organic markets, assistance with whole farm planning, improvement of post harvest handling, and understanding the biology and ecology of organic systems.

**Organic Transitions Program** was the only major grant program specifically focused on organics that was part of the 2012 farm bill extension. This program is targeted towards understanding environmental services provided by organic farming systems. Additional goals include the development of allowable alternatives to substances recommended for removal from the NOP list of allowed and prohibited substances, as well as the development of educational tools for agricultural advisors.

Including organic research programs within the farm bill ensures that a specified level of funding gets allocated to address challenges and further knowledge within the organic community. Organic researchers are also able to compete for other federal funding from programs such as:

- **Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)**: funds a variety of research and extension programs to improve upon sustainable farming practices and address the distinct regional challenges throughout the US.
- **Specialty Crops Research Initiative**: provides grants to state departments of agriculture to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.
- **Agriculture Food and Research Initiative**: the largest funding program in the USDA, it aims "to build a foundation of knowledge in fundamental and applied food and agricultural sciences that can be applied to address current and future societal challenges".

So call your congressional representatives and let them know that passing a new farm bill that restores previous funding for organic research should be a top priority in 2014!

— Carolyn Lowry

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## Farm Guide Update

We continue to add farms to MOFFA's Guide to Michigan's Organic and Ecologically Sustainable Growers and Farms, but we still have nearly 40 non-certified farms which applied for inclusion, but never returned the [Farmer's Pledge](#). If yours is among them,

now is a great time to sign that and get it back to us before spring planting begins. We hope to publish the guide on paper this spring, in addition to the online version, so we hope to include as many organic/sustainable farms as possible within the next two months.

If you have not applied for inclusion, please visit the info page at [www.moffa.net/GrowerGuideLetter.html](http://www.moffa.net/GrowerGuideLetter.html), email us at [moffaorganic@gmail.com](mailto:moffaorganic@gmail.com), give us a call at 248-262-6826, or write to us at MOFFA, P.O. Box 26102, Lansing, MI 98909.

The Farm Guide itself is online at [www.moffa.net/farm-guide.html](http://www.moffa.net/farm-guide.html).

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## Report from the Annual Meeting

MOFFA's Annual Meeting for 2013 was held on December 12th, following the close of 'organic day' at the Great Lakes Expo in Grand Rapids.

The primary order of business for the day was an election to determine whether MOFFA would continue as a 'membership organization' or modify its by-laws and articles of incorporation to change the structure to a 'directorship organization'.

This does not signal any change in the way that MOFFA operates—we remain committed to taking our direction and planning our activities based on input from the membership. However, Michigan law governing non-profit organizations requires that 'membership organizations' hold a meeting of the full membership each year for the purpose of electing board members and voting on certain other issues, such as changes to the by-laws. This has proven to be difficult to impossible in recent years, as evidenced by the meeting on December 12th—even though we have been talking about this issue since spring, with multiple mailings asking members who could not attend to mail in proxy forms, and individual phone calls to those who had not responded, it was not clear until the meeting actually began that we would have sufficient member participation to actually vote on the issue.

In the end, though, in spite of difficult weather in Grand Rapids, there were a total of 68 votes cast, five more than the required majority of half of the total membership, with 54 voting by proxy and the remainder present at the meeting. The vote to change the structure of the organization to a 'directorship' passed overwhelmingly, with 67 for and only one against. The elections of the nine currently serving board members were also formally ratified.

The balance of the meeting was devoted to a conversation about MOFFA's future direction and activities for the coming year. Vicki Morrone reports on this part of the meeting below.

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## New Ideas for MOFFA Generated at the Annual Meeting

MOFFA's annual meeting was not your traditional meeting—we held a voting station for members to cast their ballots to determine organizational structure for MOFFA, and each person was invited to share their ideas for actions and activities they would like MOFFA to offer. About thirty-five members attended the event, which was held at the close of at the Great



*A group of MOFFA stakeholders at the Annual Meeting December 12th.*

Lakes and Fruit and Vegetable Expo organic day, Thursday, Dec 12, in Grand Rapids. The vote was to determine if MOFFA would continue as a Membership organization or become a Directorship. For details about the outcome of the vote and what this means for MOFFA see 'Report from the Annual Meeting' above.

Friends reunited and shared stories of their challenges with certification and the joys of this year's harvest, as most Michigan farmers thankfully had a good harvest. New friends were made as people mingled, enjoying refreshments from some of Michigan's Organic Farms and Businesses, including Higher Grounds Coffee, Almar's Apple Cider, Apples from Tower Hill Farm, North Star's Organic Dried Cherries, cheese from Oliver Farms and Farm Boy Tortilla Chips. Other refreshments were supplied by Harvest Michigan. It was great to be able to offer some of Michigan's finest organic products!

Following a Warm Welcome from John Hooper, chairperson of MOFFA, Vicki Morrone shared a short presentation to introduce each of the Board Members. We hope you have visited the webpage with the board members' photos and short bios to get to know them and share your thoughts. Each person was invited to share how they would like to volunteer and what role they would like MOFFA to take to better serve them and their organic businesses. The walls were adorned with sheets of paper and markers for members to identify their priorities for 2014. Members and guests circulated the room to express their thoughts and share their contact info to assist with activities over the course of the year.

Everyone eagerly circulated, discussing with each other and writing their lists of ideas. The enthusiasm was contagious. The activities that received the most attention include: MOFFA Summer on Farm conference, Scale Appropriate Equipment Demonstration,

Farm/Farmer Meet and Greets, Equipment Sharing Coop, Organic Certifier Reviews, and Collaboration with other organizations like MIFFS. If you were not able to attend this fun event you can still share your priorities for MOFFA and identify how you would like to participate by emailing us at [moffaorganic@gmail.com](mailto:moffaorganic@gmail.com), or leave a phone message at 248-262-6826. We look forward to hearing from you.

— Vicki Morrone

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## Membership 2014

The new year is almost upon us, and it's time to renew your membership in MOFFA.

This issue of the newsletter highlights just a few of the ways that MOFFA has worked in the past year to support organic farmers and the growing numbers of people who seek access to real food with the assurance that it was grown without artificial fertilizers or pesticides, and with respect for the land and the animals that provide our sustenance. As stewards of this planet we have a responsibility, and hopefully a strong desire, to sustain and create as healthy an environment as possible for all life. Your membership joins you to a wonderful collective of people whose ultimate work in life follows that path.

We need your membership support. MOFFA funds for sponsorship, programs, newsletters, conferences, promotion of organics, policy work, etc. come 100% from our members. Every dime is spent to fulfill our mission.

You can join online at [www.moffa.net/membership.html](http://www.moffa.net/membership.html) via PayPal, download a copy of the [membership form](#) and mail it to us with your check, or give us a call at 248-262-6826 and we'll send you a copy.

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Keep up with MOFFA on our website: [www.moffa.net](http://www.moffa.net), or email us at [moffaorganic@gmail.com](mailto:moffaorganic@gmail.com).

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