

THE COMMUNICATOR

ORGANIC CROP IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL | WINTER 2024



Organic Eye recognizes OCIA as Certifier Upholding the Highest Ethical Standards

Take Back the Organic Farming Movement

Switch to Certifiers That Protect Family Farms and Share Our Values



Certifiers Upholding the Highest Ethical Standards

<p>Baystate Organic Certifiers Global Organic Alliance, Inc. (GOA) MOFGA Certification Services NOFA-NY Certified Organic, LLC OEFFA Certification OneCert, Inc.</p>	<p>Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA) Vermont Organic Farmers, LLC Yolo County Organic</p>
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Ethically-Challenged Certifiers

Partnering with corporate lobbyists and the USDA: hydroponics, livestock factories, imports, conflicts of interest, etc.

<p>Americert International California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)* Clemson University Colorado Department of Agriculture Control Union Certifications* EcoCert* Georgia Crop Improvement Association Idaho State Department of Agriculture Indiana Certified Organic — EcoCert (ICO)* Midwest Organic Services Association, Inc. (MOSA) Nature's International Certification Services — EcoCert* OnMark Certification Services</p>	<p>Oregon Department of Agriculture Oregon Tilth Certified Organic* Organic Certifiers, Inc.* Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO)* Pro-Cert Organic Systems, Ltd.* Quality Assurance International (QAI)* Quality Certification Services* Texas Department of Agriculture Utah Department of Agriculture and Food Washington State Department of Agriculture* Where Food Comes from Organic*</p>
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Unranked

<p>Agricultural Services Certified Organic Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship Kentucky Department of Agriculture</p>	<p>Marin Organic Certified Agriculture Maryland Department of Agriculture Minnesota Crop Improvement Association* Montana Department of Agriculture Monterey County Certified Organics</p>	<p>Natural Food Certifiers* Perry Johnson Registrar Food Safety, Inc. Primus Auditing Operations* SCS Global Services, Inc.*</p>
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* *Organic* OTA Certifier-Member



This guide will be continually updated as more information becomes available at OrganicEye.org.
 If you are a farmer or business certified by one of the unranked organizations,
 please encourage them to contact [OrganicEye](https://OrganicEye.org) to transparently share their policies.





President's Message

The staff at OCIA realizes young farmers are the lifeblood of our organization, and we are pulling out all the stops to reach them!

Lastly, I'd like to give a shout out to all organic farmers and processors for their dedication to the organic industry. As a Midwesterner, I can instantly recognize an organic farm this time of year. In December an organic farm stands out like an island of green amongst all the brown and bare soil. Organic farmers not only protect and preserve the environment they also produce healthy food too. Keep up the good work!

Thank you for choosing OCIA as your certifier. We recognize that you have many choices and appreciate your loyalty and commitment to our farmer led organization. Hope to see many of you at the Annual General Membership Meeting this February!

CHRIS JAWORSKI
OCIA INTERNATIONAL
PRESIDENT

As the year comes to a close, one can reflect back on what has been accomplished. Although 2024 has presented some challenges we, at OCIA, strive to adopt with the times and deliver organic certification services in a timely and cost effective manner.

Organic certifiers, such as OCIA, continue to operate in a challenging environment. Commodity prices for farmers have declined while input costs have increased. Also, the number of farmers nationwide has been on a downward trend. As an organization, we have recognized these issues and have initiated changes to make OCIA your go-to certifier.

First, the staff has focused on the task of turning around customer files more quickly. We realize time is money and don't want to stand in the way of anyone making a sale.

Secondly, we have changed our office location to help reduce costs. The new office, which is still located in Lincoln, Nebraska, is smaller, more efficient, and will have less overhead. Also, many of our staff members have foregone bonuses to help reduce office expense as well.

Third, OCIA has really stepped up its marketing efforts. The staff has participated in numerous trade shows across the nation. Also, OCIA members have participated in a number of farm start programs funded through TOPP (Transition to Organic Partnership Program).



Executive Director's Message

Greetings OCIA International Membership!

OCIA International wishes you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

I would like to thank you for your continued support to OCIA International. OCIA strives to continually move forward and implement positive changes annually. We will be implementing a new Pre-Inspection review process for 2025. The PIR letter you you will be receiving for 2025 will be less cumbersome and more straightforward regarding what OCIA needs to proceed with your certification renewal process.

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. In 2024 OCIA collaborated with 20 Regional TOPP partners, and contributed to 78 events. These events have drawn thousands of attendees.

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, healthy, and prosperous 2025.

AMANDA BREWSTER
OCIA INTERNATIONAL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



RANDY MOSEL
OCIA INTERNATIONAL
TREASURER

Treasurer's Message

Greetings everyone,

I had beautiful harvest weather here in Northeast Nebraska. This allowed me to be done by October 16th with corn harvest. My yields were lower due to no significant rainfall after June 30th.

The following is a look at the financial picture of OCIA international.

Other income is the bright spot with a 22% gain over last year. This was mostly due to charging for the NOP Import Certificates. Accounts receivable is running 28% above last year. Some of this will probably have to be written off as bad debt expense. Other operator and membership fees are down 12% and 6% respectively from a year ago.

Expense accounts with large increases include Accreditation and Government Relations as well as Financial Expenses. Accreditation and Government Relations increased the most at \$24,000, due to audits and increased fees.

Total income for the year is down 2% compared to last year.

The Internal Committee meet 11/26 to discuss the budget and fee schedules for the upcoming year. The budget and fee schedules will be presented at the AGMM in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

I hope everyone has a prosperous and blessed new year.

OCIA INTERNATIONAL CONDUCTS OPERATOR AND INSPECTOR TRAINING IN MEXICO



As the city of Oaxaca prepared for visitors from around the world for the Day of the Dead, OCIA International and the Mexico Regional Office welcomed producers, processors, and inspectors for training from OCIA International's Lebi Perez, Julia Perez, Cindy Elder, and IOIA/AgriVita's Luis Brenes at Hotel Misión de Los Ángeles in Oaxaca from October 15th through October 27th.

Lebi presented training to OCIA producers and grower groups on October 15 and 16 that included changes to the USDA's National Organic Program as a result of the Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) rule change, the European Union organic regulation, and improving processes on the farm. Julia shared a number of resources with the group to help search for and determine the compliance of inputs. The group ended the training by enjoying a parade (i.e., calenda) on the streets of the Reforma neighborhood in Oaxaca by the hotel. Calendas are a frequent occurrence in Oaxaca, and it's recommended to try chapulines with mezcal while enjoying the fun (or candy is okay, too)!

Twenty-one people from OCIA-certified processors attended the training on October 17 and October 18. Training with the processors by Lebi and Julia also included topics about SOE and EU, as well as formulations, LPO labeling, and inputs. The processors also provided OCIA International with important feedback about the certification process.

Seventeen potential inspectors from all over Mexico joined OCIA International and trainer Luis Brenes for an IOIA-supported introductory farm and simple processing training from October 21 through 25. Luis taught the group about the certification process, the USDA Organic Regulations, the role of the inspector, and the inspection and report writing process. The future inspectors were enthusiastic and asked lots of great questions.



OCIA INTERNATIONAL CONDUCTS OPERATOR AND INSPECTOR TRAINING IN MEXICO



To end the training portion of the week, Luis led an advanced training for twenty current and new organic inspectors, including six inspectors currently working with OCIA in Mexico and Peru. Luis covered SOE and Organic Fraud Prevention Plans, mass balance and traceability, and how to improve communication and be an active listener.

OCIA ended the successful training week with an impromptu roundtable with the OCIA inspectors to discuss the Organic System Plan, inspection report forms, as well as other concerns related to organic inspections.

Thanks to Julia Perez for all of her work organizing the events, as well as conducting training and translating as-needed, Lebi Perez for conducting training and facilitating the inspector roundtable, and to Luis Brenes and IOIA for developing these courses with OCIA and joining us in Mexico to present these trainings. Thank you to Karla Zárate for her support in these trainings. Our sincere thanks to our certified operators for attending and sharing their thoughts with us. Thank you to the potential and current inspectors for their interest and enthusiasm. Special thanks to the OCIA inspectors for their efforts year after year and for taking the time to talk with us in Oaxaca. And THANKS to everyone for their continued patience while Cindy continues to learn Spanish; it was an honor and pleasure to spend two weeks with everyone in Oaxaca. - Cindy Elder





OCIA Research and Education Mission

The mission of OCIA Research and Education (R&E) is to support farmer driven research, on farm and at research institutions, including exploratory and demonstration projects. We facilitate connections between farmers, researchers, consumers and decision-makers. We also educate organic producers along with local and global communities regarding organic farming and foods. As funds are available, OCIA R&E supports organic farming research and education projects and initiatives through scholarships and grants.

Upcoming Webinar Series

OCIA R&E is working on putting together a webinar series beginning in 2025. Some sample topics include soil health, regenerative agriculture, organic systems for livestock, grazing management, biodiversity, and wildlife management.

Stay tuned for more information.

Please contact Sarah Diamond (ocia04.re@gmail.com) if you have topic suggestions.

Board Member Vacancy

Beginning January 2025, there will be a board member vacancy for OCIA Research and Education. If you are interested in learning more about this 3-year term, please contact Sarah Diamond (ocia04.re@gmail.com).



Microgrants

Due to funding restraints, there were no grant awards made in 2024. Please stay tuned for grant opportunities for the spring 2025 term.

The micro grants (up to \$3,000) are offered for research or education and are determined on a case-by-case basis. Research and educational projects must pertain to organic agriculture. Projects are encouraged in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Latin America, and Japan. Funding is not available for equipment, infrastructure (machinery, buildings), labor costs, or community gardens. Applications are reviewed every March 15 and November 15 by the OCIA Research and Education Board of Directors.

Scholarships

Due to funding restraints, there were no scholarship awards made in 2024. Please stay tuned for scholarship opportunities for the spring 2025 term.

To encourage study and research in the area of organic agriculture, OCIA Research and Education awards an annual \$1,000 scholarship to a graduate student studying organic and sustainable agriculture.

2024 Farmer of the Year

OCIA R&E will be honoring a 2024 Outstanding Farmer of the Year at the 2025 Annual General Membership Meeting. The R&E segment of the annual meeting will take place via Zoom.

The Outstanding Farmer of the Year award is for honoring and recognizing the skills and talents of our farmers who certify to the OCIA level of excellence. Award candidates need to be selected in one of three ways.

1. Local Board of Directors selects the farmer.
2. At any meeting, members select a farmer by secret ballot.
3. Program Director or Chapter administrator selects the farmer.

For more information about this award or application process, please contact Sarah Diamond, OCIA R&E Operations Director (ocia04.re@gmail.com).



MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Transition to Organic Partnership Program

In 2022, the USDA announced plans to invest up to \$100 Million to build partnership networks in six regions across the United States. The Plains Transition to Organic Partnership Program (Plains TOPP) is a coalition of organizations providing technical assistance and wrap-around support for transitioning and existing 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 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 towards 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

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

2025 OCIA

ANNUAL GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Join OCIA International February 12th in Council Bluffs, Iowa

OCIA International’s 2025 Annual General Membership meeting will be held at the Holiday Inn and Suites at the Ameristar February 12th in Council Bluffs, Iowa. The one day event will provide OCIA operators opportunities to connect with peers, board members and OCIA International Staff. Attendees will also have the opportunity to learn about microgrant and scholarship opportunities.

Attendees with voting rights will have the opportunity to vote on proposed changes to OCIA International Bylaws, 2025 Budget and elect the 2025 Board of Directors.

Comprehensive informational packets are available on the OCIA website under “events”. The packets, available in both English and Spanish, include information about:

- AGMM Agenda
- Hotel Reservations
- Transportation from Omaha Airport
- Registration
- and more!

Members who plan to attend the AGMM should be sure to register no later than February 3, 2025.

Room Reservations are available at a block rate until January 20, 2025. To make reservations, call 712-322-5050 and mention OCIA International, for the group rate.



OCIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND COMMITTEES

2024 OCIA INTERNATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Walter Horodyski
Amy Krasne
Marg Laberge
Rebecca Talmadge, Advisor
Emily Fowell
Rick Schuchardt



OCIA Field Signs for Sale

Aluminum "No Spray Zone" signs are currently for sale at \$10 each plus shipping/handling.

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

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OCIA INTERNATIONAL

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