



the *Communicator*

Organic Crop Improvement Association International

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SUMMER 2024

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President's MESSAGE

Hello everyone! Summer is upon us and the season is typically one of the busiest for farmers as they tend to their crops and livestock. The long days of light not only benefit plants and animals but give all of us more time to get things done. Please be safe and careful out there!

Over the past quarter the staff at OCIA has participated in many trade shows and agricultural events. Some of the upcoming tours and conferences that will feature OCIA representation are as follows:

- The Missouri Organic Association will be hosting two separate programs focusing on transiting to organic production. The first one will be held on July 18 in Jefferson City, MO, and the second will be held on July 24 in St. Louis, MO.
- Practice to Paperwork: A walk through organic certification at the *EarthDance* Organic Farm School will be in Ferguson, MO, on July 24.
- Transition to Organic Farming: Farm Tour & Info Session will be held in Robinson, KS, on August 3. Current OCIA board member Jack Geiger will be hosting the event.
- The Organic Farm Innovation Expo in Cokako, MN, is on August 15. This event will feature the latest equipment focused on organic crop production.
- Natural Products Expo East will be held in Philadelphia, PA, August 24 – 27. This show mainly focuses on processors.
- Acres USA Eco-Ag Conference and Trade Show in Madison, WI, is December 2 – 5. The Acres show features many workshops, vendors, and speakers pertaining to organic agriculture.

You can find more detailed information on each of these events on our website. If you happen to attend any of these programs, please stop by our booth or reach out to the OCIA staff on site. We would be happy to speak with you!

In addition, OCIA has been tending to its Latin American members as well. Representatives will be conducting inspector and operating training in Nicaragua and Mexico. OCIA will also be registering as a foreign entity in Peru so we can continue doing business there. Peru happens to be one of OCIA's largest countries, based on members, and one of our oldest markets.

Lastly, OCIA's board of directors and executive staff have decided to change our home office location in Lincoln, NE. The existing building, at 5,500 square feet, is larger than needed and is expensive to maintain. With only seven people working in our home office downsizing made sense. Our new location, still in Lincoln will only be 2,500 square feet.

There are several advantages to making this move. The new office is of more recent construction, meaning future upkeep will be less; it is smaller and more efficient to operate; and it is in a safer neighborhood for our staff. Most importantly, OCIA will still be able to maintain a physical location. We are hoping the closing will be sometime in August. Best of all, after selling our old building, there should be no negative impact to our organization's finances. Overall, this change should be a win-win situation.

Thank you again for allowing OCIA to be your certifier. Please remember if you refer a friend or associate to OCIA, you are eligible for a \$100 reduction in your certification fees.

Chris Jaworski
OCIA International
President

Executive Director's

MESSAGE

Greetings OCIA International Membership!

We are in full swing of the 2024 inspection season. If you have not already had your inspection, I am sure yours is quickly approaching. We are still receiving files, and trying to coordinate inspections in the most efficient way possible. Cindy does an excellent job in efforts to keep your inspection cost at a minimum.

OCIA is required as an accredited body to ensure that all rules and regulations are followed by each operator. As such, OCIA also goes through the process of being audited by accreditors and we also receive noncompliances that are required to be addressed. Noncompliances are a continuous part of organic certification. Please understand that the process of a noncompliance is part of the organic regulations. It is not our intention to be “nitpicky”, we are required to ensure you are following the standards. Noncompliances are part of the certification process, operators need to respond adequately and on time so OCIA can gather the information required by accreditors. OCIA will not be able to allow extra time in the future and ask that operators respect the deadlines given.

OCIA encourages operations to seek guidance from fellow chapter members or farmers as OCIA is prohibited to consult on such matters. Should a noncompliance not be addressed adequately, OCIA is forced to move on to the next step which often results



in adverse action such as proposed suspension. In order to avoid this, we ask that all items are addressed with a timely response.

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 happy summer!

Amanda Brewster
OCIA International
Executive Director



Treasurer's MESSAGE

last year. Part of this increase is due to other income rising by \$20,000. Accounts receivable are currently running about 18% above year-ago levels.

The expense side of the ledger has seen an increase in accreditation and government relations and outside professionals costs. The accreditation and government relations increase are due to mainly USDA-NOP fees. Outside professionals fees reflect the additional audit costs this year.

Hope you all are enjoying the summer.

Hello everyone,

Summer is off to a very wet start here in northeast Nebraska. My part of the state is 8 inches above normal for this point in the year! My crops are planted but have a couple of acres that were replanted and then drowned out again.

The OCIA International office in Lincoln is moving to a new location. The new building is smaller and will hopefully require less maintenance and repair. With some of the office staff working remotely, the larger facility was no longer required. The larger, previous building has been listed for sale.

Net income is up about \$12,000 above this time frame

Randy Mosel
OCIA International
Treasurer

Want the latest updates from OCIA?
Visit our website at ocia.org!





USDA Highlight:

Mosel presents on organic weed management and TOPP

Randy Mosel, OCIA treasurer, was recently highlighted by the USDA NOP for his work educating producers about organic weed management.

Mosel presented at the Nebraska Weed Control Association conference in Norfolk, Neb., earlier this year. As a long-time organic alfalfa farmer, he drew upon his own extensive experience throughout his presentation. Mosel covered alternative weed control methods like those used by organic producers, as well as the challenges and benefits organic farming provides.

Mosel also introduced over 70 conference attendees to the Transition to Organic Partnership (TOPP) program, which is designed to support farmers transitioning to organic production. The program provides technical assistance, peer-to-peer mentorship, and networking opportunities. Many producers indicated interest in the program and asked about how TOPP could help meet their goals for their operations.

In Nebraska, TOPP has already connected over 25 organic and transitioning producers with resources and opportunities.

TOPP aims to make the transition from conventional to organic farming easier and more accessible. To that end, a robust mentorship program has been developed which 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.



TRANSITION TO ORGANIC:

Farm Tour & Info Session



Jack and Deborah Geiger of Geiger Farm will be hosting Transition to Organic: Farm Tour and Info Session on Saturday, Aug. 3, 2024 in Robinson, Kan.

The event will include a tour of the Geiger's mixed grain and livestock operation and a machinery walkthrough.

Keynote speakers Jack Geiger and Nate Powell-Palm will provide presentations on the specifics of organic production, marketing, certification, and enhancing

generational participation in agriculture. NRCS and OCIA representatives will present on resources and opportunities available for producers to improve their operations and transition to organic.

Lunch will be provided for all who RSVP and the event will go on, rain or shine.

To RSVP for the event and see the full agenda, visit <https://ocia.org/geiger-farm-tour-rsvp-form/> or scan the code below.



Operator Spotlight

Alan Wilson

For first-generation organic farmer Alan Wilson, the path to running his own certified organic operation has been characterized by constant learning, trial and error, and having an invaluable network of peers and supporters behind him.

STARTING AT SQUARE ONE

After serving as a U.S. Army Calvary Scout through two combat deployments and nearly 10 years, Wilson began pursuing an education through Barton Community College (BCC) in Kansas and exploring the world of horticulture.

“The first spring I was out of the Army, I decided I was going to try and grow a garden in our backyard and failed miserably,” Wilson said. “I did, however, learn that I enjoyed working with plants and trying to shepherd life.”

After completing his core requirements at BCC, Wilson transferred to Kansas State University (KSU) and completed a bachelor's in horticulture with a focus in fruit and vegetable production.

LEARNING THE ROPES

During his time at KSU, Wilson also

helped on the family farm of a friend, Jesse Rottinghaus. Here, he began to learn the basics of production agriculture and grew to enjoy the work he was doing.

“I began to really like farming even though I had never been exposed to production agriculture,” Wilson said. “I had also become interested in organic agriculture through my own curiosity and some undergraduate research while going to school.”

When an old alfalfa field on the Rottinghaus farm needed something new planted, Wilson received his first opportunity to put his education and growing practical experience to use. This formative experience started a journey for Wilson that eventually led to his renting and farming 600 acres in Kansas.

**“I am constantly asking questions
and advice of people that have
farmed their whole lives.”**

Later on, the opportunity for Wilson and his family to take over a farm belonging to his wife's grandparents presented itself. While

leaving behind lifelong friends was difficult, the young family made the transition to Indiana and began farming organically there.

A WAY FORWARD

Over four years, Wilson, with his wife Shelley and their two young children Lincoln and Renley, has grown 75 certified organic row crop acres into over 340. They produce corn, soybeans and small grains near Huntington, Indiana.

For Wilson, land access and a lack of generational knowledge about organic production have been his biggest challenges. While the learning curve can be steep for beginning and transitioning organic producers, Wilson has capitalized on his own experiential learning and the knowledge of others in the industry.

"I am constantly making mistakes and trying to learn from them," Wilson said. "I am constantly asking questions and advice of people that have farmed their whole lives."

Wilson encourages beginning producers in situations like his to remain flexible and always have a plan A, B, C and D. He also emphasizes the importance of determination and staying connected to other producers.

"Keep after it and take it one step at a time."

"Keep after it and take it one step at a time. The process and the adversity that you face will get easier. It will seem overwhelming at times; it will get easier," Wilson said. "The biggest thing is sticking with it and keeping an open mind. Ask questions and find other producers with a willingness to show you the ropes."

CHOOSING CERTIFICATION

Wilson chose to certify as organic because it was a financially accessible way to begin farming as a first-generation producer. He also believes in the principles of organic certification - environmentally sound practices, healthier commodities and stewardship.

Wilson was initially drawn to OCIA because of the networking and learning opportunities local chapters provide. As his operation grows, Wilson continues to see the value in certification.

"We would have never gotten to where we are today without our organic certification."

"Being [OCIA] certified organic brings a ton of value to our operation, not only from a cash flow business side, but from a quality-of-life value as well," Wilson said. "We would have never gotten to where we are today without our organic certification."

A FINAL NOTE

For those considering transitioning to organic, Wilson provides one final piece of advice.

"If I can do it, anyone can do it."

2024 OCIA Research and Education Awards

MICROGRANTS



Melissa DeSa

Working Food, Gainesville, FL

Melissa's research included a community-based plant breeding approach to crossing the feral and resilient Everglades tomato with a dwarf variety, Tanunda Red.

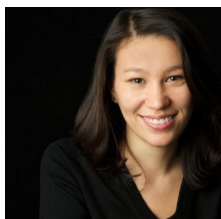


Marc Delaney

Delaney Farms, Syracuse, NY

Marc's project encompassed partnering with Peace Inc. to host a new program called "Farmer for a Day" for the children of Syracuse, New York. The "Farmer for a Day" program invited 50 children from Peace Inc to visit Delaney Farms and experience what it is like to be a farmer and learn gardening practices they can share with members of their communities.

SCHOLARSHIPS



Michelle Carkner

Ph. D. student, *University of Manitoba*

Michelle's research focused on yield stability across organic farms on prairies.



Ben Weiss

Master's student, *Washington State University*

Ben's research focused on biodegradable composite hydromulches for sustainable organic horticulture.

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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



2024 FARMER OF THE YEAR

Askegaard Organic Farm

For couple Mike and Barb Askegaard of Askegaard Organic Farm, organic farming provided a way to balance health in all aspects of their lives- their family, their customers, and the environment.

“We decided to certify as organic because we saw the negative effects that conventional farming was having on both human health and environmental health,” Mark said. “We didn’t want to expose ourselves or our neighbors to unnecessary chemicals. We want to have clean water, clean air, and healthy soil for all.”

FAMILY FIRST

One key aspect of the Askegaard operation is promoting health within their own family. The sixth-generation family operation in Moorhead, Minn., was initially transitioned to organic in 1995 by Mark and Barb to help support their health. This meant they were no longer being exposed to the industrial pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers conventional operations often utilize.

Thirty years later, Askegaard Organic Farm is now operated by Mark and his daughter Beth McConnon. During busy seasons in the spring and fall, Barb

and other family members also pitch in to ensure everything runs smoothly.

QUALITY AT EVERY LEVEL

Askegaard Organic Farm currently produces organic wheat, oats, soybeans, and flax, and utilizes an extensive cover crop plan. The flaxseed is milled and packaged on-farm and then sold to retail and wholesale markets. Askegaard Organic Farm flaxseed is distributed in grocery stores and food cooperatives and used by bakeries, hospitals, and schools across the Midwest.

For this operation, organic certification provides an additional level of quality and trust for their product.

“Organic certification brings a lot of value to our operation; our customers can trust that our crops are grown free of chemicals and are non-GMO, and that we are growing our crops in healthy soil,” Mark said.

**“Organic certification brings a lot
of value to our operation.”**



With no plans to slow down, the family farm envisions a future where the operation is expanding and continuing to build soil health. Part of this plan involves incorporating perennial cover crops into the crop rotation.

FINDING THE BEST FIT

When Mark and Barb began to transition to organic, one of the first decisions they made was who to certify with. After some research and conversations with neighbors, it became clear that OCIA was the best fit for their operation.

“We decided to certify with OCIA because it

was one of the first agencies certifying organic crops when we transitioned,” Mark said. “We were referred to OCIA by a neighbor who was also transitioning to organic at the time.”

“We have continued to certify through OCIA because we’ve been very satisfied with their application and certification process.”

As the Askegaard operation has continued to grow and change, OCIA has remained its certifier of choice.

“We have continued to certify through OCIA because we’ve been very satisfied with their application and certification process, their friendly staff, and their good reputation amongst organic certification agencies.”

In February 2024, Mark and Beth received OCIA Research and Education’s 2024 Outstanding Farmer of the Year award. This award highlights OCIA-certified farmers’ efforts to build soil health, reduce pests and weeds, enhance the environment, and remain involved in the organic community.



OCIA Board of Directors and Committees

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Carolyn Lane, Secretary, USA
Randy Mosel, Treasurer, USA
Jack Geiger, Chair, USA
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Scott Ausborn, USA
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Have a question? We have an answer!

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UPCOMING EVENTS

JULY 24

Practice to Paperwork: A Walk Through Organic Certification

EarthDance Organic Farm School, 233 South Dade Ave., Ferguson, MO

AUG 03

Transition to Organic: Farm Tour & Info Session

Geiger Farm, 2020 Raccoon Rd, Robinson, KS

AUG 15

Organic Farm Innovation Expo

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

AUG 25

Newtopia Now

Denver, CO

DEC 02

Eco-Ag Conference

Madison Marriott West, 1313 John Q Hammons Dr., Madison, WI





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