On-farm storage opens door to market opportunities

By Lynn Clarkson

Markets look for organic farmers who can offer high quality crops, domestic production, and scattered shipments with minimal variation. For farmers, the incentives include better prices and better sales opportunities. The key to access these incentives is well-managed farm storage.

Storage links you to the market. Whether provided by you or third parties, it is an essential factor in the supply chain running from your fields to the ultimate consumer of your crops. Its functions are well understood and analyzed by universities, government agencies, bankers, equipment suppliers and many farmers. Those functions include: efficiently embracing crops coming from fields at harvest; protecting and enhancing crop quality; segregating crops by identity, which is determined by variety/hybrid, culture, or biological characteristic; timing market delivery for optimal pricing; and, linking supply to logistics for an efficient mesh with client needs and freight costs. Costs and benefits attach to each function.

On-farm storage can be an opportunity to increase the value of your farm. Storage makes your farm more competitive in the market by overcoming transportation and seasonal supply/demand challenges.

On-farm storage can sometimes make or break the profitability of your farm. Storage is a key component to market opportunities.

Olson Organics in Cottonwood, Minn., stores grain on farm to take advantage of market opportunities and work with the grain buyer’s delivery schedule.

Photo by Lauren Langworthy

Communication is key to successful farm transfer

By Teresa Opheim

The generational divide can seem especially wide when you’re trying to cross it to secure your farming future. In the course of writing The Future of Family Farms, I heard from many farmers about their experiences and plans for transferring the family farm from one generation to the next. If you’re in the midst of taking over a family farm, here’s some advice to help you bridge the divide for a smoother farm transition.

Before you even say a word, listen. We are often so eager to make our mark that we don’t understand where our elders have been, why they do what they do, and their hopes and dreams for the future.

“If your elders have their way of doing things, and you should try to understand why,” said Francis Tyson (not his real name). Tyson is an organic grain farmer who has been share-cropping land as a tenant, and is also working with his parents to take over the family farm.

Listening sounds easy, but most of us do not do it very well. Instead we start formulating responses in our heads as soon as the other person starts to talk. It might help to think about and write down the specific questions you have for your elders. Or you might need someone to facilitate to help, especially if you’re from stoic stock or you have certain family members who tend to dominate the conversation.

It may get easier for you to have these conversations with your elders. Or you might need someone with “no skin” in the game or even a professional facilitator to help, especially if you’re from stoic stock or you have certain family members who tend to dominate the conversation.

As important as what to communicate is how to do it. Is it better to approach your elders while working together in the barn or at a sit-down in the farm office? Does the process go better if you have certain family members who

The Future of Family Farms, the Farm Journal Legacy Project has a list of statements, which you score from 5 (agree) to 1 (disagree), include:

1. Why do you farm/want to farm?
2. What are your professional short-term and long-range goals?
3. When you think about taking over the farm, what challenges do you anticipate?
4. What rewards do you anticipate?
5. What do you feel best about how the farm transition is going so far?
6. What do you not feel so good about how the farm transition is going?

It may get easier for you to have these conversations with your elders. Or you might need someone with “no skin” in the game or even a professional facilitator to help, especially if you’re from stoic stock or you have certain family members who tend to dominate the conversation.

As important as what to communicate is how to do it. Is it better to approach your elders while working together in the barn or at a sit-down in the farm office? Does the process go better if you provide a lot of background explanation to warm up to the problem, or is cutting to the chase a more effective way to capture their attention? Do they prefer spelled-out options or are they better with
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MOSES educates, inspires, and empowers farmers to thrive in a sustainable, organic system of agriculture.

From the Executive Director

A new year is a new beginning, and I’d like to wish everyone the best in 2017! I trust you will make the most of it—we’re planning to, too! This time of year is one for taking stock, and that’s something I’ve been doing a lot lately. One issue I’ve been examining is the ability of agriculture to sustain its workforce. We’ve all heard that the average age of the American farmer is over 58 years old. Taken on its own, that seems alarming. But, when compared with the rest of the American labor force, farmers are growing older at the same rate as other workers. Americans are living (and working) longer than ever. But, that doesn’t change the fact that in agriculture, we need to continue to train and develop new farmers. Farming is advancing in its complexity as are other fields of employment.

Just as in the broader labor force, farmers, the ultimate generalists, are becoming more specialized. Even what is commonly thought of as small-scale family farming is becoming specialized, as the evolving complexities of crops, livestock, and especially marketing, bear down on farmers.

For most of us, farming holds a special place in the labor and work force categorization picture. The fact that farm labor statistics are maintained by the USDA while other labor statistics are maintained by the U.S. Labor Department shows the government acknowledges this unique view of farming, too. Farming is different, and farmers are a different kind of worker.

All agriculture should be and can be sustainable. By definition, it has to sustain. So then, what does a sustainable workforce in agriculture look like? Well, it has to encompass all aspects of agriculture, from farmer to farm worker, to scientist and farm input supplier. It has to support an agriculture enterprise and wider industry which can grow at a rate that will allow for additional workers to join the effort. In short, in order to be sustainable—agriculture needs to add jobs across the whole sector, not just farmers, but all those who support farms and farmers as well.

I’d argue that a core education and experiential learning in production agriculture is a solid foundation for all work in agriculture. Agriculture is still about farming, at any rate. That’s why the MOSES Organic Farming Conference is an important part of the agricultural community’s ability to sustain its workforce.

Regardless of what aspect of agriculture you work in or hope to work in, you will find great benefit from interacting with and learning alongside farmers at the MOSES Conference. I hope you’ll join us next month.

You can still take advantage of Early Bird pricing if you register before Jan. 17. Regular registration runs through Feb. 9, which saves you $80 off the door price. See mosesorganic.org/conference or call our office, 715-778-5775, for a mail-in form.

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In time of change, step forward to advocate for sustainable, organic farming

By Harriet Behar

When the Organic Food Production Act was being debated and developed in 1989, there was much discussion on why the organic community would want to have the government oversee and enforce the organic label. Those who did not want government involvement expressed concern over watering down of the organic standards, misunderstandings about what the label meant, confusion about whether the government would have the resources to enforce the label, and the weight of government bureaucracy that would slow or prevent continuous improvement. Those who supported regulatory oversight cited clarity and trust in the label in the marketplace, consistency among organic certifiers, ease of trade both within the U.S. and globally, and enforcement that punishes willful noncompliance with the law.

I am a supporter of the National Organic Program with a long history of involvement as a certified organic farmer (since 1989), an organic inspector, educator and advocate. Consumer trust in organics and sales of organic products has grown tremendously since the organic law was passed in 1990. The organic program is not perfect; but, I believe that 95 percent of what we have in place is good. We have strong standards and a good system of verification and enforcement. However, there is still a lot of work to be done on that front.

I now have one year under my belt as a member of the National Organic Standards Board. From the “inside,” I can say that government bureaucracy can be frustrating and amazing in its complexity and apparent slow movement. I now see that both of these attributes are in place for a good reason, even though they can be infuriating at times. Moving slowly and requiring that many entities within the government weigh in on any changes made to the organic rules allows for there to be more acceptance and fewer issues with regulatory conflicts.

For a farmer, like me, this slowness can be difficult. You make a decision to do something on your farm and then you do it. Typically, you can see results in a few weeks or a season. Farmers are not quite used to making a decision and waiting 30 years to see any result. We understand long-term benefits, but we do like to see results sooner rather than later.

It is not always easy for other governmental agencies to understand why we want a specific change to organic rules, since we approach agricultural production differently from what they are accustomed to seeing. Typically, we want our regulations to be stricter over time—the pending organic animal welfare regulations are a good example. It is important to us as organic producers to have a high standard, maintain consumer trust, and to continually improve our production activities to produce healthy soil, healthy ecosystems, healthy livestock and healthy food and fiber for people. As we learn more about natural systems, it makes sense that we will want to improve our organic regulations. This viewpoint is quite different from other agricultural production areas, where less regulation is usually promoted by producers.

Another foundational aspect of the National Organic Program, is the transparency and openness to working with all stakeholders. The written comments submitted to the NOSB for the November 2016 meeting totaled over 40,000 pages. Granted, many pages were not full text, but it does take quite a bit of commitment to read and absorb the, at times, emotionally charged personal pleas within those communications. In addition, there were more than 12 hours of verbal public comment at the meeting, with each person saying how our decisions would affect their operation, and their lives, in a positive or negative way. It is a huge responsibility for the NOSB members to listen to and evaluate these comments, review the scientific literature and discuss what should be done. The NOSB also has a wide variety of stakeholder representation, with each member seeing an issue from a different perspective. Believe me, we have lively—and respectful—discussions on just about every topic!

Within the NOSB there is a hierarchy that provides for continuous feedback up and down the chain from the issue subcommittees to the executive subcommittee to the National Organic Program. The various subcommittee meetings are only once or twice per month, and getting feedback can take a month or more as the issue is moved up and down the chain. At first, this seemed cumbersome, but now I can see that this allows for input at all stages of development, whether it is a material that is being reviewed, or a discussion document or final proposal for a change to our regulations.

Change is never an easy thing. The recent election surely will bring change to many federal, state and even local policies. As I write this article, we do not know who will be the nominee for the next USDA secretary. It is difficult to assess what the impact of last November’s elections will be. Will the National Organic Program continue on course, or will it be stifled by administrative maneuvers or by reduced funding? Will natural resource conservation and environmental health be considered a worthy area for funding and research? Will beginning farmers have access to educational programs and financial options to help them be successful in a farming career? What can we all do to make sure that organic farming remains a viable and expanding production method?

To preserve what we’ve worked for in the organic standards and continue the expansion of organic production in this country, we need to continue to be strong advocates. Don’t underestimate the power a few focused, passionate people can have on congressional representatives. One phone call or handwritten personal letter has more power than thousands of signatures on a petition or a form letter.

A letter to the editor of a regional farm paper or local paper describing how organic farming has helped protect your farm’s natural resources, for example, can go a long way to help others understand that organic is not a threat to them, but a viable opportunity. Members of Congress are always paying attention to what they may need to do to get elected next time. Let them know you are a voter and they are paying attention to what they are doing. Visit their in-district office, or attend a local event when they return home from Washington. A simple statement asking them to support organic agriculture, can make a positive difference. Nudge them when they are leaning the wrong way, and praise them when they do something positive for organic and sustainable agriculture.

You can count on MOSES to support you by providing talking points when needed, Watch for updates in the Organic Link (our monthly enews), check the policy page on our website (mosesorganic.org/policywork), and take action when we notify you of a pending critical vote.

We may be farming a small percentage of all working acres in the U.S., but we still have the right to farm as we choose with our own land, free from unwanted chemicals and GMOs. This protection of our farming choice is something every American can understand, no matter what their political leanings are. As one politician said to me, “No one complains when an organic farmer moves in next door.”

Organic farming is always a “good” story—tell your story. We may be a small group, but we can be powerful. Don’t let the future of organics be driven by those who do not want us to succeed. I encourage you to be the change you want to see.

Harriet Behar is the Senior Organic Specialist for MOSES & a member of the National Organic Standards Board.
“We have Canada thistle growing in the large aisles in our two-acre asparagus patch. What can we do to manage this perennial weed?”

Answer by Harriet Behar

Canada thistle is a difficult weed to control—I have also dealt with it on my farm in annual crops. I am going to give you a variety of options. Timing and persistence are very important in all of these options.

Dig Them Out

I know this is very time consuming and difficult. The time to do this is as early in the spring as you can see the thistle, preferably when it is still just a rosette and has not yet started to grow a vertical stem. The length of the stem of the plant relates to the depth of the root—the taller the plant, the longer the root. So digging when the plant is very young gives you a better chance of getting the whole root.

Dig when the ground is soft and moist. You want to get the whole root. At the bottom of the Canada thistle root, there is a piece of root that is horizontal to the vertical tap root. I call this an anchor. When you get full root, including that little anchor, then you know you have gotten the whole root. REMOVE the thistle from the field and either fully compost them, or burn them on a burn pile. Thistle roots are very resilient and can re-sprout quite easily. I use a garden fork to dig out the thistle rather than a shovel. This way I don’t break the roots. Leather gloves are another essential tool when digging thistle. I do this in the early morning over a 2-week period in the spring. You can really make a lot of progress, even with just one hour a day.

Burn Them

If you have a handheld flame burner, you can burn them. Again, this needs to be done in the rosette stage and would probably need to be done 2-3 times in the early spring. This is faster than digging, but still needs persistence!

Smother With Mulch

Unfortunately, mulching is not the best method, unless you have a very thick mulch for 3-5 years that truly does not let the thistle receive any sunlight. The root will still be getting nutrients and moisture, so you may just weaken the root, but not destroy it. Black plastic mulch might work best; but make sure you don’t use a woven landscape fabric, which would still allow nutrients and moisture to keep those roots viable.

Smother With Cover Crop

I have had success with this on my farm, and I know corn/soybean growers have also had success with this on a larger scale. Plant sorghum-sudangrass with a drill or some way to cover the seed lightly after broadcasting it. Use very shallow tillage to prepare the area if you need to, but as little as possible. When the thistle is about 2-3 feet tall or starts to bud in your thick stand of sorghum-sudan, go in and mow it. It’s very important that you DON’T LET THE THISTLE GO TO SEED! This mowing cycle can be done 2-3 times in one season. This causes the thistle root to lose a lot of its vitality.

The reason this works well is that the sorghum-sudan is very thick and grows so quickly that the thistle can barely compete for nutrients, water and sunlight, and must use up the nutrients from its root stores. When you cut it, the cycle starts again. Thistle also likes compacted soil and the incorporation of all of this mowed organic matter loosens up the soil and changes the soil environment so it is less “attractive” for the thistle to grow. I’ve had about a 65-85 percent reduction in thistle in one year with this activity. Then the following spring I go out and dig or burn what is left.

Mow-Mow-Mow

Mow the thistle continually through the season, keeping them 6 inches or less. This will also weaken the roots, but is not as effective as the other options above.

Soil Health, Nutrient Balance

Having a well-balanced soil nutrient profile, especially with the use of high calcium lime or gypsum to bring up low pH soils, will also reduce compaction. Do some soil testing, and compare trace nutrients in the areas where the thistle is present and where it is not. You might be surprised to see some nutrient deficiencies in the thistle areas that you can work on correcting.

Herbicide Approved for Organic

There is an herbicide called AllDown, that is approved for use on organic land. It is a blend of acetic acid, citric acid and garlic juice. Again, it must be used in the rosette stage to be effective, although they advertise it as being effective on larger weeds, too. I do not have personal experience with this product, but others have told me that it works best on the smaller thistle. The manufacturer is located in Minnesota: 952-368-0501 or www.summersetproducts.com. This is the only herbicide that is approved for use in organic production that I know of for use on thistle.

As you can see, there are a variety of strategies to control thistle. You can do one or more of these at the same time to get long term control. It may take 2-4 years of persistent effort, but you can get ahead of thistle in your organic system!

“How can I get involved in farm policy?”

Answer by Lauren Langworthy

Policy plays an important role in our agricultural communities. Whether you’re discussing...
Time to update organic regulations to protect native ecosystems

By Jo Ann Baumgartner

The National Organic Program’s (NOP) three-year waiting period for land to be free of prohibited substances unintentionally incentivizes producers to convert native ecosystems since this land is instantly ready for organic production. While organic agriculture is an ecological management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, it offers no environmental protections prior to certification. Once certified, organic operators must maintain or improve the natural resources of the operation, including soil, water, woodlands, wetlands and wildlife, as stated in NOP regulations and guidance. Before certification though, an operator can destroy a wetland, for example, in order to obtain land that is ready for organic production.

NOP needs to catch up with the rest of the organic and environmental ecolabels of the world. Twenty of them (9 organic and 11 ecolabels) do not allow the conversion of High Conservation Value Areas (defined below) or native ecosystems for agricultural production. These programs are models that can be learned from and emulated.

Impacts of Conversion

Consumers are surprised and troubled to learn that an organic product they just paid extra for may have pushed a species closer to the brink, or irreparably destroyed precious ecosystems. Since inspectors aren’t asking if this occurred, we really don’t know numbers for sure. However, an informal survey of a few NOP inspectors and certifiers showed that:

• 1,000 acres of native short grass prairie in the western Colorado Plains and other parts of the central U.S. were converted to grow corn, milo, and wheat. Rare species like prairie dogs and burrowing owls may have lived there.

• 1,000 acres of sagebrush steppe were converted to vineyards and corn production in Oregon and Washington. The rare sage grouse’s habitat may have been destroyed.

• Native desert and coastal subtropical scrub forest was destroyed during the conversion to warm season irrigated vegetable crops like tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers in Baja, Calif. and in the Mexican states of Sinaloa, Sonora, Michoacan and Guerrero.

Conversion of grasslands to all types of agriculture is occurring at a shocking rate, according to World Wildlife Fund’s recent Plowprint report. Since 2009, 53 million acres of grassland—an area the size of Kansas—have been converted to cropland across the Great Plains alone. This number represents almost 13 percent of the 419 million acres that were intact in 2009. Grassland songbirds have declined 80 percent since the 1960s, mainly because of habitat loss. The plow-up of these grasslands from 2009-2015 caused 3.2 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide to be released into the atmosphere.

Protecting Native Ecosystems

Wild Farm Alliance and partner organizations are encouraging the National Organic Standards Board to make a recommendation to the NOP to add a rule for bringing new land into organic production. The goal of a rule change is to protect native ecosystems in a way that defines them clearly and dissuades organic producers from converting them. We suggest using the wording “High Conservation Value Areas,” which is similar to what many certification bodies use. These are defined as:

• Lands or aquatic environments that are habitat for vulnerable, threatened or endangered plant, mammal, bird, amphibian, reptile or other species as identified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, including the federal and state lists, and those compiled by NatureServe.

• A large landscape-level ecosystem which is significant at global, regional or national levels, and that contains viable populations of most of the naturally occurring species in natural patterns of distribution and abundance.

• Rare ecosystems as protected by local law or defined by the IUCN Red List of Ecosystems. In the U.S., refer to NatureServe’s Terrestrial Ecological Systems of the United States.

• Areas that provide critical ecosystem services (e.g., watershed protection or erosion control, and areas providing barriers to destructive fires). The rule change would not include land that had been cropped in the past, such as Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land, or areas where agricultural production was abandoned after resources were depleted, unless there are declining or protected species present, or the land or area is not suitable to be cropped or grazed.

To dissuade organic operators from converting High Conservation Value Areas to organic production, we suggest a prohibition from a specific list of High Conservation Value Areas to organic production. The goal is to transition current farmland. With about 330 million conventional cropland acres currently in the U.S., there is plenty of land already in production that could be transitioned to organic production.

Another alternative to converting High Conservation Value Areas is to transition current farmland. To get there, the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has Conservation Action Plan (CAP) 138, which helps transitioning producers implement a system of conservation practices that fit within the organic production system. The Organic Trade Association and National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition are working on future Farm Bill support for transition growers. Some companies, like General Mills and Kellogg, are supporting their producers as they transition.
On-Farm Storage — from page 1

I’ll be presenting a workshop at the MOSES Organic Farming Conference next month that examines the particular risks and incentives for farmers to store organic crops on farm and addresses the need for good storage management. The presentation also will compare fixed and variable costs by using current information from three suppliers for steel bins of various sizes, plus recent market information from commercial, rented, and temporary storage.

While that presentation provides a much more thorough examination, this article provides a broader view to get you thinking about your options for storing your crops.

Determining Factors

The factors involved in determining crop storage are similar between conventional and organic. But the organic farmer has some wrinkles to consider—wrinkles that favor farm storage.

Conventional markets for grain and oilseed face surplus domestic production and a constant struggle to find export demand for billions of bushels. Domestic processors are too competitive, too low to attract significant imports, and, too low to support more than marginal or negative returns to farmers.

In contrast, the demand in the U.S. for organic grain and oilseed overwhelms domestic production. High standards of quality and purity and tight supply chain management mean that even small quantities of organic feed grains are bringing a flood of imports that change the pricing picture and the time value of deferred delivery.

The U.S. market for food quality grain seeks higher standards of quality and purity and is not yet so challenged by imports. Such food markets offer price incentives for preferred, reliable domestic supply with scattered shipments throughout the year.

Commercial storage for conventional crops is ubiquitous and conveniently accessible. It can absorb a huge harvest and move massive quantities of crop 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. It is scaled for huge volumes of fungible product, but not the total costs of newly constructed steel farm storage. The recent rule of thumb for organic feed grains suggests the danger of loss by holding unpriced crop. But market dynamics suggest the potential to negotiate a better contract that covers costs or contracts that pay for storage until the buyer calls the product for delivery.

Farm storage is very well suited for linking personal responsibility to identity preservation and risk distribution, for avoiding contamination, for addressing good segregations by genetics, and, for paying attention to rules that prohibit toxic chemicals—good for clients who reject trucks and with a single live insect.

Given the lack of adequate commercial storage, farm storage is the element that allows the growing but still-small organic market to absorb the harvest throughout the year. That can be reflected in enhanced diversity, quality and variety of buyers competing not just for a product but for a service. It provides the organic farmer an opportunity to sell not only his crop but also his management service.

Storage Alternatives

The storage alternatives for organic crops are essentially the same as those for conventional crops. Their costs are well documented and easily available. The common alternatives include:

• Steel bins with appropriate aeration and handling attributes that are either owned by the farmer or rented from others (generally conventional farmers who find it more convenient or economical to use commercial storage)
• Commercial storage at licensed warehouses
• Temporary storage, such as ag bags or ground piles
• Miscellaneous flat storage options

The risk of farm storage lies mostly in retaining responsibility for grain quality. With modern technology, farmers can significantly reduce quality risk while securing the potential to reduce corn shrink and enjoy positive soybean shrink worth perhaps 50 cents. The tools available include computerized fan controllers, beneficial insects, chilling of bins and controlled atmospheres.

Benefits of Farm Storage

For organic producers, the benefits include:

• Seasonal price incentive—the rule of thumb for conventional crops suggests a seasonal bump in prices that tends to cover variable costs but not the total costs of newly constructed steel farm storage. The recent rule of thumb for organic feed grains suggests the danger of loss by holding unpriced crop. But market dynamics suggest the potential to negotiate a better contract that covers costs or contracts that pay for storage until the buyer calls the product for delivery.
• More flexibility in harvest timing and quality decisions
• Reduced handling and better control of quality and segregation
• Direct lines of control without dilution by common mixing of crops from various farms, creating a tighter supply chain with better quality—the foundation for a better market reputation
• Ready availability for on-farm feeding
• Reduction of variable costs to less than those for commercial storage
• Increased market flexibility—some buyers require farm storage for quality considerations and risk distribution
• Support for better contracts for scattered shipment and regular rather than spot client involvement
• Lower priced loans for farm storage construction or improvements than for commercial projects
• Very favorable tax treatment—depreciation and Section 179 treatment

Other Considerations

Related considerations include other factors linked to quality and to meshing with the market. Low temperature drying and gentle handling contribute to better quality and greater consistency in products. Sourcing from a single farm with identity preserved by variety and production culture reduces product variation and contributes to the consistency needed by the best markets. Homogeneity is a critical factor in almost any buyer’s definition of good quality. Well-managed farm storage allows the farmer to offer both high quality and minimal variation, full-fledged market values.

Drying systems of some sort are almost essential. In terms of buyer preferences for better quality grains, the first choice goes to low-temperature drying in bin followed by dryeration, in-bin higher temperature drying, non-screen drying, and finally stand-alone screen dryers both heating and cooling the crop on its way into storage. Vent placement is critical. The seal between side wall and roof determines how well the bin can be sealed to control the storage environment. There are lots of details to be considered—enough to challenge even farmers very familiar with farm storage.

Handling equipment should favor gentle treatment. First choice from a quality standpoint would be conveyor belts followed by en-masse and paddle conveyors, grain pumps, and lastly augers and pneumatics systems.

Storage placement should be determined with an eye to logistics flexibility and convenient farm access. If you could incorporate year-round access to both heavy trucks and rail, that would be fantastic. If not, then at least consider how to optimize a compound truck/rail supply connection. Shipping cost analysis favors water over rail, rail over truck, and heavy truck over lighter truck, with containers a competitive factor into both domestic and international markets.

The information in the “Storage to Mesh with Markets” workshop at the MOSES Conference will try to help you offer buyers reliable supplies of high quality grain and oilseed with minimal variation within and among delivered loads. Storage that helps you do that will bring you premiums from prices and competitive positions. Let’s talk about that in La Crosse in February.

Lynn Clarkson is chairman of Clark- son Grain Co. “Storage to Mesh with Markets,” his MOSES Conference workshop, will be at 11 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 25.
Illinois farmers, researchers, chefs join forces to build local specialty grains market

By Bill Davison

Farmers, plant breeders at University of Illinois, Extension educators, and a diverse coalition of nonprofit organizations, chefs, and bakers are collaborating to rebuild a viable regional food system for staple crops in Illinois. These groups started working together in 2015 as part of the Grand Prairie Grain Guild (GPGG) project. The grain guild was inspired by similar work that has been done in the northeast and is described in Dan Barber’s book The Third Plate and Amy Halleran’s book The New Breadbasket. GPGG’s goal is to connect everyone involved in local food systems to create the best crop varieties, business structures, and trusting relationships to help support thriving farms and rural communities.

The GPGG currently has 284 members from 9 states. It represents a valuable resource for learning more about innovative practices and synergistic effects that are helping to overcome longstanding barriers to developing local food systems. The group can be joined at www.facebook.com/groups/GrandPrairieGrainGuild.

Participatory plant breeding for organic grains and beans is a key part of this project. The Participatory Plant Breeding Toolkit from the Organic Seed Alliance was used to help avoid common mistakes, create clear and realistic goals, and to inform the design of the trial. The goal is to breed resilient varieties that meet the needs of organic farmers, and help create diverse crop rotations and profitable farms.

New varieties bred specifically for organic conditions offer farmers a chance to add value to their crops, and in some cases, these varieties outperform commercial standards. An example of a successful participatory breeding project for small grains is Lexi II wheat. Steve Jones, the wheat breeder with The Bread Lab at Washington State University, created a diverse gene pool by cross-breeding old and new wheat varieties and providing farmers with breeders who performed in-field selection and rogueing over a period of three years. The improved variety was then entered into a trial and a stable variety, which lead to fusarium infection in small grains and poor performance of dry beans.

New varieties that have performed well include Rebellion corn, Warthog and Banatka hard red winter wheat. Banatka is a cross between landraces from the Republic of Georgia; researchers have documented how Georgian landraces are some of the most fusarium-resistant varieties of wheat in the world. Warthog wheat has performed well in New York state; in 2016 farmers in Illinois harvested 7,000 bushels of organic, food-grade Warthog wheat with 11.5 percent protein, good falling numbers, and other metrics that are important for bakers. Glenn hard red spring wheat has also performed well and typically has protein levels of 13-15 percent. These two varieties are being used to create all-purpose flour that can be sold into local markets. Blending Glenn and Warthog in the bin allows farmers to produce consistent local flour that bakers can substitute for commodity wheat flour.

Breeding resilient corn for organic farms is another priority for the grain guild. One of the goals of our project is to determine the extent to which corn can be selected for resilience and nutritional density, and if nutrient-dense corn can succeed in the marketplace. Plant breeders, farmers, and researchers can produce nutrient-dense corn, and consumers are asking for nutritious food grown sustainably. The challenge is to simultaneously develop these varieties and the markets and infrastructure to support them.

Corn offers a significant opportunity for rebuilding regional food systems. Residents of the Corn Belt are surrounded by corn, and the Midwest has ideal soil and weather for growing corn. Why not maximize its use as human food? Corn has sustained human civilizations for thousands of years, and has tremendous potential to play a larger role as a whole food in modern diets. Consequently, this project also focuses on cooking classes, taste tests, and testing new recipes that use local grain.

Kendall College in Chicago is helping with this work by opening a Bread Lab for testing and evaluating different grains and beans. Their work will help educate students, consumers, chefs and bakers about the potential for using local grain. The goal is to help people appreciate local grain and the contribution their food choices can make to foster a sustainable agriculture based on diverse crop rotations.

Modern, open-pollinated, open-source synthetic varieties of corn are another promising area of research. Synthetic varieties are comprised of inbred lines and can also include open-pollinated varieties. Synthetic varieties made from modern, improved genetics offer an alternative to hybrid corn. Goals for breeding synthetics include selecting for N efficiency, vigorous roots, quick growth, and a plant architecture and leaf shape that result in a more resilient and competitive corn plant. These varieties will be created and refined using modern plant breeding techniques such as high-throughput phenotyping and molecular markers. They have the potential to reduce input costs and provide consistent and stable yields that will result in higher net profits for farmers.
thought I used them more than he was expecting because at harvest mine were busy with manure pumping), even though the lease was clear that the use of their tractors was included in the set rate, and I thought I was clear in our conversations that that would be the case.”

Young people forget important communication as well. Linda Lynch, who farms with her family in Central Iowa, has been surprised that her children don’t remember the significant decisions she and husband Bob have told them about their farm transfer plans. “Early and often” is the mantra for family communication. Surprises are often the thing that tears families apart the most.

Leave your sense of entitlement at the barn door. The sentiment “the old man just needs to get out of the way” is rude and crude. Plus it isn’t accurate: Until they decide otherwise, the farming business and land are Mom’s and Dad’s (or Uncle’s or Neighbor’s), and as the younger generation, it may be yours someday—but not yet.

“I have a sibling who thinks that because our dad and his siblings own the farm, he owns it, too,” said one southwest Iowa farmer. “I agree that it’s Dad and Mom’s money and land to do with as they see fit or use if needed for long-term care. I currently rent half of my family farm and hope plan to have a portion passed down to me some day. However, I also know there is always a chance none may be left when the generation changes again. There is no guarantee. I am thankful for the opportunity to farm what is available, and will continue working towards owning my own farm someday.” Amen.

Native Ecosystems — from page 5

To organic. States such as Minnesota and North Dakota offer cost-share programs to farmers transitioning to organic.

**Farms with Native Ecosystems**

Farms next to natural areas have a greater diversity of native bees and increased pollination services. Natural habitats support insects that prey on crop pests. The NOP allows organic operations to get biodiversity credit for managing natural areas adjacent to certified fields.

Keeping ecosystems intact not only conserves biodiversity, but also maintains clean streams, stores water, reduces flooding, supports pollinators, and sequesters carbon. The USDA understands the value of grasslands so much so that they offer a grasslands initiative through the Conservation Reserve Program to help livestock producers protect their grazing lands for 15 years. USDA’s Sodsaver program discourages grassland conversion by reducing crop insurance subsidies on farms where that is occurring. USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) also offers an enhancement program (Conservation Stewardship Program) for improving wildlife habitat and other natural resources on all working lands.

**Take Action**

Consumers look to the USDA organic label for environmental stewardship not destruction of valuable ecosystems. Paraphrasing Aldo Leopold, we need to change our role from conqueror of the Earth to plain member and citizen of it. I encourage you to join Wild Farm Alliance’s online community to receive periodic updates and action alerts on this and other issues. See www.wildfarmalliance.org.

Jo Ann Baumgarten is the Executive Director of the Wild Farm Alliance. She will present “Enhance Biodiversity with NOP Guidance,” a workshop Saturday at 8:15 on conservation steps farmers can take that meet NOP rules.
Young farmers work with FSA to find land tenure

By Lauren Langworthy

My 153-acre farm would not be what it is today without the support of the Farm Service Agency (FSA).

About four years ago, my husband and I were coming to the end of an annual lease and feeling frustrated about year-to-year rental situations. We wanted to be organic farmers, but the lack of tenure on the land made it difficult to justify the immense expense and time that we were putting into land we may not have access to in a couple of years. At the time, we were custom-grazing livestock and managing our own vegetable operation. We were developing market relationships, but really needed stability on the land to grow our business.

The uncertainty of short-term land leases were holding us back from pursuing the organic label and from some of the best management practices we wanted to be integrating into our farm. As most organic farmers know, there is a three-year transition process between conventional cropping systems and the potential to certify land as organic. We thought the USDA organic label would help our vegetable enterprise grow and prosper in new marketplaces. However, land tenure would mean more than just the organic label; it would also allow us to start covering more intensively, developing longer rotations, and adding necessary infrastructure that requires more time, capital, and a long-term view to carry out properly.

The two of us had participated in the Land Stewardship Project’s Farm Beginnings course and had used the opportunity to develop holistic goals for our farm’s future. We had taken the course’s planning process very seriously and had developed a business plan to use as a road map to our puzzle that might also help someone else find a solution.

However, land tenure would mean more than just the organic label; it would also allow us to start covering more intensively, developing longer rotations, and adding necessary infrastructure that requires more time, capital, and a long-term view to carry out properly.

I won’t go into our story of finding land tenure at length. Our solution won’t necessarily fit anyone else’s situation. Besides, we’re still beginning farmers—we don’t know if our story has “a happy ending.” However, I do want to share a key piece to our puzzle that might also help someone else find a solution.

The biggest problem we faced is a problem we share with many beginning farmers. With current land prices and all of the infrastructure, mechanization, and general expenses of starting a new farm, it would be difficult to come up with enough capital to make it all happen. We were entering farming with experience, but we still needed to build many of the assets that our fully grown business would require in order to function smoothly.

Through the Farm Beginnings Course, we heard of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and been given a very brief introduction of some of their programs. However, we also heard some rumors and had developed the impression that it would be very difficult to get a loan through this agency. Because of the rumors, we didn’t initially reach out to FSA to see how we could leverage its programs. It wasn’t until much later in our land access story that we struck up a conversation with a very outgoing and informative FSA agent in the exhibit hall at a conference, and learned that there might be some real opportunities in working with FSA to develop the future of our farm.

After that conference, we struck up a relationship with our local FSA office. We set up an initial meeting to ask questions, explain our goals, and explore the potential of working with FSA to purchase a farm. We learned that the interest rates on FSA loans were extremely low and that we would probably qualify to receive one. I was surprised to learn that FSA could help only provide loans for initial farm purchases, but that they can’t refinance one you already own.

We also learned that there are many different types of FSA loans. Several different varieties of Farm Ownership Loans can be used in different ways to purchase farms. There are also Intermediate Loans that can help farmers purchase equipment, certain infrastructure, or breeding stock for their enterprises. Operating Loans can be used for an annual cash flow issue in an operation—for example, if you needed to purchase your year’s hay supply before you would be planning to receive a big payment from livestock sales. There are Microloans that have a shorter application form and can help a producer with smaller projects or investments. There are also special Farm Storage Facility Loans that can be used to help purchase infrastructure such as hay storage or refrigerated storage units.

Depending on the farmer’s enterprises, goals, and willingness to take on debt, there may be several different options for someone to purchase a farm or capitalize the operation they’re already working on.

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Diverse organizations ready to exhibit at 2017 MOSES Conference

By Tom Manley

The two-floor Exhibit Hall at the MOSES Organic Farming Conference is a highlight for many of the farmers who attend the conference. We work to maintain a balance of products, services and resources that best meet the needs and interests of all of our attendees, from market farmers to broad-acre organic commodity producers.

“The Exhibit Hall was worth the trip by itself,” said one farmer who came to MOSES 2016. “I was pleased with the array of relevant businesses and information that was offered.” Another said, “The Exhibit Hall is great, as usual!”

Exhibitors also find the MOSES Conference a must-attend event. Clyde Morter, an equipment dealer who has been an exhibitor from the earliest days of the conference said, “Not attending the MOSES Conference would be a serious breach in our responsibilities to the organic farmer.” Jane Hawley Stevens, another longtime exhibitor and presenter, said, “The Exhibit Hall feels a little bit like a family reunion every year.”

The hall, as expected, is at full capacity again this year with 170 diverse organizations. We have 10 organizations and companies exhibiting at the MOSES Conference for the first time, including a farm machinery company coming all the way from the Netherlands! This shows the reach the conference has after 28 years.

We have implemented a couple of changes this year to make some important resources easier to find. We’ve designated the 10 booths at the beginning of the Concourse level as “New Farmer Lane.” That’s where beginning farmers and farm “dreamers” can learn about college programs, internships, land access, and international volunteer opportunities. The “lane” starts with our New Organic Stewards booth, which is a great starting point to learn about resources and events to help jumpstart your farm. If you are a part of the next generation of producers, plan to spend some time here.

We’re also introducing an area we are calling “Policy Place.” It is located just off the Arena at the side entrance to the General Session room. Here you will find organizations engaged in shaping policy, and the government agencies that manage the programs that result from that policy. This is a concentrated resource area where you can find information that can directly impact your success on the land.

The organizations in Policy Place also will hold roundtable discussions in this space; that schedule will appear in the Conference Program and on our website. These will be very much like the Expert Roundtables that have been part of the conference for years. We are hoping to foster on-going cross-pollination between nonprofits and government agencies to help provide tools to attendees that can solve real-world problems.

You can find all of the information you need to make the most of the 2017 MOSES Conference and the Exhibit Hall at mosesorganic.org/conference. There are links to all things conference, including the downloadable app that lets you schedule workshops, activities, and even bookmark exhibitors you wish to visit. The Exhibit Hall page lists all the exhibitors you will see this year, and the Sponsor page profiles all the organizations that really step up to help us make it all possible.

Tom Manley manages the Exhibit Hall.
Agriculture needs sustainable ‘belowground ecology’

By Liz Carlisle

As evidenced by the recent presidential election, the economy is on everyone’s mind. Old binaries pitting environment against economy (a battle the environment will always lose) are back in vogue. It’s up to the sustainable agriculture community to spread the good news that there is a hopeful third way: we can create green jobs with ‘triple bottom line’ businesses that prioritize people and the planet as well as profits.

As an example, a Montana business I’ve written about, Timeless Natural Food, strives to build a stable, premium market for ecologically appropriate rotation crops (mostly pulses like lentils and chickpeas), so that farmers can afford to grow them. They’ve been pretty successful, and I think they were critical catalysts in the move toward pulse crop rotation in Montana, which has created dramatic changes on the landscape. There happened to be a USDA Agricultural Census the year that Timeless was founded, 1987, so we know that Montana lentil acreage at that time was 1,979. By the 2012 census it was up to 198,741—a hundred-fold increase! That’s a lot of farmers who have added a nitrogen-fixing crop into a rotation that was likely just wheat/fallow or wheat/barley/fallow a couple decades ago.

But Timeless Natural Food didn’t do it alone. To imagine that the costs of transitioning to sustainable agriculture across the American Heartland can be borne by individual small businesses is asking too much, and it’s a setup for well-meaning businesses to fail as they try to support environmental and social goods on their own. Farming is a hybrid public/private activity—the public needs to participate in incentivizing agriculture’s potential for public benefits, like healthy rural economies, healthy watersheds, carbon sequestration, and access to healthy food.

That’s why underneath any solid triple bottom line, there must be an underground teeming with activity by social movements like that spurred by Montana’s Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO). This nonprofit citizens’ organization, with funding from foundations like Kollogg, incubated 120 Farm Improvement Clubs that trialed and refined the sustainable farming practices that Timeless Natural Food now recommends to its growers. AERO also lobbied for a bill that would create a formal definition of “organic” in Montana, so they could market their products to consumers looking for this designation—and then lobbied for the state to create a certification program. AERO was among the groups that pushed for crop insurance to stop incentivizing monocultures and start covering “alternative” crops that were key to sustainable rotations. And, they’ve helped organize eaters and parents into a force for change in the Montana food system, which now has a strong farm-to-school movement.

If you’re reading the Organic Broadcaster, you no doubt know about the importance of this kind of patient change work, and you’ve likely been doing it longer than I’ve even been aware of it! Our challenge now is to define this work as the very essence of creating a “good business climate,” especially in the next four years. I hope to see you next month at the MOSES Conference where we’ll explore ways to grow the belowground ecology of the organic and sustainable farming movement.

Liz Carlisle is a teacher at Stanford University, and author of Lentil Underground. She will be the keynote speaker Saturday, Feb. 25 at the MOSES Conference.
federal farm policy building conservation grants or more local policy governing infrastructure, the policies created have a huge impact on our food and farming systems. Depending on your interests, there are many different ways and places to get involved in the creation of policy that can be impactful for your farm and community. My first recommendation would be to start with the organizations that you may already have membership in. For example, Wisconsin Farmers Union, Land Stewardship Project, Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, Practical Farmers of Iowa - and too many others to possibly list here - all include policy advocacy in their work. Consider looking through their websites, calling their offices, and finding out how you might be able to get involved. Member-based organizations that focus on policy appreciate hearing from their members. They may have meetings, listening sessions, or committees that you could participate in as you learn more about policy and share your insights. If you're already a member (or would consider becoming one), you can develop deeper relationships with the staff and fellow members both in the realm of policy and beyond. These groups will want to know what policies and programs are helping their members and how less-helpful regulations or programs might be improved to offer better support.

Often, groups like these will be involved in larger policy collaborations. They will collect ideas and input from their community and share them in a larger regional or national dialogue. Along with many other organizations, MOSES is a member of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) and the National Organic Coalition (NOC). These coalitions are made up of many smaller organizations that pool resources and information to work toward building sturdy and intelligent policy platforms that support farmers, consumers, the environment, and rural communities across the country. If you don't have the interest or energy to participate in local or regional conversations, you can consider donating to policy advocacy collaborations that your favorite local groups are involved in. You can also visit their websites and consider signing up for newsletters or “action alerts” that will help you know when something important to you is being discussed and which representatives you could call to express your stance on the issue. Beyond participating in these organizations, there are lots of ways to be involved in the policy that supports farms, the food system, and rural life. If you are just starting to learn and engage, you can stop by the Policy Place at the MOSES Conference to chat with organizations that impact policy and learn more about the programs that come from it. You can even sit in on specific Roundtable discussions about how to leverage Farm Bill programs for your own farm business.

Federal farm policy has brought many amazing programs to the farming community. You can also contact your local FSA and NRCS offices to learn about programs that might help your farm – whether they are NRCS-CSP grants that offer financial incentives for conservation work, FSA loans to help you capitalize and operate your farm, or NRCS-EQIP reimbursements that can help you put in needed infrastructure for your operations— it’s good to know how the policy behind them can help you.

For those who have more of a drive to get involved, there are plenty of opportunities to engage in local government or community groups that drive policy. Perhaps you want to consider becoming a county commissioner. What about...
Access new markets under cottage food laws; boost sales with improved packaging

By Lisa Kivirist & John Ivanko

Cottage food laws open doors to new sales opportunities for farmers by enabling us to create value-added products in our farm kitchens for public sale. Crafting high-acid canned products in particular works well for farmers to use extra vegetables or fruit, producing small batches of food products like jams, jellies and pickles for farmers’ market sales. But “small batch” doesn’t have to mean super homespun with hand-written labels affixed with packing tape.

Just a little more work, your packaging can look professional and communicate the hand-crafted nature of your product and, bottom line, help increase sales and diversify your farm operation.

Cottage Food Law Primer

Nearly every state in the country, including all Midwest states, have some form of cottage food law on the books that allows us to create specific, non-hazardous food products in home kitchens for sale at certain direct-to-the-consumer venues such as farmers’ markets. In most cases, the state law covers high-acid food products—canned items with an equilibrium pH value of 4.6 or lower, such as salsas, pickles and jams. As we write about in our book, Homemade for Sale: How to Set Up and Market a Food Business from Your Home, each state law is different. So it’s important to read the specific regulation and requirements via your state’s department of agriculture. These will include gross sales limits (if any), labeling requirements, where you can sell and what you can produce. Check out www.formerage.com to connect to your state’s original cottage food law and network with others operating under your state’s cottage food law.

In Wisconsin, for example, under our current “Pickle Bill,” we can produce high-acid foods for sale at public venues such as farmers’ markets and community events, and gross up to $5,000 in sales. At our farm, Inn Serendipity, we produce small batches of sauerkraut, bread-and-butter pickles, and pickled pumpkin (our best seller) annually. Operating in a commercial kitchen

would increase cost and subject us to more complex regulatory requirements. Cottage food laws open up opportunity for us to get started without such initial barriers.

“As a beginning farmer, the fact that I could sell my products right away during my first season was invaluable in so many ways,” shared Betty Anderson of The Old Smith Place in Beldrad, Wis. She sells various high-acid items at local venues like the New Glarus farmers’ market. “Making one small batch at a time, it was easy to respond to the desires of my local market,” she added.

Branding Your Product

The quality of what’s in your product remains paramount to sales, especially to encourage repeat customers. But if you want to charge a price that accurately compensates the time and high quality organic ingredients that went into those pickles—from the organic seed to hand-pulling each jar from the hot water bath canner—that jar needs to have the look that reflects quality and professionalism and communicates your farm brand.

“Think carefully about what message—what story—you want to communicate about your farm and how that can play out in the packaging of your product,” counseled Brett Olson, Creative Director at Renewing the Countryside, a Minnesota-based nonprofit that supports farmers through a variety of programs. Are you more minimalist and modern, or playful and informal? “From the font you choose for your labels to the colors of additional elements like ribbon or fabric, these choices communicate to potential customers what you are all about,” Olson explained.

Regarding what needs to be on the label, be sure to check out your state’s requirements. Your state’s law will likely give you specific wording that needs to be on the label that identifies your product as produced in a home kitchen and, depending on your state, may not be subject to inspection. In Wisconsin, the line reads, “This product was made in a home not subject to state licensing or inspection.” The state also requires the label to list the name and address of the person who did the canning, date of canning and ingredients in descending amount by weight.

Just because you must follow these legal requirements doesn’t mean you can’t craft attractive packaging. Most often, state requirements will specify what needs to be included but not dictate the font size or how it specifically appears on the package. This opens up the opportunity to get creative.

For example, we use Avery Print-to-the-Edge Glossy Oval Labels, True Print™ 22920—the larger 2” x 3 1/3-inch size that fits nicely on both half-pint and pint-sized jars. We then add the required state verbiage “around” the perimeter of the label (something you can readily do with the Avery template). This meets the state requirement yet minimizes this legal verbiage and enables us to focus more on the actual product. Another option may be to place the legally required verbiage on the bottom of the jar, thereby showcasing the colorful appeal of the product inside.
Letter to a Young Farmer
Gene Logsdon
2017 | Chelsea Green
211 pages | $22.50

Gene Logsdon, the self-proclaimed “Contrary Farmer,” leaves us with a final series of essays in tractor tire-kicking wisdom in Letter to a Young Farmer: How to Live Richly without Wealth on the New Garden Farm. Logsdon’s final book, finished before his death in 2016, is written to the next generation of farmers moving back to the land to be “garden farmers.” The book combines wit, wisdom and experienced perspective into a sweet testimonial of Logsdon’s life work. He was a farmer and a storyteller, and combines talents to share his vision of a future filled with alternative industries and genetic diversity. “In variation is in fact beauty”, Logsdon concludes.

The New Organic Grower
Eliot Coleman
1995 | Chelsea Green
340 pages | $24.95

Eliot Coleman’s timeless classic is a perfect introduction to market farming for what Gene Logsdon liked to call, the “new garden farmer.” Coleman gives us an overview of how to plan a market farm, grow high-quality organic vegetables, market the harvest, build soil fertility, control pests organically, and improve the soil. Though there have been many books that continue where Coleman leaves off, there may be no better book that imparts such a wise and well-practiced overview for the new market farmer.

Local Grain Guild— from page 7

Farmers can save seed, and new economic models can be developed to support smaller independent seed companies.

The grain guild is applying for funding to build the relationships and infrastructure necessary to create viable regional food systems. Farmers a chance to add value to their crops and earn a living.

Open source seeds adapted to organic farms offer a viable alternative. Logsdon suggests the abandonment of a century of “get big or get out” and help counter the trend toward a population that is increasingly overfed and undernourished. Grains can provide nutrient-dense food to people based on the values of diversity, resilience, and independence, and sharing. Fresh whole grains can provide nutrient-dense food to people and help counter the trend toward a population that is increasingly overfed and undernourished.

Illinois farmer who is embracing this movement toward a regional, organic staple crop economy. Wilken is building a mill and plans to sell flour into wholesale accounts in Chicago.

“Coming from a conventional background, I have found a new and profound excitement in being an organic farmer,” Wilken said. “I am energized by participating in research and breeding new varieties of corn, beans, and small grains for direct human consumption.”

John Navazio, a plant breeder for Johnny’s Selected Seeds, has had a long and diverse career breeding hybrid and open-pollinated vegetables. In a recent Farmer to Farmer podcast, Navazio shared his perspective on open-pollinated varieties and genetic diversity. “In variation is in fact beauty, and is adaptiveness and genetic variation that is meaningful in terms of resiliency and the environment...” he said. “People are starting to see that as a value again. They’re seeing it, just like they are seeing the variation on their farms, and their systems, and the ecosystem. They are seeing the validity of how that is the true robustness and resilience of the system.”

This approach to breeding and seed production offers a new vision for sustainable food systems based on the values of diversity, resilience, cooperation, independence, and sharing. Fresh whole grains can provide nutrient-dense food to people and help counter the trend toward a population that is increasingly overfed and undernourished. Open source seeds adapted to organic farms offer farmers a chance to add value to their crops and build the relationships and infrastructure necessary to create viable regional food systems.

Bill Davison is an organic farmer turned Extension Educator for the University of Illinois. He’ll talk about this plant breeding project at a Roundtable at 9 a.m. Saturday at the MOSES Conference. He’ll also talk about niche markets and organic production of specialty grains in the “Access New Markets” workshop at 11 a.m. Friday.
Cottage Food Packaging — from page 13

“Remember you don’t necessarily want your product to look too slick and professional either because the fact that your pickles were personally made by you in your home kitchen is something to showcase and celebrate as well,” Olson added. While you will want to computer-print labels for time efficiency, you could still add in a hand-written note on each label of the jar number within the batch: day 10 of 24. “Such a small, personal addition adds instant value to your product as customers know it’s limited and rare, just like fine art prints are numbered and signed,” Olson said.

Jar Appeal

Strategically adding elements of color and texture to your jars adds visual appeal along with the opportunity to communicate your farm brand. The new free toolkit, Cottage Food Success: A Labeling Guide and Toolkit for Creating Canned Food Products that Sell, details step-by-step processes for adding easy decorative elements to your jars such as:

- Fabric toppers
- Paper toppers
- Washi tape (decorative fiber tape)
- Seasonal elements

Additionally, the labeling toolkit covers time management, including how to label and package efficiently, as well as increasing market sales through display design, sampling and inventory transport. It can be downloaded free at home-madefor-sale.com. (Click on the jar on the top left.)

“Maximize this opportunity by changing up a seasonally by changing up a seasonal approach,” Olson said. “You could start with packaging one variety of cucumber and then another, then move on to another subject like tomatoes. The time efficiency, you could still add in a hand-written note on each label of the jar number within the batch: day 10 of 24. “Such a small, personal addition adds instant value to your product as customers know it’s limited and rare, just like fine art prints are numbered and signed,” Olson said.

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- Washi tape (decorative fiber tape)
- Seasonal elements

Additionally, the labeling toolkit covers time management, including how to label and package efficiently, as well as increasing market sales through display design, sampling and inventory transport. It can be downloaded free at home-madefor-sale.com. (Click on the jar on the top left.)

“Maximize this opportunity by changing up a seasonally approach,” Olson said. “You could start with packaging one variety of cucumber and then another, then move on to another subject like tomatoes. The time efficiency, you could still add in a hand-written note on each label of the jar number within the batch: day 10 of 24. “Such a small, personal addition adds instant value to your product as customers know it’s limited and rare, just like fine art prints are numbered and signed,” Olson said.
Joining that farmer-led watershed initiative in your area?

There are many ways to be watching, learning, and engaging as we head into the next Farm Bill cycle. It's important that we all pay attention and contact our representatives when needed to make sure that the policies our local, state, and national bodies create positively impacts our farms and the environment and communities that we share.

“As I review my 2016 farm finances and prepare to file taxes, what resources can help me plan for next year and beyond?”

Answer by Jennifer Nelson

Knowing where you’ve come from in your farm business can help you know where to go. Keeping good, clear financial records is key to your future farm business success. Applying these well-kept records using helpful financial planning tools can ensure that you make sound financial decisions going forward, and avoid pitfalls from the past.

MOSES has been working on updating Fearless Farm Finances, a one-of-a-kind resource packed with instructions, tips and tools for setting up and managing a farm’s financial system. First published in 2012, the latest version will be available next month. While I recommend reading the whole book, and attending upcoming workshops in 2017, here are a few tips that really capture how to use your records to move forward with your farm business.

Chapter 19 offers an invaluable tool for your financial planning: an annual cash flow projection, also referred to as a “pro forma” cash flow. Using a cash flow projection tool, you can plot out on a month-by-month basis when cash income will be received and when cash expenses will need to be paid. You will also be able to predict which months your cash flow will not meet your needs and how to plan ahead to cover those cash shortfalls.

While it can be challenging to keep up with bookkeeping software, you can create a simple cash flow projection in a notebook. Using the financial records outlined above, you can then create your income and expense categories and fill them in. This can be as simple or as complicated as your farm operation, or as you choose. From there you’ll create your cash flow projection for each month. Farming has many variables, and farmers understand the need to be flexible and creative.

You can keep track of the variables in your cash flow projection and resulting budget through good monitoring, outlined in chapter 20. Monitoring is regular assessment of where you are headed so you know if, on that trajectory, you can expect to achieve the goals you’ve set. While assessing, you can decide if you’re on or off track, and if your circumstances have changed, and finally what you need to do to accommodate the changes.

The newly updated Fearless Farm Finances recommends: “Ideally, every month you will compare your actual cash flow to your plan (your budgeted cash flow) to assess your financial status relative to your annual goals. This requires a budget that lays out expectations for monthly progress. It also requires that you regularly enter data in your bookkeeping system. Recognizing the value of, and having a commitment to periodically assessing your performance relative to your plan provides an incentive to keep up with the weekly work of financial data entry.

Monitoring progress should lead directly to actions that control negative deviations and adjust for positive developments, and a recognition of when things are working right.

Regular monitoring can help guide your decisions as you continue through the farm season. While it can be challenging to keep up with bookkeeping in the heart of the busy farm season, it is time you can’t afford not to set aside. Knowing where you are at with cash flow in August can save you from difficulties in October, not to mention the end of the year.

Invest in your financial future with more knowledge and tools to guide your farm business planning. Fearless Farm Finances is a great place to start. The book will be available in the MOSES Conference Bookstore and our online bookstore (moesorganic.net) at the end of February.

FSA Loan Experience — from page 9

scenarios. What would be the financial cost over time of an implement versus additional annual labor? If our farm changes scale, what does that mean for the farm’s financial situation? We considered the goals we had for our business and our life and looked at different ways we could achieve what we hoped for.

When we finally felt that we understood where we wanted to go, we made the plunge into the world of FSA with our business plan as our guide, trying to be cautious about taking on only debt that we had a plan to repay. The application process did take time and patience, but the staff helped us complete the paperwork and explained the process along the way. With the help of FSA, we were eventually able to purchase farmland and capitalize our operations to fit the scale and needs of the new property.

When we look out over our farm now, we felt that the opportunity was well worth the effort. While we still don’t know our story’s ending, our land tenure now enables us to invest the time, energy, and money into building our soils, adding necessary infrastructure, growing our operations, and moving toward our goal of using best management practices on the land.

FSA loan programs are not going to be the solution to everyone’s land access or farm growth puzzle. However, for those who are still looking for a little support to capitalize their farm for the future, I recommend taking the time to investigate what opportunities FSA might be able to offer you. To find your local FSA office, see offices.scegov.usda.gov.

Lauren Langworthy is a certified organic farmer and the MOSES Events & Education Specialist.

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**News Briefs**

**Children on Farms**

If you're farming while raising children, you'll want to know about the Farm Child Safety blog on the MOSES website. Organic Specialist Jennifer Nelson, who is a farmer and mother herself, writes about the issues facing parents and ways they can protect their kids from injury on the farm—an environment with huge potential for accidents. The Farm Safety for Children section of the website includes her blog and many resources to help parents understand farm safety issues and create a safer space for their kids. The site has been created with support from the National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety. See mosesorganic.org/farming/child-farm-safety.

**Recognition for Organic Farmers**

MOSES highlights organic farms through its #FRridayFeaturedFarm posts on social media platforms. Those farms also are featured on the MOSES website under “Cheers for Farmers.” If you are certified organic or transitioning to organic, get well-deserved recognition by submitting farm photos here: http://bit.ly/Cheers4OrganicFarmers.

**Farm Bill Listening Session**

MOSES and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) will host a listening session during the MOSES Conference to ensure that the interests and needs of sustainable and organic farmers and ranchers drive our policy work on the next Farm Bill. The current bill expires at the end of September 2018.

The session, which will be at 5 p.m. Friday, Feb. 24, will provide a brief update on farm bill preparation from Washington, D.C., but will primarily be an opportunity for farmers and advocates to air their challenges, concerns, and priorities. The listening session follows the Farm Bill workshop presented by NSAC and the National Organic Coalition.

**New NOSB Members**

The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) has opened the public comment period prior to its spring meeting April 19 - 21 in Denver. Colo. March 30 is the deadline to submit public comments or sign up to make a comment at the meeting. The board will also take public comments at a webinar April 13. See the agenda of topics and current proposals and access the comment opportunities at the NOSB spring meeting webpage, www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic/nosb/meetings.

**Conservation Stewardship Program**

The newly renovated Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) rewards farmers for their working-lands conservation efforts. USDA-NRCS offices are accepting initial applications for the 2017 CSP contract year. The new revisions to CSP include expanded options for participation in cover crops, rotational grazing, ecological pest management, and alternative cropping systems. The revision also increases the minimum payment to help smaller-scale producers. To have your CSP application considered in 2017, contact your local NRCS office and complete the form before Feb. 3, 2017.

**Director Opening at NPSAS**

The Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society (NPSAS) is seeking a new executive director for this 38-year-old membership organization. NPSAS is committed to the development of a sustainable agricultural system through education, research and advocacy. For details, see www.npsas.org.

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**Pre-Conference Snowshoe Hike**

Before sitting in MOSES Conference workshops, head outdoors for a guided snowshoe hike through the forests and wetlands of the La Crosse River Conservancy. $75 covers transportation, snowshoe rental, instruction, 1.5 hour hike, and nature guides. This activity is perfect if you plan to arrive in La Crosse before the Conference Kick-Off Thursday evening, or have a partner who's attending Organic University. The event is 2 to 5 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 23. Registration is handled separately from the MOSES Conference. To register, see http://bit.ly/SnowshoeBeforeMOSES.

**MOSES Organic University**

Choose from 10 all-day, in-depth farming courses offered Thursday, Feb. 23 at the La Crosse Center just before the MOSES Organic Farming Conference in La Crosse, Wis. Courses are taught by experienced farmers, educators, and researchers. The course fee includes a custom-made resource book. Early Bird pricing ($160) is available through Jan. 17. Regular registration for $180 runs through Feb. 9. On-site registration will only be available for unfilled courses. See OrganicUniversity.org.

**Conference Roundtables**

The schedule for the Expert-led Roundtables at the MOSES Conference has been posted online, http://bit.ly/RoundtableSchedule. Those roundtables primarily will be an opportunity for farmers and advocates to air their challenges, concerns, and priorities. The listening session follows the Farm Bill session. Those farms also are featured on the MOSES website under “Cheers for Farmers.”

If you are certified organic or transitioning to organic, get well-deserved recognition by submitting farm photos here: http://bit.ly/Cheers4OrganicFarmers.

**Conference Roundtables**

The schedule for the Expert-led Roundtables at the MOSES Conference has been posted online and in the conference app. See mosesorganic.org/conference/roundtables. Those 45-minute discussions held throughout the day offer people the chance to hear more about a specific farming topic from people in the know. Sign up isn't needed, but you're encouraged to arrive early to get a seat and catch introductions. The full schedule also will be listed in the conference program.

Get the app: mosesorganic.org/conference/app.
Lakewinds Organic Field Fund

Farmers, especially those in Minnesota, northern Iowa, and western Wisconsin, can apply to the Lakewinds Organic Field Fund grant program for funding to develop their organic operation or conduct research. Application deadline is Feb. 3. Farmers also may be interested in Lakewinds’ new opportunity with The Good Acre called Maker to Market. This program will connect makers, farmers, and retailers. Independent food makers can turn their most promising concepts into market-ready products using the harvest of local farmers while gaining the marketing and retail insight of the Lakewinds team.

Local and regional food producers who are not currently selling in retail and are making unique, high-quality products with the potential to be sourced locally may learn more and apply at lakewinds.coop/community/maker-to-market.

New Service for Vegetable Growers

One of the USDA’s most popular programs is the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) from November through February, but has redesigned large portions of the program. The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) has updated its Farmers’ Guide to the Conservation Stewardship Program to help producers navigate all of the new enhancements and conservation practices now offered. It includes information on the methods and technologies that will now be used to evaluate applications. See http://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/2017-csp-resources.

Guide for Farmers Working with Regulators

Farm Commons has released “Working With Regulators,” a guide that helps farmers interpret the regulations in their region. It also gives the legal framework farmers need to manage situations in which they’ll be interacting with these regulations. There are plenty of practical examples and stories to highlight how regulations have been created and enforced. It also discusses how farmers can have influence over that process. The guide includes tips for how and when to speak with regulators and discusses the role of an attorney and how to keep the costs for one affordable. See farmcommons.org/resources/working-regulators.

Minnesota Value Added Grant

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture is accepting applications through March 6, 2017 for Value Added Grants for projects that increase the sales, diversify the markets, or improve the food safety of value-added Minnesota agricultural products. See www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/valueaddedgrant.aspx.

Pasture Plans

Troy Bishopp, a certified organic farmer with a custom grazing operation, is sharing his annual grazing plans through On Pasture. The plans are spreadsheets available free at onpasture.com/2017/01/02/page/2.

New Director at Michael Fields

Michael Fields Agricultural Institute in East Troy, Wis., has named Perry Brown as its new executive director. Brown was in charge of market development work in organic agriculture, specialty crops, and, grass-based livestock production for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection.
**EQUIPMENT**

- Never-used Erath compost tea brewer. Certified organic alfalfa, alfalfa/grass, oats straw all 3x3x8 bales, 605-460-1545.
- **Farmall A with side mt. sickle mower** electric lift, 2920, OBO. Also MF 1754, 54 HP, cab, FWA, loader, 160 hrs. Delivery possible. 319-533-0737.
- **Eco Weeder 2400; Land Pride rtr0550 tiller**; 2000 Land Pride 1b16-48 finishing mower; 2000 New Holland boom25 tractor with loader 4x4 12,000, all are best offer, 715-448-0876, bloomong1969@icloud.com.
- Smidlly outside hog feeder wilds, nice (12 hole); 708 Uni with 717 husking unit, 15R JD cutpacker, 438 JD corn head, JD 4320 & 2002 tractors, 815-499-2668.


**FARMS/LAND**

- **Organic Farm—certified 345 acres; 220 tillable-row crops- pasture-woods-creek & other buildings- tenant-Ogle County- $2,999,000. Write Mobius, PO Box 126, Rock Falls, IL 61071.**
- **Certified organic land for rent.** 110 ac with pivot current in alfalfa 2 years, Rice Lake area, 715-651-0863.

**FORAGES**

- **Certified organic balage.** 30% moisture dietary quality grass dry cow hay, also some transitional, all big square bales trucking available, Chetek, Wis, 715-764-2117.
- For sale **Certified Organic Baleage 4x4 rounds individually wrapped.** High quality (RFQ 180 and up; crude protein 20-26%) Delivery available. Also have non organic hay available. Call 262-203-6133.
- For **SALE: 2016 organic wheat or barley straw.** MOSA certified, 3x3x8 large square bales. $3.50/bale. Transportation available. Kent Wolf 608-553-1136.
- For **SALE: 2016 organic hay.** 3x3x6 large squares. Dry hay and balage. 100 – 150 RFV, MOSA certified. Transportation available. Kent Wolf. 608-553-1136.
- For **SALE: organic oats, corn, hay and straw, big bales.** Can deliver, SW Wisconsin, 608-574-2160.

**GRAINS**

- **Open Pollinated Seed Corn.** Midwest adapted yellow dent, high quality feed, not certified organic, sustainably grown, cleaned and tested, $75 per bushel. Abbe Hills Farm, Mt. Vernon, IA. www.abbehills.com. 319-895-6924, or laura@abbehills.com.
- For sale: **4,000 bu organic corn 8.50/bu; organic large square hay bales.** 815-238-3332.
- For sale: **organic oats, corn, hay and straw, big bales.** Can deliver, SW Wisconsin, 608-574-2160.
- **Organic rye seed for sale.** Cleaning available. Rye straw round bales also available. 507-725-5281.

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**SOYBEANS**

Organic Soybeans for sale, variety is Sunopta MN 0083. Feed grade, $18 per bushel. Call Christian, 218-684-5368. Located in NW Minnesota.

**CLASSIFIEDS**

- **Place an ad at mosesorganic.org**

**LIVESTOCK**

Certified organic dairy herd for sale along with calves, open heifers, short bred, and springers. Located in central PA. Call for details, 570-765-3295 / 570-541-6360.

Six moderate – framed Black Angus heifers to calve April 10. Located in NE Iowa, 563-763-2456.

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Organic Onion Plants, Sedona, Redwing, Candy, White Wing, Saffron, yellow and red Cipollini, and Leeks, Other varieties available upon request. 57 per 100, 100 plant minimum, certified by MOSA. Glen, 563-379-3951 or gitsfresh@gmail.com.


**CWF Farm Tax and Accounting.** We specialize in bookkeeping, payroll, tax planning and preparation, annual and quarterly financial reports, and business planning. Bloomer, WI 715-568-9880.

Wanted: Organic, seed-out, native, warm-season, grass hay. (Big-Bluestem, Little-Bluestem, Indiangrass, Switchgrass, Eastern-Gamagrass, etc.) I would like to establish native, warm-season grasses with this hay. Todd Steiner, Tremont, IL. Call: 309-925-5057. Email: marjaeorganic@frontier.com.

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**OPPORTUNITIES**

The Apprentice Farmer Program is a farm incubator program sponsored by Michigan State University providing support to those interested in starting their own farming enterprise. This two-year incubator provides access to land, equipment, tools, and mentorship to beginning farmers as they start their farm business. Learn more at www.msunorthfarm.org.

**For Sale:**

- **JD corn head, JD 4320 & 3020G tractors,** 815-449-2668.
- **Smidley outside hog feeder w/lids best offer,** 715-448-0876, blooming1969@icloud.com.
- **Land Pride fdr1648 finishing mower; 2000 New Hol,** 160 hrs. Delivery possible. 319-559-0373.
- **$2900, OBO. Also MF 1754, 54 HP , cab,** 1969@icloud.com.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Title</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Fee/Price</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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<tr>
<td>January 26</td>
<td>9 a.m.-4 p.m.</td>
<td>Champaign, Ill.</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>Champaign, Ill.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freeborn Area Soil Health Winter Workshop</td>
<td>Jan. 27-28</td>
<td>8 a.m.-4 p.m.</td>
<td>Columbus, Neb.</td>
<td>Contact William at 402-525-7794</td>
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<td>Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention</td>
<td>Jan. 27-29</td>
<td>9 a.m.-5 p.m.</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>Contact MOA at 605-672-8515</td>
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<td>Organic Agriculture Research Symposium</td>
<td>Jan. 29-Feb. 2</td>
<td>9 a.m.-5 p.m.</td>
<td>St. George, Utah</td>
<td>Contact SRM at 303-986-3309</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) Workshop</td>
<td>Feb. 2</td>
<td>9 a.m.-5 p.m.</td>
<td>Long Prairie, Minn.</td>
<td>Contact Michele at 612-624-7444</td>
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<td>Grassworks Grazing Conference</td>
<td>Feb. 4-5</td>
<td>9 a.m.-4 p.m.</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Contact Oregon at 503-378-0690</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organic Vegetable Production Conference</td>
<td>Feb. 4-6</td>
<td>9 a.m.-4 p.m.</td>
<td>Madison, Wis.</td>
<td>Contact Oakland at 515-232-5661</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wisconsin Fresh Fruit &amp; Vegetable Conference</td>
<td>Jan. 22-24</td>
<td></td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Contact Wisconsin Berry Growers at 608-235-5925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Farm Business Planning Workshop</td>
<td>Feb. 11</td>
<td>9 a.m.-12 p.m.</td>
<td>East Troy, Wis.</td>
<td>Contact The Land Connection at 217-840-2128</td>
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- Comes with a 1-year warranty.
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- Comes with a 1-year warranty.
- Some assembly required.