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A Message from the Chair

I hope you are enjoying this planting season! I am writing on May 15th looking out the window at horses out grazing on rapidly growing grass, redbuds, iris, and bleeding heart in full bloom, a pair of geese with five goslings out on the pond and snow blowing in the air. Sounds like many farmers are waiting for a period of soil drying that will allow cultivation and planting. Our rain patterns are one of many reasons to build soil organic matter.

I spent this past week learning about Holistic Management and Holistic Financial Planning at the newly designated Savory Holistic Management Hub at the MSU Lake City Research Station. We were a group of 20 made up of Extension Professionals, graduate students and faculty. Exciting to see the impacts of planned grazing. Pondering in the pastures greatly reduced from past years even with the wet season. The farm and herd managers have good reason to believe the difference is due to increasing organic matter resulting in less surface drainage due to greater water absorption. Also exciting to do Holistic Financial planning that is as dynamic and productive as planned grazing — growing more pasture and profits.





Participants observing less ponding of rain and more grass for grazing at the Lake City Experiment Station.

You may have noticed that there has been a little longer than normal time since our last newsletter. We shifted the quarterly schedule to avoid a late December issue in the future. Future quarterly newsletters are planned for January (winter), May (planting), August (summer) and November (harvest). We still are welcoming member contributions.

In this issue are both our 2015 Annual Report and a report on the second successful Organic Intensives held on March 10. Please take the time to carefully read them so you are familiar with what MOFFA is doing for you and our organic food and farming community.

It has been close to 20 years since I started learning about organic food and farming and I just completed teaching the Organic Farming Principles and Practices course for the sixth time. My perception is that perhaps one of the more significant opportunities facing organic food and farming is the chance to increase the understanding of what it means to practice organic farming and to purchase organic food. With policy and education as two of the key MOFFA objectives, the MOFFA Board has been discussing a new organization education focus on "What is Organic?" Starting at our last meeting of 2015 and again at our April Board and Annual Meeting we discussed a plan to focus more time and resources on helping our members and future members share and explore their knowledge of "What is Organic?" Based on a great recommendation by Board Member Dane Terrill, that effort has expanded to also address the equally important information covering "Why Organic?"

Several of the Newsletter contributions this edition are kicking off the What is Organic? initiative. We

will continue to develop this theme for the next two newsletters.

Is it fair to say that the need for organic farming has never been greater? What are you able and willing to do to help make a difference? Can you share a perspective that will connect with someone? Do a presentation at a farmer's market, church or community meeting? Would you wear a T-shirt printed with "Ask me about Organic Farming" and our MOFFA Logo? We need more voices prepared to share organic perspectives, principles and practices. With some technology help perhaps your contribution could be like an NPR Story Corp recording? Or a newsletter or newspaper article, something for our or your web page or Facebook page?

By the way, did you know MOFFA has a [Facebook page](#)? Interesting to see the growing number of likes; check it out and like and share it.

One of my personal motivators for supporting the MOFFA "What is Organic?" initiative is my involvement in the USDA Organic Hydroponic Task Force. Our task force met in San Diego in January where we visited two certified hydroponic operations. After spending time writing with the soil-based subcommittee in February and March, I traveled to Washington and presented to the NOSB open meeting for our subcommittee on April 25. This process of learning about organic rule making has clearly shaken my foundational beliefs about organic farming. Our committee reports are to be submitted to the USDA and NOSB around June 3. After that the next steps are by the USDA and the NOSB and eventual public comment. It looks at this point that the public comment period may be very important.

At our next Board meeting on Tuesday June 7 we will begin the process of planning for future conference speakers including for the December GLFV Expo in Grand Rapids in December, the NMSFC in January and the Organic Intensives. Please make suggestions for speakers or topics at moffaorganic@gmail.com.

Dr. John Biernbaum is Professor of Horticulture at MSU, one of the founders of the MSU Student Organic Farm, and recently-elected Chair of MOFFA's Board of Directors.

The See-Saw Syndrome — What is Organic?

by Vicki Morrone

This month's theme for the MOFFA newsletter is "What is Organic?" and it's a good thing that there are several of us writing on this topic, I think. I work with organic farmers and those seeking to transition to organic, maybe certified maybe not. It seems that every farmer has a little different perspective of what is organic. Some are engaged in organic production because they believe this is the right way to farm. They see it as healthier for the land, environment overall and especially their families and community. They see this approach as more caring to the ecology with the approaches they use, seeking chemicals if at all, as the last resort. Building soil is the key to their program and they anticipate a healthier crop due to a good growing environment. Other farmers see organic mainly as a marketing opportunity. Granted all farmers need to see the marketing opportunity or they will not be in business very long. Those that produce organically mainly for the market opportunity see that the price is higher on a crop or product such as milk and believe that they can produce the product for a profit at the given organic price.

It is challenging to define organic given this wide range of perspectives and work ethics (aside from USDA's NOP definition). Educators like myself just have to hope that regardless of the individuals reasoning to "go organic" in the end it is better for the environment overall. As an educator, it is difficult to put all the eggs in the organic basket when you have evidence of how some of the allowable practices impact the environment.

Take our wonderful fruit we produce in Michigan. About 1% of the fruit grown in this state is certified organic. As you probably know, to grow marketable

fresh fruit, even organic, requires spraying to manage the insects and fungal organisms. Smart organic producers use other resources too such as clean orchard management, preventative pruning, selection of resistant varieties and vigilant scouting but with our summer rains that promote development of fungal spores spraying become a standard part of organic production, especially for fruit production. As our winters are becoming milder what is going to happen to the insect pest populations? We already have the challenge to manage key pests such as codling moth and plum curculio on our fruit. In the past we counted on Michigan winters reducing overwintering pest populations but now? Sadly our choices of organic pesticides are typically broad spectrum, killing living organisms they contact, whether they are beneficial or not. Pollinator insects and beneficial insects such as lacewings and ladybird beetles can be harmed if sprayed with an organic pesticide. Timing of pesticide application is not just if the winds are calm and temperature is not too high but also if the beneficials are benefiting our trees at the time of spraying. These are truly challenges that need to be considered when setting farm management practices, markets and cropping systems.

Organic can be an improvement to our environment in terms of food production but within the organic perimeters we need to make smart decisions for the sake of the farming business and for benefits to the environment.

Vicki Morrone is organic field crop and vegetable outreach specialist with the Center for Regional Food Systems at MSU, and has been a MOFFA board member since 2009.

The Organic Conversation: What is Organic?

by Leah Smith

Who knows? Sometimes it seems not many people do. To be fair, I suppose those who already know or think they know don't ask me to define organic for them, and so don't make themselves apparent. I have a lot more conversations with the "don't knows." I know what organic meant to the Organic Growers of Michigan, thanks to some old pamphlets

my father was careful to save from decades long past. And I quote:

The word ORGANIC as we use it here means, 'derived from living organisms.' Organic growing methods encourage the development of soil organisms by the

incorporation of organic matter. This organic matter feeds soil micro-organisms which regulate the supply of nutrients to plant roots, making a living soil without which fertility cannot be maintained. Organic farming works with nature, accepts nature's restraints, in order to create a sustainable food system for generations to come. Organic agriculture promotes plant, animal, and HUMAN HEALTH through the growing of crops on soil that is nutritionally balanced.

That pamphlet was from the early 80s. By the early 2000s there was talk of using less fossil fuel energy and more renewable resources, as well as GMO avoidance and the utilization of CSAs to encourage farmer/consumer interaction. So you see, definitions change and evolve all the time. Still, if you are talking green manures and crop rotations, companion plantings and rock minerals, polycultures and biological pest controls, you are talking organic.

To get back to the "don't knows," it is clear all of the details above don't go through their minds when they hear the word organic. But they think something, accurate or not. Sometimes it can be hard to drive home accurate information. The conceptions some people have can be revealed by the statements they make when opening the "organic" conversation. What value and characteristics have been attached to organic foods in the minds of many people? Let's see.

"So I don't need to wash this?"

Interesting, don't you think? This woman must have been given the impression that organic food is safer to consume, cleaner, without knowing exactly how. I have gotten the impression that many believe pesticide residues can simply be washed off and you are left with safe food. Therefore, there is no need to wash organic food. No, organic doesn't mean equivalent to those greens sold in the grocery stores that have been triple washed and packaged with the proclamation that you can immediately eat them without washing them. Any organic produce that I have harvested has a very good chance of having an errant cat hair floating on to it from my clothes. Song birds will fly over organic gardens, you know, and could leave you know what behind. And I have seen many customers rummage through our tomatoes and lettuces before they buy what they want. So always wash your produce and remove these environmental traces. We will talk more about pesticide residues that are located inside produce,

and not just on the skins where it can be washed, later.

"Organic food is more nutritious, right?"

This is a tricky question. All things being equal, yes??? I hesitate strongly, because all things are not equal. A lot goes in to making nutritious food. Variety and color. Age and soil nutrients. Non-organic red cabbage could be more nutritious than organic green cabbage, or one variety of tomato that is a good concentrator of nutrients will have more nutrition than another red tomato even if this other red tomato is organic. How long ago was it harvested? Organic vegetables in the grocery store probably can't compete with locally raised produce, organic or conventional. Many, many nutrients depart after harvesting. Of course, the conventional will also have pesticide residues which are not wholesome. Nutrients have to be in the soil on which food is grown to make it into the food at all. Is everyone's organic soil equal? Will someone whose organic soil has been organic longer or uses green manures superbly or employs excellent crop rotation raise more nutritious food than someone whose organic soil these traits don't apply to? Yes! So is organic food always more nutritious? No. Is local produce organically raised by someone who really knows their stuff always more nutritious than the competitors, no matter who they are? Yes! It pays to know your farmer!

"Organic! That means it will have bugs in it!"

I admit, over the years I have found this to be a rather irritating question. I realize consumers at large are used to produce with no insects or insects nibbles or any hint that the produce ever saw the light of day. All right, an exaggeration. I just find it hard to picture a garden or field with no insects in it because I know how much they love to live. Organic doesn't mean the food will be riddled with insects. There are many cultural practices and environmentally friendly pesticides that are used for insect pest control. So the amount of bugs and bug nibbles you will find varies greatly case by case. It is also very likely that with organic food you will find organic farmers who are not as bothered by bug nibbles and who, like myself, don't quite understand this fear of bugs. Happily, more customers seem to be coming around to the idea that there can be scarier things lurking in your food than bug bites.

"That means you fertilize with manure."

Possibly. Animal manure can be used by organic gardeners to fertilize their soil, as opposed to the

synthetic fertilizers used by conventional farmers. It is organic material and it improves soil quality. However, animal manure can also be used by conventional farmers too. Naturally, you wouldn't want an "organic" farmer to use manure, even though it is a natural product, if their only source is a conventional farm. That manure will be of suspect quality. What you feed animals affects everything they produce for you, from their milk to their eggs to their, well, you know.

"Does this mean the vegetables will be dirty?"

That question was put to me when I was at Michigan State and helping with one of the first organic meals done on campus at the Shaw Hall cafeteria in an effort to raise awareness about organic food. I don't think the young man who asked thought much about the food he ate or cared about it, as long as it tasted good to him. What had managed to penetrate his skull was that organic means unclean and untidy, rough in appearance. I told him most vegetables that come out of the ground have a little soil stuck to them and that in this case we washed it off just for him. So no, organic doesn't mean unwashed vegetables but actually means a whole lot more.

"Does that mean you don't eat meat?"

More people than you might think seem to assume that our enthusiasm displayed at the farmers' market table for our vegetables means we have no room left to love beef, pork, and chicken. True, some organic produce enthusiasts are vegetarians. But not all of them, not this one. We love vegetables and we love animal products of all sorts. It is also a good way to farm, by making use of domestic animals. I am a big proponent of the integrated farm. Animals can make use of land that might not be ideal for gardening due to being excessively sloped, for example, a gardening situation that would lead to runoff. They produce manure that can improve soil structure. They can be used for pest control (chickens and ducks, typically) or can consume garden products that otherwise would go to waste. Farm animals and the garden have a mutually beneficial relationship; they give and take and both benefit, as does the farmer and the consumer. And the environment.

Together they create a wonderful, self-sustaining system. And we reap the wonderful, edible benefits.

"Organic flowers? Am I going to eat them?"

A joke made by many a humorous fellow who doesn't understand the need to value an organic bouquet of flowers. No, you are not going to eat the flower bouquets we sell at our market table. But you are going to be sharing an environment with them. And the flowers you buy determine what kind of a contributor you are to the environment in general, for better or worse. While many people now know that the average produce found in the supermarket has traveled 1,500 miles from its point of origin, most don't know that the average flowers found at the florist shop have traveled 2,500 miles. That is a lot of fuel and pollution! Additionally, the need for blemish and bug free flowers leads to the use of a lot of fungicides and insecticides. That is a burden on the environment, and on you depending on how much contact you and your loved ones have with the pesticide residue on these flowers. Even with fresh-cut flowers, going organic is important.

Sometimes I wish we were asked more probing questions about our organic production, like how we try to lessen our dependence on fossil fuels on our farm or how we make the benefits of using an integrated farming system (plant and animal production on the same farm) outpace the challenges; and I would like to see these questions asked to all local/organic sellers. Maybe someday. It would show a great level of concern and awareness on the part of the consumers, that they are mindful of the fact that part of their contribution to the environment is determined by the farming practices used to raise the food they eat. Yes, the consumer is a major participant in the continued health of the environment. All they have to do is eat physically dirty, residue free, nutritionally superior, bug laden produce raised with manure by a vegetarian!

Leah Smith is a Michigan State alumna (B.S., Crop and Soil Sciences) and a MOFFA member. She works at Nodding Thistle, her family's farm, which has a history of organic gardening and farm marketing since 1984.

What is Organic to You?

by Emily Shettler

For me, organic farming is about synergistically working with the land and the animals to create a

viable sustainable system. It is about reconnecting the fertility cycle to create and build soil health while

producing food. I believe that our food system can work for the consumer, farmer, and the environment. This is what organic farming allows us to do. It allows us to bridge the gap between food production and environmental sustainability. It is my experience that organic farming may take a little more time and knowledge, but over time will produce as much or more abundance than a conventional

farm. It is about learning how to work with the soil rather than against it. I farm organically because I value the health and wellbeing of my community, family, and farm.

Emily Shettler and her family farm in Shiawassee County. She is a regional procurement specialist at SunOpta, and joined the MOFFA board in January, 2016.

Organic, But Not Certified

by Jessie Smith

Our farm was certified organic for 25 years, 20 of those years with the Organic Growers of Michigan. In the early years, there was no name recognition of the word organic and it was up to you, as often the one organic farmer at the farmers' market, to inform people what that meant. Then after years of hard work people did know what organic meant, and what's more they were creating a demand for it. This led to a standardization of rules so when organic products were shipped from one area to another customers could be assured that they were getting the real product. The demand for organic processed foods also helped create the need for standardization. This increase in the demand for organics, and the increase of farmers willing to supply it, of course lead to an increase in fees, paperwork (particularly as the number of products being raised increased), time for inspections, etc. All things that can eat into the time and profits of a small farm.

With this change, it was time to weigh the pros and cons of certification, of which we eventually decided there was more of the latter and so choose to no longer be certified organic. We would be giving up name recognition and the ease of letting a certificate do the talking for us. A number of possible sales venues are closed to you if you cannot say you are certified. Many storefronts and restaurants require that certification. We, of course, were not going to change the way we farm. The motivation to start down this road was to produce nutritious food in healthy soil. In our situation with such a wide range of produce, being in personal contact with our customers at the farmers' markets, and several years of previous experience with the certification process and NOP guidelines, we felt confident enough to leave certification. To remain organic then meant to follow the guidelines on our own. This led to a deeper understanding of the principles of organic farming, i.e. improvement and maintenance

of soil health through the addition of organic materials, and the means by which they are met.

So if asked, which we are not asked nearly enough, how can we demonstrate ourselves as still being organic without the documentation of a certifying agency? I would start by saying that the central idea is to produce healthy food that is full of nutrients and free of toxic substances. To reach the first part of this goal, the nutrients we want in the food must first be in the soil. This can be tricky as many things can prevent those nutrients from being there. A field can easily be "mined" of all minerals in it, particularly when a crop is removed each growing season and nothing is returned in the form of either organic matter or inorganic additives such as rock powders. Alternatively, the minerals present in a soil can be tied up if the soil pH is changed dramatically or one or two particular minerals are overabundant. When fertilization is focused on a few minerals that produce the largest harvest, the nutrition of that food is easily overlooked. So we use composts, mulches, and green manures that return minerals to the soil or release them from deeper strata.

This release of minerals is accomplished by decomposition carried out by soil microbiology, bacteria, fungi, etc. To this end anything that inhibits these organisms will not add to the health of the soil, but rather detract from it. Herbicides kill weeds that work to bring up minerals, and one I know in particular actually kills the soil bacteria responsible for fixing nitrogen from the atmosphere. Fungicides will kill not only target organisms but all fungi. For these reasons, not to mention the residues left on produce harvested from fields where these substances are used, these chemicals are to be avoided. The use of cultural practices that minimize pressure from weeds and pests and the promotion of a healthy soil environment make the chemicals unnecessary. Again the use of mulches helps out here, not to mention cultivation and fostering of

natural predator populations. This is also an area where it pays to be familiar with the OMRI approved materials list.

As we have farmed this way for many years and seen the benefits of this method, giving up being organic was not really an option. However, a thorough understanding of the principles involved and familiarity with the guidelines allowed us the option of being organic but not certified. Organic agriculture is necessary, but for your farm

certification may not be. But understanding what goes into the guidelines and why certainly is. Continued study of organic methods through books, periodicals, and discussion with other farmers will give one the confidence to be organic on their own.

Jessie Smith is a Michigan State alumna (B.S., Crop and Soil Sciences; M.S. Entomology) and a MOFFA member. She works at Nodding Thistle, her family's farm, that has a history of organic gardening and farm marketing since 1984.

Book Review: *Farmacology – Total Health from the Ground Up*

by John Biernbaum, Pear Tree Farm

At the January 2016 Northern Michigan Small Farms Conference in Traverse City, my wife and I participated with nearly 200 people in a day long workshop focused on Farms, Food and Health. The goal was to “bring together health care practitioners, employers, teachers, principals, poverty reduction advocates, human resources professionals, farmers, food service directors and others interested in connecting the dots between health care, wellness and locally grown food.” I thought it was a great success.

One of the keynote presenters was Daphne Miller, M.D., author of the book [*Farmacology – Total Health from the Ground Up*](#). A great example from her presentation was when she showed us a picture of a root with many tiny root hairs in a biologically active rhizosphere right next to a picture that looked like an inside out root—a tube with many root hair like fine structures pointed inward. We learned that the second picture was of a human intestine with many “villi” in contact with millions of microbes known as the microbiome in our digestive tract. In addition to building healthy soil biology and the soil food web, we can also build a healthy digestive biology. There is a growing body of evidence regarding the condition of our digestive system and the impact on overall human health. Does your digestive tract have diverse and complex biological activity supported by a healthy diet including plant fibers? Or do you have a limited simple group of starch and sugar digesters and maybe a “leaky gut”?

In her book, Daphne shares examples of how she has occasionally paused her day job to make excursions or fact finding missions to visit the likes of Wendell Berry, farmers, and medical researchers across America. Her visits included:

- A biodynamic farm in Washington State where she learned about treating the whole farm or person as a complex, integrated living organism. The diet of the soil and the diet of the body of her patient have parallels including impacting the microbes present in the soil and the gut. Simple soil or medical tests are not enough to get the diagnosis.
- A split operation poultry farm with both a confinement facility and a free range facility that provided an analogy between the health of the poultry in each system and the health of two of her patients that were under either chronic long term stress or short term stress.
- A winery with an integrated pest management program that brought to light parallels between industrial farming or ecological farming and human medicine as disease management or whole-person health care.
- A city based micro-farm and the food, community and health connection that so often develops when passionate people come together around growing.

In her book Dr. Miller shares her journey from medical practice to soil to food to health. “Learning from farmers and experiencing agrarian life can make me a better doctor. The book is an exploration of how the art and science of agriculture from choice of seed to soil management can impact your personal health.”

This book is a great example how we can each share our personal story and journey to health with our family, friends or with thousands of people (fans) and make a difference. I was left with a sense of

hope that more farmers and doctors can make the shift to holistic and health based strategies.

Dr. John Biernbaum is Professor of Horticulture at MSU, one of the founders of the MSU Student Organic Farm, and recently-elected Chair of MOFFA's Board of Directors.

MOFFA's Annual Report for 2015

In 2015—Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance's 23rd year as a 501(3)c non-profit, statewide, organization—we continued to build on our long-standing commitment to education and outreach in pursuit of our mission of *"Promoting organic agriculture and the development and support of food systems that revitalize and sustain local communities"*. It was a year of innovation and new endeavors, but also a time of recommitting to collaborations with many long-standing partners.

As a nearly all-volunteer entity MOFFA is driven by the commitment of its dedicated board members



Dan Rossman joined the board in January, 2015.

who share freely of their time implementing ideas and programs suggested, supported and often conceived by our membership. Eight board meetings were held in 2015, some in person and some by phone/video. Board members for all or part of 2015 were Lee Arboreal, Chris Bardenhagen, John Biernbaum, Dan Bewersdorff, John Hooper,

Vicki Morrone, Dan Rossman, Julia Studier, Dane Terrill, and Karen Warner. As a vibrant and fluid governing body the board continues to experience occasional changing of the guard. In December of 2015 the board held election of officers for 2016. Our new board officers are John Biernbaum – Chair, Dan Rossman – Vice-Chair, Dane Terrill – Treasurer, and Julia Studier – Secretary.

In 2015 dues paying membership stood at 122, a combination of farms, organizations, businesses, families and individuals. This number is similar to the previous years and although our quarterly newsletter reaches over 1300 individuals, securing membership commitment continues to remain a challenging task. This source of funding comprises a significant percentage of our operating costs.

The MOFFA Farm Guide, *A Guide to Michigan's Organic and Ecologically Sustainable Growers and Farms*, which had been solely an electronic version on our website, also manifested in a handsome printed booklet this year. There were in 2015 130 listings. One of MOFFA's goals is to continue the vigorous pursuit of growers and farmers to add in order to expand this offering to the general public. Your MOFFA board made a commitment in 2015 to once again host our own educational event. Reimagining how best we could educate and disseminate desired relevant knowledge, the MOFFA Organic Intensives was created. Rather than attempting to duplicate a "conference", which



Dane Terrill presents at the Compost, Vermicompost, Extracts and Teas session at Organic Intensives 2015.

many of our partners were doing annually and which we assist by sponsoring and participating in, we created an intensive six-hour presentation on topics of keen interest, feeling that this would be the optimum use of our resources and energy. The first annual Organic Intensives, with three themes addressed in separate all day sessions, was a very satisfying and extremely well received event. So much so that we plan on this as an annual event, possibly twice a year in the future. Topics for 2015 were: Compost, Vermicompost, Extracts and Teas; Cut Flowers for Profit and Diversification; and Edible Landscaping and Permaculture. Planning for 2016 OI started in July and continued through the end of the year with three new topics and speakers selected and invited.

Communicating with members and non-members alike has consistently evolved through the decades.

The aforementioned quarterly newsletter, "Michigan Organic Connections", sent primarily via email, but also available as a hard copy for members, continues with each issue to attract more readership. One unique aspect is the submission of extremely well written articles almost solely from our membership. Each issue revolves around a general theme, although articles are not exclusively confined to the main topic; the newsletter is also filled with current events and relevant links. Topics in 2015 were: Economics of Organic Farming, Seed Saving, Carbon Sequestration, and The Education Issue. All electronic versions of the newsletter dating back to Jan. 2012 are available on the MOFFA website – www.moffa.net.

MOFFA could not exist without the contribution of time and effort made by its volunteers, both those who serve on the board of directors and others who write for the newsletter, help out with the booth at conferences, contribute their expertise in specific areas, and serve on committees. MOFFA has six standing committees – Education, Membership, Loan, Volunteer, Nominating, and Policy. Special committees are formed for unique one-time ventures or annual events; e.g. this year we had a very active group of individuals working on the 2015 Organic Intensives.

MOFFA partnered with several MSU Researchers during 2014 and 2015 to secure funding from the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program managed by MDARD. The focus of the work was organic raspberry and sweet cherry production and pest management in a one-acre three-season high tunnel facility located at the Horticulture Teaching and Research Center. Summation of the work and outcome report is available on our website.

Throughout 2015 your Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance dedicated resources and many hours to partnering and sponsoring events, conferences, meetings and gatherings of all natures to promote and discuss with countless individuals the need and benefits of the growing of food, fiber and fauna in an organic, ecologically sustainable manner. One primary goal of the board in this last year was to continue the conversation as to how we can be more effective at working with the many like-minded groups to forge a stronger bond and open more channels of communication. To that end we had a major presence at the following events:

- Michigan Family Farms Conference (January)
- Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference (January)
- Michigan Farmers Market Association Conference (March)
- Organic Reporting Session (March)
- Organic Farmers of Michigan Field Day (August)
- Southwest Michigan Harvest Fest (September)
- Great Lakes Bioneers (October)
- Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Growers Expo including a first time Meet and Greet



The MOFFA information booth.

session on Wednesday evening.
(December).

In addition our board members participate as presenters to smaller gatherings, e.g. Garden Clubs, Master Gardener Associations, Church Socials, etc.

On a more national scale MOFFA is an active member or supporter of three prominent organizations that speak to the nation and beyond: the National Sustainable Agricultural Committee, Organic Consumers Organization, and the Cornucopia Institute.

The MOFFA board, your voice for Michigan ecologically sustainable agriculture, remains viable. While we would always appreciate and could use more members, and more member input, the year definitely concluded with a very optimistic feel for our future. Prepared and submitted by: John W. Hooper, MOFFA Board of Directors Chair, 2012-2015.

Organic Intensives 2016

On March 10, 2016, MOFFA held the second Organic Intensives event in East Lansing during ANR week. Over 120 people took advantage of the opportunity to acquire practical, detailed information from experts and practitioners in one of three topic areas: Seed Saving, Wild Edibles, and Organic Certification for Field Crop Farmers.

Once again, participants were enthusiastic about the day — in evaluations, over 95% said they felt they received "excellent" or "above average" value in

return for their time and money. A detailed report on evaluations as well as suggestions for future Organic Intensives is available online at www.moffa.net/f/OI2016-Evaluation-Report-final.pdf.

The Organic Intensives planning committee is gratified and encouraged to see the very positive feedback expressed by the participants, and will begin planning soon for Organic Intensives 2017. If you have suggestions for next year's event, or would like to participate in the planning, please [let us know](#).

Farm Guide 2016



new farms and farm offerings.

When the Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance first published Eating Organically in 1995, it was one of Michigan's earliest guides to organic and local foods. Twenty-one years later, MOFFA's Guide to Michigan's Organic and Ecologically Sustainable Growers and Farms is online and is continually updated with

Last year, for the first time since 2008, we published the Farm Guide on paper, and it was a popular item in our booth at conferences during the winter. We will be doing that again this year; farms which are already listed in the guide have been asked to update their listings, and we are just about ready to take a "snapshot" of the guide for printing.

If you're currently listed but have changes you haven't submitted, or if you would like to be listed, we need to hear from you by Friday, May 20th in order to make the paper copy for this year. Of course, we will accept additions and changes at any time for the electronic version.

A History of Organic Farming in Michigan

by Julia Christianson

Maynard Kaufman, who was present at the creation of both Organic Growers of Michigan (1973) and MOFFA (1991), is working on a book about the history of organic farming in Michigan, and I have volunteered to help with the more prosaic aspects because I'm looking forward to reading it.

The concept is that a number of people who were involved in the growth of organic agriculture in the state will write chapters about the activities they were involved in. At present, a dozen people have agreed to contribute to the book, but we still need contributors in several areas.

If you're interested in writing a chapter, or just contributing your ideas about what should be included, please [email me](#) or write to Julia Christianson, 41219 CR 352, Decatur, MI 49045.

Julia Christianson is a lifelong organic gardener and MOFFA's "very part time" administrative assistant.

MOFFA Mailbag

Reader **John Creguer** of Twin Pines Organic Farm in Minden City offered a rebuttal to Dan Rossman's article in the last issue: [Organic Field Crop Demand Is Strong](#):

It is clearly evident that conventional crop prices are, as you worded, soft. Every factor you pointed out is a clear indicator as to why the conventional prices are at their current juncture. The dollar is strong, oil prices are at a 10 year low, and there is a huge surplus in commodities overall. However, I believe we are missing the point when comparing conventional prices, and the thought of organic prices having to come down too, and that is supply and demand. There is a huge surplus of conventional crops on the global market. The global economy is tanking currently, hence the low prices, and there is not a huge demand for conventional crops on a global scale. Organic crops, as you

stated, are in higher demand going into 2016, particularly here in Michigan. Yet, there is this insistence that there be a 15% reduction in organic crop prices. As our economy is supposed to be on the basis of supply and demand (capitalism), one would be under the impression that if there is more demand for organic crops and growers, then our prices should remain where they are, if not increase.

Long-time MOFFA member **Larry Nelson** of Dansville, MI writes:

After reading "[Altered Genes, Twisted Truth](#)" I just had to write. I strongly urge all members who haven't read the book to do so. I have been following the GMO story. The book revealed a lot of new information to me.

MOFFA News

Newsletter – We are anticipating two more issues of the newsletter this year—a Summer issue in August and a Harvest issue in November. If you are interested in contributing, please contact us. If you're not interested in writing an article, please consider contributing photos of your farm or your harvest; we're always looking for more illustrations.

The MOFFA newsletter has been published every year since 1994, with the exception of 2005. When the newsletter went electronic in 2011, the volume numbering system was reset, but we have restored the old system with this issue — marking the 22nd year of Michigan Organic Connections.

Membership – As of this moment, we have 123 members for 2016 — just one more than we had all year last year. While it's exciting to see that 27% of those are brand-new members, we also note that 45% of those who were members in 2015 have not renewed. Membership dues are a major source of funding for the activities we pursue in aid of expanding sustainable agriculture in Michigan.

It's easy to join or renew online at www.moffa.net/membership.html, or if you prefer you can download a membership form and send it along with your check to P.O. Box 26102, Lansing, MI 48909.

Keep up with MOFFA on our website: www.moffa.net, or email us at moffaorganic@gmail.com.

Contact us at:

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