



the **Communicator**

Organic Crop Improvement Association International || Summer 2023

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President's Message

Greetings everyone! Your farmer led board has been working on a number of issues this past spring. As always, our goal is to make OCIA a better place to certify your crops.

First of all, we have a few staffing changes to announce. Our longtime marketing and promotions director, Angie Tunik, resigned and has taken a new job elsewhere while also pursuing a master's degree. We will miss Angie and are grateful for her past service. We wish Angie well in her new endeavors!

Angie's position was quickly filled by Kelsey Sejkora. Kelsey is a former English teacher who is making a career change. We believe Kelsey's knowledge of media trends, especially pertaining to the younger generation, will be an asset going forward. Kelsey will be working out of our headquarters in Lincoln.

We have also approved the hiring of Sonia Whitmore, a part-time reviewer in Canada. Sonia comes to OCIA from a competitor and is a seasoned professional in her field. NOP's SOE (Strengthening Organic Enforcement) rule will go into effect in March of 2024. This ruling will create more work for certifiers. Having Sonia on board will help OCIA meet this challenge.

In other news, OCIA has joined the OFA (Organic Farmers Association). OFA is a lobbying arm for organic farmers and will help keep us informed of happenings within the NOSB (National Organic Standards Board).

The board has also signed a petition requesting the United States Geological Survey continue tracking pesticide use. As of now, the USGS is the only entity that tracks pesticide usage in the United States. With pesticide drift issues increasing, the board feels monitoring the usage of various pesticides is important.

Internally, the board has approved a \$20,000 distribution to the RE (Research & Education) organization. RE is an advocacy group, and as its name suggests, promotes organic research and education. In the past RE has focused its efforts on research, but going forward RE will place more of an emphasis on promoting and educating farmers on the benefits of organic production.

The board is also finalizing details for our membership meeting in Huatulco, Mexico, November 8th – 13th. It has been many years since the board has visited our members in Latin America and we hope this experience will strengthen our ties. This meeting

will give local OCIA farmers the opportunity to network, meet the board, and promote new membership.

Lastly, I'd like to ask all of you to help promote OCIA and organic farming as much as possible. Over the last several years our membership has declined mainly through attrition via retirement of organic farmers. The TOPP program (Transition to Organic Partnership Program) is an excellent way to teach young farmers about organic agriculture. Please consider being a mentor! You will also be compensated for your efforts!

Thank you all for your continued support, and feel free to reach out to me or any of our board members with any questions or concerns. OCIA is a farmer-led organization, and with the various backgrounds of our board members, I'm sure we have the experience and understanding to address any of your unique farming needs.

Chris Jaworski
*OCIA International
Board of Directors
President*

June 30, 2023

Executive Director's Report



Greetings OCIA International Membership!

We are in full swing of 2023 inspection season. If you have not already had your inspection, I am sure yours is quickly approaching. We are still receiving files and trying to coordinate inspections in the most efficient way possible. Cindy does an excellent job in efforts to keep your inspection cost at a minimum.

OCIA is required, as an accredited body, to ensure that all rules and regulations are followed by each operator. As such, OCIA also goes through the process of being audited by accreditors, and we also receive noncompliances that we are required to be addressed. Noncompliances are a continuous part of Organic Certification. Please understand that the process of a noncompliance is part of the Organic Regulations. It is not our intention to be "nitpicky"; we are required to ensure you are following the standards. Noncompliances are part of the certification process, and operators need to respond adequately and on-time, so OCIA can gather the information required by accreditors. OCIA will not be able to allow extra time in the future, and we ask that operators respect the deadlines given.

OCIA encourages operations to seek guidance from fellow chapter members or farmers as OCIA is prohibited from consulting on such matters. Should a noncompliance not be addressed adequately, OCIA is forced to move on to the next step which often results in adverse action, such as a proposed suspension. To avoid this, we ask

that all items are addressed with a timely response.

I would like to welcome new staff to OCIA. Kelsey Sejkora is OCIA's new Marketing Director. She comes to us as a previous high school English teacher. If your chapter would like to attend an upcoming event or tradeshow, please reach out to Kelsey. OCIA International will consider partnering with you and sharing the cost if you are attending tradeshow in your area. We are happy to send you promotional materials and merchandise to represent OCIA International. Please visit our website at www.ocia.org for information about upcoming tradeshow, local farm tours, and other events. Please let us know of your farm tours and we will list them on our website.

OCIA International works hard to provide our certified operators with excellent support and customer service. We thank you for your continued support and look forward to serving you in the future. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

OCIA International will be closed September 13th – 15th for staff training.

I wish you a Happy Summer.

Amanda Brewster
OCIA International

Treasurer's Report



Hello members,

I hope everyone's summer growing season is going well. My second cutting of alfalfa is drying in the field and is ready to bale. Some much-needed rain to keep my crops progressing this crop year fell last week.

I have included some highlights of the current financial picture of OCIA for our members.

The income for the current year is a little behind last year. Certification fees are below last year's receipts at the current time.

On the expense side of the ledger, Accreditation and Government Relations has seen a substantial increase due to EU requirements.

Net income for the fiscal year is currently \$30,500.

Have a great rest of your summer.

Randy Mosel
OCIA International
Board of Directors
Treasurer

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OCIA International Members are welcome to submit items for inclusion in the quarterly issue of the Communicator.

Please direct submissions, article ideas, letters, address changes, advertisements, inquiries, and/or comments to Marketing Director, Kelsey Sejkora, at ksejkora@ocia.org.

Articles and advertisement deadline for the Fall 2023 Communicator is September 1, 2023.



Share your story!

Your hard work, dedication, and success are truly inspiring. OCIA International would love to share your story on our website and social media accounts to help inspire others who are just beginning the organic certification process.

This quarter, we want to know why you decided to pursue organic certification and why you chose to certify with OCIA International.

To be featured, email your story to Marketing Director Kelsey Sejkora, at ksejkora@ocia.org with the subject, "Why I pursued organic certification with OCIA".



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Honey Bees More Faithful to Their Flower Patches Than Bumble Bees

Kim Kaplan || *ARS News Service*

Honey bees are more faithful to their flower patches than bumble bees when it comes to returning to collect more pollen and nectar, according to a study by U.S. Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service scientists.

Overall, 76 percent of honey bees in the study revisited the same plot of alfalfa flowers in contrast to just 47 percent of eastern bumble bees.

But size does matter, especially to bumble bees. They were more faithful to larger flower patches, while the likelihood of honey bees returning to a flower patch was not affected by patch size. Large patches in the study were nearly 15 by 15 yards, each planted with 225 plants, more than twice as many as the small patches, which were about 10 by 10 yards with 100 alfalfa plants each.

To remain faithful to a specific location, an insect or animal requires reliable spatial memories enabling them to navigate complex landscapes and repeatedly return to the

same site. Both honey and bumble bees have demonstrated this ability to return to previously visited foraging locations, so there must be other species-specific factors to explain the differences in patch fidelity observed between the two species, explained ecologist Johanne Brunet with the ARS Vegetable Crops Research Unit in Madison, Wisconsin, who led the study along with postdoctoral associate Fabiana Fragoso.

Differences in patch fidelity could be the result of bumble bees' more explorative foraging behavior—their willingness to invest individually in foraging, often visiting more than one type of flower per foraging bout—compared to honey bees' more highly developed communication system—the honey bees' well-known waggle dance. Honey bee foragers perform the dance when they return to the hive to share the location of valuable food sources with other foragers; bumble bees do not.

“So higher patch fidelity of honey bees, relative to bumble bees, may reflect a greater aversion to risk, be it in terms of wasting

energy and resources or encountering predators” Brunet said.

The better our understanding of the characteristics that drive patch fidelity in important pollinators like honey bees and bumble bees, the better beekeepers, producers and conservation biologists will be able to support pollinators health as well as uphold the essential agricultural need to have crops pollinated to produce a harvest, Brunet added.

But the implications go far beyond that. For example, the pattern of pollination can have potential impacts on gene flow, the way in which gene pools of two separate populations of the same species mix.

“Bumble bees' lower patch fidelity can translate into higher gene flow among the patches they visit, creating a higher probability for bumble bees to move genes longer distances,” Brunet said. “Higher gene flow in plant populations in the natural environment will also tend to homogenize their genetic diversity.”

National Organic Standards Board Fall Meeting

USDA Agricultural Research

The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) generally meets twice each year in a public forum to discuss and vote on recommendations to the USDA. These recommendations help the Department develop and refine the organic standards.

We plan to webcast the meeting live for those who cannot travel. Should circumstances not permit an in-person meeting, the meeting will be held virtually. Updates will be posted to the meeting webpage at the link below.

The NOSB invites oral and written public comment on its fall agenda topics. Registration for oral comment speaking slots will open in late August 2023. Written comments may be submitted via Regulations.gov.

Deadlines: To be considered during the Fall 2023 Meeting, written comments and requests to provide oral comments must be received by 11:59 pm ET on Thursday, September 28, 2023. This timeframe gives the Board time to review the comments before the meeting.

NOSB Meeting Details

Written Comments and Requests to Make Oral Comments Due: Sept. 28, 2023

Online Comment Webinars: October 17 & 19, 2023, Noon - 5:00 pm Eastern

In-Person Public Meeting:

October 24 - 26, 2023, 10:00 am - 6:00 pm Eastern

Marriott Downtown Providence

1 Orms Street

Reservations: Group name – NOSB Fall 2023 Meeting

Room reservation cutoff date: Monday, Sept. 25, 2023

In late August 2023, all meeting materials, including Zoom information to join the live meeting webcast, will be posted on the NOSB Fall 2023 Meeting. Interested parties are encouraged to review the online meeting materials. Posted content will include the meeting agenda, subcommittee proposals, discussion documents and instructions on how to submit oral or written comments.

Stay caught up on the latest news in organic agriculture by following us on Facebook and Instagram! More information on pg. 12.

Organic-focused Education Paves the Way to Technical Skills

Laura Gallagher || AMS National Organic Program

Consumers around the globe often recognize the USDA organic seal but may want to learn more about the practices the organic standards include. During an Introduction to Organic Farming and Gardening Course offered by USDA Human Capital Initiative partner Florida Organic Growers (FOG), Dr. Juan C. Rodriquez taught Valencia College students about the meaning of organic.

On the first day of class, the FOG Education Manager led students in a discussion about food labels, including the USDA organic seal. “For many students, the discussion was eye-opening,” Dr. Rodriquez shared. Most had seen the USDA organic seal, but many were surprised to learn that it is protected by federal regulations on growing, processing, and handling organic products.

The conversation kicked off a semester of learning about organic agriculture. Classes covered topics from crop production to certification, and students participated in weekly experiential learning at the college garden. On a visit to McClean Family Farms, a multi-generational certified organic farm, students learned about how on-farm research trials led to innovative production practices.

The seeds for this class were planted almost a year earlier, when FOG designed an educational program for students interested in careers in organic agriculture. Supported by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) National Organic Program’s (NOP) Human Capital Capacity Building Initiative, FOG worked

with universities to create a program focused on career education and technical skills.

After piloting the course at

Valencia College, Dr. Rodriquez reflected on the program’s success, sharing that “The students believe they can apply their new knowledge as they consider opportunities to become farmers, organic inspectors or other types of organic agriculture specialists.”

Now, NOP is publishing course plans and outlines created by several universities and teams at FOG, Northeast Organic Farmers Association, and Oregon Tilth Certified Organic. These resources are available to high schools, colleges, and universities interested in teaching their own organic-focused courses or programs. By taking these courses, students can develop skills to succeed in a career in the organic sector.

Learn more about all the successful Human Capital Initiative partners and explore program resources in the USDA Organic Integrity Learning Center.



Valencia College students participate in hands-on learning at McClean Family Farms in Florida.

Are you passionate about organic agriculture?

Do you have at least three years of direct experience with organic certification?

Become a TOPP
Mentor

For more information, email Brandon Hill at bhill@OCIA.org.



United States Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Marketing Service
National Organic Program
Transition to Organic Partnership Program

Operator Spotlight Bessette Creek Farm

Brandi Ranger, of Bessette Creek Farm in British Columbia, decided to grow her farm's garlic organically because she and her family wanted to produce high quality food that also had a positive impact on the environment.

"[That] is very important to us as a family," Ranger said.

Through traditional organic farming methods like the use of cover crops and crop rotation, Bessette Creek Farm has been able to improve the quality of their soil, reduce their water usage, and retain moisture in their soil even during the driest months of the year.

The benefits of organic farming have been many. Ranger appreciates that the sustainable organic practices Bessette Creek employs allows the farm to serve their local community. "We're able to continue providing beautiful garlic to repeat and new customers," she said.

Although maintaining an organic operation has many benefits, challenges do arise. Ranger noted that one challenge that transitioning and experienced organic operators face is the expense and time waiting on approvals and reviews, which happen annually.

But pursuing organic certification with OCIA International does come with some perks, even if there are a few challenges along the way.

"I like that [OCIA International] is a Canada-wide [certification agency]," Ranger said. Even though Ranger and Bessette Creek Farm are located in British Columbia, they can ship their organic garlic and garlic products throughout Canada's ten provinces and three territories.

Another perk of certifying with OCIA? "It is international," Ranger said, "if we choose to grow our farm that direction."

For now, though, Ranger and her family are content supplying their local community and others throughout Canada with beautiful garlic throughout most of the year.

You can learn more about Bessette Creek Farm by visiting them online:

- **Website:** <https://www.bessettecreekfarm.com/>
- **Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/bessettecreekfarm/>
- **Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/>

This article is part of a series featuring OCIA International certified organic operators from Canada, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and the United States. The series is published weekly on OCIA International's blog. Interested in being featured? E-mail Marketing Director Kelsey Sejkora at ksejkora@ for more information.



Killing the Crop Killers

Scientific Discoveries || *USDA Agricultural Research Service*

Methyl bromide was used for decades as an all-purpose fumigant to rid the soils of crop-killing nematodes, fungi, and other agricultural pests. But when researchers discovered that it depletes the ozone layer, the United States and other countries began restricting its use to limited types of agriculture. That created problems for a wide range of growers. Nursery operators alone would experience 100 percent crop loss without the fumigants, incurring annual losses of \$14.7 million for fruit and nut tree nurseries and \$9.8 million for rose nurseries.

ARS scientists have shown that anaerobic soil disinfestation (ASD), an organic treatment that temporarily removes oxygen from the soil, is inexpensive and easy to apply, and could become a reliable and cost-effective alternative. But to use ASD, farmers also need a readily available and inexpensive source of carbon to add to the soil. The source also needs to be effective on a broad range of pathogens and pests.

Field trials by ARS scientists in Wenatchee, WA, showed that orchard grass is a highly effective and inexpensive source of carbon for use in ASD treatments designed to control apple replant disease.

The treatment also had a positive side effect: there were significantly fewer weeds in the orchard. These scientists also found that Brassica seed meal is an effective carbon source and it increases the plant's own resistance to replant disease. With carbon sources such as orchard grass or Brassica seed meal, ASD is a promising alternative to methyl bromide fumigation.

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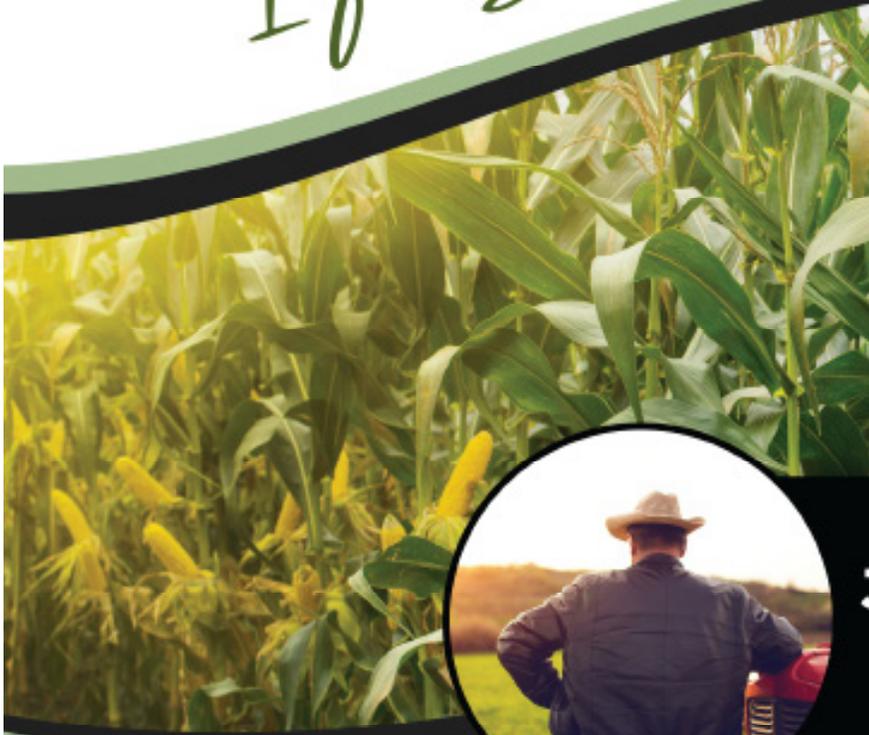
OCIA Field Signs for Sale

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TRANSITION TO ORGANIC

Info Session



Considering transitioning from conventional farming to organic farming?

Do you want to learn more about using cover crops to control pests and weeds?

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Edelman Certified Organic Farm
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AUG | 14th | 2023

10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

RSVP to Kelsey Sejkora by August 7
KSEJKORA@OCIA.ORG

Presentations:

TRANSITIONING TO
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USING COVER CROPS

Lunch Provided



United States Department of Agriculture
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