



the
Communicator

Organic Crop Improvement Association International | SPRING 2024

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President's MESSAGE

Hello everyone! Spring is here and a new crop year is upon us. The beginning of each year gives everyone the opportunity to make changes, learn upon past experiences, and start anew. Your OCIA board and staff are eager to get 2024 off in the right direction and grow our organization.

I'd like to thank all those who took the time to attend or participate in our Annual General Membership Meeting held on Feb. 8, 2024 in Council Bluffs, Iowa. Twenty-two people attended in person and an additional eighteen people attended virtually. The annual meeting is a way for members to learn about our organization, give suggestions, meet the staff, review our finances, and vote on current issues. OCIA is a member-led organization which makes us unique and different from other organic certifiers.

I would like to take the time to welcome Kelsey Sheehan to the OCIA board of directors. Kelsey is a third-generation farmer from Westlock, Alberta. Her family farm mainly raises beef, pork, hay, and oats. Kelsey proudly represents Canada on our board. Her father Terry Sheehan, a longtime member of OCIA, has served on the board of directors for ten years and has termed out.

The current board of directors gives its heartfelt appreciation to Terry Sheehan for his past service. Terry rarely missed a meeting, traveled long distances from Canada to attend in-person board meetings, and was always the voice of reason on our board. Terry put a lot of thought and insight into any decision he made.

He was a great role model for all of us who serve on the board.

Lastly, I'd like to encourage everyone to participate in one of the many Farm Start programs that OCIA is hosting this year. We are using TOPP (Transition to Organic Partnership Program) dollars to help cover the costs of these events. A Farm Start is a great way to network with like-minded farmers in your area and see an organic farm in action. Please plan to attend any Farm Start in your locality and help spread the good word about organic agriculture!

Chris Jaworski
OCIA International
President

Executive Director's REPORT



Greetings OCIA International Membership! As we are approaching planting season, I would like to take the opportunity to review OCIA International's Input review process. The NOP program allows for acceptance of input reviews by other accredited certification agencies, and third-party material evaluation programs accredited to ISO 1765 (e.g. EPA, OMRI, CDFA). OCIA will accept such reviews and document acceptance of them via certificates, copies of input list, etc. as well as maintaining copies of documents to show the program complies with requirements (e.g. ISO certificate). OCIA will still have the final approval of the input, if a material reviewer does not accept a review, this will be documented and if required, the NOP will be contacted per the NOP Handbook. If an input is listed by recognized Material Evaluation program, OCIA will accept the review to the NOP Program. However, as these programs only review for compliance to the NOP program, it is necessary for OCIA to conduct the review to other applicable programs in accordance with the procedure. Under COR the CFIA allows for Certification bodies (CBs) to consult with other CFIA-accredited CBs or input evaluation programs (e.g. OMRI Canada) to accept their input reviews as well as consult with third parties to obtain technical information to determine compliance on an input. OCIA will accept input reviews from evaluation programs and other CBs. OCIA will maintain documentation to show that any input evaluation programs accepted, and third parties consulted are accredited to ISO 17065.

It is critically important to remember that OCIA shall be informed of all inputs prior to use of them. Although these lists are accepted, at any given point an input may drop off the list or there may be restrictions on use. OCIA is still required to approve each input used. Please notify OCIA of the urgency of your input request. We work diligently to grant them as quickly as possible, however many times we have trouble getting formulations from the manufacturers.

Noncompliances are a continuous part of Organic Certification. Please understand that the process of a noncompliance is part of the Organic Regulations. OCIA is required as an accredited body to ensure that all rules and regulations are followed by each operator. OCIA also goes through the process of being audited by accreditors and we receive noncompliances that are required to be addressed.

Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) rulemaking amends the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) organic regulations to strengthen oversight and enforcement of the production, handling, and sale of organic agricultural products. The amendments protect integrity in the organic supply chain and build consumer and industry trust in the USDA organic label by strengthening organic control systems, improving farm to market traceability, and providing robust enforcement of the USDA organic regulations. Topics addressed in this rulemaking include: applicability of the regulations and exemptions from organic certification; National Organic Program Import Certificates; recordkeeping and product traceability; certifying agent personnel qualifications and training; standardized certificates of organic operation; unannounced on-site inspections of certified operations; oversight of certification activities; foreign conformity assessment systems; certification of producer group operations; labeling of nonretail containers; annual update requirements for certified operations; compliance and appeals processes; and calculating organic content of multi-ingredient products. The USDA implemented Strengthening Organic Enforcement on March 19, 2024. The new regulations will impact all segments of the organic industry. Please refer to our website www.ocia.org for updated information.

OCIA International works hard to provide our certified operators with excellent support and customer service. We thank you for your continued support and look forward to serving you in the future. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

I wish you a safe planting season.

Amanda Brewster
OCIA International
Executive Director

Treasurer's

REPORT



Hello members,
It's that time of the year when we get to start a new growing season. A new crop year brings hope and new challenges.

OCIA International is looking for improvement in the new year financially as well. Amanda and her staff worked to address the problem areas in the budget this year. Currently certification fees and other income are above year ago levels.

On the expense side of the balance sheet, financial expenses and outside professionals are running higher than last year.

At the present time net income is down from last year, but still positive at \$38,095.17.

As you prepare your soil and plant your crops, be safe and have a blessed year.

Randy Mosel
OCIA International
Treasurer

Have a question? We have an answer!

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TRANSITIONAL PRODUCTION PLAN



The National Organic Program (NOP) is offering a new public resource for producers transitioning to organic production called the Transitional Production Plan (TPP).

The TPP template helps transitioning producers develop the required supporting documentation to qualify for OTI services through either the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) or the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA). The TPP also helps producers begin learning how to properly document organic practices in compliance with the Organic System Plan (OSP) process that is required upon application for certification.

By using the TPP template, the organic transition process can be streamlined, and producers can more easily access and utilize USDA programs. For example, the transitional plan can be used by producers as OSP documentation when applying for RMA transitional crop insurance. In some cases, the transitional plan may meet some requirements for the Conservation

Activity Plan 138 application under the NRCS.

If producers are not using prohibited substances and are utilizing practices anticipated to meet compliance with USDA organic regulations, a transitional plan may be useful. When a USDA-accredited certifier reviews and signs the TPP, that operation will be considered transitional in the Organic Integrity Database.

Those interested in learning more about the TPP template or accessing it can visit https://content.govdelivery.com/bulletins/gd/USDAAMS-3900e22?wgt_ref=USDAAMS_WIDGET_422

OCIA Board of Directors and Committees

2023 OCIA International Board of Directors

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AL -- Cindy Elder

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Randy Mosel

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Jeff Kienast
Dale Maass
AL -- Amanda Brewster

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Rebeca Talmadge, Advisor
Emily Fowell
Rick Schuehardt
Carolyn Lane, EO

OCIA International wins 2024 National Organic Program Director's Award

The USDA's NOP awarded OCIA International the National Organic Program Director's Award on Jan. 30, 2024. This award is designed to highlight the work of accredited organic certifiers in support of the National Organic Standards.

Over the last three years, OCIA has consistently engaged in effective, active communication and collaboration with NOP staff. From daily operations to fraud investigations, OCIA has helped NOP gain better insight into the real-world application of organic standards. This allows the program to ensure integrity and consistency in how USDA organic regulations are applied.

The award was presented at the annual NOP Certifier



Training for USDA-accredited organic certifiers and inspectors from around the world.



STRENGTHENING ORGANIC ENFORCEMENT (SOE) UPDATE

The USDA implemented Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) on March 19, 2024. The new regulations represent the largest update to organic standards in the last two decades, and they will impact all segments of the organic industry.

Many operators wonder how SOE will impact their operations. While the impact will vary based on an operation's scope and complexity, the following frequently asked questions provide a basic guide for how SOE might impact your operation.

What is Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE)?
Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE), the largest update to the USDA organic regulations since 2002, went into effect on March 19, 2024. The comprehensive update impacts all aspects of the organic supply chain, with handlers and processors experiencing the most significant changes. New SOE rules will require almost all handlers and processors of organic products to obtain organic certification to continue using the USDA Organic Seal on their products. This is a marked change from previous organic regulations which included little oversight for this segment of the organic industry.

What is the purpose of SOE?

The goal of the sweeping update is to strengthen the oversight and enforcement of organic regulations to ensure the integrity of the organic supply chain. Guaranteeing organic integrity requires:

- Transparent supply chains
- Trusted interactions between businesses
- Tools to verify product legitimacy

Prior to SOE, mechanisms for guaranteeing these necessary elements were inconsistently implemented. Increasingly complex supply chains that crossed large geographic areas added to this difficult task.

Why is SOE necessary now?

The organic industry has experienced massive growth since the USDA first implemented organic regulations in the 1990s. Between 2012 and 2021 alone annual organic sales increased by nearly \$30 billion. While other sectors of the economy stagnated during the Covid-19 pandemic, the organic sector continued to see growth due to ever increasing consumer demand.

Additional information about Strengthening Organic Enforcement can be found on OCIA International's website. If you have a specific question, feel free to contact OCIA directly.

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OCIA Field Signs for Sale

Aluminum "No Spray Zone" signs are currently for sale at \$18 each plus shipping/handling. There are three convenient ways to order:

- Visit ocia.org
- Call us at 402-477-2323
- Email info@ocia.org



MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Transition to Organic Partnership Program

The Plains Transition to Organic Partnership Program (Plains TOPP) has begun making mentor/mentee matches! Plains TOPP is a coalition of organizations providing technical assistance and comprehensive support for transitioning and existing organic farmers.

The goal of TOPP is to make the transition from conventional farming to organic farming easier and more accessible. To that end, a robust mentorship program has been developed. The mentorship program will:

- Connect transitioning operators with an experienced organic operator who will provide guidance throughout the transition process.
- Mentors will receive training, guidance, and support to ensure a successful relationship.
- Transitioning operators will set goals with mentors, and mentors will actively assist transitioning operators in working toward their goals.

Mentors will:

- Receive training prior to beginning mentorship
- Have at least 4 years experience with organic production and certification.
- Understand organic rules and certification requirements
- Meet with mentee at least 45 hours/year
- Communicate challenges and benefits of organic certification to mentees

Stipend of \$3,000/year provided to mentors (multi-lingual mentors and mentors with more than one mentee may be eligible for additional compensation)

For more info, or to become a mentor or mentee, visit www.ocia.org/plains-topp, or email Brandon Hill at bhill@ocia.org.

UPCOMING

EVENTS

12
APR

ORGANICS IN THE OZARKS

University of Missouri Southwest Research, Extension, and Education Center
14548 Highway H, Mt. Vernon, MO, United States

03
AUG

TRANSITION TO ORGANIC FARM TOUR AND INFO SESSION

Geiger Farm
2020 Raccoon Rd, Robinson, KS, United States

25
AUG

ORGANIC FARM INNOVATION EXPO

Farm Innovation Expo
2566 Rockwood Ave SW, Cokato, MN, United States

25
AUG

NEWTOWPIA NOW

Expo West
Denver, CO, United States

\$100 Referral

OCIA is offering a \$100 referral bonus for currently certified OCIA operators who refer a producer to us! The referral bonus is valid after the new operator has paid their certification fees. To learn more or apply for a referral bonus, visit <https://ocia.org/resources-2/referral-bonus-application/>.



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