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 handwagon 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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Backed by OGF, Floyd Allen held an organizational meeting at the Monterey 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 committee was established, which included Howard Beamen, Jr., David Katz, Homer Langdorn, and Barney Bricmont. 54 growers were signed up at the time of the meeting, growing to 81 by the end of the year. With a lot of initial enthusiasm, CCOF began the real work of founding an organization.

73-74 Getting Started (Slowly)

In May of '73, Bylaws and a ballot for electors were sent to the membership. CCOF's first elected officers were Cal Slewing, President; Barney Bricmont, Vice-president; Helmut Klaver, Secretary; and David Hayes, Treasurer. Certification continued in 1973 under the auspices of OGF as CCOF organized its program, but in early 1974 this support was withdrawn. Without the help of OGF, CCOF's development quickly stalled. In addition, growers felt the initial centralized structure of CCOF, desiring instead a regional setup with locally elected officers. Growers were beginning to drop out, and the certification program was left in limbo. After this third issue, the statewide CCOF Newsletter ceased production in late 1974.

1978-79 Reorganization and Growth

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

In the Mendocino Chapter was formed. In 1982 Yolo, Big Valley (Stockton area) and North Valley (Butte County) growers got organized. In 1984 Fresno-Tulare, South Coast (Santa Barbara) and Pacific Southwest (San Diego) chapters were charted. In all 1985 CCOF included over 150 growers. In March 1985 Barney Bricmont stepped down as President. Waiting that last summer the CCOF paid staff was hired and a regular office was established in Healdsburg Santa Cruz. The program grew to 250 growers in 1986 and reached over 300 in 1987, with 15 counties. A report of the CCOF Certification Handbook/ Materials and the first Farm Inspection Manual, as well as the first series of Food Inspector Trainings. Today, CCOF employs 15 inspectors part-time staff, serving nearly 400 growers and 350 supporting members.

Cal Slewing resigned in February '75 and Barney Bricmont took over as CCOF President; a position he would hold for 6 years. A meeting of CCOF's officers in April agreed that the organization must be decentralized to allow a total of 350 growers. In May, the Bricmont group moved to the center of the Valley. A second chapter was formed, as well as several smaller chapters. Growers were surveyed and decided to move the regional logo with the CCOF symbol.

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 Organic Farmers 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. By 1987 it was organized and supporting members, which remained by the same size until 1987.

Billed as the "Annual State Membership Meeting", the March 19th CCOF Board meeting was attended by over 60 people, nearly double the usual number. Chapter rep attendance was particularly high, with over 10 chapter reps (Inland Valley/L.A. and Kern) present. The new Supporting Member Representative, Fred Mendenhall, was appointed to the Board seat at the start of the meeting by a vote of 10-0. The new board included all the regional representatives and was able to get the legislation passed.

The bill failed to pass the appeal to the Board of a State Certification Standards Committee decision concerning 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 for each of the 10 chapters to provide for conducting OCIA certification on an optional basis to CCOF growers, which was then reviewed for OCIA certification will be responsible for all additional costs and assess these involved. This motion passed 12-0.

The Board then voted to change CCOF's Bylaws in order to continue with CCOF's application for 501(c)3 tax status. CCOF must call itself "Public Benefit Corporation" instead of a "Public Benefit Corporation" the Board approved this change.

Legislative Committee Chair John LaBoyeaux reviewed current issues, including the hiring of public relations professionals to represent our position on the state Apple Maggot program, and the Organic Farm Tax Credit Bill, which was introduced by Norm Waters this month without consultation or recommendations of CCOF and/or other organic farmers. The Board unanimously approved accepting a resolution that a letter be sent to the maker of this bill (Bill # 448) expressing that the CCOF Board does not favor this bill, but does not discuss other forms of legislation which would be beneficial to organic agriculture.

Marketing & Promotion Committee Chair Greg Knox reported on the successful introduction of organic produce into supermarkets in 1987, and outlined the projects that the Committee wants to work on in '88. These include: continued presen- tation at events, such as tastings, conferences, and legislatures, including the National Foods Expo in Anaheim April 8-10, increased media coverage of the Branding effort, identification of the CCOF seal, development of grower supplies and services such as the’88体kit, the mandatory packaging with the CCOF name/logo; and development of Retailer Materials including a伤亡 kit. The Retailers Seminar is to be held in the fall this year. A membership kit and circle of support for restaurants has also just been sent out.

Bylaws Committee Chair Patti LaBoyeaux explained that CCOF Statewide Bylaws must be changed to conform to California State Corporate Code. The last membership meeting 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 support a letter to a person to be responsible for drafting Bylaws in consultation with legal counsel, with a maximum of $300 to be allocated from the "legal expenses" budget line.

Mark Lipson reported that the Laboratory Policy Committee, formed at the last Board meeting, has not met yet. A letter to California Institute for Rural Studies has been sent in support of the California Action Network proposal that CCOF establish a laboratory 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 the proposal, or that they were opposed to including labor policy as a part of CCOF certification program. The question of "CCOF expects its growers to comply with the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act" was left open. The opposition to this resolution was that the language came from outside CCOF, and it was felt that no issues needed to be developed from within the organization. The Committee plans to meet and develop an acceptable way to say that CCOF growers believe that the labor, and not just the land, have to be treated well.