

CERTIFIED

# Organic

## Organic Ranching for Strong Economies and Ecosystems



**CCOF Foundation Awards \$500,000 in Transition Grants**  
**CCOF Chapters Come Together to Help Members in Need**  
**CDFA Steps Toward Organic as a Climate Strategy**



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# CERTIFIED Organic



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## Organic Ranching for Strong Economies and Ecosystems

*In California's rural communities, organic and regenerative ranchers are tackling extreme challenges. These ranchers, whose livelihoods require working with nature's complexities every day, are problem solvers uniquely positioned to help California with these unprecedented challenges.*

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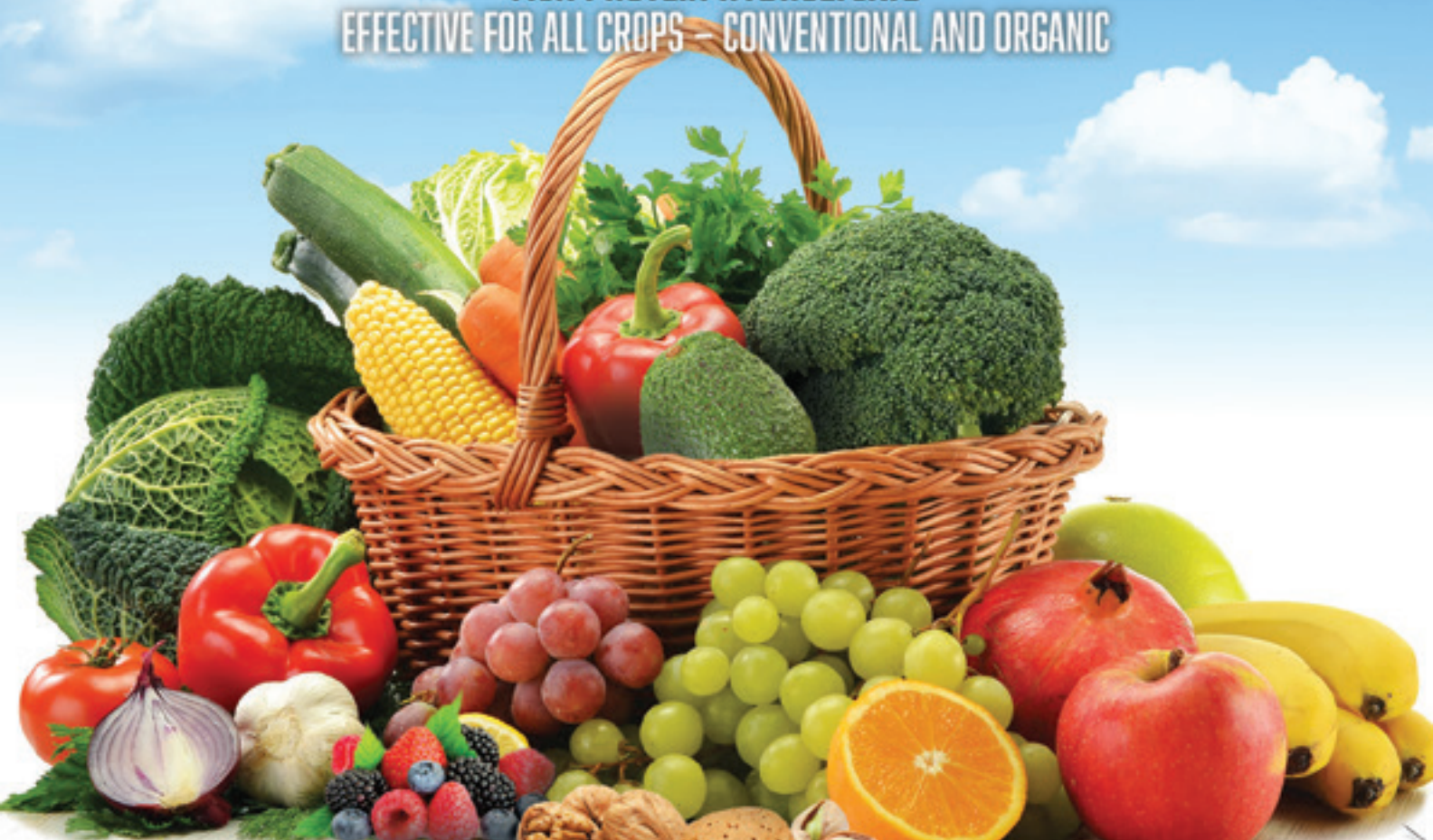
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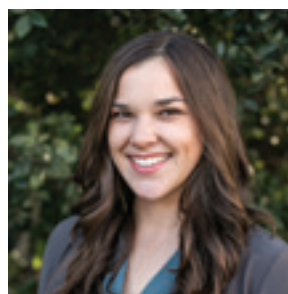
I'm starting this year with gratitude that we all made it through 2020 together and hopeful for the year ahead. Now is the time for us to take what we learned about our communities in the last year and turn it into action to build a better world.

CCOF always starts a new year fresh with inspiration for big ideas, and this year is no exception. In 2021, we'll be working on a new five-year strategic plan to realize our vision of a world where organic is the norm. We are exploring new certification opportunities, such as California's forthcoming organic cannabis program; increasing our focus on public education and outreach; and advocating for more streamlined regulation and better resources to support a diversity of organic producers.

On February 18, we'll start the conversation with David Robles, a young leader in organic farming, at **Cultivate & Nourish**, our 2021 annual event. While he prepares a nourishing meal from scratch, we'll talk about how the organic community can heal from difficult seasons and work together to create a new, equitable, and prosperous food system. Robles is a previous grant recipient from the CCOF Foundation's Future Organic Farmers program, and his message of harnessing the power of the organic family has inspired much of our work for the coming year. I hope you'll join us. Listening to the next generation of organic leaders can provide new perspectives to further the decades of work that have already been done to advance organic.

In this issue's feature article by CCOF's Policy Research Specialist Laetitia Benador, you'll also get the chance to learn more about organic livestock processing and the surprising role it has to play in the post-2020 world. Supporting local livestock processing facilities can help alleviate many of California's challenges by revitalizing rural communities, preventing natural disasters, mitigating climate change, and improving human health. Investing in strategic—and sometimes surprising—services like livestock processing will be the key to getting our communities back on their feet.

Happy New Year to you and yours from the CCOF family. Wishing you hope and healing in 2021.



*Kelly Damewood*

**Kelly Damewood**  
CCOF CEO

## Issue Contributors

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**Laetitia Benador** is a food systems researcher, writer, and farmer. As CCOF's policy research specialist, Benador spearheads CCOF's campaign to address livestock and meat processing challenges. Prior to joining CCOF, Benador lived and worked on organic and biodynamic farms in California and Oregon. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in political economy at the University of California, Berkeley, specializing in the intersection of global economic development and agriculture.



## ***Cultivate & Nourish: A Conversation About Organic & Community***

CCOF invites you to share a meal and conversation with us at **Cultivate & Nourish** on February 18—virtually! You won't want to miss this conversation about the importance of the organic family working together to rebuild our food system for an equitable and healthy future. We will join David Robles in the kitchen, where we'll listen to his story and watch him transform fresh, beautiful ingredients into a nourishing meal for the body and soul. Guests will also receive a recipe to prepare in advance so that we have the opportunity to connect over a meal.

This is your chance to meet one of the young leaders in organic farming whose passion and drive will inspire the work of post-2020 recovery that is ahead of us. A former CCOF Foundation Future Organic Farmers scholar, Robles will share his dedication to nourishing our communities through growing, cooking, and eating food *together*. His vision of the future depends on a family of farmers and food system workers to cultivate a new food system that is economically sound, ecologically responsible, and socially just. Now is a critical time to listen to the next generation of food leaders.

Before we join Robles in the kitchen, guests will hear CCOF updates from CEO Kelly Damewood and CCOF Board of Directors Chair Phil LaRocca. Participants will also get the chance to have

their questions answered during the open mic Q&A. We will also get energized for change by taking action in organic political advocacy with the CCOF policy team.

Pull up a chair to the table and join us on February 18! Learn more at [www.ccof.org/2021-event](http://www.ccof.org/2021-event).

## **Grimmway Farms Donates \$5 Million to Cal Poly College of Agriculture, Food, and Environmental Sciences**

California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) is set to change the landscape of organic agriculture with a \$5 million donation to its College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences from CCOF member and carrot producer Grimmway Farms.

With this gift, Cal Poly will expand its emphasis on applied research in organic production and soil health by providing a unique, collaborative platform for academia, industry, and government from across California and beyond to come together to advance the organic industry.

The partnership between Cal Poly's College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences and Grimmway will establish a unique learning model enabling research and innovation across disciplines, focusing on real-world issues that directly impact the state's \$10-billion organic industry. The Grimmway Farms donation will launch the Center for Organic Production and

## *"The future of this industry depends solely on the ability to prepare, educate, and excite the next generation of growers ..."*

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Research on campus, as well as build the Grimmway Farms/Cal-Organic Soil Health and Sustainability Laboratories to provide research and teaching opportunities in topics related to healthy soils, water, and air.

"Our partnership with Grimmway will facilitate bringing increased science and technology to the production of organic food," said Andre Thulin, dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences. "Cal Poly is at the forefront of using the power of collaboration to solve real-world problems. This new center will integrate the greatest talents in academia, private industry, government, and a wide range of disciplines to benefit the organic industry as a whole."

The need to increase organic research and create pathways for students to enter the industry is clear. The organic industry is one of the fastest-growing agricultural sectors in the United States, according to USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. This emphasis on organic production and research is particularly important in California, which accounts for 40 percent of all organic production in the nation.

"This is an amazing gift and investment in the future of California agriculture and a perfect match with Cal Poly's excellence in applied research and the Learn by Doing model that prepares students for collaborative problem solving in their careers," said Karen Ross, California Department of Food and Agriculture secretary. "I want to thank Grimmway Farms and the Grimm family for their generosity, leadership, and confidence in the future of California agriculture—one that is built on innovation."

Nationally, consumer demand for organic products continues to grow. Sales of organic fruits and vegetables in the United States reached \$18 billion in 2019, up nearly 5 percent from the previous year.

"We believe that lives are transformed through education, and that certainly applies to agricultural education," said Barbara Grimm Marshall, co-owner of Grimmway Farms and Cal-Organic. "Ever-evolving technologies and more sophisticated business practices mean that students who wish to pursue a career in agriculture must spend as much time in the classroom as in the field. We are thrilled to be providing an avenue for these students to work with the best minds in agribusiness and soil sciences today."

"With this commitment, the families and Grimmway Farms/Cal-Organic are affirming our belief that agriculture is the economic and cultural cornerstone of our future," said Brandon Grimm, grower relations manager and co-owner of Grimmway Farms

and Cal-Organic. "Our company has been a leader in innovative and advanced farming practices since my father and uncle founded the company 51 years ago. Today we take the next step to build on that legacy by investing in vital organic and soil health research."

"The future of this industry depends solely on the ability to prepare, educate, and excite the next generation of growers in organic production," said Jeff Huckaby, president of Grimmway Farms and Cal-Organic. "We look forward to partnering with this dynamic educational institution to cultivate those who will ensure we continue to meet the ever-growing demand for healthy and nutritious organic produce."

Cal Poly is uniquely positioned to drive these initiatives forward with its polytechnic educational model and more than 10,000 acres of land for hands-on research and learning. Cal Poly is located on California's Central Coast, surrounded by a diversity of specialty crops that form the foundation of the state's agricultural production. This prime location, as well as the university's strong ties with industry, gives students and faculty opportunities to work directly with companies such as Grimmway Farms and other top organic researchers through internships, research collaborations, and more.

"Our partnership will increase opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to gain firsthand experience in the organic food industry and beyond," said Cal Poly President Jeffrey D. Armstrong. "This new Center for Organic Production and Research emphasizes our Learn by Doing philosophy and will give students the tools to lead impactful careers addressing the agricultural challenges that face California and the world."

The new Center for Organic Production and Research will serve as a hub for students to work with experts from across the industry to develop solutions to the most pressing issues related to organic agriculture. Research on soil structure and biodiversity, nutrient cycling, carbon sequestration, water quality, composting and organic matter, and technological innovation will be at the forefront. The new Grimmway Farms/Cal-Organic Soil Health and Sustainability Laboratories will be located in Cal Poly's planned Plant Sciences Complex.

"Grimmway Farms' generous support of Cal Poly and its talented students embodies the increasingly vital partnership between the private sector and the California State University," said CSU Chancellor-select Joseph I. Castro. "I deeply appreciate Grimmway's partnership with several CSU campuses, including Cal Poly, and their strong commitment to supporting and preparing the next generation of our nation's agricultural leaders."



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Jared Siverling of Siverling Century Farms (pictured left); Patrick and Amanda Wall of Hereford Heritage Beef (pictured right).

## **CCOF Foundation Awards \$500,000 in Organic Transition Grants**

The CCOF Foundation, with support from Anheuser-Busch, awarded \$500,000 in grant funds to 100 farmers transitioning to certified organic practices in 2020. Grantees hailed from across the United States, with operations ranging from a few acres to upwards of 13,000 acres. Some grantees were beginner farmers with three years of experience or more, and some grantees had lifetimes of farming experience and family farming legacies over as many as seven generations.

Some applications came from farmers with deeply held beliefs about organic and decades of experience with intensive soil management. Other applicants are interested in organic transition because of simple economic reasoning and hope transition will make their farms profitable enough to support the next generation. All grantees see organic as the future and understand that their livelihood and the health of people and the planet all benefit from going organic.

Grants were given in two rounds, in the spring and fall. The first round of awards supported the transition of 72,371 acres into organic! We are proud that the CCOF Foundation is at the national forefront of supporting transitioning farmers

and ushering in tens of thousands of acres into organic certification.

### **Meet some of our grantees!**

#### **Jared Siverling—500 Acres in Wisconsin**

Siverling Century Farms (SCF) located in Bloomer, Wisconsin, has been in the family since 1914. SCF primarily raises corn, edible soybeans, cereal rye, oats, barley, winter peas, alfalfa and clover for hay, and beef. My wife Vanessa and I purchased the farm from my parents Steve and Kim Siverling in July 2019.

In addition to working full time as an Army Civilian and serving as a current drilling member of the Wisconsin Army National Guard, I served as the assistant manager of the farm from 2011 to 2019. I took a one-year hiatus from farming operations when I deployed overseas in 2018, and in 2019 I assumed the role of primary manager and co-owner of SCF. The generational transition between my parents and me and Vanessa has been a very deliberate eight-year process that began when I returned from Iraq in 2011.

In addition to an ownership and management transition, SCF also made a transition to managing our farm organically. In 2019, 184 of our 500 acres were certified organic, and we eventually hope to transition the rest. As with the generational transition, the transition to organic production has likewise been a deliberate eight-year process, with the bulk of our rented land farmed under organic-compliant management since 2016.



The Wall family of Hereford Heritage Beef (pictured left); Alvaro Peralta (pictured right).

I believe that the agriculture of the future will be primarily organic. The “conventional” method of farming of the last 70 years is not really conventional and is deeply out of sync with the way natural systems function. I am passionate about regenerative farming that produces healthy food for a healthy population while building healthy soils.

I didn't always think this way. In the mid-2000s, my college summer job was in commercial herbicide application, and during those three summers I was almost always ill or under the weather. I grew to believe that trying to “spray your way to success” was a false paradigm. Often, after years of being sprayed, many fields only grew stronger, herbicide-resistant weeds that required increasingly toxic chemical brews for “control.” While I was in Iraq in 2010, I read several books about organic and regenerative farming, and one of them, *Advancing Biological Farming* by Gary Zimmer, changed my life. It led me to believe that maybe—just maybe—all the sprays and synthetic fertilizers were not required.

In the top six inches of soil in most of North America there are thousands of pounds of phosphorus and tens of thousands of pounds of potassium. The air we breathe is 78 percent nitrogen. Before the 1940s, plants did fine without synthetic fertilizers. So why does conventional agriculture teach that we have to apply synthetic nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium to grow crops?

The same question arises with the poisons in commercial herbicides. Why do we need them? Weeds flourish when we set the conditions for them to flourish; it is Mother Nature's way of fixing an imbalance. When our soils are healthy, we are able to grow healthy crops without these inputs and with minimal impact from weeds. After all, a weed is just a plant out of place. They are only weeds because we call them weeds.

### Amanda Wall—160 Acres in Iowa

My husband Patrick and I both grew up on diversified farms in the Upper Midwest. Between the two of us, we have raised beef cattle, pigs, sheep, horses, alfalfa, grass hay, corn, soybeans, wheat, oats, and rye. We both were heavily involved in 4-H and FFA and both graduated from Iowa State University in 2004. Since then, we have both been working off-farm jobs while slowly growing back into agricultural production.

Our common thread and a big part of why we started dating was livestock production. We have steadily built our beef cow numbers to 50 head of Herefords. I am the fifth generation in my family to raise cattle. I currently work in sales for a livestock nutrition cooperative in central Iowa, and Patrick is a beef cattle specialist for Iowa State University Extension. We are both working tirelessly off farm to help other producers stay afloat in this current situation.

Five years ago, we purchased 160 acres of pasture, hay, and cropland, subsequently letting go of the rented land we previously operated. The 160-acre farm was in dire need of repairs and tender loving care. We've implemented several conservation practices like no-till and cover crops on the 40 acres of farmland. We've installed interior fences and repaired exterior fences to convert some hay acres into permanent pastures where we use management intensive grazing practices to better utilize forages. We added Hereford Heritage Beef to the operation around 2016, selling locker beef to neighbors and friends. Demand for that product continues to skyrocket. Hereford Heritage Beef has received several requests for organic or grassfed beef; transitioning our own acres to certified organic would certainly open up that market for us.

The farm also gives Patrick a unique opportunity to host extension meetings and field demonstrations to show area

The CCOF Foundation's .....

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Through hands-on trainings, workshops, and seminars, the Organic Training Institute provides resources to aspiring and current organic professionals about the latest organic research and best production and marketing practices.

Our online educational offerings for the first half of 2021 include the following diverse lineup of topics:

- Food Safety for Growers
- Marketing Strategies for Farms that Sell Directly to Consumers
- Trainings for Farmers' Market Managers

**Learn more about upcoming Organic Training Institute events at [www.ccof.org/oti](http://www.ccof.org/oti) »**

You can check out recordings of previous CCOF Foundation webinars on the CCOF YouTube Channel. Check out the following popular recordings:

- Farm and Food Business Marketing Collaborations
- Sustainable Produce Packaging for Farms that Sell Directly to Consumers
- Biodynamics 101 for Growers
- Social Media Marketing for Farmers

**View recordings of past webinars and follow our YouTube channel at [www.ccof.org/youtube](http://www.ccof.org/youtube) »**

The Organic Training Institute's 2021 events are supported in part by funding from private donors, the California Department of Food and Agriculture, and the following entities within the U.S. Department of Agriculture: Agricultural Marketing Service and National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

producers cover crop management strategies, rotational grazing benefits, and better beef cattle husbandry techniques. This year, we will add goats to the operation to help us with weed control of invasive species like multiflora rose, honeysuckle, and several species of thistles. We will also add an acre of sweet corn and pumpkins near the entrance to the farm as a way to involve our children and diversify our income stream.

The farm is only 25 minutes from Des Moines, host to one of the largest and most successful farmers' markets in the country. We have a long-term goal of participating in that market with several of our products, but we are struggling to get started. It has taken five years just to get fences built and land repairs in order.

Our 160-acre farm shares its south fence line with an organic dairy. They are great neighbors who help us whenever we need it. Certifying our farm as organic would not only help us, but them as well, offering us the opportunity to sell organic alfalfa hay, or potentially corn grain or corn silage for their dairy cows. There is another certified organic farm just a quarter mile away, owned by the family that helps us harvest our crops. They have shared their story with us. We have several experienced growers right in our immediate neighborhood. We finally feel confident enough with the production and management of our current farm. Transitioning to organic makes sense now.

## Alvaro Peralta—335 Acres in Idaho

I farmed with Mike Heath of M&M Heath Farms for 20 years before I started my present operation in 2017. As the years went on with M&M Heath, I learned how to transition fields to organic, and as the operation became completely organic, I learned how to farm using only organic methods. In 2016, I started renting Darcy Thornborrow's organic farm, and since then have started farming conventional fields with the goal of transitioning them to organic.

I am presently farming 235 acres of certified organic rented ground and 100 acres of conventional land that I am transitioning to organic. I have another year of transition before that ground is eligible for organic certification. I use the same methods on that ground as on my organic ground. I use compost and manure for fertility. I use no synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, or herbicides. Crops include alfalfa hay, barley, and dry beans. Weed control consists of properly timed spring cultivation, cultivating beans until canopies form, and hand weeding only if necessary. If I have a weed issue in the barley, I will swath the barley before threshing. I use organic seed when available. Otherwise, I use untreated seed. I keep the same records for the organic and transitional ground.

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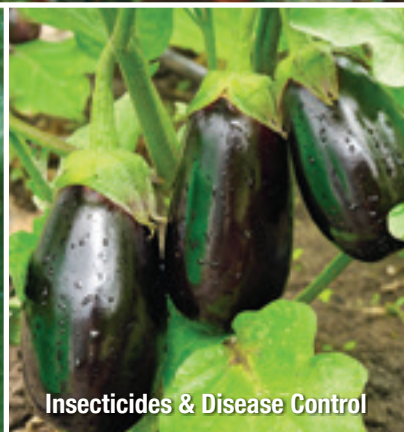
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## **CCOF Chapters Come Together to Help Members in Need**

The CCOF chapter system is the organization's backbone, helping organize members throughout the state to support CCOF's certification, policy advocacy, and Foundation work. In these challenging times, CCOF chapters have come together to help members in need by donating chapter funds to the Brimont Hardship Assistance Fund, which provides financial assistance to struggling organic businesses. Altogether, CCOF regional chapters have donated over \$25,000 to the fund in 2020. Chapter meetings also allowed members to connect, share insights and experiences, and get to know each other virtually. Five CCOF chapters—Central Coast, Mexico, Sierra Gold, Humboldt-Trinity-Mendocino, and San Luis Obispo—held virtual chapter meetings over Zoom in 2020.

### **Chapter Election Season**

In the fall and winter of 2020 and early 2021, the South Coast, North Coast, Sierra Gold, Yolo, and Humboldt-Trinity-Mendocino chapters will complete chapter elections. With many leaders agreeing to continue serving their chapters, CCOF will maintain strong institutional knowledge through chapter leadership across the various regions represented. Chapter elections also provide opportunities for new or longtime CCOF members to increase their participation with the organization and to network and communicate with other members in their region. To find out more about your CCOF chapter and how to get involved with chapter leadership, visit your chapter website at [www.ccof.org/chapters](http://www.ccof.org/chapters). The chapter website includes role descriptions for elected positions, current leadership, and chapter contacts. The CCOF newsletter and calendar include updates about chapter meetings, elections, and other events.

### **South Coast Chapter**

The South Coast Chapter welcomed a new secretary and board representative during their November virtual election. Liz Niles, who works as the food safety and packinghouse coordinator at Wise Ranch, will join the CCOF Board as the South Coast representative. Annie Faller, food safety and QA manager at Fresh Venture Foods, will join the chapter as secretary. Vice President Alisha Taff of Rack Front Ranch and

Treasurer Maren Johnson of El Caminito Ranch will continue to serve as South Coast Chapter leadership. CCOF would like to thank new and returning South Coast Chapter leaders. We would also like to thank outgoing South Coast President and Board Representative Steve Zaritsky for his years of work on behalf of chapter members.

### **Sierra Gold Chapter**

The Sierra Gold Chapter held virtual elections in November 2020. The chapter re-elected Board Representative Rich Ferreira of Side Hill Citrus, along with President Randy Hansen of Stoney Point Orchards and Vice President Mike Pasner of Indian Springs Organic. CCOF would like to thank outgoing chapter leaders Michael Lawrence and Craig Thomas for their years of support for CCOF and the South Coast Chapter.

### **What's Next for Chapters in 2021?**

With the pandemic throwing uncertainty on the timeline for gatherings in the new year, chapter meetings will continue to take place virtually until further notice. While CCOF members and other chapter meeting attendees may suffer from "Zoom fatigue" after a year of virtual gatherings, these digital meetings offer unique opportunities for guest presentations and attendees who may otherwise have been unable to join. The Central Coast Chapter held a virtual meeting in June 2020 amid the first round of applications for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), the federal relief program for farms and ranches experiencing financial losses due to the pandemic. Central Coast Chapter leaders recruited a representative from their area's Farm Service Agency to present funding opportunities and field questions. With virtual advocacy easier than ever, virtual chapter meetings also create excellent opportunities to invite local elected officials to get to know organic farms and businesses in their area.

We hope to see you, virtually or in person, at CCOF chapter meetings this year!

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**To learn more about how to participate in your chapter visit [www.ccof.org/chapters](http://www.ccof.org/chapters) or contact Adrian Fischer at [afischer@ccof.org](mailto:afischer@ccof.org).**





# Organic Ranching for Strong Economies and Ecosystems

WRITTEN BY Laetitia Benador

In California's rural communities, organic and regenerative ranchers are tackling extreme challenges. These ranchers, whose livelihoods require working with nature's complexities every day, are problem solvers uniquely positioned to help California with these unprecedented challenges.

Though California's rural communities make up approximately 10 percent of the state population, they steward 80 percent of the land. All of society relies on rural areas to meet essential human needs. Agricultural communities provide life-sustaining services, from producing food, fiber, and fuel to managing water resources.

Organic livestock production and meat processing are services provided by rural communities that have a surprisingly enormous capacity to revitalize local economies and mitigate California's disastrous wildfires. But California's ranchers—particularly organic livestock producers—are facing barriers that make it challenging to stay in business.

What happens in rural California profoundly impacts everyone, but California's leaders have yet to prioritize rural solutions that would benefit the entire state.

## 2020's Impact on Agricultural Communities

In California's agricultural communities, where two-thirds of the nation's fruits and nuts and one-third of vegetables are grown, economic insecurity shows up at the kitchen table as much as on the farm. One in three California residents lives in poverty or near poverty, struggling to afford food, while a nearly equal proportion of farms operate with net losses, struggling to stay in business.

COVID-19 is worsening these longstanding disparities in rural California. An economic analysis<sup>1</sup> prepared for the California Farm Bureau Federation estimates that California's agriculture industry will suffer at least a \$13 billion impact due to the pandemic's disruption of agricultural supply chains. The report finds that the economic impacts "fall disproportionately on impoverished, rural counties in the state" and "workers that reside in economically disadvantaged communities in these rural counties."

## *For thousands of years, indigenous peoples helped keep rangelands healthy through controlled burns. Meanwhile, their efforts were assisted by grazing herbivores, including mammoths, bison, and tule elk.*

On top of economic challenges, rural Californians and the agriculture sector are experiencing more devastating wildfires and climate extremes every year. In the record-breaking devastation of over 4 million acres of wildfire in 2020, farmers and ranchers lost valuable grazing lands, animals and crops, infrastructure, and sometimes entire farms. Farmworkers and farmers worked in hazardous air conditions and high temperatures, and many lost income due to disruptions in production. The damage from wildfires in 2020 will likely exceed the \$25-billion price tag from the previous year's fires.

Because rural areas are disproportionately impacted by climate and economic crises, firsthand experiences coupled with intimate knowledge of the state's natural and working lands give rural communities a unique perspective.

### **The Surprising Key to Rural Recovery: Organic Livestock Production**

In their roles providing essential services in agriculture, California's organic and regenerative ranchers know what it will take to rebuild strong economies and manage California's 40 million acres of rangeland to avoid devastating wildfires.

To rebuild strong rural economies, ranchers promote regionalized meat production where local farmers raise the animal and local meat processors slaughter, cut, grind, smoke, and package the meat into consumer-ready products like steaks, ground meat, sausage, and jerky.

Ranchers say that regionally produced meat builds community wealth by boosting ranchers' incomes, creating community-based jobs, and keeping dollars circulating locally between local businesses and residents.

These rancher experiences are corroborated by research showing the economic benefits of regional food economies. According to a recent UC Cooperative Extension study,<sup>2</sup> in the Sacramento region local farms selling to local consumers generated twice as much economic stimulus and three times as many jobs as farms selling to customers outside of the region. Meat production has historically played an important role in rural economies due to the employment opportunities created throughout the supply chain, from growing hay and grains to raising the animals to the veterinary medicine, inspection, transportation, refrigeration, slaughtering, and manufacturing services required to create a meat product.

Demand for local, organic meat is increasing. From 2014 to 2019, hospital demand for regional and sustainable meat, including certified organic products, increased 20 percent.<sup>3</sup>

Courtney Crenshaw from Health Care Without Harm says hospitals are prioritizing local food purchases because they see how spending their large food budget at local businesses helps build a strong and equitable economy. According to the Organic Trade Association, consumers purchased 10 percent more organic meat in 2020 than in 2019, making organic meat the fastest-growing category of the organic food market.<sup>4</sup> As more families and institutions look for healthy, sustainably produced meat, organic ranching and meat production have the potential to regenerate rural economies.

Ranchers also offer practical solutions to California's wildfire challenges. If ranchers have their way, cows, sheep, and goats may soon be inaugurated as California's fleet of four-legged firefighters. By doing what they do best—eating, walking, and pooping—these animals can effectively manage wildfire risk.

For thousands of years, indigenous peoples helped keep rangelands healthy through controlled burns. Meanwhile, their efforts were assisted by grazing herbivores, including ground sloths, mammoths, bison, pronghorn antelope, black-tailed deer, and tule elk. Large grazing herds mowed grasses and shrubs, and fires burned accumulated dead plant biomass, allowing sunlight to reach the soil, stimulating the germination of new seeds. Manure trampled into the soil decomposed into rich compost, fertilizing the soil.

A recent University of California study found that modern-day cattle play a similarly important role in reducing fire risk because they consume 11.6 billion pounds of fuel across 19.4 million acres annually.<sup>5</sup> The study also noted that grazing helps reduce fire intensity by keeping flames below four feet in height, a critical threshold that allows firefighters to work safely on the ground.

Another study found that goats grazing in California forests reduced fire hazard by eating up to 82 percent of brush understory. By trampling and mixing dry vegetation into the soil, the goats also reduced the chances of fires igniting.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, evidence shows that removing grazing animals from open spaces such as in the San Francisco Bay Area can dramatically increase fire hazards and the possibility of fire spreading into residential communities.<sup>7</sup>

Organic and regenerative livestock grazing also lowers long-term fire risk by building healthy soils that reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that drive hotter and drier fire weather conditions. Soil health improves when organic and regeneratively managed livestock graze and poop on grasslands. Healthier soils store more carbon, keeping it underground, where it feeds plants, instead of releasing it into the atmosphere, where it fuels hotter temperatures.





Since livestock can either improve or degrade soil health, good grazing practices are key. Managed grazing systems mimic the grazing patterns of native herbivores by allowing livestock to graze and poop for precise amounts of time in small, rotating pastures, which prevents compaction and overgrazing while fertilizing the soil and stimulating plant regrowth. On the other hand, conventional grazing practices, in which livestock remain on the same pastures for the entire season, often cause compaction and overgrazing, degrading the soil quality.

In addition, manure on rangelands improves soil health and emits far fewer emissions than manure concentrated on feedlots. Two-thirds of California's agricultural greenhouse gas emissions come from confined livestock production. Grassfed production, such as in organic and regenerative systems, can make a significant contribution to drawing down emissions.

## Barriers and Bottlenecks

Using livestock to revive rural economies and manage wildfire risk is a strategy that California can implement immediately, with proven results. However, California's livestock industry faces significant challenges due to limited infrastructure along the journey from farm to fork. In the last 50 years, California has shut down half of its federally inspected slaughterhouses, with 69 slaughterhouses in 1970 and only 31 in 2019. The remaining facilities are operating at capacity or are located too far away from ranches and farms to be cost-effective for producers. The disintegration of regional meat processing infrastructure undermines producers' economic viability, harms rural economies, and limits California's ability to fully utilize grazing to solve economic and wildfire challenges.

When Marin Sun Farms, San Francisco Bay Area's last federally inspected processing facility, shut its doors to outside producers at the end of 2019, the ranching community was severely impacted. With no regional options left, some ranchers shuttered their operations while others resorted to trucking their animals long distances toward the Central

Valley or northern counties. Michael Evenson, the owner of Lost Coast Ranch, reports that the influx of Bay Area ranchers toward northern counties is creating bottlenecks at the busy Humboldt County meat processing facilities that he and regional producers rely on. "The regional production is out of sync with processing capacity," he says. "With this bottleneck, I can't even bring in animals that I want to donate to the food bank, and the wait list is months long."

Meat processing bottlenecks harm all small and midsize ranchers, but organic producers are especially impacted. In order to sell meat organically, ranchers must graze animals on certified organic grazing pastures, use organic health care practices, and slaughter at certified facilities. With few facilities carrying organic certification, many organic producers are forced to slaughter at non-certified facilities and so are unable to use the USDA "Organic" seal on their meat products. Thus, organic producers cannot tell the consumer the product is raised organically, nor can they capture the true value of their products through organic premium prices.

Communities across California and the United States have suffered economic decline with the loss of regional meat processing. Because rural economies tend to be smaller and less diversified than urban economies, changes in agricultural production and processing have a larger impact. When producers face higher costs for meat processing and lower prices for their goods, they spend less money within their communities, creating a ripple effect that negatively impacts other businesses. Likewise, when there are fewer economic opportunities for workers, they earn less and spend less within their communities.

Overall, loss of regional meat processing in California inhibits the state from realizing the full potential of organic and regenerative ranching to stimulate economic recovery and manage wildfire. To benefit from ranchers' practical and proven economic and wildfire solutions, California should remove barriers to meat processing.



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# Coming Together to Develop Solutions

From health and environmental groups to rural development and social justice organizations, leaders across the state recognize that investing in regional-scale organic and regenerative meat production benefits every aspect of a community, from the soil up to the economy.

In September 2020, CCOF, Roots of Change, and the UC Davis Food Systems Lab launched the California Meat Processing Coalition to cocreate solutions that alleviate meat processing bottlenecks and support a strong regional meat sector. Members include farming and environmental groups, academic experts, technical assistance professionals, producers, and processors.

The coalition is exploring policy solutions that will remove burdens on small and midsize producers and processors, expand meat processing options, and invest in infrastructure to achieve California's economic and wildfire management goals. The menu of potential solutions includes expanding on-farm slaughter, training the next generation of butchers, streamlining regulations, and supporting upgrades and expansion of meat plants.

The UC Davis Food Systems Lab is evaluating the meat supply chain across the state of California.<sup>9</sup> Their research will inform the development of the coalition's policy solutions. "What would it take to create a meat processing system in California that is more profitable for ranchers, provides business opportunities in rural communities, is safer and fairer for workers, and is resilient to major disruptions like COVID-19 and wildfires?" asks Tom Tomich, founder of the Food Systems Lab. "These are big questions that need to be examined through a systemic lens, which is why our researchers are interviewing stakeholders along the meat supply chain, emphasizing ranchers and meat processors operating at various scales, as well as food service management companies," Tomich explains.

The coalition knows that solving complex problems requires listening to diverse perspectives. It is time for California to listen to ranchers and rural communities so that the state can recover and rebuild stronger than before.

We welcome all CCOF members and supporters to join this initiative! Please email [lbenador@ccof.org](mailto:lbenador@ccof.org) to subscribe to campaign updates and learn how to get involved.

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Between economic uncertainty, unpredictable wildfires, and a pandemic, rural communities have been hit hard in 2020, and yet still continue to provide the essential services our country and planet rely on.

The ranching community is "used to calamity, bad breaks, market conditions completely out of our control. Nonetheless, we adapt and survive," Michael Evenson remarks about this turbulent year.

As we move into recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, now is the time to invest in regional meat production to support rural areas as they heal and to ensure wildfire resilience for the entire state. From the cows, goats, and sheep who sustain healthy rangelands to the ranchers, butchers, and consumers who support strong economies, rural communities make our whole society more resilient.

**The California Meat Processing Coalition and CCOF's work supporting the organic meat supply chain are direct outcomes from the policy recommendations outlined in the CCOF Foundation's *Roadmap to an Organic California: Policy Report*. Learn more about the Roadmap project at [www.ccof.org/roadmap](http://www.ccof.org/roadmap).**

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>ERA Economics. (2020). *Economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on California agriculture* [PDF]. [https://www.cfbf.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/COVID19\\_AgImpacts.pdf](https://www.cfbf.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/COVID19_AgImpacts.pdf)

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<sup>5</sup>Rao, Devii R. (2020). Benefits of cattle grazing for reducing fire fuels and fire hazard. *University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources*. <https://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=43533>

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<sup>7</sup>Russell, W., & McBride, J. (2003). Landscape scale vegetation-type conversion and fire hazard in the San Francisco Bay Area open spaces. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 64, 201–208. <https://ucanr.edu/sites/fire/files/294802.pdf>

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<sup>9</sup>Food Systems Lab. (n.d.). *UC Davis*. <https://foodsystemslab.ucdavis.edu/>

## **CDFA Steps Toward Organic as a Climate Strategy**

At their October 15 meeting, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Environmental Farming Act Science Advisory Panel (EFA SAP) approved a recommendation to establish a new Climate Smart Agriculture program that will provide farmers with planning grants, including funds to support the development of Organic System Plans. This decision comes after a year of CCOF advocacy for CDFA to support organic transition. While the final recommendation does not fully incorporate CCOF's original proposal, EFA SAP acknowledged the climate benefits of organic agriculture in the creation of this new planning program.

In January, CCOF Senior Outreach and Policy Specialist Jane Sooby first submitted a proposal for the integration of organic into the Healthy Soils Program (HSP), which provides farmers with funds to implement soil-building practices. Rather than suggesting an entirely new program, CCOF pushed CDFA to amend the HSP by adding a small stipend for grant recipients to develop their Organic System Plans.

Meanwhile, grant recipients could also receive funding from HSP for common organic practices such as cover cropping and compost application and for planting hedgerows to promote on-farm biodiversity. This funding could help ease the financial burden of the three-year transition required for organic certification, during which growers may incur increased input and planning costs that are not yet offset by the organic price premium. The CCOF proposal would also improve HSP's long-term impact because newly certified farmers would likely continue healthy soils practices as part of their Organic System Plan long after their grant funding runs out.

### **Wide-Ranging Support**

CCOF's proposal received support from diverse advocacy organizations, researchers, and a bipartisan group of state legislators. An August 2020 letter to CDFA outlining CCOF's proposal included 56 supporting signatures from stakeholders, including environmental justice organizations, farmworker advocates, organic businesses, and farmer groups. Earlier in the summer, a bipartisan group of state legislators, led by Assembly Member Brian Maienschein, sent a letter to California Secretary of Agriculture Karen Ross supporting CCOF's proposal. Legislator signatories,



*CalCAN Associate Policy Director Brian Shobe, CCOF CEO Kelly Damewood, Scott Park of Park Organics, CCOF Senior Outreach and Policy Specialist Jane Sooby, and CCOF Policy Director Rebekah Weber briefed the CDFA EFA SAP on the organic transition option.*

including Central Coast Republican Assembly Member Jordan Cunningham and East Bay Democratic Senator Nancy Skinner, represented a variety of California regions and spanned the political spectrum, suggesting a growing recognition of the importance of organic agriculture in the state. The letter also represents a success for CCOF member advocacy, with many signatures obtained as a direct result of meetings with legislators at CCOF's Advocacy Day last February.

### **Next Steps**

CDFA staff responded hesitantly to the proposal and eventually accepted a separate planning program, suggesting that there is still work to be done to convince CDFA to embrace organic agriculture and fully invest in organic transition. Still, EFA SAP members and CDFA staff acknowledged the scientific validity of CCOF's proposal and recognized that support for organic transition belongs in Climate Smart Agriculture programs. It is up to CCOF members, staff, policymakers, and organic stakeholders to advocate for a planning program and other CDFA policies that meet the needs of current and future organic farmers.

## **New Comparable-to-Organic Cannabis Program**

California cannabis producers can begin applying to California's Comparable-to-Organic Cannabis program (OCal) in early 2021. The OCal program will be a statewide certification program based on National Organic Program

## *CCOF has worked closely with the OCal program throughout its development to ensure its success.*

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(NOP) regulations. Federal law prohibits labeling cannabis as organic, which is why CDFA is creating a comparable program that will accredit certifiers to certify to the OCal standards. NOP-accredited certifiers, such as CCOF, will have to register with the department and pay a registration fee.

OCal regulations will closely mirror NOP regulations. OCal staff have stated that they plan to continue improving the program in the coming years, including adopting new rules when necessary. The OCal program will initially apply to the cultivation and distribution of unprocessed cannabis. The certification of manufactured goods or processed cannabis, which will be governed by the California Department of Public Health, will begin in mid-2021.

### **CCOF Work on the Program**

CCOF has worked closely with the OCal program throughout its development to ensure its success. In 2019, CCOF members Karen Archipley, Phil LaRocca, and Kaley Grimland participated in an OCal working group, offering the department advice on organic regulations based on their experiences with organic agriculture. The CCOF policy team also attended working group meetings, and both CCOF and working group members stressed that the program must closely mirror national organic regulations to ensure consistency and integrity in the label.

Following working group meetings, CDFA initiated an extensive rulemaking process in 2020, which included releasing second and third drafts of the proposed rule for public comment. CCOF policy staff worked closely with certification staff to analyze the proposed rule and provide comments on sections that were unclear or differed from NOP regulations. While the department was responsive to CCOF comments regarding administrative details and NOP consistency, CCOF is concerned that high certifier registration fees included in the rule may present a challenge for certifiers and cultivators. Unlike the NOP, the OCal program does not receive ongoing state funding. Therefore, OCal staff concluded that certifiers must pay a registration fee of 26 percent of total certification revenue to the state to cover the administration of the program.

These registration fees would ultimately lead to high certification costs, which could discourage cultivators from seeking certification. Because the price premium on OCal-certified cannabis is still largely unknown, the department must balance the need to cover expenses with the realities of the cannabis market.

CCOF believes that the OCal program has the potential to be a successful part of the state's blossoming cannabis industry. We look forward to continuing to work with CDFA to ensure the

program meets the rigorous standards consumers have grown to expect from organic certification. CCOF will soon decide whether to register with the OCal program. To discuss OCal with CCOF, contact [policy@ccof.org](mailto:policy@ccof.org).

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## **Organic Sector Expecting Big Changes With Strengthening Organic Enforcement Rule**

In August 2020, the National Organic Program (NOP) released the much-anticipated Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) proposed rule. The rule, which is the product of longstanding stakeholder interest in increased integrity and fraud prevention in organic, will constitute the most significant changes to organic regulations since NOP's inception. Perhaps most significantly, the rule will limit certification exemptions, bringing brokers and traders of organic products under certification.

CCOF shares the NOP's goals of protecting organic integrity and building consumer and industry trust in the organic label. To help ensure that the rule meets these goals, the CCOF policy team worked with certification staff and CCOF members and participated in the Organic Trade Association's SOE taskforce to develop comprehensive public comments on the rule.

While CCOF aligns with the NOP's intent, a rule of this size invariably comes with challenges. We have concerns about changes that would be overly restrictive and sections that require greater clarification. For example, we would like to see more clarity regarding the expansion of certification throughout the supply chain. We believe extended implementation timelines are necessary for these and other changes, including changes to import certificate requirements. Given the challenges to achieving timely inspections during the pandemic, other inspection requirement changes may be untenable. We hope that the final rule allows certifiers the flexibility that has proved crucial for keeping inspectors safe. We also hope the final rule reflects CCOF's recommendation to emphasize on-the-job training for inspectors and individuals conducting certification review.

CCOF expects the NOP to issue a final rule in 2021. Follow the CCOF newsletter to read about updates to organic regulations at [www.ccof.org/subscribe-newsletter](http://www.ccof.org/subscribe-newsletter).

## *Organic Sector Still Seeking Final Animal Welfare Standards*

The continued success of the organic sector demands standards that are robust, consistent, and clear. One of the biggest challenges to creating meaningful organic standards has been the failure of the USDA to enact new Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices (OLPP) regulations. The years-long struggle to finalize OLPP rules has been marked by ongoing USDA inaction and delays.

On January 20, 2017, just one day after the National Organic Program (NOP) released the OLPP final rule, the then-incoming Trump Administration issued a regulatory freeze order to federal agencies. The rule was to address four broad areas of organic livestock and poultry practices: living conditions, animal health care, transport, and slaughter. Reflecting 14 years of public, transparent work within the congressional process, the rule was the result of deep engagement and input by organic stakeholders.

Under the freeze, USDA twice delayed implementing the OLPP final rule, then asked for comments on four options for proceeding: effecting the rule on November 14, 2017, delaying the effective date further, suspending it indefinitely, or withdrawing the rule altogether. More than 47,000 comments were received, with 99 percent of comments in support of enacting the rule on November 14. Yet USDA remained unwilling to implement the rule. Therefore, in September 2017, the Organic Trade Association (OTA) filed a lawsuit against the agency for failing to put it into effect these much-needed animal welfare standards.

Since then, USDA has tried unsuccessfully to challenge the trade association's legal standing to file the case and to have it dismissed. Despite clear public support for the rule, in March 2018 USDA withdrew the final OLPP regulation. The trade association amended its lawsuit, and subsequently, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia granted the association legal standing to contest the agency's withdrawal.

### **2020 Actions**

In March 2020, the court agreed that the USDA's withdrawal was based on a flawed economic analysis. The court instituted a stay and ordered the USDA to correct its economic modeling errors. In April, USDA opened a 30-day comment period on

its report. In its comments, OTA outlined many flaws in the analysis, demonstrating an intentional pattern of skewing and cherry-picking statistics to support the agency's withdrawal.

On October 15, the court lifted the stay and issued a calendar of deadlines for further legal filings. Subsequently, the trade association filed a Third Amended Complaint which claims that, in delaying and ultimately rescinding the OLPP final regulation, USDA acted illegally and capriciously, based its withdrawal on seriously flawed data and economic assumptions, and approached the decision with an "irrevocably closed mind." OTA requested that the court rule the rescission unlawful and order USDA to enact the OLPP rule. USDA was given until November 16 to respond. It did not.

In December, the trade association filed a request for a stay to reset deadlines because the previous briefing schedule inadvertently straddled the presidential inauguration. OTA requested this new schedule so that all steps now occur once the new administration is established. This goodwill gesture gives the new administration—which is, according to the briefing schedule, already responsible for the final reply—the opportunity to complete all steps of the final briefing schedule. This would prevent the new administration from having to defend the outgoing administration's arguments on their unprecedented and unlawful withdrawal of the OLPP final regulation. On December 15, the court granted a stay of proceedings in the animal welfare lawsuit and set a new timetable for further legal filings in 2021 from February 19 through May 4.

The Organic Trade Association welcomed the court's decision, saying, "This is a sensible decision. This case will be resolved on President-elect Biden's watch. We are confident that organic will prevail, and that organic standards will continue to advance."

"From the beginning, we knew this lawsuit would be complex and lengthy, but upholding organic standards and working to advance organic are our mission and our responsibility," says the trade association. "We remain confident that the court will rule in our favor, and that the organic sector will continue to advance."

### **Origin of Livestock Rule**

Meanwhile, the organic community has long advocated for a final Origin of Livestock rule that would require that transition of dairy animals into organic milk production be a one-time event.

Originally published in 2015, the proposed Origin of Livestock rule clarified that producers may transition non-organic dairy animals to organic milk production only when converting

an entire conventional herd to organic. Once the transition is complete, the producer is not allowed to transition any additional animals to organic production. All dairy animals added to the operation must be under organic management from the last third of gestation or must be sourced from another organic dairy farm that has completed a one-time transition. These rules would close a regulatory loophole allowing dairies to continuously transition animals in and out of organic production.

During the 2015 comment period, over 99 percent of the responses received supported the proposed rule. In October 2019, USDA reopened another comment period. Both 2015 and 2019 comment periods garnered widespread consensus and support for the proposed rule. Subsequently, bipartisan congressional support resulted in the Fiscal Year 2020 Appropriations Bill mandating that USDA issue a final rule by June 30, 2020.

USDA, however, failed to meet that deadline. At the late October 2020 National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) meeting, the NOP announced that instead of moving to a final rule, NOP intends to rewrite and publish a new proposed rule for public comment.

In response, OTA, members of its Dairy Council and Farmers Advisory Council, and other national groups sent a letter to Secretary Perdue on November 1 slamming USDA's decision to issue another proposed rule, and urged USDA to instead "issue a final rule on the Origin of Livestock without delay." The letter cited the congressionally mandated deadline of June 2020.

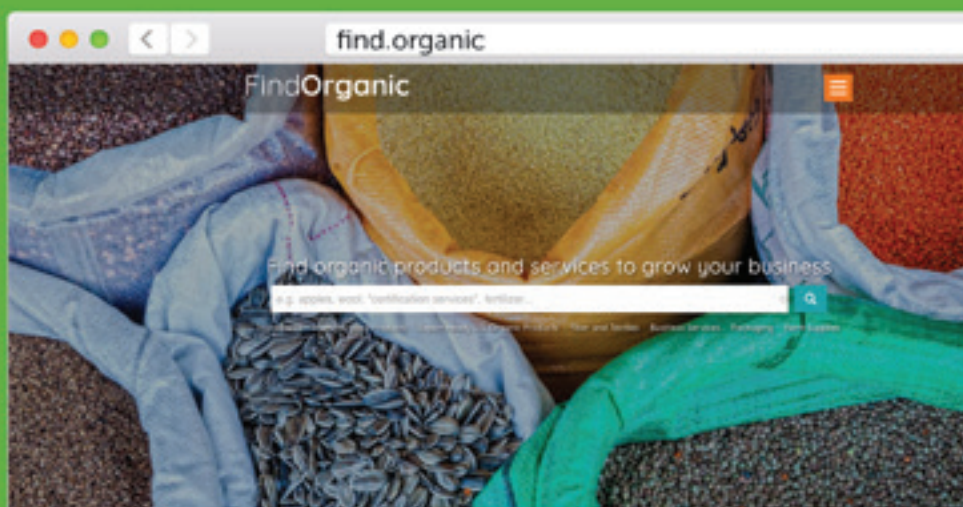
The Organic Trade Association is deeply disappointed that USDA is ignoring a fall 2018 NOSB resolution, the mandate from Congress, and overwhelming public support for the one-time transition policies in the original proposed rule. USDA's inaction to resolve the longstanding inconsistency in enforcement of the origin of livestock regulations threatens the integrity of the organic sector and exacerbates the economic disadvantage of dairy farmers on an uneven playing field.

**All CCOF-certified members receive a new member discount of 25 percent for their first year of Organic Trade Association membership. Learn more about becoming a member at [www.ota.com/membership/become-member](http://www.ota.com/membership/become-member).**

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## ***What to Expect From Inspections in 2021***

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Thank you for your continued commitment to organic production during these unprecedented times. Due to the ongoing pandemic, some 2020 annual inspections were delayed. CCOF is required to ensure every operation receives one regular inspection corresponding to each calendar year. Therefore, the scheduling of your inspections in 2021 may be different than in previous years.

If your 2020 inspection was delayed until early 2021, you will likely have a second inspection during 2021. If your 2020 inspection occurred later than usual in 2020, your 2021 inspection may occur earlier than you are accustomed to. For example, if your operation was inspected in June 2019, your 2020 inspection may have been postponed to October 2020. As a result, your next annual inspection may need to occur as early as May 2021 to get your inspection timing back on track. This adjustment will help CCOF to avoid bottlenecks that could disrupt ongoing timely service.

We are especially grateful to our inspectors, who have continued to provide excellent service throughout the pandemic. When your agent contacts you to schedule your inspection, please work directly with them to find a mutually agreeable time for your inspection. Your inspector will make reasonable efforts to group inspections for efficiency and to reduce cost.

For information about how inspections are being conducted safely during the COVID-19 pandemic, please refer to [www.ccof.org/documents/notices-inspections-during-covid-19-pandemic](http://www.ccof.org/documents/notices-inspections-during-covid-19-pandemic). Read our article about facilitating a quick and easy inspection at [www.ccof.org/three-ways-make-scheduling-your-inspection-easier](http://www.ccof.org/three-ways-make-scheduling-your-inspection-easier) and download our helpful pre-inspection checklist at [www.ccof.org/documents/inspection-prep-checklists](http://www.ccof.org/documents/inspection-prep-checklists). Please also see our articles [www.ccof.org/and-after-your-onsite-inspection](http://www.ccof.org/and-after-your-onsite-inspection) and [www.ccof.org/faqs/topic/inspections](http://www.ccof.org/faqs/topic/inspections) for more information about having an effective inspection.

If you are concerned about the timing of your upcoming inspection, contact us at [inspectionoperations@ccof.org](mailto:inspectionoperations@ccof.org).

Thank you for your patience and flexibility as we work together to make organic the norm!

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## **NOP Will Require Certification of Private- Label Owners, Brokers, Traders, Distributors, and Importers**

The USDA National Organic Program (NOP) has released an official proposed rule for Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) ([www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/strengthening-organic-enforcement-proposed-rule](http://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/strengthening-organic-enforcement-proposed-rule)). The proposed changes are the most significant changes to the national organic regulations since the creation of the NOP. The comment period



## *CCOF producers and staff are a resilient bunch. Deemed essential for obvious reasons, the show of producing healthy and safe organic food must go on.*

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closed October 5, 2020, and the NOP is expected to release a final version of the regulation soon.

Once SOE is implemented, some operations that were previously exempt ([content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAAMS/bulletins/298fc79](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAAMS/bulletins/298fc79)) from certification will now require certification to continue handling and or selling organic products. This includes private-label brand owners, brokers, traders, wholesalers, distributors, and importers. We encourage you to review the proposed rule and prepare for implementation.

The USDA NOP has stated that SOE will be implemented one year after it is finalized. At that time, previously exempt operations will be required to be certified. If you are a certified operation working with uncertified private-label brand owners or uncertified brokers, traders, wholesalers, distributors, or importers, please encourage them to seek certification ([www.ccof.org/apply](http://www.ccof.org/apply)) well ahead of the implementation date.

Getting certified early will ensure a seamless transition when the rule is finalized. The certification process can take two to three months, and many operations will be seeking certification during this time. CCOF will work hard to avoid delays. Please help us by applying early to avoid bottlenecks and ease the stress of wondering if you will meet the deadline. Operations that do not get certified by the deadline will not be able to continue to handle or sell organic products and may face civil penalties if they continue to do so. Don't wait. Apply for certification today by visiting [www.ccof.org/apply](http://www.ccof.org/apply).

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### **Food Safety Corner: Change is the Only Constant in Life**

Although the adage, "the only thing constant is change" originates from ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, this age-old sentiment has never rung so true as in 2020. In the best of times, the world of food safety changes frequently, with new science, regulations, risks, and prevention methods constantly arising. Add a global pandemic and life-changing wildfires to the mix, and we get the challenge that was 2020. Thankfully, CCOF producers and staff are a resilient bunch. Deemed essential for obvious reasons, the show of producing healthy and safe organic food must go on.

During this year of upheaval, CCOF's GLOBALG.A.P. program proactively extended certificates to give producers and staff time to adapt to the pandemic. However, delaying inspections at the beginning of the year resulted in a backlog of inspections still incomplete at the end of the year, during an arguably more difficult time to perform such tasks. In the face of this challenge, CCOF minimized on-site inspection time by developing an efficient approach for reviewing food safety plans, procedures, and records off site. Off-site record reviews do come with their own set of challenges, but there are efficiencies gained that benefit producers and inspectors alike, potentially inspiring changes in how we will approach inspections in the future. CCOF is working to roll out a digital file-sharing platform to help facilitate off-site document reviews in the 2021 season.

CCOF's food safety program also experienced change this past year. We hired a new food safety certification specialist, Ana Rivas, who is passionate about helping producers navigate the complex world of food safety certification. Six new inspectors were also hired, five of whom are qualified to perform simultaneous organic and food safety inspections. Producers who have experienced these bundled audits appreciate the efficient use of on-site time and the savings on travel bills.

We are also piloting a standalone packinghouse audit from GLOBALG.A.P., the Produce Handling Assurance (PHA) certification, which is currently undergoing benchmarking to the prestigious Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) program. Organic producers have always been keen on producing safe food without chemical residues. Today, we also work to minimize microbial risks to our food supply by implementing preventative agricultural and manufacturing practices. We launched the PHA certification to meet customer demand for third-party verification of these safety practices.

If you are interested in bundling your organic and food safety inspections, or if you have questions about how your operation fits into the food safety picture, please feel free to drop us a line at [foodsafety@ccof.org](mailto:foodsafety@ccof.org). Stay safe and see you in fields!



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