



# Michigan Organic Connections

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## A Message from the Chair

Hello again! We had close to a 40°F morning low today, September 1st. I also saw some mention on Facebook of an early frost in parts of the UP that nipped some cucurbits? Little reminders along with the arrival of this edition of MOFFA Organic Connections that we are transitioning to a new season.

I hope it has been as productive and enjoyable summer season for you and your farm as it has been for our family. Despite the unanticipated harvests by four-legged and winged community members, we have enjoyed a bounty of berries, vegetables, herbs and flowers. I know the pears started dropping off the trees this week so we need to get out there. After two years of having much reduced garden and growing activity due to house renovations, I have been energized by more time spent doing garden and greenhouse renovation and growing. I have also had the great pleasure of having my sister who recently retired from 40+ years of elementary education, half as a school principal, being with my wife and me the last eight weeks. It has been a daily gift of seeing someone who loves to garden, cook, eat vegetables and make bouquets



of flowers finally get the time to do all these things and to enjoy our garden bounty.

Our efforts here at home at planting, harvesting, processing and storing are minor compared to the effort and energy that many of you are investing each day through the farm season. My recent efforts at MSU to learn about marketing our worm compost also reminds me of all the effort and energy that goes into managing farm stands, farmer's markets, CSA programs and wholesale accounts. Are you being told "THANK YOU!" often enough for all you do to provide people with healthy food and being a steward of our land and natural community? For those who are not farming or producing, do you take the time to profusely and enthusiastically thank those who are? We can't remind each other often enough about the daily practice of an "attitude of gratitude" and saying "THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!" for all we have.

*New Board of Directors Members.* Please welcome Jessie Smith and Collin Thompson to the MOFFA Board. We are honored to have two very hard working representatives of the next generation of organic farmers and educators to help keep MOFFA grow-



Jessie Smith



Collin Thompson

ing. Their background and information have been added to our web page: [www.moffa.net/board.html](http://www.moffa.net/board.html).

*Speaking of the Web Page.* Have you visited [moffa.net](http://moffa.net) recently? The [educational information](#), [organic resources](#), and [policy updates](#) are up to date and full of information. The electronic version of the [Farm Guide](#) is a valuable

tool for identifying Michigan's organic and ecological farms. Is your farm [listed](#) yet? It needs to be. We want to keep the list growing and up to date.

*A New Season of Educational Opportunities.*

- The [Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Expo](#), December 5 through 7 in Grand Rapids. A detailed description of the organic offerings follows below.
- Organic Intensives are MOVING! Hold Saturday, January 6 as a key date to start your new year off with your farming colleagues. Three sessions are being developed and it may be difficult to choose which one to attend. So invite a friend or family member to attend the others so you can share information. This is a signature MOFFA educational event developed by members of the Board of Directors. With the help of our sponsors the Organic Intensives program is a great bargain. I hope to see you there.

*NOSB Meeting in Jacksonville FL.* It looks like I will be attending the fall NOSB meeting and participating in a rally planned to protect the organic tradition and methods from the organic hydroponic and other efforts to reduce the meaning of organic agriculture. The "[Keep the Soil in Organic](#)" movement is pulling together many of the voices of organic farming in one more effort to help the USDA remember or see just what organic farming is supposed to be about.

*Fall Meeting at Kalamazoo College.* One of our Board of Directors meetings this fall, tentatively set for October 24, will be held in Southwest Michigan. Please let us know if you would like to attend.

*Dr. John Biernbaum is Professor of Horticulture at MSU, one of the founders of the MSU Student Organic Farm, and recently-elected Chair of MOFFA's Board of Directors.*

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## Improving Soil and Plant Health Benefits Transitioning and Conventional Blueberry Growers

by Dane Terrill

This summer I've had the benefit of consulting with various blueberry farms across the country, and a few right here in on the west coast of Michigan. Many of these are currently being farmed by second and third generations. Certified organic blueberry production comprises less than 1% of the 23,000 acres of blueberries in Michigan. However, as with many cropping systems, more and more farmers are

seeking alternative management programs to focus on soil and plant Health. In my opinion, this is a critical step forward in any production system and paramount in having a successful transition to organic production. The two farms outlined below will highlight some of the benefits of focusing on soil and plant health.

Bluegold Blueberry Farm, located in Grand Junction, is farmed by John and Mary Ann Smith. They are second-generation blueberry farmers who still farm some acreage that was planted by John's father nearly 70 years ago. Conventional practice using chemical pesticides and fertilizers was the program



used through 2014. Starting in 2015 they chose to change how they were farming their land and wanted to focus on more sustainable growing paradigms. Some of the practices they have implemented would be considered by some to not have merit or

be known as "snake oil", but regardless of who judges their practices (and many do), the results they have witnessed speak volumes. John and Maryann decided to transition their entire farm to organic based on the progress made in those two years in terms of plant health, fruit quality and soil health.

The first step in rebuilding soil health involved soil testing and applying those minerals to bring the deficiencies closer to desired levels. In addition, a combination of compost teas and packaged "Minerals and Microbes" products were applied to the soil to get the biological system functioning. The applications of these biological inoculums continued on the plant as foliar applications through harvest until leaf drop. (NOTE: The marketing group Bluegold belongs to does not allow teas to be applied 45 days prior to harvest, so packaged "Minerals and Microbes" products were substituted for the compost teas during those times.) Inoculating the soil and the leaves of the plant with beneficial microbes is one way to improve soil and plant health. Specific minerals were added at critical times to supplement the plant needs according to the stage of growth. By harvest time they started seeing signs the process was working, including reduced fungal problems, dramatically higher yields, and better-quality berries.

Starting in the Spring of 2016 a similar program was followed with the application of minerals, followed by weekly applications of vermicompost teas and packaged products. Each soil and foliar application

included biological fungicides in the mix in hopes of eliminating the need for chemical fungicides. Field monitoring showed very little disease pressures, so they continued the weekly process. SAP Analysis testing was implemented to monitor nutrient levels in the plant, and Saturated Paste testing to monitor soluble soil nutrients rounded out the in-season testing programs. Foliar applications of deficient minerals were added as needed and monitored through subsequent analyses to assure plant uptake. Throughout the season, John and Maryann continued to see visible improvements in plant health and vigor. By harvest time, it was clear the program was benefiting the farm ... and most importantly the bottom line. Eliminating chemical fungicide treatments is a huge cost savings in blueberry production and while their results weren't perfect, John claimed, "There were neighboring farms that had worse fungal pressures than we did ... and they were using the chemical treatments."

Fast forward to 2017, John and Maryann decided to transition their entire farm to Organic. Using the program that had produced results in the past was the basis to move forward. However, the next big hurdle in blueberry production is controlling the insect Spotted Wing Drosophila (SWD). The control of this fruit fly is a challenge in conventional production let alone Certified Organic Production. John stated, "We were nervous about SWD with the lack of controls in organic production, but the system we put in place kept the counts in the traps (monitored by Michigan Blueberry Growers (MBG) crop scouts) as low as fields with chemical insecticides. Additionally during harvest we didn't have any loads rejected because of SWD at inspection! Pinpointing the exact reason for the control cannot be narrowed down to one or two items; for the past three years we have changed our entire program to focus on building soil and plant health. Our soil and plants are healthier and I feel they just don't attract the insects like they used to. We also applied the organically accepted "insecticides" and used some biologicals added to each foliar application. We have implemented weekly Brix testing, SAP Analysis, and simply pay closer attention to the details on our farm."

Not everything this year was picture perfect at Bluegold including the weather. There were some soft fruit issues and some sizing problems in certain varieties but that seemed to be common among many farms in the area. Overall, John and Maryann are very happy with their progress in their first year of transition. The farm is pesticide free which allowed them to market some of their fruit into the European Union program. This program paid them



a flat rate per acre for being pesticide free and a slight per pound increase for their harvest.

Groenhof Farms, owned and operated by Jeff and Joy Groenhof and their son Joe is situated in Holland, MI. Their goal in 2017 was not necessarily transitioning to "Organic" but rather building soil and plant health to reduce inputs. Utilizing similar concepts as Bluegold farm, they set out on a quest to do just that.

The Groenhofs used packaged biological products to improve their biological system as opposed to using the compost teas. Starting in the Spring, these products were applied to the soil banded on each side of the plant row. Three applications were applied with microbial activators (liquid fish, kelp, sugar and carbon). These activators are used to fortify the microbes. In most blueberry fields organic matter levels are extremely low (<2%) leaving these microbes very little to use as food. These additives are what fortifies the microbes until they are established in the soil around the roots where the plant can feed them through exudates. These were the only soil applications, the rest of the applications were directly to the plant (foliar). Like Bluegold, once leaves developed they monitored nutrient levels using SAP analysis every 2-3 weeks. Plants were "fed" accordingly during the season adding the microbes every two weeks as well as food sources (fulvic, kelp and sugar). Brix levels were monitored on a weekly basis on three different varieties, and recorded to track "trends". Of special note was a drop in Brix levels almost every time a fungicide or insecticide was applied. From fruit set to coloring they were excited about what they were observing. Through SAP results they were able to fine tune their fertility application to what the plant needed. They were able to cut back from the usual 65-105

lbs of Ammonium Sulfate down to 20 lbs. The crop scouts, consultants and area farmers who visited the farm noted magnificent new growth on the bushes despite the reduction in Nitrogen. Berry sizing and quality were good to great from first harvest until last picking which is happening at the time of writing.



Jeff considered 2017 to be one of his heaviest crops in all varieties.

Soil Health is one of those buzz-words today talked about in all types of agriculture. Growers from different growing paradigms—conventional, biological, sustainable and

organic on a variety of crops—are recognizing the benefits of focusing on soil and plant health. Increased crop yields and quality, reduced disease and insect pressures, better soil tilth and water holding capacity are common results among those growers utilizing these techniques. There is not a perfect testing system to assess soil and/or plant health, however there are tools, techniques and testing that can gauge progress. Ultimately, you the farmer will be the best gauge.

*Dane Terrill is Director of Sales and Marketing at Crop Services International and Flowerfield Enterprises. He has served on the MOFFA Board of Directors since 2012 and has served as Treasurer since December, 2015.*

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## An Interview With Philip H. Howard — Part I

by Leah and Jessie Smith

In early May, we were able to conduct a phone interview with Dr. Philip H. Howard, author of [Concentration and Power in the Food System: Who Controls What We Eat?](#) We asked questions about some of the items from his book that we found of greatest interest to us, and left us wanting to know more. We reported on the first part of the interview in the [May newsletter](#).

The following questions, with Dr. Howard's comments, touch on deskilling, agricultural subsidies, checkoff programs, and the outlawing of heritage

swine in Michigan. The questions pick up after an exchange about food deserts.

JS: That would also tie into deskilling, where there's a lack of fresh food for people and food is just brought to them already prepared. That reinforces the deskilling of that population of the people. When did this deskilling really start to take hold?

PH: I guess you could say after the Civil War. There was clearly deskilling going on. That was when there was a big transformation in flour milling. Flour milling became much more industrial with rolling

mills. It resulted in white flour, which was less perishable and could be transported much further. There was a big loss of local flour mills and more nutritious forms of flour. Also, there were industrial bakeries coming into existence, so there was kind of a shift away from baking bread at home to buying bread in a store. That process has just continued to more and more commodities. Similarly, after the Civil War, there were technologies like rail transport and refrigeration that enabled breweries to become bigger. There was a loss of smaller breweries and a loss of skills of how to brew your own beer. In the book, I talk about how the government enforced that deskilling after Prohibition. But something like bread, such a key food for so many people; bread is called "the staff of life." It's the word that means food in a lot of languages. So there's been kind of a resurgence. People are interested in making bread again and using stone ground flour, etc. But my guess is there is still a majority of the population that doesn't have a lot of skill in making bread.

JS: Do you think it is going to become important to re-teach these skills to people, in terms of keeping our food system sustainable?

PH: It is hard to predict how many problems we are going to have. One of the things I have written about with bread is that we have lost a lot of diversity in the wheat we plant. Most of the wheat that is planted is all very similar, just a handful of varieties geared towards the industrial process. There has been a small resurgence of interest, people interested in ancient heritage grains. There have been epidemics that have affected wheat, particularly when it is planted in these in huge monocultures. It would probably be a better strategy to have a more diverse supply of wheat, to be able to not be so dependent on the two bakeries that sell over half of the bread to this country. That has allowed them to increase the price of bread pretty dramatically. Maybe we will get to the point where the price itself will encourage more people to bake their own bread, just as they began planting their own gardens back when the price of oil was so high that the price of food was going up.

JS: And we have moved forward from them grinding our flour for us to them wrapping up our cookies for us. Now we can't even be relied upon to know how much to eat.

PH: Yes. Hormel has been very successful, actually. I forget what they're called, but there are these single serve flatbreads (and meat and cheese), and they really market them to teenagers because teenagers are apparently incapable of just putting together a sandwich these days.

JS: Government seems to be involved in these topics quite often, or rather lobbies and the people behind the government. And agricultural subsidies, too. Well, I think we're seeing it now that possibly a more fiscally conservative government may cut funding towards agriculture. I don't know if they are going to be cutting subsidies, though. Do you think that since insurance companies are now so deeply tied into the subsidies that they (the subsidies) are probably in for good?

PH: I am not very good at predicting the future, but I have been surprised at just how resilient subsidies have been in the face of global trade agreements. There have been many parts of the world, coalitions, the governments of New Zealand and Australia, for example, that have argued that it's unfair for the U.S. to have these subsidies. There hasn't been enough political power to get rid of these subsidies. They are being constantly transformed, and we are in a situation now where insurance companies are making a lot of money off of subsidies. But it is really hard to say what is going to happen in the future.

JS: Can you say anything more about why they are so embedded?

PH: Well, the rationale for when they were established was that they were actually beneficial to small farmers of the time, to have more stable supply, more stable prices. But just like everything, more politically powerful groups have been able to gear policies to their benefit. Even though we have fewer and fewer farmers in the United States, processors and the suppliers who benefit from these subsidies have managed to work hard behind the scenes to make sure that they stay in place. Particularly in my book I look at this, probably in the most detail, in the dairy industry. How the dairy processors are able to maintain subsidies to benefit them. And others (subsidies), those that may particularly benefit small producers, those are more easily undone. I guess it is very hard to... rather, if you look at it in other countries, if you look in the E.U., they actually spend much more on subsidies than the U.S. But it's under a different guise, it's to protect greenspace and rural areas and so on. Other parts of the world where the direct subsidies have been undone, that doesn't mean there aren't a lot of indirect and other subsidies that also help large scale producers and processors to get bigger.

JS: Reading your book, there were some specific things that we weren't aware of ourselves, though of course we haven't researched into it. But we wondered, how long has California lettuce been supported by the government?

PH: Well, government subsidies for irrigation started in the late 1800s. Initially there was a lot of rhetoric about helping family farmers, but it's the same story. The larger, more politically powerful people geared policies in their interest and now they are the ones who benefit most from this very low market irrigation water.

JS: So this is a long story, it's been going on for quite a number of years and has culminated into what it is today.

PH: Yes.

JS: Your information about the heritage swine in Michigan caught my eye, too. How did that come about? Why Michigan? Why was attention focused here? Has anything similar happened in other states?

PH: That is a good question. As far as I know there haven't been similar policies in other states, which is interesting because the damage from feral pigs is higher in other states, particularly the farther south you go. I think it's a really fascinating case, particularly if you look at how much state resources were used to go after a few farmers who resisted this policy, like Mark Baker. If they failed at some levels they went after him in other ways, like making sure he couldn't sell to local restaurants and couldn't find a local processor to process his meat.

JS: What was the driving force behind that? Government mostly, or was it the pork industry trying to put roadblocks up for him?

PH: Well, I think it is important to recognize that the boundaries between government and industry are pretty blurry, not just a revolving door. People leave industry and work for government and vice versa. But people in industries and the agencies that are supposed to regulate them have similar world views, and shared interests. So together they made a case that heritage breeds of pork were going to be a problem for the Department of Natural Resources. And they were able to convince them to come up with a policy with not a lot of scientific justification, and they tried to send a message to anybody that didn't comply with this policy. I think that this was one of those cases where information spread so rapidly that it backfired a little bit by raising awareness about the problem of such close connections between government and industry. David Gumpert is a journalist who covered this issue really extensively. He has a great blog. He has written books on this issue. He also talks about raw milk. There are other issues. Seed libraries and government's excessive response to those. It is

helping people to realize... food is something everyone can relate to. The ability to make your own choices about food. So when the government so clearly represents the interests of big business, it helps people become more aware of those tight connections.

*[Note: Since this interview was conducted, further developments have occurred regarding heritage swine in Michigan. We emailed Dr. Howard for clarification on these developments. His response was that the DNR has taken the step of clarifying exactly what breeds of swine have been outlawed due to the Invasive Species Order. Previously regarded by many as vague and, therefore, hard to understand, it has now been clearly established that the ISO does not mean it is illegal to own heritage and/or non-confinement swine in Michigan. Only Russian boars and their hybrids are outlawed by this order.]*

JS: I am looking at our question with regard to the meat industry. Is there still this lack of enforcement of the antitrust laws, are they still being dismantled? Has there been any increase in the awareness of this or a push back to reenforcement yet?

PH: Well, there have been efforts for sure. In my book, I mentioned that the Obama administration appointed some very reform-minded people at high levels, in the U.S.D.A. and Department of Justice. They held joint hearings on the issues of concentration in agriculture, and absolutely nothing came of that. Those reformers were either forced out or resigned in a few years. What it showed was that even when you have people in government who are sympathetic to reforms, they may not have the power to do so. They are going up against the power of big industry. You could go into a lot of wonky details around the antitrust issues, issues that are still ongoing. The poultry producers have complained in just the last few days. What's interesting about the meat industry is that it has become so vocal. You have the largest meat processors in the U.S., one is now a Chinese-based corporation, the other is Brazilian. Of course, people have heard a lot about issues with food safety in China. There have also been issues with Brazil, a number of countries banning the importing of meat from Brazil because of concerns about adulteration. If you know the book *The Jungle*, not much has changed. We still have a few companies that are very powerful and willing to cut corners, and put people's health at risk as a result. Some of these takeovers of U.S. firms were opposed by some people in Congress, but they were ineffective against regulatory agencies and using antitrust laws to stop them. I think in the current policy that is just

going to continue. We have the pesticide companies that are going from three U.S. firms to just one, if all the proposed changes happen. We are going to have a very global system, still just controlled by a few firms, but they are going to be headquartered in Europe, China, and Brazil.

JS: I wonder if we are going to be able to maintain our separate food system outside the main food system, which sounds like it will be developing globally.

PH: Yes. Examples we talked about illustrate that there are a lot of challenges for maintaining a local food system. Regulations, the lack of subsidies, the subsidies that make the industrial food system artificially cheap. But still there are people who are interested not just in the simple issue of quality, but all those other values we were talking about: the treatment of workers, the treatment of animals. People are helping to maintain and helping to grow local and alternate systems. I always hold up craft brewing as the best example. They are something like 20% of beer sales now.

JS: Yes, you would hope that people who are looking for it would be able to keep that system alive. My sister particularly wanted you to talk about this question. When the antitrust laws came out in the 1920s, someone must have known what was going on. Was it the writers and reporters who got people at large involved so that there was more of an outcry for these antitrust laws to be formed?

PH: Well, it actually goes back to the 1880s' Populist Movement. It was farmers; it was very visible to them they being exploited by the railroad companies, the meat packers, and so on. They were the ones that were asking for antitrust legislation. When the first one was passed in the late 1800s it was in Canada, a few years before the United States. There were more farmers then, and they had coalitions with politically powerful groups by the 1920s and 30s. But then it also became more Reformist, so the demands they were making were not radical compared to the changes the Populists were making. When you get into policy it becomes very complicated very quickly, but some of these antitrust acts actually had the effect of reinforcing the power of the big firms behind the scenes. Firms would gear legislation that way. For example, some regulation just presented more barriers to smaller-scale firms. I mentioned that it's been a little surprising to me that Cottage Food Laws have been passed in a number of states. It's just one of those examples where it's (the law) actually helping people who are at a smaller scale,

but really it is at a really tiny scale. Once you reach a really low number of sales, then you become subject to expenses.

JS: I had a question about the checkoff programs. It took off with pork and beef in '85, but had it begun earlier than that? Everything else we have talked about has gone back to the 1880s. Are the checkoff program more recent than that?

PH: I think they originally started in the 1930s, and they were voluntary. That's where their name checkoff comes from. A farmer could check off a box if they wanted to voluntarily contribute to research and promotion of the generic product. But in the 80s, some of them became mandatory. Beef and pork, for example; there is no option out. If you sell hogs or beef you have to pay the fees. That was when there was a lot of resistance. Also, by that point it was very clear the funds were being used in a way that benefited the largest players. I like that phrase the pork producers used, that they were, "Paying for their own demise." It was just like taxation without representation. So they fought these battles with the F.D.A. and in the courts. The mushroom growers were successful in undoing their checkoff. The pork producers had several victories, but votes were undone by the U.S.D.A. and by executive orders when President W. was in the White House. That's the one that I followed the most closely because I was in grad school in the late 90s and traveled to D.C. with the pork producers. I learned the U.S.D.A. has done all kinds of things to maintain these checkoffs, like holding votes on whether or not to keep them at times when it is very difficult for pork producers to take part and not doing a very good job of getting the word out on these votes, and so on and so forth.

JS: Sounds manipulative.

PH: Yes.

After thanking Dr. Howard for his time, we found we had even more to reflect on than when we had finished his book. Not much of it "happy" news, but a lot of it galvanizing.

*Jessie and Leah Smith are sisters, co-writers and MOFFA members, as well as Michigan State alumnae. They work at Nodding Thistle, their family's farm, which has a history of organic gardening and farm marketing since 1984. They are working to make agricultural writing a part of their way of life..*

## Harvest Fest Celebration: The Past, Present, and Future of Organic Farming in Michigan

Join us at [Tillers' Harvest Fest](#) on September 24 to celebrate MOFFA's 25th anniversary and the publication of [The Organic Movement in Michigan](#), which details the history of organic in Michigan from the gardening clubs of the 1940s and 1950s through the formation of Organic Growers of Michigan (OGM) in the early 1970s, the founding of MOFFA in 1992, and the work done across these decades and today by individuals, institutions, and organizations to create farming systems that provide healthy food and a sustainable quality of life for both growers and eaters.



Co-editor of the book and founding member of both OGM and MOFFA Maynard Kaufman will talk about the rich history of Michigan's organic movement, followed by a panel discussion with current MOFFA board members about present issues and future possibilities for organic food and farming in Michigan. Bring your questions, your concerns, and your visions. Learn how far we've come and how you can be involved in shaping the future of our organic movement!

[Tillers International](#) is located in [Scotts](#), Michigan, just east of Kalamazoo. For more information about and directions to Harvest Fest, visit <http://tillersinternational.org/event/harvest-fest/>.

## Buy Vegetable Varieties That Are OSSI-Pledged!

by Leah and Jessie Smith

Many of you have probably heard of the [Open Source Seed Initiative](#) (OSSI) and consider it of great importance, especially in the face of even greater challenges to sustainable farming than were perhaps anticipated, thanks to the current political landscape. Our family, who sells produce at farmers' markets, hopes to spread the word to individuals who may not yet have heard of this effort. To this end, we have printed flyers to distribute and are highlighting OSSI



**open source  
seed initiative**

varieties in our  
weekly news-  
letter. We  
encourage

anyone who reads this to do the same. If you have an audience, make use of it. The cause is an important one. The following is a copy of the information as it appears on our flyer.

into the hands of a few companies, it is becoming increasingly important for there to be non-hybrid seed alternatives to many of the common varieties. Have you seen the statement on a packet of Big Beef tomato seeds saying that by opening the package you agree not to save seed from the plants you will raise? This means everyone, even the low-scale, non-commercial, backyard gardener. As multinational seed/chemical companies claim intellectual property protections for naturally occurring genes, it is becoming more and more important to use, protect, and proliferate the number of open-pollinated and heirloom seed varieties in use. The Open Source Seed Initiative is a step in this direction.

OSSI stands for Open Source Seed Initiative. The OSSI is a combined effort of farmer-breeders, academics, and other concerned citizens to keep as many seed varieties as possible in the public domain. When a seed variety is OSSI-pledged, it means that all involved breeders, seed companies

With the recent consolidations in the seed industry, and the consequent concentration of seed varieties



and purchasers of said variety agree to The Four Seed Freedoms in any transfer of these seeds in the future. These freedoms are:

- The freedom to save or grow seed for replanting or for any other purpose.
- The freedom to share, trade or sell seed to others.
- The freedom to trial and study seed and to share or publish information about it.
- The freedom to select or adapt the seed, many crosses with it or use it to breed new lines and varieties.

The following are OSSI-pledged varieties of produce that we are growing this year. We encourage you to buy these varieties, ask other vendors about their OSSI-pledged produce varieties, and to seek out the seeds to plant in your own gardens. You can start with the watermelon, winter squash, and tomato seeds from our crops if you like!

King Sieg Leek  
 Blacktail Mountain Watermelon  
 Pink Princess Gene Pool Cherry Tomato  
 Solstice Broccoli  
 Top Hat Yellow Sweet Corn  
 Redventure Celery  
 Uncle David's Dakota Dessert Winter Squash

Remember that when you use OSSI-pledged seed for seed saving or breeding, your new seed continues to be subject to The Four Seed Freedoms. You are a part of the open source seed saving cycle!

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For more information on the OSSI, visit: [osseeds.org/](http://osseeds.org/). For more information on the consolidation of the seed industry, see [msu.edu/~howardp/seedindustry.pdf](http://msu.edu/~howardp/seedindustry.pdf).



My (Leah's) fondness for poetry and rhymes led me to construct the following parody of the nursery rhyme "For Want of a Nail." This nursery rhyme has been used for centuries to show how dire situations can be avoided by small, thoughtful deeds. To encourage individuals to think carefully about their actions and consider all possible consequences.

#### ***For Want of a Seed***

*For want of a seed the plant was lost.  
 For want of a plant the harvest was lost.  
 For want of a harvest the homestead was lost.  
 For want of a homestead the farmer was lost.  
 For want of a farmer the future was lost.  
 And all for want of an OSSI seed!.*

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## **Food, Farm, and Garden Funding**

A new book, *Food, Farm and Garden Funding: 300+ Grants, Scholarships and More in the U.S. and Canada* has been published by Michigan author and grant writer Pamela Burke. With this book you can search among 300+ potential funding sources for community and school gardens, farm markets, value added products, hubs, best practice education and more. Bonus sections include information about writing a grant, technical assistance providers, and other fundraising methods. Available from amazon.com, or purchase from the author at \$25 each (includes shipping/handling) by sending check payable to Pamela Burke, PO Box 291, Remus, MI 49340 (put # of copies and name of book in memo).

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## **Join Us at the Great Lakes Fruit and Veggie Expo — December 5th to 7<sup>th</sup>**

By Vicki Morrone

The [Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Expo](#) is a wonderful educational program for fruit and vegetable farmers that offers great networking and a huge trade show that includes representatives and displays offered by seed companies, equipment vendors, farmers market suppliers and many service organizations. The program is held at the DeVos Center in Grand Rapids, MI, starting on Tuesday,

December 5 and ends on December 7, Thursday. There will be a wide range of topics on specific crops such as carrots and squash but there are also sessions that focus on hoophouse production, farmers market management, and a variety of programs on food safety including GAP certification information. There are at least seven sessions this year with organic farming related topics.

On Wednesday morning (9 to 11) there will be the high tunnel session (9 to 11). A new addition to the organic session lineup is the Large scale Organic Transition session that will also be held Wednesday morning (9-11). In the afternoon (2 to 4) is the always popular soil health session.

- The high tunnel session will have three farmers each with a different crop focus.
- The organic transition session will include certification, weed management and fertility strategies and process recommendations from an experienced organic farmer.
- The soil health session will have four presenters covering microbial products, nematode community survey results, reduced tillage, cover crops, biochar and overall soil health strategies.

On Thursday, there will be two sessions in the morning and two in the afternoon.

- The first morning session will cover topics that include transitioning to organic, transplants, permanent beds and organic certification.

- The second session will have detailed farm reports from Zilke Vegetable Farm and Spirit of Walloon Market Garden.
- In the afternoon (1 to 4) the organic vegetable session will include squash research updates, grafting for vegetable transplants and small scale post-harvest.
- There will also be an organic fruit session.

Also note the trade show is phenomenal. The trade show has something for everyone, as well as the opportunity to ask those management questions about the utility of a tool or input. But do note that it closes down at 1pm on Thursday so plan accordingly so you are not disappointed.

Watch for details of the sessions offered at [www.glexpo.com](http://www.glexpo.com) and [www.moffa.net/](http://www.moffa.net/).

*Vicki Morrone is organic field crop and vegetable outreach specialist with the Center for Regional Food Systems at MSU, and has been a MOFFA board member since 2009.*

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## Organic Intensives 2018—New Date and Location

After three years of Organic Intensives held at MSU's Brody Hall during ANR Week, the Board of Directors has decided on a new day of the week, time of the year and location for this key event. The 2018 Organic Intensives will be on Saturday, January 6th, at the MSU Plant and Soil Sciences Building. Based on a variety of factors, we think the Saturday early in the year will be more accessible to participants. This move in location will also allow us to use a local caterer for the day's food options. We will use multiple classrooms and the greenhouse conservatory for lunch.

Three in-depth sessions are being developed:



Diverse Grain Options for Farms and Homesteads. Local and organic grains, particularly from heritage seed sources, are gaining in popularity. Reasons include diversifying crop rotations and farm income, improving local diets and food security,

developing local sources of non-gmo seeds, and supporting Michigan's craft beer industry. Crops include oats, barley, wheat, spelt, sorghum and even rice. We are bringing together key seed providers,

farmers and researchers with the intention of growing this important movement. Information will be provided for both small plot homestead production for family use and farm scale production for local marketing.



Small to Medium Scale Livestock for the Integrated Farm. Integrating crops and livestock is a key opportunity for developing soil and farm health, as well as being an important component of a diversified financially successful farm.

But where do you start and how do you develop strategies that incorporate respect for animal health and welfare? How do you develop animal husbandry systems that truly help the farm ecology and economics and improve the quality of life of the farmers? Topics to be covered include animal nutrition, humane care, thoughtful integration of animals into your existing farm operation, and common livestock problems and how to solve them. Featuring presentations and recommendations from nationally recognized as well as locally experienced organic livestock farmers.



Secure a Successful Season with Succession Starts (Transplant Production). To get the desired vegetable, flower and herb varieties at the times needed and raised with organic methods, most farmers and gardeners need to start their own transplants. This workshop will include

information about making important decisions about ordering seeds, making or selecting root media and growing containers, water and fertility management, using indoor lighting systems and greenhouses, selecting temperatures and managing pests and diseases. How to market transplants throughout the year as an additional income stream will also be covered.

Details and presenter information will be available soon at [www.moffa.net/oi-2018.html](http://www.moffa.net/oi-2018.html).

## Changes to the Organic Certification Cost Share Program

Beginning this fall, organic farmers and ranchers will need to visit their local U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) office in order to apply for cost share reimbursement through the Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP). This represents a change from prior years.

Eligible costs include application fees, inspection costs, fees related to equivalency agreement/arrangement requirements, travel/per diem for

inspectors, user fees, sales assessments and postage. Ineligible costs include equipment, materials, supplies, transitional certification fees, late fees and inspections necessary to address National Organic Program regulatory violations.



To learn more about organic certification cost share, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/organic](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/organic) or contact a local FSA office by visiting <http://offices.usda.gov>.

## Crop Insurance Survey

The nonprofit [National Center for Appropriate Technology](http://www.nccat.org) is surveying U.S. specialty crop and organic growers to see why they do or don't have crop insurance. NCAT offers growers \$20 (while funds last) to take the confidential 20-minute survey.

## Policy Update

by Julia Christianson

As John Biernbaum mentioned in his Message from the Chair, he is planning to attend the fall NOSB meeting in Jacksonville, Florida, at the end of October. The NOSB is scheduled to take up, for the third time, the recommendations of the Hydroponic Task Force, of which John was a member. Information on the fall meeting, and how to submit public comments, is available on the [USDA website](http://www.usda.gov).

Congress continues to hold hearings around the 2018 Farm Bill. A good source of continuing information about the farm bill is the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. The [Policy page](#) on MOFFA's website has a [notice](#) about their early coverage. I would encourage you to sign up for their email bulletins ... there's a form on the main page of their [website](#).

Earlier this summer, I read a [report](#) from Natural Grocers' Alan Lewis on a recent visit to Capitol Hill to discuss the upcoming Farm Bill with lawmakers. The paragraph I found shocking was this one:

*One of my Hill meetings was with a senior staffer for Senator Roberts who works on the Senate Agriculture Committee staff. The discussion was fairly normal until, towards the end, with my hand on the door knob, he stated that his people would be "reforming the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB)." Taken aback, I asked him what that meant. Rather than walking back the statement, he doubled down: he was going to put a stop to Cornucopia Institute's habit of using the NOSB for its fundraising by riling up consumers about the practices of*

*large scale industrial chicken, egg and dairy farms.*

[Cornucopia](#) has already documented the presence of corporate representatives on the NOSB in seats which were intended for farmers, and I believe we can see the results of this practice in the extended inaction of the board on issues like "organic hydroponic". If Congress does indeed change the makeup of the board to include more representatives of industrial agriculture, we may find ourselves again in the position so many of the organic pioneers found themselves in 20 years ago,

when they discovered that the reality of federal regulation of "organic" was not consistent with what they understood organic to be.

I encourage everyone, especially those who make their livelihood in the organic sector, to stay abreast of developments on the Farm Bill, and take every opportunity to make sure that your legislators know your views and are educated on the issues.

*Julia Christianson is the volunteer Chair of MOFFA's Policy Committee.*

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## MOFFA News

**Board** – We are pleased to announce two new members of MOFFA's Board of Directors, Collin Thompson and Jessie Smith, bringing the number of board members to 12. Both Jessie and Collin bring substantial experience with organic growing, and we look forward to their contribution. (See their pictures and a bit about them and the other members of the board at [www.moffa.net/board.html](http://www.moffa.net/board.html)).

**Newsletter** – We are very interested in featuring new voices in the newsletter. If you are interested in contributing, or if you have a suggestion about content or can recommend someone who would be interested in contributing, please [contact us](#). If you're not interested in writing an article, please consider contributing photos of your farm or your harvest; we're always looking for more illustrations.

**Membership** – (report on current stats) we have 121 members for 2017, which is 24 fewer than we had at this time last year ... and what's more disturbing, 41% of last year's members have not renewed their memberships. MOFFA relies on the support of its members. If you haven't already joined for 2017, please take a minute to join or renew online, or if you prefer you can download a membership form and send it along with your check to P.O. Box 26102, Lansing, MI 48909. If you're not sure whether you've renewed your membership for this year, [email us](#) and we'll be happy to let you know.