



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Minnesota couple who've had national impact named Organic Farmers of Year**

LA CROSSE, WI – Jim Riddle and Joyce Ford, pioneering organic farmers from Winona, Minnesota, are the 2019 Organic Farmers of the Year. They'll receive the award Feb. 21 at the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual MOSES Organic Farming Conference in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

This prestigious award recognizes Midwest farmers for outstanding land management, innovative farming practices, and the outreach they do to teach others how organic farming works. Fellow farmers nominate candidates, and the winner is chosen by the board of the Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service (MOSES). MOSES organizes the annual conference, which is the country's largest event focused on organic and sustainable farming practices.

Riddle and Ford have had a profound impact on organic agriculture, not just as farmers, but also as educators, policy advocates, and advisers. They have worked at local, state, and national levels to promote organic agriculture, and helped shape the country's founding organic standards in the 1990s. In truth, they've been front and center in nearly every aspect of the organic world.

Riddle served on the USDA National Organic Standards Board, the body responsible for shepherding what can and can't be used in organic production. He supported research on organic practices when he worked for the University of Minnesota and later at The Ceres Trust. He helped launch the Land Stewardship Project, a farm advocacy organization based in Minnesota, and the Organic Farmers Association, a national group that provides a strong, unified voice for organic producers. He also served nine years as the elected supervisor of the Winona County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Ford has extensive leadership experience as well. She served two terms on the MOSES Board of Directors in the early 2000s, and was on the board of the Organic Growers and Buyers Association. She was on the steering committee of the Minnesota Healthy Food Charter, and currently serves on a committee for the International Organic Accreditation Service. She also co-wrote the Organic Trade Association's manual *Good Organic Retail Practices*.

The couple started farming near Winona, Minnesota in the early 1980s as Wiscoy Organic Produce. Long before *organic* and *local food* were mainstream terms, this was their approach to farming and marketing. They grew their produce organically and marketed it locally through a home delivery subscription program when no one had even heard of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). To reach more consumers, they helped found the still-thriving Winona Farmers Market.

They recalled the early 1990s as a sort of “Wild West” in the organic world, without uniform national standards for organic farming and little training or oversight of organic certification inspectors. Their response was to help create an organization that would train inspectors and standardize the organic certification process. They ran the International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA) for its first eight years out of their home office, and shifted their focus from farming to conducting organic inspections.

They returned to farming in 2009, finding a new niche by growing nutrient-rich “blue” fruits—blueberries, black currants, aronia berries, elderberries, honeyberries, juneberries, and plums. They aptly named their new business venture “Blue Fruit Farm.”

Their farm is certified organic by MOSA. As exemplary organic farmers, they have surrounded their orchard with habitat for pollinators and beneficial insects.

“The native bees pollinate the fruit,” Riddle explained, adding that native bees thrive when protected from insecticides.

With all that Riddle and Ford have done in the organic community, they are most proud of their work as farmers.

“It makes it all real,” Riddle said. “I’m not just talking about something I’ve read in a book. I’m out there doing it.”

The Organic Farmer of the Year award is a project of MOSES, which is a nonprofit organization that promotes organic and sustainable agriculture by providing farmers with education, resources, and practical advice. For more information, see [mosesorganic.org](http://mosesorganic.org).

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