

California Certified Organic Farmers Statewide Newsletter

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OUR STORY SO FAR: CCOF MARKS 15TH ANNIVERSARY

Ed. Note: February 24th marked the 15th anniversary of the meeting at which CCOF was born. On that date in 1973, over 50 growers from six counties agreed to form a group called "California Certified Organic Farmers" for the purpose of defining organic standards and certifying organic growers.

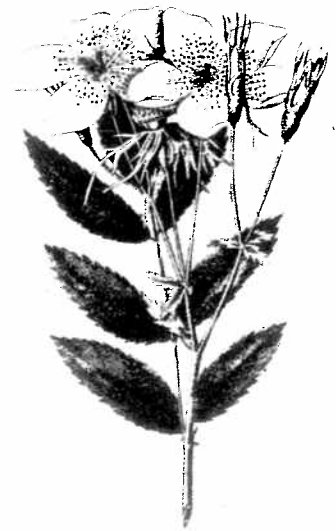
This new organization gave shape to a seemingly revolutionary idea: that you could grow food without using synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, and that you could run a profitable business selling it. Fifteen years later this idea is growing faster than ever. The chronology which follows was written by Sy Weisman; it gives us a perspective on the vision and long-term dedication that has nurtured our industry. Despite signs of a bandwagon for organic agriculture on the horizon, our presence on the scene was not inevitable. It has taken a lot of work by a lot of people. We would like to hear from others involved in CCOF during these early years, so that we may better plan for the future by acknowledging our past.

1970-73 The Rodale Years

The first certification of organic farms was conducted by Rodale Press' Organic Gardening and Farming Magazine (OGF). Floyd Allen, the West Coast editor for OGF oversaw the program, which was totally paid for by the magazine. OGF determined the certification standards and conducted lab tests for soil fertility and pesticide residues. The September, 1971 issue of the magazine listed 34 California farms including 11 in the Sacramento Valley, 6 in the Monterey Bay area, and 8 in the San Luis Obispo area.

In May of '72, OGF sponsored a national conference on organic farming in San Francisco. Discussions at this meeting spawned a marketing co-op known as the California Organic Farmers Association (COFA). By early '73 this group listed 47 members. COFA was limited to marketing and was set up to allocate votes based on financial investment, so Floyd Allen and others began organizing for a democratic, certification-based group.

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We are pleased to introduce the upgraded CCOF quarterly newsletter. We welcome feature articles on organic agriculture, science news, book reviews and most importantly, news from each of CCOF's diverse chapters. Most items should be no longer than 750 words but we will try to include all the material we receive depending upon space available. The deadline for the summer issue is July 1st.

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Backed by OGF, Floyd Allen held an organizational meeting in Morro Bay on February 24, 1973 to establish a California certification program. 90 people attended the meeting and decided to form a group called California Certified Organic Farmers! The 12-person organizing committee included Howard Beeman, Jr., David Katz, Homer Lundberg, and Barney Bricmont. 54 growers were signed up at the time of the meeting, growing to 81 by the end of March. With a lot of initial enthusiasm, CCOF began the real work of founding an organization.

1973-78 Getting Started (Slowly)

In May of '73, Bylaws and a ballot for election of officers was submitted to the membership. CCOF's first elected officers were Cal Slewing, President; Barney Bricmont, Vice-president; Helmit Klaver, Secretary; and David Hayes, Treasurer. Certification continued in 1973 under the auspices of OGF as CCOF organized its program, but in early '74 this support was withdrawn. Without the help of OGF, CCOF's development quickly stalled. In addition, growers were questioning the initial centralized structure of CCOF, desiring instead a regional set-up with locally elected officers. Growers began dropping out, and the certification program was left in limbo. After its third issue, the statewide CCOF Newsletter ceased production in late '74.

Cal Slewing resigned in February '75 and Barney Bricmont took over as CCOF President, a position he would hold for 10 more years. A meeting of CCOF's officers in April agreed that the organization must be decentralized to survive. After a statewide meeting failed to materialize, a Central Coast chapter was formed in the Monterey Bay area, but no other chapters were organized. Between 1975 and '78 CCOF essentially shrinks down to the Central Coast Chapter, although some other growers continue to use the Rodale logo with the CCOF name.

In the vacuum left by CCOF's retreat, two new groups were formed. California Organic Growers (COG) was a one-man certification show organized by a grower named Don Foote. At its peak in 1977, COG had about 30 growers. In the Santa Rosa area, a dozen organic farms created a marketing co-op called Farmers Organic Group (FOG). By 1979, COG had disappeared and FOG members had formed a North Coast Chapter of CCOF. The chapter met for the first time in January 1978 with 16 farms. Sy Weisman was elected Chapter Secretary, which he remained until 1987.

IN MEMORY
OF
RICHARD KOZLOW
January 21, 1948
February 3, 1988

1978-79 The Organic Food Act

At the suggestion of Jerry Brown's Department of Consumer Affairs, legislation was introduced in 1978 by Assemblyman Vic Fazio to define and regulate the production of organic foods. Upon reading the proposed legislation, Sy Weisman and Stuart Fishman (a San Francisco natural foods retailer) concluded that it would exclude virtually all of the growers using the term. CCOF became actively involved in rewriting the law, which took two years of meetings and revisions. The California organic industry began to take shape as a network of growers, processors, retailers, and wholesalers hooked up to discuss the legislation.

The bill got fierce opposition from a number of factions. The natural foods industry fought (successfully) to remove the term "natural" from any regulation. Health foods advocates fought the bill as too weak, and opposed any regulation by the state agencies. Despite the confusion, the bill finally passed with a two-year "sunset" clause. CCOF supported the final bill with some misgivings, waiting to see how it would work itself out.

1979-1980s Reorganization and Growth

As the Organic Law was being passed, CCOF's two chapters redrafted the statewide bylaws to reflect a decentralized structure and the new standards defined by the law. Total grower membership in 1979 reached 34 growers.

In 1981 the Mendocino Chapter was formed. In 1982 Yolo, Big Valley (Stockton area) and North Valley (Butte-Glenn counties) got organized. In 1984 Fresno-Tulare, South Coast (Santa Barbara) and Pacific Southwest (San Diego) were chartered. By 1985 CCOF included over 150 growers. In March 1985 Barney Bricmont stepped down and Warren Weber became President. Later that summer the first CCOF paid staff was hired and a regular office was established in Santa Cruz. The program grew to 250 growers in 1986 and reached over 300 in 1987, with 15 chapters statewide. 1987 also saw the publication of the first CCOF Certification Handbook/Materials List, and the first Farm Inspection Manual, as well as the first series of Farm Inspector Trainings. Today, CCOF has two fulltime and two part-time staff, serving nearly 400 growers and 350 supporting members. ■

CCOF STATE MEMBERSHIP MEETING HIGHLIGHTS 3/19/88, Stockton Ag Extension Auditorium.

Billed as the "Annual State Membership Meeting", the March 19th CCOF Board meeting was attended by about 60 people, nearly double the usual number. Chapter rep attendance was particularly good, with only two chapter reps (Inland Valley/L.A. and Kern) absent. The new Supporting Member Representative Diana Freidman was appointed to a Board seat at the start of the meeting by a vote of 10-1-0. Diana, who works at Veritable Vegetables in San Francisco, was the only nominee submitted for Supporting Member Rep for 1988. (See "Open letter to Supporting Members".)

The second item of business was an appeal to the Board of a State Certification Standards Committee decision concerning a farm's certification status. The appeal was heard in closed session; the Board unanimously voted to deny the appeal.

The next order of business was a resolution directing the Certification Standards Committee and staff to provide for conducting OCIA certifications on an optional basis to CCOF growers who qualify. (Growers applying for OCIA certification will be responsible for all additional costs and assessments involved. this motion passed 12-0-0).

The Board then voted to change CCOF's Articles Of Incorporation in order to continue with CCOF's application for 501C-3 tax status. CCOF must call itself a "Public Benefit Corporation" instead of a "Mutual Benefit Corporation"; the Board approved this change by a vote of 10-1-1.

The CCOF 1988 budget was approved unanimously, balanced at \$106,950 for the year. CCOF needs to raise an additional \$33,000 from outside the organization this year in order to balance the budget. (\$12,000 raised so far this year). Input from the membership is needed to design the "side dishes" to the main fundraising menu, which consists of Certification Program support, staff, and materials.

Guest speaker during the lunch break was Dr. Ken Farrell, University of California Vice President, Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Dr. Farrell indicated his support for increasing the level of funding of the UC Sustainable Agriculture Program to 1.5 million dollars in 1989. He also responded to questions from the floor.

Committee reports filled most of the afternoon agenda, beginning with the Certification Committee. Chair Jim

Meyer outlined the accomplishments to date, (5 inspector trainings completed; 50 new grower applications being processed so far; new certification forms and 'streamlined' process being implemented). Three goals for the Committee to address in 1988:

- 1) Creation of an RFP for a CCOF analytical testing program which will be distributed to various labs.
- 2) Continued work towards establishing a scientific basis for all certification standards, e.g., establishing a rationale for longer transition periods based on specific circumstances, and more case-by-case analysis of materials for agronomic value, rather than whether they are simply allowed under the state law.
- 3) Upgrading of the Materials List, including more brand name detail.
- 4) Development of oversight of wholesale/retail/processor use of seal. Complex issues facing the Certification Standards Committee, and more growers' participation needed.

Jim cautioned that the role of the chapter certification chair is very important, and needs to be taken very seriously; the right inspector needs to be assigned to each farm, based on knowledge of local situation, crops, practices, etc. We need combined efforts of the State Certification Committee, the chapter certification committee, and farm inspectors all fulfilling their part of the certification process to the best of their ability.

Legislative Committee chair John LaBoyteaux reviewed current issues, including the hiring of part-time lobbyists to represent our position on the state Apple Maggot program, and the Organic Farmer Tax Credit Bill, which was introduced by Norm Waters this month without consultation or recommendations of CCOF and/or organic farmers. The Board unanimously approved a resolution that a letter be sent to the maker of this bill (AB 4481), expressing that the CCOF Board does not favor this bill, but does wish to discuss other forms of legislation which would be beneficial to organic agriculture.

Marketing & Promotion Committee Chair Greg Knox reported on the successful introduction of CCOF organic produce into supermarkets during 1987, and outlined the projects that the Committee wants to work on in '88. These include: continued pres-

ence at events, such as tastings, conferences, farm tours, and conventions, including the Natural Foods Expo in Anaheim April 8-10; increased media and PR exposure and better identification of the CCOF seal; development of grower supplies and services such as CCOF twist-ties, box labels, and packaging with the CCOF name/logo; and development of Retailer Materials and regional networking with stores. The Retailers Seminar is to be held in the Fall this year. A membership solicitation letter to gourmet restaurants has also just been sent out.

Bylaws Committee Chair Patti LaBoyteaux explained that CCOF Statewide Bylaws must be changed to conform to California State Corporate requirements that all Board members of a 'membership organization' be elected by the entire membership, and that the Executive Committee must have at least two Board members on it. The Board unanimously voted to authorize Patti LaBoyteaux to be responsible for drafting Bylaws in consultation with legal counsel, with a budget of \$300 to be allocated from the 'legal expenses' budget line.

Mark Lipson reported that the Labor Policy Committee, formed at the last Board meeting, has not met yet. A letter from the California Institute for Rural Studies has been received in support of the California Action Network proposal that CCOF establish a labor policy as part of its Certification Program. Some calls and letters from our membership have been received as well, mainly against adopting a CCOF Labor Policy.

The Board discussed adopting the CAN proposal, but several reps said their members were opposed to adoption of a labor policy, or that they were opposed to including labor policy as a part of CCOF certification program requirements. A resolution stating that "CCOF expects its growers to comply with the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act, and all State and Federal regulations regarding employee protection and social insurance benefits," failed by a vote of 7-7-0. (Part of the opposition to this resolution was that the language came from outside CCOF, and it was felt that a statement needed to be developed from within the organization.) The Labor Policy Committee plans to meet and develop an acceptable way to say that CCOF growers believe that workers, and not just the land, have to be treated well. ■

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