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22

Pass the Fair Organic Farming Act

Now is the time to update California's state organic law and create a comprehensive, streamlined regulatory framework that advances organic agriculture...

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For every pound of paper used to print this edition of *Certified Organic*, an equivalent number of trees are planted through Trees for the Future, an organization dedicated to planting trees with rural communities in the developing world, enabling them to restore their environment, grow more food, and build a sustainable future.

MORE ORGANIC FARMERS AND ACRES WILL FINALLY CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN DEMAND FOR ORGANIC PRODUCTS AND U.S. ORGANIC PRODUCTION.

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Fifty percent of all Organic Check-Off assessments will be earmarked to tackle unmet research needs, such as alternatives for weed control and agricultural inputs, and bring new farmers into organic production through information and technical assistance. In addition to agronomic and husbandry research focused on farmer needs, diverse research activities like nutritional value studies, confirming the environmental and human health benefits of organic food and farming, and compiling market data would be possible.

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Advocacy has always been a critical part of CCOF's work to advance organic agriculture.

CCOF marches into the New Year in tune, with an updated strategic plan to fulfill our organizational vision of a world where organic *is* the norm. We work to achieve this vision through organic certification, education, promotion, and *advocacy*.

Advocacy has always been a critical part of CCOF's work to advance organic agriculture. In the beginning, CCOF members worked with other organic leaders to advocate for a legal definition and regulatory framework for organic that would ensure the integrity of organic production and instill trust in organic for consumers. We achieved those goals with the passage of the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990, which established the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) certified organic label—a label that continues to represent responsible producers and is the gold standard for conscious consumers.

Today, a new challenge has emerged that calls for advocacy among CCOF members and supporters: how do we scale up organic production to meet tremendous unmet consumer demand? The market alone will not sustain and grow organic. History demonstrates that change happens through

both market forces and policy initiatives, advocated for by membership-based organizations like CCOF and the organic community as a whole. In addition to pest management, water rights, and unpredictable weather conditions, organic producers face unique regulatory and cost-related challenges nationally, while in California, producers are also subject to the only state-level organic program in the country. CCOF consistently supports public investment, primarily through the federal Farm Bill, that helps to address some of these challenges for organic producers.

California is the *only* state in the country where organic producers pay fees to a USDA-accredited organic certifier *and* duplicative fees for a state organic program. As California is home to over 60 percent of our members, CCOF is focusing its advocacy in 2016 on updating California state law to remove these duplicative fees and paperwork through the Fair Organic Farming Act. Read more about this initiative on page 22.

CCOF looks forward to passage of the Fair Organic Farming Act this year, and working with officials in California to truly promote and grow organic.



Cathy Calfo
CCOF Executive Director/CEO

Issue Contributors

Pass the Fair Organic Farming Act, page 22



Kelly Damewood is the policy director at CCOF. She received her J.D. *magna cum laude* from Vermont Law School and her B.A. in English from the University of Portland. Damewood is also a LL.M. Candidate in Agriculture and Food Law at the University of Arkansas School of Law. She has had many diverse experiences working in food and agriculture—from running a small organic farm to writing for *Food Safety News*. Damewood lives in Santa Cruz, California, and she is licensed to practice law in Oregon.



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Determine the Future of “Natural” Food

The time has finally come for exploring regulation of an unverified, confusing food label that has frustrated consumers and organic advocates for years: “natural” is up for review. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced on November 10 that they will be requesting public comment on the use of the term “natural” in food labeling. The agency is asking for information and comment from the public on whether “natural” should be defined, how it should be defined, and how the FDA “should determine appropriate use of the term on food labels.”

“Natural” has become such a source of contention for consumers that the FDA received three citizen petitions asking for FDA regulation of the term, and one citizen petition requesting FDA prohibition of the label on food packaging. Currently, “natural” is an unregulated term. Although the FDA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have informal policies that natural foods should not include anything artificial or synthetic, there is no formal regulation that restricts use of the word on any food packaging.

Studies have found that food bearing labels of “natural” or “all-natural” don’t often meet the implied meaning of the term: these products often contain GMO ingredients, dairy from cows treated with growth hormones, or ingredients grown with the help of synthetic pesticides and herbicides, among other things. Despite this misuse of the term, food bearing “natural”

claims garner annual sales of more than \$20 billion. Surveys have shown that nearly 60% of consumers look for the label when grocery shopping, and 66% of them believe it means that a processed food has “no artificial ingredients, pesticides, or GMOs,” according to a survey conducted by Consumer Reports.

The only label that promises food free of all these attributes is the USDA organic label. “Natural” only causes confusion in the marketplace and dilutes the perception of organic as the gold standard in sustainable, healthy food production.

Want to get involved? Submit your comments directly to the FDA by visiting www.regulations.gov and typing FDA-2014-N-1207 in the search box. To contribute your opinion to CCOF’s written comment, contact our policy team at policy@ccof.org.

Europe Eschews GMOs

If you’re a farmer who wants to grow GMO crops, don’t plan to do so in Europe. As reported in the Fall 2015 issue of *Certified Organic*, Scotland formally prohibited GMO crops from the country in August 2015. As of October 2015, 19 additional European countries—including Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland—followed Scotland’s precedent and also banned the cultivation of GMOs inside their borders.

These decisions have been met with mixed reviews. The *New York Times* reported on the multi-country GMO ban, describing it as a move that would hinder scientific and technological advances in those countries. Other critics have criticized the GMO bans as politically-based decisions that have not been founded in science. On the other side of the debate,

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

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About 31% of the American food supply goes uneaten, and only 3% of that waste is composted.

environmental organizations and the majority of citizens in these 19 countries have largely applauded the restrictions, and await further safety assessments and scientific research before making any decision to move forward.

To further complicate the matter, the European parliament rejected a proposal at the end of October that would allow individual EU nations to also restrict or prohibit the sale and use of food and feed from EU-approved GMOs within their countries. Controlling the sale and purchase of GMO products within specific countries of the EU would be logistically impossible, with the EU acting as a single market and the lack of border controls between EU countries. Blocking all GMO sales would have also posed a particular problem for livestock producers who often rely on importing feed for their animals. Despite rejection of this proposal, the EU will review a revised version of the proposed legislation in the future.

Reception of GMOs in the EU has always been hesitant. All 28 EU nations require GMO labeling, and many of the countries also have additional strict laws about GMOs due to environmental concerns. These European attitudes about GMOs stand in stark contrast to those in the United States, where the GMO debate rages on.

Of course, GMOs are prohibited in organic production, the premier label in the United States that ensures your food is non-GMO. CCOF advocates on behalf of the organic community for GMO transparency and educates consumers about the facts on GMOs. To learn more, **visit www.ccof.org/non-gmo**.

Federal Action Taken to Reduce Food Waste

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are getting serious about the approximately 133 billion pounds of food waste generated each year in the United States. In September 2015, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and EPA Deputy Administrator Stan Meiburg announced that the United States' first-ever national food waste reduction goal will call for a 50% reduction by 2030.

Food waste is a far-reaching problem that occurs at many different points along the lifetime of a grocery item: production, processing and packaging, distribution and retail, and of course, in consumers' homes. About 31% of the American food supply goes uneaten, and only 3% of that waste is composted—food is quite literally filling up our landfills. Our uneaten food that is decomposing in landfills amounts to 23% of all methane emissions in the United States. And all this is happening at a time when one in six American homes is food insecure, not knowing where their next meal will come from.

With such a complex issue, the solutions will also be multifaceted and varied. Food waste diversion is one strategy that will be an important piece of the plan to reduce the country's food waste and get it to the people who need it most. Secretary Vilsack has indicated that Congress may be considering legislation that provides economic incentives for farmers and others who donate unused food to the needy. Initiatives like Ag Against Hunger and the California Association of Food Banks' Farm to Family program already gather surplus produce from farmers to distribute to families in need, and we may see this happen on a bigger scale between now and 2030. "Let's feed people, not landfills," said EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy.

Public awareness is another hurdle that will be addressed in this campaign, which Secretary Vilsack has compared to the public education campaigns that tackled the litter problem of the 1960s and 1970s. Although many of us feel guilty about it, throwing out excess food at home doesn't elicit the same immediate response for Americans as the thought of littering. The USDA and EPA will have their work cut out for them as they change American mindsets to considering food waste to be culturally unacceptable.

From closed-loop production-to-composting systems, partnerships with local food banks, and other waste reduction strategies, many of our members have already fine-tuned productive models of waste sustainability. The organic community will be able to make important contributions to the conversation as strategies are developed to meet the food waste reduction goals in the next 15 years. Do you have a waste reduction strategy to share? Send your stories to **marketing@ccof.org**, and you may get featured in an upcoming issue of *Certified Organic* or on our blog!

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Get Your Groceries Online

As the technology age continues advancing, Americans are able to choose from a growing number of options when purchasing the food they put on their families' tables. In addition to the now-commonplace grocery stores, growing farmers' markets, and warehouse club wholesale retailers, we have the ability to click some buttons on our computers, enter a credit card number, and have dinner delivered to our doorsteps. But where does organic fit into all of this?

Freshpep is one CCOF member who is going online to meet grocery shoppers' demands for organic. The certified organic retailer allows customers to fill their online grocery carts with organic veggies, fruits, dairy, meats, and any other grocery staple found in the aisles of brick and mortar stores. Since most of Freshpep's products are organic, it's a one-stop shop for those looking for an easy way to get their organic goods gathered and delivered for them.

Organic certification is not required for retail operations under the USDA's National Organic Program, but can be acquired by retailers who are looking to give their customers the extra assurance that their groceries' organic integrity has been maintained. Organic retail certification verifies that organic products sold by a retailer have been handled in a manner that maintains their organic integrity. This includes verification of signage and organic claims, organic sources, preventing contamination with pest control and sanitation materials, and prevention of commingling of organic with non-organic products.

"Meal kit" companies are another rapidly growing segment in the online food world. These services are expected to comprise between \$3 billion and \$5 billion of the food industry over the next 10 years based on current adoption rates, according to Technomic, a food industry consulting firm. Blue Apron, Plated, and Hello Fresh are equally credited with starting the meal kit phenomenon in the United States, a service that delivers recipes with pre-measured ingredients straight to subscribers' homes. When it's dinnertime, all the at-home cook needs to do is crack open the box—no recipe-hunting, grocery shopping, or portion calculating required.

While the big meal kit players are combining hands-on cooking with convenience for millions of Americans' meals every month, subscribing to one of their services requires giving up some of the control over how your food is grown. Most of these services make general statements about sourcing as many sustainable, organic ingredients as possible, but don't offer any organic certification for their products. Green Chef, one of CCOF's newest certified members, is a notable exception.

In a sea of competitors, Green Chef's edge is their organic certification: subscribers still get boxes with recipes with the right amount of ingredients for them, but kits from Green Chef rely on organic ingredients, and clearly label their recipes and ingredients so customers know what they're cooking. Subscribers receive recipes and ingredients for certified organic meals and meals that contain as many organic ingredients as possible to whip up in their own kitchens.

"We firmly believe that organic is better for our health and for the ecosystem. Our reasons range from preserving bee populations and rebuilding soil to not eating synthetic chemicals and being stewards of animal welfare," states Green Chef on its

These training programs are crucial for the next generation of organic farmers, and for serving as community gathering-places.

website. “We firmly believe the future should be a place where thousands of organic, local and artisanal food purveyors are the norm and chemical intensive agriculture can only be found in a museum.”

In the meal kit business, an additional hurdle for maintaining overall earth-friendliness is the waste factor: in order to ensure freshness and safety during transport, each individual ingredient (including small amounts of spices and other seasonings) is individually packed with ice packs and other insulation. Green Chef has also approached this issue with an eye toward the planet: the boxes and packaging for their meals have been thoughtfully curated to make most of the materials biodegradable or recyclable, and the Green Chef website includes detailed instructions on the most eco-friendly way to reuse, recycle, or otherwise dispose of the boxes’ components. This whole-system viewpoint is what sets Green Chef apart from the meal kit crowd.

Our members are taking part in the technological shift in the way Americans put food on the table. With Technomic predicting that online retailers and service-based apps will increase sales by 13.5% each year, it’s important for organic to continue being a part of this national shift.

Interested in learning more about organic certification for retail establishments? Visit www.ccof.org/certification/standards.

The Southeast’s Organic Farmer Training Ground

In our grandparents’ time, children learned about farming by watching their parents work, digging their own hands in the soil, and learning from their mistakes on the safe ground of their family farm. Today, experiential agricultural education has changed—prospective farmers can enroll in a university or vocational training program where they learn the skills they need, but they don’t often have the opportunity to learn from their own trial and error with protection from a safety net when experiments fail over a long period of time. That’s where programs like the Elma C. Lomax Incubator Farm come in—farmers-in-training at incubator farms such as this one spend three to four years running their own farming business on the incubator farm’s land, all while learning from seasoned farmers, agricultural educators, and their peers.

The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association’s (CFSA) Elma C. Lomax Incubator Farm in Concord, North Carolina is a new CCOF member who shares our focus on growing the next generation of organic farmers. It is the only certified organic incubator farm in the southeast, and serves as a place to provide beginning

farmers with land to learn on before venturing forth to their own farming endeavors.

The farm spans 30.6 acres of land donated by Elma C. Lomax that Cabarrus County owned and operated until the summer of 2014, when the county abruptly decided to cut funding to the farm as a result of last-minute budget cuts. The farmers-in-training at that time were faced with the possibility of losing their crops when access to the farm—with their crops still in the ground—was restricted for 10 days. Upon hearing the news, CFSA swiftly stepped up to save the Lomax Farm by agreeing to offer organizational oversight while helping plan for the future of the farm.


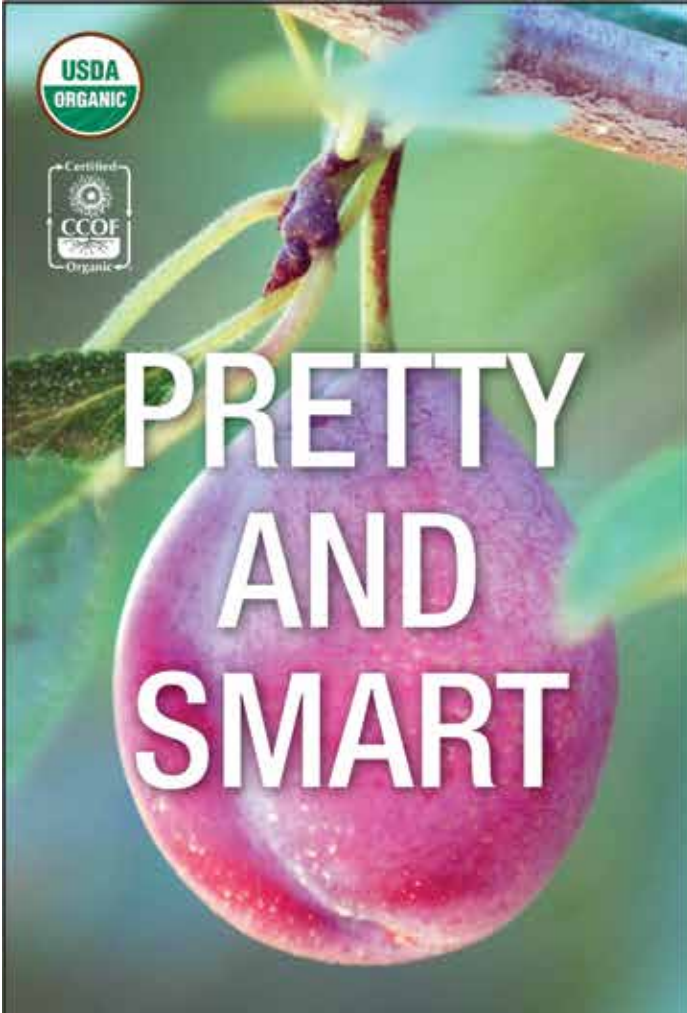
The community quickly rallied around saving the Lomax Farm, and a fundraising campaign began with a large personal donation from Scott Avett of The Avett Brothers, a nationally-known folk rock group. Avett’s contribution shed a national light on the farm’s troubles, culminating in a Barnraiser.com crowdfunding campaign that raised \$30,175 from 292 backers. This farm, like many others, is a place where the community has come together to address the national shortage of young farmers and the rising demand for organic agriculture.

Participants in the farm’s Farmer in Training program are immersed in a three- to five-year vocational training on farmland they manage as their own agricultural businesses with guidance from CFSA, Cooperative Extension, and other farmers-in-training at the farm. They get to try out their business ideas and hone their craft on the Lomax Incubator Farm’s land without the added pressures of making ends meet in a completely self-owned business.

After completing the training program, participants get help finding their own land to farm. CFSA and Cooperative Extension help connect the farmers-in-training with landowners in the area who are looking to sell or rent farmland. Giving these future farmers up to five years to start their businesses in a protected environment helps them gain momentum as they leave the incubator farm and continue growing their businesses after flying the coop.

On top of its function as a training ground for new farmers, the Lomax Farm is home to a community garden and beehives tended by members of the community. The farm also hosts potluck gatherings with supporters and farmers-in-training, volunteer days, and events with other local environmental organizations.

Programs like the Lomax Farm are crucial to training the next generation of organic farmers, and for serving as community gathering-places. To learn more about this project, visit www.carolinafarmstewards.org/lomax-farm. To read about our own initiative for growing organic farmers, visit www.ccof.org/foundation/fofgf.

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CCOF Foundation Trustees and Look at Agriculture...Organically! grant-winning teacher Barbara Roether of Casa di Mir Montessori School with her class in their "Orchard of History."

Working Together for an Organic World

The CCOF Foundation is one of the nation's only non-profits looking out for the needs and interests of *organic* producers. Through our four programs—the Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund, the Organic Training Institute, the Brimont Hardship Assistance Fund, and our Buy Certified Organic consumer education campaign—the Foundation reached over 135,000 people across the United States in 2015.

This work would not have been possible without the strong partnerships we've developed with agricultural organizations and businesses, large and small. This winter, we are giving thanks for the partnerships that allow the CCOF Foundation to work toward realizing a world where organic *is* the norm.

Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund

The Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund was created to offer an organic option to the existing pool of grants available to students interested in agriculture across the country. While plenty of agricultural organizations have given grants for years to young people interested in agricultural careers, the CCOF Foundation's goal was to incentivize the study of *organic* agriculture. When launching the Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund, we looked for agricultural organizations to partner with who were already making scholarships and grants to young people, but didn't focus on organic.

The California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom (CFAITC) was a natural first partner for the Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund. CFAITC works with K-8th grade teachers in California to get agricultural literacy curriculum into the

classroom. CCOF and CFAITC created Look at Agriculture... Organically!, an organic-focused grant for K-8 teachers in the United States that CCOF and CFAITC co-administer. Over the past two years, we have jointly given out \$30,000 in grants to teachers across the country to bring organic agriculture education into their classrooms!

The National FFA Organization (formerly known as the Future Farmers of America), founded in 1928, has been making grants for decades to students who are interested in agriculture. Historically, very few of those grants have gone to support students studying organic. Together with FFA, CCOF has offered grants to 30 high school students to help them conduct organic Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) projects. SAE projects enable FFA students and chapters across the country to have hands-on learning experiences with organic agriculture.

The Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund was able to give \$100,000 to students and teachers in 2015 which provided organic education for more than 4,500 people, thanks to the partnership of businesses and individuals who make our work possible. We are grateful for the strategic and financial support provided by the UNFI Foundation, the Clif Bar Family Foundation, Driscoll's, National Co-op Grocers, Organic Valley, and Lauren and Eric Schiermeyer.

Organic Training Institute

The Organic Training Institute engaged over 600 people through in-person workshops, field days, and webinars in 2015. Classes were held throughout California and North Carolina,



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and webinars reached people across the United States and Mexico. How, you ask? Partnership, of course!

The CCOF Foundation worked with dozens of organizations to put together an outstanding lineup of educational events in 2015 for organic business owners, including the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association, ATTRA/The National Center for Appropriate Technology, California FarmLink, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, Community Alliance with Family Farmers, Ecological Farming Association, The Farmers Guild, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Organic Education Solutions, Resource Conservation Districts, and University of California Cooperative Extension. We were also able to enhance our programming thanks to the help of organic companies who were willing to host tours and share their knowledge in webinars.

True to form, the community of organic businesses that are connected to CCOF jumped in to lend a hand and put on over a dozen engaging events—all of which would not have been possible without our members and organizational partners.

Buy Certified Organic Consumer Education Campaign

The CCOF Foundation began its consumer education campaign a few years ago utilizing its strongest and most obvious partners—organic farmers! In response to requests from our members, we provided free consumer education postcards for them to distribute to customers that explain why buying certified organic is different than buying products labeled as “natural” or “pesticide free.” In the first year of this campaign, 10,000 of these postcards were distributed at farmers’ markets, road side stands, and in CSA boxes.

In 2015, the program grew as we partnered with 300 organic farmers and handlers to hand out 30,000 postcards! In addition to our farmer partners, the Bay Area Costco stores came on board to expand the program to reach retail shoppers. Ten Costco stores handed out a total of 100,000 “Buy Certified Organic” postcards to Costco customers. This year, the Foundation plans to continue expanding the reach of this program through the networks of our farmer and retail partners.

Join the Organic Partnership

Do you have ideas about partnership for the CCOF Foundation? Is your business or organization interested in integrating the message of organic into your programming? Do you want to help us make organic the norm? The CCOF Foundation would love to hear from you! Reach us at **(831) 346-6244** or ccofoundation@ccof.org.

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Pacific Southwest Chapter Celebrates Under the Stars

The Pacific Southwest chapter held a gala night under the stars at Linda and Kenny Antonioli's CCOF-certified KooL Ranch in the heart of De Luz Canyon in Fallbrook on October 17. The evening featured cocktails, dinner, and dancing to a live band and DJ, at the beautifully decorated ranch.

The Antoniolis—who grow over a dozen varieties of pomegranates, Hass avocados, and three types of feijoas (also known as pineapple guavas)—cooked up the “Fallbrook to Table” event with the chapter’s Board of Directors Representative Karen Archipley as a farmer-to-buyer event and fundraiser for the CCOF Foundation’s Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund program.

The evening was planned in part to help CCOF-certified growers promote their farms by highlighting the extraordinary range of organic food offerings available locally, with emphasis on northern San Diego County. Event sponsors provided funding to purchase dinner ingredients wholesale from participating growers.

Los Angeles-based Chef Bruce Hecker, Executive Chef Jesse Genovese, Director of Catering and Events Anthony Smith, and their team prepared a staggering 17-plate menu featuring seasonal produce from over 16 local CCOF-certified growers.

CCOF Board of Directors Chairman Phil LaRocca and Archipley, both of whom are also on the Board of Trustees for the CCOF Foundation, spoke at the event about the importance of organic and how far it has come. Dwight Detter of Food Centricity, a food company business accelerator, spoke about the direction of organic and retail.

Approximately 150 guests attended, including local growers; Los Angeles and San Diego county buyers from stores, restaurants, and produce companies; and foodies, who enjoyed dining together and mingling under the stars of a perfect evening. Valet staff was on hand to park cars and greet guests who were provided a specialty pomegranate margarita crafted just for the event, then escorted to glowing tents under which cocktails and hors d’oeuvres were served.

A large double bar served up organic mixology as well as LaRocca Vineyards’ organic wines. Cow Bop’s five-member band brought their swinging Western groove to the grove. Following dinner in the field, guests joined each other in the “KooL Lounge” for three organic desserts while DJ. Rick Hettish spun tunes that got people out on the dance floor. Upon departure, goodie bags donated by Whole Foods Market were filled with special items and gifted to attendees.

Thank you to the sponsors for their generous donations that helped make this event possible: Valent U.S.A. Corporation, JH Biotech, Inc., Real Food Marketing, BioFlora, Westbridge, California Vermiculture, and The Catalyst Product Group.

A huge thank you to Linda and Kenny Antonioli for sharing their expertise in farm-to-table dinners. KooL Ranch (www.koolranchfarms.com) is the perfect spot for weddings, farm-to-table dinners, and seminars.



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Winter Chapter Updates

Congratulations to the **North Coast** chapter leaders for maintaining momentum throughout a busy year and providing space for CCOF members in their region to gather, talk business, and enjoy each other's company: President Debby Zygielbaum, Vice President Christian Cartano, Secretary Cassie Reiser, Treasurer Gove Celio, and Board Representative Andrea Davis-Cetina. In July, the Novato Whole Foods Market hosted the chapter meeting, and the chapter held a harvest festival in November at Jack Neal & Son in St. Helena.

The **San Luis Obispo** chapter met in September at the San Luis Obispo Grange. Chapter President Carolyn Shaffer of Fandango Olive Oil gave a report and Secretary-Treasurer Eric Michielsens of Pozo Organic Farm encouraged all members to consider becoming a chapter leader.

The **Central Coast** chapter also met in September at Doña Esther's restaurant in San Juan Bautista. President Steve Pedersen opened the meeting by asking about people's experiences with Bagra bug this past season, then gave an update on the organic strawberry start project. James Rickert will have up to one million certified organic strawberry starts available for the 2016 season. The chapter held an election and incumbent leaders Steve Pedersen, Toby Garrone, and Grant Brians were re-elected as president, vice president, and board representative, respectively. Emily Musgrave was voted in as the chapter secretary and Christine Coke, previously alternate board representative, was elected treasurer. Thank you all for your service!

CCOF staff Meaghan Donovan, Kelly Damewood, and Jane Sooby led an organic research priority-setting session at these three meetings. Collectively, members identified over 60 issues needing research, ranging from the ecological benefits of grazing to organic hemp production. CCOF staff summarized the priorities and shared them with the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF), which will consolidate the information with data gathered through their organic farmer survey. CCOF and OFRF will deliver organic research priorities to the University of California, Davis College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Dean Helene Dillard to assist in developing an organic research program.

The **Mexico** chapter held its first meeting in November during el Expo AgroAlimentaria (Food and Agriculture Expo). Chapter President Esteban Macias hosted the meeting at the Mr. Lucky office in Irapuato, Guanajuato. Mr. Lucky is a CCOF-certified organic produce company. Chapter members socialized, toured the processing facility, and enjoyed a light meal together. Congratulations to the chapter for holding its first meeting!

The **North Valley** chapter started the year off right by holding a meeting in January in the Richvale/Chico area. CCOF Executive Director/CEO Cathy Calfo spoke at the meeting and outlined the legislative strategy that CCOF will implement in 2016 to eliminate state fees on certified organic businesses in California.

Let us know what your chapter is doing!

Write to jsooby@ccof.org and we will publish your chapter update in the next edition of *Certified Organic*.

Pass the

FAIR ORGANIC FARMING ACT

Eliminate Outdated California Organic Program Fees & Paperwork



With your help, California will usher in the next chapter of organic agriculture by eliminating outdated regulatory requirements and fees.

WRITTEN BY Kelly Damewood

Organic has come a long way since a group of farmers sat around a kitchen table in 1973 and created a 53-member organization known as California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF). Today, CCOF is an accredited certification agency, a trade association, and an educational foundation with membership that spans 42 states and four countries. CCOF continues to certify and advocate on behalf of over 2,000 certified operations in California and 3,000 nationally and in Mexico, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

From the beginning, CCOF strived for an organic enforcement scheme with integrity, meaning, and value for consumers. Not only did CCOF help California implement one of the first organic laws in the United States, but it also played a critical role in the passage of both the California Organic Products Act of 1990 and the federal Organic Foods Production Act of 1990.

Today, CCOF continues its legacy as a leader in forward-thinking policy to support organic agriculture and food production by promoting the passage of the Fair Organic Farming Act—the act that looks to the future of organic’s growth by eliminating fees and paperwork that are duplicative, unnecessary, and burdensome for California’s organic producers.

Leveling the Playing Field for Certified Organic Operations

California Central Coast Assemblymember Mark Stone, CCOF members, and other organic leaders are working together to create an improved, progressive organic law in California. Since the implementation of the national organic standards in 2002, CCOF members have expressed concerns that the California State Organic Program (SOP) duplicates the fee and reporting requirements of the USDA National Organic Program (NOP). In response to these concerns, CCOF wrote a comprehensive report in 2015 titled *Review of the California State Organic Program*. The report describes the structure, function, purpose, and activities of the SOP.

CCOF wrote the *Review of the California State Organic Program* in collaboration with an advisory committee to ensure input from a range of stakeholders, including organic producers, policy experts, and public officials. The committee helped identify the scope of inquiry and reviewed drafts of the report. CCOF also interviewed over 15 diverse stakeholders

and reviewed multiple public documents, including laws and regulations that impact certified organic production and marketing.

The findings in the *Review of the California State Organic Program* confirm that the California’s SOP is the *only* state-level enforcement program in the country, which results in unfair, duplicative fees for certified organic operations in the state. Organic operations in California must pay SOP fees in addition to their certification fees, in contrast with certified producers outside of California who pay only a certification fee. Moreover, the SOP requires additional reporting and compliance requirements beyond what the NOP requires of certified operations outside of California. As a result, California producers pay more fees and comply with more regulatory requirements than producers in other states who market and sell organic products.

Furthermore, the SOP is no longer needed to monitor organic activities in the state, given today’s robust regulatory system. Since the creation of the NOP and implementation of organic standards, organic certification has become a more standardized process with mandatory residue testing, guided enforcement actions, and other requirements as recommended by the National Organic Standards Board. In addition, California continues to have among the strictest pesticide regulations in the world along with other market enforcement mechanisms like the state’s farmers’ market inspection program. With so much oversight in place, organic certification and food production has outgrown the need for a separate, enforcement-driven state organic program.

Based upon these findings in the *Review of the California State Organic Program*, the CCOF Board of Directors unanimously adopted a policy initiative to end SOP fees and registration.

Assemblymember Stone Authors Bill to Advance Organic Agriculture

Representing over 120 organic operations in his district, Assemblymember Mark Stone appreciates the longstanding concerns that the SOP imposes unfair, duplicative fees and requirements on certified organic operations in California. In response to the findings of the *Review of the California State Organic Program*, Assemblymember Stone authored the Fair

Organic Farming Act (FOFA) to help carry forth CCOF's policy recommendation to end unfair fees and level the playing field for California's certified organic producers.

FOFA has the following primary functions*:

1. It prohibits the state of California from collecting fees and registration from certified organic operations, because certified operations already pay fees to certification agents and report to the NOP.
2. It allows the NOP to contract with the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to perform enforcement activities such as investigating complaints of fraud.
3. It allows the California Secretary of Agriculture to establish a program to monitor non-certified operations.
4. It allows the California Secretary of Agriculture to establish an advisory committee to advise the Secretary and the University of California on policies and programs to improve organic agriculture in California, including outreach, education, research, and technical assistance.
5. It allows the California Secretary of Agriculture to receive and spend state or federal funds to assist organic transition, conduct education and marketing activities, enter research and develop partnerships, and provide other support for organic operations.

FOFA's goal is to end unfair, duplicative fees and reporting requirements that exist for organic operations in California while expanding the opportunity for the Secretary of Agriculture and CDFA to advance organic agriculture and food production throughout the state.

California Secretary of Agriculture Karen Ross has demonstrated commitment to organic in numerous ways, including engaging with the organic community at CCOF's Annual Meeting and Conference, supporting a GMO-testing pilot project, facilitating a Bagrada bug working group to collaborate on organic solutions to a significant pest, and improving the process for approved organic pest management when transporting feedstock. FOFA creates opportunities to build off of Secretary Ross's leadership in organic by creating authority to collaborate with the NOP and others to meet the growing needs of the organic sector.

This legislation also creates a new partnership between CDFA and organic. It replaces existing state organic law—which limits CDFA's role to enforcement of organic standards—and puts in place a framework that not only allows CDFA to contract with the NOP where appropriate, but also allows for CDFA to support organic through marketing and promotion, collaboration on organic research and technical assistance, and support for organic transition. The structure of FOFA is in part modeled after Minnesota's progressive organic law, which gives similar directives to its department of agriculture. Minnesota has several worthwhile programs, such as a marketing promotion

known as "Minnesota Grown Organic" and recently announced an organic transition business planning tool. FOFA could be a step toward a more innovative, strategic partnership with CDFA to help advance organic agriculture throughout the state.

Updating California Policy at a Critical Time

Agricultural policy in California is at a crossroads where public officials and policy makers must decide what role California agriculture will play in the flourishing organic marketplace. California already produces more organic product than any other U.S. state, with over \$8.2 billion in organic product sales annually, despite having to comply with more regulations and pay more fees than any other organic producer in the country. At the same time, consumer demand for organic continues to skyrocket with double-digit growth and expanding sales in all food categories, but domestic organic acreage and production are not growing at an equal rate.

Retailers and food manufacturers are calling upon the organic community to help increase acreage and expand production, and California is at the forefront of this call to action. Fresh fruits and vegetables are the top-selling category of organic food in the United States, and California is the leader in domestic organic specialty crop production, including fruits and vegetables. Additionally, California is the exclusive producer of certain organic crops like almonds and table grapes, and its \$1.4 billion annual organic commodity sales include dairy, eggs, and beef. Public officials and policy makers will need to understand what it will take to responsibly increase organic acreage and production in California to meet the high national demand for organic.

Supporting existing and new organic producers is at the forefront of CCOF's organizational priorities. Among other initiatives, CCOF supports beginning farmers through the Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund; helps farmers endure severe drought other natural disasters through a hardship assistance fund; hosts workshops on organic certification in English, Spanish, and Hmong; facilitates focus groups on economic barriers to transition; continually improves certification services and inspection operations; and advocates at the local, state, and national levels.

Despite the multifaceted efforts to support existing producers and incentivize transition, CCOF consistently runs into the hurdle of the SOP and its additional registration requirements. Undoubtedly, the number one policy issue identified by CCOF members in California is compliance with unfair, duplicative fees and registration under the SOP. At this critical time when CCOF and other organic leaders are working to support and grow California's organic production, it is crucial for policy makers to update California's organic law and replace it with a law that eliminates unfair, duplicative fees while also creating mechanisms to advance organic agriculture. Until California

Fair Organic Farming Act FAQs

Does the Fair Organic Farming Act deregulate organic?

A: No. The Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 is a federal law that regulates organic, and the NOP is the federal agency responsible for implementation of the law and enforcement of federal organic standards. California has a state law that subsidizes NOP's enforcement responsibilities at the expense of California's certified organic producers. California is the only state that requires certified operations to pay two sets of fees to comply with organic standards. FOFA will end this second layer of fees and level the playing field so that NOP provides the same regulation of organic across all states.

Doesn't the SOP provide an enforcement that benefits organic?

A: The SOP replaces NOP enforcement in California at the expense of California's certified organic operations. FOFA will end unfair fees on certified producers and update CDFA's authority to work with NOP to enforce organic standards. CDFA will still have authority to contract with NOP to handle enforcement in California, so long as it is not funded through additional, unfair fees on certified operations.

Will FOFA end the federal Organic Certification Cost Share Program in California?

A: No. CDFA can still administer cost share, and CDFA's cost of administration is covered through the cost share program.

Will FOFA impact the materials registration program?

A: No. The organic input materials program is separate from the SOP.

Couldn't we use the existing state program to better support organic producers?

A: The existing state program operates solely for enforcement, and it is solely funded through extra fees on California's organic producers. Therefore, existing state law must be updated to remove fees and transform the role of CDFA from strictly an enforcement body to an agency that partners with organic operations and organizations to advance organic agriculture in California. CCOF does not support a program that is funded through additional fees on certified operations.

Who authored the Fair Organic Farming Act?

A: Assemblymember Mark Stone represents over 120 organic operations, and he recognizes the long-standing concern among certified operations that SOP fees and registration place unfair

burdens on organic production. He engaged with CCOF to author a bill that would update state law and improve the regulatory framework to ensure the integrity of organic while removing unfair fees.

How much are organic producers paying into the SOP?

A: The range of fees is from \$25 to \$3,000 annually.

Will FOFA impact organic processors and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH)?

A: Yes. Processors, handlers, and retailers would no longer be required to pay SOP fees, and CDPH would no longer handle enforcement unless contracted and funded through other means than fees.

What is the existing SOP budget?

A: For fiscal year 2013-14, CDFA collected about \$1.4 million in SOP fees and expended about \$1.2 million for the SOP. CDPH collected almost \$800,000 in SOP fees and expended about \$700,000 for the SOP program. Collectively, CDFA and CDPH collected about \$2.2 million in SOP fees and spent about \$1.9 million for the SOP program in 2013-14.

Are CDFA and CDPH collecting more money than they are spending on enforcement?

A: Yes. CDFA has collected over \$3 million more from organic farmers than it has spent on organic enforcement. FOFA proposes refunding this reserve fund back to farmers who paid into it, with the specific amount depending on the number of years they paid into it.

Will FOFA impact other programs? Will it impact non-organic agriculture?

A: No. The SOP is funded through fees on organic producers and the fees fund enforcement activities. FOFA ends the mandate to do enforcement, so CDFA will not incur new operating costs.

What will be the impact on the California Organic Products Advisory Council (COPAC)?

A: FOFA could give the California Secretary of Agriculture authority to continue to facilitate an advisory committee. Currently, COPAC exists to advise the Secretary on administration of the SOP. However, COPAC could exist with the purpose of advising the Secretary and the University of California on policies and programs that will improve organic agriculture in California, including how available resources can most effectively be used for outreach, education, research, and technical assistance that meet the needs of the organic agriculture community.

levels the playing field and builds support for its organic community, organic demand will continue to outpace growth in production.

You are Essential to the Passage of the Fair Organic Farming Act

The Fair Organic Farming Act will pass with strong support from the organic community. Over the course of the year, the California Legislature and Governor Jerry Brown will review the merits and impacts of FOFA. To inform their votes and decisions, engage with your representatives and tell them why you support legislation that supports California's organic farmers.


Tell your representative that you support FOFA because it will end outdated, unfair, and duplicative fees and regulations for California's certified organic producers. Let them know that FOFA will level the playing field for California producers. Give your representatives the facts and explain that FOFA is critical to creating a world where organic *is* the norm.

You can help pass the Fair Organic Farming Act through the following opportunities:

1. Join CCOF at our 2016 Annual Conference on February 29 in Sacramento, where Assemblymember Stone will set forth his plans to pass the Fair Organic Farming Act. Connect with Assemblymember Stone and share your own insights on the long-needed changes to California's organic fees.
2. Tell your district representatives why you support the Fair Organic Farming Act. Make a phone call or meet with them in person. Contact policy@ccof.org for help connecting with your representatives.
3. Become an official supporter of the Fair Organic Farming Act by sending a letter of support on behalf of your operation or organization to Assemblymember Stone's office. Contact policy@ccof.org for help drafting a letter.
4. Become a CCOF Supporting Member. Are you an organic consumer interested in supporting the organic movement? CCOF is the only certification agency that is also a member-based trade association. The support of the organic community is essential to advancing organic agriculture for a healthy world. Visit www.ccof.org/help-organic-grow to join CCOF today.
5. Contribute to the CCOF Action Fund—a fund dedicated to advancing organic agriculture through support of elected leaders who want to help grow organic. To contribute, visit www.ccof.org/ccof-action-fund.

No matter how you choose to engage, join CCOF in vocalizing firm support for the Fair Organic Farming Act—the act that will level the playing field for California's certified organic producers and ensure the integrity of organic agriculture and food production.

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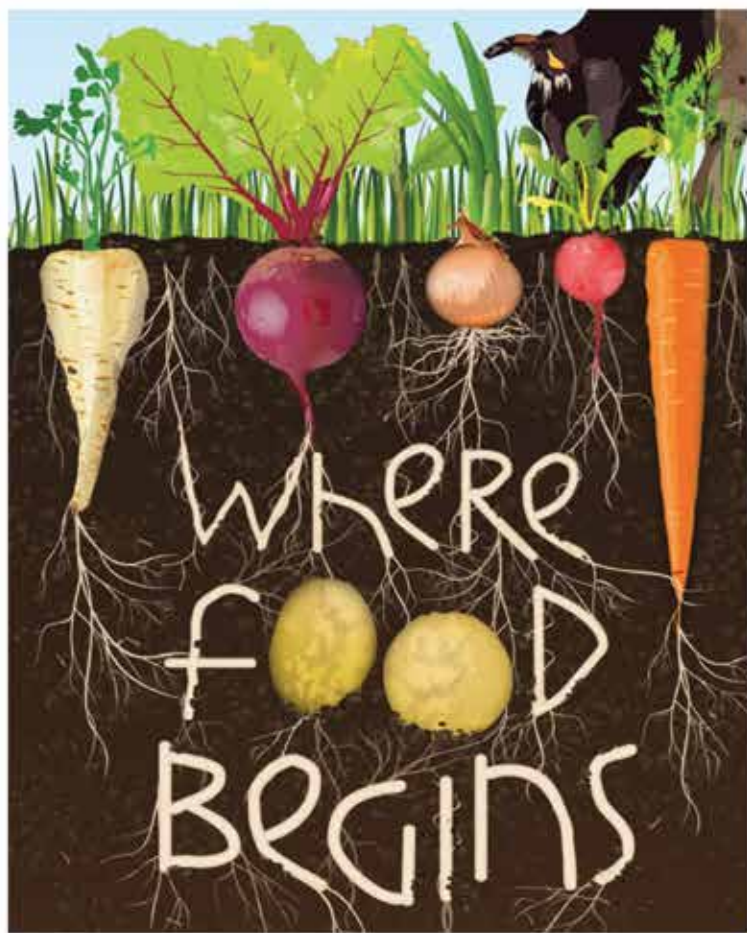
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Organic almond producer Ward Burroughs uses compost for improved soil health.

Climate & Ag Legislative Roundup 2015

CCOF is a founding partner of the California Climate & Agriculture Network (CalCAN), a coalition that advances policies at the nexus of sustainable agriculture and climate change. CalCAN represents the interests of organic and sustainable producers and family farmers on climate policy, and believes that agriculture can offer powerful solutions to the climate crisis. The following summary from CalCAN recaps climate and agriculture state legislative developments in 2015.

The 2015 legislative year in California started off with a bang, climate policy-wise.

Speaking before the assembled members of the Legislature at his January inaugural address, Governor Jerry Brown outlined several bold objectives for the year 2030, including goals to produce 50% of the state's electricity from renewable sources, reduce petroleum use by 50%, and double the energy efficiency of existing buildings.

Perhaps most radical was the Governor's declaration that "we must manage farm and rangelands, forests and wetlands so they can store carbon." By this, he meant agricultural practices—including many in the organic toolkit—that can draw down and hold atmospheric carbon in soils, perennial crops, and conservation plantings.

Furthermore, in his budget proposal, Governor Brown included a new program called the Healthy Soils Initiative that "ensures that our agricultural soils have adequate soil organic matter (SOM). Increasing the amount of SOM from its current levels in soils can provide multiple benefits." Existing and transitioning organic producers should be among those to benefit from this initiative since SOM is a cornerstone of good organic practices.

His inclusion of these soil- and plant-based climate actions right alongside the energy- and transportation-related goals signaled a clear turning point, and was in many ways a validation of the policy work that CalCAN, CCOF, and other coalition partners have been doing for years.

Senate Bill 367: The Agriculture Climate Benefits Act

Emboldened in part by the Governor's message, CalCAN and coalition partner Community Alliance with Family Farmers co-sponsored Senate Bill 367, the Agriculture Climate Benefits Act.

This bill, authored by Senator Lois Wolk (D-Davis), would create a program at the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to incentivize growers to use practices that reduce agricultural greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions or store carbon. It identifies four categories of practices eligible for funding: soil building, water conservation, increased biodiversity, and renewable energy. It also expands an existing CDFA advisory committee to include climate science expertise, representatives familiar with technical assistance, and, importantly, one organic producer.

Funding for the vision laid out in SB 367 was proposed to come from the state's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF), derived from cap-and-trade funds being collected annually from the largest GHG emitters. The GGRF is growing steadily and was budgeted at \$1.7 billion in the 2015-16 fiscal year.

SB 367 picked up significant support from the get-go, including dozens of sustainable agriculture organizations as well as the California Farm Bureau and some environmental organizations.

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It had almost unanimous bipartisan support in both the Senate and Assembly. Another bill, AB 761 (Levine), complements SB 367 by creating a carbon farming program and highlighting the importance of agricultural climate solutions.

Delayed But Not Defeated...

In the last two weeks of the legislative session, it became clear that many political forces were at play in the allocation of cap-and-trade funds, including bills that set ambitious GHG reduction targets for the next 20 to 30 years. In the end, the Legislature and Governor could not come to agreement on how to divide up the GGRF pie, and they left almost \$1 billion on the table. All bills proposing GGRF allocations, including SB 367, were put on suspense. But the fight to pass SB 367 is not over—the bill can be revived in 2016.

Protecting Farmland and the Climate

In 2015, the Department of Conservation launched a new cap-and-trade-funded program called the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALC). SALC funds agricultural conservation easements and local government land use planning to improve farmland conservation. It is the country's first-ever program that invests in farmland protection as a strategy for minimizing development and limiting increases in GHG emissions related to transportation and higher energy use. It serves as a groundbreaking model for the nation and the world, sending a signal that land use strategies have a critical role to play in addressing the climate crisis.

This year, SALC received a budget of only \$5 million. SB 367 proposed an increase to \$40 million, and though the bill has not yet passed, it did have an effect on the SALC budget, along with the advocacy of many in the conservation community. As of this writing, there is a staff proposal to increase the 2016 budget to \$40 million; a decision will be made in December 2015.

Water-Energy Efficiency

In 2014, in response to the drought crisis, Governor Brown announced the launch of the State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program (SWEET), funded initially with \$10 million of cap-and-trade money. This program, administered by CDFA, provides grants directly to growers who seek to implement irrigation projects that simultaneously reduce water and energy consumption and related GHG emissions. While SWEET has been funded through emergency drought allocations over the past two years, its \$40 million budget for the coming year indicates a significant vote of confidence in the program and its potential to make a real impact.

Two other bills were introduced with a focus on increasing water-energy efficiency. SB 471 (Pavley) would create an additional program to facilitate water-energy efficiencies (including in the agricultural sector), while SB 551 (Wolk) would make it a priority for water-related projects in the state to be as energy-efficient as feasible. Neither bill advanced very far in the process, but could potentially be revived next year.

Adaptation to Climate Change Impacts

In addition to taking steps to reduce climate pollutants, California has also recognized the need to prepare for climate change impacts that are already being felt. Farmers and ranchers are on the front lines of these impacts, which include more severe drought, greater weather extremes (including storms and extreme heat), as well as shifting climate patterns over time (fewer chill hours, higher average temperatures, and/or decreased snowpack).

This year, legislators passed several bills that lay out planning actions to prepare for climate impacts. SB 246 (Wieckowski) would create a program to coordinate local and regional planning efforts, drawing on a new adaptation information clearinghouse. The bill also creates a new state adaptation advisory council, which will include an agriculture representative. Another adaptation planning bill, AB 1482 (Gordon) takes the novel approach of prioritizing adaptation solutions that use "natural systems and natural infrastructure." The bill directs state agencies to "[promote] actions to ensure healthy soils and sustainable agriculture" for their adaptation benefits.

Revving up Compost Production

The Legislature also passed a trio of bills to facilitate improved compost production infrastructure. These bills are a follow-up to two bills passed last year, AB 1826 (Chesbro) and AB 1594 (Williams), that require a greater portion of food and yard waste to be diverted from landfills. Passed this year were AB 867 (McCarty), which improves local-level planning for diverted organic wastes; AB 1045 (Irwin), which streamlines the process for permitting compost production facilities; and AB 199 (Eggman), which provides tax incentives to build infrastructure for the production of compost and other soil amendments.

Meanwhile, the state is busy preparing to implement SB 605 (Lara), a bill passed last year that necessitates a plan to reduce short-lived climate pollutants, including methane generated by organic wastes rotting in landfills. That effort is expected to draw significant state investment in organic waste management, especially facilities for the production of compost. All of these efforts to increase compost production have potential value in increasing the availability of compost for farmers.

In 2016, legislative leaders and the Governor will continue efforts to pass new climate legislation that doubles down on the state's climate targets. There will be ongoing discussions about how agriculture can reduce methane and nitrous oxide emissions and enhance carbon sequestration. CalCAN and partners such as CCOF will be at the table, advocating for organic and sustainable agricultural solutions to the climate crisis.

For more information about CalCAN and to learn how you can get involved, visit www.calclimateag.org.

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Organic Check-Off: Imagine What We Can Accomplish!

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As you may recall, in May 2015 OTA filed a request with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for a proposed organic check-off known as GRO Organic (Generic Research and Promotion Order for Organic). Different from other check-offs, it will benefit the entire organic sector, rather than a single commodity.

GRO Organic as proposed could bring in \$30 million annually year after year to help fund activities for the organic sector! Of this, organic research, information, and promotion programs would each receive at least 25 percent of that amount—an expected \$7.5 million a year—and be eligible for an additional \$7.5 million from discretionary funds allocated based on the needs of the sector.

Just think: At least 50 to 75 percent of the expected funds will be allocated for research or complementary activities like on-farm technical assistance and communicating research results. In just one year, \$7.5 million plus an additional \$7.5 million with the use of discretionary funds could become \$15 million for matching funds to tackle unmet organic research needs.

And that doesn't even take into account the potential for check-off dollars to leverage federal funding opportunities and put organic at the table for setting our own research priorities. Check-off programs are highly influential in determining criteria for the limited federal research dollars that do exist. As a result of the 2014 Farm Bill, both USDA's Organic Agricultural Research and Extension Initiative and Organic Transitions programs now require most non-university research to provide 100 percent in matching funds. Suddenly that \$15 million for research could become \$30 million with federal matching funds.

What else can we envision to help American farmers meet the growing demand for organic?

Imagine technical specialists on the ground in every state working with transitioning and existing organic farmers! Did you know that the Natural Resources Conservation Service funds just one organic specialist in the entire United States? The position requires a 50:50 match from industry, and three additional positions went unfilled due to lack of matching funds. A \$1.5 million investment of matching funds could support 25 organic specialists nationwide, creating direct links to USDA programs.

We could educate the next generation of agricultural leaders about the benefits and opportunities of organic farming through the National FFA Organization—a network of 600,000+ members and their families and 11,000 agriculture teachers. Organic check-off funds could be used to invest in young farmer education through grants, scholarships, and supervised agricultural experiences. A \$525,000 commitment (on par with Monsanto's FFA scholarship fund) could award 350 students with \$1,500 each to pursue education related to organic or a \$300,000 investment could give 150 student farmers \$2,000 each to learn more about organic.

As I write this article, we anticipate that USDA will have published a proposed rule for an organic check-off in the Federal Register by the time you read this. Publication of the proposed rule will be followed by a critical public comment period during which diverse voices can weigh in.

Here is a quick primer on the proposed GRO Organic program:


Assessments for the check-off would be collected annually from the range of organic certificate holders—farmers, handlers, processors, exporters, and importers. Organic producers could pay 1/10 of one percent of either net organic sales or producer net profit. Farmers and businesses with annual revenue below \$250,000 would not be automatically assessed, but could choose to pay into the system and have a say in how the check-off funds are spent.

Directing the program would be a 16-member board of organic certificate holders. The board would reflect the diversity of the sectors paying into the check-off, with at least half of the seats filled by producers. Producers will directly select their regional representatives through a simple nomination and balloting process.

The final step will be a referendum. If the check-off is implemented, there would be an automatic referendum every seven years to decide whether or not to continue with the program.

Make sure you are up to speed on the conversation by visiting **GROorganic.net** to get more details or download a full copy of the proposal submitted to USDA.

And look for USDA's proposed rule—which may already be out! The public comment period is the time for stakeholders to voice their support for an organic check-off. Spread the word and your support—the success of an organic check-off could be a game-changer for our agricultural landscape.



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Launching System Improvements

CCOF Certification Services has been working hard throughout 2015 to evolve our systems. We're excited to announce the planned launch of a variety of internal system improvements and new tools for our clients during 2016. Look for more details about these various improvements in subsequent magazines and newsletters.

Action Item Workflow - New in January 2016! Action Item Workflow allows you to respond to CCOF action items—including attaching documents to your responses—directly through MyCCOF! This eliminates letters and emails and will help CCOF work with you. Over time, as other improvements are implemented, Action Item Workflow will help you address compliance matters quickly and easily, one by one.

Fewer inspection documents - We've reduced the number of additional documents our inspectors are required to complete during an inspection. Less paperwork means faster inspections and reviews!

Single action items per issue/request - During 2016 you will see a shift to creating separate action items for each compliance issue, CCOF request, or reminder. Currently, CCOF creates only one action item per letter. In the future, we will create a separate action item for each specific item. This will allow you to respond to specific items without the confusion of which item has been responded to. This new framework will also feed into our next service improvement, the Compliance Report!

Compliance Report - We know it may be difficult to keep track of the various issues and requests regarding your certification with CCOF, and we've been working to make this confusion a thing of the past! With our new Compliance Report, all open action items will be available in a single easy-to-read and understand report, which will be updated every time there is a change to your open action items.

Your inspector will only need to review your Compliance Report and will almost never have to search for old letters.

Project Chrysalis - We're really excited about this one! Just like the caterpillar emerges from its chrysalis as a new butterfly, so too will MyCCOF emerge from Project Chrysalis as a new and improved online certification tool. The leading online organic certification tool is about to take its new improved form.

Supplier list - We're bringing the innovation of the Materials List to organic suppliers:

- We're no longer collecting certificates for the same supplier from multiple operations, but instead utilizing our supplier records to keep track of the certification status for all operations purchasing from that supplier. Please remember to keep current certificates on file at your site.
- This new format allows us to communicate to all operations using a given supplier, should that supplier's certification status change.
- The new supplier list will reduce the size of your electronic OSP, reducing paperwork burdens for inspectors and review staff. This means quicker inspections and reviews!

As we roll out these tools and improvements, look for presentations at events, CCOF chapter meetings, and other



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venues. Our goal is to continually improve so we meet your needs professionally while maintaining strong organic integrity. Systems that make us more efficient and give you tools help CCOF be a great organic certifier that can focus our energy on the needs of our members.

CCOF Inspector Field Evaluations

Field evaluations are required by the National Organic Program (NOP) for all certifiers. As a result, CCOF implemented a pilot program in 2015 that has been very successful. We appreciate the NOP's requirement and are embracing it with additional time and effort in 2016.

As a part of our ongoing inspector quality efforts, the CCOF inspection operations department is conducting field evaluations of about 25 inspectors during regular inspections throughout 2016. Field evaluations help us ensure quality inspections, and give us a closer look at your experience with our inspectors to help us improve the inspection system overall. Field evaluations do not increase inspection time or impact the inspected operation, but they do provide an opportunity for you to provide direct feedback to senior inspection services personnel.

We always welcome your feedback and use your post-inspection surveys to help us improve and identify field evaluation options.

Signature No Longer Required on Inspection Exit Interviews

We've removed the requirement for a signature on our Inspection Exit Interview Forms. The use of a signature was developed by CCOF, outside of the NOP regulations, and proved difficult in our fully-electronic inspection and review system. By submitting the exit interview to CCOF, our inspectors verify that the information is correct to their best knowledge. After your inspection the inspector will either leave a paper version with you or email an electronic version.

NOP Integrity Database

The NOP is launching a new database for certified organic operations' data, called the Organic INTEGRITY Database. The database provides updated information about all USDA NOP certified organic operations in the hope of deterring fraud, increasing supply chain transparency, and promoting market

visibility for organic operations. CCOF worked closely with the NOP to ensure the database would continue to function as a resource for domestic and international buyers, and is continuing to work with the NOP to improve the system.

Over the coming years we expect to further integrate our data into the NOP framework to help foster improved market research. In the interim, it will include more detailed product information. We encourage CCOF operations to carefully review their products, crops, or livestock during inspections to ensure their list is accurate and up to date. CCOF expects to update the NOP database on a monthly basis.

Meet With Certification Staff Out in the Wild!

Our staff are always excited to see our certified members at the various trade shows and conferences we attend each year. Meeting up at events can be a great opportunity to review concerns, ask questions, or just put faces to names. Be sure to stop by our booths and say hello at the following events: **EcoFarm Conference**, January 19-23 in Pacific Grove, California; **World Ag Expo**, February 9-11 in Tulare, California; **MOSES Organic Farming Conference**, February 25-27 in La Crosse, Wisconsin; **Natural Products Expo West**, March 10-12 in Anaheim, California; **Natural Products Expo East**, September 22-24 in Baltimore, Maryland; and **Produce Marketing Association Fresh Summit**, October 14-16 in Orlando, Florida.

CCOF's regional representatives will also be attending events throughout the United States. Keep an eye on our events calendar throughout the year. If you think CCOF should attend an event in your area, please let us know!

If you'd like to set up an appointment to meet with staff one-on-one please email our Senior Programs Specialist Alexandra "Gamai" Gregory at ggregory@ccof.org.

Electrolyzed Water Now Allowed Under NOP

On September 11, 2015 the USDA National Organic Program released a Policy Memo updating the status of electrolyzed water under the USDA NOP regulations. The memo clarifies that hypochlorous acid generated by electrolyzed water systems is a type of chlorine material, and is now allowed to directly contact organic products in wash water, when followed by a fresh water rinse. Check MyCCOF Materials Search if you'd like to switch to an electrolyzed water system for your produce washing or equipment cleaning.

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