

*Organic News, Certification Updates, Member Profiles, and More!*



**CERTIFIED**

# Organic

**INSIDE LOOK** ■

## **ORGANIC GRAIN SHORTAGES**

**Organic Companies Work Together  
to Address Supply Challenges**



**Breaking Down Financial Barriers for New Farmers  
Helping the Next Generation of Organic Farmers  
Zea Sonnabend: Playing for the Organic Team**



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# CERTIFIED Organic



22

## Organic Grain Shortages

*"What is inspiring ... is that increasing the supply of organic grain is centered on the principle that farmer profitability is at the heart of solution-making."*

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## *It seems like organic is both everywhere and nowhere.*

Organic food sales increased by nearly 400% between 2004 and 2014 as organic produce and packaged products became widely available at farmers' markets and road stands, through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, at natural foods grocers and co-ops, and even at mainstream supermarkets and "big box" stores.

But the amount of agricultural land farmed and grazed organically in the United States seems to be stuck at about 2%.

You're probably thinking it doesn't add up—and you're right. Generally, farmers benefit from a "price premium" for organic, demand is sky-high, and communities reap a wide range of environmental and economic benefits from organic agriculture, but the number of farmers choosing to grow crops organically isn't keeping up with the growing benefits or the demand.

This issue's feature story describes how groups and companies across the nation are working to address the imbalance between organic grain supply and demand for organic products that rely on organic grain. On page 31, you'll also find an update from CCOF Policy Director Kelly Damewood on research she recently conducted on behalf of USDA that identifies barriers to organic transition.

What can ease the organic demand pressure? Those interested in meeting the increasing consumer need must find solutions to the challenges outlined in these reports and elsewhere:

- The import of organic products to the United States is increasing at an astronomical rate. As an example, this year, organic corn imports have increased 752% compared to last year.
- Other "eco-labels"—including Non-GMO—are seeing unprecedented growth as retailers fill the gap in organic supply with products bearing alternative labels or by highlighting other favorable product attributes.
- U.S. farming of all types is under assault due to rising land costs, declining numbers of farmers, labor shortages, and climate-related phenomena including drought, major weather events, and increased pest activity.
- The major policy driver of U.S. agricultural growth—the Farm Bill—gives barely a sideways glance to organic production, leaving the door open for those beyond our borders to meet domestic consumer demand.

There is a lot of passion and a lot of creativity in the organic sector. Let's harness and focus it on a goal of growing organic production in the United States from 2% to 25% or more by 2025. Americans are choosing organic; it's our duty to respond.



*Cathy*

**Cathy Calfo**  
CCOF Executive Director/CEO

## **Issue Contributors**

### *Organic Grain Shortages, page 22*



*Elizabeth Reaves is a program director at the Sustainable Food Lab in Heartland, Vermont. Reaves provides project management, research, analysis, and support for the Food Lab's efforts to develop landscape-level collaboration to achieve more sustainable agricultural practices. Her work is informed by deep listening, community-based research, and an appreciation for the complex interactions between social-economic systems and the environment. Having spent the early part of her life on a dairy farm in Vermont, and then later on a large organic vegetable operation, Reaves carries farming and food systems close to her heart and believes that farmers are integral to the stewardship of our working lands. She has worked on behalf of private businesses, Trust for Public Land, Donella Meadows Institute, and U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy. Her advanced degrees are in Community Development and Applied Economics from the University of Vermont.*

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## **Breaking Down Financial Barriers for New Farmers**

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As existing farmers in the United States age and head closer to retirement, we will need a whopping 100,000 new farmers to step into their roles. The outlook is grim: between 2007 and 2012, the number of young farmers increased by only 1,220.

One of the proposed strategies that would incentivize young people to pursue farming careers is outlined in the National Young Farmers Coalition's (NYFC) report, *A Case to Add Farmers to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program*. With financial limitations presenting the biggest barrier to beginner farmers, the option of student loan forgiveness could make farming a viable option for young people with higher education degrees.

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program forgives the remaining balance on federal student loans after an individual has made income-based payments toward their loan balance for 10 years. The program is intended for those pursuing careers in public service with lower salaries that make paying off student loans more financially difficult. Teachers, doctors, nurses, law enforcement officials, and government and nonprofit employees are among some of the individuals who qualify for PSLF.

NYFC believes farmers also provide a public service and should qualify for federal student loan forgiveness. "Farmers deliver critical services to our nation," the report authors argue. "They provide a secure domestic food supply, steward half our nation's land, and support rural communities."

WRITTEN BY Rachel Witte

NYFC surveyed more than 700 young farmers about their student loans as a part of the report. On average, survey respondents held \$35,000 in student loans, and 30% said their student loan debt is delaying or preventing them from farming, despite their interest in farming as a career. Other common responses from survey participants included 28% who are unable to grow their business due to student loan pressure and 20% who don't qualify for other credit because of their student loan balance. An astounding 42% of the survey respondents report relying on another income—either through an off-farm job or their partner's income—to help pay student loan bills, preventing them from focusing solely on farming.

On top of the financial burden of student loan debt, starting a farm is a capital-intensive endeavor, particularly as farm real estate values continue to rise. All of these financial burdens—combined with the fact that farmers' average annual net income was reported as \$43,750 per farm in the 2012 Census—are signals that student loan forgiveness could eliminate one of the biggest barriers to today's aspiring young farmers, who will be responsible for growing this nation's food in the future.

Help may be on the way. On June 1 of this year, Representative Chris Gibson (R-NY) and Representative Joe Courtney (D-CT) introduced The Young Farmer Success Act (House Bill 2590), which, if passed, would add farmers to the PSLF program. HB 2590 will be considered as part of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. Visit [www.youngfarmers.org/studentloans](http://www.youngfarmers.org/studentloans) to learn more or find out how to support the bill.

The CCOF Foundation also helps offset education costs for students pursuing education that supports their organic career aspirations through its Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund. Learn more about the fund in this issue on page 15, or visit [www.ccof.org/foundation/fofgf](http://www.ccof.org/foundation/fofgf).

# SERVE THE ORGANIC COMMUNITY

Are you a member of the organic food industry, but not certified by CCOF?  
Do you want to get involved with CCOF at the governance level?  
Are you a CCOF member who knows someone who may fit these criteria?

The CCOF Board of Directors is seeking applications from individuals for appointment to the CCOF Certification Services, LLC Management Committee, which they will review at their November meeting. The LLC Management Committee is appointed by the board and has the responsibility to control and manage the business and affairs of CCOF Certification Services, LLC.

The board looks for applicants who have a background in the organic industry (preferably with an understanding of organic certification) and who have experience in business management, including human resource, financial, and program management. ***It is important to note that CCOF-certified members are not eligible for appointment to the LLC Management Committee.***

Committee members are appointed for three-year terms. While committee members are not compensated for their participation, they are reimbursed for their CCOF-related expenses. The LLC Management Committee meets once quarterly throughout the year, with other meetings and events occasionally scheduled as needed.

If you would like to learn more about participation on the LLC Management Committee, or if you are interested in applying, contact Cathy Calfo at [ccalfo@ccof.org](mailto:ccalfo@ccof.org). Applications for appointment to the committee will be considered on an ongoing basis.



Read about our structure: [www.ccof.org/ccof/structure](http://www.ccof.org/ccof/structure)

**CCOF MEMBERS—THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO RECRUIT SOMEONE YOU TRUST TO OVERSEE YOUR CERTIFICATION BUSINESS! HELP US SPREAD THE WORD!**

## SOIL NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT IN TIMES OF DROUGHT

Adapting farm management practices during extreme drought presents new challenges for growers and researchers alike.

UC SAREP, Sustainable Conservation & FarmsReach are hosting an ongoing series of "Virtual Field Days" and accompanying Toolkits to explore the research, innovations, and questions to better equip the agricultural community for the challenges ahead.

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*If farmers are able to stick it out through the transition period, organic certification will benefit their businesses' bottom line.*

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## For Profitable Farming, Go Organic!

Organic farming has long been recognized as costlier and more labor-intensive than growing crops using conventional practices. However, the time investment and creative thinking of organic farmers is paying off: organic farming is 22-35% more profitable than non-organic farming, according to a new study by David Crowder and John Reganold published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*.

The study authors compiled and compared data about the financial performance of organic and non-organic farms that spanned 40 years of studies covering 55 crops grown in 14 different countries. The examination of the data showed that despite having higher operating expenses than conventional farms, organic price premiums were reliable in offsetting those costs and making organic operations more profitable overall.

Furthermore, organic farms provide what the study authors call “ecosystem services,” which are not factored into the price premiums benefiting organic farmers. “As is, organic premiums may serve as a proxy for the monetary value of ecosystem services,” suggests the study. The higher profits of organic operations are in essence the stand-ins for these farmers’ “payments” for the multitude of benefits organic production provides for the environment.

One of the biggest challenges to widespread adoption of organic agriculture is the financial burden of the three-year transition period required to achieve organic certification on non-organic land. During that period, farms experience the higher costs and possibly lower yields associated with organic production, but are not able to sell their products as organic and earn the associated price premium.

The results of this study, however, show that if farmers are able to stick it out through the transition period, the long-term payoff of achieving organic certification will benefit their businesses' bottom line. Says the study, “The fact that organic premiums are significantly higher than those premiums needed to break even with conventional agriculture provides substantial financial incentives for organic growers to go through 3 years of transition expenses, acquire certification, and establish buyers and markets.”

CCOF's Certified Transitional program can help transitioning producers during the three-year period by providing a way to display their commitment to organic production practices before attaining full organic certification. For tools to help you transition to organic farming visit [www.ccof.org/transitional-resources](http://www.ccof.org/transitional-resources).

## New Agricultural Policies in Europe

The organic industry has seen tremendous growth in the United States, but other countries are seeing the demand for organic and sustainably-grown food soar as well. Recent top-level policies in Denmark and Scotland reflect a shift in national priorities to growing environmentally-friendly food.

Earlier this year, Denmark announced its intention to make the country more organic in its plan, Økologiplan Danmark. The country plans to double organic acreage by 2020 and serve more organic food in its public institutions.

“In order to achieve our goals, which are the most ambitious in the West, the public sector needs to lead the way. With Økologiplan Danmark, we will strengthen cooperation between municipalities, regions and ministries with a long line of new initiatives. We will commit ourselves to, among other things, have more organic items on the menu in canteens, hospitals and daycare institutions,” Food and Agriculture Minister Dan Jørgensen said.

Danish consumers are some of the most organic-focused in the world. Organic food makes up 8% of the total food market in Denmark, giving organic operations in that country the highest market share of organic products in the world.

Meanwhile, Scotland announced its decision in August to formally prohibit GMO crops from the country. The ban is taking advantage of a new European Union rule that allows countries to exclude their nation from any EU-approved GMO crops.

Scotland's Rural Affairs Secretary Richard Lochhead explained this move in a statement: “Scotland is known around the world for our beautiful natural environment—and banning growing genetically modified crops will protect and further enhance our clean, green status,” he said. He also noted that there has not been a demand for GMO crops from Scottish consumers, and that the country was intent on following the precautionary principle in its approach to GMOs.

These environmentally-focused national agricultural policies and decisions show that organic isn't a fad—it's an international consumer shift in priorities toward healthy, eco-friendly food.

CCOF is a part of the conversation, so make your voice heard! Contact [policy@ccof.org](mailto:policy@ccof.org) to contribute your opinion to the national and state-level policy work we're doing in the United States.

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## Earth-Friendly Grapes at Fetzer Vineyards

Barney Fetzer became a leader in sustainability when he founded Fetzer Vineyards in Northern California in 1968. His philosophy was simple—earth-friendly grapes are better grapes, and better grapes make better wine. Fetzer Vineyards began a revolution in winemaking with their commitment to sustainability and helped forge the way for eco-friendly winemaking. Over the years, this commitment has taken form in many different earth-friendly practices that reduce the wine company's impact on the planet, including organic certification. Fetzer Vineyards has been certified organic by CCOF since 1989 and was the first CCOF-certified organic vineyard!

"We're really proud to have blazed the trail for sustainability in the wine industry, and we've been able to continue to lead in the wine industry because of the culture we've created," explained Fetzer Vineyards Sustainability Manager Josh Prigge. "It's something that has been embedded in the DNA of our company ever since the founding. That's led to a lot of 'firsts' in the wine industry."

Fetzer Vineyards is still being recognized 47 years later for their commitment to sustainability as the recipient of a California Green Medal: Sustainable Winegrowing Leadership Award in the Leader category. The California Green Medal was developed as a way to showcase some of the leading wineries and vineyards committed to sustainability. The Leader category award bestowed on Fetzer Vineyards "honors the vineyard and/or

winery that best demonstrates the ability to balance the '3 E's' of sustainability, (Environmentally sound, socially Equitable, and Economically viable) and excels in each of these areas."

"Winning the Green Medal award for the leader category is very exciting," said Prigge. "[It acknowledges] all the hard work from all the employees over many years, all the dedication and the passion. This award—being the first winner of this award—really recognizes all the great work that's been done."

Fetzer Vineyards added another important achievement to their long list of sustainability accomplishments last fall: becoming the first wine company in the world to achieve Zero Waste certification, meaning the winery has successfully diverted 98.5% of their waste from landfills. Since 1990, Fetzer has been tracking and reducing the waste their operation sends to landfills. Over the years, the winery steadily increased its waste diversion tactics, including recycling everything possible, sending reusable materials back to vendors, and selling used materials. Even though their production doubled between 1990 and today, they were still successful at reducing waste during that period by an impressive 97%.

One of the most impactful Zero Waste undertakings at the winery is their closed-loop system for composting the grape skins and seeds left over from processing. After its time in the compost pile, the compost comprised of the skin and seeds is reused in the vineyard, growing more wine grapes whose processing leftovers will also be added to the compost heap at the end of the season.

Encouraging employees' passion for environmentally-friendly practices has proven to be a key to their sustainability success. The company created the Patrick Healy Award—named after a former employee—to recognize employees who come up with



ideas that improve their sustainability efforts. Two employees recently won the award for developing a plan to sell the wine company's lees (yeast residue), which not only diverted 620 tons of lees from their wastewater treatment plant, but also brought in additional revenue.

In addition to the company's Zero Waste accomplishments, Fetzer also boasts a host of other initiatives that help them grow their earth-friendly grapes. In 1999, Fetzer Vineyards became the first winery in California to operate on 100% renewable energy, and in 2006 completed installing the largest solar array in the wine industry: an 899-kilowatt photovoltaic system on a production building and a 40-kilowatt photovoltaic system on the roof of their administration building. Fetzer Vineyards is also a founding member of the Climate Registry, and they have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by more than 50% since 2005. Water conservation is also a priority for the company, resulting in construction of two additional storage ponds and various water-reducing methods that reduce water usage by about 200,000 gallons a year.

Says Prigge about the company's varied sustainability efforts, "We are always looking for ways to work in harmony with nature rather than against it. We are moving beyond merely minimizing our negative impacts to actively creating positive impacts in the environment and in our community."

Congratulations Fetzer Vineyards! We are proud to highlight stories about our members' conservation efforts, such as this one. Do you have some best practices to share? Let us know at [marketing@ccof.org](mailto:marketing@ccof.org).

## Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op: Sacramento's Community Grocer

Today's organic and local foods shoppers can buy their groceries at a variety of different outlets, from the local farmers' markets and natural foods retailers to major U.S. chain stores like Costco, Walmart, and Safeway. Despite this overwhelming number of options, co-op style grocery stores that are owned and governed

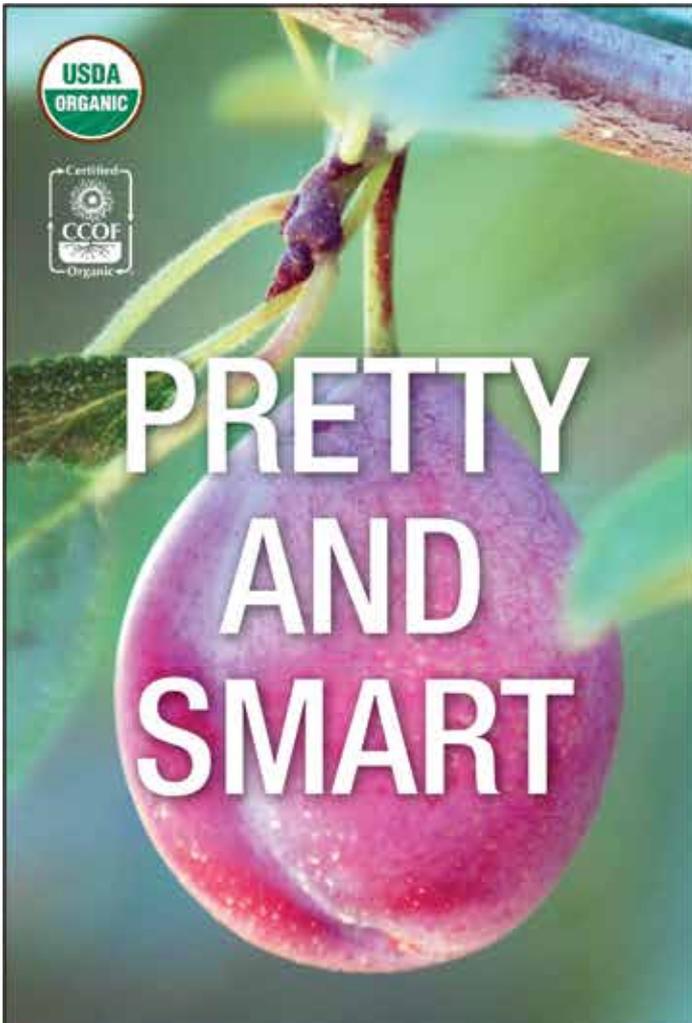
by their consumer owners like the Sacramento Natural Foods Cooperative still attract a multitude of customers and new owners, and offer vital services to their community.

The Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op is a community-owned natural foods grocery store that was founded in 1973. Their produce department has sold an impressive 100% certified organic produce since 2000, and the department even recently joined the CCOF family as one of our newest certified organic retail operations! "Our co-op has been working with local organic farmers for over 40 years and committed to selling only organic produce since the year 2000. Now that more and more retailers are selling organic produce, we felt it was a good time to raise the bar and differentiate ourselves with a CCOF Certified Organic Produce Department," says the co-op's Education Assistant Manager Julia Thomas.

Dollars spent on groceries at the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op don't just pay for what shoppers take home for dinner—they also go toward the many community outreach programs the co-op is a part of. The Co-op Community Kitchen run by the grocer is a program that partners with nonprofit organizations to offer free hands-on cooking and nutrition education classes to low-income and underserved populations. Over 1,000 students in the Community Kitchen's classes have learned how to prepare healthy low-cost recipes from seasonal ingredients, how to make healthy choices for themselves and their families, and how to shop for good food—including organic produce—on a budget. Classes are taught by members of the co-op staff, community volunteers, and Nutrition Program interns from Sacramento State University.

The co-op is also a part of One Farm at a Time, a partnership of the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op with other co-ops, family farms, and land trusts to raise funds and awareness about ensuring the sustainability of local family farms for future generations. Through the program, the co-op and partners have successfully raised \$300,000 to permanently protect Good Humus Produce, a 20-acre organic family farm in the Capay Valley.

The money raised for the farm will be used to purchase an easement that will ensure that Good Humus Produce will remain a farm forever. In this strategy, a land trust purchases the easement from the farmer for the amount of the development value of the land, which is typically much more than the agricultural value. The land trust holds and monitors the easement, including



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enforcement of the easement language that prohibits non-agricultural development of the land. By permanently eliminating the development value of the land, the farm becomes affordable at its agricultural value to all future farmers.

One Farm at a Time is completing its pilot project at Good Humus Produce and is now beginning to look for the next small farm to protect. To learn more, visit [www.onefarmatatime.org](http://www.onefarmatatime.org).

Consumer owners invest in the co-op business to support these community-minded ideals, with the traditional co-op owner perks and discounts as a side benefit to the connections with their neighbors and local food providers. Explains the co-op, "According to our 2008 Owner Survey, when considering the Co-op's seven goals, 82.5% of owners responded that the following goal is the most important to them: 'to honor the earth and cultivate the Co-op's relationships with the communities we serve and with the broader network of farmers, suppliers, manufacturers and cooperatives.'"

You can visit the co-op, shop for some organic produce, become an owner, or contribute to the organization's charitable endeavors at their store in Sacramento, California. In April 2016, be sure to visit their new location in Sacramento. Learn more at [www.sacfoodcoop.com](http://www.sacfoodcoop.com).

Do you have a retail operation you'd like to get certified? Visit [www.ccof.org/apply](http://www.ccof.org/apply) to learn how.

## Whole Foods Market Updates Rating System

On July 14, CCOF and Whole Foods Market announced that productive discussions between certified organic farmers and the retailer regarding its new Responsibly Grown rating system will soon result in adjustments to that program. These adjustments will ensure that the leading achievement of USDA's certified organic growing system is recognized within the rating system and clearly communicated to Whole Foods Market customers. Whole Foods Market will also add support and training to address the needs of the many small farmers that uniquely characterize its produce and floral supply. To that end, all certified organic produce and flowers will automatically be awarded a minimum "Good" rating in Whole Foods Market stores until January 1, 2016, to allow certified organic growers more time to start or resume Responsibly Grown compliance efforts.

CCOF and Whole Foods Market are committed to working with our farming community to continuously improve Responsibly Grown to achieve its goals, and we are unified in recognizing the importance of addressing multiple relevant issues in agriculture that affect human health and the environment. Details of adjustments to the Responsibly Grown rating system are available on the Whole Foods Market website at <http://bit.ly/1KbdQDn> and on CCOF's blog at [www.ccof.org/wfm-rating-system](http://www.ccof.org/wfm-rating-system).



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Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund recipients (from left) Eliza Milio, Margaret Goolsby, Sunyoung Yang, and James Harris

## Helping the Next Generation of Organic Farmers

Now in its second year, the CCOF Foundation's Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund (FOFGF) is supporting an increasing body of students and teachers who want to learn about and promote organic agriculture. Each year, the fund targets three populations: kindergarten through eighth grade educators, high school students, and higher and vocational education students. The CCOF Foundation has created unique partnerships with the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom and Future Farmers of America (FFA) that help us make reaching these groups a reality.

This spring we received and vetted applications for both the *Look at Agriculture...Organically!* grants for K-8 teachers and higher and vocational education grants, and were amazed with the quality of submissions.

### Organic in the Classroom

129 teachers sent in applications for the kindergarten through eighth grade *Look at Agriculture... Organically!* grant program. These grants are targeted at educators who are integrating organic agriculture education into regular classroom instruction. We received so many applications that we doubled our 60-application goal!

Applications came from 14 states, and teachers who received grants span the United States as well. Of the K-8 Ag in the

Classroom grant winners, 64% of the projects are located in school districts with over 50% of their students receiving free or reduced lunches. The projects submitted for consideration this year were smart, creative, and fun!

### 2015 Recipient Highlights

Frances Christian of Duval Charter School in Jacksonville, Florida will help her kindergarten class create an organic research garden to learn about growing fruits and vegetables while understanding how to protect the earth. Children will use "zoo poo" from the Jacksonville Zoo as an organic fertilizer in their raised garden beds. They will also explore the use of hydroponic vertical garden stacks as a way to reduce their garden footprint. The hydroponic system will run on solar power, illustrating energy efficiency. The class will compare the success of the plants in each system to determine the best technique.

Juliane Mueller of Napi Elementary in Browning, Montana, proposed a project to creatively address the rising overweight and obesity rates on the Blackfeet Reservation and in the Browning Public School District. In 2008, diabetes screenings in the district revealed an obesity/overweight rate of 20%. In 2014, the diabetes screenings showed increased obesity/overweight rates of 44% (fourth grade), 50% (sixth grade), and 32% (eighth grade). Food insecurity is a daily reality for many families in this region, and is part of what contributes to these numbers.

The goal of Mueller's project is to enhance the work of what they are calling the Blackfeet Garden Project by planting, growing, and harvesting organic spinach and radishes in the fifth grade classroom. Teaching students how to grow their own food is part of the project's goal of increasing food security, improving knowledge of nutrition and physical activity, and bringing science education to life. As students invest time and energy



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James Harris is a FOFGF grant recipient in UCSC's CASFS apprenticeship program

into plant care, they will learn about growing vegetables, plant systems, water systems, nutrition, and how to prepare healthy snacks. She also hopes to create a classroom garden with grow lights so students can have hands-on applications for science, math, and reading topics all year long.

## Funding Organic Degrees

We also surpassed our 60-application goal in the FOFGF higher and vocational education grant category by receiving 85 total applications from organic agriculture students. The applications in this category were reviewed in-house, giving our employees and volunteers the opportunity to be inspired by the next generation of organic farmers.

Our reviewers were excited by the broad range of individuals in the applicant pool: applicants hailed from 37 programs across 15 states throughout the country. It's heartening to know that there are so many programs drawing in students who are passionate to learn about organic agriculture. Dominant programs in the applicant pool included the pioneering apprenticeship program at the Center for Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS) at the University of California, Santa Cruz (12%); Rogue Farm Corps in Oregon (14%); and Archi's Acres in San Diego (12%). Of all the applicants, 55 were from vocational education certificate programs, 20 were from universities, and 10 were from junior colleges. Closely mirroring the applicant pool, the grant recipients are spread between vocational education certificate programs (11), universities (6), and junior colleges (3).

### 2015 Recipient Highlight

James Harris is a student at the University of California, Santa Cruz and is part of the CASFS apprenticeship program. Harris spent 10 years in the U.S. Army including two deployments to Iraq. Like many veterans, he found it difficult to adjust to life

outside of the military and longed to be a part of a cause bigger than himself—something that offered him purpose and a chance to serve again.

At the time, Harris was volunteering at an elderly home, working in a garden where he helped the residents with sowing and planting seeds. He witnessed how their moods improved while working in the garden: having their hands in the soil brought joy to their eyes. At that moment he thought to himself that if having his hands in the soil could help him heal, he should give it a try.

Harris's organic farming journey started over three years ago, and since then, he has worked on several organic farms, taught gardening classes for youth, and is now an apprentice at CASFS. He tells us that he looks forward to what the future may hold for him in organic farming. The CCOF Foundation feels honored to be able to help these beginning farmers get the education they need to succeed in making their organic dreams a reality.

## Increasing Our Impact

The Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund gave grants to 20 deserving higher and vocational education students, and the projects funded by our *Look at Agriculture... Organically!* grants will reach upwards of 4,000 kindergarten through eighth grade students this year in classrooms across the country.

We are grateful for the support of our 2015 partners: the UNFI Foundation, National Co+op Grocers, Clif Bar Family Foundation, Driscoll's, Organic Valley's Farmers Advocating for Organics Fund, and Lauren and Eric Schiermeyer. The CCOF Foundation plans to grow this fund for 2016, and we invite you to be a part of it! Get in touch with us at [ccofoundation@ccof.org](mailto:ccofoundation@ccof.org) or **(831) 423-2263** to find out how you can help.



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## Meet the Mexico Chapter Leaders

The new CCOF chapter in Mexico elected a group of people with lengthy organic experience to lead the chapter. We are happy to introduce the new Mexico Chapter leaders!

### Board Representative: Eduardo Morales

Morales grew up in the farming community of Salinas, California, and was raised on a vegetable farm. His father is a farmer and was one of the first organic growers in the Salinas Valley. Morales reports that his father's hard work and belief in the organic movement laid a strong foundation for him. Today, Morales is the food safety and organic certification director for Promotora Agrícola El Toro. He has been with the company for more than 12 years and feels fortunate to work for a company that is truly committed to the organic movement. Morales says that he looks forward to working hard and furthering his commitment to the organic movement in Mexico.



### President: Esteban Macías

For 20 years, Macías has been responsible for plant protection and technical supervision of 3,000 hectares (7,400 acres) of vegetables grown in central Mexico, both organic and conventional. He also grows grains and vegetables at his family's farm. Throughout his farming career, Macías has been dedicated to developing techniques that make agriculture environmentally friendly, and he finds a personal challenge in organic agriculture. He says that it utilizes all his expertise as an agronomist and presents him with an opportunity to break his own paradigms.



### Vice President: Daniela Robles

After finishing her degree in Horticultural Engineering, Robles specialized in composting and organic production, learning to adapt these practices to the desert of Sonora. For six years, she has been working with Grupo Alta, one of the biggest agricultural companies in Sonora, as their organic production coordinator. Robles oversees production on seven farms growing ten different crops—watermelons, tomatoes, table grapes, and cucumbers—which are all certified organic. She also produces compost and worm castings for the farms. While this takes a lot of time, she believes these materials create a balance between healthy soil, healthy plants, and good production.



Robles is a sustainable garden designer in her free time. She loves to create areas where people can relax that reduce the impact of the urban environment on people's homes.

One of Robles's goals as chapter vice president is to connect people in organic agriculture for the purpose of sharing information on organic practices and inputs and making connections to improve organic production and sales.

### Secretary: Dante Gutiérrez

Gutiérrez has worked for Berrymex Baja California since 2008, starting as organic ranch manager in charge of 30 acres of strawberries. Currently, he is their organic production director in charge of 300 acres of organic strawberries, 200 acres of organic raspberries, 30 acres of blueberries, and 5 acres of blackberries. Gutiérrez has introduced numerous innovations for Berrymex. His work includes producing amendments such as compost (10,000 tons annually), worm castings (50,000 liters weekly), and marine algae (20,000 liters weekly). He also creates pest controls such as plant extracts for aphids, beneficial mites, and fungal biocontrol using native strains. With the help of these innovations and the 2,000 beehives he maintains, the farm is promoting the sustainability of organic production.



### Treasurer: Lois Christie

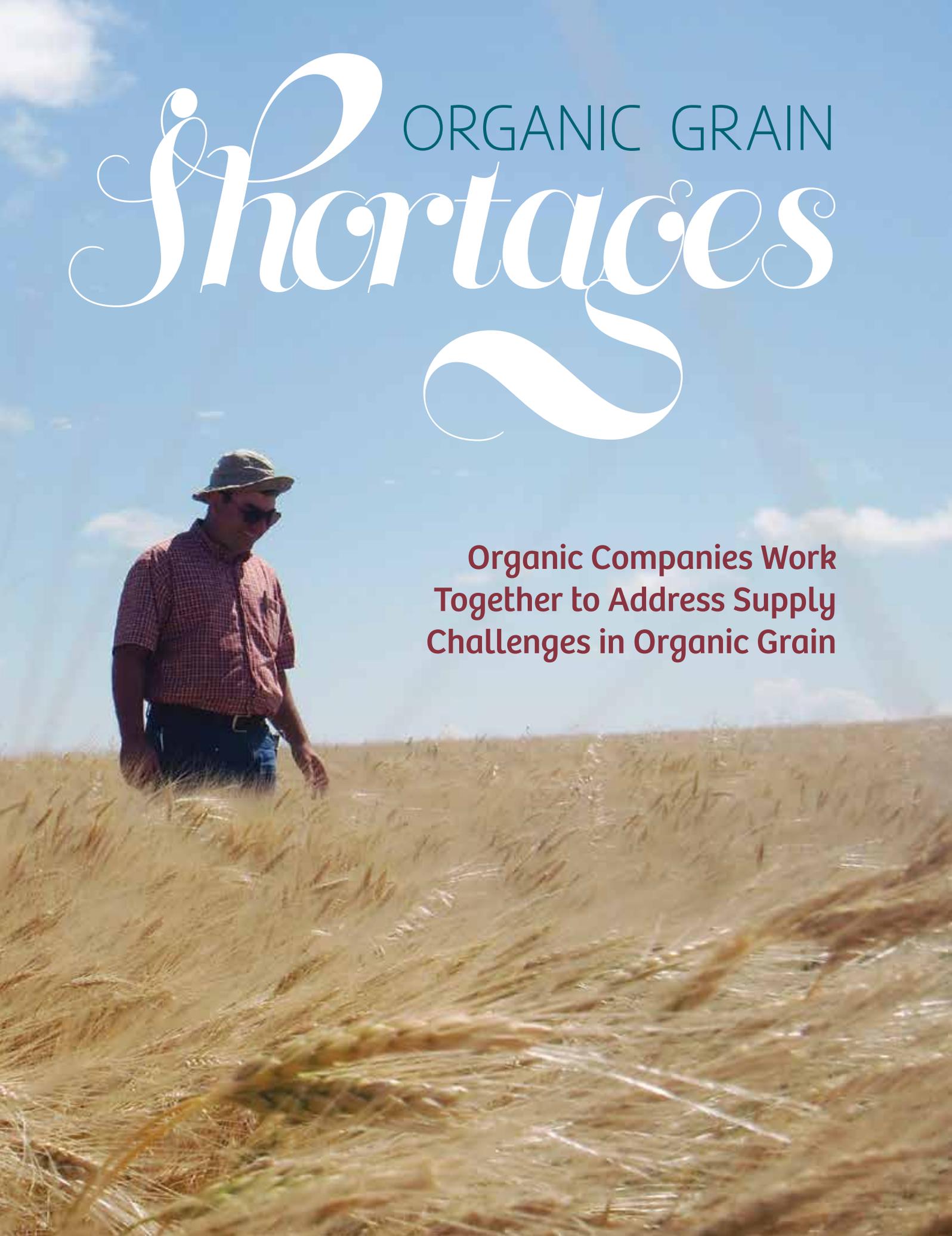
Christie's dedication to CCOF began in 2002, when she became a regional certification representative and started CCOF's certification in Mexico as a new region. She has inspected organic farms in the United States and Mexico for 13 years. She currently represents and manages certified organic programs for many clients in the United States and Mexico, and is also a supporting member of CCOF. Christie served in the California Pacific Southwest Chapter as an Alternate Board Representative and as Secretary for several years. She recently resigned these positions to be a part of the Mexico Chapter.



Christie believes that now is the time to bring together growers and processors in Mexico. She reports that she has "an insatiable need to pay it forward and to give back to the industry for all it has given to me." Christie is thrilled to have this opportunity to help lead the Mexico Chapter.

.....  
**Let the CCOF community know what your chapter is doing!**

Write to [jsooby@ccof.org](mailto:jsooby@ccof.org) and we will publish your chapter update in the next edition of *Certified Organic*.

A man wearing a hat and sunglasses is walking through a field of golden grain. The sky is blue with some clouds. The text 'ORGANIC GRAIN Shortages' is overlaid on the top half of the image.

# ORGANIC GRAIN *Shortages*

**Organic Companies Work  
Together to Address Supply  
Challenges in Organic Grain**

# “Farming organically ... is one of the most entrepreneurial enterprises anyone can undertake. The land stewardship and rural economic development benefits are tremendous.”

WRITTEN BY Elizabeth Reaves

Supply headaches are a frequent complaint across many food categories in the organic industry, but companies who depend on grain for food and feed are experiencing severe migraines.

The Organic Trade Association (OTA) estimated that sales of organic bread and grain products increased by 12% in 2013, but grains account for only 2.6% of total certified organic cropland in the United States. Dairy, one of the largest organic markets, increased by 8%, but the grain to fuel that growth is slow to catch up. In total, the organic market accounted for 4% of all food sales, but only 0.8% of total cropland.<sup>1</sup>

With so little domestic land being used for certified organic grains, dairies and organic processors are importing record amounts to meet the demand. According to Kellee James, CEO of Mercaris (an online trading platform for organic commodities), “Year-to-date, total organic corn imports have reached 5,202,698 bushels, which is an increase of 752% [compared to] last year. If the current pace continues throughout the year, imports could reach 31,216,188 bushels.” Corn sales are included with grains in sales calculations, especially from a livestock feed perspective, so the amount of organic corn imported to the United States paints an interesting picture about the state of organic grain as a whole.

With 81% of U.S. families reporting that they choose organic food at least sometimes, organic is a market the big food companies have realized consumers are asking for. General Mills, for example, recently made a commitment to double organic sales in the next five years, but America’s farmers have yet to catch their production up to rising demand. Miranda Leis, Feed Program Operations Manager at Organic Valley, agrees, “Many producers are expressing their preference for domestic supply and would prefer to keep their purchases local. The simplest solution to this concern is to increase domestic organic grain production. Since it appears there isn’t a shortage of demand to spur an increase in supply, the answer seems to lie in increasing the number of organic acres and operators to manage the land.”

## Positive Momentum

Frustration with organic grain shortfalls has resulted in bold moves by key industry players. Nature’s Path recently bought 2,800 acres of Montana cropland as a step towards securing their own supply. Clif Bar and Organic Valley named the

University of Wisconsin-Madison as the recipient of the nation’s first endowed chair focused on plant breeding for organic crops, and Clif Bar is now working with other organizations to raise an estimated \$10 million to fund additional chairs. General Mills is supporting the Vilicus Farms apprenticeship program, which trains new farmers in organic production practices.

In addition to investment in farms and research, companies are signing contracts with organic farmers for three- to five-year purchasing agreements, and some are paying conventional farmers organic prices for non-certified crops during their organic transition years in order to incentivize transition to organic production.

## Working Together

Each of these individual company efforts is addressing a particular need in the organic grain sector, but just tackling one part of the problem will not have the impact that can be achieved by taking a more systemic approach. In an effort to generate creative solutions that address the whole system, a group of pioneering organic companies and organizations—including Annie’s, Organic Valley, Stonyfield, Clif Bar, Pete and Gerry’s, Grain Millers, Whole Foods, Nature’s Path, General Mills, Dave’s Killer Bread, and OTA—have formed the U.S. Organic Grain Collaboration, a pre-competitive industry effort stewarded by the Sustainable Food Lab. These companies have identified the need for collaborative action in addressing key challenges to expanding the supply of organic grain in the United States.

“This challenge is so much bigger than what any one of our companies can solve on their own,” explains Britt Lundgren, director of organic and sustainable agriculture for Stonyfield. “But by working together to identify and address barriers or gaps in research, extension, and infrastructure, we are hoping to find ways to enable more U.S. growers to take advantage of this market opportunity in the long run.”

Beth Roberston-Martin, senior manager for natural and organic sourcing at General Mills, agrees, “With demand growth continuing to outpace the increase in supply, we see a lot of value in collaborating with industry experts. It’s one thing for us to say that we want to double our organic sales, it’s quite another to source the ingredients. Working together is the only way to guarantee that we will all have long-term, sustainable supply.”

<sup>1</sup> Organic Trade Association. (2015). *OTA’s 2015 Organic Industry Survey*. Washington, DC: Organic Trade Association.



## Key Obstacles to More Grain

The Collaboration began its work in 2015 by identifying barriers to growing the organic grain supply (see URL of full report on page 27). Analysis of these obstacles found that farmers are unable to find sufficient organic livestock feed, soil amendments, and seed bred specifically to thrive in organic production systems. They are also challenged by persistent weed and soil health problems, but can't rely on the robust technical support systems that are available to non-organic farmers, such as extension agents, crop advisors, or fertilizer dealers—all of whom help farmers troubleshoot production problems.

In addition to these challenges, organic farmers have fewer pathways to hedge risk than conventional farmers. Only a quarter of organic farmers are enrolled in federal crop insurance. Historically, enrollment in crop insurance has been low for organic farmers because they had to pay a 5% surcharge penalty, and most crop insurance policies paid out at conventional—rather than organic—prices. Recently, more organic farmers have enrolled because organic crop insurance terms have improved, but the USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) continues to refine crop insurance options and develop a more accurate insurance rate for organic commodity farmers.

Limited insurance options are compounded by limited marketing opportunities for organic grain farmers. A non-organic grain farmer in the Midwest and Northern Great Plains can drive 25 miles in any direction and find a co-op or grain elevator to sell to, while organic grain farmers must market

directly to buyers. Direct marketing relationships are not a bad thing, but the surety of finding a market and being able to deliver grain in a timely fashion is key to helping farmers take risks on crops, and encouraging banks take risks on farmers. In agricultural communities across the country, farmers find it difficult to get a line of credit due to a lack of knowledge among lenders about organic markets and crop insurance lenders' inability to feel like they can safely bet on the organic farmer.

Woven into the challenging landscape is a cultural bias against organic agriculture. Social pressures in agricultural communities line up against new farmers wanting to take advantage of the organic opportunity, and there are limited resources for new farmers through traditional farming networks such as Future Farmers of America (FFA) and agricultural colleges. While significant attention from agricultural organizations has been focused on supporting local food systems and farmers' markets, until recently, comparatively little attention has been devoted to mentoring young organic farmers and non-organic farmers looking to transition.

Farmers beginning organic production also face the economic challenge of the three-year transition period, during which they can experience an increase in capital and labor costs combined with a yield drag as they adjust to a new farming system, all while having to sell their product at conventional prices.<sup>2</sup> This, coupled with the uptake in new knowledge that is required and the lack of technical support, often results in farmers reverting back to non-organic practices.

<sup>2</sup> McBride, William D., Catherine Greene, Linda Foreman, and Mir Ali. *The Profit Potential of Certified Organic Field Crop Production*, ERR-188, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, July 2015.



Anna Crabtree-Jones and Doug Crabtree of Vilicus Farms in Montana.

## Learning From Experience

Anna Jones-Crabtree and her husband, Doug Crabtree, operate Vilicus Farms, a first-generation, mid-scale organic grain farm in Montana. With the support of companies like Annie's, General Mills, Dave's Killer Bread, Kamut International, and Nature's Path, Vilicus Farms is one of the country's only on-farm apprenticeship programs for farmers interested in organic grain production.

Doug and Anna are all too familiar with the hurdle of organic farm financing. While part of their vision for the farm's apprenticeship program is to teach students about the practical side of growing specialty grain, pulse, and oil seed crops, it's equally important to teach them how to meet the challenges of business planning and working with lenders to secure the capital needed to get themselves onto their own land. Lenders require as much education about the economic opportunity of organic farming as new organic farmers need in how to piece together the dollars necessary to start their own operations.

"Farming organically ... is one of the most entrepreneurial enterprises anyone can undertake. The land stewardship and rural economic development benefits are tremendous. We all need to support more models that show organic systems aren't just possible theoretically but that they realistically work for the farmer, the community, and the planet," says Anna.

Doug and Anna draw on their own experience working with banks and USDA programs to secure financing for Vilicus Farms to advocate nationally and in their home state of Montana for

financial support for new farmers. They know firsthand where more support from the private sector would be meaningful.

"We are excited about the Grain Collaboration's goals, but we challenge them to become clear about the level of systems change and metrics of success in which they are actually willing to invest," Anna recommends. "Meeting market demand and taking care of the planet—which takes care of all of us—isn't going to happen with a tweak of the existing supply chain or merely more farmer education. Members of the Collaboration are reaping the benefit of exponentially growing consumer demand. Those benefits need to be more equitably shared with existing farmers and used to create opportunities for new organic farmers who don't come from existing farms. The Collaboration needs to embrace innovative arrangements to share production risk with producers."

As a Collaboration, the group can work together to address other means of supporting farmers to optimize production and reduce risks and costs, such as supporting more research and improving technical assistance to help farmers overcome key challenges presented by weeds, soil moisture/health, seed varieties, crop rotations, and taking advantage of market opportunities. Individual companies participating in the Collaboration will also need to decide how to work through their own supply chains in order to share rewards and risks with farmers through contracts and other types of arrangements.



Framed by Mt. Katahdin, a crop of organic rye grows on Dyer's farm during the engagement session in Aroostook County.

## Getting to Systemic Solutions

As a result of examining the barriers to organic grain production, the Collaboration rolled up their sleeves to test how they could help leverage a systemic approach to solutions in two pilot regions: the Northern Great Plains (Montana, South Dakota, and North Dakota) and Aroostook County, Maine.

To achieve increased supply, the collaboration recognized that both increased acreage and improved production are necessary. Increasing organic acreage can be achieved through the recruitment and training of new farmers and transitioning acres to organic production. Improving land access for organic farmers is also important, and will need to be done through financing, education of landowners who may be hesitant to lease to organic farmers, linking farmers to the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) which is designed to help new farmers, and improving crop insurance. Each region the Collaboration visited presented a case study on challenges that are unique to organic grain production in that area.

For Stonyfield, Pete and Gerry's, and Organic Valley, Aroostook County was of interest because it is a large growing region, producing mostly conventionally grown potatoes in rotation with oats, but is also close to Northeast organic dairies and chicken farms. For Annie's, Grain Millers, Clif Bar, Nature's Path, Whole Foods, and Dave's Killer Bread, the Northern Great Plains is an important area to study as it is a primary sourcing region for food-grade grains.

"We had a sense that there would be some barriers that were similar across all regions, such as crop insurance or organic extension services. But we also expected that there would be regional differences in what solutions were needed, and to address them, we will need to engage the entire supply chain in each place," said Lundgren.

This turned out to be true. The findings from the engagement session in Presque Isle, Maine for Aroostook County farmers and the session at the North Dakota State University Carrington Research Station revealed that while some problems facing organic grain production are the same across the country, some areas are tackling issues specific to their region.

A unique dynamic in Aroostook County is that the cash crop is potatoes, not grain. Grain is grown by conventional farmers as part of the potato rotation, but is treated more as a nurse crop than the primary crop. To address this, the Collaboration is exploring ways to support farmers in this region with developing and marketing the full rotation of food and feed-grade grains, root crops, and vegetable crops as a way of better supporting whole-farm profitability for growers who transition to organic.

Farmers in Aroostook were also challenged by lack of on-farm storage and harvest equipment that would allow them to dry, sort, and store grain in order to get the highest price possible. Additionally, they felt disconnected from markets due to lack of transportation to get the grain out of the county and difficulties of contracting relationships.

Organic grain farmers in other grain-growing regions also identified with the challenges associated with on-farm storage and transferring grain crops to processors. However, farmers in

# “It will take a multi-faceted approach from all segments of the organic industry to overcome the barriers farmers face...”

North Dakota are an exception—for them, marketing their grain and having the right type of storage and processing equipment were not issues. Instead, North Dakotan farmers identified a need for organic extension agents to field their production questions and bring research trials happening at the university level from the academic silo to the farmer. Similarly, these farmers saw NRCS as a valuable resource, but felt that agents were not knowledgeable enough about organic systems. They also identified the need for good mentorship between established farmers and new farmers getting into organic, and pointed to the availability of organic seed as an issue on the horizon in need of analysis.

In both the Northern Great Plains and Aroostook County, solutions will not just involve national food companies, but will also require the participation of local processors and businesses. For example, local grains are part of a new local economy in Aroostook for both the craft beer market and the bread market. Grains sold for these purposes return a higher price to the farmer, allowing for more than one market option. In North Dakota, several local companies like SK Foods International have a large reach to big markets with good local relationships. In Montana, local oilseed and lentil companies—such as Timeless Seeds, Montana Specialty Mills, Montana Milling, and Montana Flour and Grain—can pay a premium for legume and oilseed crops that are an important part of a diversified grain rotation.

In each region, the Collaboration is taking farmer input and incorporating it into a strategic plan for how to reduce barriers for farmers and improve organic farming in the region. In addition to the pilot projects, the Collaboration hopes to contribute to the USDA goals “to support research and education that enables organic production, reduce overlapping requirements, eliminate other obstacles, and collaborate with others to make certification more feasible for small and beginning farmers and businesses.”

The Collaboration is also looking to work more closely with Mercaris, a market data service and online trading platform for organic, non-GMO, and other certified agricultural commodities. Mercaris is one service that may help the Collaboration facilitate marketing opportunities for farmers through an auction platform, as well as make prices more transparent and available to farmers when they are ready to sell their product. The company recently completed the first online auction for transitional oats, a promising sign of potential future opportunities for transitional grains.

“Often, there is difficulty on the part of both buyers and sellers in understanding and depending on each other’s ability to fulfill terms of a contract: price, quality, delivery, etc.,” explained Mercaris CEO Kellee James. “Mercaris offers a way for the parties to streamline the negotiation process, manage the risks associated with payment, and spend less time doing it. For markets to work, these are critical functions.”

## The Future of Organic Grain

The success of the Collaboration will be measured in many different ways, but the group’s work in 2015 has unmasked some clear leverage points that the participants can work on together. The Collaboration will begin to explore how other companies can become part of the effort in the fall of 2016.

There is still a lot of work to be done in each of these places. One of the bigger-picture tensions that the Collaboration members must balance is the risk-sharing proposition with farmers. Farmers are willing to grow organic grain and companies are willing to buy their products at the right specifications, but neither stakeholder wants to take on all the risk. The Collaboration is a way of sharing in the investment to support farmers in optimizing their production and hopefully reducing some of their risk.

Nate Lewis, OTA’s senior livestock and crop specialist, has been a close-working partner with the Sustainable Food Lab in moving the Collaboration forward. “What is inspiring about the Collaboration is that increasing the supply of organic grain is centered on the principle that farmer profitability is at the heart of solution-making,” he says. “OTA is involved in this initiative because we represent the entire organic supply chain, and it will take a multi-faceted approach from all segments of the organic industry to overcome the barriers farmers face in converting their acreage to organic production.”

For some, organic farming is a lifestyle choice, but for others, it is a complicated algorithm of the attractiveness of organic farming compared with the attractiveness of non-organic farming. Our hope is that the more companies that can invest together in breaking down barriers and increasing the profitability of organic grain production, the more we can weight the attractiveness equation towards organic production methods. In order to be successful, the collaboration will need to go beyond engagement sessions in each of the pilot regions to clarify types of investment and where to target their efforts to realize their goals for more organic grain.

Through the work of the Collaboration, farmers, and other industry leaders, we can begin to change the market landscape and move towards a future filled with more organic grain.

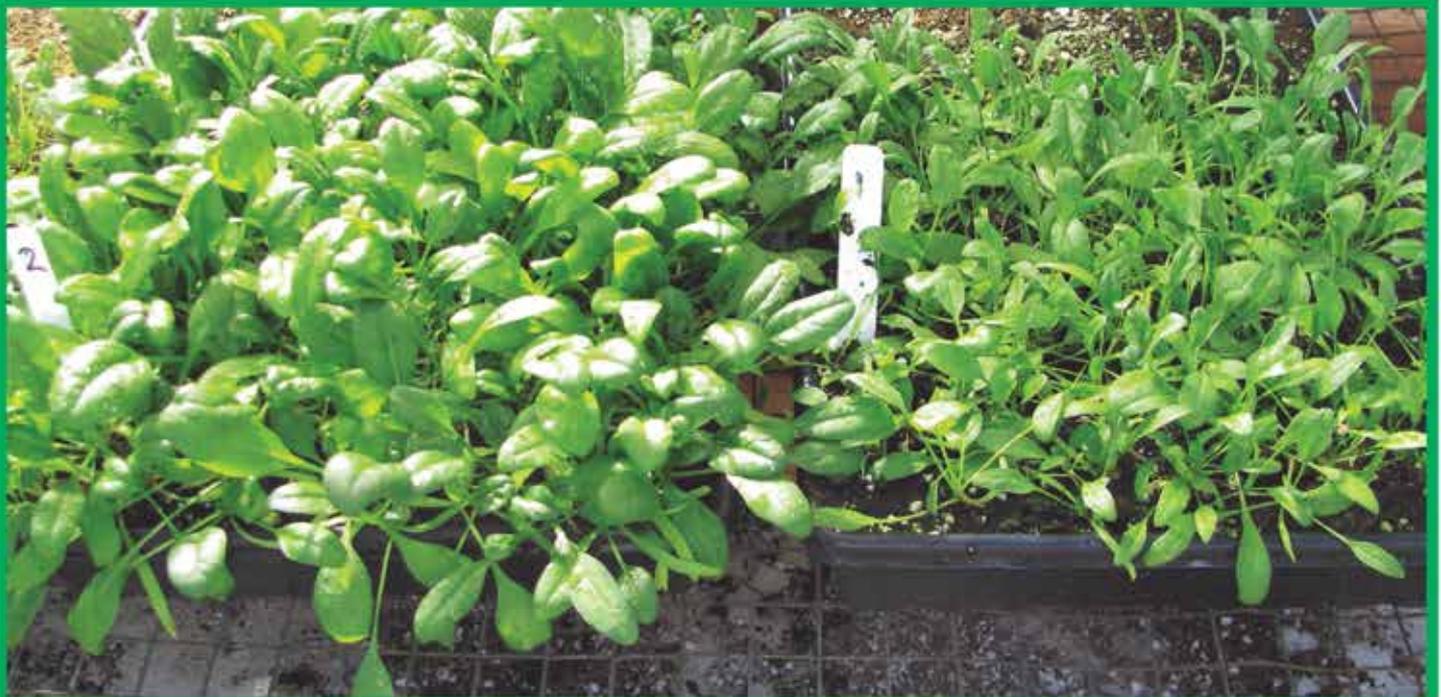
### A Closer Look at Barriers and Opportunities

To read the full organic grain report, visit: [www.sustainablefoodlab.org/images/PDF/Organic\\_Grain\\_Report\\_Final\\_9.28.14.pdf](http://www.sustainablefoodlab.org/images/PDF/Organic_Grain_Report_Final_9.28.14.pdf)

CCOF also recognizes the need for more organic transition to meet organic sourcing demands and conducted two focus groups in June to examine economic barriers. Read more about the focus groups on page 31.



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## *Zea Sonnabend: Playing for the Organic Team*

You could call Zea Sonnabend a fixture of the organic movement if she didn't move around so much—Zea just can't resist getting involved. Time and time again, she's been in a small meeting where a volunteer was needed to carry on the work and she felt the urge to step up. Collaborative, sharp, determined to do the right thing with organic, and known for her tenacity, Zea also knows how to relax as a San Francisco Giants season ticket holder. Perhaps it's team loyalty that keeps her tied to organic strategizing.

Take CCOF, for example. Before there was even an office and organic farmers stumbled upon each other by chance, she was hitching a ride with Wendy Krupnick and found herself in the right place at the right time to be invited into a meeting in Marin County with Barney Bricmont to hammer out the CCOF bylaws. As an idealistic fruit grower with much to learn in the Chico area, Zea became a part of the North Valley Chapter in their first year of organization. "I was on the CCOF board when we hired the first staff member, Mark Lipson," she says about her early involvement with CCOF. (Mark famously went on to advise Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan on organic issues for four years in Washington, D.C.)

Today, driving her Gator around one of the sites of Fruitilicious Farm, she points out her blueberries, avocados, lemons, and—of course—the farm's sought-after apples. "We're producing ten

acres of apples at the other place. Here, there's a total of four [acres] planted but they're not ready. By year five, they say a tree has enough production to count it as productive. And by year seven or eight, it will be profitable." Zea's long-term outlook inspired her to purchase the farm in Corralitos in 2008, hoping to lease out the land, but the farm was in transition to organic and several deals fell through. Eventually, she teamed up with Terence Welch in 2011, a fruit advisor who was eager to try a wide variety of organic techniques—old and new. Soon after, plans were made to farm organically at two farm locations.

From farming to her early involvement with CCOF, Zea's reach in the organic community began to spread.

For many years she coordinated the EcoFarm conference, and she still serves on the program committee, a position she describes as creative and fun. "We get to invite people to keynote and offer sessions on the latest trends in organic farming. But I'm glad someone else is hammering out the details now," she says of the 36-year-old event.

She also became involved with National Organic Standards Board (NOSB, which advises the National Organic Program of the USDA) soon after its formation. "At first I went to the NOSB meetings as an audience member for many, many years before I applied to be a member. So I know what it's like to be on both sides," she recounts. "The first meeting I went to was the second meeting they ever had. We were brought in—myself and Lynn Coody and George Siemon—to give them 'Organic 101' lessons in spring of 1993. George (livestock), Lynn (inputs), me (crop production)."

A few years later she helped found the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI), becoming one of its first board members.

Now midway through her five-year stint filling the scientist position on the NOSB, Zea's team loyalty is regularly put to the test. This position requires the board to make tough decisions that affect the state of organic standards. Despite sensationalist news stories about those standards becoming less stringent, she supports the democratic process NOSB put in place. "On the NOSB, I think we're doing a fairly good job of keeping the reins tight and not letting a lot of stuff in," she says in reference to the work companies are required to do to get inputs approved for organic use.

With a master's degree in plant breeding from Cornell University, she is qualified for the post, but also brings years of field experience to the position that helps her make balanced decisions. "I've learned everything I know by doing," she says.

When describing the state of the organic community today, Zea says, "Like the rest of the country, it's polarized. However,



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I guess I would say the good part about organic today is that we have made the rules and the environment stable enough that it's easier for more people to convert to organic. After all, organic is predicated on building a healthy plant to withstand all the pressures from pests, and that's still the fundamental thing that's really true."

Besides keeping a healthy sense of perspective, Zea recommends seeking guidance and companionship along the way to become a successful organic farmer. "Developing that network is key," she advises. "Go to EcoFarm, go to CCOF chapter meetings, go to these Farmers Guild gatherings—any type of event where farmers gather. There [are] a lot of opportunities for organic now."

---

## **CCOF Report: Economic Barriers to Transition**

CCOF is working on a report on economic barriers to organic transition that synthesizes discussions from two focus groups in June 2015. CCOF hosted the focus groups under a contract with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through its Sound and Sensible initiative, an effort to make organic certification accessible, attainable, and affordable.

The focus group participants included non-organic producers, organic producers, representatives from mixed operations that produce both organic and non-organic products, economic development experts, policy experts, and other organic business stakeholders. Discussions at the sessions had two parts: first, participants identified economic barriers to the transition of existing agricultural land to organic production; second, participants brainstormed policies, private industry models, and other options to remove barriers to transition.

### **Barriers to Transition**

Four primary themes emerged from the discussions concerning barriers to organic transition:

1. The three-year organic transition period poses numerous challenges, including need for capital investment, high operating costs, risk management, and regulatory compliance costs at the same time that product is not yet eligible for the organic price premium.
2. There is inadequate information to sufficiently develop business plans or economic models for transition.
3. Public investment in organic agriculture research, technical support, and education is not sufficient to meet the needs of existing, expanding, and future organic producers.
4. Access to land and capital are significant challenges for farmers in high-cost regions of the United States.

### **Strategies to Overcome Barriers to Transition**

No single method to remove barriers to transition was the most obvious solution; rather, participants weighed the costs and benefits of each barrier. From these conversations, five key considerations for removing barriers to transition emerged:

1. Develop solutions for the most challenging barriers—land and labor—in high-cost regions of the United States.
2. Develop public investment in research and technical assistance, and consider public investment in transition programs.
3. Develop accessible sources of organic market information.
4. Develop transitional tools, such as a certified transitional label or certified transitional program, and continue communication and education about opportunities for organic production.
5. Develop educational tools and resources such as financial and technical assistance for new, beginning, and next-generation farmers.

### **Key Focus Group Takeaways**

Participants identified a number of interrelated barriers and did not develop a specific method to overcome these barriers. Nonetheless, the following takeaways from the discussions should inform future efforts to understand and remove barriers to transition:

1. Educate policy makers and public officials about the challenges and opportunities of organic transition.
2. Identify and gather economic information to inform transitional strategies.
3. Support new, beginning, and next-generation organic farmers with the information and resources they need to survive through the transition period.
4. Work to overcome land access barriers.
5. Explore strategies for overcoming labor shortages.

### **Next Steps**

CCOF will incorporate the identified economic barriers, potential solutions, and key takeaways into our ongoing work to support organic transition. One outcome of these discussions is that at the CCOF Annual Conference in Sacramento in February, we will include a workshop on how handlers and retailers can support producers who transition to organic. Additionally, we will work with OTA's Transitional Certification Task Force to weigh in on a transitional certification program to support the growth of organic.



Pictured left to right Cesar, Lupe, Roy Jr., Roy and Ilse

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## **OTA Urges White House to Put Organic in Pollinator Policy**



The Organic Trade Association has called on the White House to officially recognize organic farming practices as beneficial to the health of honeybees and other pollinators, and to emphasize agricultural production methods as a key solution to stopping disproportionate bee deaths.

In a unanimous decision this June, OTA's Board of Directors adopted a set of policy positions on pollinator health that promote organic farming as part of the national solution to conserve and protect pollinator populations.

"It's time our policy makers recognize organic's contribution to our pollinator population, and officially make organic a part of the solution," said Melissa Hughes of Organic Valley and president of OTA's Board of Directors. "Organic farming alleviates many threats to bees and other pollinators by not using synthetic pesticides and supporting biodiversity and the habitat of pollinators."

OTA also urged the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to move forward in investigating the most successful models—including organic systems and organic agricultural practices—to protect the habitat of pollinators. It called on USDA and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to recommit to identifying alternatives to neonicotinoid pesticides, which have been found to be especially harmful to bees.

The action by OTA follows the June release of a report from The Organic Center showing the effectiveness of organic farming practices in maintaining the health and population of important crop pollinators, predominantly bees. The full report is available on The Organic Center's website, [www.organic-center.org](http://www.organic-center.org).

"The good work of our sister organization was the foundation of our policy position. The Center's report takes an in-depth look at the science behind the critical role of organic in protecting pollinator health," said Hughes.

Seventy-five percent of all crops grown for human consumption rely on pollinators, mostly honeybees, for a successful harvest. Every year more than \$16 billion worth of crops in the United States alone benefit from pollination. But

over the past decade, the bee population has plummeted. Since 2006, beekeepers have lost over a third of their beehives.

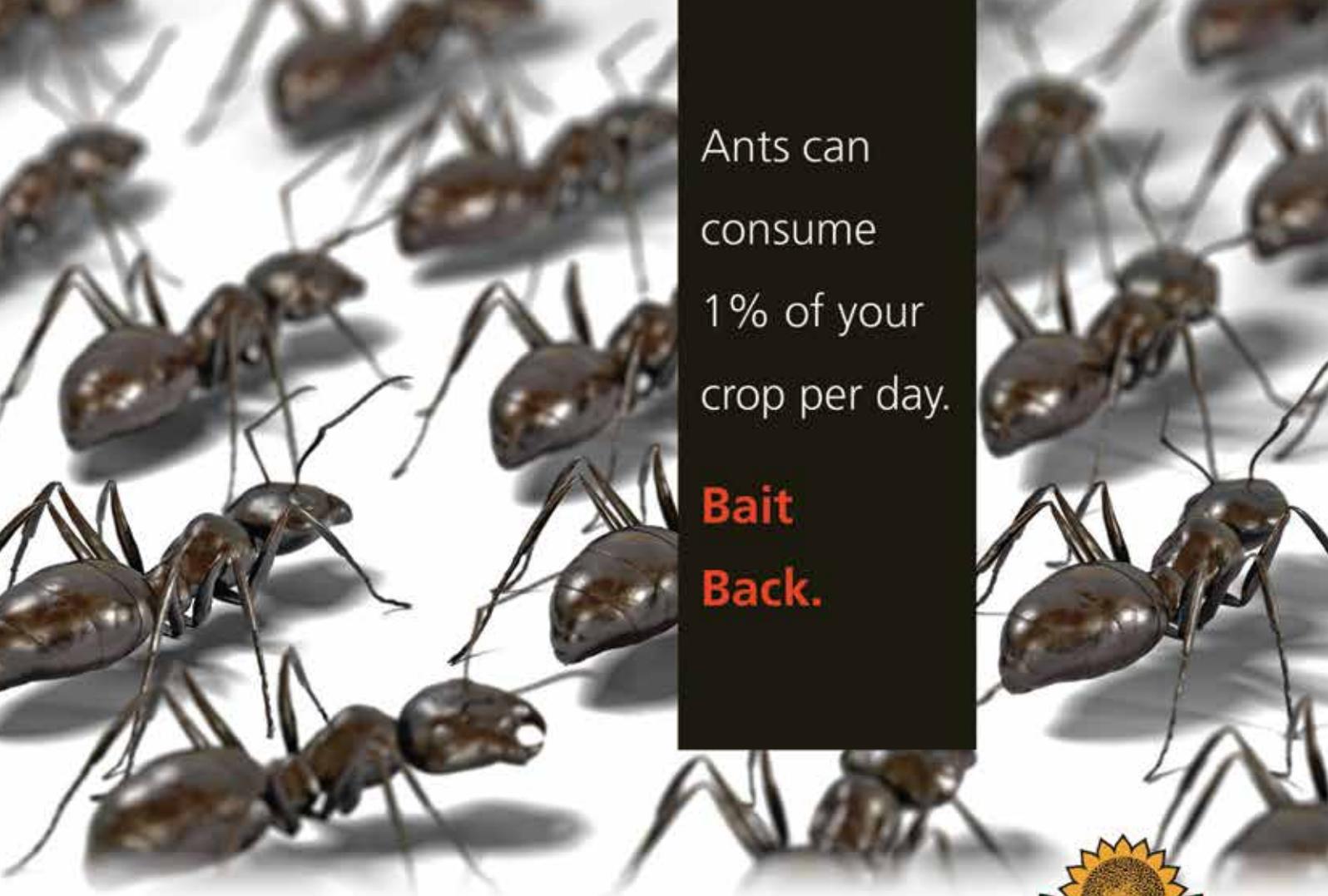
"If we are serious about stopping this dangerous decline in our bee population, then we have to put organic in the center of the discussion," said OTA's Executive Director and CEO Laura Batcha. "We need a comprehensive approach to reducing the sources of stress for the pollinator population. That means affirming how agricultural practices can either contribute to, or take away from, our bee population and, in particular, how organic farming practices can benefit and protect pollinators."

The White House recently released its official strategy to protect pollinators. While the administration's strategy provides funding to protect bee habitat, increase research, and directs the EPA to re-evaluate neonicotinoids, OTA said the plan "only minimally addresses the impact of agricultural production methods on pollinators."

"This is like ignoring the elephant in the room," said Batcha. "As The [Organic] Center's report shows, a number of factors have been clearly identified to have lethal consequences for bees—exposure to toxic pesticides, poor nutrition, loss of habitat—and a major source of these threats is chemically intensive agricultural production. We call on the Administration to devote serious resources to this critical problem and study how organic farming practices support pollinator health before it's too late."

OTA called on USDA to expand the programs—conservation or otherwise—through which producers can get assistance in establishing an appropriate pollinator habitat, and to prioritize organically-managed habitat in these programs. It urged USDA to move forward in developing an organic beekeeping standard. OTA also advocated for assistance from USDA for farmers who convert to organic in order to benefit pollinators, through existing and new research.

"Organic farmers have perfected tried and true methods that benefit the environment and support the bee population," said OTA Board President Hughes. "These methods can be adopted by other producers, and need to be a keystone of any strategy to protect our pollinators."



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- **January 1** - All renewals and annual payments are due.
- **February 14** - A Notice of Noncompliance and a \$75 late fee will be issued to all operations that have not completed the renewal process. This is also the last day to withdraw from certification without accruing 2016 certification fees.
- **March 15** - A Notice of Proposed Suspension and an additional \$75 late fee will be issued to all operations that have not completed the renewal process.
- **April 15** - All operations that have not completed the renewal process will have their certification suspended. If your certification is suspended and you wish to be certified organic

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Thank you for taking the time to renew your organic certification! We look forward to another year of growing the organic movement with you. Read our Frequently Asked Questions for more help: [www.ccof.org/faqs](http://www.ccof.org/faqs).

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## Fee Changes

To keep up with service needs and rising costs, and to create a more regular pattern of smaller increases to fees, we are adjusting both certification fees and inspection fees for 2016 and fine-tuning the CCOF fee schedule to include more tiers.

Inspection fees will increase to \$72.50/hour for preparation, inspection, and report writing and \$45/hour for travel time, effective January 1, 2016. Certification fees are increasing approximately 5% in each fee category effective October 1, 2015 for new operations, and January 1, 2016 for existing clients. A full fee schedule can be found in the CCOF Certification Services Program Manual, on the back of annual invoices, and online at [www.ccof.org/fees](http://www.ccof.org/fees).

In addition to modest changes within existing fee categories, we are creating additional fee tiers between organic production values of \$10,000,000 and \$150,000,000. Previously, this range was a single tier. These changes are intended to create smaller fee increases as organic companies grow.

These increases are intended to be modest, but also support the staffing necessary to meet service expectations and organizational goals. The National Organic Certification Cost Share Program remains in place, and can help offset certification costs ([www.ccof.org/costshare](http://www.ccof.org/costshare)). By participating in this program, the vast majority of CCOF's smaller operations will see only minimal changes to net certification costs. CCOF is also implementing new initiatives to minimize inspection time.

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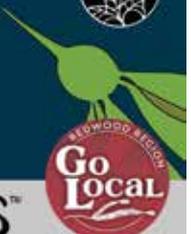
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