



Farmers Advisory Council (FAC) **2015 Annual Report**



OTA's FAC Meetings and Membership

FAC GROWS ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

OTA's FAC continues to gain momentum in the strategic alliances it is developing with organic farmer organizations nationwide. In December 2014, Montana Organic Association (MOA) voted to join FAC at their annual membership meeting. Nate Brown of Amaltheia Organic Dairy (Belgrade, MT) will represent MOA membership as the farmer representative, and Sam Schmidt of Montana Milling (Great Falls, MT) will serve as the MOA staff liaison. Tilth Producers of Washington also officially joined FAC in the Spring of 2015 and appointed Larry Bailey (Clean Food Farms, Orting, WA) as their farmer representative. Michele Catalano, Executive Director of Tilth Producers will provide staff support for FAC communications. NOFA-VT has made a firm commitment to joining FAC and is waiting to finalize the memorandum of understanding until they have selected their farmer representative. The growth of FAC has spurred additional interest from organizations across the country including Organic Association of Kentucky (OAK), Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES), Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society (NPSAS), and the American Organic Hop Growers Association (AOHGA). These organizations have requested additional information about FAC and will be discussing the potential advantages to their missions at their upcoming board meetings.

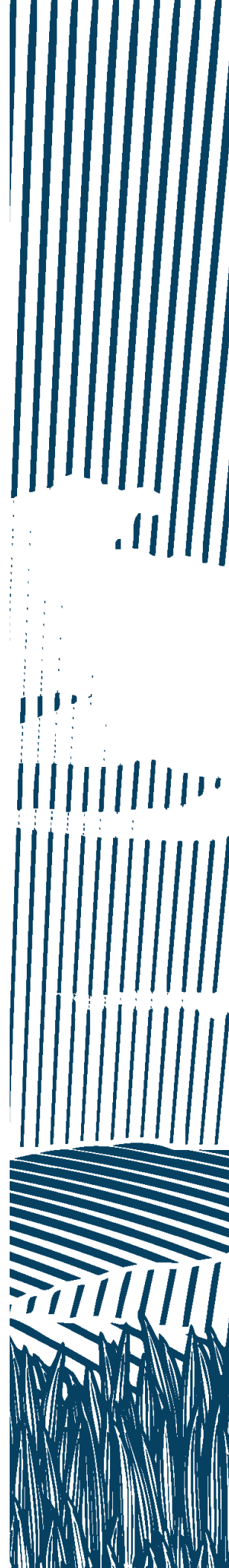
FAC ESTABLISHES QUARTERLY CONFERENCE CALLS

In an attempt to maximize participation, FAC established 4 quarterly conference calls at the beginning of the year. By getting these times and dates scheduled out far in advance, FAC members are able to plan their schedules around the calls and bring forth agenda topics that are timely and relevant for the sectors and regions they represent.

Federal Policy Work

FEDERAL CROP INSURANCE

In August, Risk Management Agency (RMA) announced changes to its Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) program. All of the changes they plan to implement for the 2016 crop year were key elements of the suggestions OTA and the FAC made to the agency during the FAC Summit at Policy Conference this past spring and in subsequent visits to RMA by OTA staff. RMA announced in early September the availability of organic price elections for 15 additional crops including barley, rye, dry peas, safflower, and wheat. Availability of these elections will allow organic producers to obtain coverage for the organic premiums they receive for the full rotation of crops that are grown on organic grain farms. OTA and representatives from FAC have consistently communicated to RMA the need for insurance that covers all the crops an organic farmer must grow in order to manage soil fertility and pest and disease concerns. RMA's genuine effort to make WFRP more meaningful and available to beginning and young farmers, livestock producers, and farmers who grow highly diversified and specialized crops and their efforts to expand availability of organic price elections shows their commitment to extending the USDA safety net to organic producers. Implementation of these changes also shows how the engagement from OTA members through FAC amplifies the voice of the organic sector and can truly affect change at the national level.





ORIGIN OF LIVESTOCK

USDA released the long awaited 'Origin of Livestock' proposed rule this summer, and OTA organized a task force to inform our comments to USDA. The task force represented the full supply chain in organic livestock production (farmers, handlers, processors, and retailers) and garnered participation from the livestock sectors represented on OTA's Farmers Advisory Council (CROPP Cooperative and Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance). The proposed rule indicated that NOP is very serious about leveling the playing field for organic livestock producers in how they grow their herds and replace animals. OTA analysis indicated that the proposed changes accomplish much of what the organic sector has requested, and our comments made a number of suggestions to strengthen the provisions of the proposed rule.

ANIMAL WELFARE

FAC requested updates from OTA's senior staff regarding the progress towards a proposed rule on animal welfare standards in organic production. OTA communicated out actions and communications with USDA on the rulemaking process and shared the position OTA has taken which encourages USDA to release a proposed rule as soon as possible to ensure the organic standards are applied uniformly and appropriately across all types and scales of livestock operations. FAC decided to support OTA's position on the need for prompt federal action for animal welfare rulemaking, and OTA provided guidance to FAC members on submitting their own letters and positions to USDA on the topic.

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AND CAN TRULY AFFECT CHANGE AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Young and Beginning Farmers

APPRENTICESHIPS

The need to train new and beginning farmers in the principles of organic production has been on FAC's workplan since its early meetings. Specifically, FAC members indicate that supporting apprenticeship programs, which provide education to new organic farmers at scale, was of particular importance. FAC's summit at Policy Conference in Washington DC included a discussion forum to identify stakeholders interested in supporting apprenticeship programs and to develop strategies that ensure industry needs and perspectives are represented in nation-wide discussions around apprenticeship programs. In response to the discussion at Policy Conference, OTA staff was invited to attend meetings for 'FarmerCorps' which is a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to making farm apprenticeship programs more cohesive and effective so that training for future agricultural careers is effective. As these meetings and discussions develop, OTA's presence will ensure organic industry perspectives continue to become incorporated into the framework that emerges to support apprenticeship programs nationwide, and FAC's role in elevating the issue of apprenticeships provided the impetus for OTA's involvement.

LAND ACCESS & LAND TENURE

FAC elevated the issue of stable access to land being one of the major barriers keeping new farmers from entering agriculture. This barrier is most significant for young farmers who are often saddled with student loan debt making access to land unattainable. To address these issues broadly, FAC convened a listening session at Policy Conference where attendees brought the issues facing producers trying to access land for organic production to the table. The session afforded the opportunity to hear about efforts already underway to remedy land access issues, and OTA was able to further its collaborative efforts with the National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC) on land access and affordability. At the time, NYFC was seeking support for their legislative effort to extend student loan forgiveness to young farmers through the Young Farmer Success Act of 2015. OTA signed on as a partner in their effort, and the act has been introduced to congress under H.R. 2590 which seeks to expand the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program to include young farmers.

Regional and Sector Specific challenges

ORGANIC GRAIN SUPPLIES

FAC has discussed the issues around growing organic grain supplies since its inception in 2013. The focus of FAC's efforts has been around convening the organic supply chain to develop solutions that reduce barriers to organic acreage growth while maintaining profitability in organic grain farming. The initial conversations were held at OTA's Policy Conference in 2014, and out of those discussions, OTA began participating in the US Organic Grain Collaborative which is taking a regional approach to identifying the major barriers to organic grain acreage growth and the efforts organic companies can take to help producers overcome those barriers. The collaborative has held numerous engagement sessions in New England and the Northern Great Plains to inform region-specific strategy recommendations for growing organic grain supply. The collaborative's work has gained momentum and interest in conducting additional regional pilot projects has pushed the group to reevaluate their organizational structure and to consider establishing an official OTA sector council that will address issues specific to the grain, pulse, and oilseed market.

WHOLE FOODS' RESPONSIBLY GROWN PROGRAM

FAC members representing CCOF growers requested discussion of the concerns around Whole Foods' Responsibly Grown produce rating program raised by a number of California growers. CCOF has mediated conversations between Whole Foods and California growers to develop a path forward for the Responsibly Grown Program that satisfies each party's needs and concerns. Staff representatives for CCOF provided FAC with an overview of the talks between Whole Foods Markets and CCOF growers, and FAC decided to continue to monitor the conversation and direction that both parties were taking. FAC's discussion on the topic largely revolved around a desire that organic certification remain the gold standard for process verification and to reduce possible consumer confusion about verification systems when shopping at Whole Foods Markets.



FAC Organization and members

Participating Organizations

CCOF, Inc.

Organic Egg Farmers of America (OEFA)

Oregon Tilth Certified Organic (OTCO)

Western Organic Dairy Producers Association (WODPA)

CROPP Cooperative

Montana Organic Association (MOA)

Tilth Producers of Washington

Co-Chair

Perry Clutts
Pleasantview Farm | Ohio
OTA Board Member – Farmer Seat

Steve Koretoff
Nick Koretoff Ranches & Purity
Organics | California
Affiliation: CCOF Inc.

Co-Chair

Samantha Cabaluna
Earthbound Farm | California
OTA Board Member – Community
Relations Committee

Phil LaRocca
LaRocca Vineyards | California
Affiliation: CCOF Inc.

FAC Members

Larry Bailey
Clean Food Farm | Washington
Affiliation: Tilth Producers of
Washington

Jenny Lester Moffitt
Dixon Ridge Farms | California
Affiliation: CCOF Inc.

Roger Peters
Peters Farms, Inc. | Wisconsin
Affiliation: OEFA

Jon Bansen
Double J Jerseys | Oregon
Affiliation: CROPP Cooperative

Steve Pierson
Sar-Ben Farms | Oregon
Affiliation: CROPP Cooperative

Grant Brians
Heirloom Organic Gardens | California
Affiliation: CCOF Inc.

David Roberts
Organic Dairy Farmer | Idaho
Affiliation: WODPA

Nate Brown
Amaltheia Organic Dairy | Montana
Affiliation: Montana Organic
Association

Bob Quinn
Quinn Farm and Ranch | Montana
Affiliation: OTA Member

John Brunnuell
Egg Innovations, Inc. | Indiana
Affiliation: OTA Member

Jimmy Wedel
Wedel Farms | Texas
Affiliation: OTA Member

Doug Crabtree
Vilicus Farms | Montana
Affiliation: OTA Member



Questions?

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