Organic Farmers of Year dedicated to soil-building, healing with herbs

By Bailey Webster

“The reason I’m alive (my mission statement) is to really connect people to nature for their health and the health of the planet,” said Jane Hawley Stevens. “The more people use plants for healing, the more they will trust nature and develop a relationship [with it]. It will make people become better stewards of the Earth.”

Jane and her husband, David Stevens, are the MOSES Organic Farmers of the Year. It’s immediately apparent that they are deeply passionate about the work they do. Jane and David own Four Elements Organic Herbals, a 130-acre farm in North Freedom, Wisconsin, about an hour northwest of Madison. They have been growing organic herbs and marketing herbal products for the past 32 years. They’re committed to good stewardship of their land, quality of life for their employees, and improved health for their customers.

Jane is originally from Oconto on the shore of Lake Michigan’s Green Bay. She has a bachelor’s degree in horticulture from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. David was born on Long Island and raised in northern Virginia, where he enjoyed working on vegetable farms in his youth. He has a bachelor’s degree in horticulture from Virginia Tech.

When Jane graduated from college in 1981, she was asked to install an herb garden as her first job out of school. She found that she really enjoyed growing herbs, and that became her specialty. The couple met in Texas when they were both working for the Dallas Arboretum. They each loved cultivating plants and quickly discovered that they shared a vision of having a family farm.

Living in Dallas, Jane missed the four seasons, so she decided to move back to Wisconsin. About six months later David followed her when he was accepted into graduate school at UW-Madison. Before they married, Jane purchased the farm that would become Four Elements Organic Farm. They had their first child in 1987, and Jane left her off-farm job to be home with her son, Forrest. She continued to grow and sell herbs from their farm.

As a baby, Forrest would often have earaches, particularly when he was teething. Jane was looking for an alternative to the medication she was getting from the doctor, so she turned to herbs for a solution. In spite of specializing in herb cultivation, Jane had never tried an herbal remedy before. With a healthy dose of skepticism, she looked up a remedy for earaches. The herb book she used said to add some mullein flowers to olive oil, heat the oil to body temperature, and put a couple of drops in the ear canal. To her amazement, his earache healed with no further treatment. Jane was hooked!

“I was so impressed that it’s become my passion and my path to learn more and more about plants and healing,” she explained. “For common ailments, you can’t beat herbs for self-care. Using herbs causes you to engage with your own health, to pay attention to a place of commitment to spiritual activism, of soil force, and the fire refers to the passion we have for making positive change in the world.

Can you tell us more about your farm?

It’s in Grafton, New York (about 3-1/2 hours north of New York City). We have 80 acres, of which we manage intensively about 7 acres in annual and perennial crops, and the remainder is managed woodland. The soil is Buckland gravelly clay. It is very dense and difficult to work. It does retain water and nutrients very well, so that’s a blessing. However, there are always issues with flooding and waterlogging, and heavy equipment doesn’t get along too well with the soil we have here.

Soul Fire Farm founder talks farming strategy, vision for future of food movement

By Molly Rockaumann

Leah Penniman presents the Friday keynote, “Uprooting Racism; Seeding Sovereignty” at this year’s MOSES Organic Farming Conference. A true farmer-hero to me and many others, Leah recently talked with me about her farm, her experiences, and some exciting changes she’s collaborating on in the organic farming movement.

Leah was a professor at Hampshire College and has been farming in New York State since 1996. She is the founder and executive director of Soul Fire Farm, which she started in 2013 on a 10-acre farm in Grafton, New York. The farm’s mission is to awaken the personal, spiritual, and economic healing of communities of color, while connecting people to the land.

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What crops do you grow and what animals do you raise?

We have about 5 acres of silvopasture, a herd of Katahdin sheep, 50 layer chickens, about 300 broilers (Freedom Rangers), honeybees and 30 hogs. We also have a couple acres of perennial agroforest—an intercrop of crops like hazelnuts, apples, raspberries, blackberries, blueberries together with perennial herbs. And, then another acre of annual crops—vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, onions, and so forth, and two 80-foot high tunnels that also have hot-season annual crops.

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Leah Penniman, the author of Farming While Black, will present a keynote at the 2020 MOSES Organic Farming Conference.

Photo by Capers Rumph

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Board promotes Langworthy to lead MOSES

By David Perkins, MOSES Board President

The MOSES Board of Directors is excited to announce the promotion of Lauren Langworthy to Executive Director of MOSES. The Board is proud of MOSES’s wonderful past contributions to our farm community; however, it recognizes the need to reinvigorate and refocus its efforts to meet the needs of new generations of farmers. Lauren is part of the new generation; she is dedicated, passionate, accessible and eloquent, and so is well-positioned to carry the organization into the future. For this reason, the Board voted unanimously in November to make Lauren the organization’s leader.

Formerly the Program Director at MOSES, Lauren had stepped up to serve as Interim Executive Director in March following a board-directed change in leadership. Over the past nine months, she has demonstrated exceptional expertise in managing the nonprofit’s inner workings and relationships in the wider organic agriculture community. She has helped the organization weather a challenging year with skill and diplomacy. She has proven herself to be an adept and practical leader, ensuring that MOSES carries out its mission of educating, inspiring, and empowering farmers to thrive in a sustainable, organic system of agriculture. In other words, she really impressed us all!

The board chose to hire internally rather than undergo another national search following so closely on the heels of the 2016 executive director search. We wanted a leader who is familiar with the organization, its staff and board, our partners, our farmers, and the unique attributes of organic agriculture. We believe that Lauren’s experience at MOSES and her background and continued role in farming contribute greatly to her credentials as the organization’s new executive director.

Lauren and her husband, Caleb, own a 153-acre grass-based farm in Wheeler, Wis. They rotationally graze a 150-ewe flock of sheep and a small herd of Highland cattle. Prior to investing in livestock, they had a certified organic vegetable operation for six years. In 2017, they were selected as Wisconsin’s representatives to the national Farmers Union Enterprises leader development program, a one-year training to cultivate new leadership for that organization. In 2018, Lauren was elected to represent her district on the board of the Wisconsin Farmers Union for a three-year term.

Lauren has a bachelor’s degree from Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. Since joining the staff at MOSES in early 2015, Lauren has completed the International Organic Inspectors Association NOP Organic Crops Standards Training, served on the Land Stewardship Project’s Federal Farm Policy Steering Committee, and advocated for farmers on Capitol Hill with our partners in the National Organic Coalition, National Farmers Union, Land Stewardship Project, and the Organic Trade Association. She has also participated in racial justice and diversity trainings, and brings a strong commitment to providing programming and services that are equitable and inclusive.

“Just as it is in our fields, diversity in our community is a strength we can actively pursue to improve future resilience,” Lauren told the board recently. “We can make a welcoming space for organic, sustainable, regenerative, transitioning, questioning, and curious farmers and community members of all identities. We can communicate the value of our work to this broad spectrum of people and invite them to join us in creating a better future for food and farming.”

Please join us as we welcome and thank Lauren for accepting the challenge of leading MOSES into this new decade.

David Perkins is the president of the MOSES Board of Directors and a longtime organic farmer.
Real Organic Project add-on label helps farmers show organic values
By Dave Chapman, Real Organic Project

There has been growing dismay in recent years over erosion of the integrity of the National Organic Program. The Real Organic Project was created in 2018 to address this crisis. We see a widening gap between the traditional meaning of “organic” and the USDA’s reinvention. Most of the farms certified by the USDA are really organic, but much of the certified food now sold in stores is not.

Organic farming began as a movement in Europe in the 1940s. Albert Howard had a belief that farming should be based on soil health, and that all good things would come from that. J.I. Rodale brought Howard’s ideas to the U.S., and our organic movement was born. As these ideas slowly caught on with farmers and eaters, demand grew. American certification began in Maine with the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) in 1972, and in California with CCOF in 1973. MOFGA started certifying 27 farms. CCOF began with 54 growers at the first MOSES Organic Farming Conference in 1990; grew to 90 farmers.

An international movement has grown out of these humble beginnings. Annual U.S. retail sales of organic products reached $52.5 billion in 2018 and sales in the European Union exceeded $41 billion. Organic food is grown all over the world, and much of it is sent to America.

Organic in America began as a movement of family farms. At first scorned by the USDA, many innovative farmers had a vision of a different kind of farming from the reigning chemical model. At the time Secretary of Ag Earl Butz was saying, “Get big or get out,” some farmers were turning to organic to get smaller. Everything about chemical farming seemed to encourage farms to get bigger and bigger. Everything about organic seemed to reward smaller farms that treated their soil with care. Consumers responded to the lack of pesticides and superior taste as well as the ideal of food grown by people instead of by corporations. As people became more uneasy about what they were having for dinner, they turned to organic.

In 1990, Congress passed the Organic Food Production Act. At that time organic was still small business, and a real effort was made to protect the integrity and transparency of an organic label. After 10 years of thrashing around, the National Organic Program (NOP) was created in 2001, and with it, organic certification became the business of the USDA.

“Getting the feds and organic farmers together in 1990 wasn’t easy,” said Roger Blobaum in the keynote speech at the 1993 MOSES Conference. “It certainly wasn’t love at first sight. It had many of the character-istics of a shotgun wedding and when it was over, there was no honeymoon. Although these two have tried to work things out, they have been on the verge of a breakup ever since.”

But even if we pass it, will it be enforced or will it languish beside the Pasture Rule as a good idea that is often ignored?

Hydroponic production is now embraced by the NOP, despite the 2010 recommendation from the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) that hydroponic should not be allowed. Hydroponic production is dominating the organic tomato and berry markets. There is a pending lawsuit from the Center for Food Safety claiming that certifying hydroponic violates the Organic Food Production Act. With stronger standards, the EU continues to prohibit hydroponic as organic. Virtually all of the U.S. “organic” hydroponic production was started after the NOSB recommended banning hydroponic from organic. The NOP has ignored the last 20 recommendations from the NOSB. When asked about this by Congressman Rodney Davis in Congressional hearings, Undersecretary Gregg Ibach’s final response was that the USDA was looking forward to picking different members for the NOSB. And they will certainly get that opportunity, with five seats just filled and another five seats coming up for change in the next year.

Out of these many failures in the National Organic Program, the Real Organic Project (ROP) was born. From the very beginning it has been farmer-led. Twelve of the 15 ROP Standards Board members are farmers. Four of five Executive Board members are farmers. Fourteen of the 25 Advisory board members are farmers. We are farmer-led and will remain that way.

Our goal is to make sure that eaters are getting honest choices in the marketplace. We want to reconnect organic farmers with the people who care.

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We see a widening gap between the traditional meaning of “organic” and the USDA’s reinvention... Our goal is to make sure that eaters are getting honest choices in the marketplace. We want to reconnect organic farmers with the people who care.
Organic certification has four big steps each year: application, initial review, inspection, and final review. Now is the time to start on the first step. It is the most work in the first year— from the second year on, most of the information will carry over from the year before. The learning curve in the first year may be intimidating, but it levels out pretty quickly after that.

Start by selecting a certification agency. The MOSES fact sheet “Organic Certification & Tips for Choosing a Certifier” suggests questions you can ask to help you find a certifier that’s suited to your operation. The fact sheet is #19 at mosesorganic.org/organic-fact-sheets. Browse the Midwest Organic Resource Directory for information about certification agencies in this region. It’s online at mosesorganic.org/organic-resource-directory or available in print by calling the MOSES Organic Answer Line, 888-90-MOSES.

Contact your certifier early.

This will help you make sure you are on the right path. If you’ve ever asked a certification question at a field day or conference workshop, you heard “ask your certifier.” While this may seem like a cop-out, it is actually the best answer for context-specific questions about certification. If you are wondering if you are allowed to do a specific practice within your system, the certifier has the ultimate say on whether it is allowed or not. Even if you’re pretty sure an input is allowed, check with your certifier first. They are only a phone call away.

Make sure that you get your application in with enough time to spare before you need to sell organic crops. This should be a minimum of 90 days before harvest (or you may have to pay a fee to expedite your inspection).

Have the certifier send you an application in the mail, or sign up on their online application system early.

Document your transition date.

When was the last prohibited material applied to the fields you want to certify? What are you planting in the fields that will be certified this year? Your field must pass 36 months since the last application of a prohibited material, such as herbicide or synthetic fertilizer, before you harvest any organic crop. That means if you or the previous manager applied herbicide on 6/14/2017, then your field would be eligible for organic production on or after 6/14/2020. If you have a later transition date, make sure to plant a crop with a harvest date after the transition date. You can plant crops intended to be sold as organic before your transition date—the only thing that matters with the transition date is the harvest.

If you have managed the land for the past 36 months, you can document your own management of the land. If someone else managed the land for some or all of the last 36 months, the previous manager needs to sign a document with some information about how they managed the land. Note that land ownership is irrelevant in organic certification—certification is of both the land and how it is managed. Certifiers have forms that will help you gather the information you need to document your transition date.

Collect and organize your records.

As a certified organic farmer you will have to keep good records, but don’t worry if you haven’t kept perfect records during your transition. Get together what you can from the past three years. Your inspector will look it over and report to the certifier what you have and what is missing. There are some records that you need to have that your certifier will ask you to send in after your inspection. For example, you will need receipts for all seed purchases for the entire transition period. If you have missing seed records from 2017 until now, you can probably get these records from your seed supplier. Your certifier will let you know if other kinds of records are missing, like if you forgot to record a cultivation. Your certification letter at final review will help you learn what is missing for next year.

Transition your animals.

The 36-month transition period for land doesn’t apply to livestock. Different kinds of animals and animal products have specific requirements to be eligible to be certified. Dairy animals have to be managed organically for one year before you sell organic milk. They can be transitioned on third year transitional feed from your farm during this transition. Any purchased feed must be certified organic.

Animals meant for organic slaughter cannot be transitioned. They have to be managed organically from the last third of gestation all the way through their slaughter and packaging. Brood animals can come in and out of organic management. Poultry must be managed organically from their second day of life whether they are for meat or eggs.

For a more thorough explanation of certification rules for livestock, see the 32-page Guidebook for Organic Certification. It’s online at mosesorganic.org/guidebook-for-certification.

Talk to a MOSES Organic Specialist.

MOSES has a team of Organic Specialists to help answer your questions about organic production and certification. We can help you answer questions that your certifier can’t—certifiers are not allowed to help you overcome barriers to certification. They can tell you what the rules are and they can tell you if what you want to do is allowed or not, but they can’t give you advice on what to do. If you are a dairy farmer, your certifier can tell you that your cows need at least 30% of their dry matter intake from pasture during the grazing season. They can tell you whether or not you are currently meeting that requirement, but they can’t help you improve your grazing plan. You can call us through the Organic Answer Line, 888-90-MOSES, or email us at specialist@mosesorganic.org with your questions.
Distillery partners with farmers to grow heirloom grains for spirits

By Chuck Anderas

La Crosse Distilling, a craft distillery founded in 2018, operates a tasting room and restaurant just down the road from the MOSES Organic Farming Conference in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Their certified organic spirits are made from local or regional organic grain (and potatoes) that they contract with farmers to grow.

“There really is a future for farmers in distillery grains, and no one has really shown a light on that yet,” said La Crosse Distilling co-owner Nick Weber. He and his business partner, Chad Staehly, decided to buy local, organic grain for their spirits from the very beginning.

“It’s about restoring the land,” Weber said. “We really wanted to bring back open-pollinated heirloom grains, and it just so happens that they have deeper flavor profiles that are better for aged spirits.”

They have spent the last few years developing relationships with growers in the area and testing out new open-pollinated varieties of barley, corn, rye, and wheat. For one of their spirits, they tried about 100 different varieties of corn before they found just the right one—an heirloom red corn that will remain nameless due to the immense amount of work that went into identifying it. When one of their local growers had a crop failure of that variety due to a hailstorm, they were only able to locate one other grower, in Ohio, who had it.

Each variety that one of their farmers grows is most likely a new variety to that farmer. “It’s been a learning curve for both [the farmers and us], but it’s been awesome,” Weber said.

La Crosse-area farmer Patrick McHugh, who has been growing grain for the distillery from its launch, said that to grow open-pollinated heirloom varieties, you need “patience with learning how to take care of a specialty crop that doesn’t generally have as much vigor as newer varieties do.”

As the owners grow their distillery business, they are expanding the amount of acreage they contract each year. Their first year, they had 50 to 80 acres under contract, and nearly 400 this past year.

“We’ve enjoyed buying directly from the farmers,” Staehly said. He and Weber have a goal to offer farmers under contract, and nearly 400 this past year.

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La Crosse Distilling have different ways of achieving this standard-based on the rest of their marketing strategies and relationships. McHugh said that he had to buy a seed cleaner/sePARATOR to separate the grain from the buyer’s point of view. To visualize the level of cleanliness needed, the Wepkings said that grain sold to a distillery or bakery needs to leave the farm clean track of the details—particularly your labor. Put a fair labor rate on what your time is.”

Food-grade distilling grains have a high standard of cleanliness. The farmers that grow for La Crosse Distilling have different ways of achieving this standard-based on the rest of their marketing strategies and relationships. McHugh said that he had to buy a seed cleaner/separator to separate the seed according to test weight. “If there is any disease, I’m able to segregate with air volume of the higher quality seed.” He said he has only had to remove about 1-2% of the crop so far.

The Wepkings have also invested in grain cleaning equipment that helps them achieve their desired consistency of product. The Wepkings both come from high-end restaurant and bakery backgrounds, and that experience helps them see their product from the buyer’s point of view. To visualize the level of cleanliness needed, the Wepkings said that grain sold to a distillery or bakery needs to leave the farm clean.
Conversation with Leah Penniman — from page 1

What do you consider to be the most important soil-building practice of your farm?

No-till. Instead of using heavy equipment to till, we use a combination of tarping to manage the weeds as well as building up the soil over time instead of digging down. We’re adding heavy mulches, cover crops, compost, and then managing that with our tarp or paper mulching as a weed barrier.

What are some of the greatest insect or weed challenges you’ve faced on your farm, and how have you handled them?

We definitely have our share of insect challenges, but I would say that they’re not so bad because we have a very diverse operation with a lot of intercropping and crop rotation. Our past challenges have been pretty manageable; occasionally we’ll lose the chard to leaf miner. We had a problem with root rot nematode in the alliums a couple years ago, but those seem to be isolated and then manageable.

Weeds are definitely a huge issue because we’re committed to no-till. We’ve lost some whole beds of crops to weeds when we don’t get the timing quite right with the tarping. We just continue to refine our methods and we’re confident that next year will be a good year. It’s just never, ever letting that soil lie bare and exposed; it’s got to always be in some type of opaque mulch, and then we’re good to go.

From what I can tell, your farm’s main distribution model seems to be a sliding-scale CSA. This is something that I think, for many farmers, seems great in theory but difficult in practice. Can you tell us how you’ve made it work? What are the biggest limitations and greatest opportunities of such a model?

Yes, in 2019 our farm’s main distribution model was the sliding-scale CSA. We did this for nine years. We are shifting out of it, not because it didn’t work—it actually works great. We’re just shifting focus to better meet the needs of our community. We had 110 members with doorstep delivery; people paid what they could afford.

What’s great about it for the farmer is with 100% CSA you can really predict and manage the amount of crop you need to grow, and there is almost no waste. Everything is bought ahead of time. Also, we found that doing doorstep delivery actually is less time-intensive than doing something like a farmers market, with more guarantee that you’re actually getting your crop out there.

So a lot of the things work really well, I think one of the challenges is that for very low-income people, who are maybe less familiar with the CSA model, there’s quite a bit of communication necessary and back and forth and modification to make the program work, which can be labor-intensive on the administrative side. So that’s something that needs to be taken into consideration. One of the ways we surmounted that is we made relationships with some institutions in the community that support distribution—organizations like the Refugee Welcome Center that will take 10 or 20 boxes and go ahead and distribute those to their patrons.

In the intro of your book Farming While Black, you share your background as a person of color in mostly white spaces like farming conferences, and how that affected your view of what type of work and activism you were “supposed to do.” With Soul Fire Farm’s programs and with your book, you’re helping to change that for other young people of color who might also find inspiration and their life’s work in agriculture and the food system. Are you seeing changes in those same spaces and conversations? Do you see more leadership and voices of people of color reflected?

Absolutely, things are certainly changing. One of the most powerful things is that I’m seeing more visibility of the powerful black- and brown-led farming organizations that have existed for a really long time. When I was coming up, I didn’t know anything about the Federation of Southern Cooperatives. I didn’t know anything about Operation Spring Plant, which is a food hub in the South. I didn’t know about the Land Loss Prevention Project. So, it’s been really powerful to see some of these organizations getting more visibility and us as younger farmers coming into the marketplace being able to connect with these elders to learn from them.

There are also a number of newer organizations that have sprung up, including BUSI (Black Urban Growers) and organizations like the Black Farmer Fund in New York and Northeast Farmers of Color. It’s been great to see spaces where our leadership and our voices can really be heard and we can make sure that projects really benefit our community.

Last year, you led a workshop at the MOSES Conference that was my favorite one. Your way of weaving together history and acknowledgment of ancestral practices with how we can do better for each other right now was incredible. Most especially, I was very moved by where you said you were headed afterwards—to meet people who are from the tribe whose land you are on. Can you share more about that?

Yes, right after the conference I went up to the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Reservation in Bowler, Wisconsin. We are collaborating in a number of ways with the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican people who are the original stewards of the land that is Soul Fire. One of those ways is by growing some of the seeds that they originally domesticated such as bee balm, which they call #6, their medicine, and the Calico popcorn. We grow out the seeds and when we sell the seeds all of the proceeds go to the reservation. We also are in the process of drafting a cultural respect easement which will allow tribal members to use the land of Soul Fire Farm for wildcrafting and for ceremony. So that’s a negotiation that we’re having right now.

Acknowledging that the U.S. food system was built on stolen land and stolen labor, you are part of the Northeast Farmers of Color Network claiming your sovereignty and calling for reparations of land and resources. This seems to be a pivotal step in American agriculture. Do you have any advice for groups interested in working on this in the Midwest?

This is very, very exciting. The Northeast Farmers of Color Network, and specifically the land trust, are working very hard on land rematriation, which means land returned to indigenous people and also to black farmers. Right now, we have a map that actually covers much of the country that matches up people of color doing land-based work with those who have resources. It’s called Reparations Map. And we’ve had over 30 successes, matching people in that way to resources that they need.

The land trust is still in the process of getting its paperwork approved by the government so that it can actually hold land. But, we have a number of donors lined up who want to give their land back so that’s very exciting for us. And, we are certainly open to sharing all of our founding documents and strategic work with anyone in the Midwest who might be interested in doing something similar because our vision is a network of these community-based land trusts all around the country. I recommend also checking out the work of the Agrarian Trust, which is a collaborating organization that provides a lot of technical assistance.

Is there anything else you’d like to share?

To remember that when we talk about justice in the food system we need to be thinking about the fact that the vast majority of the labor that’s done on farms is done by people of color and around 85% of farmworkers are Latino or Latinx, while only about 2% of managers are people of color. So, a big part of justice is going to look like how we support these really expert farmers—who sometimes have decades of experience—in becoming producers and entrepreneurs that have the autonomy associated with running their own businesses. And also, to make sure that laws are in place to treat farmworkers well, so supporting the Fairness for Farmworkers Act.

Molly Rockmam is Founding Director of EarthDance Organic Farm School in Ferguson, Missouri. She serves on the MOSES Board of Directors.
Farmers tell buyers their concerns, vision for organic marketplace

By Audrey Alwell

At the Organic & Non-GMO Forum in Minneapolis in October, a panel of organic grain producers shared their stories to help the grain buyers and food manufacturers at the event understand why organic farmers have a multi-crop rotation and need a market for everything they grow, not just corn and soybeans. Lauren Langworthy, MOSES Executive Director, moderated the panel, which featured Minnesota farmers Carolyn Olson of Olson Organics, Carmen Fernholz of A-Frame Farm, and Peter Schwagerl of Prairie Point Farm.

Olson and her husband, Jonathan, have 1,100 acres of organic row crops and small grains. They just added an alfalfa mix to make more of an “ideal” rotation, but are concerned because there’s not a market in their area for alfalfa since there are so few dairy farms now, she explained. They are growing alfalfa largely as a cover crop to improve soil health, she added. Olson offered a digestible explanation of their six-year rotation, adding it’s not all one crop one year and another crop the next.

“One-third of our acres is going to be corn, one-third will be soybeans, and one-third will be a small grain and the alfalfa mix,” Olson said. Within their various fields, the crops grow change each year, except for the alfalfa, which they leave in for two to three years.

“We have a lot of different varieties that we grow, which is why we don’t say we just grow wheat. We grow a lot of seed for Albert Lee Seed. That’s been a really great relationship for us. We’ve been in the seed growing business since the late 1930s on our farm. And, that kind of dictates what varieties of soybeans and small grains we grow. And then our corn, we market to Prairie Organic for vodka.”

As soon as the small grain comes off, they plant cover crops and then corn will go in that field. The next year, soybeans will follow the corn, and the following year, it might be alfalfa or a small grain mix again.

“It’s called a six year rotation, but each field will have either the corn, the soy, or the small grain every third year,” she explained. “It’s a three-year system, but it’s six crops.” Fernholz has been following a similar rotation for the last 20 years.

“When I introduced alfalfa into the rotation, it changed the farm,” he said. “I didn’t have any livestock, but alfalfa changed the operation. Alfalfa serves not only as a soil-building crop, but is a terrific weed-management tool, and this is of primary importance in an organic system.” He said he tried growing field peas years ago, but there wasn’t a market for them. Now, Puris Foods is renovating a plant in nearby Dawson, so he expects to be growing field peas once again. He also mentioned he has been participating in research to breed out a perennial wheat, called Kernza. (See the story in the November Organic Broadcaster at moses-organic.org/kernza.)

He said his rotation has always been a bit of a work-in-progress. “It has continually evolved and when I look at the potential again for peas and Kernza, I think we’ve got a whole new story on this rotation,” he added.

Schwagerl runs an 800-acre split operation, with half in non-GMO soybeans, which are “far and away the best marketing opportunity for us,” he explained. On their organic acres, they run a four-year rotation with corn, field peas, soybeans, and a small grain. He said he’ll be planting a long-term crop, either alfalfa or Kernza, for weed control and building soil health.

“We’re going to be playing around with those perennial crops as a base that we can strip till and plant our row crops into that living cover,” he said.

Schwagerl, who transitioned to organic within the last seven years, explained some of the barriers they needed to overcome.

“We went through a particularly difficult time to transition just because the conventional margins right now are so incredibly tight,” he explained. “Farmers are being pretty risk-averse. They can see that in the end, once they can get to certification, there is financial benefit to their farm. But it can be a very risky transition period. That’s why for us, we’ve had to rely more on the [non-GMO] soybeans.

He also said that it can be tough to go organic if all the neighbors are non-organic. “You can’t just go to the nearest co-op and find answers to your agronomy or marketing questions,” he said. “You have to find a completely new network of suppliers and markets, and that can be very intimidating. I think, for a lot of people who are trying to transition. Fernholz, who also serves on the MOSES Organic Specialist team and handles organic grain calls on the Organic Answer Line, said he frequently gets calls from farmers asking about transition and the organic market. The main question he hears is, “How do I deal with weeds?” He said most younger conventional farmers have “probably never sat on a cultivator or probably never used a rotary hoe or a tine weeder. So, it’s a whole new system for them.” He added that the conversations always include questions about mechanical equipment, what to use and when.

“Today’s transition is probably not as big of a challenge as it was 10 or 15 or 20 years ago because there are a lot more experienced people out there than can tell you some of the shortcuts you can take. So, consequently, there isn’t really the yield hit either during transitioning.” Fernholz explained, especially when you can learn from what others have done before you.

Marketing Crops

Langworthy asked the farmers to share how they market their crops and what they’d want buyers to consider as they negotiate with farmers.

“For us, the biggest thing is relationships—relationships matter when we’re marketing,” Olson said. She explained the importance of getting to know buyers and “what makes them tick.” Then when buyers call and name their price, her husband will call around to make sure it’s a fair price. “He’s calling around and everybody knows that. He wants to work with every-body, but he wants it to be fair for everybody as well. That has worked really well for us.”

Olson outlined how they’ve set up a unique marketing structure with one of their buyers to include both a set contract and a flex contract. “Then we’re not locked in if the price happens to be low in January. If the price of corn for us could be higher later, we do have the option to flex a part of that contract. So that has worked for us,” she explained.

She said they prefer short-term over long-term contracts. “We like to work with our buyers and get the best for all of us because we want them to stay in business. And, we want them to buy our crops, too,” she added.

Olson pointed out that contracts are important for farmers who take out crop insurance. “Sometimes you need a contract in hand to be able to insure it for a price point,” she explained. “For us this year, crop insurance has been very important.”

Schwagerl said he prefers the stability of annual production contracts, based on acreage, that are drawn up in January. Even if they could get more for their organic grain later in the year, they prefer the security of a contract set before the production year starts.

“That works well for us as beginning farmers because we might not have the resources or capital that some of the more established farmers have,” Schwagerl explained. “We’re willing to just take a set price ahead of the production season because it allows us to have some economic security and plan our cash flows for the upcoming year.”

Working on annual contracts also has given his farm the chance to work with different buyers, giving them a sense of where they’d like to establish longer-term relationships.

On his non-GMO operation, Schwagerl has found he’s limited to soybeans because he can’t find a market for specialty crops. “Part of that is just our farm’s location,” he explained. “The logistics and freight costs on those lower-value, non-GMO crops just haven’t worked.” He’s able to grow a wider variety of crops for the farm’s organic side. “We’re very willing to try new crops—that’s just part of the fun of being a farmer,” he added. “It has been difficult for us to market some of the field peas that we wanted in our rotation for soil benefits. We’re excited about the new players that are...
Inside Organics — from page 3

getting started, we already have over 250 farms across the country, and over 60 of those are in the Midwest. Our goal is to reach 2,000 ROP-certified farms in the next three years.

The ROP standards are quite simple. They address the failures of the USDA program. CAFOs and hydroponics are prohibited. Parallel production (organic and non-organic of the same crop) is prohibited.

A soil-building program is required. Basic animal welfare is required. Regular access to the outdoors and pasture is required. (See www.realorganicproject.org/ provisional-standards.)

We are not here to replace the organic program. We are here to save it. As farmers look to new terms for the same concepts, such as regenerative and agro-ecological, we think it is worth saying, “No” to the theft of the original term we all spent years building. It is remarkably easy to sit back and shake our heads. Instead, let's take action and protect organic. Get certified. Sign up for email updates at realorganproject.org. There is a wealth of information on the website. Tell your friends about ROP. Make a donation. Sign the petition. We can do this. Please join us. In the words of one of ROP's farmers, “If not us, who? If not now, when?”

Dave Chapman runs Long Wind Farm in Vermont and is the Executive Director of the Real Organic Project.

Distillery-Farmer Relationship — from page 5

enough that it is “ready to go into a bulk bin at a co-op, ready to eat.”

To be food-grade, grain has to have less than one part per million of deoxynivalenol (DON), commonly referred to as vomitoxin, and be free of straw and weed seeds. John Wepking said that their wheat may have “1.6 DON off the combine” but after cleaning can be brought down to below one ppm. Above one ppm and the grain must be sold as feed-grade for a significantly lower price.

Investing in grain cleaning equipment has allowed them to “capture the value” of their grain. The Wepkings also said they can only grow food-grade small grains on the parts of their farm that are wind-swept, well-drained ridgetops. In their area, the higher moisture levels of lower fields make growing food-grade small grains nearly impossible.

Because the distillery lacks on-site storage space, the grain must be delivered in small quantities spread out over the course of the year. Because of their distilling process, they also need the grain delivered in 50-pound bags. This means that the farmers that sell to them have to focus on post-harvest handling, including bagging and storage strategies that will maintain the quality of their grain over several months.

McHugh delivers truckloads of grain to nearby seed company Foundation Direct Seeds, and they put his crop into 50-pound bags as required by the distillery. Some of these bags are stored at Foundation Direct while the rest is stored at his farm.

The Wepkings have invested in a bagging line and grain bins on their farm. They said post-harvest handling is one of the biggest differences between growing feed- and food-grade grain. For food-grade grain, you have to clean the grain bin really well before you store anything, and then “you have to pay a lot more attention” to insect control and moisture levels as the year goes on. Because a farmer selling direct makes many smaller deliveries rather than a few trips to the elevator, you have to keep the grain in good condition for up to nine months.

McHugh said post-harvest handling is where labor costs can cut into profitability. “You have to get the seed out of the bin, clean it properly, then into another storage bin, then bagged from there, and stored again,” he explained. “The amount of time handling the grain until you get it in a finished product is new to me. I haven’t cleaned seed in my entire life. Once you start getting the tricks figured out, then you can start figuring out your efficiencies. You don’t want to be a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none. You have to be a master of all your trades as a farmer.”

As La Crosse Distilling continues to grow, they will look to partner with more farmers and plan to buy more from the farmers they already work with. They see their goals as a company as mutually beneficial to the farmers who grow crops for their spirits. They want to be leaders in their industry, buying quality grain at a competitive price while helping small family farms stay profitable. The owners of La Crosse Distilling have a deep respect for farmers and are committed to leaving this world “better than we found it,” Weber explained.

Chuck Anderson is MOSES Organic Specialist. Reach him through the Organic Answer Line: 888-90-MOSES.

La Crosse Distillery hosts a farmers social and show after the MOSES Conference Saturday, Feb. 29 with advance tickets priced at $17. See ad below for details.

MOSES Conference — from page 7

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- More from the farmers they already work with.
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Farmers, researchers team up to trial potato varieties for organic production

By Ruth Genger & Marie Flanagan

When Maria Carter’s parents emigrated from the Netherlands to America in 1956, they brought with them knowledge about how to grow seed potatoes. As they put down roots in North Dakota, they put down tubers to start their new seed potato farm. They knew that healthy seed potatoes were a necessity for potato growers, and they knew how to produce them.

Potatoes are usually grown from the eyes of tubers rather than seeds; growers replant the whole potato or pieces of it. These tubers are referred to as “seed potatoes,” even though they are not true seeds.

While the Carters primarily produced conventional certified seed potatoes for more than 50 years, they had become interested in growing seed potatoes under certified organic conditions as well—sometimes referred to as “double-certified” seed potatoes. Only a handful of farms in the U.S. produce double-certified seed potatoes—both certified organic and certified free from yield-limiting diseases, an important factor since tubers can carry several potato diseases. In the Midwest, Vermont Valley Community Farm in Wisconsin has produced double-certified seed potatoes since 2003.

When the Carters first tried growing organic seed potatoes, they had little success. Then, at the 2017 MOSES Organic Farming Conference, Maria Carter met Ruth Genger, a researcher at the University of Wisconsin who organizes on-farm and research-station organic variety trials to select for potato varieties that excel under organic management. From their conversation, Carter and Genger saw a need and an opportunity to create a regional network of farmers to grow desired specialty varieties for organic seed potato production.

Since new potato breeding line evaluations rarely include organic production environments, Genger and Carter talked about using a regional network of farmers to evaluate and select outstanding lines from crosses between existing varieties. With support from a $199,106 NCR-SARE Research and Education grant, they went about turning this vision of participatory breeding and organic seed potato production into a reality.

In addition to Carter, 15 farmers across the region and on tribal lands teamed up with Genger between 2014 and 2018 to trial production of high-quality organic seed potatoes, and to learn about and engage in the on-farm selection of potato breeding lines from true potato seeds.

**Trialing Minitubers**

Their initial on-farm trials used “minitubers,” produced in greenhouses to avoid insect vectors of disease, as planting stock. The trials took place at five diversified organic vegetable farms. Field production from minitubers generally resulted in low yields, likely due to weed competition with the less vigorous plants that typically emerge from minitubers. An exception occurred at Paradox Farm in Minnesota, where use of the Ruth Stout method of heavy mulching resulted in good yields. Production from minitubers was also successful in hoophouse plots at Snug Haven Farm in Wisconsin, where the protected conditions allowed for earlier planting and harvest, and weed pressure was low.

Plants tubers that were set aside for the following year at Paradox Farm and at the White Earth Land Recovery Project, another participating farm, gave yields comparable to potato crops planted with purchased certified seed potatoes. Results from these trials suggest that more intensive management of potato crops grown from minitubers, including mulching and hand weeding, may be required to make this a viable method for seed potato production. Additionally, while conventional production uses minitubers of 0.5-1 inch diameter, larger minitubers produce more vigorous plants and may be more successful in organic production.

**Foundation Seedlots**

Foundation seed potatoes (seed potatoes tested to ensure that disease levels are below a strict threshold) were planted in trials at 16 farms in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Dakota across three years of trials. Farmers planted foundation seedlots alongside their production fields and provided samples of harvested tubers to Genger for disease testing.

Genger’s research team tested tubers for the most common disease that limits seed potato production in Wisconsin, Potato Virus Y (PVY), which is spread by aphids and infected tubers. PVY stunts plants and reduces yield, and some strains of the virus can discolor tuber flesh. Certified seed potatoes must have less than 5% incidence of PVY and other viruses.

Across the three years of trials, 74 seedlots out of 107 tested seedlots had low enough levels of PVY to achieve certification. Farms located in regions with large-scale potato production were more likely to have a high incidence of PVY in their seedlots. Participants growing smaller acreages of potatoes more isolated from large-scale potato production had lower or no incidence of PVY, potentially due to isolation from sources of viral inoculum.

**Potato Breeding**

To begin the breeding project, Genger crossed potato varieties that were good performers in previous organic variety trials, including several with resistance to viral diseases.

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This cross between Huckleberry and Red Endeavor was one of the potatoes selected by farmers for the potato variety trials. **Photo by Ruth Genger**
Organic Farmers of Year — from page 1

The staff at Four Elements Herbals is key to the business’s success, say owners Jane Hawley Stevens and David Stevens (center). Photo by Marlys Closser Greenhalgh

your body and how you are feeling and realize you are part of the healing process.” She’s careful not to disparage traditional healthcare—for serious illnesses, she still turns to Western medicine.

Jane continued to experiment with herbal remedies for her family. She found that they were “cheap, easy, beautiful, and effective, with no side effects.” Her interest in how herbs promote healing grew.

At around the same time, the organic movement was picking up steam. She had been indoctrinated into the chemical fertilizer approach through her horticulture studies and didn’t know another way. Still, she was intrigued by the organic approach to soil health. She saw a connection between the health of her soil and the efficacy of her remedies. After about a year of contemplation, she decided to go for organic certification in 1989 and has been certified organic since then.

Jane and David had been growing and selling potted herbs, but without the chemical fertilizer they were accustomed to using, the herbs languished. Organic certification was very new at that time, and there really weren’t any organic fertility options for potted plants. Jane had signed up to sell plants at several different markets, and all of her plants were dying. She quickly realized she needed to pivot if she was going to have anything to sell.

Pivot she did! Using the herbs in her fields (which did not have the same fertility problems), Jane began making herbal remedies to sell at the markets—the same remedies she found so effective in caring for her own family. The rest, as they say, is history.

Jane has been on the farm full-time since then, managing the entire business, Four Elements Organic Herbals. The company’s products are now in hundreds of stores in over 40 states. Products include teas, salves, tinctures, creams, lip balms, sprays, and, of course, Mullein Flower Ear Oil.

Jane is quick to point out that the farm wouldn’t be what it is without David and her dedicated staff. David works full-time at the University of Wisconsin Arboretum as the curator of their living collection of 4,000 woody plants. During the summer, he also puts in full-time hours at the farm.

“David is the soil builder,” Jane said. “He’s created excellent fields and has reduced the weed seed bank through good organic practices. I feel like an artist walking out into a clean palate to do my beautiful artistry.”

David is the unsung hero of the farm. Along with handling the production field’s fertility and cultivation programs and acting as head mechanic, he also oversees the 130-acre farm as a whole. Over the years, he has reforested an abandoned 20-acre field and established a prairie restoration organically. In his spare time, he grows and preserves a large portion of the family’s food, makes maple syrup and raises pastured poultry.

The six employees who work for Four Elements are indispensable, Jane said. Most work four days a week and several are mothers of young children. Having started a business when she had young children, Jane has always offered flexible scheduling for her employees so they can prioritize their families’ needs. Having spent some time in Europe, she appreciates the culture that puts family first and work second. It’s a principle she believes in and has built her business around.

Jane praised her staff as being “on the ball and dynamic,” really owning their piece of the operation. This has freed up Jane in recent years to do more teaching and writing. “It is my job to connect people to nature as their source of wellness,” she added.

In terms of her own work-life balance, Jane acknowledged that “the boundaries are fuzzy if you have your business where you live.” She and David often work through the weekends, and Jane frequently travels to teach and sell their products. They try to make time to get off the farm about once a month, to connect without all of the work around them. Last fall they took a trip down to Decorah, Iowa to visit Seed Savers Exchange.

The farm has about three acres of herbs in production. It’s hard to pinpoint exactly how many unique varieties of herbs they grow, but Jane estimates the number is over 200. Jane’s first love is cultivating plants, particularly in the greenhouse.

They also use a lot of herbs that are wild-harvested on the farm, and that provides a special connection to the land. The wild plants include jewel weed, chickweed, dandelion, prickly ash, and many others. “It makes you feel so ‘in the right place’ when you can be harvesting wild plants for medicine.”

Four Elements Organic Herbals’ business model is unique in that it’s vertically integrated. The supplies
they can’t produce on the farm, they purchase directly from the source. Most herbal companies buy on the world market, which is very unstable because of tariffs and customs, Jane explained. There are also a lot of testing requirements. Four Elements’ herbs are “super effective and potent because we can manage everything from field to function,” she said.

Jane and David are feeling the effects of climate change. A lot of the plants they grow are perennials, which makes mulching an essential part of managing weeds and soil organic matter. Because of the erratic weather this spring, they were never able to get into the fields to mulch properly. Similarly, they were unable to establish summer and fall cover crops, so they ended up utilizing the weeds as cover, frequently mowing to minimize seed development.

Jane knows people who source herbs from all over the world, and “farmers are telling them there is no normal in the world anymore.” She said she sees the Farmer of the Year award as an opportunity to encourage other organic farmers. “I just really want to congratulate every organic farmer that they are part of the solution,” Jane said. “Through organic farming, you’re helping to improve the planet.”

In keeping with the name of her business, Jane thinks of regenerative practices on the farm in terms of the four elements: Earth—improving soil health by increasing organic matter and soil microbial diversity; Water—organic practices reduce the number of chemicals getting into the water supply, and increased soil health improves water absorption; Air—soil-building sequester carbon dioxide in the soil; Fire—reduced chemical use helps to preserve the ozone layer, which protects us from harmful ultraviolet radiation from the sun.

After 32 years of farming, Jane and David show no signs of slowing down. They don’t have plans to retire anytime soon. None of their three children has expressed interest in farming. Their daughter, Savannah, has some interest in the business side of things, and their youngest, Syvlie, who is 15 years old, loves being on the farm.

One of the things that Jane and David are proud of is that they have nothing to do with the business or profitability. The first summer on the farm, they noticed that they had bobolinks nesting in their hay fields. The bobolink is a small blackbird native to North and South America. A ground-nesting bird, the bobolink population has been rapidly declining since the early 1960s due to habitat loss and is at risk. Jane and David observed that if they cut their hay after the 4th of July, it allowed the young bobolinks to fledge and leave the nest. By altering this one practice, the farm’s bobolink population has remained robust.

The MOSES Board of Directors will present Jane and David with the 2020 Organic Farmers of the Year award Thursday, Feb. 27, at the kick-off to the MOSES Organic Farming Conference in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

Bailey Webster writes about farming issues from her farm in Prescott, Wisconsin.

New award honors emerging leaders
By Audrey Alwell

The MOSES Board of Directors, 10 dedicated individuals who are deeply connected to the organic movement, have been selecting an organic farmer or farm family from community nominations to honor as the Organic Farmer of the Year for the past 18 years. Along with this “lifetime achievement” award, the board has discussed ways to recognize individuals or groups whose leadership benefits farmers even if they themselves are not actively farming or who go above and beyond their farm work to break down barriers and empower others in the community to farm in ways that are environmentally responsible, socially just, and economically viable.

As a result of this discussion, the board developed a new award this year—the Changemaker Award—to recognize people in the organic farming and food movement who are creatively overcoming systemic challenges to nurture a thriving agricultural future for all. Board members David Abazs, Dave Campbell, Clare Hintz, and Sara Tedeschi honed the criteria and narrowed the field of candidates recommended by MOSES staff and other board members for the award this initial year. The full board then selected the 2020 Changemakers:

- Steve Acheson, Peacefully Organic Produce, S. Central WI Hemp Producers Coop, Veterans for Compassionate Care, High Ground Veterans, Veggies for Vets
- Bad River Food Sovereignty Program, represented by Loretta Livingston, Bad River Tribe, and Joy Schellibe, University of Wisconsin–Extension
- Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin, Regenerative Agriculture Alliance, Peace Coffee, Main Street Project

These honorees each receive a $500 honorarium and complimentary admission to the MOSES Organic Farming Conference, where they’ll receive their awards at the conference kick-off Thursday, Feb. 27 at 7 p.m. Look for profiles of these amazing Changemakers in the March edition of the Organic Broadcaster.
really ramping up. So, we’re excited to get back into that realm because we think there’s a lot of benefits for our farm if the market side now is catching up to that.”

Fernholz, who has been growing organic grains for over 40 years, said he has come to understand that he’s not a good marketer—he’d rather focus on farming and leave the marketing to someone else who is better at it. “I am too connected and too bonded with my corn or soybeans or wheat to be able to be objective about it,” he said. “So, I ask somebody else—a third party—to go to work for me on that crop. Let them be objective about it. And, they can find the markets. That person can spend 100% of their time searching out the markets and searching out where the best crops will be this year, next year, and the year after, so that I can plan my evolving rotation accordingly.”

The challenge with growing organic grains is balancing the production with the market, Fernholz said. “If one gets ahead of the other, we are in trouble.” He’s excited to see the market interest in Kernza and expects more acreage will be planted in 2020.

Fernholz likes the diversity of crops he grows—diversity that’s integral to an organic system. He finds soybeans to be the most challenging to grow, “simply because the neighbors can see quite readily how good or how bad you are in managing weeds.”

Olson, who grows out seed for Albert Lea Seed, is able to grow some unusual varieties. “Triticale, I think, is the most fun because it looks like wheat until it looks blue—when it’s planted next to a wheat field, it has a blue cast to it. We get a ton of calls from neighbors going, ‘What is that?’”

Farmers need some flexibility when it comes to contracts with buyers, the panelists said. There can’t be a “one-contract-fits-all” mentality. Buyers, especially those with triple bottom line goals (financial, social, and environmental), should take into consideration how much organic farmers already are doing to be good environmental stewards.

“Our organic seal already covers a lot of the environmental aspects that many companies, I think, are looking at right now,” Olson said. She recently had a buyer present a contract with environmental and social justice aspects that weren’t realistic. “If we were to implement that, our farm might not be profitable and live to fight another year,” she said. “Some of the asks that are being put on farmers in these situations, without a price increase, are prohibitive.”

Fernholz agreed and suggested that if companies really “want to be green,” they should convey their reasons to their consumers so they can justify paying farmers more for the raw product.

“We, as organic producers today, have to be fully engaged in protecting the markets that we have,” Fernholz said. “That is going to determine where organics will be in the future. Because if we look at the conventional system, and we start moving down that direction, we will be in the same predicament in organic as my conventional friends are today.”

“We’re building a new paradigm here, right?” Langworthy added. “We want to create something that supports both the buyers and the consumers as well as farmers so that we can maintain rural communities and our environment.”

Audrey Alwell is the Communications Director for MOSES.
Carving out time for family, social life helps farmer create work-life balance

By Mike Bollinger

I didn’t grow up on a farm, my parents did. Their South Dakota farm was located about seven miles from the border with North Dakota. It took almost an hour to travel there every holiday break and the handful of other times we would go to see my grandparents each year. At the time, I didn’t think much about the fact that we were all ready to travel home. As far as my grandparents and rarely was it the other way around. I was focused on whether or not I was going to get to ride the four-wheeler around the farm, or if they were going to open up the school gym so I could shoot baskets. I was also concerned with how long it would be until we were headed back home to the city.

At family gatherings, sitting around the table sharing stories about times past, we would often replay stories that would bring us to tears as we laughed. One of those stories we like to recount is a time my grandfather came home and went down to the basement to take a shower and clean up, as was his usual routine after long hours working on the farm. When dinnertime came and he hadn’t come back upstairs, my Mom asked me to go down and get him. Before I saw him, I heard him. I came around the corner and saw him sitting on his favorite chair. But, what gets my sister tear-yawned laughing, was how he was sleeping on the chair—bent over with his head resting where you normally put your rear end. As non-farmers and traveling to see my grandparents, we knew this was unusual. For him as a farmer with countless hours of work, that position gave him a place to rest his head and put his aching back at ease.

Almost a decade later, I was on a farming adventure with my new partner in life, Katie. We were stewing the small homestead of back-to-the-land gurus, Helen and Scott Nearing, on a beautiful small cape in coastal Maine. We were living in a community of incredibly inspiring people—farmers, blacksmiths, carpenters, artists. As is the case with entrepreneurs and small business owners, they always had projects they were working on and, for that reason, we usually just waved in passing. Except for Wednesdays. Wednesday was sauna and potluck day. Basking in the heat of the sauna, rinsing in a pond or a spring, and eating abundant homemade dishes made by each person attending felt like a luxury.

Mealtime was always a joy. In the midst of real-time conversation, jokes, stories about “that one time when…” there were also moments that seemed like ritual to us, one of which was the reading of E.B. White’s essay ‘Memorandum’ each spring. His essay is essentially an endless list of things he ought to do on his farm that day. “I ought to finish husking the corn and wheel the old stacks out and dump them on the compost pile, and while I am out there, I should take a fork and pitch over the weeds…” The list of things he ought to do that day lasts for more than seven pages. The story ends because he notices it is getting dark out and that he better get started. At the close of the essay, laughter breaks out amongst the group. Understanding the realities of the coming season and the work that will pile, the simple outburst of laughter acknowledges that one will never be all caught up, there is always something to be done—we all have come to terms with that.

It has been almost 15 years since our time in Maine, but that time solidified our passion for agriculture. Since then, we’ve had many opportunities: as workers for the Chicago Botanic Garden, as managers, as agricultural consultants, as co-founders of a greenhouse company, and, for the last several years, as owners of River Root Farm in Decorah, Iowa.

At the outset, it was just the two of us with our abundant energy, time, and a drive to pursue our passion for agriculture. Since we’ve had two children, Oliver (11) and Adeline (9), we bought and sold a farm, moved our farm infrastructure, explored wholesale markets, farmers markets, and tried a winter CSA. Now that the dust has settled, we seem to have found our niche selling seasonal salad greens, microgreens, herbs, flowers, and flower plant starts.

Work-Life Balance

I don’t claim to be an expert on work-life balance. In fact, since being asked to write this article, I tried to be a quick study. Wikipedia was a good place to start. Forbes wrote a good article outlining the art. And, if the Organic Broadcaster handled multimedia, I would replace this article with Chris Blanchard’s keynote presentation at the MOSES 2018 conference. (Watch the keynote on YouTube at bit.ly/BlanchardKeynote.)

For Helen, the “work-life plan” was not made out of whole cloth, all at once. It was flexible, but in principle and usually in practice we stuck to it.

To the Nearings, a “good life” provided equal value and time to bread labor, avocational pursuits, and to civic and social engagement. Their bread labor was their work—time in the garden, chopping wood, building projects, and saleable crop production. Of equal value to work was personal time. For Helen, this was often music, but it could be anything. Self-care is important because it nourishes the body and mind, feeds creativity, and is in direct opposition to the stress we often experience in work. The third equally valuable tenant was the importance of civic and social engagement. In this regard, they wrote, “The chance to help, improve, and rebuild was more than an opportunity. As citizens, we regarded it as an assignment.” Although Katie and I have not designed our daily activities to function in the same manner, I do find myself coming back to these basic tenants regularly.

Over the years we’ve engaged in a myriad of farm enterprises. We have always had the mindset that the farm needed to suit our family, the needs of our community and the needs of our regional markets.
to potato viral diseases or late blight, and tolerance to potato pests such as Colorado potato beetle and potato leafhopper. Parents included popular yellow varieties Carola and Yukon Gold, red varieties Red Endeavor and Chieftain, specialty varieties Spartan Splash, Barbara and Picasso, and heirloom varieties from the Seed Savers Exchange collection such as Huckleberry and Aylesbury Gold.

Potato berries—small green fruits that resemble unripe tomatoes but are not edible—were collected, and the seed was extracted and distributed to participating growers. None of the participating growers had ever started potatoes from “true” potato seeds (TPS), Genger guided farmers through the process of preparing the seeds. Potato seeds, which are similar to but smaller than tomato seeds, germinate best in slightly warmer conditions of around 75 degrees Fahrenheit in the day and 60-70 degrees at night. Temperature spikes over 80 degrees can delay germination.

Seedling vigor can be quite variable in breeding populations, and the most robust seedlings can be selected and potted up to individual pots when the seedlings are 2-3 inches tall. Participating growers transplanted potato seedlings into field or garden plots when they were 30-40 days old, ideally before plants had begun to produce tubers. Since potatoes do not breed true, each TPS-derived plant produced a unique tuber type.

Growers observed plant characteristics such as vigor and pest tolerance and selected their favorite individuals at harvest based on tuber yield and appearance. Zachary Paige, with the White Earth Land Recovery Project, saved tubers from five populations to study. Maria Carter commented that eating quality from his selected lines was as good as the parent potatoes. He continued to save and replant his favorite line, a cross between Yukon Gold and Chieftain, for another two years.

Four lines selected by two other participants (Paul Whitaker of Waasau, Wisconsin, and Pat Dunn of Middleton, Wisconsin) were included in Genger’s organic potato variety trials at West Madison Agricultural Research Station in 2019. These of these lines, derived from crosses between the varieties Huckleberry, Picasso, and Red Endeavor, yielded well in comparison to standard varieties. The fourth, from a cross between Spartan Splash and Red Endeavor, gave lower yields of particularly attractive multicolor tubers and may be suited to garden production.

Participants in this research are working to prove that farmer-selected lines from potato breeding populations can equal or out-perform parental lines. Zachary Paige is working with TPS to select potato lines suited to his growing conditions. He is currently collaborating with the Organic Seed Alliance and other growers in his region to evaluate the economics of certified seed potato production and other seed enterprises. This project is funded by an NCREAS Partnership grant. As part of the project, Paige is facilitating educational workshops on seed saving as well as selling seed for a range of vegetables.

Maria Carter was able to identify optimal varieties for her growing conditions in North Dakota, and now her farm is the second farm producing organic certified seed potatoes in the region. “It has been a gift to do this project with Ruth,” Carter said. “We’d been trying to grow organic seed potatoes on and off for about 10 years. Of course, I had a lot of potato knowledge and background, but we didn’t have enough information to do the organic potatoes. Ruth solidified some things for us with her knowledge and varieties. We’ve been selling our organic seed potatoes using the internet, and last year was a fantastic year for us; we’ve reached our goals and then some. I have a son attending North Dakota State University, and he is looking forward to coming back to be involved in our organic seed potato business line.”

Learn more about this potato project on the SARE project reporting website. Search by project number LNC14-358 at projects.sare.org/search-projects, or contact the NCR-SARE office for more information.

Read more about Genger’s potato breeding research in this article from a 2015 Organic Brewer: moses-organic.org/organic-potato-varieties.

**Work-Life Balance — from page 13**

Although we started out as a diverse market-style farm growing a multitude of crops, we quickly realized it wasn’t a model that was going to work for us. We were in a small rural community filled with talented vegetable growers that were already going to the farmers market, and already providing CSA memberships. We explored local and regional marketplace ideas and determined early on that the best approach for us was going to be to focus on wholesale markets and a handful of high-value crops. We weren’t going to be getting top dollar, but we were going to be able to save a considerable amount of time. We streamlined our systems with efficiencies around a small number of crops. We sent our availability, received orders, then harvested, packed, and shipped without the added time associated with farmers market and CSA models.

We have also worked hard to constrain our work hours to a limited number of hours in a day. Chris Blanchard talked about this in the keynote presentation. By constraining the number of hours we work on the farm each day, we force ourselves to be focused and to make the most of our peak productivity hours. I am an early riser. In the morning, it’s quiet and I can make a coffee and take time to think about the things we need to accomplish that day. It also gives me time for any prep that needs to be done before the staff comes in, so, when our employees are here, we get the most of their effort as well. By the afternoon, it’s usually hot and I am not as productive. This also suits the desire to spend more time with our kids. They are at home at 3:30 each afternoon and most days Katie and I call it a day.

We’ve also made a conscious effort to engage in activities that have nothing to do with the farm. Katie regularly attends yoga classes. I’m in a bowling league. I’m not a great bowler, but I look forward to those Wednesday nights. A few years ago, my parents moved to a nearby lake town. Any chance we get in the summer to spend time playing in the water we do. In fact, their park and rec summer program has a sailing camp and our kids are learning to sail.

The final key component, which is at the heart of our ability to do any of this, is community—all the people who have worked for us over the years both as employees and as volunteer weekend waterers. Without this community of hard-working people, our farm would not exist. The biggest hurdle here is learning to ask for help and being OK with needing help. For whatever reason, farmers often have this “I can do it all” mentality, and it’s just not necessary. Partnerships and community-building make us more resilient and provide the opportunity to live more fulfilling lives. And, to quote Scott Nearing one more time, “An act repeated makes a habit; a habit, repeated, makes character.” And, I would add, it makes community.

Mike Bollinger farms at River Root Farm in Decorah, Iowa. He serves on the MOSES Board of Directors.
Grant opportunities can help farmers accomplish business goals

By Danielle Endvick

Farmers need a broad skill set. From animal caretaker to agronomist, marketer to veterinarian, we wear our fair share of hats. One role that rarely comes to mind for most, though, is grant writer.

I was working as an intern at a statewide agricultural newspaper in 2008 when I first stumbled upon the alphabet soup of grant opportunities available to farmers: EQIP, REAP, FMP, VAPG, etc. At that time, the idea of writing a grant seemed daunting and beyond my reach, certainly something to be left to the professionals. It ended up being over a decade before I finally set foot into my local NRCS office and set the ball in motion on some conservation-focused grant opportunities for my farm.

That hesitant mindset is something the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (MFAI) has set out to change. The nonprofit, based in East Troy, Wisconsin, offers a grants-advising service that is working to empower farmers by linking them with grant and cost-share resources that can help them attain their farming or ag-related business goals.

“We don’t write the grants for people, but do help review proposals and navigate the world of resources available to help grow their farm or business,” said Margaret Krome, MFAI policy program director.

The free service, available to farmers, farm organizations and institutions in the Upper Midwest, is supported by Farm Aid, Wisconsin Farmers Union, and North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE).

Martin Bailkey, MFAI’s grants advisor, said a key aspect of the program is educating about what grants can and cannot do.

“There are a lot of grants out there that cover a lot of ground,” said Bailkey, a seasoned grant writer and proposal reviewer. “But they don’t necessarily represent easy money for someone who wants to renovate their barn, buy farmland, or cover the costs of daily operation for a farm.” While he sympathizes with folks seeking such resources, especially given the current economy, Bailkey often points such inquiries toward USDA low-interest loans.

MFAI’s service helps potential applicants craft proposal around a bigger picture. “The intention behind most grants is not to make one lone farmer more profitable, but rather to leverage outside funds for the benefit of a larger group,” Bailkey said. “A lot of the bigger USDA grants are really community-focused. Some are also targeted at the larger causes of community food systems, conservation, or sustainable agriculture practice.”

Framing Your ‘Ask’

Common mistakes in grant proposals include applicants not fully following application instructions or a failure to align a proposal with the intended outcomes of that particular grant program.

“Once we help identify which grants might fit a project, a key step is helping people think about how to frame what they’re asking for,” Bailkey said.

Bailkey helps applicants identify appropriate programs, assists in drafting thinking points, and reviews proposal drafts. He also manages a list-serv that informs recipients of upcoming application periods and deadlines.

Prior to serving on MFAI’s staff, Krome worked on appropriations for the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and Midwest Sustainable Ag Working Group (which later merged into the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition). In those roles, she saw a need for grant-writing training and educational resources for farmers and other rural stakeholders.

“It was clear to me that especially immigrant farmers and historically underserved farmers needed more than just ‘here’s how to write grants,’” Krome said. “We realized we needed to offer help navigating resources and to help them think through how to develop a good project, stakeholder partners, and assets so the project stands the best chance of being successful.”

Among the grants MFAI frequently recommends to clients are opportunities offered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, State Departments of Agriculture, State Extension Offices, and foundations.

“There are many opportunities out there, especially for farmers interested in conservation,” Krome said. “We encourage folks to connect with their local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office to learn more about things like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), which are intended to support working farmers who are using good conservation practices.”

Given recent climate challenges and difficult market conditions for many agricultural commodities, now may be the ideal time to think about how a grant or low-interest loan could help you rethink certain aspects of your farm business.

“We want people in this period of tough finances to not despair that they can’t get a conventional loan but instead go meet with the Farm Service Agency staff and explore what other kinds of funding are available,” Krome said.

Best-Kept Secret

MOSES In Her Boots Coordinator Lisa Kivirist is one of many farmers who has taken advantage of the MFAI Grants Advising program. She calls it a best-kept secret.

“It’s a great resource that helps farmers stop grant chasing and instead take a strategic look at funding opportunities that meet the needs of their farm and business vision,” Kivirist said.

Kivirist’s advice for other farmers is to start the grant-writing process early, building in enough time to review and improve upon the initial draft with feedback from the MFAI advisor.

“We can all cooperatively tap into these resources to help our farming community,” Kivirist said. “These programs are not just about funding one specific thing on your farm, they’re about bigger solutions for everything. Talking to someone like Martin can help put that lens on it.”

Do yourself a favor, and don’t wait a decade to take advantage of MFAI’s grant resources or to walk into your local NRCS office. Make 2020 the year you set your farm up for success.

Learn more at michaelfields.org/grant-advising. For more information and to sign up for the MFAI list-serv for program announcements, contact Martin Bailkey at 608-698-9478 or martinbailkey@gmail.com.

Danielle Endvick is the Communications Director for Wisconsin Farmers Union.
MOSES Conference
The 31st Annual MOSES Organic Farming Conference takes place Feb. 27-29, 2020, in La Crosse, Wisconsin. This event brings together farmers of all kinds to learn the latest organic production methods and build a supportive community with resilient organic and sustainable farms. The conference offers 60 workshops total with topics in 10 categories, including business and marketing, certification, field crops, livestock, market farming, and homesteading. More than 170 vendors will be in the 2-floor trade show providing supplies, buyer connections, and services to help farmers grow.

Author and farmer Leah Penniman (featured on page 1 of this issue) presents the Friday keynote, “Uprooting Racism; Seeding Sovereignty.” Visionary economist John Ikerd presents “Reclaiming the Future of Farming” for the Saturday keynote.

The conference also offers roundtable discussions, open meetings, an organic research forum, film screenings, and many more opportunities to connect with your farming peers.

Registration is open through Feb. 18. On-site admission will be available starting at 8 a.m. Thursday, Feb. 27. Find details at mosesorganic.org/conference.

Books on Farming
The MOSES Conference bookstore stocks a wide selection of books on farming, the food system, and eating. The selection includes hard-to-find titles, such as Before You Have a Cow and The Northlands Winter Greenhouse Manual. There are also books by conference presenters, including Gianaclis Caldwell and Leah Penniman—Penniman will sign copies of her book, Farming While Black, after her workshop Friday afternoon.

The store also offers MOSES Conference T-shirts and glass mugs as well as “I choose organic!” stuffable shopping bags.

The bookstore is located on the top floor of North Hall. Hours are 5 to 8 p.m. on Thursday for the opening evening of the conference, 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. on Friday, and 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Saturday.

Get a free “Thank a Farmer” wooden spoon with a $50 purchase or a wooden cutting board with a $100 purchase. Bookstore sales fund farmer education—something you won’t get at any other book retailer!

Books on Farming
These titles and dozens more will be available in the bookstore at the 2020 MOSES Organic Farming Conference. Photo by Stephanie Coffman
MOSES Conference Workshop Change

Presenters Eduardo Rivera and Sammi Ardis Rivera of Sin Fronteras Farm & Food aren’t able to attend the MOSES Conference. In place of the work-
shop about their operation, Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin of the Regenerative Agriculture Alliance will present “System-Level Strategy to Decolonize Agriculture.” The workshop, offered Saturday, Feb. 29 at 8:30 a.m. will share the alliance’s strategy to acce-
larate production models designed for scale across five emerging sectors. Hear about this whole-system approach that builds on Indigenous wisdom and traditions as a foundation to deliver what the market needs while decolonizing the methodology of sys-
tems change.

In Her Boots Podcast

The MOSES “In Her Boots” podcast currently features interviews with Barb Perkins of Vermont Valley Community Farm, a pioneering CSA in the Midwest. Host Lisa Kivirist talks with Barb about the CSA model and ways Barb involved members in the farm plus how Barb and her husband, David, managed to retire from farming. New episodes post every Friday. Find the In Her Boots podcast wherever you get your podcasts or listen at mosesorganic.org/ in-her-boots-podcast.

Farming Jobs

The MOSES Farm Job Postings page is bursting with opportunities to join the crews at farms across the Midwest. Find your next job at mosesorganic.org/job-postings. Farmers: Add your farm’s job openings to this popular page—posts are free!

OGRAIN 2020 Conference

Discussions, networking, and presentations about successful organic small grain production will be offered at the 2020 OGRAIN Winter Conference Friday and Saturday January 24-25 on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. Hosted by the Organic Grain Resource and Information Network of Wisconsin-Madison campus. OGRAIN is a project of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Sustainable Cropping Systems Lab, CIAS and MOSES.

Organic Grain Learning Hubs

Through our partnership with OGRAIN, MOSES is organizing farmer-led groups to build communities of support for organic grain farmers around the Midwest. These farmer-led groups will be able to share ideas and practical knowledge, and provide opportunities for collaboration.

To join an Organic Grain Learning Hub, complete the short signup form at bit.ly/OGRAINhub. This information will help us form groups based on location. Interest so far shows potential for groups in Duluth/North Shore, western Wisconsin/Twin Cities, SE Minnesota, western Minnesota, eastern Iowa, central Illinois/western Indiana, and SE Wisconsin. Spread the word in your area to create a viable group.

Organic Workshops in Iowa

The Iowa Organic Association and regional partners will host workshops for agriculture service providers and farmers interested in organic transition. These full-day workshops will provide information about the National Organic Program, organic certification and transition, organic standards and production practices and insight into current organic market trends and demands. The workshop schedule is:

- Tuesday, Feb 4 — Mason City
- Thursday, Feb 6 — Ames
- Tuesday, Feb 11 — Fairfield
- Tuesday, Feb 17 — Council Bluffs

Cost is $20 and includes lunch. See details at www.iowaoorganic.org/calendar or call 315-608-8622.

Perennial Crops

The Savanna Institute has a new series of free “Key Perennial Crops” information sheets in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin’s Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems and the USDA-SARE program. They cover 12 key Midwestern agroforestry crops: aronia, Asian pear, black currant, black walnut, Chinese chestnut, cider apple, elderberry, hazelnut, honeyberry, northern pecan, pawpaw, and serviceberry. See www.savannainsitute.org/tree-crops.html.

National Organic Standards Board

The USDA has announced five new members for the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). Nathaniel Powell-Palm of Cold Springs Organics in Belgrade, Montana, will serve in a farmer seat. Kimberly Huseman from Pilgrim’s will serve in a handler seat, as will Gerard D’Amore of Munger Farms. Eastern Food Co-op Grocery Manager Mindee Jeffery will serve in the retailer seat. Wood Turner with Agriculture Capital will serve in an environmental protection and resource conservation seat. These new members will serve five-year terms beginning in January 2020. The NOSB is made up of 15 members representing the organic community. Learn more about the NOSB at www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic/nosb.

Value-Added Producer Grants

Farmers and farmer-cooperatives may apply now for USDA Value-Added Producer Grants. These grants support farmers looking to expand opportunities by producing and marketing a value-added agricultural product. Planning grants of up to $75,000 may be used to conduct feasibility studies and develop business plans for processing and marketing the proposed value-added product. Working capital grants up to $250,000 may be used for processing costs, marketing and advertising expenses, and some inventory and salary expenses. Paper applications are due by March 10, 2020; electronic applications are due to Grants.gov by noon EST March 5, 2020. See www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/value-added-producer-grants.

Farmer Letter on Climate Change Solutions

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, which includes MOSES, has created a sign-on letter for farmers and ranchers to express their concerns to Congress about climate change and share the solutions agriculture offers. This letter will be sent to Congressional members and leaders at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the spring of 2020. The letter does not endorse specific policy proposals but broadly calls for investments in agricultural solutions to the climate crisis, including soil health, farmland conservation, on-farm renewable energy, sustainable livestock production and more. To learn more about this effort and access the link to sign the letter, go to sustaininagriculture.net/our-work/campaigns/emerging-issue-climate-change-and-agriculture.

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Fair Competition Rules for Livestock
After years of farmer advocates highlighting the need for stronger rules governing the meatpacking industry and poultry contracts, a proposed change to the language of the Packers and Stockyards Act of 1921 is now open for public comment. USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service introduced four criteria aimed at making it easier to determine whether a meatpacker’s actions could be interpreted as providing an “undue or unreasonable preference or advantage” to one producer over another. The rule does not address harm to competition, retaliation, or a farmer’s right to speak out against undue preference concerns. Public comment on the proposed rule will be accepted until March 13, 2020. See the Federal Register rule at bit.ly/MeatpackerRuleChange.

FSMA Produce Safety Rule Trainings
University of Minnesota Extension has created a resource to explain who and what is covered by the FSMA Produce Safety Rule. “FSMA Produce Safety Rule: How does it apply to my farm?” is a seven-minute video that describes what the rule covers and who is “qualified exempt.” Watch it online at extension.umn.edu/news/video-how-fsma-produce-safety-rule-applies-farm. UMN is hosting one-day trainings across the state. In Wisconsin, the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension is collaborating with the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection on trainings. See dates and locations on the Community Calendar on page 20.

Farmland Lease Template
Vermont Law School’s Center for Agriculture and Food Systems recently released a new tool to help farmers and landowners create a fully-drafted lease ready for legal review. The Farm Lease Builder guides participants through a series of questions, allowing them to customize the details, including rent, maintenance, insurance, chemical use, conservation easements, and more. See farmlandaccess.org/farm-lease-builder.

Solar Leases for Farmers

Pilot Insurance Coverage for Hemp Growers
USDA’s Risk Management Agency is offering a pilot crop insurance option for hemp growers in 2020. The insurance will provide Actual Production History coverage under 508(h) Multi-Peril Crop Insurance for eligible producers in designated counties in Alabama, California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin. The coverage is for hemp grown for fiber, grain, or CBD oil. For details, see the news release at bit.ly/RMA-cropinsurance-hemp.

South Dakota Regenerative Farm Directory
The Natural Resources Conservation Service in South Dakota has assembled a directory of agriculture and local foods producers in that state who can talk to others about using regenerative practices. The 35-page directory that lists more than 160 volunteer-mentors by county, giving their contact information along with a synopsis of their soil health-building experience. Request your free directory by contacting any of the partners or visit your local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service or conservation district office. To receive a directory, email colette.kessler@usda.gov or call 605-352-1200.

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stubble hay, large round bales. Organic Wheat Straw, small square bales. Organic


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For the Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development Program, these courses provide information regarding such topics as husbandry practices, housing, records maintenance, biosecurity, and more. Register at ucanr.edu/sites/poultry.

**Eco-Farm Conference**

January 24 - 25 | $ Pacific Grove, Calif.
To learn more, call 831-763-2111.

**Organic Agriculture Research Forum**

January 23 | $ Little Rock, Ark.
This day-long forum is for scientists, organic farmers and ranchers, extension agents, non-profit organizations, and more to explore the latest research and science-based grower education for the Southeast. 831-426-6606.

**Grassworks Grazing Conference**

January 23 - 25 | $ Wisconsin Dells
Email Heather at grassworksheather@gmail.com to learn more.

**Emerging Farmers Conference**

January 23 - 25 | $ St. Paul, Minn.
To learn more, call 651-433-3676.

**ORGAN Winter Conference**

January 24 & 25 | $ Madison, Wis.
Call ORGAN at 608-969-1503 for more information.

**Blazing Trails Workshop**

January 24 | Free | Grand Manan, N.B.
January 24 - 27 | Free | Sartell, Minn.
January 28 | Free | Cold Spring, Minn.
February 5 | Free | Eagan, Minn.
February 5 | Free | Little Falls, Minn.
February 18 | Free | Detroit Lakes, Minn.
February 22 | Free | Sartell, Minn.

“Blazing Trails through the Jungle of Food Regulations” is a project to bring a half-day training workshop about local food regulations to every county in Minnesota. Questions? Call Jane 218-670-0066.

**Science of Plant Propagation Workshop Series: Cuttings, Grafting, and Soils**

January 25 | $ Chaska, Minn.
January 25 | $ Chaska, Minn.
January 28 | $ Chaska, Minn.

Minnesota Landscape Arboretum hosts these workshops that are designed to make college-level plant science accessible to all. 612-644-2000.

**Farm Succession and Estate Planning Workshops**

January 27 | $ Dodgeville, Wis.
January 28 | $20 | Marshfield, Wis.
January 29 | $20 | Menomonie, Wis.
January 29 | $20 | Kewaskum, Wis.
January 29 | $20 | La Crosse, Wis.
February 26 | $20 | Deforest, Wis.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension is hosting workshops in seven locations providing information and resources on farm succession and estate planning. Learn more at farms.extension.wisc.edu/programs/cultivating.

**FACT Webinar: Host a Farm School for Adults**

January 28 | 6 p.m. | Free | Online

Learn about registration processes, pricing, advertising and promotion, programming, and evaluations.

Go to foodanimalconcernstrust.org/webinars to learn more.

**FSMA Produce Safety Rule Grower Training**

January 30 | 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. | $35 | Rogers, Minn.
February 11 | 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. | $35 | Grand Rapids, Mich.
February 20 | 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. | $35 | Farmington, Minn.
April 9 | 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. | $35 | Winona, Minn.
April 14 | 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. | $35 | Lambert, Minn.

Fruit and vegetable farms that are not exempt must attend FSMA training.

**Fellowship of Preparation Makers Gathering**

Jan. 30 - Feb. 2 | $ | East Troy, Wis.
Hosted by Michael Fields Agricultural Institute. 262-642-3303.

**LSP Farm Transition Planning Workshop**

February 14 | $15 | Red Wing, Minn.
February 22 | $15 | Red Wing, Minn.
March 14 | $15 | Red Wing, Minn.

Network with other farmers and landowners and hear from professionals regarding financial, tax, and legal implications of farm transitions. 612-722-6377.

**FACT Webinar: Pasture Management with Sarah Flack**

February 14 | 11 a.m. | Free | Online
February 18 | 11 a.m. | Free | Online
March 3 | 11 a.m. | Free | Online

Join grazing expert Sarah Flack for a 3 part series on pasture management strategies.

Go to foodanimalconcernstrust.org/webinars.

**Sustainable Farming Annual Conference**

February 15 | $10 | St. Joseph, Minn.
To learn more call 844-922-5573.

**Local Food Fair**

February 20 | Free | Stevens Point, Wis.

Farmsheds premier outreach event, bringing together producers, consumers, local businesses, and educators. 715-544-6154.

**FSMA 2020 Local Food Fair**

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**LSP Farm Crisis Workshop**

February 24 | 1-4 p.m. | $50 | Goodhue, Minn.

Create a vision for your ag communities during this economic farm crisis. Light meal provided. To learn more call 507-523-3366.

**10th Organic Seed Growers Conference**


For more information, contact Cathleen at cathleen@seedalliance.org.

**Farm to School Workshop**

February 27 | 8 a.m. - 3 p.m. | Free | Franklin, Wis.

This workshop covers farm to school concepts, food safety, culinary skills, schoolyard garden best practices. Call Kara at 280-310-0527.

**LSP Farm Crisis Workshop**

February 28 | 10:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. | Free | Presto, Minn.

Special guests Dr. Richard Levins and Dr. Joe Neteen speak on the crisis in dairy farming. Light meal provided. To learn more, call 507-995-3541.

**OEEFA’s 41st Annual Conference: A Climate for Change**

February 13 - 14 | St. Dayton, Ohio

**OFA Webinar: How Corn and Soy Imports Impact US Production**

February 13 | 1 p.m. | Online
Register at organicfarmersassociation.org/webinars.

**Northeast Minnesota Farmer-to-Farmer Gathering**

February 14 | 9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. | Forestwood, Minn.

Connect with fellow fruit and vegetable growers in Minnesota and learn about ongoing research in fruit and vegetables.

Contact Kelsey with questions at kelsey.gantzer@aeoa.org or 218-404-8466.

**Indiana Organic Grain Farmer Meeting**

February 19 - 20 | $ | Lafayette, Ind.

Learn 704-494-8491 to learn more.

**Insight Summit Conference**

February 20 - 27 | $ | St. Paul, Minn.
University of Minnesota hosts this summit that will help you to learn new ways to market your small, ag-based business in an online environment. Call 785.532.3504.

**MOSES Organic Farming Conference**

February 27 - 29 | $ | LaCrosse, Wis.
This is the country's largest educational event on organic farming. It features 60 workshops over six sessions, 10 full-day classes, a two-floor trade show, organic meals, and round-table discussions. It is organized by MOSES and the University of Wisconsin Extension. More opportunities to network. Whether you're certified organic, using organic practices on your sustainable farm, or considering the switch to organic, you'll find the latest information, the best resources, and the right connections to help you succeed. 888-90-MOSES

**Annual Design with Nature Conference**

February 29 | $ | St. Paul, Minn.
Call 612-293-3833 or email info@wildonestwincities.org.

**Midwest Soil Health Summit**

March 1 | $ | Lakeville, Minn.
This summit will take place at the Oliver Kelley Farm. Questions? Email jason@sfaj.org.

**Indiana Small Farm Conference**

March 5 - 7 | $ | Danville, Ind.
For more info contact Small Farm Conference at klabau@ Purdue.edu or call 1-888-EXT-NFO (1-888-398-4630).

**FACT Webinar: Managing a Pig Poultry Rotational Grazing**

March 12 | 1:30 p.m. | Free | Online

Presenter Lee Rhinehart of NCAT/ATTRA will discuss how to manage your pigs and poultry in a rotational grazing system. Go to foodanimalconcernstrust.org/webinars to learn more.

**Midwest Organic Pork Conference**

March 13 & 14 | $ | Dubuque, Iowa.

The Iowa Organic association hosts this conference, presenting the best resources and information available to help expand opportunities for organic pork production and distribution. Get details from Kris Winter, Conference Coordinator, at 515-276-6010.

**FACT Webinar: Livestock Compass: A Profit Management Tool for Livestock Producers**

March 18 | 11 a.m. | Free | Online

Presenters John Hendrickson and Jim Munsch will show how to use this tool for your livestock operation. Go to foodanimalconcernstrust.org/webinars to learn more.

**Wyoming Business College Conference**

March 20 - 21 | $ | Cheyenne, Wyo.
For more info call 307-514-6051.

**Best Practices for Pollinators Summit 2020**

March 23 | $40 with lunch | 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. | St. Anthony, Minn.
Learn more at www.pollinatorsfriendly.org.

**FACT Webinar: Trees for Livestock Food and Medicine**

March 25 | 11 a.m. | Free | Online

Presented by Steve Gabriel. Go to foodanimalconcernstrust.org/webinars to learn more.

**Soil Health Innovations**

March 30 - 31 | $ | Bozeman, Mont.
Contact Sandra at sandrab@nact.org or call 406-494-4572 to learn more.

**Soil Health Academy School**

March 31 - April 2 | $ | Belgium, Wis.
Instructors Gabie Brown, Ray Archuleta, Rudy Garcia, Will Allen, and Shane New provide insight on regenerative farming practices. Scholarships available. Call 256-996-3142 or email info@soilhealthacademy.org for more info.