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Greetings—

Greetings to all amidst a stunning summertime in our Great Lake state. Decades of experiencing the beauty and the profound explosion of flora growth does not lessen the appreciation and awe at the palette nature has provided us. Many, many of us have garnered a livelihood in some fashion from the ecologically sustainable agriculture opportunities offered by this abundant land, and all of us have partaken in some manner of the bounty. For this fortunate life we are appreciative, humbled and forever reciprocating.

As the MOFFA quarterly newsletter evolves we are focusing on each release being grounded in a central theme. This will not preclude us though from interspersing with diverse relevant and timely information. As an example—as this issue centers on Marketing and it many nuances and connotations, we are also delighted and excited to bring to light “Organic Intensives”, a



progressive evolution of the Michigan Organic Conference. Please read John Biernbaum's article below.

Life is full of moments when we are attempting to "sell" something, be it a commodity, an idea, philosophical stance, political agenda, raffle ticket, ourselves, or a fresh bunch of radishes. Whether we embrace or disdain marketing per se, it is an integral aspect of all our lives; especially for those that have agricultural products and are seeking fair market value from reliable buyers.

Many organic growers have the good fortune to be able to sell all they can produce. Usually this is the result of a stellar reputation built up over time, excellent product, and a good strategic marketing plan. But even for the most accomplished producer there are still slight nuances and tweaks that can assist in fine-tuning their approach to maximizing return—and most important of all save time doing so.

Hopefully one of the articles in this Summer Edition of Organic Connections will provide information that will be relevant for you and assist in the journey forward. MOFFA welcomes, encourages, and actively seeks article submissions from our community of readers, both members and non. If you have something to share by all means pass it along!

The MOFFA board of directors is favored with the addition of two women of extraordinary abilities and enthusiasm - both certified organic farmers extraordinaire. Welcome, welcome Julie Studier of Tower Hill Farm and Karen Warner of Big Head Farm. May your time on the MOFFA board be filled with grand times and satisfying projects. The board in addition has seen in this transitional phase two very key members depart, though their spirit and insight remain with us. A heartfelt thanks to Yvette Berman and Carolyn Lowry for their uncompromising dedication to the Michigan organic culture.

The word uncompromising may seem to some as counterproductive but one has only to traverse any avenue of society—farms, neighborhoods, schools, industrial and business parks, city green-ways—to see the NON- sustainable conventional approach to ecology the vast majority of society pursues. Constructive dialogue can occur while still holding fast to core principles. Speak out daily with joy in your heart and a smile on your face but stand and be counted—it is essential!

— Enjoy, John H.

The Organic Farming Intensives Initiative

For the past 3 years the MOFFA Board of Directors has sought to make the most educational impact with the resources available by focusing on providing educational organic farming content for the multiple Michigan farming conferences that have paid staff to organize and host the conferences. We have worked with organizers of the Michigan Family Farm Conference (Battle Creek, January), the Small Farms Conference (Traverse City, January), the Michigan Farmer's Market Association Conference (MSU, March), the MSU Organic Research

Reporting Session (MSU, March) and the Great Lakes Fruit and Veggie Expo (Grand Rapids, December).

Now we think the time is right to launch an initiative that has been discussed by members of the board for several years. As an alternative to a one or two day farming conference with many speakers and presentations on a wide variety of topics, we plan to organize a day of organic education with a focus on intensive coverage of a limited number of topics. We believe this effort is realistic to plan, schedule and manage with the resources currently available.

The goal is to give current and potential organic farmers the opportunity to focus on a topic for six hours with recognized farmer and educational experts. The concept is modeled after the very successful MOSES Organic University that has been in operation since 2001, when they started by offering six courses. The sessions are presented by one or more recognized farmer experts and educators. A spiral bound resource book is provided to each participant. Lunch is included. In 2013 they offered 10 courses with nearly 600 participants paying \$190 for each class. (For more background information see: <http://mosesorganic.org/events/organic-university/history/>.)

Decisions made to date:

- When: Thursday, March 12, 2015, during MSU Agriculture and Natural Resources Week
- Where: MSU Brody Building, just west of the Kellogg Conference Center in East Lansing
- What: Four classes for up to 50 participants each; opportunity for trade show participation

Decisions that need to be made:

- Select topics
- Establish cost: target is \$100 to \$150
- Identify and recruit presenters
- Recruit participants
- Recruit sponsors from allied organic suppliers and supporters that can provide scholarship support.

The schedule for the day is designed to allow adequate breaks to facilitate learning and participant interaction. An example of a total of 6 hours of class time from 9:00 to 5:00 (8 hrs) is provided. The classes can start later in the morning (10:00) to allow for travel time if desired.

- 9:00 Start (90 min)
- 10:30 Break (30 min)
- 11:00 Continue (90 min)
- 12:30 Break – lunch (60 min)
- 1:30 Continue (90 min)
- 3:00 Break (30 min)
- 3:30 Continue (90 min)

- 5:00 Finish

Following is a list of possible topics with a focus either on concepts/principles or a particular commodity. Any of these can be narrowed down to a more specific topic.

- Organic Certification: NOP, Organic Systems Plans, Inspections, Records and Transition
- Organic Soil Management: Cultivating Soil Biology, Organic Matter, Fertility and Health
- Organic Pest Management: General Concepts, Weeds, Insects, Diseases
- Market Gardening: Farm Development, Equipment, Infrastructure, Planning, Markets, etc
- Organic Livestock Basics: NOP, Pasture, Fences, Feed, Housing, Health
- Organic Livestock Basics: NOP, Poultry, Pigs, Ruminants (Goats/Sheep)
- Marketing Methods: Farm Market, Farm Stand, CSA, Restaurant, Institution, Food Hub
- Cold storage for the Diverse Market Farm and Season Extension
- Compost Production and Use
- Organic Transplants: Vegetables, Herbs, Flowers
- Four Season High Tunnel Vegetable Production
- Organic Small Fruit: Strawberries, Brambles, Grapes, Blueberries
- Organic Tree Fruit: Pears, Apples, Peaches, Cherries, Plums
- Organic Field Crops: Dry Beans, Wheat, Spelt, Oats, Corn, Feed Corn,
- Organic Marketing and Food Safety: CSA, Farm Stands, Farmer's Markets, Institutional
- Honey Bee Management

The key to a successful educational event is inclusion of multiple perspectives in the planning process and starting the planning process well in advance. We welcome your ideas and participation. As a first step, we invite you to vote on potential topics at www.moffa.net/oi-2015-topic-poll.html.

Intensive Integrated Important Incisive Inventive Imaginative Intoxicating **Information**
 from Intelligent Impassioned **Instructors** that will
 Illuminate Invigorate and Inspire Industrial Idealistic Intellectual **Individuals**
 to have Infinite Indelible Instant Immediate Initiative, Improvement and **Impact**
 Indulge Your Self - Present or Participate

— John Biernbaum

Labels on Organic Produce and products made under the Michigan Cottage Food Law

Getting labels right is crucial to promote the product and provide necessary information to consumers. When creating labels, farmers are faced with the challenge to identify their fresh produce for different purposes: the label needs to be descriptive for different customers. For



produce organically grown the label needs to meet legal requirements that have been established by the USDA National Organic Program. For products prepared in a non-certified kitchen, they must meet the requirements of the Michigan Cottage Food Law, a program developed by the State Of Michigan's Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources.



Growing organically but not certified: Organic produce that is NOT certified by USDA National Organic Program (NOP) cannot be labeled organic. For example, the label cannot state "Organic onions" unless the produce has been certified to meet organic production standards. However, the label can indicate, "Onions raised following organic practices" or "Sustainably raised onions" or "Naturally grown onions" ... with one exception:

Growing organically and selling under \$5000 of product: If you are following NOP organic rules and have sales of less than \$5000 (adding up all agricultural products sold on an annual basis) then it is permitted to label as organic. Using the example above, you can state "Organic onions" but you cannot use the NOP Organic seal (the green round label shown above) on your signage. Note that you are to keep records just as if you had completed an application and inspection with an NOP certifying agency. Anyone has the right to ask to see your Organic Farm Plan and records since you are stating that you are producing organic food.

NOP Organic Certified: Upon completing and passing the USDA NOP inspection (complete with certificate) then you can label your produce/products as NOP Organic and include the USDA NOP seal in your farm literature and on your produce and signage. For further details visit: www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELDEV3004446

Selling food made in your own kitchen (certain products).

The Michigan Cottage Food Law was designed to give new food entrepreneurs the opportunity to explore possible markets for a new product. This law can be used by operations taking in up to \$20,000 in total sales annually. The products that can be sold under this law include baked goods, bread products, spiced vinegars, confections such as sugared nuts and popcorns, and jams and jellies.

Once the product is made you must design a label containing all of the correct information required by the Michigan Cottage Food Law. Each label must have a label that includes the following:



Product Label Requirements:

- Physical address where product was made (no PO Box numbers)
- Name of product (in all caps or capitalized words)

Ingredients in order of amount (largest to smallest amount):

- List ingredients of prepared items used, e.g. "organic almond extract (organic almond oil, alcohol)"

- List any potential allergen as noted by the Federal Food and Drug Administration

Then: ***“Made in a home kitchen that has not been inspected by the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development”***

This last sentence for the Cottage Food Law product label is required for all products made under the Michigan Cottage Food Law. It must be on each product’s label. Details can be found at www.michigan.gov/mdard/0,4610,7-125-50772_45851-240577--,00.html#Labeling. Not only should the label include the correct information, but a safe process should be followed to assure the food is of highest quality and meets food safety standards. A short checklist is available through the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources: www.michigan.gov/documents/mda/A_Cottage_Foods_Checklist_353382_7.pdf. A more comprehensive document on the requirements of the Cottage Food Law is available at www.michigan.gov/mdard/0,4610,7-125-50772_45851-240577--,00.html.

— Vicki Morrone, Center for Regional Food Systems at MSU

Tips for the Farmers Market

Marketing produce at farmers markets is often the first market-type a new farm practices. Farmers markets are also a popular approach to try out new produce with a wider clientele than, say, those belonging to the farm’s CSA. Being prepared for the typical and even not so typical day of sales is critical for the well-being of the farm workers and quality promotion of the produce.



Moss Funnel Farms at South Haven Farmers Market, July 2014

A couple of experienced organic vegetable farmers who sell at several local markets have put together [a list of things](#) they have learned over time, and hope you can profit from their experiences.

So if you are new to the farmers market scene, take a moment and see what you may be missing to enhance your farm stand, and make marketing at farmers markets a more positive experience and productive sales day. (The list of sources of items is not intended to promote the companies, they just let you know where these two farmers sourced their market accessories.)

— Vicki Morrone

MOFFA Board Member Julie Studier found [this issue](#) of the publication *Growing For Market* helpful in her early days — especially the article "Top Ten

Also useful: ["Some Thoughts on Selling at Farmers Markets"](#), authored by a long-time market vendor. It's ten years old now, but it's inspirational, and provides

Rules of Market Displays" on pg. 4.

many excellent suggestions.

The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service [resource page on Marketing](#) offers a wealth of information on marketing, from the general to the highly specific. Just a few of the titles: [Direct Marketing](#) (very comprehensive), [Bringing Local Food to Institutions](#), [Farmers Markets: Marketing and Business Guide](#), [Food Hubs: A Producer Guide](#), [Marketing Tip Sheets](#) ... well, the list is practically endless, and the quality is high.

Most publications are free; some carry a small pricetag (the most expensive is \$3.95). Publications can be downloaded from the website or ordered by mail for an additional \$3 per copy to cover shipping and handling. Those without internet access can request a list of publications by calling 1-800-346-9140.

The Michigan Food Hub Network

Beginning in 2012, the Michigan Department of Agriculture has partnered with the Center for Regional Food Systems at MSU to integrate food hub and regional food commerce resources in an initiative called the Michigan Food Hub Learning and Innovation Network.

There are currently nine part-time food hub facilitators serving in regions across the state:

[Trish Varney](#) – Mason, Oceana

[Jayson Otto](#) – Grand Rapids

[Dan Peat](#) – Van Buren & Berrien

[Joe Colyn](#) – Calhoun & Kalamazoo

[Jane Bush](#) – Barry, Jackson, Livingston & Washtenaw

[Rory Neuner](#) – Clinton, Ingham, Eaton & Shiawassee

[Mary ZumBrunnen](#) – Genesee, Saginaw

[Cary M. Junior](#) – Macomb, Oakland, Wayne

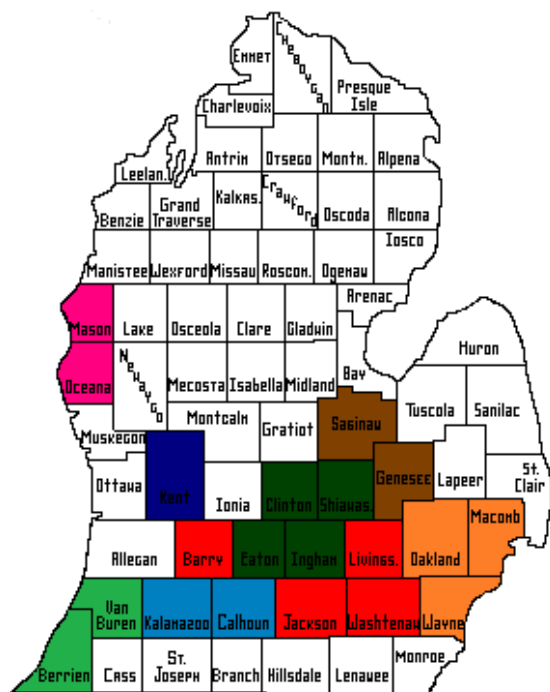
[Megan Masson-Minock](#) – regional planning support statewide

(additional contact and biographical information on the facilitators is available at foodsystems.msu.edu/uploads/files/fhn-facilitators.pdf)

More information on the network and its activities is available

at foodsystems.msu.edu/activity/info/michigan_food_hub_learning_and_innovation_network.

Interested persons are invited to join the listserv at list.msu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=MIFOODHUB.



Role of Cooperative Brands for Organic and Regional Food Systems

While both local and organic foods continue to gain a bigger and bigger bite of the overall food market, and while local and organic are very in vogue, there is a dearth of local, regional, and local organic foods in mainstream supermarkets. For example, I write this in the middle of strawberry season, and I have yet to see local strawberries, even liberally defined (say 400 miles). However, those supermarkets are using local and organic advertising techniques wherever they can to present a picture that they are substantially involved with sales of local foods.

The mainstream supermarkets are largely untapped by local and or organic growers, for various reasons. Some of these reasons are obvious, others less so. An obvious reason is that it is difficult for individual farmers to develop a supply that can fulfill even one supermarket's needs, let alone a large chain. To start, the farmer needs delivery truck(s), cold storage to deal with perishable items, processing equipment and facilities, packaging (often sold in minimum lots of 50,000), PLU numbers, and to develop a brand, for starters. All this is needed to market any one seasonal product, and processing and packaging equipment will only be utilized for a few weeks out of the year. The capital cost is hard to touch for small or medium scale farmers, because it is simply not feasible in many cases. This is why when we see organic products in supermarkets, they are mostly from large-scale organic producers.

Less obvious reasons for the lack of regional organic foods in mainstream supermarkets might be the challenges that arise during the development of a common product brand with other farmers. To develop a common brand might seem simple at first glance—but let's use green beans as a hypothetical example. If five farmers work together to pool green beans, certain things will need to be addressed. Which variety will be used? What are the quality or size specifications? Certainly more than one variety could be used throughout a season, but mixing varieties creates challenges with processing, storage, and especially appearance for sale (e.g. small dark green variety mixed with large light green variety). Are some farmers certified organic, and others non-certified? Are all GAP certified? What is the geographical distance between the farmers—how far will farmers have to travel in order to pool the product?

Cooperative businesses have a role to play in answering some of these challenges (whether or not they are technically incorporated as “cooperatives”). In order to create a feasible plan for getting into supermarket chains under a cooperative brand, growers will have to be willing to give up having their name on that particular batch of product (something many farmers are reluctant to do, understandably), although consumers via websites could potentially access their name and farm to learn more about their “farm story.” Also, growers will likely have to grow product specifically for the endeavor, versus just be willing to pool in their “extra” after their normal sales. Common certification will need to be used (for example, GAP and/or USDA organic). A strategic, season-long plan between growers will need to be developed, so that not all product comes in at once. Staggering plantings and utilizing different varieties of the product (early, mid, and late season varieties) can help to



keep a consistent product over a longer period of time. And probably first and foremost, initial agreements with the target supermarket chains need to be in place before moving forward.

Good planning and the use of cooperative processing and marketing have potential to bring local, organic, and regional food systems to new levels. Businesses can also cooperate with each other to share processing and infrastructure facilities throughout the year, bringing further potential efficiencies. Common brand development between products can be utilized to build recognition and at the same time save costs.

The idea, however, is to be efficient enough to find a strong place in supermarkets, but not to jump on just another type of agricultural treadmill. This is why laws that are supportive of the regional food system are important at the state, national, and international levels. State government can create and fund protective measures for food system businesses in the state, so that not every trademark challenge needs to be litigated, thereby creating a buffer between entrenched food system businesses and smaller regional food system businesses (France is a model for these types of protections). Being able to stop exploitation of cooperative brands could be critical to long-term success of regional food systems.

While all of these challenges are not obvious, they are all quite possible to meet. Without meeting them, we may not see the changes in the food system that many of us hope for.

— Chris Bardenhagen

Farm-To-Institution

["Institutional Markets Good for Farms, Communities"](#) by Colleen Matts and Vicki Morrone of the Center for Regional Food Systems at MSU appeared in the June, 2014, issue of [Vegetable Growers News](#). The article reports on a recent survey that found that 68% of Michigan's K-12 schools buy local produce, with 24% purchasing directly from farmers, and goes on to discuss typical mechanisms for farm-to-institution commerce. Readers are invited to download [Marketing Michigan Products: A Step-By-Step Guide](#), and to join the [Michigan Farm-To-School listserv](#) which reaches both farmers and institutional buyers.

Social Media Tools for Farmers

Nowadays most consumers are asking the question “who grows my food?” which is why jumping on the social media bandwagon is a good idea for anyone growing food or creating artisan food products. There are so many different platforms that you can use and they all work to reach a different audience. It’s a good idea to figure out which ones work best for you and your time. Hopefully this will help you decide which to go with.



[Facebook](#) is free, fairly easy to use, and can be an excellent way to connect with your customers to give them the story of your farm. You can post photos, events, even set up a shop using any of the online apps that integrate with Facebook Pages. Facebook is also mobile and can be used on your smart phone in the fields.

We try to post to it daily with quick updates on what's happening with the crops or what we are bringing to the markets. It's also fun to get followers to interact by asking them questions, presenting a survey or poll or posting a contest for them to win prizes.

Keep in mind that when you start using Facebook Pages you will have customers contacting you using the messaging feature or posting to your page so you will have to commit some time to reviewing and replying to those very important people! Facebook pages also allows folks to review your farm but only if you have an address location entered in your account settings.

Facebook Pages allows you to assign content creators so if you have field hands on the farm who are more adept with social media platforms they can be offered access to post to your farm page throughout the day. Remember- with any social media platform you have to be posting regular updates and interacting with others to build your following and to get noticed!

Think of Facebook as you inviting people onto the farm, to hang about, look around, ask questions and find information about you!



[Twitter](#) is also free, it provides a lot less information about you and the farm in the profile section but it can also provide quick info updates for your followers. Twitter is much faster-paced than Facebook – multiple daily tweets is fine, and even necessary if you want your page to be noticed. Think of Twitter as a cocktail party with lots of conversations going on. You can use the hashtags to link to specific topics and follow conversations. There are also tools available that allow you to schedule regular tweets to your followers but I recommend being very careful with this feature as folks on Twitter are very active and will expect you to reply if they like your tweet, re-tweet your tweet or reply to you. Keep in mind that basic etiquette is to respond and thank others for re-tweeting and mentioning your “handle”.



[Instagram](#) is free and works best if you have a smartphone that takes pictures. Keeping it updated again is the challenge. You need to keep updating photos, linking them to similar content by using hashtags and then liking others photos. The more you interact on this platform and the more active you are, you will gain more followers!

Social media and an active web presence can provide your farm and farm products with an excellent, fun and fairly easy way to grow and connect with your customer base. Your customers will appreciate all that you share with them as they follow along!

— Karen Warner

Policy Alert

Your voice is currently being solicited concerning two issues of interest to organic food advocates:

- Representatives Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Chellie Pingree (D-ME) have written a Congressional sign-on letter urging the EPA and USDA to deny approval of 2,4-D-resistant crops and the new version of Dow's 2,4-D herbicide, and they are circulating

the letter to Congress for signers. More information, and an opportunity to ask your congressperson to sign on to this letter, at The [Center for Food Safety](#).

- A [White House petition](#) has been created asking President Obama to reverse recent actions by the USDA impacting the integrity of the National Organic Standards Board. More information on this issue is available from the [Cornucopia Institute](#).

Membership Update

Nearly 25% of the members who have paid their dues for 2014 are new this year, which is exciting, but we're still well short of our overall goal. We don't like to be a broken record, but we'd like to encourage you, if you have been intending to renew your membership but just haven't gotten around to it, to take a moment to do that today. MOFFA relies upon the support of its members to continue to provide advocacy and education about Michigan's sustainable agriculture to a wider audience.

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

Upcoming Newsletters

For our fall newsletter we have chosen to feature Food Storage and Preservation, and the winter newsletter will focus on Soil Health. We encourage our readership to contribute articles to the newsletter. We're also always looking for photos to illustrate the articles. If you're interested in contributing something on either of these topics (or another topic altogether), please contact Julia Christianson at moffaorganic@gmail.com.

Electronic Communications

MOFFA continues to update its website ... most recently to add to the [Available Land](#), [Employment and Internships](#), and [Educational Opportunities](#) pages.

In May, MOFFA sent a paper mailing to a more or less random group of members to ask about their internet usage. So far we've received responses from a little more than 20% of those who received the survey—not a lot, but enough to be relatively certain that nearly all our members are active online.

Now we'd like to open the survey to our newsletter readership—both members and non-members. We'd greatly appreciate it if you'd take a few minutes to let us know about your internet usage and how well we're communicating with our members. The survey is now online at www.moffa.net/internet-survey.html.

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

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