



Volume XXIII, Number 2
May 2017

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A Message from the Chair

Hello organic farmers, gardeners and supporters! Here is your Spring edition of the Organic Connection Newsletter. Out of the “conference” season and into another Michigan “planting” and “growing” season. Is there such a thing as a “normal” spring in the Midwest? Planning for any weather possibility by building resilient systems seems to be what is needed as a norm. Sounds like another way of saying “avoiding risk” or increasing the probability of success.

Since the last newsletter in January we have completed the Organic Intensives and our annual public Board Meeting on April 11 at the Allen Neighborhood Center in Lansing that included election of new Board of Directors officers. For the next year, I will continue as chair, with Dan Rossman as Vice Chair, Dane Terrill as Treasurer and John Hooper as Secretary. No new official Board members to report yet but we have two great prospects joining us for our June 6 meeting. Included in this spring edition are the 2016 Annual Report and a summary of the Organic Intensives.



We have several issues that are still with us and undecided.

- There are concerns about the organic livestock new rules being either delayed, gutted or eliminated. They are definitely delayed again.
- The hydroponic recommendations are also delayed. For an update of the testimony at the Denver meeting you can check with "Keep the Soil in Organic" www.keepthesoilinorganic.org/. There are also two keynotes by Vandana Shiva and Eliot Coleman from winter conferences available there.
- The 2018 Farm Bill discussions have started with two listening sessions held already. Organic farming was included in the organized testimony at the May 6 session in Frankenmuth. A request for increased funding for organic research is in the works. Makes sense since all farmers benefit from investments in organic farming research and the amount of funding has not changed since 2008. Collin Thompson was invited to testify relative to the importance of organic farming: ofrf.org/news/ofrf-researcher-provides-testimony-organic-research.

- Please don't let your membership in MOFFA remain undecided. If you have not already done so, please [weigh in](#) as a MOFFA supporter.

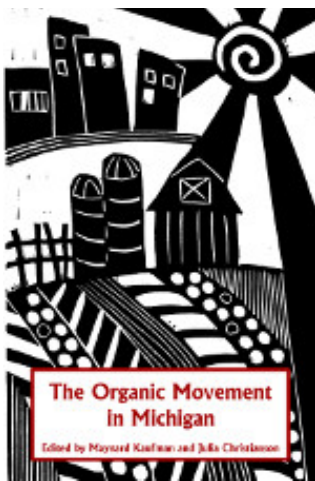
Happy to report that the Organic Farming Research Foundation funded a research project related to organic grain production for organic livestock. Details about the project are available here: ofrf.org/research/grants/examination-organic-grain-productivity-support-upper-peninsula-organic-livestock.

On a personal note, I had two important events over the period of a month in March and April. The first event was the birth of our grandson. He was born on the day of the year that tells you something to do: March fourth. The timing with spring break meant I got to see him in Florida starting the day after he was born. He has already been on a very long road trip with his parents and made a stop at our house two weeks ago. The second event I also shared with my wife Patti which was one of those birthdays that ends in zero.

I hope you enjoy the Organic Connections. I have shared some additional thoughts in other articles.

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 Organic Movement in Michigan



After nearly two years in development, [The Organic Movement in Michigan](#) was published on May 26th.

The outline for the book was written several years ago by Maynard Kaufman, one of the founding members of Organic Growers of Michigan, which began meeting in 1973; his farm was one of the first six in Michigan to be

certified organic. He continued to be active in the organic movement for the next 40 years, and played a leading role in the organization of MOFFA in the early 1990s.

Julia Christianson, MOFFA's "very part time" administrative staff, came across Maynard's outline for the book in the fall of 2015 and volunteered to help bring it to publication, because it was a book she wanted to read. Laura DeLind contributed the cover illustration and design. MOFFA is the publisher, and proceeds from sales of the book will go to support MOFFA's activities.

The [19 chapters](#) in the book encompass a wide variety of information: historical summaries of the major organic organizations, reports on various organic activities, and essays about the past, present and future of organic farming. The authors include many of those who played a significant part in the movement: Maynard Kaufman, Joe Scrimger, Pat Whetham, Dean Berden, Fred Reusch, Bob and Linda Kidwell, Lee and Linda Purdy, Ken Dahlberg, Laura DeLind, George Bird, John Biernbaum, Jim Bingen, Jessie and Leah Smith, Taylor Reid, Luise Bolleber, and Julia Christianson.

The book is available for purchase at amazon.com. There is a website for the book at <http://michiganorganic.org/the-book>; information on both single-copy and bulk sales is available there. There's a

[flyer](#) on the website, and we would be grateful to all those who are able to print out a few copies and distribute them in your area in places where people who might be interested are likely to see them.

An Interview With Philip H. Howard — Part I

by Leah and Jessie Smith

In early May, we were able to conduct a phone interview with Dr. Philip H. Howard, author of [Concentration and Power in the Food System: Who Controls What We Eat?](#) We asked questions about some of the items from his book that we found of greatest interest to us, and left us wanting to know more.

The following questions, with Dr. Howard's comments, touch on the value-based food sector, food deserts, Walmart, and commodities lobbies.

JS: What is driving buyers in the value-based food sector? [The value-based food sector is those buyers who will pay more for food based on a value they assign to it beyond its intrinsic value because of what it is. For example, organic, fair trade, free range, artisan, gluten-free.]

PH: I think there are a lot of things going on that are hard to disentangle. If you look at, just for example, the growth of organic foods, many of the farmers who were the pioneers in organic production had a different set of values than the consumers who have now started buying it. This is particularly true as it has become more and more mainstream. It's less about the health of the soil, and more about avoiding synthetic pesticides and due to even fuzzier notions of health. It's clear that our food system isn't very transparent. People do want to support food products which mirror their values. Everybody has a different set of values. As we make things more transparent, people shift their purchases. Organic is a great example of this, another example is craft brewing. Clearly it is not just health concerns that's driving all these sectors, but that tends to resonate with the widest segment of society. There is a lot of interest in fair trade, which does not have the same identification with the potential health benefits that organic does. It's very successful, particularly in Europe where there's been more awareness in fair trade. There is really a growing interest in humane labels. The standards around humane are pretty vague, compared with organic, though there have been attempts to define them more clearly. There needs to be much more detail with humane labels. There are about three different labels in the U.S. that

deal with humane criteria. You had another question about domestic fair trade or justice labels. That's not very widespread as yet. What is interesting is that there are more and more similar labels coming into being. There have been very small efforts that have kind of gone under for lack of grant funding. There was a domestic fair trade network in Minneapolis, for example, that is no longer there. There is the Equitable Food Initiative, and Fair Trade USA now beginning to certify U.S. operations. It is hard to keep up with how much is happening. It is on a fairly small scale, but there is consumer interest, and if it makes it to next level it could be much bigger.

JS: It is interesting how we didn't use to have to use labels on our foods, but now we use these labels to indicate how we feel about our food system. We want to know more about what we are buying.

PH: Efforts to think about a way to make a super label that embodies all of these criteria have occurred, but to meet all of this criteria is, of course, very difficult in detail. Consumers are interested in all of these things, particularly if it doesn't cost any more; many people would support it.

JS: Food deserts seems to be something that is hard to define, at least that is our impression from what we have read. Is a food desert more like when people don't have access to fresh food or that they lack the opportunity to learn about and be involved with their food, as in the inner cities? Is interaction really what they are missing? [There have been studies of supermarkets opening in food deserts and purchasing and eating habits not changing as rapidly as expected. Based on Dr. Howard's response, apparently that can be attributed to the income of the citizens not changing as well.]

PH: I avoid the use of the term food desert because it is not very precise. It was first coined, actually, by a resident of a government housing complex in Scotland, and it was discussed in an academic paper. It really resonated with journalists, they found it a great headline. But it can be misleading, because if you are talking about an area that has

convenience stores and fast food restaurants people have access to food. You could argue whether it's food or not, but it is an edible substance; they do have access to calories, let's say, though maybe not good access to nutritious food. Most academics use a loftier term called retail food access. It is really a complicated subject to study because people have different access to transportation. There is public transportation and there are cars; this is such an auto dominated society. Some early research was very simplistic, looking at retail chains but not going into the store and seeing what's available. Detroit was mischaracterized because there was a Farmer Jacks that closed, meaning there were no chain supermarkets in Detroit any longer. Detroit still had grocery stores selling fresh produce, but that is not the way the media and some researches portrayed it. That is a long explanation to say that my main point was that I was at a conference over ten years ago with a number of geographers that were looking into the subject and everybody in the room said the real problem is lack of income, or economic inequality. But we're not allowed to study that, so instead we look at inequalities in access to food. If we have more economic equality those differences in access to food would be resolved pretty quickly. Big chains and markets would go into areas where people don't have income, if they did now, and begin serving them.

JS: Not allowed to study?

PH: Well, you're not going to get grant funding for that.

JS: I guess that really influences what you do and do not study.

PH: Yes!

JS: As consumers and organic farmers, I feel my family pays particular attention to the activities of seed companies and we, of course, fully appreciate what goes into being organic. But for people who are just buying food, the average consumer, is it your impression that they understand the difference between the foods and products available for them to buy? I am hinting at the question of Walmart and their highly inexpensive goods. Do average consumers have any conception of the business Walmart does? [Walmart's laundry list of business activities, covered in Dr. Howard's book, include being anti-union, threatening suppliers with sourcing products from foreign competitors in order to get lower prices, tax avoidance strategies, and the extensive use of government subsidies, including assistance for its low paid workers, in order to produce more profit for their owners.]

PH: I think there's been a lot more awareness of the Walmart model recently. I mean, certainly not everybody knows. I read an article many years ago by Charles Fishman, which shocked many at the time, but by now a number of people have read his articles and read his book, *The Wal-Mart Effect*, or have seen documentaries like *Wal-Mart: the High Cost of Low Price*. A lot of people have seen first hand what happens when Walmart comes to town and local businesses shut down. Walmart has been struggling in recent years, having trouble maintaining the growth rate they had in the 90s. Now they haven't been growing as fast as Kroger, their second largest competitor.

JS: So the importance is really the comparison in growth rates rather than the money they are earning at times.

PH: Yes, because it is all about expectations of getting more and more power in the future, and a lot of investors have lost faith in Walmart's ability to do that. In some ways that's encouraging. Also, a potential challenge to Walmart's business model is if the price of oil and gasoline goes way up, like it did a few years ago. It is going to be hard and expensive for them to source from all over the globe, and those who can source locally may have an advantage over them.

JS: It seems to be mostly the producers and processors of the unhealthy food ingredients that have the strongest lobbies.

PH: There is one good example of when public health arguably played a role in controlling big processors, namely the labeling of trans-fats. There have been some studies out in the last few weeks about how it has really improved public health by requiring labeling and encouraging processors to remove trans-fats from their products. That is one of those rare examples when the evidence was so clear and there were so many forces that coalesced against big processors and got change. But that was one battle; in most cases, there are more and more subsidies for the production, marketing, and selling of unhealthy foods which are contributing to a lot of the health problems of society.

JS: What we need is more research on where the health problems are coming from and to identify unhealthy foods. Then focus a group of farmers on raising better alternatives.

In the next MOFFA newsletter, we will share the remainder of our interview and Dr. Howard's comments on deskilling, agricultural subsidies and checkoff programs, antitrust laws, and the outlawing of heritage swine in Michigan.

Jessie and Leah Smith are sisters, co-writers and MOFFA members, as well as Michigan State alumnae. They work at Nodding Thistle, their family's farm, which has a history

of organic gardening and farm marketing since 1984. They are working to make agricultural writing a part of their way of life..

Blind Spot

by John Biernbaum

Ishmael shook his head. "I still haven't quite managed to articulate what I'm getting at. Let me try again. Thinkers aren't limited by what they know, because they can always increase what they know. Rather they're limited by what puzzles them, because there's no way to become curious about something that doesn't puzzle you. If a thing falls outside the range of people's curiosity, then they simply cannot make inquiries about it. It constitutes a ***blind spot*** – a spot of blindness that you can't even know is there until someone draws your attention to it."

From *My Ishmael*, 1997, by Daniel Quinn.

One of the books that influenced the start of my journey down the road of sustainable and organic agriculture was *Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn, published in 1992. (Same year that MOFFA was formed.) Quinn asked some important questions, including looking at the origins of the biblical creation story and what it might say about social change in the past related to food. Twenty-five years later, I am still curious or puzzled. How did we get to this place of too many greedy, angry white men needing to be a dominator, that seems so contrary to the loving, caring humanity that I have been able to experience? How did we move from balance, faith and giving, to extremes of bigotry, fear and greed? Or to agriculture based on fear and poisons?

In some sense, farming and agriculture were a gift that allowed the arts and many other aspects of human culture to develop. In another sense it was a mechanism that allowed the waging of prolonged wars and the rise of a ruling wealthy social class and serfs/servants that is still in place. Was it the farming or the "locking up of the food" that over thousands of years led to the emergence of monarchies, religions, "science" and eventually the industrial revolution?

I recently read a book that likely influenced Daniel Quinn's story of *Ishmael*. The book is titled *The Chalice and the Blade – Our History, Our Future*, authored by Riane Eisler and published in 1987. I was looking for an answer to share with the Organic Farming Principles, Practices, Perspectives and

Policies class that I teach regarding why organic and ecological farming seem to make so much sense to some of us, but still only comprise a few percent of the farming and food production. I have also been asking a more basic question for many years regarding what happened to our culture, or more specifically primarily to white men (aka known as the "white man's disease" by some Native Americans) that allowed so much greed and fear?

"Agricultural Chemistry" by von Leibig is often pointed to as the emergence of chemical and industrial agriculture that threatened soil health and led to the need for modern day organic farming. But my sense is the problem we want to address is much, much older and rooted in the warrior way and the idea of locking up the food that is introduced by Quinn.

[Riane Eisler](#) asked a question regarding what else besides the emergence of agriculture happened 6,000 to 8,000 years ago in old Europe that might explain the shift from an egalitarian matrilineal or more gender balanced culture that respected the goddess and mother earth to the development of warrior, patriarchal cultures that concentrate power in the hands of a few? Was it more than the use of animal power and a plow?

The author explains that in the early decades of archeology, assumptions were made to interpret findings. Often the assumptions were made from the dominant male bias of the times and without an accurate method of dating the archeological sites. Later (~1960's), when carbon 14 dating allowed more accurate time lines to develop, it was evident that mistakes were made about what methods and cultural norms developed when.

"Going all the way back to the time our ancestral primates first began to change into humans, scholars are beginning to reconstruct a far more balanced view of our evolution – one in which women, not just men, play central roles. The old evolutionary model based on "man the hunter" attributes the beginnings of human society to the "male bonding" required for hunting. It also claims our first tools were developed by men to kill their prey – and also to kill competing or weaker humans.

An alternative evolutionary model has now been proposed by scientists. This alternative view is that the erect posture required for the freeing of hands was not linked to hunting but rather to the shift from foraging (or eating as one goes) to gathering and carrying food so it could be both shared and stored. Moreover, the impetus for the development of a much larger and more efficient brain and its use to both make tools and more effectively process and share information was not the bonding between men required to kill. Rather, it was the bonding between mothers and children that is obviously required if human offspring are to survive. According to this theory, the first human-made artifacts were not weapons. Rather, they were containers to carry food (and infants) as well as tools used by mothers to soften plant food for their children, who needed both mother's milk and solids to survive.

The importance of considering a matriarchal or patriarchal view is a central idea to interpreting Caucasian history. Eisler proposes to avoid these loaded terms and introduced the terms "gylanic" (birth centric, female and male balanced and working together in partnership) and "androcratic" (death centric, male dominator), as a way to increase understanding and move beyond the historical implications of the prior terms. She and others question the assumption that since patriarchal cultures are male dominated, that therefore what we know as matriarchal or matrilineal cultures of old Europe were similarly female dominated as opposed to egalitarian. The evidence that she and others see in the archeological record supports more an assumption that in what we know as matriarchal cultures, there was a balance of gender roles and activities along with decision making. She proposes the cultural labels of a "partnership" compared to a "dominator" model. Forgive me for jumping ahead in the story, but these terms seem particularly appropriate or descriptive when considering what we think of as organic and non-organic farming models.

My reading of historical fiction novels related to Celtic/Druid cultures, Native American cultures, and other indigenous cultures portrayed gender roles and decision making in a more balanced light than what we have seen over recent millennia in primarily Caucasian cultures. So what might have happened 6,000 to 8,000 years ago, or more recently, that might also need to be considered? Eisler reviews the archeological evidence and considers the impact of the invasions by the Mongolian horsemen/herdsmen / warriors, aka Attila the Hun, and how previously less warlike Old Europe cultures were decimated, which led to a merging of "old" and then "new" dominator roles of the invaders. She does not

address the question of how that culture developed in the first place. But she develops a case for how the male dominated warrior culture was gradually introduced over thousands of years and became a new way of life. It is that culture that eventually became so prevalent around the world and is still so relevant in our current lives.

In recent times we have been reminded of the George Orwell introduction of the "Ministry of Truth" that rewrote stories to fit the needs of the men in power. Eisler proposes and or cites evidence to support the perspective that something similar had already happened thousands of years ago. The Gaia or goddess creation stories were rewritten as the Biblical Old Testament creation story emerged to support the male dominated and warlike societies. It appears this thinking influenced Daniel Quinn and the story "Ishmael". I learned some of the aspects of this understanding of the different voices (the "J" and "P") or authors interwoven in the old testament in religious studies courses taken many years ago. A notable example is the two stories of Genesis and of how God created human beings, the first gender neutral and the second with women as an "afterthought". Another is the Garden of Eden story, with the blame placed on the once highly regarded serpent (close to the earth) and the woman Eve.

I can remember thinking/puzzling about this idea in the past and very briefly thinking that an answer was that women needed to step up and do more, as they often do in organic farming. I pretty quickly realized that that was not an answer, or not one that a man wanted to propose publicly or out loud. With a little more wisdom, what I see now is a need for all of us to cultivate partnership perspectives whether in regard to gender, race, age or monetary wealth. We can all be prepared to share the partnership and shame the dominator perspective.

While I am outside my area of expertise, there are some important questions to be considered and puzzled over. I am not trying to say how things were or that I have the answers. I am trying to share questions to consider regarding how we got here, because I do not like where we are and I want to be somewhere else.

So, how do we connect this back to organic farming? During the early part of the semester I had shared with the class the many examples and relationships between "pest control" and military language, including showing examples of recent advertisements. We also discussed the IFOAM principals of Heath, Ecology, Fairness and Care that go well beyond the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) rules. We also spent time trying to

understand different “perspectives” and how and why people’s views develop over time.

I shared with the students how I have learned over the decades that most all the institutions that I tried to support and be a part of, from church, to school, to academics/teaching, to science/scholarship to farming/agriculture, all have some aspects of history and policy that I now choose not to support or be a part of. But not all of it is “bad”. There are methods of farming that do not try to “feed the world” or “lock up the food” at the price of profit for a few as a way to “control” people. The alternative goal is to “help all people feed themselves” and to help people recognize that producing more food is not the answer. Valuing the Earth and our roles as possible caretakers or stewards or **partners** and not with any charge or crusade to subdue or dominate the earth was something that cultures did before, and it is something that cultures can and will do again. There have been thousands of years of “resistance” and memories of living in partnership. Organic farming is more than managing soil and crops.

One of my goals in teaching is sharing with students what has puzzled or confused me over time and how I have tried to question what I have been taught while looking for better answers. Accepting organic farming requires asking questions and then looking seriously about what makes sense, regardless of what the majority of people might be doing. To a large extent, our culture is debilitated due to an excess of fear and greed as well as an androcratic / dominator model that has been allowed to be in place for thousands of years. To make the necessary change means working on our “blind spots” and being willing to question cultural assumptions about humanity and our history. Once a person has the chance to experience first-hand the “oneness” of natural systems, standing up and speaking out for organic and ecological farming, as well as other important cultural principles including partnership, fairness and care, becomes something that you just have to do. You can be the “who” of organic farming.

Dear Secretary Perdue ...

The National Organic Coalition has prepared a letter to incoming Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue.

The letter is framed in terms of the economic benefits of organic – rural development, domestic production, consumer choice – messaging that reaches across the aisle. It conveys that consumer demand depends on trust, and therefore, the integrity of the NOP, and asks for strong support for the NOP and the federal marketing, research and data collection programs that support the label. The recipient will be Secretary Perdue, with a cc to Congressional leaders.

The NOC is gathering signatures from farms, organizations, and businesses, including major retailers for whom organic is a growth market.

NOC has a fly-in the first week of June, so they hope to have a robust list of signatures by June 1st. To add your organization to the list, visit <https://goo.gl/forms/TJtLLZ68V0Hv7CRt1>. The letter appears below:

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As you embark on your important role as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, we are writing as farms, businesses and organizations representing a broad

spectrum of perspectives about food and agriculture to express our strong, shared support for the USDA organic label and the federal marketing, research and data collection programs that support the label.

With the establishment of the National Organic Program in 2001, uniform national standards were created to govern the labeling of organic food and the use of the USDA organic seal. Consumer confidence in the integrity of the USDA organic seal has been a driving factor in the exponential growth in the organic sector. In 2000, organic sales of products labeled under various conflicting state and private organic labels totaled only \$6 billion. Today, as a result of the establishment of the uniform federal organic standards, total sales of organic food and beverages are nearly \$50 billion. Domestically, the organic sector is home to nearly 24,000 certified organic family farms and other businesses.

Organic farmers are required to use farming practices that preserve and enhance natural resources, and organic processors are required to use ingredients that have passed strict environmental and human health reviews. Consumers are willing to pay higher prices for products that meet these higher standards. As a result, organic farmers and processors enjoy a

higher price to reward them for their extra costs and efforts.

Organic regulations are voluntary, or opt-in, in the sense that farmers decide whether they want to participate in the National Organic Program. Similarly, consumers voluntarily decide whether to buy organic food. House Speaker Ryan has used the USDA organic standards as an example of a "better way" to approach federal regulations to foster a stronger U.S. economy using a voluntary approach to regulations.

The economic success of the organic sector also depends on strong enforcement by USDA and USDA-accredited organic certifier organizations domestically and internationally. It is the job of the certifiers to ensure that all organic operations meet the strict production, processing and handling standards established by USDA through an open and transparent public process. It is the job of USDA to use its accreditation and oversight functions to ensure that certifiers are enforcing the standards in an effective and uniform manner for all organic operations. Consumers depend on the integrity of the USDA organic seal, and expect uniform enforcement of the standards.

Despite the success and growth of the organic industry, the U.S. organic sector faces significant challenges. While organic sales are growing at a double-digit pace each year, domestic organic production is struggling to keep pace with that growth with an increased reliance on imports to meet the demand.

In the spirit of the public-private partnership that underlies the success of the organic sector, it is critical that your agency continue to support the work of the National Organic Program, as well as the research and data collection programs that will help ensure that U.S. organic farmers can meet growing consumer demand for their products. It is our firm belief that jobs associated with organic agriculture can and should be kept here in the United States, without having to rely on increased imports to meet demand for products we can produce here.

In that regard, we look forward to working with you to support the key marketing, research and data collection programs, as well as the strong standards enforcement procedures that are critical to the U.S. organic sector.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.

MOFFA's Annual Report for 2016

The purpose of this report is to document and review accomplishments and growth while providing inspiration for the emerging year of activity. Each year the Chairperson of the Board of Directors prepares an annual report to share with the Board and membership. This is my first opportunity to reflect and report on the past year's activities and accomplishments after four years of reporting by previous Board Chair John Hooper.

2016 was Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance's 24th 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". MOFFA members can be very proud of their organization as a valuable contributor to the long term growth of healthy soils, healthy crops and livestock for food, and healthy people.

The need for food, feed, fiber and flowers raised, processed and marketed with a deep respect for managing living soil and the ecological balance of all living organisms has never been greater. The physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of

human health are all integrated with our relationship with our natural world and our food.

While the sales of organic produce and livestock products continue to grow and we can celebrate the progress, we know that organic accounts for a fraction of the total agriculture and food system. We must also be aware of the apparent growing separation between people able and willing to support organic food production and the apparently growing number of people who are unaware of how food is produced and are able to focus only on food of any type needed to survive.

Awareness of changing weather patterns is increasing. Extreme rainfall events interspersed with longer periods of drought are beginning to be understood as a result of human impacts on our environment and home. There is progress toward an understanding that managing soil groundcover and below-ground organic matter to increase rainwater absorption and retention, and to move carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to the soil, has the potential to heal the damage and reverse the dangerous weather and climate trends.

What is organic farming? Why do we need organic farming? These are the questions that we need more and more people of all ages to be able to answer with confidence. Speaking up is one way we make a positive difference. Organic farming is clearly the way forward. The USDA may or may not continue to support and enforce long standing organic farming principles such as the essential nature of soil. But all of us as members of MOFFA can confidently share what we know. We can make a difference for our family, friends, farmers and local communities.

Board of Directors

The [Board of Directors](#) continued to grow and strengthen during 2016, in large part due to the long term efforts of prior Board Chair John Hooper to recruit new participants. Continuing members include: John Biernbaum (2009), Dan Bewersdorff (2015), John Hooper (2009), Vicki Morrone (2009), Dan Rossman (2015), Julia Studier (2014), and Dane Terrill (2012). New members include Emily Shettler, Emily Nicholls and Amy Newday, bringing



Emily Shettler



Amy Newday



Emily Nicholls

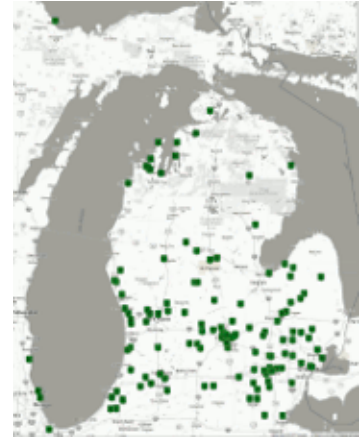
the total to ten. Our board officers for 2016 were John Biernbaum, Chair; Dan Rossman, Vice-Chair; Dane Terrill, Treasurer; and Julia Studier, Secretary. Our goal is to keep the board at a minimum of 8 to 12 members and to have improved representation from each of the geographic regions of Michigan.

The Board was fortunate to have Julia Christianson fill the “very part time” Administrative Assistant position to work with the Board of Directors in 2013. Julia has continued to increase her responsibilities for record keeping, communication including the [website](#) and [Organic Connections Newsletter](#), management of the [Organic Intensives](#) educational event, processing of financial and organizational information, and other roles. The otherwise all volunteer organization is indebted to her dedication and efforts that allow us to use our time to better serve the Organic Community.

Membership

Membership continued to grow from the 2015 total of 122 to 147 in 2016. The membership includes 64

individual or family memberships (\$40), 41 small business memberships (\$60) and 17 larger business memberships (\$100). We also added a membership category for students or those with limited resources (\$20). Total revenue was \$7,171 in dues with an additional \$644 of generous donations members included when paying their dues, for a total of \$7,815. MOFFA members are well distributed across lower Michigan as illustrated in the figure above. Although we can use some more yoopers!



Board Meetings

To facilitate involvement of members from across the state, the board of directors uses a combination of in person and conference call meetings. We have established a schedule of eight meetings per year with three in person and five conference phone calls. The annual meeting is held in the Lansing area during April. In July 2016 we revived a tradition of a meeting that includes a meal and social component. We enjoyed an afternoon on the patio at the Biernbaums’ with a great pot luck meal. With several members from Southwest Michigan, we were fortunate to be the guests of Dane Terrill at the Crop Services International facilities in Kalamazoo for one of our fall meetings. A [schedule of meetings](#) for 2017 is available on our website.

During 2016 a component of our meetings was discussion about why we do organic farming and what organic means to a wide variety of audiences. This discussion included a review of past MOFFA projects, discussion of current board members’ key values, and discussion of possible future goals. We reviewed and maintained the MOFFA mission statement and committed to updating the MOFFA vision statement in 2017.

Organic Connections Newsletter

The quarterly [Organic Connections](#) newsletter (electronic since 2012) continues to be a core method of connecting and reaching our membership and many more organic supporters. We had three instead of the normal four issues in 2016 as we

adjusted our schedule to avoid the busy holiday times of the year. In recent years we have also identified topic themes. The priority for 2016 was the why, what and how of organic farming to align with the discussions taking place in board meetings. We benefited from several articles by non-board member authors including Leah and Jessie Smith of Nodding Thistle Farm and MOFFA founding member Maynard Kaufman. We continue to request contributions from members and have proposed that in 2017 we will invite specific members to contribute articles. The archives of the newsletter is available on our website. The newsletter reaches over 1300 addresses on our group email list.

Website

The [website](#) has continued to grow into a reliable source of information about organic farming and gardening, local food and business related events and announcements. Historical aspects including past newsletters and annual reports are available. Education, employment, grant, and marketplace information is maintained up to date for the organic community.

Farm Guide

The MOFFA [Farm Guide](#), A Guide to Michigan's Organic and Ecologically Sustainable Growers and Farms, which is now available both as an electronic version on our website and as a printed book, continues to be a popular item. The listings grew from 130 in 2015 to 144 in 2016. One of MOFFA's goals is the vigorous pursuit of growers and farmers to add in order to expand this offering to the general public.

Conferences and Meetings Attended

Michigan is fortunate to have a diverse and distributed array of organizations that support ecological and local farming initiatives and development of beginning farmers. While distributed systems are a hallmark of sustainability, to be more effective the organizations also need to be networked and responsive to each other. To that end, a standing MOFFA goal has been to be a trusted collaborator and partner that encourages sharing of information. In 2016 we continued to participate in the diversity of educational activities in Michigan where we could share organic ethics and methods. These conferences include:

- Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference (January)
- Michigan Family Farms Conference (January)
- MSU Organic Reporting Session (March)

- Organic Farmers of Michigan Field Day (August)
- Southwest Michigan Harvest Fest (September)
- Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit (October)
- Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Growers Expo (December)

An important contribution of MOFFA at these conferences is providing friendly conversation and answers to questions about organic farming and gardening and certification methods. A wide range of books is also made available to stimulate learning and discussion. In 2016 book sales totaled \$1,464. Our thanks to board member John Hooper who most often is the friendly face that conference participants greet at the MOFFA table.

MOFFA also worked with the organizing committee for bringing Dan Kittredge to Michigan. Dan is a farmer and organizer of the [Bionutrient Food Association](#). His goal is to help more people understand the relationship between soil life, soil fertility, and food quality. MOFFA partnered with the Allen Neighborhood Center and the Lansing Food Bank and Garden Project to host one of Dan's three stops in Michigan in late September. We also helped publicize the two-day event in Ann Arbor November 12-13.

Education Programs

In 2015 the previously recognized "signature" Michigan Organic Conference event was reconfigured to the "Organic Intensives" (OI). The OI was modeled after the successful MOSES Organic University with the goal to allow more in-depth presentation and discussion of a smaller range of topics. In 2016 the second annual Organic Intensives was held on March 10th on the MSU campus. The topics included:

- Organic Certification for Field Crop Farmers
- Seed Saving
- Wild Edibles and Herbs

The OI is a project and event that most all of the Board of Directors work on together. It requires advance discussion and selection of topics and speakers. One goal has been to select topics that



John Edgerton on Seed Saving at OI 2016

will include participation by larger scale field crop farmers and businesses, medium scaled diversified farmers and business, and smaller scale urban agriculture and homesteading farmers and gardeners. Participants provided positive comments and reviews of the 2016 event and speakers. We will continue to question the timing and location of the event to increase participation. But by the end of 2016 we had a good plan for three new presentations for 2017.

Another key component to the success of the OI is the sponsorship support from a variety of business and organizations. We would like to recognize the support of the following organizations in 2016:

North Central SARE
 Blue River Hybrids
 Herbruck's
 SunOpta
 Bay Shore Sales
 Eden Foods
 Crop Services International
 George and Anne Bird
 GreenStone Farm Credit Services
 USDA NRCS
 Certis USA
 Organic Valley
 Grice Farms
 Cherry Capital Foods

Policy Efforts

MOFFA is active as a member of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC). Julia Christianson (in her role as a MOFFA member and volunteer Chair of the Policy Committee) is the primary contact who participates in the calls and keeps the board informed of developments with the organization.

During 2016 Board member John Biernbaum was one of 16 members of the USDA Hydroponic and Aquaponic Regulations Review Task Force. John participated in the January meeting in San Diego and was also invited to present an update at the April meeting of the National Organic Standards Board in Washington, DC. The Task Force submitted their report in July and the NOSB and USDA are still working on the recommendations since no decision was made at the November NOSB meeting. Updates on details were provided in the [September](#) and [December](#) issues of the Organic Connections Newsletter.

Proposed rule changes for livestock regulations were released in 2016. Given the potential impact directly on Herbruck's Poultry Ranch Inc. in Michigan and indirectly on many Michigan field crop producers and members of Organic Farmers of Michigan who

sell grain for livestock, this was a topic that the board discussed multiple times. Given the diverse perspectives on the issues, MOFFA requested input from the membership.

Grants and Projects

The MDARD High Tunnel Grant in cooperation with Michigan State University was completed in 2016 with submission of the final report. The report is available at our website at www.moffa.net/f/MOFFA_Final_Rpt_HighTunnel_Organic_Fruit.pdf.

We provided letters of support and partnership for four research proposals:

- An MSU project "Lab to farm: integrating organic cucurbit science and production in the Midwest" submitted to the Organic Research and Education Initiative (funded).
- MSU North Farm's proposal "Building Capacity for School Based Agricultural Education in the Food Insecure Region of Michigan's Upper Peninsula" submitted to the USDA SPECA Challenge Grant Program (funded).
- Dr. Sieg Snapp from Michigan State University and Jen Blesh, University of Michigan for the USDA Transition OREI proposal entitled, "Putting biodiversity to work for farmers: optimizing management of cover crop mixtures" (not funded).
- Dr. Liu and Dr. Biernbaum from Michigan State University for the USDA Transition OREI proposal entitled, "Novel fungal composting for chitin, chitinase and lactic acid production with potential plant protection and soil pH control" (not funded).



In 2016 MOFFA agreed to be the publisher of a book titled [The Organic Movement in Michigan](#) edited by Maynard Kaufman and Julia Christianson. Maynard was instrumental in starting MOFFA and has served on the board and as Chair of the organization. Julia has been the administrative assistant since 2013, and took on this project on a volunteer basis. Of the 15 authors, all of whom played a role in the development of organic agriculture in Michigan, almost all are MOFFA members. The book is scheduled for publication in May 2017. Understanding foundational historical perspectives is very important as organizations grow and move forward. The board would like to express our appreciation to Maynard and Julia for inspiring and managing preparation of the book.

Financials

Total revenue for the year was \$26,850 (within 1% of budget) and total expenditures were \$20,194 (~28% below budget) resulting in carry forward for 2017.

Emerging Priorities for 2017

Priorities for 2017 include:

- Continuing the Organic Intensives program with possible regional events

- Completing a new vision statement for the organization
- Discussing sponsorship of MOFFA activities including the Organic Intensives
- Recruiting authors for the Organic Connections Newsletter
- Maintaining and increasing membership involvement

Respectfully Submitted by John A. Biernbaum, Chair

Organic Industrial Hemp Survey

Purdue University is conducting an online survey of certified organic farmers in the Midwest to determine their interest in and knowledge of industrial hemp. This survey is part of a larger effort to assess the potential for reintroducing industrial hemp as a crop in the Midwest and to identify key areas for research and education. Your participation in this survey is vital to ensuring that the needs and interests of organic farmers are represented. We anticipate that the survey will take about ten minutes to complete. We care very much about your privacy and all responses will be kept confidential. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Purdue University. To participate in the survey, please follow this link:

https://purdue.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5uUn1fCcTjcmrnf

For more information, please contact Leah Sandler at sandler@purdue.edu.

Policy Update

by Julia Christianson

With the change of administration in Washington, there are many issues of importance in the political sphere. We noted one earlier in this newsletter, a letter put together by the National Organic Coalition and addressed to incoming Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue. The deadline to sign on to that letter is Tuesday, May 30, so that they can have a maximum number of signatures for their appearance on the Hill on June 1.

Another major issue is the postponement of implementation of the Organic Livestock and Poultry Rule. After more than ten years of effort by those who want to see strict adherence to the intent of the initial legislation, NOSB and NOP finally agreed, and the new rule was scheduled to go into effect on March 19, 2017. The implementation date was postponed from March 19th to May 19th, and then to November 14th. There now seems to be a real question whether it will be implemented at all. Failure to implement the new rule means that agri-

business firms whose primary interest is profit will continue to compete unfairly with the many family-scale farms which are following the spirit as well as the letter of the existing rule.

The USDA is accepting public comment on the Organic Livestock and Poultry Rule until **midnight on Friday, June 9th.**

Please take time before then to register your comment at

<https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=AMS-NOP-17-0031-0002>

On February 24, Trump signed Executive Order 13777, "Enforcing the Regulatory Reform Agenda." This has been widely understood to mean the elimination of hard-won regulations addressing toxic

pollution and fuel emission standards, and programs that improve and protect the gains we have made toward clean water and clean air. The EPA is responsible for national-level **regulation of pesticides**, and while its record under the previous administration wasn't ideal, we believe it would be disastrous for the program to be weakened or eliminated. The EPA requested input from the public on the question of regulatory reform; the closing date was May 15. MOFFA expressed its opinion, as did nearly 200,000 other concerned individuals and organizations. We can hope that our voices have made a difference there.

Another serious issue is the proposed reorganization of the Dept. of Agriculture. Under this plan, the USDA stands to lose one of its core Mission Areas – Rural Development. In addition to demoting the Rural Development Mission Area to the status of “office,” the reorganization would shift the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Services Agency (FSA), and Risk Management Agency (RMA) from two unique Mission Areas (each with their own undersecretary) to a single “Farm Production and Conservation” Mission Area. Although the Secretary contends that this move represents an “elevation” of Rural Development, most commentators strongly disagree.

On May 25th the Secretary testified before the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee concerning the President's 2018 budget proposal, which slashes USDA's FY 2018 discretionary funding by an estimated 21%. According to the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, “Members of the Subcommittee pressed the Secretary to explain what drove the Administration to slash successful programs that benefit farmers and rural America. The Secretary did not attempt to

defend (or decry) the proposed cuts, but simply told legislators that he would implement whatever budget Congress set for FY 2018.” You can read more about the hearings at <http://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/house-ag-appropriations/>.

A bright spot on the legislative agenda is the proposed [Organic Agriculture Research Act of 2017](#), sponsored by a bipartisan group of Representatives. The bill is intended to spur innovative research and extension programs by increasing funding for the [Organic Agriculture Extension and Research Initiative](#) (OREI) from \$20 million to \$50 million annually. The bill also extends the program's authorization to 2023.

In the face of all this, reports of GE apples, GE salmon, GE eucalyptus and other “[frankenfoods](#)”, and the poisoning of farmworkers in California by drift of [Chlorpyrifos](#), a pesticide the EPA was set to ban under the Obama administration, but has since approved, lead me to despair. But this is the reality we find ourselves living in, and if we want a better reality for ourselves and for future generations, it is clear to me that we're going to have to fight for it.

I will try to keep you up to date on policy issues through a regular feature in the newsletter, on our [website](#), and through [Facebook](#). But I strongly suggest that anyone who cares about these issues subscribe to some or all of the newsletters linked on our [Organic Resources](#) page; those from the National Organic Coalition and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition seem particularly valuable right now.

Julia Christianson is the volunteer Chair of MOFFA's Policy Committee.

The Report From Organic Intensives

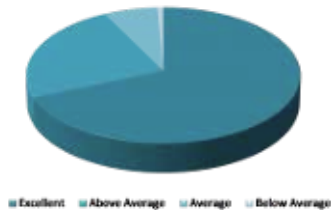
MOFFA held its third annual Organic Intensives all-day in-depth educational event on March 8th on the MSU campus in East Lansing. More than 100 people attended the event, choosing their educational experience from a selection of three topics:

- The Changing Face of Organic Field Crop Marketing
- Organic Weed, Insect and Disease Management for the Diversified Vegetable Farm
- Small Scale Success: Growing Nutrient Dense Vegetables in a Changing Climate



Just under half of the participants were farmers, 18% represented a food or farm related businesses, 8% were with non-profit organizations, another 8% work for the state or Federal government, and 17% were “other” – mostly students or private gardeners.

MOFFA Organic Intensives 2017
Participant Evaluations - All Aspects



Once again, participants expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the experience, with 93% rating it "excellent" or "above average" overall. There were multiple comments along

the lines of "Nice job. Thanks for doing this", "Awesome info presented in an easy to understand way", "Great program! Well organized and many great resources", "Great to see other people with the same passions".

We received many, many suggestions for topics to address in future Intensives. Those mentioned more

than once include: beneficial insects, small animal husbandry, permaculture, soil biology, food preservation, value-added products, companion planting, weed management, food justice/community gardens, and growing with less reliance on fossil fuels.

We also asked about the best time and location for the event. As might be expected, 71% favored the early March date and 79% voted for the Lansing location.

As we begin planning next year's Organic Intensives, we would like to hear from you about what you'd like to see, and ask that you please take a moment to fill out the short survey at www.moffa.net/oi-2018-survey.html.

Mechanical Weed Control Field Day

Tuesday, September 26, 10:00-5:00 Rain or Shine
MSU Horticulture Farm
3291 N. College Road, Holt, MI

From wheel hoes to walk-behind tractors to Allis G's and beyond, come learn the principles and tools for precise mechanical weed control from farmers and researchers.

- See in row cultivation tools demonstrated in vegetables
- Learn about cultivation in Europe
- Hear from farmers who are using in-row tools
- Meet with and learn from other growers and company reps

Equipment on display and in demonstration:

- Cultivating tractors – JD 900HC, Case 265, all manner of Allis G's

- Tools – Finger weeders, Torsion weeders, Reigi/Eco-weeder, steerable toolbar, Lilliston, Flamer, Flex tine weeders, Walk-behind tractor cultivation ... and more



\$20 cash or check payable at field day (lunch included).

Please register as it helps us plan. For questions, to assist, or to register, contact Sam Hitchcock, MSU Department of Horticulture, 414-213-5337 or hitchc32@msu.edu.



The opportunity above, and dozens of others, can be found on the [Educational Opportunities](#) page of MOFFA's website.

MOFFA News

Newsletter – We are very interested in featuring new voices in the newsletter. If you are interested in contributing, or if you have a suggestion about content or can recommend someone who would be 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.

Membership – We are sorry to report that membership for 2017 thus far is less than 80% of what it was by this point in 2016. MOFFA relies on the support of its members. If you haven't already joined for 2017, please take a minute to join or renew online, 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. If you're not sure if you've renewed your membership for this year, email us and we'll be happy to let you know

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

Write to us at: Michigan Organic Food & Farm Alliance
PO Box 26102
Lansing, MI 48909