

# Organic Matters

## MOA 2014 Conference Review

By Wes Gibbs, MOA Member, Montana Flour & Grains

MOA's 12th Annual Conference in Great Falls last December 4-6 was full to the brim with educational and social opportunities. Our planning committee decided nearly a year ago to focus on a theme that reflected the rich farming area of the Golden Triangle that surrounds Great Falls. So, "Organic Business: Benefitting Producers and Consumers" became our focus for the conference.

The use of a modest regional advertising and promotion budget helped MOA reach out to invite local farmers and consumers who wanted to become more acquainted with organics. The result was a large turnout for our Organic University and Processor Tours that took place on Thursday to kick off the conference. MOA board member

Jonda Crosby facilitated a very successful Organic University this year. We appreciate the participation of the local organic processors hosting the tours: Timeless Seeds, Montana Milling, Montana Specialty Mills, Montana Flour & Grain, and Montana State University (MSU) College of Technology in Great Falls for the hydroponic system tour.

One of the exciting aspects of this conference was a focus on youth—the future of our families and our business. Board members MonaRae Tuhy and Jess Alger organized our first Kids' University, which was a huge success. They were assisted by a local mom and organic advocate, Coya Williams, to plan this fun and educational event. Two volunteers from Food Corps, Jessica Manly and Whitney Pratt, educated and entertained 42 participants during three hours of fun-filled activities. These

activities included garden yoga, planting micro-greens, making hummus, the importance of soil and water and learning about the advantages of buying locally. Also, the Montana Department of Agriculture sent Montana Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey backpacks filled with goodies. Items included a bug collector, handheld magnifying glass, a ruler, an Emerald Ash Borer



Whitney Pratt co-facilitated MOA's first Kids' University. Photo by Coya Williams.

identification guide, stickers, a plate, and a knife/spoon/fork set. Comments from the kids included: "My favorite thing was making and eating the hummus." Several kids said their favorite thing was planting the micro-greens. One said, "(she) made a new friend."

At the Friday night banquet, we also heard from a local young organic

advocate, Quincy Balius, a freshman at Cascade High School. A few months ago the Great Falls Tribune published a guest article by Quincy entitled "Eat Like a Superhero and Go Organic!" She read her article to us, and received a standing ovation from more than 200 banquet-goers.

Sandi Shanks, our conference coordinator who you all see behind the registration desk, said that MOA picked up about 20 new members at this conference. Our sponsors and vendors are key to carrying out an annual meeting. We had eight more sponsors/vendors than years past.

It was also a highlight for the MOA Conference on Friday to hear remarks from U.S. Senator Jon Tester. As an organic farmer himself, Sen. Tester addressed some of the

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issues affecting organics, like GMOs and aspects of the newest Farm Bill.

MOA's business meeting saw some lively interchange regarding future policy positions for MOA. One resolution was approved by the membership, which stated, "We support a proposal to require seed patent holders to demonstrate that their GMO seeds contain mechanisms to prevent genetic drift or out-crossing, as well as to prevent contamination of non-GMO crops in the food handling system, before any new GMO crops are approved." A list of other proposed policy positions were referred to the MOA Board for more discussion. Five new members of the MOA Board of Directors were elected:

Seth Goodman, Big Sandy; Andrew Long, Big Sandy; Heather Estrada, Kalispell; Rob Knotts, Lambert; and John Larmoyeux, Havre. The outgoing board members, Wes Gibbs, Casey Bailey, Chaz Holt, and Mike Nault, were thanked for their tireless service.

We heard two keynote presentations from journalist and author Judith Schwartz. Judith gave us viewpoints of environmental and social challenges of agriculture

as seen by many outside the organic community. There were give-and-take opportunities in both her sessions, as Judith learned from MOA's organic producers as well.

Over 2-1/2 days of workshop sessions, we heard from US Department of Agriculture (USDA) representatives Brandon Willis from USDA Risk Management Agency and Betsy Rakola of the National Organic Program. On the theme of organic economics, business and marketing, we heard from Canadian grain analyst Stuart McMillan; MSU economics professor Anton Beckerman; Shawn Fladager of Farm Credit Services; and Jeff Schahczenski of NCAT.

Speaking toward nutrition, we heard from MSU professor Alison Harmon and some of her graduate students in two interesting breakout sessions,

which included Dave Oien of Timeless Seeds and Michael Fox of MSU.

There were some interesting organic production sessions from MSU plant pathologist Mary Burrows; Steve Zwinger of North Dakota State University; Patrick Carr from Dickinson Research Center; and Ole Norgaard, co-founder of Organic Advisory and Education Council.



Jon Tester & Quincy Balius. Photo by Jonda Crosby.

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Speaking about organic standards and issues were: Margaret Scoles, International Organic Inspectors Association; Nate Lewis, Organic Trade Association; and lunchtime speaker Ron DeYong, Director of Montana Department of Agriculture.

Estate planning and engaging the next generation in agriculture presentations were led by MSU's Marsha Goetting and Montana Department of Agriculture's organic program director Georgana Webster.

MOA's fundraising live and silent auctions were very successful, headed up by MOA board member Cliff Meriman and his wife Anna. Dave and Dee Turner assisted in the auctioneering, along with our Friday night DJ and auctioneer Jim Sargent of KMON radio.

Saturday's closing speaker Bob Quinn, a successful organic farmer and businessman, highlighted "Starting a Business and Staying in Business." It was a fitting way to close the conference that we hoped would help people strengthen their businesses, families, and friendships.

MOA wishes to thank all of the Conference sponsors and donors (visit [www.montanaorganicassociation.org/sponsors.htm](http://www.montanaorganicassociation.org/sponsors.htm) to view the sponsors with links to their websites) for their support of MOA's 2014 Conference.

A big "thanks" also goes out to the participants and the dedicated and hard-working Conference Committee for making this such a successful event.

## DriftWatch Update

by Bob Walters, FieldWatch, Inc.

The DriftWatch® Specialty Crop Site Registry is a voluntary communication tool that enables crop producers, beekeepers, and pesticide applicators to work together to protect specialty crops and apiaries through use of the DriftWatch registry mapping program.

In 2014, DriftWatch added three states to the DriftWatch® Specialty Crop Site Registry and significantly increased the number of approved producer sites. They now have over 6000 specialty crop and apiary sites mapped in DriftWatch. In addition, they registered over 200 new pesticide applicators in DriftWatch. With regulatory and product changes coming in 2015, they expect another banner year of growth. They are working with new Precision Ag companies to bring DriftWatch closer to applicators and growers alike.

You can register for DriftWatch for free at [www.driftwatch.org](http://www.driftwatch.org) and add your fields and apiaries. As agriculture continues to grow and have more demands put on it, DriftWatch will become a key communication tool for applicators to use to minimize the effects of off-target drift and become closer neighbors with their agriculture growing partners.



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## MOA Lifetime of Service Award

by Judy Owsowitz, MOA Board Member

Becky Weed was presented with MOA's Lifetime of Service Award at the MOA Conference last December. While it is a culmination and acknowledgement of her dedication and commitment to certified organic farming and farmers in Montana, it is also a symbol of her values and beliefs.



Becky Weed. Photo by Lisa Whiteman.

Becky is incredibly passionate about her farming program. As a steward of the land and the environment, she understands and attends to the details of maintaining and promoting organic practices. Thirteen Mile Farm in Belgrade is where Becky and her partner Dave Tyler call home. Their values and beliefs are exemplified in their company called Thirteen Mile Lamb and Wool Company, organic since 1999. Their well-thought-out land stewardship practices are too long to list—if a practice is honorable and it promotes health, Becky has incorporated it into their program.

It is not easy to maintain these values and practices in today's farming world. Becky is a brave person. She is willing to stand, and stand alone if necessary, in the face of big political and commercial forces to address the underlying issues facing organic producers today. Becky does her homework. She researches and keeps herself informed and up to date on the issues and challenges facing her colleagues and constituents. She is a well-spoken advocate for her values and beliefs dealing with organic growing and land stewardship. Becky exemplifies the concept of value-added in her farming program. Her wool mill incorporates renewable energy practices. She raises and produces her own wool product and then processes it in her own natural fiber-processing mill. Becky does a lot of

Thirteen Mile Farm's marketing and is the founder of the predator-friendly ecolabel used on their wool products.

Weed's efforts to understand and market grass-fed lamb and beef over the last 25 years, together with her former training and work as a geologist, have led to her involvement with several issues at the interface of agriculture and conservation. Becky has represented MOA interests on the State of Montana Board of Livestock. Dealing with many competing viewpoints, Becky has maintained her professionalism while advocating for the often under-represented parties. Her passionate participation in the Yellowstone Bison issue, a particularly contentious one for many years, is to be applauded.

A few years ago, after facilitating a potentially polarizing presentation on Genetically Modified Organisms at Montana State University, participants commented that it was a well-balanced presentation and very skillfully moderated discussion, thanks to Becky.

She is a leader's leader. She is always striving to improve her practices and her operation through education and innovation. For this and so many more reasons, we were proud to present Becky Weed MOA's 2014 Lifetime of Service Award. It is a small token for such a great person.

## Leadership in Organics Award

by Nate Brown, MOA Board Chair

Daryl and Linda Lassila were the recipients of the Leadership in Organics Award at the MOA 2014 Conference. This couple exemplifies the Leadership in Organics Award. They are patient, hard working, soft-spoken, selfless, get-er-done type people. They have built bridges between the conventional and organic communities, attending meetings and events near and far while being a face for organics. They have brought their families into our MOA community and have helped at our conferences, most of the time behind the scenes, wherever it was needed.

Linda Lassila grew up on a farm in Nashua, Montana. After graduating from Concordia College, she worked in the insurance industry for over 20 years. Linda enjoys gardening, especially her flower gardens, and spending time with her family, including their children Trista and Brady. Daryl and Linda celebrated their 30th anniversary and organics has been a big part of their life together.

Daryl worked for Western Montana Co-op for four years and ten years at what is now Mountain View

Co-op in the fertilizer/chemical department. In 1998, Daryl started transitioning to organic on the fourth generation family farm east of Great Falls. Today, he grows winter wheat, spelt, spring wheat, lentils, peas and barley and plows down cover crops of peas, lentils, radishes, sorghum sudan grass, crimson clover, buckwheat and oats.

Daryl is a Torchbearer and member of the Montana Farmers Union, twice visiting Congress members in Washington, DC, on agriculture issues. He is also a founding board member of the Organic Advisory and Education Council.

Daryl has become a strong advocate for organic agriculture and was elected to the Board of Directors of the Montana Organic Association in 2010 and served as its Chairman in 2011 and 2012. Being a MOA board chairman, Daryl would do anything and everything to promote, build, and advance the Montana Organic Association. MOA has never seen a couple fund-raise more money than these two have brought in. The sponsors and vendors that have come to support MOA because of their work has been key to the healthy financial state of MOA. We truly owe them a debt of gratitude for all their hard work because they truly care about organics and the work our board does.

It's with deep appreciation and admiration that the Montana Organic Association presented the 2014 Leadership in Organics Award to Daryl and Linda Lassila.



Daryl and Linda Lassila. Photo by the Lassila Family.

## Upcoming Food Safety Training

by Jonda Crosby, MOA Board Treasurer, IOIA

Food Safety training focusing on Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) guidelines will be held in Montana. The courses are offered free through a Montana Department of Agriculture USDA Specialty Crop grant and in partnership with the Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center and the International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA). The trainings are designed for farmers, sanitarians, cooperative extension agents, local food educators, farmers market managers, food safety auditors, organic inspectors, food retailers, restaurant owners, farm interns, farm to school and farm to college professionals and agricultural service providers.

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) are guidelines that were established to ensure that field operations account for potential food safety issues. The workshop will help participants understand food safety risks that may exist on the farm, and how to conduct risk assessments on a farm. The course will specifically cover food safety issues including: farmer self-inspection preparation, traceability, ground history, adjacent land, fertilizer and crop nutrition, irrigation and water use, crop protection, field worker hygiene, and harvesting practices. Participants will gain skill in navigating the regulations and using standard assessment tools.

The trainings will be offered as both in-person and via webinar. The course is a six-hour training and will include pre-course exercises and a post course exam for those pursuing certification as a food safety Regional Independent Verifier.

The in-person trainings will be held in Chico Hot Springs (March 26), Great Falls (March 30), and in Helena (April 1). Webinar trainings are scheduled for May 15 and September 25. Trainers for the course are Jonda Crosby, PrimusLabs GAP Auditor and Karen Troxell, who is trained in GAP and GMP by PrimusLabs and who has worked for over 20 years in all segments of food and farming including food processing facilities.

Participants from the states surrounding Montana, including Idaho, Wyoming, South Dakota, and North Dakota, are encouraged to attend and may participate in the training for free if their work directly impacts fresh fruit and vegetable production and consumption.

For more information about the training, please contact: Jonda Crosby at 406-227-9161, or email her at [jcrosby@mt.net](mailto:jcrosby@mt.net).

# Inspector's View

## Resources & Biodiversity Conservation

by Jonda Crosby

The Agricultural Marketing Service recently published a notice in the Federal Register announcing the opening of a public comment period for "Draft Guidance: Natural Resources and Biodiversity Conservation for Certified Organic Operations."

Why this new guidance is important to you as a producer is that additional information about each operation's plan to improve, maintain and record natural resource and biodiversity conservation practices will be included in the annual organic system plans each producer must submit to their certifier each year.

Also, as a producer, expect your inspector to ask more questions about your efforts to improve, maintain and monitor your plan for natural resources and biodiversity conservation in the coming years.

What will that look like for operators in Montana? Well, that depends on where (climatic) and what type of operation (dryland, irrigated) you farm or ranch. Montana, due to the significant rainfall in the western counties and the dryland conditions in most of the state that is farmed and ranched, will have very different natural resource and biodiversity needs and

options to comply with the guidance, once it is approved. Of significant note is, if an operation has a conservation plan with NRCS, that will help to demonstrate that an operation is working toward conservation and biodiversity goals.

**As a producer, expect your inspector to ask more questions about your efforts to improve, maintain and monitor your plan for natural resources and biodiversity conservation in the coming years.**



For operators in Montana, improving natural resources and biodiversity conservation could include windbreaks, grass waterways, managing the timing of grazing, protecting riparian areas, using non-lethal predator control, restoring native lands, documenting rare or threatened species of plants and animals and taking steps to protect them. Growers can use diverse cover crops, minimum tillage on highly erodible land, water conservation practices, adding organic matter to the soil and other practices specific to the site that improve natural resource conservation and biodiversity. The guidance has a long list of practices that will demonstrate improvement and maintenance of natural resources and biodiversity included in the draft guidance. If you are using practices not included in the list be sure to comment on the list and see if they can be added as examples. Chances are others in Montana are using the same practices and it would be good to have the practice recognized as a valid option.

In the meantime, the draft guidance is available for review. I urge you to look over the draft guidance and comment on its merits and voice any concerns it raises for you as an organic operator. I also would encourage you to review natural resource and biodiversity research and education materials developed by Wild Farm Alliance at [www.wildfarmalliance.org](http://www.wildfarmalliance.org).

**The public comment period for this draft guidance will be open from December 29, 2014 through February 27, 2015.**

To read the Draft Guidance go to: [www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5110083](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5110083)

To Comment on the Draft Guidance go to: [www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=AMS-NOP-14-0062](http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=AMS-NOP-14-0062)



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When finalized, the guidance will help organic certifiers, farmers, and businesses understand the types of production practices that support conservation principles and demonstrate compliance with the USDA organic regulations. The guidance also clarifies the role of certifiers and inspectors in verifying operator compliance with this regulatory requirement.

Organic certification agencies have to show USDA that they are making sure their farmers and others using the USDA organic seal are conserving natural resources and improving biodiversity on their farms and ranches. These regulations have been in place since the beginning of the National Organic Program in 2002, but it was not until 2012 that the USDA



Nancy Matheson demonstrating growth of windbreak planted on Big Sky Organic Farm to prevent wind erosion of crop fields and to provide wildlife (bees and birds) cover and forage. Chokecherry and Caragana hedges planted in 1999.

began making organic certification agencies accountable. With the new guidance, once people have had a chance to provide feedback, farmers and ranchers can expect to see more questions from organic inspectors about their natural resource, conservation and biodiversity practices and their plans for continued improvement.

The draft guidance document announced through this notice was developed in response to a May 2009 request from the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) that AMS clarify the requirements and limitations of the general natural resources and biodiversity conservation requirement of the USDA organic regulations (7 CFR part 205). 7 CFR. 205.200 requires operations to “maintain or improve the natural resources of the operation, including soil and water quality.”

Section 205.2 of the USDA organic regulations defines “natural resources of the operation” as the “physical, hydrological, and biological features of a production operation, including soil, water, wetlands, woodlands, and wildlife.”

This draft guidance provides examples of production practices that support these conservation principles and demonstrate compliance with 7 CFR. 205.200. This guidance also clarifies: (1) The certified organic operator’s responsibility to select, carry out, and record production practices that “maintain or improve the natural resources of the operation;” (2) the accredited certifying agent’s responsibility to verify operator compliance with this requirement; and (3) how domestic organic operations that participate in a USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) program and the NOP can reduce their paperwork burdens.

The preamble to the final rule establishing the NOP explained, “[t]he use of ‘conserve’ [in the definition of organic production] establishes that the producer must initiate practices to support biodiversity and avoid, to the extent practicable, any activities that would diminish it. Compliance with the requirement to conserve biodiversity requires that a producer incorporate practices in his or her organic system plan that are beneficial to biodiversity on his or her operation.” (76 FR 80563)

*Jonda Crosby is MOA Board of Director, an organic inspector and works for the International Organic Inspectors Association as the Training Services Director.*


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# Certified Organics: 2015

by Barry Flamm, MOA Member

Members of MOA care deeply about organics. For many it is your life: manifesting a deep conviction that organics is the future for agriculture if a healthy, sustainable world is to be achieved.

An important step in advancing U.S. organic production was the 1990 passage of the Organic Food Production Act (OFPA), which brought integrity and order to organic food production and marketing. This Act and the implementing regulations were driven by the organic community's desire to insure the integrity of organics, which is reflected by the seal of approval, and to assure a continuing role of the organic community in maintaining the high standards for organics.

To help achieve this goal, Congress established a citizen advisory panel, the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), and gave it very important duties and rather unique powers as essential advisor to the Secretary of Agriculture on all issues concerning the implementation of OFPA and special responsibilities for what substances may appear on the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances. Intended as the voice of the organic community, the 15-member Board intends to represent the broad spectrum of interests in the organic community: farmers, handlers, retail, environmental protection and resource conservation, consumer interests, science, and certification. For some more background on the NOSB, please take a look at my article in the Summer 2014 issue of *Organic Matters* or the NOSB page on MOA's website at [www.montanaorganicassociation.org/nosb.htm](http://www.montanaorganicassociation.org/nosb.htm).

Since passage of the Act and implementation of the Rule, organic production and sales have increased, outpacing other agriculture sectors. Organics can be found on shelves everywhere, but to our dismay, they are sometimes mixed with labels such as "natural," confusing customers as to which is best. But we have pointed with pride to the organic seal and all that it stands for!

I remember not long ago being ridiculed and attacked for risking my neighbor's crops by being organic. Now many of the same people are at least occasionally buying and eating organic food.

Organics are mainstream. The January 2015 issue of *Costco Connection's* cover story was "Growing Organic," with the subtitle "keeping pace with a booming market." The article begins, "Walk into just about any food retailer and, more often than not, you'll be

faced with a choice: whether to buy organic or conventionally grown food. But what does it all mean? Simply put, certified organic foods have been farmed without synthetic pesticides and fertilizers and do not use GMOs..."

We know that organics is more than what we don't do, but what we do to produce healthy food while protecting and sustaining the environment. Consumers are concerned with these values, but are mostly concerned with buying chemical-free foods. OFPA reflects this public interest by saying, "...establishes the overall principle that, in order to be labeled as organic it must be produced and handled without the use of synthetic chemicals." The law recognizes there may be a need for temporary exemptions, thus it provided for a thorough review process, whereby certain synthetics could be permitted for use but would sunset, or be removed, after five years.

OFPA and public expectations vs. exemptions are in conflict. The materials on the National List have grown to 137 (crops 51, Livestock 40, processing 46) and consumers may be surprised by what is currently allowed.

As I reviewed in my last article (referenced earlier), the National Organic Program (NOP) was established within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to administer OFPA requirements. The staff was very small until 2008, when increase in budget and staff occurred along with newly declared USDA support for organic and a pledge of "organic integrity from farm to table—consumers trust the organic label." For several years, collaboration and working relations between NOSB and NOP grew and recommendations for strengthening organic programs were submitted and adopted.

In 2013, all began to change without public notice or opportunity to comment. In summary, NOP limited the NOSB's ability to provide independent advice to the Secretary of Agriculture by taking away the Board's ability to develop its work plan and agenda. NOP also arbitrarily disbanded the important Policy Development Committee (aka sub committee) and expired the Policy and Procedures Manual (PPM), which was developed over the years with public participation.

Then in September 2013, NOP announced dramatic changes in the approval process for synthetic and non-organic materials allowed on the National List. The sunset procedural changes were now in conflict with OFPA and NOSB procedures mandated in the PPM. The important concept here is that materials sunsetted after five years unless, after careful review,



the material was shown to be safe and was essential as no viable alternative existed, was turned on its head. As with all petitioned materials, sunseting materials had required a super majority 2/3 vote in order to stay on the list. NOP's dictate now required a super majority to remove a material from the list. This action makes sunset almost meaningless! It will be rare that any material will be removed if these procedures remain in effect.

Principle authors of OFPA, Senator Patrick Leahy and Representative Peter De Fazio, wrote Secretary Vilsack expressing "great concern" regarding the sunset provision changes. Past NOSB chairmen, including myself, wrote the Secretary expressing grave concerns for the arbitrary changes at NOSB and in the sunset process. These appeals were ignored by Secretary Vilsack and Deputy Administrator McEvoy. Instead, USDA/NOP tried to cement the radical changes last May through an amendment to the NOSB Federal Advisory Board Charter, improperly assigning authority to USDA to terminate the NOSB. This action took place immediately following the April NOSB meeting, in which McEvoy took over as Co-chair, intruding on the independence and authority of the NOSB.

Twenty organizations, pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act, petitioned amendments to the Charter to reflect the duties of NOSB and reflect the mandatory, continuing status of the NOSB. The Petition's issues have not been fully resolved, but USDA has now amended the Charter to acknowledge that NOSB status is continuing.

At the Fall 2014 Board meeting, the NOSB Chair resumed presiding over the proceedings. The Policy Development Sub Committee was reinstated, but according to a NOSB source it has not yet met nor has an agenda. In any case, NOP overstepped their authority by unilaterally dismissing a Standing Committee (aka sub).

In spite of Congressional and many public objections, NOP has stood firm on its Sunset change. NOP's instructions on implementation of the new policy has left the NOSB and its subcommittees confused. The confusion was apparent at the Fall meeting, where members were unclear on how and what to vote. This

was not so serious this time as there were few materials to vote on. However, coming up are a massive number of materials sunseting. (9 materials in 2016 and 115 materials in 2017).

Unfortunately, these serious problems created by NOP may have to be addressed in court. Involved organic advocates and organizations have been cautious criticizing program faults as they believe strongly in organics and have not wanted to weaken the organic image.

This is changing. Consumer Union, publisher of *Consumer Reports* and the most widely respected private consumer watchdog, downgraded the value of the organic seal from their highest rating. Uravashi Rangan, Director of Consumer Safety and Sustainability at Consumer Union stated last October that, "Organic is slipping. As a result we have downgraded its rating from highly meaningful to meaningful." This happened only after very

**There are other seals of approval that have a high rating for integrity that may challenge the Certified Organic Seal if we don't speak up about the weakening of the NOSB.**

careful consideration of several issues, but was ultimately triggered by the NOP Sunset changes and the debasing of NOSB. We should also be aware that there are other seals of approval that have a high rating for integrity that may challenge the Certified Organic Seal if we don't speak up about the weakening of the NOSB. Other labels will emerge if the trend of eroding organic integrity continues and if consumers are not getting what they paid for.

There has been much progress in organics and a rapid increase in production and product availability to consumers. But quantity must not diminish quality and the integrity of organics.

Integrity should be a fact, not rhetoric! If you believe this, your voices **MUST** be heard.

Visit [www.montanaorganicassociation.org/nosb.htm](http://www.montanaorganicassociation.org/nosb.htm) for easy ways to express your concerns to the representatives that can make a difference and to the organizations that are working hard to retain the integrity of the Certified Organic Seal.

*Barry Flamm is a MOA Lifetime Member, former MOA Board Member, Recipient of the MOA Lifetime of Service Award 2006, NOSB Board Member January 2008 – January 2013, NOSB PDC Chair 2008 – 2011, and NOSB Board Chairman 2012.*



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## Group GAP Specialty Crop Project

by Jan Tusick, Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center

Growing demand for locally and regionally produced farm products offers an unprecedented opportunity for Montana farmers and ranchers, particularly small- and mid-sized organic vegetable and fruit farms. Food hubs and other farm product aggregators make it possible for small and mid-sized farms to gain entry into larger-volume markets that have been difficult or impossible for producers to access on their own.

The wholesale supply chains have long relied on external (second or third party) food safety (e.g. GAP and GHP) audits as demonstration of product safety compliance. Over the years, these requirements have become increasingly complex and expensive to meet. These requirements constitute a present and growing barrier which hubs and their local/regional suppliers must meet in order to assure that market opportunities truly grow into all that they can potentially be. Small and mid-scale producers, those most suited to supply the hubs and buyers, generally find the cost of meeting these requirements to be disproportionately expensive. To meet the challenges facing growers, Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center (MMFEC) is embarking on a three-year program for specialty crop producers. The project is in collaboration with the International Organic Inspection Association (IOIA), the Montana Department of Agriculture's Food and Agriculture Development Center Network (FADC) and MSU Extension.

MMFEC and partners will deliver a comprehensive program that will assist specialty crop producers and processors to develop Global Group GAP Quality Management Systems (GAP QMS). The project will leverage a previous USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant that developed a food safety management toolkit for food business, which will be modeled in the development of a Group GAP QMS toolkit. The project will target organic producers and food hubs of specialty crop producers, specifically vegetable and fruit producers, and will provide training and technical assistance in the area of developing and implementing GAP QMS plans that will successfully pass USDA Group GAP QMS audits. The project will deliver a series of Regional Inspector Verification (RIV) trainings to develop a pool of second (internal) party auditors for specialty crop producers to access to successfully meet the parameters of a USDA audit. Through the FADC network, the project will partner on a series of trainings to insure specialty crop producers and processors have the necessary information and skills to develop and implement their Group GAP QMS plans.

To receive more information about this project, contact Jan Tusick, MMFEC Center Director at [jan.tusick@lakecountycdc.org](mailto:jan.tusick@lakecountycdc.org) or call 406-676-5901 ext. 111.

# MOA Welcomes New Board Members

**Heather Estrada** is the Agriculture Program Director and an Assistant Professor at Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC) in Kalispell, Montana. Heather studied agronomy in organic grain cropping systems while earning her PhD in Plant Science from the University of Alberta in her native Canada. Before relocating to the US to work as a cropping systems



agronomist with Montana State University (MSU), Heather worked as a research associate with the Organic Agriculture Center of Canada, and took courses through IOIA to learn about organic crop inspection. Heather left her position with MSU to develop an agriculture program at FVCC, which includes coursework and

on-farm classes in organic farming. Heather has a keen interest in exploring the agronomic challenges of organic farming and is passionate about agriculture education. Through her service on the MOA Board, Heather hopes to support organic farming in Montana, learn more about organic farming policy and practices, and communicate that information to Montana's next generation of farmers.

**Seth Goodman** was raised in Utah and graduated with an agronomy degree. Seth and his wife, who is Canadian, have two children. They moved to Big Sandy, Montana, in 2011 when Seth became the farm manager of Quinn Farm and Ranch, where he has been involved in organic row crop farming. Seth is pleased to serve on the MOA Board where he can be more involved and advance organic agriculture. (Photo not available)

**Rob Knotts** and his wife Libby have been actively involved with organics in Montana since moving to Lambert in 1999. Rob is a past contract organic inspector and a charter member of MOA. The Knotts raise certified organic grass fed (finished) beef and actively promote organic agriculture at every opportunity. Rob is looking forward to working on the MOA Board and continuing and expanding the work of



MOA by helping to create more opportunities for the advancement of organic food and farming in Montana.

**John Larmoyeux** and his wife Brei have three girls, ages ten, three and one, and a seven-year old son. They are originally from Little Rock, Arkansas, where John worked in construction, real estate, and investment banking. He had a growing desire to work in sustainable agriculture and wanted to raise his family



on a diversified farm and ranch. John took a seasonal calving job in Montana in 2012 to gain some ranching experience. He returned to Arkansas to manage a medical clinic, but using the MOA directory, he began applying for full time agriculture work. In March 2014, the family moved to Havre,

Montana, to work for Prairie Grass Ranch where they grow organic specialty grains and raise organic, grass-fed beef. John delights in his work and thrives as a student of the industry. John is honored to serve on the MOA board and appreciates the confidence so many members have expressed in him.

**Andrew Long** is originally from Northern California and has also lived for several years in Maryland and Utah. He moved to Montana three years ago after graduating from Brigham Young University with an MBA degree. He married Bridgette, daughter of



long time MOA member Bob Quinn, and with Bob started The Oil Barn in Big Sandy. The Oil Barn is an on-farm, organic safflower oil production and alternative fuel business with distribution in various parts of Montana. Andrew decided to serve on the MOA board to become more involved in furthering the organic movement and to become more

aware of issues facing organic producers, handlers, retailers, processors and consumers. Andrew and Bridgette have three young children, two boys and a girl.

# Montana NRCS Announces EQIP Conservation Initiatives

Four national initiatives are being offered this year in Montana through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): On-Farm Energy, Organic, Seasonal High Tunnel, and Prairie Pothole Wetland and Grassland Retention. While the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) accepts applications for EQIP on a continuous basis, **NRCS has set a deadline of Feb. 20, 2015, to apply for 2015 initiatives funding.** Below is an overview of each initiative:

**National On-Farm Energy Initiative (NOFEI):** NOFEI has two components. In the first component, agricultural producers work with an NRCS-approved Technical Service Provider to develop Agricultural Energy Management Plans or farm energy audits that assess energy consumption on an operation. In the second component, NRCS may also provide assistance to implement various recommended measures identified in the energy audit through the use of conservation practice standards offered through this initiative.

**National Organic Initiative (NOI):** NRCS will assist producers with installation of conservation practices on agricultural operations related to organic production. Producers currently certified as organic, transitioning to organic, or National Organic Program exempt will have access to a broad set of conservation practices to assist in treating their resource concerns while fulfilling many of the requirements in an Organic System Plan.

**Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative:** NRCS helps producers implement high tunnels that extend growing seasons for high value crops in an environmentally safe manner. High tunnel benefits include better plant and soil quality and fewer nutrients and pesticides in the environment.

**Prairie Pothole Wetland and Grassland Retention:** NRCS will assist producers in 13 counties in Montana to implement conservation practices specifically targeted to encourage the retention of wetland and grasslands in the Prairie Pothole Region, improve wildlife habitat for migratory birds, improve water quality and quantity, improve grassland health, and reduce soil erosion and sedimentation. This initiative will be offered in Blaine, Cascade (north of the Missouri River), Chouteau, Daniels, Glacier, Hill, Lewis and Clark (east of the Divide and north of the Dearborn River), Liberty, Phillips, Pondera, Richland, Roosevelt, Sheridan, Teton, Toole and Valley counties.

EQIP offers financial and technical assistance to eligible participants to install or implement structural

and management practices on eligible agricultural land. Conservation practices must be implemented to NRCS standards and specifications. In Montana, socially disadvantaged, limited resource, and beginning farmers and ranchers will receive a higher payment rate for eligible conservation practices applied.

Applicants that operate as an entity are required to have a DUNS number and have that number registered with SAM.gov prior to submitting their application for consideration.

For more information about EQIP, or other programs offered by NRCS, please contact your local USDA Service Center or visit [www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov).

## MSU to Assist Organic Growers by Dr. Zach Miller, Western Agricultural Research Center

The Western Agricultural Research Center (WARC) located in Corvallis, Montana, has initiated a new research and extension program to serve organic producers. A new superintendent and professor of horticulture, Dr. Zach Miller, was brought onboard last May. Zach comes to the position from MSU-Bozeman, where he was a professor in Land Resources and Environmental Science. In Bozeman, Dr. Miller was a co-director of a large organic research project to improve the sustainability of organic row-crop production by using livestock to terminate green manure crops and reduce tillage. At WARC, Dr. Miller plans to expand his research to include organic fruit and vegetable production. "I'm excited about the potential we have to do relevant research to help to increase the profitability and scale of organic farming in Montana," states Dr. Miller. "The stage is set for good things. The staff at the station, Marty Knox and Bill Fleming, have extensive experience in organic production. There are lots of producers, extension agents, and other professors with great ideas and energy. In addition, there's more and more funding available for this type of research."

WARC has already initiated several organic research projects, many of which will be showcased during the station's field day in July 2015. For fruit and vegetable producers, the station will be evaluating which varieties perform best under different cultural practices. In the high tunnels on the station, Marty Knox has been working with cover crops, tomato varieties under different transplanting practices, and season extension with row-cover. The station is also investigating using cover crops to raise poultry to increase the profitability and nutrient benefits of cover crops in a vegetable rotation.

The station is also involved in three projects funded by the Montana Department of Agriculture's Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG). With Dr. Mac Burgess, a new professor of small-scale agriculture in Bozeman's Sustainable Food and Bioenergy Systems program, WARC is joining with North Dakota State University and the Northern Great Plains Sustainable Agricultural Society to identify superior varieties of carrot, green bean, broccoli, lettuce and cucumber that meet the needs of local organic growers and markets. The station will also be one of several sites conducting research to improve organic strawberry production, led by Seth Swanson, the MSU Extension horticultural specialist in Missoula County. This project aims to improve organic strawberry production by reducing pest management issues and increasing marketable yields using annual strawberry production in high tunnels. The third SCBG-funded project seeks to identify the most productive and profitable types of berries and small fruits for Montana growers.

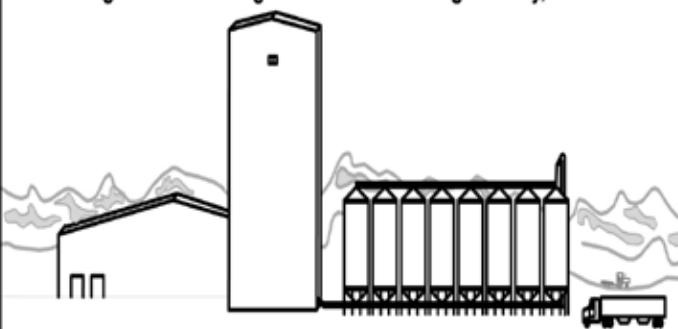
Montana growers may be able to take advantage of increased demand for "superfoods" by growing novel fruits that are well adapted to our soils and climates. This project will evaluate nearly 30 varieties of Currants, Aronia, Saskatoons (Serviceberry), Haskaps, Dwarf Sour Cherry, Sandcherry, and Elderberry at four sites across the state. This superfood evaluation project will include collaborators that may be

familiar to MOA members: Pat McGlynn, MSU Extension Flathead County; Heather Estrada, Flathead Valley Community College; Toby Day and Mac Burgess from MSU Bozeman; and Brent Sarchet, MSU Extension, Lewis and Clark County.


In addition to the horticultural research, WARC is also conducting research to improve weed management in organic grain production. The project is a collaborative effort among several MSU faculty: Drs. Bruce Maxwell, Jeff Littlefield, Fabian Menalled, Zach Miller and Judit Barroso. This work, funded by the Montana Wheat and Barley Committee, seeks to identify the impact and best-integrated management of Field Bindweed. This weed is one of the most serious pests in organic production, according to MOA's survey of producers in Montana. According to Dr. Miller, "This project is a great start to improve the management of perennial weeds in organic systems. With the research reviews of management of Canada Thistle and Field Bindweed funded by the Montana Organic Advisory and Education Council and this project, we are laying the foundation for more research that's critical for all organic producers across Montana."

The project is also looking for organic grain growers who are interested in on-farm research. If you have fields with Field Bindweed, please contact Dr. Miller via email at [zachariah.miller@montana.edu](mailto:zachariah.miller@montana.edu).

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## **MOA Joins OTA's Farmers Advisory Council**

In a move to elevate the voice of the western organic grain farmer and better connect the organic sector with key organic grain growers and handlers, the 230-member Montana Organic Association voted to join the Organic Trade Association's (OTA) Farmers Advisory Council (FAC), becoming the newest farmer-governed association to form a strategic alliance with OTA.

The addition of the Montana Organic Association to FAC will provide invaluable perspective from organic growers in the important Northern Great Plains and the Mountain West regions. The Northern Great Plains is a significant provider of organic grains, with Montana ranking as the nation's largest producer of organic wheat.

"We heartily welcome MOA and its members to our Farmers Advisory Council," said Laura Batcha, CEO and Executive Director of OTA. "We know that MOA's presence on the council will add much to our understanding of the unique needs and issues of organic growers in that region. It's an encouraging sign that our diverse members are actively participating and engaging in our efforts to move the organic sector forward."

"Joining OTA's Farmer Advisory Council will benefit our membership in giving them a larger influence on national organic policy issues, and it will give FAC our perspective on issues facing Montana's organic farmers and ranchers," said Nate Brown, Chairman of the Board for MOA and an organic dairy farmer. "With the demand for organic food so high, especially for grains, MOA thinks this partnership will help us to better serve our membership, cultivate new organic farmers and ranchers, and expand organic acreage in our region."

The Farmers Advisory Council was formed by OTA in 2013. The group gives a bigger voice to organic farmers, and fosters two-way communication between OTA and organic farmers, while providing a network to share relevant and timely information to growers.

**Visit MOA's Website for More:**  
[www.montanaorganicassociation.org](http://www.montanaorganicassociation.org)

**Join the Discussion on Facebook**  
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# Get Involved! Contact Your Representatives

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Website: <http://governor.mt.gov/>

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Website: <https://zinke.house.gov/>

Web Form: <https://zinke.house.gov/contact>

## SENATORS

**Steve Daines (R – MT)**

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Phone: 202-224-2651

Website: [http://www.senate.gov/senators/](http://www.senate.gov/senators/114thCongress/Daines_Steve.htm)

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Office of Senator Jon Tester

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\*\*\*If you are a Farm/ranch Business level member,

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[association.org/omadrates.htm](http://www.montanaorganic.org/omadrates.htm) for details or call Seth

Swanson at (406) 258-4205.

# Join MOA Today!

Each membership level delivers a quarterly newsletter devoted to sharing the latest news and information about the association and the organic industry, discounts to MOA events, special mailings on legislative alerts and events, and the networking and educational opportunities presented by joining others who share interest and experience in the field of organics.

Other member benefits include eligibility for a Workman's Comp premium discount, safety training and other services to assist you in your organic endeavors.

The business level categories offer discounts on advertising in our print publications and an online directory listing on the MOA website. The Lifetime Membership gives you permanent access, listings, discounts and the satisfaction that you're supporting the farmers, ranchers, processors, distributors, retailers, students and researchers who make organic food available and accessible.

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## A View from the Chair

I'd like to start off by expressing a huge "Thank You!" to our departing board members Wes Gibbs, Casey Bailey, Chaz Holt and Mike Nault for their service to MOA. It has been awesome working with them on the board and we greatly appreciate the time and effort that they have put in. We will miss them but wish them the best of luck in their future endeavors.

The face-to-face MOA board meeting took place in late January in Fort Benton. It is always great to get together as a group and plan the upcoming year for our organization. So many great ideas come out of these meetings and I look forward to the energy and enthusiasm that comes from this. Some of the highlights from the board meeting were that we finally decided on a new logo after years of trying! We are working on the final colors and this will be unveiled in the summer newsletter. We secured committee members and brainstormed ideas for the conference and fundraising activities. There was a good discussion reviewing the conference and going over the survey results. These help the organization

tremendously, so thank you to all of you who filled them out. One other thing we explored was putting a credit card payment system on our website for the conference registration. This will help streamline registration and be a convenience for people. The 2014 Conference brought in a similar income to the previous year. We also worked through all of the policy proposals that were brought up at the member meeting that were given to the Board to discuss at our face-to-face meeting. Overall, I think there were some stimulating conversations, we got a lot of work done, and set MOA on the path for another productive year.

I hope the wintertime has been treating everyone well as the days start getting longer with spring right around the corner. It'll be here before you know it!

Nathan Brown, MOA Board Chairman