



the ORGANIC Cultivator

VOL. 21 ISSUE 1 SPRING 2023

Transitioning to Organic Partnership Program: Farmer to Farmer Mentorship

by Allison Walent, Program Director

In November 2022, Executive Director, Cori Skolaski, signed a cooperative agreement with the National Organic Program. With this agreement MOSA received \$13.6 million to serve as the Midwest Regional Center for the Transitioning to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP).

Through TOPP the Midwest Regional Center and its partner organizations

United States Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Marketing Service
National Organic Program
Transition to Organic Partnership Program



will provide wrap-around support to farmers transitioning to organic production. This support will include: connecting farmers who are transitioning to organic with local, experienced organic mentors; providing training and education; providing education and technical assistance on agronomy, organic certification, extension, conservation planning, organic regulations, certification cost share, business development, and marketing; building networks that serve to strengthen the organic community; developing and expanding access to technical assistance and training; and supporting workforce training and development.

The National Organic Program considers farmer mentorship to be the cornerstone of TOPP. Mentoring is a reciprocal relationship that through support, belonging and trust engenders community building. It is generally defined as a developmental relationship between a mentor and a protégé (mentee) who have different levels of expertise and skill. A successful relationship between a mentor and a protégé facilitates an opportunity to build and enhance skills while also providing psychological safety and encouragement through friendship that is formed throughout a mentorship. When a foundation of trust exists,

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

| | |
|--|---|
| TRANSITIONING TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM | 1 |
| FROM THE DIRECTOR | 1 |
| PAPER-BASED PLANTING AID UPDATE | 3 |
| CERTIFICATION POLICY UPDATE | 4 |
| CLASSIFIEDS | 6 |



FROM THE DIRECTOR

Cori Skolaski, Executive Director

Hello, Friends! Since Spring has sprung, are you feeling that Spring energy? Here at MOSA, we feel it. Clients are submitting their annual updates to their Organic System Plans, our inspectors are out doing inspections, we're in the thick of initial reviews, and we're taking lots of phone calls to answer questions and provide information.

In this newsletter, you will find quite a bit of information about the new Strengthening Organic Enforcement rule, the most significant change to the national organic regulations since the creation of the NOP! The rule safeguards confidence in organic products and minimizes fraud throughout the organic supply chain. All operations, including certification agencies

see DIRECTOR on page 2

see TRANSITIONING on page 2

like MOSA, must meet all of the requirements in the Rule by March 19, 2024, and we want to make sure you are ready! Please read Jackie DeMinter's informative article about this Rule on page 4.

There are many operations (non-processing handlers) that pre-SOE were exempt, but will now have to be certified. If you have partners that are a part of your supply chain, or know of any new operations that will need certification, we'd like to offer you a "finders fee" if you refer them to MOSA.

We are pleased to announce a new **Client Referral Award** to any MOSA-certified operation that refers a new client to MOSA for certification. When that operation submits their OSP and paperwork and pays their certification fee, both you, and the new client, will receive a \$50 discount on your certification fees! We'll be sending more information about SOE and the details of the Client Referral Award in the near future.

Recently, several staff members from MOSA attended the annual NOP and Accredited Servicers Association training in New Orleans. MOSA is a proud member of the Accredited Certifiers Association (ACA), which envisions a world in which the USDA Organic label is always trusted and valued. Its primary mission is to ensure consistent implementation of Organic Regulations through collaboration and education of accredited certification agencies, i.e. developing uniform criteria for implementation of the National Organic Program, training, support and networking, and hosting a listserv for discussion of issues impacting organic certification.

At the meeting in New Orleans, MOSA was extremely honored to receive the **2023 National Organic Program Director's Award!** From the NOP, "Over the past three years, MOSA stood out for its consistent, effective communication and collaboration with NOP staff on a wide range of issues and day-to-day operations, including fraud investigations. MOSA's regular, open collaboration with the Program provided increased insight into the real-world application of the organic standards while allowing the NOP to more effectively ensure certifiers are consistently applying the standards for USDA-certified farms and businesses." We are proud and honored to have received this award and we will happily continue to work collaboratively with the NOP and other certifiers.

As always, if you have any questions or comments about anything in this newsletter or about MOSA please feel free to contact me at Cori@MosaOrganic.org or 844-637-2526. Thank you for reading, and thanks for your continued commitment to organic integrity. ■

participants feel safe voicing ideas, seeking feedback, and taking risks (Murrell, 2021; Woo, 2017). A one-to-one mentorship program under the TOPP program will strengthen the organic community by building relationships between producers, encouraging creative solutions, and providing a psychological safety net.

We have been collaborating with our partner organizations and each of the Regional Leads for the other TOPP Regions (Northwest, California and the Southwest, Plains, Southeast, and Northeast) to develop mentor and mentee expectations; the most important expectations of the mentor/mentee relationship are:

The **mentor** will receive an annual stipend, and will:

1. Be provided training.
2. Be expected to commit 45 hours per annual program cycle (12 months on a rolling calendar cycle)
3. Will participate in a minimum of two on-farm visits per year (one at mentor farm and one at mentee farm).
4. Will have at least 3 touch points during the growing season with mentee.
5. Assist mentees in creating/reviewing an Organic System Plan and completing a farm assessment.

The **mentee** will:

1. Be expected to commit to 45 hours per yearly program cycle (12 months on a rolling calendar cycle)
2. Will participate in a minimum of 2 on-farm visits per year (one at mentee farm and one at mentor farm).
3. Will have at least 3 touch points during the growing season with a mentor.
4. Commit to a 2–5-year relationship with a mentor.
5. Will create an Organic System Plan and/or complete a farm assessment.

Are you thinking, "Oh wow, I have been waiting for just the right opportunity to connect with farmers interested in pursuing organic methods, this could be the perfect opportunity" or "gee, that sounds great, I would love to learn from an experienced organic farmer," but think you might not have the appropriate qualifications or experience? Here are some of the qualifications we seek in mentors and mentees.

Mentor Core Qualifications, a mentor will:

1. Have substantial farming experience (specific to region)
2. Be currently certified in good standing or have at least 3 years of experience with organic certification (retired producers welcome)
3. Possess a strong understanding of the organic rule; challenges and benefits of farming organically; and the process of transitioning to certified organic production.
4. Possess a willingness to share openly and candidly with mentee.

5. Possess a willingness to engage in problem solving, and a desire to give back to the farming community.

Mentee Core Qualifications, a mentee will:

1. Plan to (or are in the process of) transition an existing operation to organic, add new organic acreage, add new scopes of organic certification, and/or start a new, certified organic operation.
2. Commit to pursuing organic certification.
3. Have a curiosity about organic farming.

Have we piqued your interest? We will continue to work over the summer to design training and materials to support the mentor/ee relationship and look forward to launching our first mentor pairs in the Fall of 2023! Please reach out to Allison Walent to learn more (use the QR Code or awalent@mosaorganic, 608-447-0082).



Murrell, A. J., Blake-Beard, S., and Porter, D. M., Jr. (2021). The importance of peer mentoring, identity work and holding environments: A study of African American leadership development. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(4920), 1-19.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18094920>

Woo, H. R. (2017). Exploratory study examining the joint impacts of mentoring and managerial coaching on organizational commitment. *Sustainability*, 9(181), 1-15. ■

A New Allowed Organic Crop Material: Paper-Based Planting Aid

by Mark Geistlinger, *Customer Service Team Lead*

Are you a vegetable farmer who uses paper-based planting system on your MOSA-certified organic farm? If so, you may have already learned that the National Organic Program (NOP) added a new material last December to the National List of synthetic substances allowed for use in organic crop production: “paper-based crop planting aids.” The Organic Program also added a very specific definition of this material to the “Terms Defined” section of the National Organic Standards. Does this mean that paper-based media systems, such as the two commercial inputs used by some MOSA clients—the Paper Pot System from Small Farm Works and the Ellepots from Ellepot—are now permanently allowed for use? No, but the new additions to the Standards do create the necessary regulatory framework for these inputs to be reviewed by MOSA and other agencies.

MOSA and some other organic certifiers have allowed paper-based media systems for years based on the inclusion of “recycled paper” as an allowed synthetic material on the National List for use as mulch or a compost ingredient. About five years ago, other certification agencies informed the National Organic Program that they disagreed with this understanding, for two reasons: paper was not included on the National List for the actual use (planting media) of paper pot systems, and the paper pot inputs may contain non-paper ingredients (resin, adhesive, etc.) not included on the National List of allowed synthetic materials. The Organic Program agreed with this assessment and initially directed certifiers to not allow paper-based media systems. Advocates of paper pots immediately

CERTIFICATION POLICY UPDATE

by Jackie DeMinter, Certification Policy Manager

National Organic Program Strengthening Organic Enforcement

On January 19, 2023 the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) published the Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) final rule. The rule is effective March 20, 2023 and all operations must be in compliance by March 19, 2024. This update to the USDA organic regulations strengthens oversight and enforcement of the production, handling, and sale of organic products. This final rule implements 2018 Farm Bill mandates, responds to industry requests for updates to the USDA organic regulations, and addresses National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) recommendations.

“Protecting and growing the organic sector and the trusted USDA organic seal is a key part of the USDA Food Systems Transformation initiative,” said Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, Jenny Lester Moffitt. “The Strengthening Organic Enforcement rule is the biggest update to the organic regulations since the original Act in 1990, providing a significant increase in oversight and enforcement authority to reinforce the trust of consumers, farmers, and those transitioning to organic production. This success is another demonstration that USDA fully stands behind the organic brand.”

National Organic Program information about the rule can be found here: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/strengthening-organic-enforcement>

What does the rule do?

SOE protects organic integrity and bolsters farmer and consumer confidence in the USDA organic seal by supporting strong organic control systems, improving farm to market traceability, increasing import oversight authority, and providing robust enforcement of the organic regulations. Key updates include:

- Requiring certification of more of the businesses, like brokers, traders, importers and exporters, at critical links in organic supply chains. Operations new to certification will need to submit an Organic System Plan and be inspected and certified by March 19, 2024. See the article “SOE & Non-Processing Handlers” in this issue for more details.
- **Requiring NOP Import Certificates** for all organic imports. This system in the Organic Integrity Database is being developed and by the time the rule is fully implemented, certifiers will have the ability to generate import certificates.
- Requiring organic identification on nonretail containers. **Updates will be needed on most nonretail labels** currently in use. Operations will need to begin using new labels by March 19, 2024.
- Increasing authority for more rigorous on-site inspections of certified operations. On-site inspections conducted annually will continue to include mass-balancing and traceback audits that thoroughly verify the organic supply chain. MOSA will also begin conducting full supply chain audits for high-risk products across certifiers and certified entities to verify organic integrity.

Requiring uniform qualification and training standards for organic inspectors and certifying agent personnel. We are confident our staff and inspectors meet all requirements.

- Requires standardized certificates of organic operation. Certificates will be printed from the Organic Integrity Database (OID) found here: <https://organic.ams.usda.gov/integrity/> and will look a bit different but still contain the same information as current certificates.
- Requires additional and more frequent reporting of data on certified operations. MOSA will maintain and update the OID for your operation Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) Client Summary, as well as provide more information about your operation on a regular basis.
- Creates authority for more **robust recordkeeping**, traceability practices, and fraud prevention procedures. New Organic System Plan information will be needed this year.
- Specifies certification requirements for producer groups.

SOE complements and supports the many actions that USDA takes to protect the organic label, including the registration of the USDA organic seal trademark. The registered trademark provides authority to deter uncertified entities from falsely using the seal, which together with this new rule provides additional layers

of protection to the USDA organic seal. See more about the new seal below.

Who is affected?

The rule may affect USDA-accredited certifying agents; organic inspectors; certified organic operations; operations considering organic certification; businesses that import or trade organic products; and retailers that sell organic products. To see if you are affected by SOE, please read the full rule available at: <https://www.federalregister.gov/public-inspection/2023-00702/national-organic-program-strengthening-organic-enforcement>

Additional resources are available on the MOSA website here: <https://mosaorganic.org/news-commentary/strengthening-organic-enforcement-soe-client-summary>

When must organic operations comply with the rule?

Organic operations, certifying agents, and other organic stakeholders affected by the rule must be in compliance by **March 19, 2024**. This means that operations new to organic certification must be certified by this date. Currently certified operations requiring updates must have all updates in place and MOSA must also verify compliance by March 19th, 2024. Operations that are unable to meet this compliance date will be in noncompliance with the new regulations.

MOSA is actively working to update our systems, processes and procedures and will be communicating directly to certified operations. MOSA certified operations should review the new regulations to evaluate if your operation is directly affected or if operations you work with are affected. We are poised to offer a streamlined certification process to non-processing handlers. This includes all handlers conducting any handling activity but not processing organic product. Contact us with any questions about your operation or operations you work with throughout the organic supply chain.

Trademark Registration of the USDA Organic Seal

On December 20, 2022, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) announced that it has registered the USDA organic seal trademark with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Registration of the organic seal grants additional intellectual property rights to further restrict the use of the trademark or a confusingly similar one, by uncertified farms and businesses.

As the trademark owner, USDA can seek additional civil remedies such as injunctive relief and monetary damages under the Lanham Act. Operations trafficking in counterfeit organic goods or otherwise willfully misusing the USDA organic seal may be subject to fines and imprisonment under the Trademark Counterfeiting Act. This also means the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) can now detain, reject, or re-export imported products confirmed to be fraudulently using the USDA organic seal. Trademark authority and penalties for misusing the seal are in effect regardless of whether the ® is included.

Though the use of the new seal is encouraged, certified organic operations are not required to change their labels to include the registration mark ® of the seal, and certified organic products currently in the marketplace still meet the requirements of certification. Operations may choose either version of the seal and existing labels do not need to be revised or discarded. New versions of the seal can be found in multiple file formats can be found here: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic/organic-seal>. New labels using the registered trademark seal must be approved by MOSA prior to use.

One last reminder on the Origin of Livestock Final Rule

The Origin of Livestock (OOL) final rule for organic dairy was effective June 6, 2022 and all operations must be in full compliance by April 5, 2023. MOSA has updated our internal policies, systems and organic plan paperwork to fully align with the new rule, which:

- Allows a dairy livestock operation transitioning to organic, or starting a new organic farm, to transition nonorganic animals one time.
- Prohibits organic dairies from sourcing any transitioned animals. Once a dairy is certified organic, new animals must be managed as organic from the last third of gestation. Variances may be requested by small businesses for specific scenarios.

More detailed information about the Origin of Livestock rule is available at: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/national-organic-program-origin-livestock>. ■

CLASSIFIEDS

LIVESTOCK

GROUP OF FEEDERS

20 Jersey, Guernsey, beef cross feeders. The animal's weight is 200-400 lbs. They are certified organic and grassfed. Located in New London, Ohio. For more information, call 419-606-2396 or email grimdairy@ncwcom.com.

MEAT PROCESSING AND MEAT SLAUGHTER

Integrity Meats does it all, from slaughter, to cutting, and packaging. Will cure and smoke, vacuum seal, etc. Call Sandy 608-572-4303. USDA Inspected. Integrity Meats, N3825 County Road P, Elroy, WI 53929

ORGANIC SOWS

Herd reduction. Choose from a dozen certified organic, open, mature sows. Weight varies from 400-600#. Some nice breeders in this group, or use for bacon/sausage. \$1.50 per pound liveweight. Tamworth, large black, GOS. Click for Photo. Contact Valerie Dantoin Adamski, Full Circle Farm, 920-590-1511, Seymour WI.

YEARLING OPEN HEIFERS AND 1ST LACTATION COWS

Normande and Normande Cross. Dams were dairy, sire was beef Normande. Some are polled, some have horns. Certified grassfed. Good grazers, and good with fences. Located in Port Wing WI. Call 715-685-4291 for more info.

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PREMIER LIVESTOCK & AUCTIONS - NOW CERTIFIED ORGANIC!

Premier Livestock & Auctions is now the only certified organic livestock auction barn in the Midwest. Sell your certified organic cattle and feed. N13538

State Highway 73, Withee, WI 54498. 715-229-2500.

LAND/FARMS

ORGANIC CROPLAND TO RENT

Sno Pac is currently seeking organic crop land to rent or possibly contract for growing peas and green beans in the 2023 crop year. Located within a 75 mile radius of Caledonia, MN. Please contact Sno Pac for more information. Phone: (507) 725-5281. Email: snopac@snopac.com

BEEF BUSINESS - RED HOOF FARM

Are you interested in the beef business? Red Hoof Farm prides itself on its unique market: Local sustainable farm, certified grassfed and organic beef, private label, home delivery, and a dedicated client base (private sale, restaurant, retail and wholesale) market that has much potential to grow. Our beef brand/market includes the Twin Ports area, South Shore, Bayfield, Washburn and Ashland. If these aspects appeal to you, let's talk more! We can discuss: cattle, financials, market/brand, ideas, honest expectations and more information. Please call/text 715-685-4291 to learn more.

EQUIPMENT

ROLLER CRIMPERS

Organic Roots Way is a dealer located in Camp Douglas, WI. Contact Joel @ joel@rollercrimpers.com or call 608-424-5577 for information and pricing shipped directly to your address. See <https://rollercrimpers.com/>

HORSE DRIVEN IMPLEMENTS

New I&J Manufacturing cover crop roller & horse driven implements. Organic Roots Way is a dealer located in Camp Douglas WI. Contact Joel for info and pricing shipped directly to your address. 608-427-3423.

EMPLOYMENT

POSITIONS AVAILABLE AT HARMONY VALLEY FARM, VIROQUA WI

Office Assistant

This position will help manage the details that keep our operation running smoothly. The

person who will perform well is attentive to details, able to prioritize tasks, work independently and on a team, has excellent communication skills, and is able to develop and maintain organization systems.

Packing Shed Support

Seeking an individual with administrative and organizational skills to help us execute the nuts & bolts that help our packing shed run smoothly. This is a hands-on, physically active position. The individual who will thrive in this position is organized, works independently and with a team, is attentive to details, thinks proactively, and enjoys a varied workday. See full job descriptions at www.harmonyvalleyfarm.com

FARM WORKER WANTED FOR 2023 SEASON - MINNESOTA

Starting in March 2023 and going through November 2023. BIPOC and LGBTQ friendly farm in Kenyon, MN. \$15/hour negotiable. 25-30 hours/week. Housing may be available. Prefer 1+ year experience on a working vegetable farm. Email Melissa at m.driscoll66@yahoo.com or visit my website at <https://www.sevensongsfarm.com> for more information.

FORAGES/GRAIN

ORGANIC HAY AND OATS

800-900 bales of certified organic oats for feed. Hay price reduced: 100 round bales of 2022 2nd crop hay, 4 x 5 net wrapped. Moisture 30.25%, crude protein 21.49%, feed value 144. 50 round bales of 2022 1st crop, individually wrapped dry. Moisture 13.69% crude protein 14.92%, feed value 95. Located in Cashton WI. Gary Wiedemann 608-487-3693 or 608-654-7336.

ORGANIC ALFALFA HAY

1st and 2nd and 3rd cutting, no rain, 1600 pound net wrapped round bales; also meadow hay and beef cow hay. Little Falls, MN. Call: 320-630-4156.

ORGANIC DAIRY BALEAGE

Individual and inline wrapped. Some lots made 'Hay-in-a-day'. Moisture adjusted pricing. Some dry 3x3x8. Tested. Delivery available. Located in North Central WI. 715-921-9079. Leave a message.

OATS/PEAS MIX BALES

80 individual plastic wrapped, 1400lb bales, 15.3CP, 57TDN, 114RFQ. \$70/bale OBO. Can help load from Holland, Michigan. Also have tubed bales, if interested. Call Luke at 616-485-3264.

ORGANIC HAY AND BALAGE

4 x 5 bales. Baled with McHale baler. Thorp or Medford WI. Call Allen at 715-206-0491.

CERTIFIED ORGANIC HAY

Alfalfa grass hay 4x5 bales. 1st, 2nd and 3rd cuttings available, \$45-\$55 per bale depending on cutting. Also have good meadow hay for sale for \$40 per bale. Central Minnesota. Call 330-573-4197

CERTIFIED ORGANIC HAY

2022 crop. Grass, Clover, Alfalfa mix of 4x5 net wrapped round bales. 60 bales of 3rd crop, RFV 105, CP 15%. Very palatable and soft. \$100/ bale. Belleville WI. 608-438-1632. Delivery available.

ORGANIC ALFALFA

3x3x8 large squares. 2nd Cutting. Faulkton, SD. Call 605-460-2256.

CERTIFIED ORGANIC OATS

2022 crop, clean, \$7/bushel. Near Alpena, MI. Call 989-727-3252.

CERTIFIED ORGANIC BALEAGE

1st, 3rd and 4th cut baleage. Big squares individual wrapped. Have test results available. Also have big and small squares of oat straw available. 608-498-0258 leave message with number if I don't answer. Located in Stoddard, WI.

CERTIFIED ORGANIC HAY

2nd and 3rd crop baleage. No rain. \$70/bale. Near Green Bay WI. Contact seifarm@hughes.net, call or text 715-745-6017.

CERTIFICATE ORGANIC DRY HAY & BALAGE

2022 1st and 2nd Crop Alfalfa 3x3x7 – 219 total no rain baled dry. 2021 – 2022 Balage: 155 1st crop CP 16-21 RFV 119-161; 256 2nd Crop 17.5-21/ 122-150; 342 3rd Crop 17-20/ 128-150; 30 4th Crop 23/191. Delivery from Westby WI. 608-634-3860.

To submit an ad to be posted in the printed version of the Organic Cultivator and on the MOSA website, send it to MOSA, PO Box 821, Viroqua, WI 54665, or email to mosa@mosaorganic.org.

All ads will be posted for 60 days free of charge for MOSA clients (100 words max). For non-clients, cost of an ad is \$5.00 for 40 words, and \$0.10 per word over 40 (max 100 words). MOSA does not guarantee that all products posted on this page are certified organic, and MOSA is not responsible for the accidental purchase of non-organic products through the use of this page. Always check to guarantee the certification status of any product before purchasing or using.

made a formal petition to have this material added to the National List, so the Organic Program agreed to allow continued use of paper planting media while the formal process for decision-making proceeded. That process—which included deliberations at several National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) meetings, hundreds of public comments, and a unanimous recommendation from the NOSB for National List inclusion—resulted in last December's revised Organic Standards that now recognize a place for paper-based media in organic production.

So what's next for MOSA's review of brand name paper planting systems? The very specific definitions now included in the National Organic Standards will serve as the review criteria MOSA and other agencies will use to determine if particular commercially-available paper pot inputs are acceptable for organic use. We have informed the manufacturers of these systems that we will continue to allow their use this year but we must receive verification documents addressing the new requirements. Alternatively, we will accept approval by either of the two accredited material review agencies, the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) or the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA). Once we have completed the review of a paper pot input we will communicate the result directly with clients who have that input on their Input Inventories.

Paper pot planting media's winding road through organic regulations perfectly showcases the deliberate, inclusive nature of rule-making within the USA's Organic Standards. Certification agencies were allowed to make their own material review decisions, until certifiers disagreed in their interpretations. The careful, thorough process that the NOP and NOSB then followed encouraged participation from all interested persons and a full consideration of the acceptability of paper as an organic media material. The resulting Standards change took time but resulted in a stronger rule that certification agencies can now consistently follow.

MOSA

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