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Carrying On

Challenges and Hopes of Farm
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26

Carrying On: Challenges and Hopes of Farm Succession in the Organic Sector

A full third of all U.S. farmers are now 65 years or older, and fewer new farmers are stepping up each year. What will become of the first wave of organic farms?

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Two hundred and five CCOF-certified farms in California have been farmed organically for more than 20 years, many established well before USDA's National Organic Program was created. These farms were originally certified between 1973 and 1996, and represent over 8 percent of CCOF-certified organic farms in the state. Their land comprises just 11,000 of 700,000 certified organic acres of crops in California. As waves of these early CCOF farmers retire, we are contemplating how to support these "agrarian elders" in a quest to preserve the productivity and legacy of their land.

This month's feature article on Page 26 chronicles some of the ways that farmers are preserving heritage farms by keeping them either in the family or in organic production. Plans for farm succession in the organic sector, described by Kendra Johnson in this issue, are emerging as a generation of organic pioneers considers how their farms might support their families' next generations while maintaining the productivity of the soil they have carefully managed for decades. These stories convey the passion and the hopes of an early CCOF generation, and include an outline of key steps in succession planning.

CCOF, working with California FarmLink and others, is providing assistance in farm succession planning through the Organic Elders and the Next Generation Project. The initiative launched this winter to provide business transition services designed to preserve the legacies of organic farmers approaching retirement. The project also harnesses the wisdom of long-time organic farmers to support those who will take over management of these invaluable land resources. The Organic Elders and the Next Generation Project will help with succession planning, support development of business and land financing strategies, and encourage mentoring between

generations. Succession workshops are taking place in central and northern California. Visit www.ccof.org/events to register for upcoming workshops.

Ensuring that the next generation organic agricultural professionals is inspired and ready to meet opportunities for succession and organic farming is the mission of CCOF's Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund. By the close of this year the fund will have distributed nearly a half million dollars in grants to promote the study of organic agriculture. This program, entering its fourth year, is made possible by the financial support of organic businesses including CCOF, the UNFI Foundation, the CCOF Processor/Handler Chapter, the Clif Bar Family Foundation, Dr. Bronner's, Driscoll's, Duncan Family Farms, Forager Project, Frey Vineyards, Frontier Co-op, Green Ox Pallets, Independent Natural Food Retailers Association, National Co+op Grocers, Organic Valley, and SunRidge Farms.

This broad commitment to supporting the future of organic farming is due to the inspiration brought to us by our organic pioneers, as well as by future organic farmers who are now studying organic methods in elementary school classrooms, high schools, and in higher education and vocational institutions across the country. Join us as we honor the organic legacy while preparing the next generation of organic farmers for success.



Cathy

Cathy Calfo
CCOF Executive Director/CEO

Issue Contributors

Carrying On: Challenges and Hopes of Farm Succession in the Organic Sector, Page 26



Kendra Johnson first developed an interest in beginning farmers during the four years she operated a market garden and community supported agriculture (CSA) project in the East Bay. She owned and operated a landscaping business for many years, and has worked in urban agriculture, ag education, landscape restoration, and floriculture. Johnson is fluent in Spanish with a background in international agricultural development and a Master of Science in community development from the University of California, Davis, where she focused on agricultural conservation easements and farmland access. She worked for five years as Central Valley regional coordinator for California FarmLink, where she helped farmers with land access, farm transitions, and farm business and finance needs. Since 2012 she has served on the FarmLink Board of Directors and consults with a variety of groups on farm preservation, land access, farm succession, and stewardship. Johnson lives on the Russian River with her husband Jacob and their three children.

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USDA Publishes Climate Change Guide as Earth Sets New Temperature Record

.....

The news that Earth had another year of record-high temperatures is starting to sound like a broken record, yet it's no less concerning that our planet continues to steadily warm year after year.

Scientists reported in January that Earth reached its highest temperature on record in 2016, the first time that high temperature records have been set three years in a row in the modern global warming era. El Niño is in part responsible for the warm temperatures in 2015 and 2016, but the overall trend is undeniable: according to scientific consensus, increasing levels of carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases are causing big, long-term changes to our global climate.

People across the planet have been affected by high temperatures, and coastal areas are already being forced to adopt strategies that fight increased tidal flooding. Farmers will also be on the front lines of combating the effects of climate change as growing seasons change and severe weather events occur with more frequency. Agricultural

professionals will be forced to adopt new strategies and systems in an unpredictable, changing environment.

Last December, USDA published a report to address these challenges, providing farmers with preparation strategies, coping mechanisms, and recovery tools to help them address the on-farm effects of climate change. USDA's Climate Hubs for the Midwest, Northeast, and Northern Forests put together the report, *Adaptation Resources for Agriculture: Responding to Climate Variability and Change in the Midwest and Northeast*, in collaboration with scientists, conservationists, and educators to translate the best available climate science into actionable strategies for farmers.

Organic farmers already engage in farming techniques that sequester carbon and help lessen the effects of climate change. This guide highlights the benefits of greenhouse gas mitigation, which also reduces the farmer's risk for climate- and weather-related impacts in the coming years.

Visit www.ccof.org/USDA-Adaptation-Resources-Ag-Workbook to download the guide and learn more.

Leadership Changes at USDA

With the inauguration of President Donald J. Trump in January comes a new administration as his cabinet appointees are selected, vetted, and put up to a confirmation vote by the Senate. The secretary of the USDA is no exception, although President Trump's pick for Secretary of Agriculture is one of the last few to begin the confirmation process.

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The USDA oversees a wide variety of programs that touch on food, agriculture, rural development, natural resources, and nutrition.

On January 18, 2017, President Trump announced former Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue as his selection for secretary of agriculture. Perdue was raised by a farmer and a teacher in Georgia, going on to earn a Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine in 1971 from the University of Georgia. He practiced veterinary medicine for a few years before going on to become an entrepreneur, owning companies involved in grain trading, trucking, and fertilizers. Perdue was elected as a state senator in 1990, then served from 2003-2011 as Georgia's first Republican governor since Reconstruction. After completing his two terms as governor, Perdue cofounded Perdue Partners, a company that helped American companies export their goods.

After his experience growing up in a farming family in an agricultural community, Perdue oversaw Georgia's \$74 billion agricultural industry as governor. Broiler chickens raised for meat, eggs, peanuts, cotton, watermelon, and tobacco comprise the top products raised in the state. His experience overseeing a state with a large agricultural state economy and his years of service in politics and governing have led supporters to promote Perdue as someone who has the skills and experience to run a department as complex as the USDA.

The USDA has a \$150 billion budget and oversees a wide variety of programs that touch on food, agriculture, rural development, natural resources, and nutrition. The National Organic Program is administered by the USDA, which also oversees food safety, the Forest Service, farm policy programs, the National School Lunch Program, food stamps, and land and water conservation efforts.

Perdue was governor at the time of a Salmonella outbreak in 2008 that was traced back to peanut butter produced in Peanut Corporation of America's factory in Blakely, Georgia. The outbreak killed nine people and sickened more than 700 people across 46 states, resulting in the recall of more than 3,900 products and prison time for three of the company's top executives who knowingly shipped contaminated products.

Critics have noted the 29 percent decrease to Georgia's food safety budget that was made under Perdue's governorship two years before the outbreak, which some say resulted in preventing inspections that could have caught the contamination issues. After the Salmonella event, Perdue responded by restoring some of the funds to the food safety budget.

In 2009, Perdue signed a food safety reform bill in the state that gave regulators authority to set higher standards for food safety practices, testing, and reporting. The event

eventually helped push Congress to pass the Food Safety Modernization Act of 2010. The USDA is responsible for ensuring the safety of all meat and poultry consumed in the United States, which will fall under Perdue's watch if he is confirmed, while the Food and Drug Administration is responsible for all other food safety regulations.

2007 was also a challenging year in Georgia's agricultural sector as the state experienced an extreme drought, during which time then-governor Perdue held a prayer service for rain at the state Capitol that quickly drew national attention. Perdue ordered water restrictions, promoted water conservation among individuals, and declared a state of emergency in Georgia before the drought eased later in the year.

Some environmental activists have voiced concerns about Perdue, including his stance on climate change and his financial and political ties to big agribusiness and fertilizer companies. He will also face questions about agricultural labor in light of the new administration's stance against immigration.

Perdue's positions on organic agriculture remain to be seen, although Perdue comes from a state where organic is an increasingly important part of the agricultural economy. As Laura Batcha explained to *Civil Eats* earlier this year, the Georgia Department of Agriculture has helped farmers take advantage of the organic market by providing funding and training for farmers interested in organic production.

"We are deeply encouraged that Perdue's home state recognizes the value of organic and the opportunity it offers for family farmers and rural communities," Batcha said.

As of March 2, 2017, Perdue is still in the initial stages of his appointment, as the administration has not yet formally provided the Senate with the requisite paperwork for his nomination. Without the paperwork, the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee Chair Senator Pat Roberts (R-KS) is unable to schedule a hearing. Stay tuned as steps follow in Perdue's confirmation process.

CCOF is—and will continue to be—engaged in political advocacy on behalf of our members and the organic community at the local, state, and federal levels. Learn more at www.ccof.org/advocacy.



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Each year, students like Eliza, James, Sunyoung, and Margaret receive grants from the CCOF Foundation that help them learn about organic agriculture.

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The first annual CCOF Foundation Feast brought supporters together to celebrate the accomplishments they've helped make possible in the organization's work.

Honoring Organic Champions and Celebrating Achievements

The CCOF Foundation held its first annual CCOF Foundation Feast on February 9 to kick off CCOF's 2017 Annual Meeting and Conference. This new, yearly fete brings the CCOF Foundation's supporters together to celebrate the accomplishments they've helped make possible in the organization's work, while also honoring the recipient of each year's Organic Champion Award.

Guests mingled and dined on an all-organic meal while learning about the impacts the CCOF Foundation made in advancing organic agriculture in 2016. During the year, contributions from our generous supporters and members helped us reach 14,000 students through our Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund (FOFGF), 7,500 consumers who received our "Why Buy Certified Organic?" postcard, 12 organic farmers affected by hardship, and 739 organic professionals who attended Organic Training Institute educational events. The impact of these donations was emphasized with smiling photos of future farmers around the room.

The CCOF Foundation also debuted its first annual Organic Champion Award by presenting it to the National Co-op Grocers (NCG) and their CEO Robynn Shrader. The Organic Champion Award recognizes an organization or individual who

has championed organic agriculture through their enormous support of the CCOF Foundation's programs.

NCG has been an outstanding supporter of the FOFGF, which launched in 2014 and will give away nearly a half million dollars by the end of this year in grants to students and teachers whose work is focused on organic agriculture. When CCOF announced the formation of the FOFGF, Shrader and NCG went to work and raised \$57,000 for us to distribute in grants. Their generosity even grew the following year, when they returned to support the fund by doubling down on their initial commitment. NCG also supported the CCOF Foundation's Brimont Hardship Assistance Fund during the severe drought year of 2014 by contributing an additional \$10,000 to help keep organic farmers experiencing hardship in organic production.

"Among the challenges to meet the rising demand for organic products that are healthy for both people and the planet is the need for new organic farmers and entrepreneurs. CCOF is proud to partner with NCG to address this challenge and build opportunity for those wishing to enter the organic marketplace," said CCOF Executive Director/CEO Cathy Calfo. "We are changing the face of agriculture with strong partnerships that reach to the corners of the food industry, and this is just the beginning."

"NCG is tremendously honored to receive this award from the CCOF Foundation, which has a powerful history of supporting organic enterprise across generations and geographical regions," added Shrader.

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Keynote speaker Gary Hirshberg of Stonyfield Farm; Michael Joseph of Green Chef listening to Hirshberg's keynote address

Organically Inspired!

CCOF hosted its 2017 Annual Meeting and Conference in Visalia, California, on February 9 and 10.

With over 200 participants, a wide range of speakers came together to inspire organic businesses and supporters on the theme of Organic Innovation and Inspiration: Ideas that are changing the way we grow.

Keynote speaker Gary Hirshberg gave an insightful speech centered on the state of organic in today's political uncertainty. He began by outlining the parallels between the organic movement today and where the green energy movement was when President Ronald Reagan was elected, when those pushing for green energy felt deterred. At that time, the green energy industry was forced to "grow up," as Hirshberg described, and create businesses that functioned without government subsidies. In his speech, Hirshberg made the bold assertion that organic is in a similar situation today and now is the time for this community to pull together and "grow up."

However, Hirshberg continued, there are new opportunities for organic posed by this moment in history. He called upon those in the room to join with the larger organic community to champion organic with a unified voice. "Organic is about building the next generation of hope," he said. For too long, according to Hirshberg, the organic movement has wasted valuable time on infighting amongst fellow advocates, and those in Washington will not be able to hear us without a unified voice.

Hirshberg closed his keynote speech by speaking about the need to invest in organic research through the private and public sectors, and to refine the message of why organic is meaningful and different. He also spoke to the need to educate the next generation of organic producers. "Organic is long-term economic stability," he explained, and now is the time to come together as a unified community to advocate on behalf of organic.

Ideas to Change the Way We Grow

Other highlights of the conference included inspirational "TED-style" talks from two CCOF members: Michael Joseph of Green Chef and Paige Poulos of All American Hay and Grain.

Joseph flew in with a team from Boulder, Colorado, to talk about the rise of Green Chef, a CCOF-certified, all-organic meal kit delivery service. Founded in 2015, Green Chef now employs over 600 people and delivers meal kits across the country. Joseph spoke about how this type of service caters to millennials who want to choose organic food but are also looking for a more convenient way to eat. He highlighted the stagnant growth of the retail market and pointed to how the tech industry will continue to influence the way people purchase and consume food.

In her talk, Poulos outlined the basics of the American livestock industry and spoke about the need for a national plan to transition land into organic rangeland. She highlighted the fact that the majority of rangeland is in state- and federally-protected land programs and addressed our need as a community to advocate for organic use of those public lands.

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CCOF's 2017 Annual Meeting and Conference would not have been possible without the support of the CCOF Foundation Members.



The Willeys celebrating their retirement with CCOF, Inc. Board of Directors Chairman Phil LaRocca of LaRocca Vineyards

Getting Inspired by Organic Innovators

After getting inspired by Joseph and Poulos, the conference attendees enjoyed a series of panels comprised of innovators in the organic community.

Big Ideas in Organic highlighted past and future market trends in organic. Robynn Shrader from National Co+Op Grocers, John France from Homegrown Organic Farms, and Matt Rogers from Whole Foods Market spoke about the pressures felt by long-time organic growers and retailers now that mainstream retailers and larger farming operations are entering the organic market. Carmela Beck from Driscoll's moderated the conversation, which centered on ways for farmers and retailers who have long been committed to organic to adapt to a rapidly changing marketplace.

CCOF members who are transitioning their farms to the next generation's care participated in a discussion about the opportunities and challenges of succession in Bringing Inspiration Back to the Family Farm. Heather Mondello from Abundant Harvest Organics/Peterson Family Farm, Dieter Schellenberg from Schellenberg Farms, and Caitlin Couture from Couture Farms represented the next generation of CCOF-certified operations in the Central Valley, and Robin Singh from California's Organic Harvest spoke about involving his two grown children in his farm business.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Jim Houston and Jamie Johansson from the California Farm Bureau Federation were joined by CCOF members Mark Lipson from Molino Creek Farm and Nancy Casady from Ocean Beach People's Organic Food Market to discuss the state of organic

politics in the Golden State. Members were encouraged to hear about opportunities for increasing organic leadership within Farm Bureau and CDFA.

Conversations about organic market competition and price fluctuation continued in the afternoon in Expanding Opportunity: Organic Distribution and Retail, a panel which included organic distributors and retailers: Mark Squire of Good Earth Natural Foods, Rick Lejeune from Heath & Lejeune, and Veritable Vegetable's Bu Nygrens. All three stressed their ongoing commitments to maintaining strong and enduring relationships with organic growers.

To cap off a productive, inspiring day, CCOF hosted a reception highlighting Organic Innovation in the Valley, featuring wines, dried fruits, nuts, citrus, olive oil, vegetables, juice, and cheese grown and processed by organic farmers and handlers in the Central Valley. Tom and Denesse Willey of T&D Willey Farm received a bronze shovel commemorating their contributions to the organic movement, and the crowd toasted to their retirement!

Thank You CCOF Foundation Members

CCOF's 2017 Annual Meeting and Conference would not have been possible without the support of more than 35 CCOF Foundation Members, which include a range of CCOF-certified organic operations and other leaders in the organic community. The work of the CCOF Foundation—to invest in and educate new and existing organic producers as well as build support for organic through consumer education—would not be possible



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Grant funds allowed Kristie Eaten's students at Parkside Elementary in Naples, Florida, to learn how seeds grow into food that nourishes their bodies.

without their support. Our Annual Meeting and Conference is an opportunity to acknowledge and thank these partners.

CCOF is particularly grateful to the Pacific International Marketing family of businesses—including Dynasty Farms, Pure Pacific Organics, and Dynapac Harvesting—for providing support at the Visionary Level. Special thanks is also due to our Champion Level sponsors: Cal-Organic Farms, Driscoll's, and Tanimura & Antle. A full list of CCOF Foundation Members is available at www.ccof.org/our-supporters.



If you are also interested in becoming a Foundation Member, visit www.ccof.org/get-involved or contact Eric Winders at ewinders@ccof.org or (831) 346-6272.

Save the Date for 2018

Next year, CCOF's annual conference will be held in Sacramento, California, on February 23-24, 2018. We hope to see you there!

Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund Applications are Available!

Interested in teaching or pursuing a career in organic agriculture? Apply for a Future Organic Farmer Grant!

Over the last three years, the CCOF Foundation and its partners have given away \$300,000 in grants to students and teachers of organic agriculture across the United States. K-8 teachers with organic classroom projects and higher education and vocational students studying organic agriculture can apply for a Future Organic Farmer Grant beginning April 1, 2017. Visit www.ccof.org/fofgf for application details.

Grants for K-8 Teachers through Agriculture in the Classroom

Are you a certified K-8 teacher in the United States interested in bringing organic agriculture into your classroom? If so, apply for one of our \$1,000 Look at Agriculture...Organically! grants for organic classroom education, administered in collaboration with the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom. Last year, our grants paid for projects such as raising laying hens to donate eggs to a local food bank, and designing and building a sustainable organic garden ecosystem. Visit www.ccof.org/fofgf for application details.



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Grant funds help Parvati Brown (left) study horticulture at Cabrillo College and Jennifer Shafer (right) take classes through Rogue Farm Corps' FarmsNext program.

Grants for Vocational and Higher Education Students

Are you studying organic agriculture in a junior college, undergraduate program, or in a vocational training program? Apply for one of CCOF's \$2,500 grants to apply toward your educational expenses! Last year's grants supported students involved in programs including the Michigan State University Organic Farmer Training Program and the Growing New Farmers Program in South Carolina. Students who are previous recipients of a Future Organic Farmer Grant are encouraged to reapply for grant funding if they are continuing to study organic agriculture in a college, university, or vocational program.

Grant winner Parvati Brown was born in a small farming community in Nepal, where age-old, animal-based organic farming practices endured for centuries. Within her lifetime she witnessed the drastic shift toward the convenience of modern-day synthetic chemical-based farming practices. Brown is now a full-time horticulture student at Cabrillo College where she is pursuing an associate degree in general horticulture and crop production. She believes healthy food depends on the health of the soil.

2016 Future Organic Farmer Grant recipient Jennifer Shafer is focusing on making organic accessible to people of all income levels in all communities. "I am currently taking classes through Rogue Farm Corps' FarmsNext program, and my future goals include growing organic produce for our local community; educating the community about the importance of supporting local farmers and local products; and working to provide lower-income families with convenient access to affordable organic produce," she says.

Grant applications for both the K-8 teachers' Look at Agriculture... Organically! grants and Future Organic Farmer Grants for vocational and higher education students open April 1, 2017. The deadline for submission is May 15, 2017.

To learn more about the Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund, contact the CCOF Foundation at ccofoundation@ccof.org or (831) 423-2263.

The CCOF Foundation's **ORGANIC TRAINING INSTITUTE**

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. All event dates and locations are subject to change—check online for the latest details.

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Awakening the Soul of the Chapters

CCOF's chapter system and chapter meetings are incredible venues to network and strengthen your business, as well as your community. At chapter meetings, both CCOF members and the public can bring concerns, questions, and ideas, and can witness or participate in leadership roles within the organic community and beyond. Chapter meetings can be solid ground to build solidarity in a field where we are continually looking for allies.

While many of us are connecting constantly in virtual spaces created by the internet and social media, it is crucial to remember the importance of meeting and communicating with others face-to-face. Your chapter meeting is one of the rare settings specifically intended to bring us together—a space in which we can commune (without a screen between us) with a colleague, an old friend, or new potential business partner.

As one of the bedrocks of CCOF, the chapter system helped establish and carry what has been a grassroots movement for over 40 years. CCOF is committed to continually refreshing our approach to this framework because of the essential value it presents to our members. Institutions like our chapter system that bring people together and help us find our shared interests, concerns, and challenges strengthen the work and love we put into our daily lives.



Adrian Fischer is CCOF's new member and public outreach specialist.

In an effort to increase support for our membership and the grassroots democratic governance process supported by the CCOF chapter system, CCOF has dedicated an increased portion of staff resources to this important task. Adrian Fischer is CCOF's new member and public outreach specialist, and will be focused primarily on making sure our members are as active as possible within their chapters. Fischer comes to us from more than six years of farming, and ran small CSAs and managed educational farms in Connecticut, Costa Rica, and the Central Coast of California. Before diving headfirst into farming, Fischer spent nine years as a music producer and event coordinator for multimedia projects in Los Angeles, New York City, and throughout the Northeast.

We invite you to get involved with your local chapter. Please contact Fischer at afischer@ccof.org or visit www.ccof.org/chapters for more information.

Membership to Vote on Bylaws Amendments

To meet goals put forward by the strategic plan adopted by CCOF in 2016, CCOF is in the process of updating our organizational bylaws. Some of these changes require a membership vote to approve. Be on the lookout for communications about a membership vote later this year.

Recent Chapter Activity

North Valley

The North Valley chapter held its first meeting this year on February 7, 2017 at Lundberg Family Farms in Richvale. Speaking were organic farm advisor Amigo Bob Cantisano, CCOF Board Chairman Phil LaRocca, and CCOF's Policy Director. Elections were held for president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Phil LaRocca will continue his legacy as board representative of this vibrant chapter.

Fresno-Tulare

The Fresno-Tulare chapter held a meeting on December 12, 2017 at Fresno State University, where they continued shepherding momentum for an organic agriculture minor at the university. Students and chapter members are actively working together to make this possibility a reality. They held their next meeting to continue this push on March 1, 2017 at the Jordan School of Agriculture at Fresno State University.



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Be on the lookout for communications about a membership vote later this year.

Sierra Gold

Sierra Gold is gathering nominations for their chapter election at their upcoming meeting on April 23, 2017. They are still soliciting nominees for every leadership position. Elections will take place just after the meeting by an electronic ballot that will be sent to all chapter members. Randy Hansen has held both the president and board representative roles for the last few years and is looking forward to focusing on only one of them and handing off the other to another chapter member.

Processor/Handler

The Processor/Handler chapter held a meeting at the CCOF Annual Meeting and Conference in Visalia on February 10, 2017. Among the topics discussed were the National Organic Program updates and National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) updates, which included materials whose standing the National List of Allowed & Prohibited Substances will be reviewed at the NOSB summer meeting. A brief board update

was given on a range of policy issues from the California Organic Food and Farming Act and its changes to the California Organic Products Advisory Committee, the USDA's approval of the Transitional Certification Program, the open comment period for the National Organic Check-off Proposal, State Organic Program fees becoming eligible for cost share reimbursements, cannabis and organic certification, and hydroponic/bioponic and container production. There was also a brief discussion about the revised CCOF bylaws, which are in the process of being updated before going to a membership vote for approval later this year.

Let the CCOF community know what your chapter is doing!

Write to afischer@ccof.org and we will publish your chapter update in the next edition of *Certified Organic*.

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Carrying On

Challenges and Hopes of Farm
Succession in the Organic Sector



It's 2017 and our nation's first wave of organic farmers has grown long in the tooth.

Over forty years ago, an inspired group of commercial and new-entry farmers bucked the norm and committed to non-toxic, soil-building production practices—and so, organic was born. The first handful to be certified organic included Carl Rosato, founder of Woodleaf Farm in the Sierra foothills. Rosato has been farming fruit, studying soil, and teaching sustainable ag for over 35 years. Still, he's a relative youngster among first-generation certified organic farmers: At age 58, he has just reached the *average* age for farmers in the United States.

Some refer to Rosato and his peers as the “organic pioneers.” Over 200 of them have been CCOF-certified for at least 20 years, and most have worked six days a week for a whole generation now. They're ready to retire.

A full third of all U.S. farmers are now 65 years or older, and fewer new farmers are stepping up each year. What will become of the first wave of organic farms? The continuation of these heritage farms—whose soils have been improved, infrastructure tuned, and biodiversity tended for almost four decades—is especially precious. While the challenges of passing down the first certified organic farms are a microcosm of the nation's greater farm succession challenges, their outlook is a bit rosier: Organic farmers are six years younger, on average, than farmers in general, with significantly more beginning farmers in their ranks.

Organic also provides a boost for succession strategies on conventional farms, as organic transition can itself be a valuable succession tool. It's not uncommon for the younger generation to convert to or add organic practices, improving markets and often revenue for the family business—which in turn can become a key factor in whether a successor will choose to carry on.

First-wave organic farmers were early adopters, with goals reaching beyond the “bottom line.” They have a track record of creative thinking, which today is extending to how to keep the legacy of their land alive.

What can we learn from succession stories among us?

Farm succession is a challenging matter, and we often hear the sad farm succession stories in which family farms end up subdivided or developed, and vibrant agricultural histories are paved over forever. Or worse, irreconcilable differences about the fate of a farm or ranch can end up tearing families apart.

Others bequeath their land to their off-farm kids, who may be dedicated enough to lease out the farm for continued production. But more often than not, inherited farms get cashed in for easy division among heirs, the equity to be used in other ways. A farmer with no heirs will inevitably sell his or her greatest retirement asset—the land.

Luckily, there are many other happier cases for us to explore, like that of the Soghomonian family, where the children of our organic pioneers are carrying on their parents' legacy. Or, like the Sitkins and the Smiths, where a transition to the next generation goes hand in hand with a transition to organic production—a win-win for the future of organic.

We'll also learn from organic pioneers Jeff and Annie Main, who have honed in on an innovative tool to make sure their farm remains affordable for the next generation in response to the prevalence of farmland consolidation in agricultural regions and land development in peri-urban areas.

And once in a while, though rare as a hen's tooth, a farmer finds a non-family successor and is able to pass on the farm, intact, to a farmer of new blood—Rosato has done just that.

What can retiring farmers do?

They say the best time to plant a tree is a generation ago, and the second-best time is now. Rod Carter has worked with hundreds of farm families on business transitions and says the best time to plan for a farm transition is the day the business is started. “I have heard many say they should have started their planning sooner,” he warns, “but I have never heard a single farmer or rancher, from any family, say they started too soon.”

Engaging the right team is also key to succession success. Besides representative family members, a family succession team might be comprised of business and financial advisors, an accountant, an estate attorney, key business mentors, and ideally, a meeting facilitator or mediator.

Because most American farmers and ranchers don't know where to start, a growing number of private and nonprofit services are emerging to help farm families develop farm transfer plans in response to the great need for succession planning support.

California FarmLink connects beginning farmers to agricultural landowners and retiring farmers; operates a loan program for underserved farmers; and assists farmers with tenure, financing, business, and succession planning. Informed

"Each generation on this farm has had something new and exciting that changed. My generation will be marked as the first full generation as organic."

by almost two decades of direct work with transitioning farms, FarmLink partnered with CCOF to develop the Organic Elders and the Next Generation Project—a series of farm succession workshops and targeted follow-up assistance for farm and ranch families. One of three workshops has already taken place, with about 25 farm families receiving one-on-one help developing their succession plans. For more information on future workshops, visit www.californiafarmlink.org/events.

Estate planning attorneys and farm advisors of all sorts concur that the most important ingredient in a smooth farm transition is *communication!* Senior farmers who won't share their plans with all the kids can inadvertently create bad feelings—or a rude surprise, later on. Successors too hasty to "do it my way" can miss out on the valuable wisdom of their elders. It's essential that all stakeholders understand the status of the business, express their own goals for the business and land, and feel listened to.

Success in Succession: Five Stories from the Field

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Ryker Smith represents the fifth generation on his family's dairy farm in upstate New York.

Tre-G Farm, LLC, is 600 acres of hay and forage crops, pasture and a 160-cow dairy, and a small U-Pick berry and vegetable operation.

Smith didn't want anything to do with the family dairy when he started school at Cornell University, but while studying soil science he discovered a passion for organic systems and his feelings began to change. Meanwhile, the regional dairy industry had become increasingly cutthroat, and his parents decided to switch to organic production under Organic Valley, who offered to help with the cost of transition. The prospect of

organic production and expanding the farm's U-Pick operation sealed Smith's interest in returning to the family farm. He also recently won a CCOF Foundation Future Organic Farmer Grant, which is helping him fund the education that will inform his career in organic production.

Only a semester away from finishing college, Smith is working closely with his dad and is bringing new tools and ideas into the business. The organic transition has been positive for

Key Steps in Developing a Good Succession Plan

- 1. Both generations:** Communicate vision and goals for the land and business to lay the foundation for a viable plan. Take the time to learn how to have productive meetings, and involve all stakeholders if possible.
- 2. Business owners:** Update the farm business plan. It is crucial for everyone with a stake in the business—even an indirect one—to know where the business stands, how it is changing, and whether it is profitable.
- 3. Senior generation:** Develop a retirement plan. What do the retirees want at this stage of life? For example, how much income is needed to maintain their desired lifestyle? What are long-term care plans, and insurance to address those? Do the retirees wish to stay on the farm indefinitely?
- 4. Both generations:** Address any knowledge gaps with a successor development plan. What courses, on-the-job training, or mentorship does the incoming generation need to begin taking the reins?
- 5. First the senior generation, then both generations:** Create a business ownership transfer plan—even if ownership transfer is not expected to take place soon. The choice of legal business entity (Limited Partnership, LLC, C-Corp, S-Corp, etc.) can facilitate a smooth transition. Buy-sell agreements are key tools for getting everyone on the same page, and to treating stakeholders "fairly." (Read more about buy-sell agreements on Page 33.)
- 6. Both generations:** Adopt a business management transfer plan. This plan lays out a timeline for transfer of key responsibilities. It should be discussed thoroughly, and written down!
- 7. Senior generation:** The estate plan—do it. For so many land-rich, cash-poor senior farmers, estate planning becomes a weighty task. The alternative is to resign the fate of the farm to probate court—and a good deal of the money too. A living will is the minimum, but a good, sound estate plan will make sure assets are properly allocated to align with the goals of the senior generation. It's a tough question to ask, but what if something should happen to the key decisionmaker(s) tomorrow? Is there a clear plan to follow? Estate plans should be drafted, and then, as things necessarily change, revisited regularly.

everyone, he says. Raising dairy cows in confinement gave him the feeling that they were always “on pins and needles.” Now, he says, they seem healthier and more resilient, so the farmers are less stressed too.

“After college, I intend to return full-time to my family farm, finish out the organic transition, and continue farming for another generation. Each generation on this farm has had something new and exciting that changed. My generation will be marked as the first full generation as organic.”

Smith feels his whole family supports him to eventually take over the farm. “But I’m only 22,” he says. “I don’t know all the details yet.” This farm transition is still in its infancy, but it’s looking healthy and strong.



As a tomboy kid, Natalie Soghomonian always liked helping her dad Joe Soghomonian on their vineyards in the San Joaquin Valley.

She’d sleep on the couch so she wouldn’t miss going with him on his early morning rounds. Now *she* manages the farm, raising a family of her own.

In the 1940s Natalie Soghomonian’s Armenian-born grandparents homesteaded 40 acres in Fresno, growing grapes like neighboring Armenian families. Joe Soghomonian took over the business young, when his dad passed away. By the time his three daughters were born, he had come to the conclusion that pesticides were dangerous and self-perpetuating, so he decided to stop using them for good. Joe Soghomonian became certified organic in the early 1980s and never looked back.

Natalie Soghomonian took a job tractor driving on the family farm at 19, then took over managing harvest, learned how to keep the books from her mom, and began marketing. She developed her own brand, Three Sisters Organic. Soghomonian Farms grows table grapes, raisins, and wine grapes on 600 contiguous acres. Natalie Soghomonian is especially known for her high-quality raisins, sold both wholesale and direct-to-consumer.

The “principal” farm operator is still Natalie Soghomonian’s dad, but now he helps with oversight while she takes the reins. It can be intensely difficult for a business founder to let go, but Joe Soghomonian has allowed for a gracious transition. “I feel really blessed,” Natalie Soghomonian says.

Natalie Soghomonian is vice president of the newly formed S-Corporation, but she is not yet part owner in the business. Her parents are working on an estate and business transfer plan to ensure that her sisters, who don’t farm, will have an inheritance without having to break up the family ranch.

The business is a real roller coaster, Natalie Soghomonian says, and they’ve weathered many ups and downs. Right now she’s concerned about unparalleled labor costs and crippling price drops in organic grapes due to intense market competition from larger organic farms and, ironically, Turkish raisins. Natalie Soghomonian is grappling with the possibility that the business won’t remain economically viable. “It’s discouraging,” she says. “I don’t see that there’s a future for my kids here.” Even such model successions as the Soghomonians’ can ultimately depend on success factors far beyond any farmer’s control.



Along the Calaveras River east of Stockton lies the 900-acre, fifth-generation Old Dog Ranch.

Roger Sitkin’s grandma thought once about selling the ranch, but she saw his interest in farming and passed it down directly to her grandsons under the condition that they’d farm it and keep it in the family. In addition to the majority acreage leased for grazing, Roger Sitkin built up the farm’s kidney bean seed operation and added oats, cucumbers, nuts, and other crops.

His daughter Mollie Sitkin, 32, earned a degree in sustainable business, then saw an opportunity to add value to her dad’s main product. She began making and selling walnut milk, nut butters, and candied nuts for sale at farmers’ markets and online. When the markets demanded it, she easily convinced her dad to convert a 10-acre orchard to organic production. Organic certification has allowed Mollie Sitkin to grow the value-added product business by 50 percent per year since

she founded the brand, and they plan to convert more acres in coming years. Roger Sitkin is clearly proud of his daughter, and enjoys working with her. As for Mollie Sitkin, "it's not lucrative, but I love it," she says.

Roger Sitkin, now 65, has no plans to fully retire any time soon. "I'll still be driving tractor when I'm 90 if I can," he explains. "It's the business end and money worries that I'll be happy to give up." He doesn't want to pressure the next generation. His dad didn't farm, and though Mollie Sitkin is running a great farm-based business, she's not actively involved in the production end. Her cousins visit regularly and her brother shows some interest, so the future is unknown. Although the details are unclear so far, they're all committed to keeping the ranch in the family—just as their great-grandma wished.



Jeff and Annie Main are pioneers of the local and organic food movements.

For almost 40 years they have owned and operated Good Humus Produce—20 acres of vegetables, tree fruits, herbs, and flowers for local markets and a loyal CSA. Co-founders of the Davis Food Co-op and the nationally-recognized Davis Farmers' Market, the Mains have raised three children on the farm and fed tens of thousands of people. They, too, are ready to slow down.

For about a decade the Mains have been asking themselves what the future of Good Humus will look like. "If we stopped farming and had to sell tomorrow," Jeff Main says, "this farm would be over. Immediately." The property value doesn't mesh with farm economics—the aptly-named Good Humus is on some of the most productive farmland in the world, but bona fide farmers can't afford to buy it. By contrast, in peri-urban regions with higher land values, small-scale organic farms make highly desirable country estates, with the real estate market ensuring that they won't be owned by a working farmer again.

Unwilling to see their life's work turn into a fancy estate, Jeff and Annie Main asked their community to help preserve Good Humus for affordable transfer to future generations. Using a

model developed by Massachusetts nonprofit Equity Trust, the Mains created an innovative easement to preserve the "whole farm." Like other agricultural conservation easements, it prohibits subdivision and certain buildings and uses, but the Mains' easement goes further, requiring that any future owner must earn a livelihood from farming and live on the property.

In 2009, the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op joined with Davis Food Co-op, Twin Pines Cooperative Foundation, California FarmLink, and others to raise money for small-farm preservation projects and to highlight the importance of next-generation farmers in a project called One Farm at a Time. The campaign raised over \$300,000 for the Good Humus easement, guaranteeing the community a long-term source of food and farm livelihoods.

Because future owners will be required to farm, the Mains' three children will not be able to inherit the property *unless they choose to farm it*. This has been sobering for the family. But in another way, it's refreshingly clear to the Main family what Good Humus is supposed to be. Their daughter Allison Main recently returned from New York City to help with the flower business and marketing. She's trying it out, and says, "it feels like coming into the sunshine."

One Farm at a Time is seeking its next farm preservation project. The organization's goal is to help set aside small family farms for affordable entry and continued production, under good stewardship, for generations to come. To learn more, visit www.onefarmatatime.org.



Before Woodleaf Farm was a twinkle in his eye, Carl Rosato grew up in Phoenix and started picking fruit as a teenager.

When a friend of his moved to a commune, Rosato went along. He was soon growing food all over the West Coast, and at age 22 he bought 26 acres in Oroville. His was among the first farms to be certified organic by CCOF.

"I'll still be driving tractor when I'm 90 if I can. It's the business end and money worries that I'll be happy to give up."

Known for its delectable peaches, Woodleaf Farm grows dozens of fruit varieties on only seven acres. Rosato taught himself how to do everything farm-related, from building soil and maintaining equipment, to selecting and marketing the best varieties for the hot foothill climate. To stay at a scale where he could be the primary farm laborer, Rosato gave up on wholesale early and made his business selling at farmers' markets.

Thirty years later at an EcoFarm Conference, Rosato met Helen Atthowe, a legendary no-till farmer from Montana, and they were married soon afterward. They both loved mentoring and teaching about sustainable agriculture, and shared a dream of retiring to a farm where they could grow enough food for their own diets and just a few markets.

When they found their dream retirement property in eastern Oregon, Rosato knew it was time to sell Woodleaf Farm. In fall 2015 he and Atthowe made a farm sale video to help spread the word. Rosato's goal was to get a fair value for the land and the mature turn-key business. He was even willing to finance part of the land sale to find like-minded younger farmers who could afford to buy and keep the farm going.

He quickly received multiple offers. Danny Lazzarini and Andrew Seidman, a young couple with 15 years' farming experience, seemed like just the right fit. They studied their financing options, investigated the business's earning potential, and asked themselves if they'd be capable of taking over such a finely tuned operation. When Rosato assured them that he would commit to a year's mentorship and that his right-hand man Leonardo Montes Soriano would stay on, Lazzarini and Seidman agreed. In early 2016, they formalized the sale of the land, the business, and some equipment.

Nothing was normal about their transaction: Neither party used a realtor or a paid lawyer. Lazzarini and Seidman got help from family members and farmer mentors to evaluate the land purchase contract and the business. Rosato drafted a mentorship agreement based on what he thought his successors might need. They agreed to purchase some of the equipment separately, with Rosato agreeing to defer payments until after their first growing season. The year-long overlap in their transition also allowed Lazzarini and Seidman to continue selling at the farmers' markets that had come to love Woodleaf Farm fruit year after year.

Rosato's willingness to mentor—and Lazzarini and Seidman's desire to learn—have been the defining factors in the success of this transfer. During the first year after the sale, Rosato made good on his mentorship agreement, coming down once or twice a month to help Lazzarini and Seidman and

answering their frequent phone calls. He says they used less of his help than he expected, especially in the area of marketing, which they already had down pat. But Lazzarini and Seidman are very clear that Rosato's mentorship was one of the most essential parts of the deal for them. "It's amazing to know that he's willing to have us bug him to get answers," says Lazzarini.

Even though the one-year mentorship contract has now closed, the incoming farmers are welcome to call Rosato any time. Most recently, it was for step-by-step instructions on how to mix lime sulfur. "Forever they'll get my ears," says Rosato.

The Succession Challenge, in Numbers

Farmers, as a group, keep getting older.

- » A full third (33 percent) of principal farm operators are 65 years or older.
- » The average age of the American farmer is up to 58, from age 50 thirty years ago.
- » Organic farmers are younger overall, age 52 on average.

There are fewer and fewer beginning farmers.

- » In five years, the number of beginning farmers (operating farms less than 10 years) declined more than 20 percent.
- » There's a higher percentage of beginning farmers in the organic sector: 27 percent of majority-organic producers vs. 18 percent beginning farmers overall.

Land is changing hands, but beginning farmers are priced out.

- » Over the next 20 years, about 70 percent of the nation's private ag land will change hands (Farm LASTS Project).
- » Per-acre farm values rose 36 percent in five years (2007-2012).
- » Land access is named as one of the top two issues faced by beginning farmers (National Young Farmers Coalition).

Who are the farmers of the future?

- » The number of minority-operated farms has grown significantly, the most noteworthy growth being a 21 percent increase in Hispanic operators.
- » The number of female principal operators has dropped more quickly than male operators (6 percent drop in women vs. 4 percent drop in men); yet the numbers of female farmers vary dramatically by region.

Data from the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service 2007-2012 Ag Censuses, unless otherwise noted.

"...the pioneering organic farmers of my generation have a greater responsibility to mentor and pass along knowledge and experience to a new generation of cultivators than we do to continued production."



Lazzarini and Seidman carrying on the Woodleaf Farm farmers' market tradition (photo courtesy of Brie Mazurek/CUESA).

Lazzarini and Seidman are making some changes, too. They plan to extend their growing season with vegetables and row crops to make the most of the months they're spending at the market. They'd like to eventually get youth and their new community more involved.

The youngsters have a whole season under their belts now, which they've weathered well. "Still, the whole thing is completely terrifying," says Lazzarini. "We've seen so many friends go into farming who are not still farming."

Overall, both parties in this transfer felt they had similar goals and philosophies, and there was mutual trust and minimal tension from the get-go. Rosato felt he got a fair price, and Lazzarini and Seidman feel that if all goes well, they'll be able to cover their payments and build long lives there. "We will need a few more good years before we know for sure if we can make it work," says Lazzarini. But so far, so good.



Agriculture is as basic as breathing to modern human existence, yet it seems to come with more than its fair share of trouble and toil. Food prices are low, while the costs of land and labor are at all-time highs. Business startup costs are prohibitive, and financing can be hard to come by. Continuing farm kids often say they want a healthier work-life balance than their parents had, and their parents don't blame them. Older farmers want to slow down while still preserving the work they've put into their land, but those without a willing heir may not have that choice—or anyone to pass their

knowledge on to. New-entry farmers, without the benefit of lifelong on-farm learning, face a steep learning curve.

Add to all of this the traditional farm succession challenges of family communication, inheritance and estate planning, retirement and long-term care needs, and ongoing threats to agricultural land, and it's clearly not an easy row to hoe.

Still, there's another trend among today's young farmers that ought to make the organic elders proud: They are passionate about ecological stewardship. Addressing a Placer County sustainable agriculture audience last fall, Tom Willey said, "I have come to believe that the pioneering organic farmers of my generation have a greater responsibility to mentor and pass along knowledge and experience to a new generation of cultivators than we do to continued production. Our young organic movement has taken some baby steps on the path to evolve agriculture towards a more harmonious relationship with [the] natural systems operating this planet." The next frontier awaits.

These stories have shown us some of the positive ways that both generations are overcoming today's troubles, at least for now. Making sure the farm works for the next generation, as a business *and* a lifestyle, is key. Full Belly Farm partner Paul Muller once shared the following advice: "All of us need to be planting watermelons so our kids will fall in love with farming too." Considering all four of his kids are now involved in the farm, his plan seems to be working. ■

Succession Resources

Building a Future with Farmers: Challenges Faced by Young American Farmers and a National Strategy to Help Them Succeed, published by the National Young Farmers Coalition in 2011 with contributing authors Lindsey Lusher Shute with Avery Anderson, Hannah Bernhardt, Tierney Creech, Severine vT Fleming, Emily Oakley, and Benjamin Shute: www.youngfarmers.org/newsroom/building-a-future-with-farmers-october-2011

California FarmLink offers workshops, technical assistance, and professional referrals to farm and ranch families in the succession planning process on a first-come, first-served basis: www.cafarmlink.org

California Chapter of the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers: www.calasfmra.com

"**The Elders of Organic Farming**" by Carl Pogash, published in *The New York Times*, January 24, 2014: www.nytimes.com/2014/01/25/business/the-elders-of-organic-farming.html

The Farm Succession Guidebook was published by California FarmLink as part of a collaboration with the Center for Land-Based Learning and University of California Cooperative Extension: www.cafarmlink.org/succession-planning/farm-succession-guidebook

Farm Land Access, Stewardship, Tenure and Succession (LASTS) Project is a national multi-year project initiated in 2007 to focus research, curriculum development, and/or outreach efforts in farmland access and tenure for farm entrants, farm succession challenges for exiting farm operators, and the impacts of tenure and succession arrangements on land use and the environment: www.uvm.edu/farmlasts

International Farm Transition Network is an umbrella organization "fostering the next generation of farmers" by providing research and resources to individuals, universities, and nonprofits working to address farm transition issues: www.farmtransition.org

The Greying of California Farming: Success and Succession, a California Health Report in Farm Labor by Matt Perry published in 2016: www.cirsinc.org/rural-california-report/entry/the-greying-of-california-farming-success-and-succession

Land Trust Alliance, a national land trust advocacy organization that offers resources on the role easements can play in estate and succession planning: www.landtrustalliance.org

Land for Good, a nonprofit focused on "gaining ground for farmers" in New England, features myriad resources for landowners and farmers dedicated to keeping lands healthy, productive, and accessible: www.landforgood.org

National Young Farmers Coalition "represents, mobilizes, and engages young farmers to ensure their success": www.youngfarmers.org

Passing Down the Farm: The Other Farm Crisis, written by Wayne D. Messick and Donald J. Jonovic in 1996

Rod Carter, Agriculture and Business Professionals, Inc.: rodcarter@abpinconline.com

Ties to the Land, landowner succession planning workshops, curriculum, and DVD prepared by Oregon State University: www.tiestotheland.org

USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service: www.nass.usda.gov

Woodleaf Farm Soil Management System, by Carl Rosato, Helen Atthowe, and Alex Stone, published by Oregon State University Extension in 2016: <http://articles.extension.org/pages/73428/organic-farm-system-woodleaf-farm>

Buy-sell Agreements Maintain Harmony and Legacy

WRITTEN BY Jim Rein, CPA and Holly Salisbury, CPA

This week we had a meeting with a father and two sons who are co-owners of a farm business. It was one of our favorite types of meetings because the family was taking a proactive step toward protecting their business and the owners by drafting a buy-sell agreement. The buy-sell agreement sets forth a blueprint for what will happen to each person's share of the company if one of several triggering events occurs.

These agreements are important because they provide a plan if any of the following triggering events occur: death, disability, divorce, bankruptcy, desire of owner(s) to withdraw, or desire of owner(s) to buy out another owner(s). If one of these events were to occur, what would happen to the ownership interest in your business?

To put it bluntly, you might not want to be in business with the next person in line if a triggering event occurs without a buy-sell agreement in place. Think about that for a moment. Do you want to work directly with your business partner's spouse or relative?

In the case of our clients, the father wants to treat his two sons equitably, but he also knows that son number one is and will continue to be the main driver of the company moving forward. In this case, we helped them put a buy-sell agreement in place that gives this son first right of refusal on dad's shares in the case of death or disability. The other son can continue his participation in the company as he has to date. The advantage of this type of agreement is clarity for all parties about what will happen should the ownership situation change.

In short, a buy-sell agreement:

- » prevents unwanted third parties from taking possession of any part of the company;
- » enables a smooth transition of ownership;
- » provides a method for buying out a withdrawing or deceased owner;
- » and provides an independent mechanism for the purchase price of a withdrawing or deceased owner without further arbitration.

A buy-sell agreement can simply state that the company reserves the right to purchase back the shares of the withdrawing or deceased owner. Some of our clients review their buy-sell agreement every year because it includes

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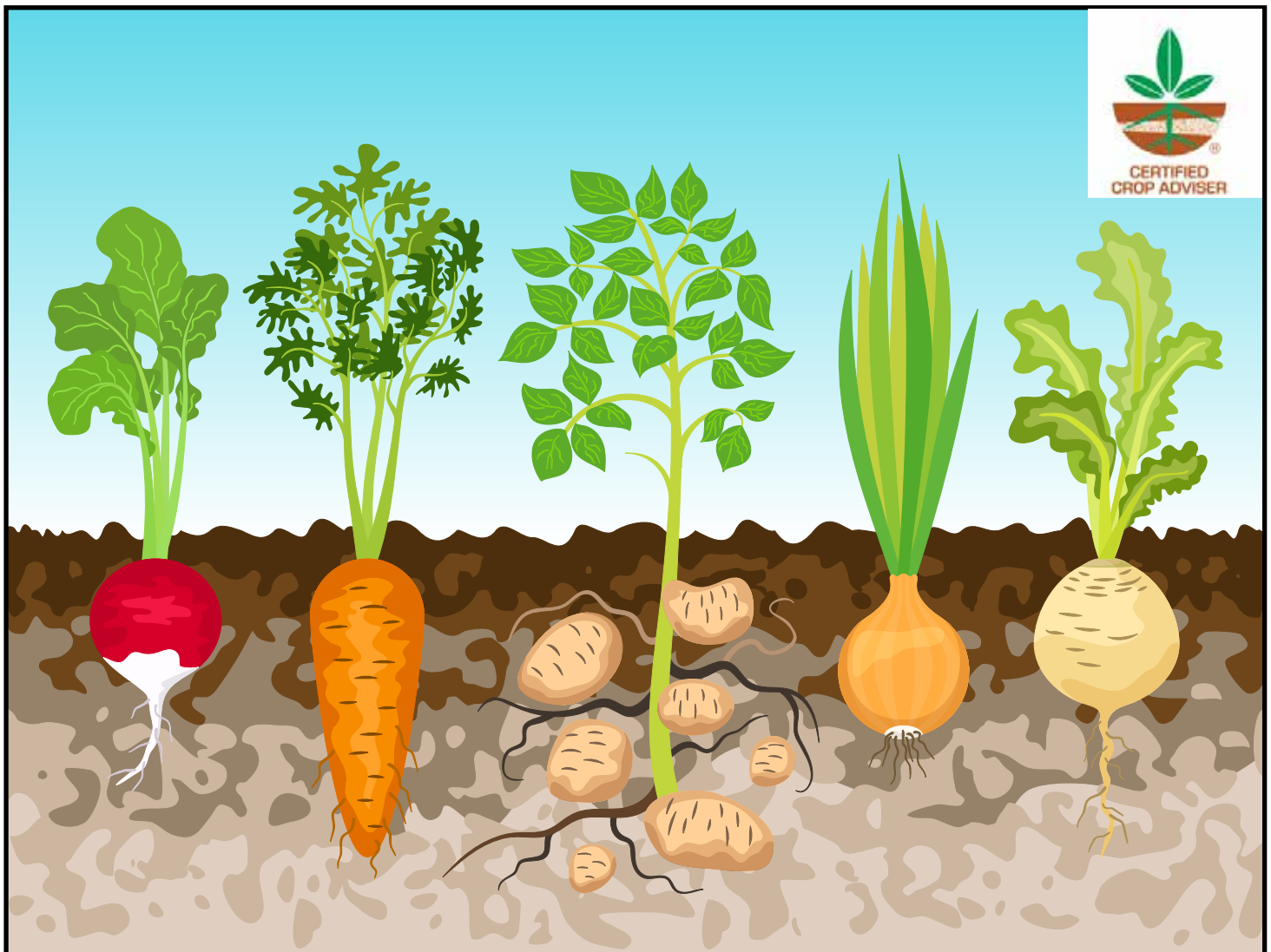
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important information, such as the value of the company, which changes over time.

There are three common ways to fund the buyout set forth in the buy-sell agreement. One is to take out life insurance on the owner(s) and use proceeds from the policy to buy them out. The second method is called the self-funded method. In this case, the company accumulates liquid or convertible assets over time to fund an eventual buyout. The third method is to borrow money from a third-party lender.

If you are in need of a buy-sell agreement, the first step is to get all the owners together with a trusted advisor and facilitate a discussion

around triggering events, goals, and the structure of the deal. The next step is to have an attorney create the actual document. From there, it's a matter of working through the details to come to an agreeable plan for everyone involved.

ABOUT K-COE ISOM: K-Coe Isom leads, nationally, as consultants and CPAs in the food and agriculture industry. The firm helps sustain and grow food and ag operations, making sure these businesses are strong for the next generation. The firm is solidly embedded throughout the food-supply chain, working "from policy to plate" with traditional and organic producers, input suppliers, processors, packagers, distributors, biofuels manufacturers, equipment dealerships, landowners, lenders, and agencies and policy organizations that support the industry. Visit www.kcoe.com.

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The 2018 Farm Bill Journey Begins

The U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry held its first 2018 Farm Bill hearing in Manhattan, Kansas, on February 23, 2017, kicking off what Committee Chair Pat Roberts (R-KS) characterized as the “farm bill journey.”

The farm bill is a law that governs a range of important agricultural and food programs. It consists of twelve major sections or titles addressing commodity price and income supports, conservation, trade, nutrition, credit, rural development, research, forestry, energy, horticulture, and crop insurance programs. The programs and services authorized by the farm bill impact millions of Americans, including farmers, low-income communities, and rural America.

The current farm bill was approved in 2014, and Congress is now preparing to pass a new farm bill in 2018. The journey to passing a farm bill includes gathering public input, debating existing programs, vetting new proposals, and many hours of deliberation among Congress members. The long journey officially began in February 2017 when the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture began the first of several hearings held around the country to gather public input.

Led by Senator Roberts and ranking member Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), the committee heard from a panel of Kansas farmers, ranchers, bankers, and representatives from other rural groups.

The panel expressed unanimity on many issues, including:

- Continued funding for conservation programs, particularly the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP),
- The importance of crop insurance as a safety net for farmers and ranchers, and
- The need to maintain free trade and access to export markets.

The panelists and senators did not state whether they had organic production, and they did not directly address organic agriculture or programs such as the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program.

CCOF-certified food maker Hilary’s Drink Eat Well, a company specializing in convenient and delicious foods made from real ingredients that are free from common allergens, attended the hearing.

“It was a great opportunity to engage in the national conversation about the future of our food and farm policy. We will submit a public comment on the importance of supporting organic in the 2018 Farm Bill and urge other organic businesses to do the same,” said Hilary Kass, who is responsible for research and development and quality assurance for Hilary’s Drink Eat Well.

Stay tuned for additional hearings and public comment opportunities by signing up for our weekly newsletter at www.ccof.org/subscribe. Contact policy@ccof.org for more information.

CCOF Attends California Farm Bill Listening Sessions

The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) is also preparing for the 2018 Farm Bill. In February 2017, CDFA Secretary Karen Ross hosted listening sessions throughout the state to gather farm bill priorities from stakeholders to present to California’s congressional delegation.

CCOF Senior Policy Specialist Jane Sooby presented testimony at the listening session on February 22 in Salinas. At the core of Sooby’s testimony was a call for strong support and protection of the National Organic Program (NOP).

“The single most effective way to support California’s robust organic sector is to preserve and protect the NOP, the federal agency in charge of overseeing organic and enforcing the

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“The single most effective way to support California’s robust organic sector is to preserve and protect the NOP...”

organic standards,” Sooby explained. “We don’t want to be alarmist, but we’ve heard rumblings that the very existence of the NOP may be under attack in the coming farm bill discussions.”

Sooby encouraged policymakers to build upon the remarkable momentum of the flourishing organic marketplace and better support organic producers in meeting the high demand for organic product. She highlighted a few key programs for continued or increased funding:

National Organic Certification Cost Share (Cost Share)

Cost Share is a key program that has made organic certification affordable and accessible for farmers and processors no matter how small. The program rebates organic producers 75 percent of their certification-related expenses up to a maximum of \$750 per certified scope. CDFA reports that in fiscal year 2015/16, they processed and distributed a total amount of \$1.5 million to 1,900 producers and handlers. Cost Share is a very important tool that helps bring more farms, ranches, and businesses into organic certification to meet growing consumer demand.

Organic Research and Extension Initiative (OREI)

OREI is a federally funded grant program that funds research on certified organic ground. In the 14 years of its existence, OREI funding has generated a significant body of knowledge on organic farming and how best to manage biological farming systems. CCOF supports continued and increased funding for OREI and for USDA’s organic data collection programs, including price reporting on organic produce, grains, and dairy.

Expanded Crop Insurance Options

Like all producers, organic growers need a safety net to keep them in business when natural disasters—or even just bad weather—result in crop failure. Risk Management Agency has greatly improved organic crop insurance in the past few years, and now more types of organic crops than ever are eligible for coverage at the organic or contracted price. CCOF endorses expanded organic crop insurance options in the 2018 Farm Bill.

CCOF will continue to engage with California’s representatives as farm bill discussions evolve and will reach out to our members to share opportunities to advocate for organic priorities. To learn more about how to get involved, contact Sooby at jssooby@ccof.org.

COPAC Welcomes New Members and Chair

On January 26, the California Organic Products Advisory Committee (COPAC) held its first meeting of the year, where it welcomed six new committee members and elected Mindee Jeffery of Good Earth Natural Foods as committee chair.

COPAC advises the CDFA secretary on organic issues. Current Secretary Karen Ross recently appointed six new members to the committee, including three producer seats, two alternate producer seats, and an environmental seat.

Several seats remain open for appointment, including a processor seat, a newly created certifier seat, and numerous alternate seats. CDFA accepts applications on a rolling basis. To apply, fill out the application form at www.ccof.org/copac-application-2017 and return it to Laurel Rudolph via email at laurel.rudolph@cdfa.ca.gov or by mail to 1220 N Street, Sacramento, CA 95814. A letter of recommendation is also required. CCOF policy staff are available to talk with you about serving on COPAC. Direct questions to policy@ccof.org.

At the January 26 meeting, after electing Jeffery as the new chair of the committee, COPAC elected presiding chair Melody Meyer of UNFI as vice chair. CCOF salutes Meyer for her 12 years of service to COPAC, many of them as chair, and congratulates Jeffery on her new position as chair.

Other business at the meeting included an update from Danny Lee, supervising special investigator at CDFA. Lee reported on 2016 enforcement actions and registration data. Additionally, CDFA staff reported on the implementation of the California Organic Food and Farming Act (COFFA). As a result of this legislation, online State Organic Program (SOP) registration renewal has been reduced from between six and thirty forms (depending on the number of different crops grown) to two simple forms. Growers in attendance reported significantly reduced time spent renewing their registration. Learn more about COFFA at www.ccof.org/coffa.

COPAC also voted to approve recommendations made by an organic stakeholder work group that was tasked with evaluating SOP efficiency and responsiveness, and formed two new subcommittees: one to explore the possibility of gathering extra data from registrants and one to work with SOP staff to develop a communications and outreach plan.

The next COPAC meeting will be Wednesday, May 3, at the SOP office in Sacramento, California. CCOF will post more details on our blog and in the CCOF newsletter as the date approaches. For more information on COPAC, contact policy@ccof.org.



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U.S. ORGANIC WORLDWIDE 2017 CALENDAR

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✓ Trade Mission to Singapore and Malaysia

JANUARY

OTA and 4 organic companies will participate in a buyers' mission and market investigation in to fast-growing Asian markets for USDA certified organic products.

✓ Mexican Health Products Summit

JANUARY

OTA will deliver a key note at the summit and host 1:1 buyer meetings representing a diverse range of U.S. organic products in an effort to grow stronger ties with retailers in Mexico as the implementation of its domestic regulations draws near.

✓ BIOFACH / VIVANESS

FEBRUARY

OTA will host 13 companies at BioFach and 4 companies at Vivanness – the largest trade organic trade show in the world, in Nuremberg. OTA will lead 3 panels and speak on 3 more at the BioFach congress as well.

✓ FoodEx Japan

MARCH

OTA will deliver a key note speech at FoodEx Japan, Japan's largest trade show. And for the first time, OTA will host 5 companies in the USA pavilion. Japan is the #1 market for U.S. organic products in Asia.

✓ = Activity Complete

✓ Natural Products Expo West Buyers Mission

MARCH

OTA will host buyers from around the world, who will meet with U.S. organic companies off the hectic trade show floor in pre-arranged 1:1 meeting.

Seoul Hotel and Food

MAY

OTA will host 7 companies at the Seoul Hotel in Food show at Kintex for the third year in a row!

Trade Mission to Hong Kong

JUNE

OTA will lead for the first time a trade mission to Hong Kong and host a seminar for buyers and importers in partnership with FAS in Hong Kong.

Organic Category Management Training

JULY

For a developing market, positioning and differentiating organic products in the store can be a challenge. OTA will host an Organic category management training open to retailers from around the world. This interactive hands-on training will showcase the latest techniques and best practices for selling organic across a variety of retail channels.

Organic Retail Promotions Mexico and Taiwan

AUGUST

Mexico and Taiwan are key growth markets for U.S. organic products (2nd and 4th largest markets respectively). OTA will work to increase exposure of the USDA Organic seal and support products on the shelves with in-store demoing at key retail partners in both markets.

Natural Products Expo East

SEPTEMBER

OTA will host key member meetings at Expo East in an effort to meet the needs of the diverse group of U.S. organic producers and exporters. Please join the conversation and help grow the success of the whole industry by sharing your perspective and expertise.

Anuga

OCTOBER

Anuga is the largest food trade show in the world in 2017. OTA will return with 8 companies to represent the U.S. organic industry at the show.

Middle East

OCTOBER

The Middle East is the fastest-growing region for U.S. organic exports. OTA stakeholders have identified Israel as a key market of U.S. organic products. As a result, OTA will lead a trade mission to Israel following Anuga for the first time.

Promotion in Japan and Korea

NOVEMBER

After two successful promotions in 2016, OTA is dedicating funds to promote US organic products on the shelves in Japan and Korea. Partnering with producers and imports makes these international collaborations a true success!

OTA as Part of Your Export Team

ONGOING

OTA will continue to provide organic market intelligence to U.S. exporters; serve as representative of the U.S. organic industry to the global market, and work 1:1 with companies to find export opportunities for U.S. produced, U.S. ingredient-based organic products.



About OTA

The Organic Trade Association (OTA) is the membership-based business association for organic agriculture and products in North America. OTA is the leading voice for the organic trade in the United States, representing over 8,500 organic businesses across 50 states. Its members include growers, shippers, processors, certifiers, farmers' associations, distributors, importers, exporters, consultants, retailers and others. OTA's Board of Directors is democratically elected by its members.

About OTA Export Program Funding

OTA's organic export initiatives are funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) Market Access Program (MAP). Since 1999, FAS has awarded millions of dollars to OTA to help expand commercial export markets for U.S. organic products. OTA aims to showcase and educate key target markets on the quality, integrity and variety of USDA-certified organic products available for export around the world.



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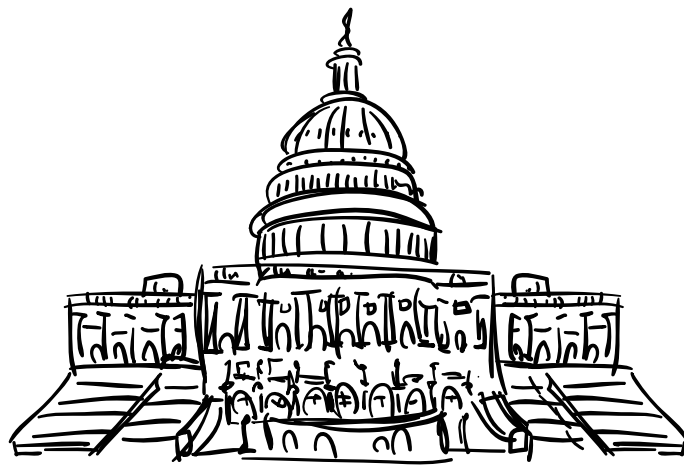
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Organic Stakeholders Weigh in on Top Priorities for Next Farm Bill



More than 500 organic stakeholders across 45 states have weighed in on issues they see as critical to the organic sector as part of a comprehensive farm bill survey conducted by the Organic Trade Association (OTA) in the lead-up to Congress beginning debate on the 2018 Farm Bill.

Organic fruit and vegetable growers, grains and oilseed farmers, livestock and poultry producers, dairy farmers, vineyard owners, and flower growers, along with organic processors, food makers, distributors, and other organic operations answered questions concerning barriers they face in their organic operations—from regulatory, research, and marketing, to production and investment barriers. Survey respondents also evaluated the effectiveness of existing programs geared towards the organic sector. In preparation for developing its advocacy work on the next farm bill, OTA partnered with members of OTA's Farmers Advisory Council and other organic organizations—17 of them, including CCOF—to poll stakeholders directly on issues.

The \$50 billion per year organic industry has earned a seat at the farm bill table as one of the bright spots in the farm economy. Organic farmers, ranchers, handlers, and food and textile makers add measurable value to rural economies, creating jobs and raising incomes—and they do this by responding to consumers' interest in how their food is grown and made. We want to build on the success of past farm bills and focus on expanding the production base, supporting successful organic farmers, and ensuring healthy markets.

The current farm bill—a five-year omnibus bill that sets policy for commodity support and risk management, publicly-funded agricultural research, rural development, conservation, and nutritional support programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—is set to expire in September 2018.

Survey participants cited lack of university or professional programs focusing on organic processing and technology, and lack of consumer awareness of organic's benefits and value as critical challenges—or barriers—for both organic producers and handlers. Specific producer concerns were the cost of buying

land, and the cost and availability of labor. Organic processors and food makers said a pressing issue is the lack of dependable supply of domestic organic raw materials.


Some of the top organic policy actions suggested by participants include:

- Strong support for the National Organic Program in applying uniform standards and providing strong oversight across the globe,
- Increased public education about the benefits of organic,
- Investment to support transition to organic and access to land programs for new organic farmers,
- Increased funding for organic production and ingredient research,
- Programs to improve transparency and tracking of international organic trade, and
- Improved and increased data on the organic industry.

"Thanks to CCOF and our many survey partners, we received responses from a diverse cross section of the industry, which will assist us in developing policy recommendations for the next farm bill. Input from the organic sector is invaluable in shaping all of our advocacy efforts, and as we prepare for a new farm bill, we value the comments and observations from organic stakeholders even more," said Megan DeBates, director of legislative affairs and coalitions at OTA.

"To represent and advocate for organic as effectively as possible in the debate over the next farm bill, and with a new administration and a new Congress, OTA did what we frequently do—we reached out to the organic community for their feedback to guide us," DeBates added.

OTA is now using the information obtained in the survey to build a well-vetted farm bill platform with additional input from OTA task forces and councils. Efforts will then focus on educating Congress and the administration about the importance of America's almost \$50 billion organic industry, the priorities of the country's more than 20,000 organic operators, and the expectations of millions of organic consumers.



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Focus on Natural Resources and Soil Conservation in 2017

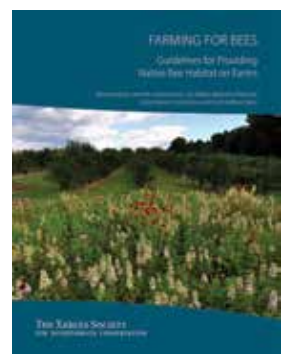
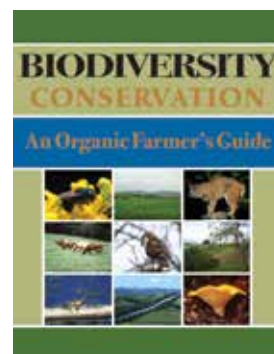
In 2016 the National Organic Program (NOP) issued final guidance 5020 on natural resources, commonly called biodiversity.

CCOF wants to continually improve how we address both natural resources and long-term soil management. To better meet our obligations under the NOP's guidance, we are taking the following actions:

- 1.** CCOF-certified farming operations will be required to complete a revised two-page Organic System Plan (OSP) section G4.2 and provide it at their next annual inspection. All clients will have an action item in their compliance report identifying this requirement, and copy of this form is available on the CCOF website at www.ccof.org/g42-natural-resources. Any CCOF staff member or inspector is also happy to provide a copy to you directly. You can save time and money by completing this prior to your inspection. Visit MyCCOF to view your compliance report and the details about this request.
- 2.** Operations that do not have a revised OSP on file when their annual inspection is reviewed will be asked to provide one as a condition of certification. After May 1,

2018, we may issue noncompliances to those operations that have not yet met the requirement.

- 3.** We will provide updated guidance and tools from WFA to support clients' and inspectors' understanding of the requirements. WFA's tools include a thorough guide and a conservation farming matrix that is helpful for identifying practices you already maintain or that you may consider. Visit www.ccof.org/natural-resource-conservation to review these and other helpful tools.



- 4.** CCOF is improving our inspection reports regarding natural resource conservation. During our reviews we hope to raise awareness and work with operations over time to address challenges, including encouraging engagement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and technical service providers.
- 5.** We will be providing additional training to CCOF inspectors with WFA and others. We hope to utilize the NOP's requirement to perform field evaluations of our inspectors to concentrate on natural resources observations in the coming years.

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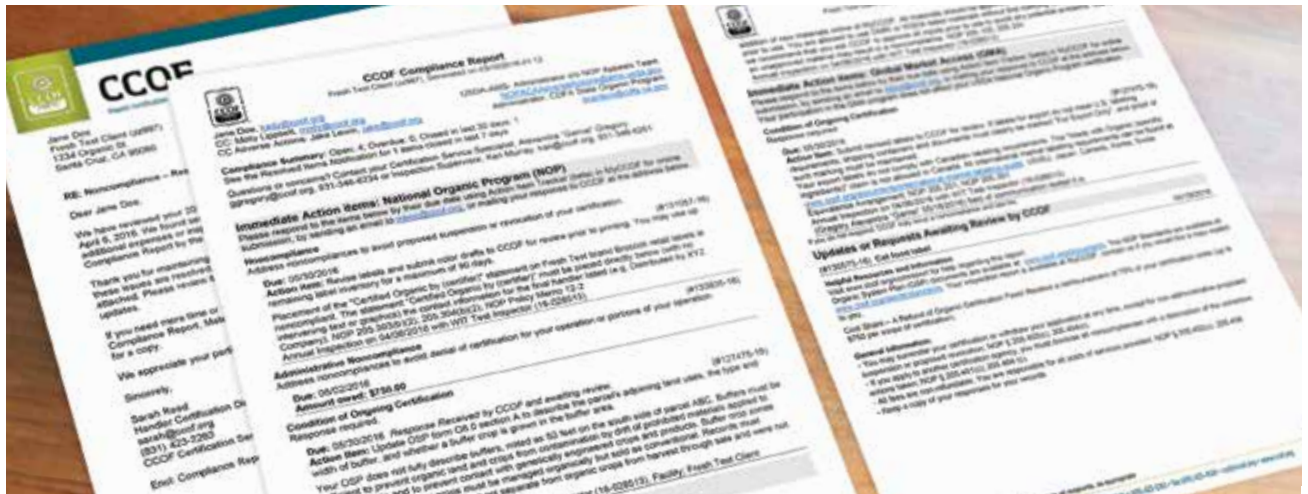
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- 6. CCOF is also exploring options for periodic focused inspections that address only past compliance issues and focus on a deeper discussion regarding natural resources/biodiversity and long-term soil management and conservation on the farm.

CCOF-certified farms are strongly encouraged to review the guidance and the Wild Farm Alliance's (WFA) guide that provides more details at www.wildfarmalliance.org/biodiversity_guide. WFA has worked hard to raise awareness regarding this important area of organic standards and has developed knowledgeable resources about biodiversity conservation.

Farming is a complicated process and we recognize that many growers are subject to unique challenges and have different resources and opportunities. Our goal is to work together to maximize conservation and soil management practices over longer cycles of time than annual inspections. As the core foundation of organic we want to work with all growers to explore these issues and continually maintain and improve their diverse natural resources. We look forward to working with you.

Compliance Report Improvements

CCOF continues to improve your tools and resources to help you manage your organic certification. If you ever wonder what is due to CCOF and why, you can log in online to MyCCOF and check your items at a glance on your personalized dashboard. In MyCCOF's Action Item Tracker, you can view your action items, respond to them, and produce a compliance report at any time. Compliance reports have all the information you need for keeping your certification on track: all requests, all your CCOF contacts, and the latest news and promotions. Log in and get yours today. Learn more about these tools at www.ccof.org/compliance-report-action-item-tracker.

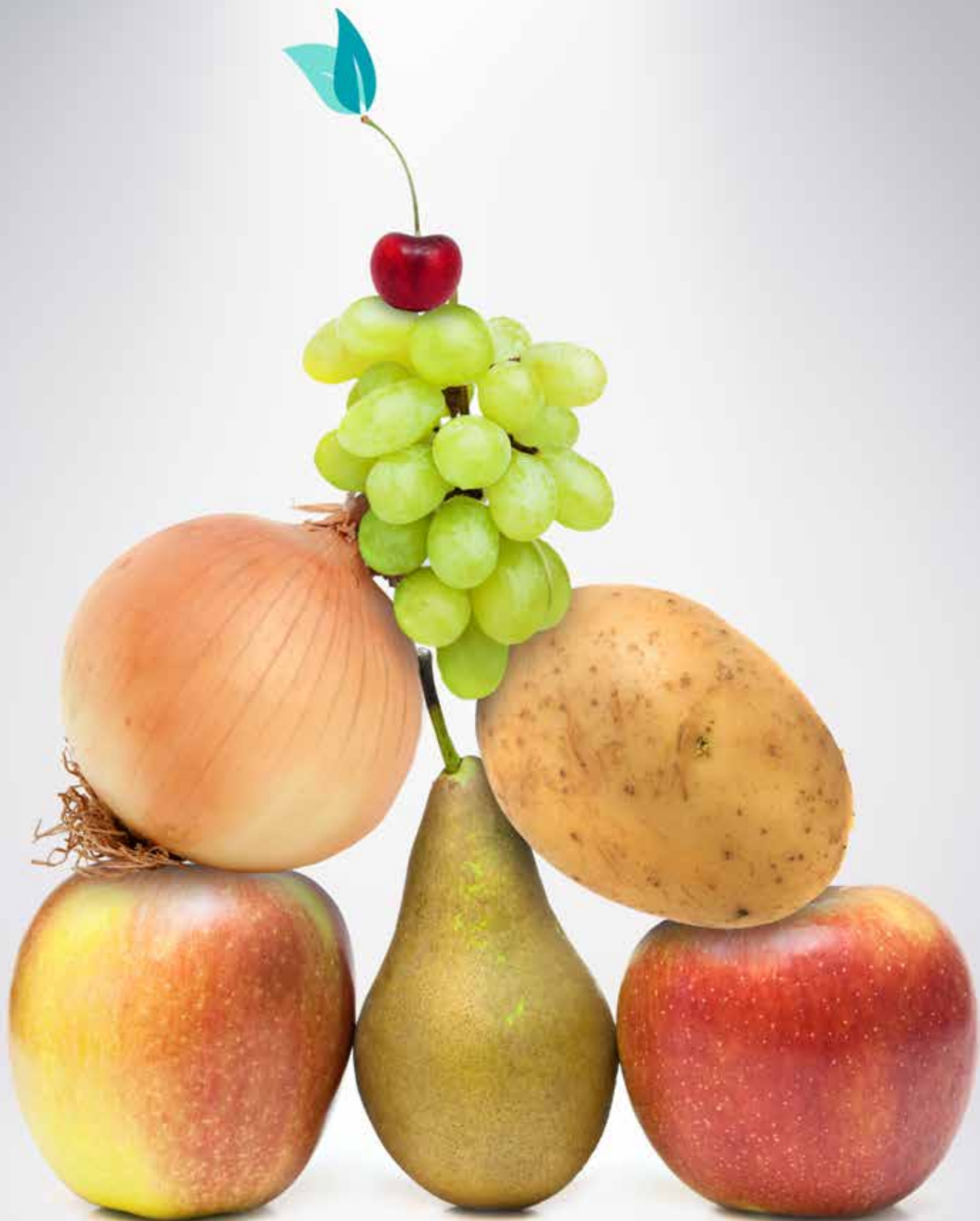
Improvements to Spanish Language Resources



We are proud to announce major strides in improving CCOF's Spanish services. CCOF is the only certifier in the United States offering a fully bilingual service built to meet the needs of Spanish-speakers.

In the last year CCOF has worked hard to translate many flyers, our entire MyCCOF tool, and key certification tools, including the OSP Materials List and Compliance Report. In the coming months we expect to improve our website in important ways to support Spanish-speakers as well.

As events such as the EcoFarm Conference expand their Spanish programming and incubator farms graduate more Spanish speakers, we are pleased to see these operations utilizing organic practices.



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