

# the *Communicator*

Organic Crop Improvement Association International

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FALL 2024

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# President's

# MESSAGE

**G**reetings everyone!

Fall is almost here. Your OCIA board of directors and I wish all of you a safe and fruitful harvest season. This is the time of the year when one's past efforts finally start to pay off!

In recent newsletters I've commented on the number of trade shows and farm tours OCIA has been participating in. Our latest farm tour of Jack Geiger's operation in Robinson, Kansas was a smashing success with approximately 50 people in attendance. This event was funded with TOPP (Transition to Organic Partnership Program) dollars and is a way to get more farmers interested in organic agriculture. Thank you again Jack for hosting this event out at your farm!

Even though your OCIA staff has been busy marketing and promoting organic agriculture, our membership numbers are slightly down from last year. As of now, we've signed up 66 new operators but year to date we are down 27 members.

Unfortunately, a lot of farmers are retiring with no one lined up to take over their farms. We are simply losing membership through attrition. We all need

to encourage young people to consider agriculture as an occupation. Please give thought to becoming a mentor through the TOPP program. You will also be compensated \$3,000 for your efforts!

Lastly, I would encourage everyone to visit OCIA's website. There is a plethora of information about organic agriculture at your fingertips. Of course, you may call our office in Lincoln, Nebraska too. You will always speak to a live person who will take the time to answer any questions you may have.

**Chris Jaworski**  
OCIA International  
President

# Executive Director's

# MESSAGE



**G**reetings from Nebraska!

Inspection season is wrapping up. If you have not been inspected or received the notice for your inspection, please know we are continuing to work on assigning inspections. We are busy with inspection reports and final reviews. Our goal is to make a decision on each file within 60 days of receiving the inspection report. We do the best we can to achieve this goal. Please respond to inspectors timely should they need more information to complete your inspection report.

Noncompliances are a continuous part of Organic Certification. Please understand that the process of noncompliances are 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, we also receive noncompliances that are required to be addressed. Please understand it is not our intent, to be “nitpicky”, we are only required to ensure you are following the standards. Please feel free to contact us about any questions you have during your certification process.

The International Board of Directors, will be submitting Bylaw proposal Amendments at the 2025 AGMM. Generally the amendments are to bring OCIA International into accreditation compliance and aligning our membership terminology.

The Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) is a USDA Program investing up to \$100 Million over five years in cooperative agreement with non-profit organizations, across the United States, who will partner with others to provide technical assistance and wrap-around activities. OCIA International is the Lead Cooperator for the Plains Region, serving North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas, and Oklahoma.

TOPP is a collaborative effort involving many partners working together towards a common goal of providing mentoring services, technical assistance, community building and organic workforce development. If you are interested in becoming a mentor, please see [www.ocia.org/plains-topp](http://www.ocia.org/plains-topp) Please visit our website at [www.ocia.org](http://www.ocia.org) for upcoming events such as tradeshow we will be attending, and local farm tours.

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 harvest season.

**Amanda Brewster**  
OCIA International  
Executive Director



# Treasurer's MESSAGE

Hello members,

I just completed baling my fourth cutting of alfalfa. The humidity levels in northeast Nebraska this summer were higher than usual which caused a lot more challenges to my hay harvesting. Soybeans are started to drop leaves so harvest season is approaching soon.

Total income is presently up 1.7% over last year's level. Contributing to this are certification fees up 8.4% and other income up \$25,457.

The following expenses are below last year:

- Business insurance (-14%)
- Occupancy costs (-29%)
- Operating supplies (-30%)

- Promotional expenses (-73%)
- Secondary inspections and testing (-34%).

Expenses that have risen are:

- Financial expenses (+59%)
- Outside professionals (+36%)
- Accreditation and government relations (+73%)

I hope you all have a safe and blessed harvest.

**Randy Mosel**  
OCIA International  
Treasurer

**Want the latest updates from OCIA?  
Visit our website at [ocia.org](http://ocia.org)!**

# TRANSITION TO ORGANIC Farm Tour and Info Session

The Transition to Organic event hosted by Jack and Deborah Geiger in early August was a huge success for OCIA! Over 50 people attended the event, where they were introduced to organic production methods, tips for beginning producers, and certification information.

Through a partnership with Plains TOPP (Transition to Organic Partnership Program), funding and resources were made available to help put on this event. Events like this are essential to help integrate beginning and transitioning producers into organic production and facilitate peer-to-peer networking and connections.

Host and keynote speaker Jack Geiger led a walking tour of his family's mixed grain and livestock operation and fielded questions about his production methods. During the afternoon presentation series, Geiger also covered organic weed management.

Nate Powell-Palm, keynote speaker, spoke about building his own certified organic operation from the ground up and provided a unique, first-generation perspective. He also covered the basics of working with consultants, selling organic crops, and attaining organic certification.





**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](http://www.ocia.org/plains-topp), or email Brandon Hill at [bhill@ocia.org](mailto:bhill@ocia.org).**

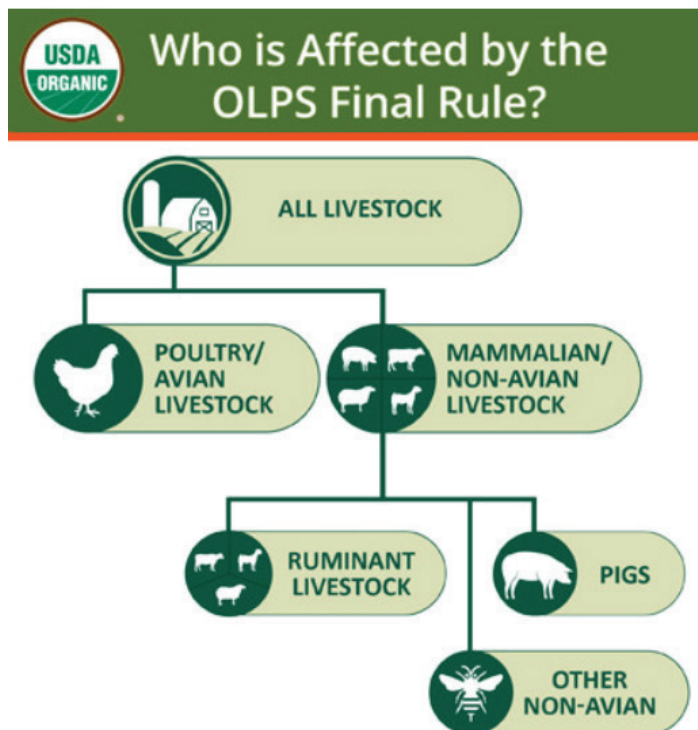
# USDA UPDATE

## USDA offers OLPS course for organic producers

In November 2023, the Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards (OLPS) final rule was published. The intent behind this new ruling was to clarify and add detail to existing organic livestock living condition and health standards, as well as introduce new standards for avian species. These details allow certifiers and producers to consistently enforce organic regulations for livestock to enhance consumer trust in the organic label and support a fair marketplace. The final rule will go into effect January 2025.

The recently released Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards Final Rule Core Course helps producers, certifiers, and inspectors apply regulatory changes concerning the OLPS before the rule becomes effective in January. Key changes the rule will require include new requirements for living conditions, transportation, slaughter, handling, and indoor/outdoor access.

To learn more and access the course, visit <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/organic-certification/training>.



## USDA expands specialty and organic producer insurance options

Beginning with the 2025 crop year, the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) will expand coverage by allowing enterprise units by organic farming practices, updating existing policies, and creating additional enterprise unit eligibility for previously overlooked crops. This update marks the first of a few slotted for this year.

This expansion will affect numerous specialty and organic products as part of the RMA's efforts to reach more producers and serve specialty producers more effectively.

For more information, visit <https://www.rma.usda.gov/news-events/news/2024/washington-dc/usda-expands-insurance-options-specialty-organic-growers>.





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## GUATEMALA

### Guatemala Chapter 1

Dariusz Echeverria

## 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](http://ocia.org)
- Call us at 402-477-2323
- Email [info@ocia.org](mailto:info@ocia.org)

# OCIA Board of Directors and Committees

## 2023 OCIA International Board of Directors

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Rick Schuehardt  
Carolyn Lane, EO

## Have a question? We have an answer!

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# UPCOMING EVENTS

OCT 21

## **Introductory Organic Inspection Course**

Hotel Misión de los Ángeles Calz. Porfirio Díaz 102, Col. Reforma, Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca, Mexico

DEC 02

## **Eco-Ag Conference**

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

FEB 12

## **2025 Annual General Membership Meeting**

Holiday Inn, 2202 River Road, Council Bluffs, IA, United States





## the Communicator

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