

MOFFA has been talking about the why and the what of organic as we look to build a stronger consensus with more people and seek a more defined path forward. One of the most accessible and clear doctrines of organic farming is the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) Guiding Principles published initially in 2004. The principles were developed through a two-year participatory international process. They are described as “ethical principles to inspire action and to guide development of positions, programs and standards”. The four principles are:



The Principle of Health.



The Principle of Ecology.



The Principle of Fairness.



The Principle of Care.

**Health:** Organic Agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animal, human and planet as one and indivisible.

**Ecology:** Organic Agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them.

**Fairness:** Organic Agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities.

**Care:** Organic Agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment.

## About MOFFA

The Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance was organized in 1992 as a non-profit organization with the mission of promoting organic agriculture and the development and support of food systems that revitalize and sustain local communities. MOFFA was one of the first organizations in Michigan and in the nation to actively promote these principles.

MOFFA welcomes new members to join us and get involved in creating a better food system for Michigan. Our members include organic and other farmers, food coops, educators, environmentalists, food businesses, food and farm activists and concerned citizens throughout Michigan and elsewhere.

Each year MOFFA sponsors and/or exhibits at a number of major conferences and festivals in Michigan, which allows us to reach many more individuals with our limited resources. We publish a Guide to Organic and Ecologically Sustainable Growers and Farms, and monitor public policy issues that relate to regenerative farming. We also maintain a website and a Facebook page, and publish a quarterly newsletter.

All of this activity is made possible by the contributions of our members. If you haven't joined for 2018, we hope you will take a few minutes to lend your support.

## MOFFA

P.O. Box 26102 · Lansing MI 48909  
 moffaorganic@gmail.com  
 www.moffa.net



## What Is Organic?



## **Health**

“This principle points out that the health of individuals and communities cannot be separated from the health of ecosystems—healthy soils produce healthy crops that foster the health of animals and people. Health is the wholeness and integrity of living systems. It is not simply the absence of illness, but the maintenance of physical, mental, social and ecological well-being. Immunity, resilience and regeneration are key characteristics of health. The role of Organic Agriculture, whether in farming, processing, distribution, or consumption, is to sustain and enhance the health of ecosystems and organisms from the smallest in the soil to human beings. In particular, organic agriculture is intended to produce high quality, nutritious food that contributes to preventive health care and well-being. In view of this it should avoid the use of fertilizers, pesticides, animal drugs and food additives that may have adverse health effects.”

## **Ecology**

“This principle roots Organic Agriculture within living ecological systems. It states that production is to be based on ecological processes, and recycling. Nourishment and well-being are achieved through the ecology of the specific production environment. For example, in the case of crops this is the living soil; for animals it is the farm ecosystem; for fish and marine organisms, the aquatic environment. Organic farming, pastoral and wild harvest systems should fit the cycles and ecological balances in nature. These cycles are universal but their operation is site-specific. Organic management must be adapted to local conditions, ecology, culture and scale. Inputs should be reduced by reuse, recycling and efficient management of materials and energy in order to maintain and improve

environmental quality and conserve resources. Organic Agriculture should attain ecological balance through the design of farming systems, establishment of habitats and maintenance of genetic and agricultural diversity. Those who produce, process, trade, or consume organic products should protect and benefit the common environment including landscapes, climate, habitats, biodiversity, air and water.”

## **Fairness**

“Fairness is characterized by equity, respect, justice and stewardship of the shared world, both among people and in their relations to other living beings. This principle emphasizes that those involved in Organic Agriculture should conduct human relationships in a manner that ensures fairness at all levels and to all parties—farmers, workers, processors, distributors, traders and consumers. Organic Agriculture should provide everyone involved with a good quality of life, and contribute to food sovereignty and reduction of poverty. It aims to produce a sufficient supply of good quality food and other products. This principle insists that animals should be provided with the conditions and opportunities of life that accord with their physiology, natural behavior and well-being. Natural and environmental resources that are used for production and consumption should be managed in a way that is socially and ecologically just and should be held in trust for future generations. Fairness requires systems of production, distribution and trade that are open and equitable and account for real environmental and social costs.”

## **Care**

“Organic Agriculture is a living and dynamic system that responds to internal and external demands and conditions. Practitioners of

Organic Agriculture can enhance efficiency and increase productivity, but this should not be at the risk of jeopardizing health and well-being. Consequently, new technologies need to be assessed and existing methods reviewed. Given the incomplete understanding of ecosystems and agriculture, care must be taken. This principle states that precaution and responsibility are the key concerns in management, development and technology choices in Organic Agriculture. Science is necessary to ensure that Organic Agriculture is healthy, safe and ecologically sound. However, scientific knowledge alone is not sufficient. Practical experience, accumulated wisdom and traditional and indigenous knowledge offer valid solutions, tested by time. Organic Agriculture should prevent significant risks by adopting appropriate technologies and rejecting unpredictable ones, such as genetic engineering. Decisions should reflect the values and needs of all who might be affected, through transparent and participatory processes.”

More information and a brochure you may want to print and share can be found here:

[www.ifoam.bio/en/organic-landmarks/principles-organic-agriculture](http://www.ifoam.bio/en/organic-landmarks/principles-organic-agriculture)

The IFOAM principles go beyond the USDA-NOP and certainly well beyond the often shared simple definition of organic as “no chemicals or pesticides”. If we cannot get more people beyond the basics of “no chemicals or pesticides”, it is likely that the future of organic farming will not be what we desire. It will be limited to something much less than the passion we have had the good fortune to experience from organic farmers and supporters in Michigan, the Midwest and across the country.