

Sustainability Council Annual Report | 2022

The Organic Trade Association's Sustainable Food Trade Action (SFTA) Council joined forces with two Organic Trade Association (OTA) Task Force groups to form the new OTA Sustainability Council in 2023. By the end of 2022, 92 companies had representatives on the Council!

The Sustainable Food Trade Association integrated with OTA in 2020 with the concept of a 1+1=3 consolidation. We incorporated their members into the SFTA Council, and the group met quarterly while welcoming new members each year. During that time other OTA members assembled task forces focused on the need to engage in climate advocacy and create resources to educate the industry on the value of organic and the intersection of organic and sustainability. Both the Climate Change Task Force and Advocating for Organic within National Retailer Sustainability Initiatives Task Force concluded work on their specific projects, but the need for climate advocacy and communication toolkit development remains a top priority for OTA members. Establishing the OTA Sustainability Council encompassing these groups allows this work to continue at a larger scale on an ongoing basis.

The Sustainability Council is a hub for all member stakeholders engaged in sustainability management strategies. The Council meets quarterly with additional opportunities to connect and collaborate throughout the year.

2022 Highlights:

The SFTA Council, Climate Change Task Force, and Advocating for Organic within National Retailer Sustainability Initiatives Task Force merged to form the new OTA Sustainability Council under the OTA Board of Director's approval in November 2022. The SFTA Council spent much of 2022 analyzing takeaways from each group's previous work and outlining its 2023 work plan and project goals that allow for OTA Board engagement from Council members in the coming year. Key takeaways identified from their previous two years of work included:

- Council members value opportunities to share successes and challenges, collective advocacy and impact, and benchmark progress through mandatory reporting
- Structured conversations and collective data points help keep a large group engaged and progressing toward a shared goal
- Climate-focused initiatives are the biggest focus for most Council members
- There is a need for clearer and consistent messaging around organic and sustainability; OTA's Organic Wheel of Sustainability and other Organic Opportunity Communications Toolkit resources were identified as a good starting place.

The Sustainability Council also hosted engaging breakout groups and guided discussions in council meetings around questions and topics of interest to the Council members:

- Measuring and reporting on the positive impacts of organic purchasing and climate action
- Engaging the farmer supply chain in advancing organic and regenerative practices, and sustainability
- Materiality assessments
- Science-based targets
- Social responsibility
- Sustainable development broader than climate change
- Leveraging industry partnerships and supplier engagement for sustainable packaging improvements

Looking Ahead to 2023:

The Sustainability Council's goal for 2023 is to use the Organic Wheel of Sustainability as a framework for discussing the true cost accounting of organic. The Council will identify member initiatives and collect data points to enhance clear and consistent messaging around organic and sustainability and showcase council member achievements. The Council will review one section of the Organic Wheel of Sustainability at each meeting.

- February Council meeting – Good for Planet
- April Council meeting – Good for People & Animals
- July Council meeting – Good for Business
- October Council meeting – Report out of collective council member contributions within each of the wheel spool topics, including specific initiatives and collective data points



COUNCIL MEMBERS



The Council is led by Joseph Brinkley (Bonterra Organic Estates) as Chair, John Foster (Wolf & Associates: The Organic Specialists) as Vice Chair, and Beth-Ann Roth (R|K Invest Law) as Secretary. Their work is supported by OTA's Associate Director of Events and Solutions, Adrienne Messe. If you are interested in joining the Sustainability Council, please reach out to Adrienne (amesse@ota.com)



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