



Organic MATTERS

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FSA Support Available

by Shelly Rolando, USDA Farm Service Agency

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers a variety of programs to support both organic producers and handlers. From financing input costs and storage and handling equipment, to risk protection, FSA is committed to helping organic agriculture grow and thrive. Now, organic operations will have the opportunity to apply for cost share assistance for receiving or maintaining organic or transitional certification, while exploring the many available FSA program benefits.

A recent addition to FSA's toolkit of assistance to organic producers is the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program and the Agricultural Management Assistance Organic Certification Cost Share Program. Beginning March 20, 2017, organic producers

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The Heartbeat of Organics is Strong

by Kaleena Miller, Alternative Energy Resources Organization*

Welcome to the MOA Community

On the first day of December of 2016, Kalispell welcomed the attendees of the 14th annual MOA conference. In turn, MOA welcomed me into their knowledgeable community of growers, researchers, industry representatives, state employees and more.

With approximately 225 folks in attendance, the conference space buzzed with the sounds of producers exploring new products from vendors, collaborations developing, and longtime friends catching up. With 50 new registered organic growers in Montana, and a 5% increase in organic sales in 2016, there was a lot to discuss at this year's conference. Glancing at the conference agenda, I noticed the many hours scheduled for social activities, particularly different from other conferences I've attended, and wondered why. This question was soon answered: MOA's strong and supportive community of members don't have many opportunities each year for face time with each other and there was good beer available. Though the social hours could have easily kept us longer, in this piece I'll focus on session highlights and knowledge gained throughout the conference.

A Thought-Provoking Keynote

This year's keynote speaker was Dr. John Reganold, hailing from Washington State University's Department of Crop and Soil Sciences. In just one hour's time,

Dr. Reganold provided a brief history of organic agriculture, reviewed the top reasons why people buy organic

"I don't think organic agriculture has a future, it IS the future."

- Dr. Bob Quinn

food, discussed farming systems that fall in between conventional and organic, and addressed biodiversity, environmental effects, and economic performance as it relates to the comparison of conventional and organic systems. Dr. Reganold flowed between the meta-level observations and extremely detailed comparisons between organic and conventional agriculture with ease. He spent time addressing the social well-being component of organic agriculture, such as the reduction of worker exposure to pesticides. The bottom line is that we have a long way to go. He stated, "We're sort of the guinea pigs when it comes to human health impacts of pesticide exposure. There just isn't enough data yet." Dr. Reganold pointed out how organic agriculture has pulled some conventional growers towards the middle of the spectrum, falling into other farming systems that are

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The Heartbeat of Organics *continued from p. 1*

more sustainable than conventional practices. He also emphasized the extremely important role consumers play in regards to contributing to environmental issues through their daily purchases. (Although discussed at Dr. Reganold's Saturday session on Soil Health, I thought it would still be valuable to mention the book he strongly recommended to this audience, titled "Building Soils for Better Crops," produced by SARE in 2010 and, free to download here: <http://tinyurl.com/7nvvvww>).

Organic Finances

Angie Nelson from the Department of Agriculture and Joe Willauer from the Food and Agriculture Development Center Network were the perfect duo to cover training, technical assistance, and funding opportunities at the conference. The pair was lively and entertaining while speaking about what could easily become boring subject matter in less capable hands. They highlighted the Specialty Crop Block Grant due in February 2017 (see p. 15), noting the high federal allocation amount (over \$1 million) for this grant, resulting from interest and growth in pulse crops. The session covered a few successful business models, including the Bitterroot Valley Food Cooperative and Headframe Spirits Distillery. Angie and Joe also brought attention to the Community Food and Agriculture

Coalition's Specialty Crop Mini-Grants that are currently accepting applications. The right crowd was in the room for this well attended session, with about half of those in attendance never having applied for these grants before. Angie and Joe disseminated a plethora of valuable information effectively and with humor.

Is Saturation Possible in the Craft Beer Market?

This popular session addressed two main topics: the state of the craft beer market and the opportunities for growing organic hops in Montana. This panel discussion session included representatives from across the industry spectrum, including Tom Britz of Glacier Hops, Matthias Haaben of Gambrinus Malting and Brian Smith of Blackfoot River Brewing Company. There was complete consensus among these speakers when asked why there was phenomenal growth in the craft beer market. The answer? A higher quality product, diversity in taste, and the connection breweries have to communities. Matthias pointed out that, "Germany makes wonderful beers, but they are boring - everyone makes the same beer." There was also strong consensus among the panel that the craft market is not saturated yet, by any means. The millennial generation is largely responsible for contributing to the growth of the craft industry and their demand isn't expected to decrease anytime soon. When the topic switched to discussing opportunities for growing organic hops in the state, the panels' optimism rapidly declined. Mr. Britz explained why the economics for small hops growers are so challenging, citing startup capital and labor as large barriers, and there is the issue of the end market. "You can grow hops in Montana, but finding the marketplace is very challenging," Britz noted. The bottom line message from the expert panelists was that the creation of shared infrastructure is needed in the form of harvesting and production facilities in order to source more organic Montana hops.

High Tunnels, Flaming, Grazing and Future Research

MOA attendees heard from over 50 different speakers during the conference, including 22 speakers covering 13 breakout sessions in the last two days of the conference. A few additional highlights from the breakouts covered topics such as the construction of high-tunnels, flaming, and grazing, as well as future research ideas from the audience. Dr. Mac Burgess from MSU's Sustainable Bioenergy and Food Systems Program discussed ventilation, temperature, and soil fertility concerns during high-tunnel construction. He touched on the topics of material type, relative costs, heat gain and loss, in addition to cover crop varieties. The interactive nature of his session created an atmosphere ripe for audience member participation and discussion, as both the presenter and attendees

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organization dedicated to advocating and promoting organic agriculture for the highest good of the people, the environment and the State economy.

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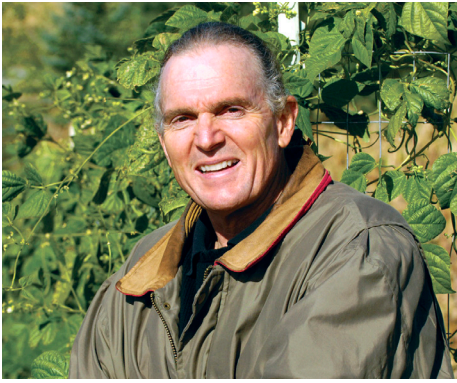
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Dr. John Reganold, Keynote Speaker, discussed soil health and how organic can feed the world. (Washington State University)



Steve Peters (OSA) and Judy Owsowitz (Terrapin Farm) instruct at the Terrapin Farm Tour. Another group visited Browns Meadow Farm, also braving near zero temperatures. (Robbe Lindsay/MontanaGrow)



MOA offered a record number of social events, including a live play, all of which were well attended. (Robbe Lindsay/MontanaGrow)



Kids' University, facilitated by FoodCorps volunteers, drew 80 local school children, who learned about food and soil health. (Jessica Mrugala)

shared many lessons learned. Dr. Zach Miller from MSU's Western Ag Research Center and Dr. Fabian Menalled, a Cropland Weed Specialist at MSU, shared some of their recent research on field bindweed management through flaming and also through grazing practices. Flaming is a thermal pest control method that harnesses the intense heat of combustion to kill weeds and insects. Dr. Miller noted the critical window that flaming creates for pre-emergent weed control and how effective the researchers found it to be during trials. Dr. Menalled highlighted the ongoing research of utilizing grazing techniques to reduce tillage. Looking forward, the next steps in their research are focused on increasing yield; there will be more data coming from MSU over the next few years. Dr. Patrick Carr from MSU's Central Ag Research Center described MSU's need for more on-farm partners to conduct additional research in the future. When he proposed to the audience: "Tell us what you want MSU to work on," they were quick to respond with ideas that ranged from developing more cover crops with greater allopathic qualities, to additional research on appropriate tillage and effects at different depths, to the integration of more livestock into organic systems.

Too Many Nuggets to Count

Before the social hour started on Friday evening, there was a session titled "Nuggets of Knowledge," facilitated by MOA Board Member Jonda Crosby. I couldn't believe how well attended this was, with both new and veteran farmers filling up a room with more than 50 people, eager to get to know one another. "The time to sit with veteran farmers while they reflected on the things they learned during their careers was exactly what every new farmer dreams about. The community and involvement of that session was

powerful," said Jessica Mrugala, a new farmer looking to make meaningful connections and learn more about beginning farming. The nuggets ranged from vaccination strategies to advice on lawyering up early to regrets of not farming at earlier ages. Veteran farmers nodded their heads in agreement when one attendee spoke about how all those in this field operate on trust and honesty. I think that speaks to why there were so many in the Nugget session. They were coming together through a desire to strengthen the organic community by getting to know each other.

Year of the Pulses

David Oien and Jim Barngrover of Timeless Natural Foods were joined by Ty O'Connor of O'Connor Crops and Cattle as speakers for a session focused on pulses. The group covered the recent popularity of pulses to the seemingly endless nutritional benefits to some very convincing yield numbers coming right off of O'Connor's farm. Dave referenced the United Nations designation of 2016 as the year of the pulses. Why did they choose pulses? They are healthy, they are an affordable protein, and they hold the golden status of being nitrogen fixers. Did you know that lentils have 56% more antioxidants than blueberries? Did you know that 11% of CO2 emissions on the planet are a result of nitrogen fertilizers? What I want to know is: what is not to love about lentils?

Dave also discussed Montana's long history of interest in pulse crops starting with Jim Sims, a researcher at MSU (who, sadly, passed away recently), introducing pulses to Montana forty years ago. Mr. Barngrover discussed the benefits of fava beans as excellent nitrogen fixers, but acknowledged the challenge posed by lack of markets for them. "We can tell where our fathers and grandfathers planted

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Accreditation Program for Transitional Agricultural Products

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is accepting applications from existing organic accredited certifying agents (ACAs) interested in AMS accreditation to certify agricultural products as "Transitional." ACAs should submit their applications by February 28, 2017, for this National Certified Transitional Program (NCTP). AMS will utilize a standard for transitional agricultural products that was developed by the Organic Trade Association (OTA).

OTA designed the certified transitional program to create a consistent mechanism for certifying agencies to document operations' adherence to organic regulations on land in transition to organic status. The new program provides certification and oversight to producers who are in transition to organic. It does not provide standards or criteria for labeling products certified under the program.

The Montana Organic Association (MOA), however, has reservations about this program. Doug Crabtree, MOA Board Chairman, states, "While MOA supports expanding opportunities for new and existing farmers to access the organic market, we do NOT feel that transitional certification is necessary or in the best interests of our Certified Organic members."

Crabtree continues by pointing out that the danger of a certification program for "transitional organic" is that it will provide food manufacturers with an alternative supply of lower-cost commodities. These not-quite-organic ingredients will then be packaged, labeled and marketed to consumers as a less costly alternative to true organic foods, resulting in confusion, market segregation and ultimately lower demand and prices for organic crops and products. The word "organic" must not be allowed on any product that does not meet the requirements of the Organic Foods Production Act and the National Organic Program rule. The "transitional certification" program, as published by USDA, does not address handling or labeling. These issues must be clarified to assure that processors cannot use "transitional" ingredients as substitutes for organic or label products in a manner that could confuse consumers or compete with certified organic products.

Visit www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/apply for more information about the standard, the application process, and to download the application for service. Contact Jeffrey Waite by email at Jeffrey.Waite@ams.usda.gov or by phone at (202) 720-4411 for additional information.

Sources: *USDA and Organic Trade Association* 


USDA Seeks Comments on Proposal to Establish a New Organic Research, Promotion, and Information Order (Organic Check-off)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is seeking comments on a proposal for a new industry-funded research and promotion program. The proposed Organic Research, Promotion, and Information Order would cover certified organic products and would include a range of agricultural commodities, such as fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat, poultry, breads, grains, snack foods, condiments, beverages, and packaged and prepared foods. It would also include non-food items, such as textiles, personal care products, pet food, and flowers. Organic imports – both those certified under the USDA organic regulations and those entering the U.S. under an organic equivalency arrangement – would also be covered.

Like all USDA R&P programs, the proposed program would establish a framework to pool resources to develop new organic markets, strengthen existing markets, and conduct important research and promotion activities. Under the proposed order, certified domestic producers, certified handlers and importers of organic products would pay an initial assessment rate but provide exemptions for producers and handlers with gross organic sales of \$250,000 or less during the prior marketing year.

A proposed rule with information about the proposed program was published in the Jan. 18, 2017 Federal Register. A 60-day public comment period, ending on March 20, 2017, will follow the publication of the proposed rule. Comments should be posted on www.regulations.gov or mailed to:

Promotion and Economics Division
SCP, AMS, USDA, Room 1406, Stop 0244, 1400
Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250.
Copies of the proposed rule may be requested from the address above or viewed at www.regulations.gov.

More information about research and promotion programs is available at www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/research-promotion. 

2017 Conservation Webinars

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is offering conservation webinars throughout 2017. An assortment of conservation topics will be presented by USDA, university, and other technical specialists. Visit <http://www.conservationwebinars.net/documents/planned-conservation-webinars> for more information.

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Perdue Tapped for Ag Secretary

Sonny Perdue, the former Republican governor of Georgia, was selected by Donald Trump to lead the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Perdue is slated for confirmation hearings as this publication goes to press.

Perdue got his start in local politics in Georgia as a Democrat, then switched parties and in 2003, became the first Republican governor of Georgia in a century. Perdue is the son of a Georgia farmer and was trained as a veterinarian. Perdue is considered a friend to conventional agriculture, having received more than \$325,000 from agribusiness interests, according to published campaign reports. As Governor of Georgia, Perdue championed the expansion of factory chicken farms in the state, and signed a bill in 2009 that would prohibit local communities from taking action to stop animal cruelty, pollution and other hazards from factory farms.

Sources: *National Public Radio, Associated Press and Center for Food Safety* 🌱

MOA Welcomes New Board Member



Jamie Ryan Lockman has worked as the North American Regional Director for Kamut International since 2011. She is responsible for protecting the use of the KAMUT® trademark throughout North America and in developing markets including South Korea, China, Dubai, Bahrain,

and Egypt. She oversees trademark use, licensing, and audits for more than two hundred companies ranging from small to mid-sized businesses, including organic artisan bakeries and pasta makers, to larger food corporations, such as Nature's Path, Kashi®, and Dave's Killer Bread (Flowers Foods). Jamie believes strongly that developing Montana's organic production and its organic processing capabilities are solid and sustainable strategies for supporting family farms, promoting health, ensuring crop diversity and environmental resiliency, protecting natural resources, creating jobs, and growing Montana's economy.

Jamie was born in Conrad and grew up in Missoula. She attended Montana State University, but earned her degrees in Business Administration and Anthropology from the University of Montana. She and her husband, Clem, farmed conventionally in Northeastern Montana for many years and maintain ownership of farmland located just north of the Missouri River on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. 🌱

New Organic Animal Welfare Standards

USDA has determined that the current organic regulations covering livestock care and production practices and living conditions needed additional specificity and clarity to better ensure consistent compliance by certified organic operations.

The new Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices Rule attempts to level the playing field and ensure that all poultry and eggs sold as organic comply with baseline practices and principles for animal welfare and treatment. The new rules, which are available in the federal register, represent more than a decade of work to clarify and improve animal welfare standards in organic. They incorporate input from thousands of stakeholders as well as recommendations the National Organic Standards Board.

The rules attempt to ensure that all livestock, including poultry, have enough space to lie down, turn around, stand up and fully stretch their limbs. Beaks couldn't be removed and tails couldn't be cut. Poultry houses would have to have fresh air and ventilation and inviting access to the outdoors.

Opponents of the rule claim that unlike Europe, where organic chickens are required to have access to 43 ft² outdoors, the USDA's rule only requires 2 ft² outdoors and as little as 1 ft² indoors, same as conventional.

Opponents of the rule also claim that providing outdoor access to poultry will make them vulnerable to predators and enable disease to spread. In reality, protective barriers can be used and scientific studies indicate that indoor confinement is a risk factor for spreading disease.


Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts said he will work to reverse the rule.

It is important to remember that all existing USDA and FDA health and safety rules will remain in place once the new standards are implemented. Operations that do not currently meet the standards will have ample time - up to five years - to comply with the new standards.

You can read the new rules at: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic-livestock-and-poultry-practices>.

Sources: Associated Press, National Organic Coalition 

NOSB Removes Carrageenan

At the fall National Organic Standards Board Meeting, carrageenan was voted to be removed from the National List of approved additives in organic food. The decision was a big win for consumers, who have been voting with their purchasing power for products without the dangerous additive. 

Organic Matters, Winter 2017

Free Crop Planning Resources

National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) Agricultural Specialists Luke Freeman and Margo Hale recently introduced the topic of crop planning for vegetable growers wanting to scale up into wholesale or institutional markets in a new webinar: "Crop Planning for Vegetable Farmers."

The webinar was recorded and archived on NCAT's ATTRA program website at www.attra.ncat.org, where it's available to view free of charge. If you have questions concerning the webinar or any other sustainable-agriculture issues, you can use the email "Ask an Ag Expert" feature on the website or call the ATTRA "hotline" at 800-346-9140. Both are free of charge.

Also, a resources and links PDF you can use to further your crop planning knowledge is available for download at: <https://attra.ncat.org/downloads/Crop-Planning-for-Vegetable-Growers-Webinar-Resources.pdf>.

GAP Safety Training in March

Fresh produce farmers will receive training and help developing their on-farm food safety Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) plans in three locations in Montana in March. The On-Farm Food Safety GAP Workshops will guide participants through the plan writing process. The trainings will be held March 2-3 in Billings, March 6-7 in Corvallis and March 9-10 in Kalispell.

The workshops are designed for fresh produce growers, especially those who are exempt from the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Rule. However, the workshop will be useful to all fresh produce growers, as well as buyers of fresh produce, and educators working with growers of fresh produce. The workshop is free for vegetable, fruit and nut crop producers. For non-produce farmers, educators and others taking the course, there is a \$25 fee to cover the cost of course materials and lunch on both training days.

To register go to: <http://lccdc.ecenterdirect.com> Select "Training Events" from the drop-down menu then select the location option for the workshop you would like to attend. For more information contact Jonda Crosby at 406-227-9161 or jcrosby@mt.net.

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MOA 2016 Award Winners

MOA's 2016 Award winners were announced at the MOA Conference in Kalispell last December.

The MOA "Lifetime of Service" award goes to an organic producer, handler, retailer, researcher, service provider (or other) who has demonstrated a long-term commitment to organic agriculture in Montana. The 2016 Lifetime award was presented to Ric and Dawn Blair of Third Street Market in Whitefish. The Blairs have been committed to organic food for decades. They learned everything from the ground up, educating themselves so that they can help others take better care of their health through wholesome organic food and appropriate supplementation. They opened Third Street Market so that their community would have access to the best organic and natural products available. They support local farmers and ranchers and carry "Made in Montana" products. Third Street Market has become a fixture in the community for providing good food, a wide variety of vitamins and supplements, healthy pet foods, and most importantly, product education. The Blairs feel that organic food is nature's medicine. And, they share that information and support the community every chance they get.

The MOA "Leadership in Organics" award goes to an organic producer, handler, retailer, researcher, service provider (or other) who demonstrates an on-going commitment to advancing the adoption, practice and success of organic agriculture in Montana. The 2016 Leadership award was presented to Connie Poten and Andy Sponseller of Ten Spoon Vineyard and Winery. The mission of Ten Spoon is to grow and produce quality wines free from synthetic chemicals, and to preserve open space for wildlife, agriculture, people and companion animals. Their farming and wine-making are open as a community experience, and they offer tours and run a very busy tasting room/ outdoor patio where visitors can sample wines, enjoy good music and learn about winemaking from the Ten Spoon staff. They also open their facility to area non-profits for fundraising events and are involved in many community initiatives. Ten Spoon crafts award-winning organic wines from estate-grown grapes, as well as from family vineyards in the Pacific Northwest and from Montana's renowned Flathead Lake cherries.

Congratulations to the award winners for being organic leaders, and thank you for your tireless service to advance organics and for supporting your communities. 

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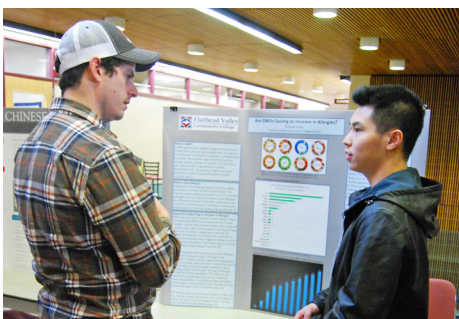
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MOA had a record 33 vendors at the 2016 Conference. MOA's sponsors and vendors make the conference possible for all to attend. (Robbe Lindsay/MontanaGrow)



MOA's auctions and raffles are becoming known not just for the great food offerings, but for their unusual items. (Robbe Lindsay/MontanaGrow)



The first ever student poster competition was a success, drawing conference attendees' interest and questions. (Laramie Groats)



MOA provided menu ideas and local organic farms and businesses donated ingredients to the FVCC chef to create the wonderful meals served at the MOA Conference. (Robbe Lindsay/MontanaGrow)

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fava beans in a field, because it's still the most fertile ground around," Jim Barngrover told attendees.

Ty O'Connor grows eight varieties of lentils on his land in Ekalaka. He noted the increased wheat yield from 18 to 30 bushels after using peas in rotation. That statistic generated impressed grumbles from the audience. This session was aptly placed before the closing keynote, since the tone spoke to the value of lentils as it pertained to our future generations. "Good soil for future generations," was a phrase reiterated throughout the conference as speakers urged attendees to think about how we value our soil and how we emphasize that value moving forward.


Organics are Changing our Environment, Perspectives, and Our Future

Dr. Bob Quinn of Kamut International warmed up the crowd with a few jokes to gain everyone's attention during the very last session of three quality-packed days of conference activities. In the closing keynote, Dr. Quinn acknowledged the strong membership and sense of community amongst organic farmers, and advised the group to accept newcomers and future organic farmers who will only strengthen the community. He shared his appreciation for the MOA conferences because of the new ideas presented, new friends made, old friends around, and the fact that each conference allows him to catch up on the progress made in research. "This year, it straightened me out on a few things," Dr. Quinn remarked, followed by a chuckle or two from the audience. Dr. Quinn was upfront about the industry's need to be more direct about connecting food and human health. "It's time we start talking about healthy food in relation to healthy

people. It's time to become bolder about connecting organic food and health. Organic food is capable of reducing sickness and health care costs. It's time to say cheap food equals high costs." Dr. Quinn encouraged the MOA community to embrace Hippocrates' philosophy of food being your medicine and medicine being your food. He also talked about how to shift focus after the election by concentrating on marketing opportunities, job creation in rural communities, and investing in and prioritizing research dollars in organic agriculture. Dr. Quinn left us on a high note, encouraging everyone to tell their stories to schools, via their vo-ag, FFA, and 4-H programs. We must engage our legislators and invite them to our farms so they too can become part of the MOA community.

In closing, it was clear that the conference brought a fierce community of revolutionaries together to share science, facts, experiences and perspectives. There should be great pride in everyone who is a part of this society, because you all are changing our environment, perspectives, and futures. Many thanks to all who were a part of this fabulous meeting of the minds, and many luck in the years to come. Never stop growing!

**This article was written as a collaborative effort between Kaleena Miller, Laramie Groats and Jessica Mrugala. Kaleena lives in Butte and works for AERO as a Program Manager, covering both their sustainable agriculture and renewable energy programs. This was her first time attending the MOA conference and certainly not her last. Laramie Groats is an agriculture student and Jessica Mrugala is an intern at Terrapin Farm.*

Editor's Note: MOA would like to thank Conference Chair, Heather Estrada, and the entire Conference Committee for their tireless work to create and execute the 2016 MOA Conference. 

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Outgoing Board Member

Despite intense lobbying, our friend and fellow Board Member and Treasurer, Jonda Crosby, allowed her tenure on the Board to close without seeking reelection. We owe Jonda a huge debt of gratitude for her service



Photo by Robbe Lindsay/MontanaGrow

to MOA. Serving as Treasurer, Jonda kept the books, paid the bills, collected the fees and created the reports to keep us all informed of the financial position and performance of MOA. In addition to her formal duties, Jonda was an informed, organized and professional Board member, usually the first to show up and last to leave, motivating fellow Board members to raise the bar of performance and service. While Jonda assured MOA that she will continue to volunteer her time as a member, we will miss her and her great work on the Board. 



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FSA Programs *continued from p. 1*

and handlers will be able to visit their local FSA office to apply for federal reimbursement to assist with the cost of receiving and maintaining organic or transitional certification. To learn more about organic certification cost share, please visit www.fsa.usda.gov/organic or contact a local FSA office.

The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) is a risk management tool to protect organic producers from low yields or crop losses due to natural disaster. Since traditional crop insurance isn't available for all crops, or in every county, NAP can provide this type coverage at a low cost for those crops not insured by the federal crop insurance program. For crop year 2017, the sales closing date for the majority of spring-seeded crops is March 15, 2017. For more information on NAP, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/nap.


FSA offers additional programs to help producers recover when natural disasters impact their farming operation. These programs include the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP), Livestock Forage Disaster Assistance Program (LFP), Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP), and the Tree Assistance Program (TAP). LIP provides assistance to livestock producers who have suffered a loss of livestock in excess of normal mortality, due to an adverse weather event or attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the federal government. LFP provides compensation to livestock producers who have suffered grazing losses due to drought or fire on federally-managed land. ELAP provides emergency assistance to producers of livestock, honeybees and farm-raised fish for losses due to disease, adverse weather, or other conditions, such as blizzards and wildfires, not covered by LFP and LIP. TAP provides financial assistance to orchardists and nursery tree growers to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes and vines damaged by natural disasters.

FSA can provide credit to agricultural producers when private and commercial credit isn't available. Loans are available to purchase or expand a farming operation and for operating expenses. FSA's microloan program is designed to meet the needs of small and beginning farmers, non-traditional, specialty crop and niche-type operations by easing some requirements and offering less paperwork.

FSA can also provide low-interest financing to build or upgrade facilities for storage and handling of eligible commodities through Farm Storage Facility Loans (FSFL). Eligible borrowers must be able to show repayment ability and meet other requirements to qualify for a loan.

FSA is also committed to protecting our greatest resources through a number of voluntary conservation programs. These programs work to address conservation issues including protecting drinking water, reducing soil erosion, preserving wildlife habitat, preserving and restoring of forests and wetlands, and assisting farmers whose farms are damaged by natural disasters. FSA accomplishes this through programs like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), and Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP).

Organic dairies may be interested in FSA's Margin Protection Program for Dairy (MPP-Dairy), a voluntary risk management program for dairy producers. MPP-Dairy offers protection to dairy producers when the difference between the all milk price and the average feed cost (the margin) falls below a certain dollar amount selected by the producer.

For additional information on these programs and other programs available to producers, please contact your local FSA office or visit www.fsa.usda.gov/mt. To find an office nearest you, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>. 

National Organic Research Agenda by Vicki Lowell, OFRF

Organic farmers and ranchers face unique challenges—from the availability of organic seeds, crop cultivars, and livestock breeds adapted to organic systems—to coping with weeds and pests.

In 2015, the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) surveyed over 1,000 organic farmers and ranchers across the U.S. to identify their topmost challenges. Responses to the online survey and additional input gathered through listening sessions, were used to develop the organization's 2016 National Organic Research Agenda (NORA), which is being presented to land grant universities, USDA, Congress, and the greater research community to help increase public investment in critical challenges identified by organic farmers.

Responses from the survey directly inform OFRF's top recommendations for intensified research funding and attention in the areas of soil health and fertility management, weed, insect, and disease management, and the nutritional benefits of organic food.

The 2016 National Organic Research Agenda report is available to download at ofrf.org.



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Specialty Crop Block Grant

This competitive grant program is designed to expand markets for Montana specialty crops with \$1.3 million to be awarded in federal funding. Specialty crops include fruits and vegetables, peas, and lentils, as well as horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture. Technical assistance calls will be held on February 1 and 15, 2017. For more information, visit <http://agr.mt.gov/SpecialtyCropBlockGrants>. Grant proposals are due to the Montana Department of Agriculture by February 22, 2017. For more information, eligibility guidelines, technical assistance and resources, visit scbg.mt.gov or contact Jim Auer, Specialty Crop Block Grant Program Manager, at (406) 444-5424. 

Calendar of Events

www.montanaorganicassociation.org/events.htm

Organic Matters Ad Rates

Ad prices and dimensions:

- 1 page ad --- \$110 (Size: 7-1/2W x 10H")
- 3/4 page ad --- \$90 (Size: 7-1/2W x 6-1/2H")
- 1/2 page ad --- \$65 (Size: 7-1/2W x 5H") -OR- (3-1/2" W x 10"H)
- 1/4 page ad -- \$40 (Size: 3-1/2W x 4-1/2"H)
- Business card ad --- \$30 (Size: 3-1/2W x 2H")

***If you are a Farm/Ranch Business level member, you will receive a 5% discount on your ad. If you are an Organic Business or Lifetime member, you will receive a 10% discount on your ad. All ads must be print ready.

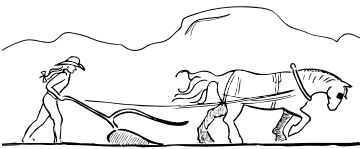
See www.montanaorganicassociation.org/omadrates.htm for details or call Seth Swanson at (406) 258-4205.

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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, a MOA member vote, 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.

Please sign me up as a MOA Member!

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Annual Membership Levels:

- Individual.....\$30
- Household.....\$50 (includes two memberships)
- Farm/Ranch/Business....\$75 (includes two memberships, a 5% discount on newsletter ads and a website directory listing)
- Organic Business.....\$250 (includes two memberships, a 10% discount on newsletter ads and a website directory listing)
- Lifetime.....\$750 (includes two memberships, a 10% discount on newsletter ads and a website directory listing)
- Lifetime Business.....\$2500 (includes two memberships, a 10% discount on newsletter ads and a website directory listing)
- Publication/Media.....\$500 (includes full page, quarterly newsletter ads, a website directory listing, and full media coverage)
- Silver (-5%).....\$1650 (includes two memberships; full page, quarterly newsletter ads; a website directory listing; full media coverage; two conference registrations & conference lunch sponsorship)
- Gold (-10%).....\$2000 (includes two memberships; full page, quarterly newsletter ads; a website directory listing; full media coverage; two conference registrations & conference dinner sponsorship)

Please fill out this form,
make check payable to MOA and mail to:
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A View From the Chair

For most of us in Montana, this week has brought a welcome respite from several weeks of extreme cold and snow. The bright side is that the cold should help lessen some pest and disease populations. Likewise, winter snow promises a contribution to soil moisture.

At our recently completed Board retreat, we filled executive positions and committee chairs. I am honored to continue as Chairman; Cliff Merriman will continue as Vice President; Heather Estrada, whose leadership made the 2016 Conference a great success, takes over as Treasurer; and Jamie Lockman is the new Secretary. The complete list of Board members, executive committee and committee chairs can be found on the "Contact" page of MOA's

website. There are opportunities for YOU, our members, to employ your talents and energy to grow and improve the association. Please contact the chairs or any Board member if you are able to help on any of these committees. Working with other MOA members is pleasurable and helps strengthen our organic community.

The USDA has released, for public comment, a proposal to create an Organic Research, Promotion, and Information Order. Commonly referred to as a "Check-off," this program offers tremendous opportunity to fund research to improve organic farming systems, disseminate research information to farmers and to educate the public on the benefits of organic food and farming. Our membership

voted overwhelmingly to support development of this program and its submission to the USDA. Now is the time to read the formal proposal, consider its costs and benefits and submit your comments to USDA by March 20. The resources and links can be found on the MOA website's homepage.

I look forward to serving and working with you in 2017. Please contact me, or any MOA Board member, if you have ideas or energy to share. Together we can grow MOA and organic agriculture for the highest good of the people, the environment and the state's economy.

Doug Crabtree, MOA Board Chairman