A Partial History of Early NOFA and Our Alliances

by Jack Kittredge based on work and contributions by Grace Gershuny, Liz Henderson, oral histories of various early NOFA leaders compiled by Robert S. Cox at the University of Massachusetts, and personal Emails and records

Introduction

NOFA has left a dappled history, as have many small and modest organizations. Some individuals, often the ones who speak or write, leave something of a trace. Some activities, again tending to be the ones written about in minutes or newsletters or personal diaries, leave a record. Most people’s memories, however -- the excitement, the discoveries, the relationships, the songs and laughter -- are too ephemeral and subjective to live on their own.

So this will be an attempt to acquaint our newer members with the beginnings of NOFA, and the alliances that helped it get started and grow. You will learn of a few individuals, put together a rough timeline, and hear of some of those early, wishful efforts to live untarnished. But it will be inherently flawed and leave out many important people and events. We still need our Herodotus.

NOFA, along with a dozen other organic farming groups, grew out of the unrest among 1960s American youth. Idealistic movements for racial equality, peace and economic justice had encountered strong opposition, with some faltering and turning upon themselves. An unpopular war was proving unwinnable, but our national leaders kept sending new recruits into its maw. Young people, striving to retain their ideals in a society they saw as reeking with cynicism and greed, sought ways to support themselves without compromising.

For some, the idea of a rural life, raising food in harmony with the earth, was very attractive. The beginnings of an environmental movement, writings on ‘The Good Life’ by the Nearings, Rachel Carson’s dire warning in ‘Silent Spring’, even the hip advice to ‘drop out’ all encouraged that direction for these decidedly urban and suburban young people -- who had no experience of the realities of farming.

Some early NOFA leaders are still active, and others have left strong memories. I mention a few here just to give new readers a sampling of the kind of people who formed the association.

Individuals

Born and raised in Brooklyn, NY, Samuel Kaymen was exposed to all the movements and motivations of the 1960s. Feeling that his life was spiritually undernourished, in 1964 he and his wife Louisa dropped out of the dominant mainstream society. After six years searching they found themselves in rural Unity, New Hampshire, and started their first self-sufficient garden.

With no previous experience in agriculture, Kaymen learned all he could from outdated library books, eventually stumbling across Edward Hyams’ ‘Soil and Civilization’. Hyams argued that when a civilization loses is topsoil it begins its decline. The fall of all the great civilizations of the past could be linked to agricultural collapse. Kaymen was shocked. “I didn’t know that agriculture was...”

The founding meeting of NOFA, held on June 7, 1971 in Westminster, VT, was organized by Samuel Kaymen. He proposed that the organization would teach 9 principles.

Inside this Supplement

Chapter Alliance Experiences B- 2
New York B- 2
New Jersey B- 2
Massachusetts B- 3
Vermont B- 3
New Hampshire B- 4
Wins, Losses, and Work Still To Do B- 5
Working for A Pasture Rule B- 9
NOFA’s Memberships and Alliances B-12
IFOAM B-12
NSAC B-13
NFFC B-14
USFSA B-15
OFA B-16
NOC B-17
AJP B-18
DFTA B-19
Urban Garden Alliances B-20

Published by the Northeast Organic Farming Association, (NOFA), www.nofa.org, 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005, 978-355-2853, tnf@nofa.org
The Natural Farmer

Summer, 2018

NOFA-NY

Collaborations
by Andrianna Natsoulas

NOFA-NY has a long history of collaborations, as all programs and projects flourished when working in partnership. Whether it is farmer to educator education, specific projects with education institutions, or joint policy initiatives, collaboration is at the heart of much of the work we do, as we are a community of farmers, gardeners, consumers, educators, and organizations. Below is a sample of building an organic New York!

Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA), For about a decade during the tenure of Representative Jim Walsh (Congressional Rep from Central NY), NOFA-NY and the New York Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NYSAWG) annually pulled together farmers in the district to successfully lobby Rep. Walsh to be the lead champion of a well-used technical assistance program for farmers: Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas. Every year, ATTRA was zeroed out in the budget, and every year, we would meet with Rep. Walsh, and encourage farmers to meet and make phone calls to ask him to get it funded. While he often told us he wasn’t interested in supporting conservation programs, he always came through, and he eventually became a supporter of organic agriculture. This has formed only as a result of collaborating with NYSAWG and activating organic farmers in his district.

New York Organic Action Plan, Over an eight year period, volunteer members of the NOFA-NY Policy Committee collected input from people across the state who care about an organic future. With waves of activity and spells of dormancy, the process involved hundreds of people through web-based questionnaires and face to face brainstorming sessions. After discussing what is working, what is not working and then putting those ideas within the context of change, an overall goal was set to move New York’s Organic Action Plan forward: Create an ecological New York where healthy food and access to land are considered human rights. NOFA-NY created an infographic so everyone can make a difference and implement the New York Organic Action Plan. We will be presenting this plan to the organizations with whom we worked on GMO labeling for their endorsement and support.

Food Safety Outreach Project. In response to the Food Safety Modernization Act, NOFA-NY partnered with Cornell University, NOFA-VT, and Universities of Vermont to develop the Food Safety Outreach Program to expand Food Safety education to small and mid-sized farms in New York and Vermont. Through support from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, the four partners compile the best training materials, develop curriculum, and conduct on-farm workshops to educate farmers about Food Safety in order to help them create their on-farm Food Safety Plans.

Collaboration by NOFA-NJ
by Adrian Hyde

Collaboration is the number one driver of NOFA-NJ’s success, especially given the very small size of our staff. Nearly all our recent successes have involved effective collaboration in some form. In addition to serving the needs of our producers in NJ, we also strive to stimulate demand for their products with outreach efforts to the general public. There is no way to have a broad reach like this, from production to consumption, without good partners. We have too many partners to list in a short summary, but some of our more recent collaborations are illustrative of how we operate.

Smaller, organic farms are the primary constituents we serve. The range of issues they face requires a breadth and depth of knowledge that no one person could ever hope to attain. Our farmers have questions about business, soil, entomology, certification and other topics. Even within certification, few people can confidently handle production, processing and livestock. Our solution has been to develop a roster of vetted resources, which requires collaboration. For example, on Right to Farm issues, we rely upon our friends at the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC), the very same folks who built and maintain the njlandlink.org resource with us. We conduct most of our workshops at member farms, and we work with other organizations, the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT), National Young Farmers Coalition, and Master Gardeners, to reciprocally promote events. Consumer outreach relies even more heavily upon good partnerships. Public libraries, especially the Princeton Public Library, have given us numerous speaking, book club and film screening opportunities. Locally, social media groups, businesses, Meetup groups, churches and especially universities have been indispensable. We do not have the capacity to take on national issues alone, so we are heavily reliant upon the strength of related or kindred organizations like the NOFA-IC, NOC, Rodale, Weston A Price, Environmental Working Group, Food & Water Watch, the Humane Society, Cornucopia, Moms Across America and others to represent our views with authority.

Recently, our best efforts have been those that involved the most collaboration. Our excellent Neighborhood Shares Program, In collaboration withgrid-supported Agriculture farmers in Rochester and Buffalo, NOFA-NY provides affordable CSA memberships to low-income community members so everyone has access to fresh local produce.

NOFA-NY Field Days, Since 1983, NOFA-NY has collaborated with organic farmers to conduct farmer to farmer education. Over the course of the years, NOFA-NY has worked with 100s of farmers to spread the knowledge of organic farming techniques through high tunnel use, dairy management, food safety, and carbon farming, to name only a small handful of the methods that enhance organic farming. Only in partnerships can we grow local organic food and farm communities across the state, region, country, and world!

Sourcing Health Locally event was a joint venture with The Suppers Programs last September. A few months later, in late 2017, the mayor of Princeton, which is home to many NOFA members, reached out to us to help write a proposal for the prestigious Bloomberg Mayor’s Challenge that addresses problems around food waste. On February 21, Princeton was awarded the distinction of “Champion City”, along with $100,000, to take our plan to the next level. To make that happen, Mayor Lempert convened representatives from several leading organizations, including NOFA. Every grant application we have prepared in 2018 has been strengthened by other parties, including both public and private entities.

The most impactful collaborations are those that bring together people with different backgrounds or viewpoints. Last year, we convened a local grains workshop that brought together conventional and organic farmers. This year, we are all working together on our upcoming Deer Management Symposium. Nothing does more for our movement than an open door with a big welcome mat.

NOFA Chapter Alliance Experiences

A lot of the work NOFA chapters do involves allying with other groups. To understand this process, we asked each NOFA chapter to send us a short write-up showing an example of their building alliances with other groups as a way of accomplishing their objectives. Here is what they said.

Subscribe to:
Natural Farmer
by check (to “NOFA”): send $15 for U.S. address, or $25 for foreign address to: 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005 or by credit card at: thenaturalfarmer.org

Let clients & employers know you’ve got what it takes.
Visit StewardsUSA.org to become a Certified Sustainable Agriculture Professional (CSAP)!

Land Stewards USA
Massachusetts and the GMO Labeling Win that Got Away
by Marty Dagoberto

Organizing by NOFA/Mass in 2005 and 2006 helped to pass local resolutions in 30 Massachusetts towns and cities calling for mandatory GMO labeling. Seeing the local demand in her district that included Amherst, Representative Ellen Story started introducing a GMO labeling bill each year in the state legislature. Support, however, was small until in 2012 a highly contested state ballot initiative in California caught the attention of food activists, farmers and parents across the country.

During that summer the NOFA Summer Conference, not coincidentally, featured the popular anti-GMO author and lecturer Jeffrey Smith, who delivered the keynote and facilitated a preconference communications training. It was here that MA Right to Know GMOs, a single issue action group, formed.

That group, with NOFA/Mass, MASSPIRG and MoveOn.org, built a broader coalition of nearly 500 community groups, environmental organizations, farms and local businesses expressing support for GMO labeling.

By the time the 2015-16 bill was released from committee, it had more than 75% of the state legislators as cosponsors. Many reported it was the #1 issue they were hearing about.

As the end of the legislative session approached, ex- clusion was also building in neighboring Vermont, which was about to enact its own GMO labeling law (July 2016). By this time more than 20 other states had introduced similar legislation and it felt like Massachusetts could be the next to pass.

Late in July, only weeks after Vermont’s law went into effect, Congress passed an industry-sponsored law that pre-empted state level labels. Vermont’s law was null, the Massachusetts GMO Labeling bill was dead.

Despite this, many people learned about the existence of GMOs in our food and try to avoid them.

Voluntary “non-GMO” labels are now quite a common selling point and the USDA is charged with coming up with some sort of GMO label sometime soon.

Here are a few lessons learned about coalitions from that experience.

Structure: We had two tiers: the actual organizing Core of four groups, and then the list of “Network Partners” (approved by the core) endorsing the work of the core. This gave us a “big tent” without getting “too many cooks in the kitchen.”

Each core group had relatively distinct constituencies: the farmers and gardeners, the consumer advocates, the liberal activists. It’s important for legislators to hear from a diverse set of demographics, so this was a strength of the campaign.

Accept that organizations want to put themselves in the lead. Share credit, everyone can repackage progress/wins for their own people. Give groups autonomy on how they talk about the issue to their people. Share materials without “pride of authorship” (promote open sourcing of communication materials.)

Communications: Establish regular communications systems such as weekly calls among the core. Communicate updates and breaking information as needed, first to core then immediately to partners.

Decisions: Aspire to consensus, but only when necessary (ie. for joint statements or synchronized timing of actions, etc.) It never came down to a vote for us, but we had established that in such a case, each group in the core would have one vote, so three out of four would be needed to proceed. I think working toward consensus is the right approach. Keeping the group small makes it possible.

Generally, have autonomy. But be clear about “red lines,” i.e. what NOT to say or do. A partner group suggested putting labeling on the ballot, but we thought our chances were better for legislation and a ballot question would allow legislators to bypass the pressure we were generating. So partners couldn’t support the ballot route as well.

Money: Be clear about finances. Our coalition did not have a shared budget, each organization had to leverage its own resources. Fortunately the fiscal sponsor for MA Right to Know GMOs was a 501c4 and because of the national interest was able to secure us funding for a lobbyist and PR firm. These two elements were of critical importance in the later stages of the campaign.

Don’t avoid hiring professionals to negotiate the tricky waters when you get close to a win. There are some sharks out there who know the waters and will fight you seriously at that point.

Vermont Food Education Every Day (VT FEED), a collaborative project of NOFA-VT and Shelburne Farms
by Abbie Nelson, NOFA-VT Food Systems Education Director

For a non-profit to collaborate with other non-profits on a project is not uncommon in Vermont, given that we have an abundance of non-profits. However, to collaborate for eighteen years on a project—not typical!

Since its inception in 1971, NOFA-VT has served as an educator of consumers about healthy food and has advocated for changes which sustain the local food system. Beginning in 1994, NOFA-VT experimented with school food initiatives, based on organic farmer interest: conducting a pilot food purchasing project at three schools in 1996, and holding a “Vermont Farm to School Forum” in 1998 with a focus on strategies for increasing local purchasing by public schools. We were expert at connecting our family farms -- organic and aspiring to be organic -- with their communities, especially around food. What we were not expert at yet, but were passionate about, was connecting to schools so that local food could be served to school children. We realized we needed to partner with other established food and farm organizations that were working with schools -- Food Works and Shelburne Farms. Thus, the statewide, collaborative farm to school project was created in 2000. The mission of Vermont Food Education Every Day (VT FEED), is to raise awareness about healthy food, good nutrition and the role that Vermont farms and farmers play in our communities.

How is it possible to collaborate for so many years? Why didn’t our organizations finish the project and move on? As the landscape of school food issues was changing, it became apparent that our Vermont organizations would have a greater role in this movement if we worked together to share resources and ideas. Each organization does what it does best, without trying to learn and do it all. NOFA-VT provides training and technical assistance to farmers and school nutrition personnel. Food Works was (it folded in 2014) an educational organization specializing in community-based food/garden curriculum and integrating themes of hunger prevention and ecology into curriculum. Shelburne Farms is a well-established nonprofit education center and working farm dedicated to cultivating a conservation ethic by teaching about stewardship of agricultural and natural resources and by practicing sustainable rural land use.

Collaborating, which requires joint decisions, joint fund raising, joint staff hiring, and shared administrative tasks has not always been easy or efficient. Imagine the number of meetings! However, we have purposefully kept Vermont FEED as a project of two strong partners who continue to grow the farm to school movement in Vermont. In addition, as new farm to school initiatives started in communities across Vermont, we saw the need for statewide network building to share the ideas and strategies for addressing farm, food and nutrition issues and identify some of the key economic and policy issues. Now the Vermont FEED partners are the backbone of our statewide farm to school network. With about thirty other organizations and state agencies we have developed a shared goal to address food system changes at both the local and state level and become a Farm to School model project nationally.
NOFA-NH Alliances
by Nikki Kolb

NOFA-NH aligns with many of New Hampshire’s most active and renowned organic farmers, producers, markets, distributors, programs, educators, associations and fellow non-profits.

Through our collaboration with MainStreet Book-Ends in Warner, NH, we bring together incredible authors with a vast array of knowledge on relevant topics at our annual Winter Conference, further engaging our community through book signings at our conference’s Green Market Fair. This year, MainStreet Book-Ends worked with NOFA-NH and participating authors and conference presenters to showcase the books of Phillip Ackerman-Leist, Will Bonsall, Ross Conrad, Andrew Mefferd, Dr. Daphne Miller, Michael Phillips, George Heilshorn and Nathan Searles. This important alliance adds so much value to our winter conference, its attendees and community each year.

Since 2013, NOFA-NH has participated in NH Gleans with partners Seacoast Eat Local, NH Farm to School and the Seacoast Gleaning Coordinator. NH Gleans is a network of organizations working to increase the availability of fresh and local produce that would otherwise go undistributed or unsold, and donates that food to partnering community organizations. Our alliance with Seacoast Eat Local and NH Farm to School enables NOFA-NH to provide gleaning services throughout the seacoast area of our state. Last year, Seacoast Gleaning Coordinator and volunteers collected 17,620 pounds of food that was distributed through the NH Gleans network of 85+ community partner organizations.

NOFA-NH’s alliance with Concord Food Co-op benefits both organizations’ members and the community at large. Through this alliance, NOFA-NH provides discounts to Co-op members on our programs such as bulk ordering and conferences. In turn, the Co-op aids NOFA-NH in fundraising and outreach for programs such as our subsidized Farm Share Program. Concord Food Co-op and its farm Shaker Organic Gardens are a Farm Share Program partner. Last year, the Co-op and Shaker Organic Gardens were one of 8 certified organic NOFA-NH member farms that provided subsidized CSA shares to 40+ low-income NH residents.

In 2017, NOFA-NH worked with NOFA-VT and NOFA/Mass to organize a series of rallies for the Keep the Soil in Organic movement. We continue to explore The Real Organic Project, and hosted project leaders Dave Chapman, Roger Noonan and Michael Phillips during a panel discussion at our 2018 Winter Conference. Upholding and educating the public about soil health remains one of NOFA-NH’s primary policy initiatives.

We also collaborate frequently with our neighbors, NOFA-VT and NOFA/Mass. Our work on the NOFA Cost of Production Project resulted in the publication of 8 robust fact sheets outlining the cost of production of vegetable crops commonly grown in the Northeast. The factsheets support farmers’ production planning and assists them in increasing the profitability of their farm businesses. These resources have been immensely valuable to NH growers.

Much like soil microbes and mycorrhizae interact to create rich soil and healthy plants, our alliances enable NOFA-NH to enrich our community and carry out our work.

Stay connected with our authors, learn about new releases, and get special discounts!

Sign up for our newsletter at ChelseaGreen.com/newsletter-signup and you’ll receive a coupon code for 25% off of a future order just for signing up!

Since 1984, Chelsea Green has been the leading publisher of books about organic farming, gardening, homesteading, natural building, sustainable living, socially responsible business, and more. Now employee-owned.
We have opposed mandatory irradiation of foods for food safety and the sale of cloned animals for human food, so far with little success. And we did win the labeling of irradiated foods.

Although it took five years to change federal policy on crop insurance, organic farmers no longer have to pay an extra premium only to be reimbursed at conventional prices. The organic crop insurance premium is good news for organic farmers who receive organic prices. A new program insures Whole Farm Revenues and gives a premium for farms that have more than three crops. Gradually, this program is being implemented in the region and could be of special interest for smaller diversified farms.

The Food Safety regulations are final, though some sections like water testing are still not resolved. The huge coalition of farm groups that worked on FSMA has been successful in getting FDA to recognize that safety measures should be different for family-scale farms than for large-scale processors. NOFA has been working on food safety as a member of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) and the GMO Labeling and Commercialization

Although we lost our state level fights for GMO labeling when it was preempted by the DARK Act of 2016, that legislation does require some sort of labeling. In expectation of the Vermont GMO labeling bill, some food manufacturers started labeling their products right on the package and continue to do so. USDA is still pussyfooting around with how to do it and may yet come out for QR codes instead of on-package labels.

For decades, NOFA members have wanted farms and food manufacturers to make information on all chemicals and irradiation used on foods and in food production available to the buying public. We still have a lot of work ahead to make full transparency labeling a reality. We have made no headway yet on a draftorium on GMO commercializations or plantings.

Fracking and Licensing Undocumented Workers

Together with many other residents of the NOFA states, we have helped hold off hydraulic fracking for gas. This battle is far from over, as is the effort to prevent the construction of the pipelines and other infrastructure for storing and exporting natural gas and liquified natural gas.

In Vermont, Migrant Justice led the successful campaign for legislation to allow undocumented people to access drivers’ licenses. In NYS, NOFA-NY supports the Green Light NY campaign for similar legislation headed up by Alianza Agricola.

NSAC’s long list of achievements

• Substantially increased farmer awareness of funding opportunities offered through the Value-Added Producers Grants Program
• Increased opportunities for direct marketing from small family farms to consumers through the Farmers’ Market Promotion Program (FMPP).
• Secured designations for FMPP in 2001, led the campaign to secure its addition to the farm bill in 2002, and secured mandatory funding for the program in 2008.
• Expanded the scope of FMPP in the 2014 Farm Bill, transforming it into the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP), by crafting and securing legislative champions for the Local Farms, Food, and Jobs Act (LFFJA) — a marker bill which expanded support to local and regional food systems.
• Secured financial and technical assistance for very small business start-ups through the Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program.
• Secured loan guarantees for local and regional food enterprises to help rebuild infrastructure for a healthy food system through the Local and Regional Food Enterprise Promotion of the Business Industry (B&I) loan program (2008 Farm Bill).

The NOP

In 1998 NOFA was part of a large coalition demanding that USDA withdraw the NOP from a moratorium. By the time USDA had published the NOP as a Final Rule, the NOP was opposed by USDA plans for a National Animal Identification Program. After a few years of trying, USDA seemed to have given up on that one.

We opposed a research program. After a few years of trying, USDA members would like NE farmers to be over 90% of the food eaten by people in our region comes from third parties (grocery stores, food manufacturers, etc.), farms will need a reliable label to communicate with the public.

Hemp, Labeling and Food Safety

NOFA-NY members would like NE farmers to be able to legally grow industrial hemp — that day gets closer. In hemp, farmers can grow hemp if the right research is done.

We supported USDA plans for a National Animal Identification Program. After a few years of trying, USDA seems to have given up on that one.
Al Johnson came to his interest in farming after getting ill in second grade and changing to a healthier diet. He graduated in environmental education at Boston University and after a stint in the Peace Corps in Solomon Islands, came to Vermont, taking a job under Gershuny setting up educational on-farm workshops and the first winter conference in 1980. He also was an early certification inspector where NOFA worked with the state, before being NOP. Al eventually settled in New Jersey, helping start the NOFA chapter there and serving on the board for many years.

A pioneer in organic agriculture in New England, Bill Duesing graduated from Yale University in 1964 and worked as a Cooperative Extension agent before turning to organic principles in the early 1970s. In 1971 he founded Run Farm in Connecticut NOFA started as an outgrowth of his work as an extension agent promoting solar energy and energy saving. In 1990 an organic landscape workshop at the summer conference got a number of landscapers interested in learning organic approaches as alternatives to using many of pesticides. Eventually this resulted in the Organic Land Care Program, which developed standards for accredita- tion and then a five-day training course in 2001. This program was hosted at the CT NOFA chapter, of which Bill was executive director.

Another early member who came to NOFA through the back-to-the-land movement in 1970 was New York’s Steve Gilman. A market gardener seeking to make his living from the land without chemicals because of their impact on food and the environment, he avidly sought information from whatever sources were available: Rodale, the Nearthings, Cooperative Extension, and focused on learning how to make his farming sustainable. He read all he could about what he would call a farm and had linked up with NOFA figures such as Kaymen and Houriet, and would later be helpful in building the NY NOFA chapter.

A farmer, activist, and writer, Elizabeth Henderson has played a strong role in NOFA since the 1970s. Although a city kid, she discovered rural America as a teenager at summer work camps and loved the experience. After completing a doctorate at Yale on the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky in 1974, she took a job at Boston University as a professor of Russian literature and culture. The sudden death of her husband in an auto accident, however, put her distaste for academic hierarchy, changed her career plans. In 1979 she and a group of friends purchased 65 acres in Gill, Massachusetts, built a house, barn and greenhouse there, and began cultivating the land.

She formed an organic certification committee for local farmers and helped organize a Massachusetts chapter of NOFA in 1982, of which she was the first president. In 1988, however, she moved to New York and began teaching first on Rock Valley Farm and later on Peacook Organic Farm. In both cases she established CSAs, a marketing innovation which had been successfully tried out in Germany, and she served actively in NOFA-NY on the board, on the Interstate Council, and as a founder and NOFA emissary to fraternal groups such as the Agricultural Justice Project.

The earliest activities of NOFA were those necessary to help the members survive as farmers, including education and training about how to practice this new and strange trade. Coming largely from an academic background, many early NOFA members were seeking information from established authorities such as government and universities. But these were the very institutions that were peddling chemical agriculture – what NOFA members wanted to avoid.

But NOFA also sought out information from practitioners of cutting edge thinking experimenting with new materials and technologies. The work on greenhouse growing, aquaculture and alternative energy that had recently taken place at the nearby New Alchemy Institute on Cape Cod, particularly, was studied by many early NOFA farmers. Co-founders John and Nancy Jack Todd were among the Wilson guests who gave occasional workshops.

Anarchist theories shaped some early organizational efforts in NOFA. Just as in the recent “occupy” movement, officials and hierarchical structures were suspect as standing in the way of true democracy. Decentralization was a goal. Anarchist Murray Bookchin was a popular early speaker at NOFA events, and both Robert Houriet and Grace Gershuny mention being influenced by his talks and writings.

In flyers and posters announcing the 1971 founding meeting of NOFA, Samuel Kaymen had written a how-to list that anyone could teach. They included such topics as proper composting, seeding, weeding and other aspects of farm production. Connor序ertziously missed from the list, however, was marketing.

“This shows how naive I really was,” Kaymen later said (1998).

Without marketing, of course, even the best farming techniques would not bring early NOFA growers the farm viability that eluded so many of them. So the organization set up trucking operations to get produce to markets like New York, organized farmers markets to sell product locally, made close connections with wholesalers and helped larger growers ally with others to establish farmer coops which could collect, clean and package crops to meet the requirements of wholesale, and to educators members about minimal crop quality standards.

As Grace Gershuny remembers it in her book, Organic Revolution:

“Early NOFA organizers aimed to distribute produce organic farmers in Vermont and New Hampshire to activists and food coops in northeastern cities. This entailed costly and time-consuming truck routes to pick up a case of broccoli here and some carrots there, and barely paid the cost of delivery for products of very questionable quality—when payment was even involved. Jake Guest, one of the earliest
growers, then based at Wooden Shoe Farm in New Hampshire, tells a story about a load of Chinese cabbage bound for Chinatown in New York City that ends [with the proposed buyer shouting], “that not cabbage, that garbage!” It didn’t take too long or too many truck breakdowns to convince the guys (and it was primarily guys at that time) that this was not exactly sustainable.

“Despite the prevailing distrust of the profit motive, though, a serious group of growers quickly learned that you can’t make a living growing vegetables—you have to sell them. A change of strategy was clearly called for, and the group quickly adopted a new mission of “local food for local markets.” The focus would now be on revitalizing agriculture and helping the predominantly dairy farmers in our region diversify by initiating farmers markets and wholesale grower cooperatives. Quite a bit of research and analysis went into discussions about the feasibility of eating more locally and seasonally, along with despair over the lack of infrastructure for accomplishing that goal.

“The resurgence of farmers markets in the 70s and 80s is one of the success stories of the early alternative agriculture movement. Farmers markets were at first viewed with suspicion by conservative local merchants, who feared that they would take business away from established grocery stores. “We don’t want that kind of people hanging around in public areas,” was the response I got in 1975 when I set out to organize a farmers market in Newport, Vermont, about twelve miles from our home. We contented ourselves with a less central location in the neighboring hamlet of Derby, with support from a sympathetic merchant. For two or three years we had only a handful of vendors, including crafts and baked goods. I was the largest produce grower, generating almost $400 from my half-acre garden in my best season—enough to pay the taxes, anyway.”

Certification

Although education and marketing assistance were early needs of member farmers, perhaps the most iconic effort of NOFA was to propose and agree upon standards to enshrine organic practices and divergent verification procedures. As the organic movement grew, and diversification was clearly called for, the need for a common set of standards to verify which farms were in compliance with those standards became important. A committee was formed to do just that. The committees were voluntary, as were the inspectors who had to be approved by local farmers. Farmers had to be approved by the committees as well.

“Of course, the movement was at that point more an ideology than a reality, comprising a tiny portion of national food production. But by the late 1970s, there was a growing concern fit perfectly with the growing public interest in organic foods. NOFA or one of its members were on the launch teams of many new programs that were on the books. All these programs had a common set of basic organic principles which they all agreed upon standards to enshrine organic practices and divergent verification procedures. The committees were voluntary, as were the inspectors who had to be approved by local farmers. Farmers had to be approved by the committees as well. The inspectors usually had to be paid for their time and travel. There was a constant comparison of standards between the different certification programs—which were inherent allies in needing to keep standards, paperwork, and fees reasonable to farmers while assuring consumers that the label meant something.

At first only a trickle of growers sought certification. They were selling their products locally, to people who either were not concerned about their growing methods or were happy to buy direct from a producer they trusted. Occasional stories of fraudulent organic claims were not enough of a motivation to most farmers to go to the expense and hassle of certification. As the organic market grew, however, and particularly as stores and distributors became important players, third-party verification increasingly was required to make a sale.

Organic Goes Federal

Certainly the most intense period of activity involving NOFA in associations was the period of 1989 and 1990 during which the Organic Foods Production Act (OPPA) was drafted and presented to Congress.

In early 1989 the CBS news program ‘60 Minutes’ ran a segment produced by the National Resources Defense Council on Agra, a ripening agent applied to apples that had been found to be carcinogenic. The public response was immediate anger, with apple sales nose-diving and parents dumping jars of juice down the drain. This storm of public concern fit perfectly with the growing consumer demand for organic food and encouraged Senator Patrick Leahy in his efforts to give “organic” a legal federal definition and create a USDA label for such food.

Organic farming groups, needing to confer on this pending development, organized an unusual national meeting in Leavenworth, Kansas in December of 1989. The Organic Food Production Association of North America (OFAN/A), organized in 1985, helped get representatives from across the country to come and many, who had been reading about each other for years in newsletters, met for the first time. Kathleen Merrigan, the Leahy staffer charged with drafting the law, had sent out early versions of the legislation. She came, answered questions and listened to farmer concerns, changing some aspects of the law on the spot.

The groups meeting formed a fledgling Organic Farmers Associations Council (OFAC) with Tom Forster, who had worked on the Oregon Tilth organic program and with Gene Kahn at his Cascadian Farm in Washington State, as solo staffer.

Grace Gershuny describes what happened next:

‘An unprecedented scenario unfolded in Congress in the spring of 1990. The Organic Foods Production Act (OPFA) was introduced as one of many titles included in the omnibus legislation known as the Farm Bill, which was moving through Congress that year with little fanfare. Introduced by Senator Patrick Leahy, Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, it won easy passage there, but the House version, introduced by Representative Peter DeFazio of Oregon, faced undisguised hostility in that chamber.

A lobbying campaign brought organic farmers and a host of allies to Washington to meet with their Representatives, who were also bombarded with letters and phone calls from members of the Organic Foods Act Working Group (OFAWG), an informal coalition consisting of OFAC’s thirty-five member organic producer groups plus 25 environmental and consumer public interest groups. The higher-rolling organic business community, organized as the Organic Foods Alliance, also played a role in the lobbying effort. As a result, the OPFA was introduced on the floor of the House where it narrowly passed, and President Bush (the first) signed it into law— an event that has been called “a legislative miracle.” For the first time since the Reagan administration abolished it ten years earlier, the “O” word was now grudgingly accorded official credibility.

As Gershuny so vividly relates, the ability of the farming and the consumer halves of the good food movement to form an alliance was crucial in getting the OPFA passed. (When those two parts of the movement were on opposite sides, as occurred in 2010 during consideration of the Food Safety and Modernization Act, what passed Congress satisfied neither side.)

Of course, the movement was at that point more a vision than a reality, comprising a tiny portion of national food industry dollars. It was simply not on the screens of the major food companies, enabling us to work below their radar and pass measures that seemed to guarantee strong and independent organic standards. It has taken them almost 30 years to roll back those guarantees.

New Alliances?

During those 30 years, however, organic farmers have also been at work—building a supply of quality food, informing consumers about what to look for, and educating themselves about better and better practices. NOFA has been in the forefront of
farmer groups doing this work, widening the circle of support for a good food movement.

Many potential allies now present themselves to help us build toward our original vision of living meaningful lives in harmony with the earth. There are of course the consumers, still worried about toxins, carcinogens and other poison and contaminants we put into our food. And there are the environmentalists, concerned about soil, water, air and biodiversity – all things that the industrial food system seems to believe are expendable. We have long counted these folks as our friends, most of the time, for a long time.

But the continuing failures of modern corporate agriculture have awakened new allies to whom we need to reach out. Alternative energy proponents have become far more conscious of the role of factory farming in increasing demand for fossil fuels, from use synthesizing fertilizers or petrochemicals to fueling food production, processing and distribution. Smaller farms using fewer chemicals and selling locally can make a big dent in the fossil fuel picture. Decentralized, local food production and marketing also are attractive to those concerned for the values of animal welfare and social justice.

Interest in alternative health has skyrocketed over the last generation. Cancer and degenerative diseases of all kinds are growing at epidemic rates. More people now understand that “Let food be thy medicine” is not only good advice but is crucial to our survival. And they know the food being discussed is not processed, fumigated, irradiated, and adulterated. It is food grown simply in healthy soil by traditional methods. And guess who is growing that?

Perhaps most encouraging of all these new forces is the expanding scientific understanding about soil carbon’s ability to act as a sink for atmospheric carbon dioxide. It can mitigate climate stresses for a period, giving us a respite to gain control of emissions and bring them to sustainable levels. Farmers are better prepared to sequester carbon than anyone else on the planet.

We have the keys to solving many modern problems in our hands, which might surprise (and would certainly please) our early NOFA predecessors. Maybe they weren’t so naïve after all!
New York’s St. Lawrence County -- the state’s largest -- is also its northernmost, bordered by the St. Lawrence River and, across the river, Canada. The part of the river bordering the small towns in the northwest corner of the county is known as the ‘Thousand Islands,’ named after some 1800 islands in just a few miles of river. It developed as a playground for the rich and super-rich during the ‘Gilded Age’ between the Civil War and World War I, with wealthy families buying whole islands and building vacation homes on them. George M. Pullman of sleeping car fame, as well as the heads of Scribner’s Magazine, Macy’s Department Store, the American Tobacco Company, and the Singer Sewing Machine Company were some of the executives creating such island ‘castles’. For the merely rich, sumptuous hotels were erected on islands and shore alike, reached by rail and then river steamboats. It was quite common for families of the rich to spend all summer there to escape the heat of New York City.

Today the renown of the Thousand Islands has largely disappeared. For the enjoyment of the remaining summer tourists, some old town halls along the river, once luxurious with second floor theaters devoted to opera production, have been renovated and the upstairs turned into auditoriums for contemporary music and theater with the downstairs now made into gift shops selling local art and crafts. Out on the river one can still buy passage on a tour boat to learn the history of the castles and mansions one is drifting by, built during the region’s heyday.

Agriculture, of course, has long been the occupation of the not-so-rich of the area. The farmland soil along the river is as flat as alluvial soil deposited anywhere, but is not ideal for agriculture composed as it is largely of glacial till with marine silt and clay sediments. Yet it is good enough to have supported numerous dairies over the years. Before the advent of fluid milk as the dairy product of choice, buttermilk and cheese sales paid the farm mortgage. In the 1880s there were 92 creameries in the county, 7 in the town of Hammond alone. Factory Road in that town was so named because of the cream ‘factory’ situated there.

Although that factory has long been gone, failing as dairy preferences changed and demand mounted for fluid milk in the early part of the 20th-century, a farm on Factory Road, two miles from Canada, is where Brian and Liz Bawden have raised their family and still milk 55 cows.

Liz is president of NODPA (Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Association) and a member of the NOFA-NY board. “I grew up in Springfield, Massachusetts,” she relates. “My dad was an accountant. But I went to UMass and I always wanted to farm. I remember a conversation with my dad and he looked me in the eye and said: ‘Do you have any idea how hard your grandparents worked to get off their farm?’ (She laughs.) That was true. I remember my grandmother hated cows!”

Liz was trained as a naturalist. She worked in parks and museums, mostly – for the Audubon Society in Massachusetts, the Connecticut Children’s Museum in West Hartford, the Dallas Nature Center, and ended up with the Toronto Conservation Authority at Blackcreek Village, organizing their interpretive staff. That is where she met and soon married Brian, becoming a dairy farmer by marrying one.

“It’s handy on the farm,” she suggests, “to have a person who knows how to identify grasses or knows what kind of a tree that is. Being a naturalist isn’t bad, but I’m not so good at fixing things!”

Bawden feels that farming, for women, is a way of working to contribute to the support of the home, and raising your family at the same time.

She says: “You are gardening, canning, doing the housework, working in the barn – doing all those things while you still have your kids. You don’t have to farm them out to anyone else. A lot of women don’t have that choice. I think it is really important to kids to have both parents with them when they are growing up. On a farm you can have that.

“Nathan,” Liz recalls, “when he was three years old was feeding out the salt and minerals to the cows from his little pail and teaspoon. He knew every cow, remembered their faces. That teaches kids, at a very young age, that they have a contribution to make. And they want to help. ‘When the tricycles leave the barn, that’s the end of the farm’ is really true of dairies. You always want another generation coming along.

But it took awhile for Liz to get used to the isolation of farming.

“My job was really coordinating a staff of 60 people,” she says, “who all did really cool and neat things. But I went from having this huge, giant group of people I interacted with all the time to a bunch of cows. It’s a massive change and it took me a while to adapt to it. Brian, however, is the kind of gruff farmer who can work all day by himself and not need to see people.”

Brian’s grandfather came to Canada as a child, as one of the many who were brought over from Britain during the air raids in World War II. He ended up as a classic mixed farmer there - shipping cream and raising crops, beef, poultry and a little of everything.

Canada has a supply management system, so dairy farmers have a quota, based on kilos of butterfat.
Organic Dairy Producers at the 2009 NODPA Field Days hosted by Roman Stoltzfus at Spring Wood Organic Farm in Kinzers, PA

they have the right to ship. Brian wanted to go in a different direction, though, and sold his quota. Then Liz became pregnant and the couple decided if they could possibly farm without her having to go back to work, they would. But things were difficult on the farm without a quota, so they decided to move to the US.

“We were starving to death up there,” Liz recalls. “Brian looked at 40 different farms. This one wasn’t the best, but it was what we could afford. He still had family in Canada so we wanted to be close to the border. We moved to Hammond in 1999, paying $70,000 for the house and 120 acres.”

Brian had read about organic farming (or ‘ecologi
cal farming’ in the 1970s. One day he mentioned it to the milk inspector, saying: “You know I’m kind of interested in organic. If there is an organic milk market we should check that out.” The next day the man from Horizon Organic was in the driveway with a contract! They shipped their first organic milk in September of 2000.

Over the years their son Nathan grew into a young man and they built the herd up to 115, counting the calves, heifers and dry cows. The original farm did not have enough land for a herd that size, so they also bought two nearby farms, ending up owning 425 acres plus a second house.

“And about 18 tractors,” Liz says, rolling her eyes. “We do 99% of the work with 5 of them, but my husband and son got into admiring different old tractors for various aspects of performance. Fortunately, Nathan is good at fixing them up and making them look as good as new!”

The relatively low price of land along the northern reaches of St. Lawrence County has attracted several Amish communities to the area. Their black buggies and horse-drawn equipment are evident on local roads and fields.

“Dairy is the main Amish cash income,” says Brian, “but the milk processors aren’t taking on any new dairy farms so it is a tough time for them.

“They milk by hand,” he continues, “and take the milk in milk cans to their community milk houses, where there will be five to six electric coolers. The facility has to be in the coop’s name to have electricity in, and bills the farmers back. The facility has to be in the coop’s name to have electricity in, and bills the farmers back.

“We would review the farms,” she explains, “and give our feedback. I didn’t know much about vegetable farming, so I learned a lot about that. But when they got a dairy they would give it to me to review. I did that for a number of years. I got to know Lisa Engelbert (certification program administrator) very well that way. I didn’t really have too much to do with the overall NODPA-Chapter since we were busy farming. But only a year ago or so I was asked to join the board. I think they wanted another farmer on the board and thought they should have some dairy representation.”

Liz has been active in the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers’ Association (NODPA) since 2002. She appreciates the fact that organic dairy farmers are so willing to share information with each other.

“They work together,” she says, “help each other out, share their special secrets. Conventional dairy people tell me that is really unusual. If you have a sick cow or calf, what do you do? You can’t bring out the drugs. You can’t call your vet for a diagnosis because the vet will likely just tell you here are the drugs you should have. In the early days people would just go on the computer with a listserv like Odairy and type ‘I have a sick cow, what should I do?’ People would chime in ‘Try this’ or ‘Try that’.”

Milk Economics 101

Milk is a nutrient-dense fluid and supports rapid microbial reproduction, which can spoil the milk. Extreme temperature is usually used to prevent that. Cold below 40˚F slows microbial growth and heat above 145˚F for 30 minutes (or 161˚F for 15 seconds) kills almost all microbes. Federal and state laws require that virtually all milk and dairy products sold in the US must be pasteurized. Thus it is chilled immediately after milking, picked up daily at the farm by a processor, taken to a processing facility, and heated to the required level for pasteurization.

Cold milk can go a day from being picked up until it is processed. The tankers aren’t refrigerated, but they are insulated so the milk will stay cold for a while. In the Northeast we have a lot of consumers and not enough farms to supply them. So for the most part we are constantly trucking milk in from other regions that are oversupplied.

When the Bawdens converted to organic, Horizon was the only organic brand picking up in the area. Now at least four processors – Horizon, Organic Valley, Maple Hill and Upstate Farms – serve the region with trucks. That competition is a good thing for farmers. But there is a national oversupply of organic milk and the producer’s relationship with the processor is not as firm as it once was.

“Now you don’t actually get a contract,” says Brian, “just a letter of commitment – at least from Horizon. It’s all in their favor. They can terminate at any time, but we can’t. The way the price works is they submit to the market price. It used to be about $2 an hundredweight but that has been declining. Then there would be additional premiums, which could be worth up to an extra $1.10. There are premiums for components like butterfat, premiums for quality and what they call ‘market adjusted’ premiums.

“For example,” Brian continues, “cows produce a lot of milk in the Spring when the grass is lush. So your cows will peak then, up to a thousand pounds a day more, for a small herd. But the market is gener ally stable all year, so the processors don’t really want seasonal herds with the cows calving in the Spring and then tailing off and going dry in the Fall. So usually there is a Winter premium that goes for three of four months, starting in December.”

“Also,” adds Liz, “when we were young, butterfat was supposed to be bad for you. Now they realize we need animal fat and so butter is good for you. Skim milk is not good for growing children. There has not been a farm-separated cream industry in this country for a long time – probably a couple of generations. But in Canada they had one until the 1980s. Cream shipping was another way to farm. When they farm for cream they are not allowed to take the milk to Toronto, the milk trucks didn’t run in the winter. The roads were not passable enough. So you just shipped cream. You could bring a couple of cream cans to the local creamery but the processor would not pick it up from your farm. That is how people survived. You were a mixed farm. You sold the cream, fed the skim to your cows, veil calves, pigs and even chickens.

If you have a Holstein herd like the Bawdens the average butterfat of your milk is about 4%. With Guernseys or Jerseys it will be higher. At a buttermilk count above 3.5%, which is considered whole milk, the farmer gets a premium.

The primary factor that dairy farmers can control, when it comes to farm viability, is the diet of the cows. In non-organic operations the conventional wisdom holds that if you keep cows in a barn and don’t put them out, they will use less energy on exercise and you will thus get higher milk production. But a lot of organic farmers feel that pastured cows are healthier because of the exercise they get, and also the nutrients they consume.

“Dairy is the main Amish cash income,” says Brian, “but the milk processors aren’t taking on any new dairy farms so it is a tough time for them.

“They milk by hand,” he continues, “and take the milk in milk cans to their community milk houses, where there will be five to six electric coolers. The facility has to be in the coop’s name to have electricity in, and bills the farmers back. The facility has to be in the coop’s name to have electricity in, and bills the farmers back.

“Dairy is the main Amish cash income,” says Brian, “but the milk processors aren’t taking on any new dairy farms so it is a tough time for them.

“They milk by hand,” he continues, “and take the milk in milk cans to their community milk houses, where there will be five to six electric coolers. The facility has to be in the coop’s name to have electricity in, and bills the farmers back. The facility has to be in the coop’s name to have electricity in, and bills the farmers back.

“The state law is that milk can’t sit in the cooler longer than 24 hours,” he concludes, “but the processors aren’t allowed by the Amish to pick up on Sunday. So the truck drivers don’t like them. And their quantity of milk is small. The biggest Amish dairy farmer that I know is milking 18 cows. A small place will do five.”
Their biggest concern was to come up with a Pasture Rule for organic production that enforced adequate grazing but didn’t put some organic farmer out of business because it was too stringent.

“We had to account for Southern California,” Liz sighs, “where it is so dry, and coastal Washington state where it rains all the time. We wanted to first of all do no harm to a dairy farmer.”

What they came up with is that cows should be able to graze in the grazing season, which shall be not less than 120 days, and that during that period they should get no less than 30% of their nutrition, on a dry matter basis, from the grazing.

For those not familiar with feeding cows, measuring ‘dry matter’ is a way to standardize various ruminant feeds by ignoring the moisture in them. Virtually all feeds contain some water, but fresh grass has a lot more than dried hay. If you know how much water is in your feeds, then you can compare them on a ‘dry matter’ basis. Fresh grass varies but is usually between 17% and 30% dry matter. Baleage (hay baled before it is fully dry and then wrapped in plastic and allowed to ferment before being fed) can be anywhere from 25 to 45%. Hay has some moisture, but is close to 90% dry matter. Grain is considered 89%.

“We decided,” recalls Liz, “that there had to be a minimum grazing period. It had to be at least 120 days. Most places have a much longer grazing season. In the Southwest, for example, they might have 2 separate grazing seasons, a Spring and a Fall season, with the Summer too hot and dry to grow grass. Your grazing season is based on your climate. They called me, farmers in Maine, all around – asking ‘Is 120 days going to hurt anyone who is honestly trying to graze their cows?’ All of us had short grazing seasons because of our northern locations. We all said ‘no’.

“But what we know now,” she continues, “is that some farms are letting out their animals for 120 days and then bringing them back inside, saying ‘we have met the 120 day rule and now we can feed them in the barn’. But their grazing season could last for another couple of months. Our grazing season here, almost in Canada, is typically May 15 to October 15. That’s five months.”

Liz says that she feels the coalition that came up with these draft regulations was a farmer-based or producer organization. The drafts were then sent to Ed Maltby, NOPDA executive director, who was active with NOFA (the National Organic Caucus). Then groups like MOSES, Food and Water Watch, and other consumer groups would have input on all the things in the drafts they felt it was important to change and modify. The process took a long time before approval was final. The Pasture Rule ultimately became law in 2010.

CAFO Milk

“Were there people opposed to it?” Liz asks. “For sure. I was told there were a lot of large CAFOs from California watching closely. They wanted to go organic, but if the Pasture Rule passed they might not. I’ve never been to a dairy CAFO, but I’ve seen pictures of Aurora, with 15,000 cows in one location in Colorado. I know I’m not seeing what looks like any reasonable amount of pasture. I know how many acres per cow we need here, and we get rain.”

“Yet they are certified by the Colorado Department of Agriculture and Oregon Tilth,” she continues. “But Colorado didn’t have a certification program when Aurora started up. So Aurora said ‘We’ll tell you how to do this.’ Brian and I pay about $2000 to be certified each year. But when you have a CAFO or business that is the size of Aurora, the certification fees are going to pay the entire salary of the person doing the inspection. They’re big enough they can change the rules.

“Aurora is a model that has pushed the envelope,” she concludes. “I don’t mean to pick them out in particular. They are certainly not the only large farm that people feel has run fast and loose with the standards. But because they are vertically integrated as well they have become the poster child for the big CAFOs and Big Organic. That is a scary thing. Vertical integration is not something that has hit dairies yet like it has hit other parts of organic production – pork and chicken and that sort of thing.”

Competition from big organic CAFOs has hurt dairy farmers in New York. Aurora is in Colorado and Texas, but milk packaged by Aurora was sold in New York under the ‘Woodstock Farms’ label, Liz says. The organic task force, a group Liz was part of that was organized in New York with a lot of organic dairy members, was telling people that if you want local organic milk you should buy containers that have ‘56’ as the first part of the processing plant code. That plant is in New York. Of course the milk could come from Pennsylvania or Connecticut, because milk is trucked across state lines, but it would have been processed in New York.

“On the Woodstock Farms label,” says Liz, “was a nice little red barn and a cow out in pasture. So the marketing made it look like it was from my farm, but the money was going to theirs! I wouldn’t have a problem if they put a picture of their farm on their box of milk. But they didn’t want to do that!”

Liz believes certifiers are also responsible for the problem: “People in the East said QAI (Quality Assurance International), Oregon Tilth, and CCOF are the ones that certified questionable CAFOs. We have always been certified by NOFA-NY. They have a reputation as a tough certifier. That is not necessarily a bad thing. It keeps you on your toes. But there are always people looking for a certifier who will let you do what you want. It just boils down to human greed.

“The National Organic Program is what we have,” she concludes. “The question is can we fix it? A dairy farmer doesn’t have the ability to say ‘I don’t like the NOP anymore’. A vegetable guy can do that – they can go with the Farmer’s Pledge to say they are the ones that certified questionable CAFOs. We are always people looking for a certifier who will let us do what you want. It just boils down to human greed.”

Pioneers of organic farming products since 1946. Leaders of all natural and organic acceptable livestock supplements, fertilizers and soil amendments.

Call for a dealer near you. The Fertrell Company • 800-347-1566 • fertrell.com
Leading Change Organically:
IFOAM Organics International and IFOAM North America

by Elizabeth Henderson

“Organic Agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs. Although it has a long track record of critiquing the methods and materials of industrialized monoculture agriculture and the overblown corporations that profit thereby, as well as Washington’s food and agriculture policies. We work hard to be good partners, reliable and long-term, and to express publicly our solidarity with the struggles, losses and victories of our allies. We still have a lot to learn about how to make progress towards racial justice and equity.”

The NOFA-Interstate Council in itself embodies collaborative efforts. Over 30 years ago, across the region, seeds were planted to create a network of organizations that formed the organic farming community. Throughout the years, the NOFA’s continue to work together, support each other’s efforts and stand with a united voice in the protection and advancement of organic food and farming. Even with our limited resources, we have accomplished so much to elevate the very fabric of agriculture and the health of food systems for eaters and the earth. So much so, that big organic business is suing to take over. To combat this monster, our NOFA Network, collaborations and alliances are even more important. As the saying goes, when you control the food, you control the people. NOFA will not allow that to happen. And the only way to do that is by banding together.

NOFA folks were among the founding members of IFOAM in its early years. IFOAM was newly established IFOAM North America. We have been involved in the whole history of development of the movement for sustainable agriculture, starting with the Dialogue for Sustainable Agriculture, through the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, the formation of the regional Sustainable Agriculture Working Groups, like the Northeast SAWG, to the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. To work more effectively to influence the National Organic Program of USDA, NOFA became a founding member of the National Organic Coalition, our very own brain trust for organic integrity. We helped found the Agricultural Justice Project and the Domestic Fair Trade Association, and built on the work of international organizations like ICARDA that provided to start breaking down the distrust between farmers and farm workers and their advocates. More recently, we’ve worked to add our voices to the US Food Sovereignty Alliance and the National Farm Family Coalition, and endorsed the program of the HEAL Food Alliance (HEAL stands for Health, Environment, Agricultural Labor). We contributed to the careful process that assembled the Organic Farmers Alliance (OFA).

This issue of TNF introduces you to our growing list of alliances and affiliations. We include only the organizations with which we have formal agreements and for which we are able to extend our networks to many more groups – the Organic Consumers Association, Vermont Migrant Justice and other farm worker organizing efforts in our region, the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Association, Cornucopia, the Biological Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association, American Farmland Trust, and so forth. The NOFAs often sign onto letters and petitions circulated by these friendly groups and even sometimes by organizations where our overlap of shared values or goals is limited. We seek common ground, mutual understanding and effective action.

It is not always easy to work in alliances. Sometimes, you have to agree to disagree in order to focus on the commonalities. The larger mission and vision need to go above and beyond individual differences. Tensions can arise when working in alliances when there is disparity in budgets. Many organizations vie for the same money pots and some are more successful than others. Another challenge is that individuals create the relationships that allow alliances to grow and prosper. When an individual leaves the network, a vacuum can be created that may stall the ability to continue to collaborate. As you will read in these pages, NOFA collaborates quite extensively, but we need to convey this to you – our members – and provide opportunities for your involvement. That is a challenge that this edition of The Natural Farmer aims to address, but it will take more work to further engage you.

Despite any obstacles, NOFA is committed to what IFOAM calls Organic 3.0 – building a worldwide movement for the transformation of farming systems, from the local to the global, with higher levels of resilience, sustainability and systemic health. We seek to unite disparate efforts that currently compete for scarce resources and speak at cross-purposes. Agroecology, urban agriculture, organic food, agroforestry, agroecological research, biodynamic, regenerative organic, domestic fair trade, soil health, farmer justice, environmental justice... we will never achieve the future we long for of health, stability, racial and ethnic equity and peace, unless we collaborate and cooperate with one another. To transform the current world food system, we need to pool our resources and raise our voices to inform and empower many, many more.

What follows is a description of 8 NOFA Interstate Council formal alliances.

In the 1970’s and 80’s, IFOAM was the world leader in the development of organic standards. When Leu Van Bosch was one of the main figures in organic certification, we used the IFOAM Basic Standards as our template and adapted them for our region, as did organic farming groups in other parts of the country. For years, the NOFA Interestate Council Policy has used the IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture as our basic policy platform.

During the era of Organic 2.0 (1980 – 2015), IF- OAM’s focus was on legitimizing the principles: the need for an ecological system that is certified. It was focused on certification, regulation, verification, accreditation and harmonization of the various standards was put in place. IFOAM’s mission statement was “To lead, unite and assist the global organic movement in its full diversity.”

Starting with the 2008 elections to the IFOAM World Board when farmer Andre Leu became president, IFOAM’s top priority shifted from certification-accrredititation-harmonization to promoting “small-holder” organic agriculture. For its 40th anniversary in 2011, IFOAM launched the Sustainable Organic Agriculture Action Network (SOAAN) to reclaim leadership in organic standard setting and challenge the idea that agriculture remains the world to distinguish between the mounting waves of greenwashing and authentic transformation that will lead to stable, healthy, just and sustainable communities. IFOAM subsequently built on SOAAN for Organic 3.0, the springboard for future policy and “CSA and PGS, Empowering Farmers and Consumers, Beijing CSA conference, 2013.”

IFOAM has helped persuade the UN that small scale farmers need much more promising than industrial agriculture if we are serious about arresting climate change and ending world hunger and has been an important voice in shaping the Sustainable Development Goals. As part of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report that was another result was the initiative by FAO (the Food and Agriculture organization of the UN), IFOAM engages in projects that support the development of family-scale farms in Africa, and our members have held leading positions in both. IFOAM is a champion of Regenerative Organic and is out there arguing that a transition to a Green Economy with strong environmental protections and reduced GHG emissions is our only hope.
IFOMA is an excellent source of materials for NOFA’s policy work. From its website you can download well-crafted position papers: Global Policy Toolkit on Public Support for Organic Agriculture, Use of Nanotechnologies and Nanomaterials in Organic Agriculture; The use of Organic Seed and Plant Propagation in Organic; The Role of Smallholders in Organic Agriculture; The Full Diversity of Organic Agriculture; The Role of Organic Agriculture in Mitigating Climate Change; Smallholder Group Certification for Organic Production and Processing; Position on Genetic Engineering and Genetically Modified Organisms; Organic Agriculture and Food Security; Organic Agriculture and Biodiversity. “The World of Organic Agriculture” 2018 edition, graphs, and infographics can be downloaded at www.organic-world.net/yearbook/yearbook-2018.html.

IFOMA NA

Increasingly as membership has grown on all continents, IFOMA has decentralized its activities through regional bodies. IFOMA allocates 25% of membership income from a geographical area for regional activities. North America is the last region to form its own body and includes Canada, the US, and the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean. There are 40 members, or, what IFOMA calls “affiliates.” IFOMA NA – held its first meeting at Expo East in the fall of 2016, and elected a board: myself, Jeff Moyer, Sarah Brown, Bob Quinn, Leslie Zuck, Ryan Zinn, Dag Flack, Brian Baker and Lisa Pierce. Ryan and Lisa have since stepped down to be replaced by Jennifer Taylor and Shannon Jones. Brian Baker serves as president. IFOMA NA’s Mission is to provide a forum to exchange ideas and engage in North America-specific activities to advance organic agriculture and its principles in partnership with IFOMA-Organics International and the global organic community.

IFOMA expects regional bodies such as IFOMA NA to play a leading role in the transition from Organic 2.0 to Organic 3.0, particularly with respect to including greater sustainability interests and empowerment from the farm to the final consumer. How IFOMA NA will accomplish this is not yet clear. Its first task is to get set up as an organization, to raise some additional funds and hire staff. The Board is determined not to compete with existing organic organizations and seeks to define a special role spread- ing understanding of the principles of organic which go way beyond the NOP. IFOMA NA also intends to sponsor regular conferences on organic research.

Sustainable Development Goals

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015: Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

• People
We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfill their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.

• Planet
We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.

• Prosperity
We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.

• Peace
We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.

• Partnership
We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people. The interlinkages and integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals are of crucial importance in ensuring that the purpose of the new Agenda is realized.

If we realize our ambitions across the full extent of the Agenda, the lives of all will be profoundly improved and our world will be transformed for the better.

NOFA Alliances:

NSAC
by Steve Gilman, Interstate NOFA Policy Coordinator

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) is one of NOFA’s oldest alliances. With an expanding membership currently at 130 organizations from all around the country, an energetic and seasoned staff, and offices just a stone’s throw from the legislative office buildings on Capitol Hill – NSAC is well-positioned to advocate for the many-faceted interests of grassroots sustainable agriculture and organic groups at the House, Senate and government agencies.

NSAC was founded in 2009 via a merger of the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture that were earlier attempts to create effective policy alliances of rural grassroots organizations to meet the farm crises of the late 1970’s and 1980’s. When repeated tractordrives to DC involving thousands of farmers failed to persuade the Federal government to maintain the policy of “parity” (government supported fair pricing for farm products that covered the costs of production), farmers and their allies turned to organizing for sustainability. If the government would not support farm gate prices by setting price minimums for managing supply, perhaps there could be payments to farms to practice conservation and to rural communities for development.

Active in ag policy since the late 70’s, Ferd Hoefner headed up many of these early organizing efforts and then came on board as the first NSAC Policy Director. Over the years these efforts have brought about some major accomplishments including the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program, the Value-Added Producer Grants Pro- gram, the National Organic Certification Cost Share, the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, the Wetlands Reserve Program and the Farmers’ Market Promotion Program.

However, it is a testimony to the political severity of today’s times that many of these hard-won sustainable agriculture reforms and advances are now on the chopping block via back-room machinations in the upcoming 2018 Farm Bill – with some important long term conservation programs slated to be completely zeroed out. More on this in a moment.

Farm Bill focus

In addition to addressing such issues as food safety legislation and climate change, much of NSAC’s efforts are directed toward the multiple phases of the Farm Bills which authorize programs and the annual Appropriations process which fund them. Although this farm, food and rural development legislation must be reauthorized every four to five years by Congress, continuing work goes into formulating proposals, getting bipartisan support for old programs and new marker bills (legislative language proposals) ahead of time, developing a Farm Bill platform and orchestrating coalition advocacy efforts for their inclusion.

Then, once the House and Senate versions are merged in conference and the Farm Bill is passed on the floor by Congress, continuing vigilance is required to ensure success during the following multi-year program implementation and funding process. Even though the finalized Farm Bill programs are authorized with mandatory or discretionary funding – the actual money must be authorized through Congressional Appropriations committees and are subject to the annual budget process which requires
Another whole set of outreach and advocacy efforts.

The Farm Bill is organized into ag-related titles such as commodities, conservation, trade, research and development, and nutrition along with a new food security title as well as nutrition which includes the food stamp or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which was initially authorized in 1964 to give urban lawbreakers a stake in the farm economy. For this current 2018 Farm Bill, the SNAP program ranks high on the hit list for the Republican majority causing a larger and in a number of cases, higher prices. A Democrat strategy to counter these dealings is emerging to delay the 2018 Farm Bill past the September 30th deadline until after the November elections.

Partisan battle delays that have occurred with past Farm Bills are acutely problematic, however, because the smaller family farmers may have a $50 million baseline cut-off become suspended and are stranded without funding until a new Farm Bill is finally passed. Organic initiatives were orphaned in this situation when Congress failed to pass the 2012 Farm Bill – which wasn’t authorized until 2014.

**NSAC’s Priority Setting Process**

As you might expect, developing annual policy priorities for 130 diverse member organizations in 50 states and raising the funds to take them on is quite an undertaking. Over the years NSAC has evolved an effective process grounded on the work of six issue committees (some with active sub-committees) that meet at least monthly by conference call and then face-to-face twice annually at the Winter and Summer meetings held at various member locations all around the country.

- **Research, Education and Extension (REE)** focuses on USDA and other public agricultural research and extension programs as well as the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE).
- **Marketing, Food Systems, and Rural Development (MPSRD)** explores value-added marketing channels for sustainably-produced farm goods as well as economic strategies that build the vitality and sustainability of rural communities.
- **Conservation, Energy, and Environment (CEE)** helps formulate policy options and positions on a broad array of agricultural conservation programs, sustainable energy policy, and environmental policy issues.
- **Farming Opportunities and Fair Competition (FOFC)** aims to improve market conditions for farmers by advocating for commodity program reform, farm credit, and beginning farmer and rancher provisions, among others.
- **Food System Integrity (FSI)** develops and advances policies that ensure a safe food supply and support for family farms, healthy food systems, and opportunities for sustainable farmers.
- **Diversity (part of the Grassroots Council)** incorporates and assesses social justice and diversity as operational elements of NSAC’s activities, including in the Organizational Council, Policy Council, Issue Committees, any ad hoc committees, and other operations of NSAC.

The heart of member involvement is through the regularly scheduled monthly committee conference calls. Continuity is provided with live notes taken by paid interns. Committee members develop and carry out their policy and appropriations agendas over the course of the year beginning with a monthly priority setting process that gets underway in the fall. Starting with a detailed survey, members are asked to rank their priorities for each committee they serve on. Based on these results each Committee then goes through an elaborate proposal process ranking Campaign Level, Second Tier, Backburner and Sign-On/Support categories for both Policy and Appropriations Issues.

At the Winter Meeting these finalized Committee recommendations are presented to the Policy Council which is made up of Representative (as opposed to Participating) NSAC members who proceed via a series of votes to merge, approve and launch the overall NSAC priorities for the year. The Summer Meetings feature in-depth plenary sessions and committee meetings devoted to strategizing the coalition’s policy and grassroots priorities for the year. Also featured at each year’s far-flung location is a Farm Bill year, for 2018 the Winter Meeting was in Washington DC with the Summer Meeting coming up this August in the Seattle area.

Meanwhile, grassroots activists were organizing in their home states to help farmers, their families and their communities to manage this crisis. Groups were formed in states from Vermont to the Carolinas, from Virginia to California and from Texas to Minnesota. When the federal government offered little to no hope or support, Willie Nelson, Neil Young, John Mellencamp, and dozens of musicians friends held a day-long concert called Farm Aid on September 22, 1985, to call attention to the farm crisis and raise funds for farmers in crisis.

In January 1986, with Farm Aid’s support and encouragement, a number of grassroots advocacy organizations, including the American Agriculture Movement, traveling hundreds or thousands of miles from Washington, DC, seeking support for 100 percent of parity—a price floor based on a crop’s cost of production—and a moratorium on foreclosures. With but a few champions in D.C., foreclosures, auctions, and suicides escalated throughout farm country.

The Natural Farmer Summer, 2018

Collaboration at the National Family Farm Coalition

by Lisa Griffith, Interim Director, National Family Farm Coalition

The 1970s and 80s were a tumultuous time for many U.S. family farmers. After President Nixon ended the U.S. dollar’s convertibility to gold in 1971 to curb inflation, all commodities—from grains to oil—soured. Then USDA Secretary Earl Butz sold off U.S. grain reserves and told U.S. farmers to plant from ‘fencerow to fencerow’, which many did. Grain prices remained high for several years and farmers were emboldened to take on more acreage, resulting in a large oversupply, grain prices fell and profits for many did. Grain prices remained high for several years and farmers were emboldened to take on more land. As scarcest and Summer meetings held at various member locations all around the country.

There’s no question that NSAC has evolved an extremely effective membership-based policy advocacy vehicle, guided and carried out by an expert staff. That this Administration and current Client Congress are presenting an enormous challenge to the broader grassroots sustainable agriculture/organic agenda is a major understatement, however. NSAC’s many legislative accomplishments over the years, as well as new proposals are now being specifically targeted for cuts or eradication. It’s plain that the way forward is to rally the growing citizen unrest to overturn the present regime and bring back a representative government while NSAC fulfills a critical role on Capitol Hill reforming federal food and agricultural policy and advancing a fair and just food system.
The Natural Farmer

Summer, 2018

The idea of creating an alliance of social movements, the idea of creating an alliance of food sovereignty activists, went largely unnoticed for years. The US Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA), Co-founded in 2007 by Center for Food Justice Coalition, Food and Water Watch, and other organizations to advance for food sovereignty, has since posted more information regarding the situation of farmers in the U.S. and Brazil by the Farm Bill process, which has helped maintain its rBGH division.

Joining La Via Campesina, the international peasant organization supporting communities worldwide striving toward food sovereignty. Activities have included international conferences to develop declarations and platforms; UN Climate Change Conferences of the Parties; agroecology learning encounters; protesting free trade agreements; and helping foil the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization. Participating in hearings, sign-on letters and editorials with Citizens Trade Campaign to voice farmer and farmworker concerns over NAFTA renegotiations, including U.S. pressure to Canadian dairy farmers to drop milk supply management program, reintroducing Country of Origin Labeling, and removing investor state dispute settlement.

Highlighting farmer concerns of Monsanto’s rBGH to the public and numerous retailers, including creameries, who eventually served/sold milk products only from cows not treated with rBGH, and enabling retailers to apply labels to such products for public knowledge (along with Monsanto’s message that milk from cows treated is deemed safe), which ultimately resulted in Monsanto selling its rBGH division.

The US Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA) emerged from a global process initiated during the International Forum on Food Sovereignty: Nyeleni 2007 Forum for Food Sovereignty. Since 2010, USFSA has awarded the Food Sovereignty Prize to national and international grassroots organizations whose work lifts up food sovereignty in their communities.

Joining with Rural Coalition, Community Food and Justice Coalition, Food and Water Watch, and other organizations to advocate for access to educational and fiscal resources by socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, particularly during the Farm Bill process, which has helped maintain funding for Section 2501 programs.

Working with faith-based and environmental organizations to publicize the procurement of food land in the U.S. and forest land in Brazil by university pension fund manager TIAA, which has since posted more information regarding the location of their U.S. farms and is slowly being pressured to reveal and divest of these investments by pension holders throughout the U.S.

Introducing the concept of InterDependence between family farmers, community-based fisher men, and eaters at Farm Aid 2017 Homegrown Village exhibit by engaging exhibit visitors to help write its Declaration. Collaboration can be difficult but it is essential for the larger wins—those that ultimately benefit everyone working to grow, catch, harvest, process, transport, market, and serve our food. For all to achieve food justice and food sovereignty, there is an unspoken agreement that such change will not arrive quickly, simply or easily, but few would argue that anything worthwhile ever is.

The content of this article might not reflect the view of others in my organization WhyHunger and the US Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA). I thank TNC for the opportunity to share my views based on what I experience as part of the USFSA’s Secretariat.

by Saulo Araujo, Director, Global Movements Program, WhyHunger

USFSA members visiting South African farmers

The Natural Farmer

Summer, 2018

Movement, Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Land Loss Prevention Project, Missouri Rural Crisis, Northern Plains Resource Council, and more, established the National Save the Family Farm Coalition, dba National Family Farm Coalition, or NFFC.

These leaders agreed that NFFC should be established as a coalition of advocacy organizations, not of individual members. NFFC would be stronger at the onset with an existing base of groups, some with thousands of individual members, working from different states toward common goals at the federal level. It would also be easier to organize events and outreach for developing policy recommendations that NFFC would represent to Congress and the administration.

The USFSA was built on two main tenets: raising crop prices in the marketplace to parity to promote family farm agriculture, while eliminating the tax burden of deficiency-payment subsidies; and, encouraging sound environmental farming practices, in part through a ‘bushel-based’ supply management program. These commonsense approaches, which would have kept farmers afloat and from planting every square inch of bare ground in order to stay afloat, were not so common among government leaders. Although farmers have historically been reticent to ask for government assistance, their messages have been largely misunderstood, amplifying the need for their message to be heard more often in face-to-face meetings by people with influence.

Over the years, NFFC members, staff and allies have collectively written legislative proposals, organized participatory panels, circulated farmer research and writings to educate the public, Congress, and administration about the changes needed to improve farm, food, and trade policy. Some accomplishments include the following:

• Serving as a founding member of the Community Food Security Coalition, which grew to include roughly 300 organizations that helped establish and/or sustain equitable national food policies and programs, including Farm to School and Farm to College networks, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program.

• Working with allied and member organizations advocating for the development of national organic standards to rally 250,000-280,000 public comments in 1997.

• Protecting the rights of farmers to save their seeds and purchase non genetically engineered seeds through the Farmer Declaration on Genetic Engineering, released just prior to the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference of 1999.

• Serving Monsanto for not testing GE seeds for safety before public sale and for requiring farmers to ‘license’, not buy outright, their seeds and saving the Environmental Protection Agency for deregulating Monsanto’s Xtend cropping systems, despite warnings about crop damage from dicamba drift.

• Helping farmers to stay afloat, were not so common among government leaders. Although farmers have historically been reticent to ask for government assistance, their messages have been largely misunderstood, amplifying the need for their message to be heard more often in face-to-face meetings by people with influence.

• Protecting the rights of farmers to save their seeds and purchase non genetically engineered seeds through the Farmer Declaration on Genetic Engineering, released just prior to the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference of 1999.

• Suing Monsanto for not testing GE seeds for safety before public sale and for requiring farmers to ‘license’, not buy outright, their seeds and saving the Environmental Protection Agency for deregulating Monsanto’s Xtend cropping systems, despite warnings about crop damage from dicamba drift.

• Highlighting farmer concerns of Monsanto’s rBGH to the public and numerous retailers, includ ing creameries, who eventually served/sold milk products only from cows not treated with rBGH, and enabling retailers to apply labels to such products for public knowledge (along with Monsanto’s message that milk from cows treated is deemed safe), which ultimately resulted in Monsanto selling its rBGH division.

• Stopping the deregulation of Monsanto’s GE wheat with allies in different coalitions and influencing Rep. Dennis Kucinich to hold a hearing to investigate APHIS’ (Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service of USDA) negligence to farmers pressing to reveal and divest of these investments by pension holders throughout the U.S.

• Introducing the concept of InterDependence between family farmers, community-based fisher men, and eaters at Farm Aid 2017 Homegrown Village exhibit by engaging exhibit visitors to help write its Declaration. Collaboration can be difficult but it is essential for the larger wins—those that ultimately benefit everyone working to grow, catch, harvest, process, transport, market, and serve our food. For all to achieve food justice and food sovereignty, there is an unspoken agreement that such change will not arrive quickly, simply or easily, but few would argue that anything worthwhile ever is.
and currently, there are four other similar spaces: the Australia Food Sovereignty Alliance; the Latin American Food Sovereignty Alliance; the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa; and, the Nyeleni Pan-European Forum.

The organizing of the USFSA was grounded in the relationships and processes led by grassroots organizations and grassroots support organizations. The first iteration was the creation of the Global Food Crisis Working Group to influence agriculture and food policies through grassroots action. The USFSA, as it is today, was established a few years later at the 2010 United States Social Forum in Detroit, Michigan and then officially launched in New Orleans. Born through a People’s Movement Assembly on Food Sovereignty, the idea of the USFSA was shaped with the participation of several members of La Via Campesina International from Palestine, Haiti and Honduras, reinforcing the idea that it is a process grounded in grassroots internationalism.

The belly of the beast

At the forum in Mali, participants reaffirmed that the fast-paced consolidation of international agribusinesses, supported by Global North governments, required a broadening reach of rural social movements. In that perspective, building unity in the diversity of ideas and struggles and a stronger connection between rural and urban people were necessary steps to achieve food sovereignty. An other point raised in Mali was the need to strengthen organizing in Europe and the U.S., to begin to fill the current void. Therefore, the creation of the US Food Sovereignty Alliance was a critical piece in the strategy of building power at a global scale.

The building of the US Food Sovereignty Alliance, as a viable political space, continues to evolve. More recently, at its 2015 National Assembly, the USFSA decided to implement a new organizational structure to put grassroots leaders more firmly in the driver’s seat, to grow membership and to streamline its work through defined roles among its members. Four regional caucuses were formed: Southeast, Northeast, Midwest and Pacific Northwest. Each region has elected two grassroots leaders to serve as coordinators and to represent them at the national level. The USFSA’s National Coordination body is now comprised by the regional coordinators, working team coordinators and the secretariat.

With the new structure in place, the USFSA is currently organizing four regional assemblies that will undertake a process to develop shared political analysis and shape the USFSA’s agenda. The regional assemblies will culminate in the IV National Assembly in October 2018 that will define a political agenda, set multi-year goals, and outline a strategy to enact them.

In preparation for these regional assemblies, the USFSA has successfully established new relationships with other national alliances and regional organizations to broaden their participation and scope to build power. Over the last few years, the USFSA has entered in an alignment process with the following groups, all of which will actively be participating in the 2018 regional and national assemblies:

• The Agroecology Research Action Collective (ARC): Formed by allies scholars from universities in the US and Canada, the Agroecology Research Action Collective is working with the USFSA to provide technical and logistical support for grassroots organizations. ARC’s Science Shop will receive research questions from grassroots organizations and plan participatory research projects in coordination with the USFSA.

• Closing the Hunger Gap (CHG): Formed by progressive food banks and food pantries in the US, Closing the Hunger Gap is working with the USFSA to build a shared analysis around food sovereignty and the Right to Food in the United States. The USFSA is also lending its knowledge and expertise to Closing the Hunger Gap as CHG builds a regional and national coordination space for emergency food providers in the US focusing on dismantling racism and power inequalities.

• The Climate Justice Alliance (CJA): created in 2013, the Climate Justice Alliance gathers over 60 organizations nation-wide around principles and goals for a Justice Transition. CJA has played a critical role to include the voices of frontline communities in the debate around climate change as well as support the leadership of local communities in the building of real solutions to this environmental crisis.

• Food Systems New England: A regional network dedicated to better food and agriculture policies in New England, Food Systems New England is interested in joining forces with the USFSA and the Northeast regional body.

• Fish Locally Collaborative: An international network led by the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (NAMA), the Fish Locally Collaborative is formed by scholars, fishing communities and grassroots support organizations.

The Regional Assemblies organizing process

The USFSA’s regional assemblies bring together diverse members and allies to strengthen relationships, develop a shared political analysis and provide recommendations for the USFSA’s national agenda. These gatherings are not isolated events but coordinated, organizing processes to build power.

With the new regional structure, the USFSA embarks in a nation-wide process of building a dialogue space AND a democratic process where different sectors can meet and develop common strategies. The expectation is that these gatherings will serve as spaces for political education and communication channeling with other existing alliances working to dismantle structural problems for the building of a more just food system. Currently, there are 42 members of the US Food Sovereignty Alliance, including the NOFA Interstate Council. For more information, visit the website at usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org.

The USFSA is having its NE Regional Assembly in Amherst, MA on August 9th and 10th, thanks to the support of the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) and other national alliances.

Organic Farmers Association: A national voice for domestic certified organic farmers.

by Kate Mendenhall, Director

Five years ago, several organizations began discussing what it would take to build a more effective and authentic voice for certified organic farmers at the national level. A cross-section of representatives from organic farming associations from the East, Midwest, Northwest, South, Upper Great Plains and mountain regions, representing approximately one-third of national organizations, held exploratory meetings and conducted surveys with other organizations across the US. This demonstrated strong interest in forming a national alliance of organic farmers and ranchers to fill the current void.

In early 2016, this group began discussions with the Rodale Institute, an organic pioneering organization, who also expressed interest in bringing organic farmers’ voice to the forefront. In 2017, the two efforts aligned as the Organic Farmers Association, sponsored by Rodale Institute.

Organic Farmers Association is an independent and autonomous voice for domestic certified organic farmers, focused on national policy issues that are of highest priority for certified farmers. Organic Farmers Association is also committed to building community and networking among the nation’s organic farming organizations. A stronger organizational network will support and grow organization capacity to better serve their local organic farmer-members

The Organic Farmers Association Governing Council

build higher-rates of grassroots policy engagement to participate in the national organic farmer voice. To engage certified organic farmers, organizations, and supporters of this work, Organic Farmers Association offers three types of memberships to unify the national organic farmer movement.

Organic Farmers Association (OFA) achieved much in its first year, through the guidance of an appointing Steering Committee. The partnership with and sponsorship by the Rodale Institute provided much needed organizational capacity to build a functioning website and communications platform as well as membership and development support. We published two issues of New Farm Magazine, elevating national organic farm stories. We began a membership program for farmers and organizations to begin to unify our movement at the national level. We established a firm policy, under which only certified organic farmers vote on policy positions and leadership.

In September 2017, Organic Farmers Association farm members elected a Policy Committee of 12 certified organic farmers and six advisory organization members to establish our policy platform. In March 2018, we elected our first Governing Council of 12 certified organic farmers and six advisory organization members to lead the organization through the next phase of growth. Both leadership committees are farmer led and farmer controlled. Both committees are regionally diverse and aim to gain diversity in farm size, commodities, gender, race, and sexual orientation to ensure an accurate representation of the nation’s organic farms. Organic Farmers Association also hired a part-time director.
The Natural Farmer

Advocates to Keep Organic Seal Strong

by Abby Youngblood

The National Organic Coalition is a cross-sector alliance of fourteen organizations from across the U.S., including the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA). Our member organizations represent diverse stakeholder groups in the organic community – we are farmers, consumers, environmental groups, certifying organizations, retailers, and progressive businesses coming together to be a strong and united voice for integrity in the USDA National Organic Program.

Our coalition came together in 2001, just as the federal organic regulations were being finalized and put into place. Since that time, NOC has been working in various arenas, including Congress, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the National Organic Standards Board, to garner support and federal resources for organic programs, organic research, and plant breeding to benefit organic farm businesses coming together to be a strong and united voice for integrity in the USDA National Organic Program.

Our coalition came together in 2001, just as the federal organic regulations were being finalized and put into place. Since that time, NOC has been working in various arenas, including Congress, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the National Organic Standards Board, to garner support and federal resources for organic programs, organic research, and plant breeding to benefit organic farm businesses coming together to be a strong and united voice for integrity in the USDA National Organic Program.

Our coalition came together in 2001, just as the federal organic regulations were being finalized and put into place. Since that time, NOC has been working in various arenas, including Congress, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the National Organic Standards Board, to garner support and federal resources for organic programs, organic research, and plant breeding to benefit organic farm businesses coming together to be a strong and united voice for integrity in the USDA National Organic Program.

Our coalition came together in 2001, just as the federal organic regulations were being finalized and put into place. Since that time, NOC has been working in various arenas, including Congress, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the National Organic Standards Board, to garner support and federal resources for organic programs, organic research, and plant breeding to benefit organic farm businesses coming together to be a strong and united voice for integrity in the USDA National Organic Program.

Our coalition came together in 2001, just as the federal organic regulations were being finalized and put into place. Since that time, NOC has been working in various arenas, including Congress, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the National Organic Standards Board, to garner support and federal resources for organic programs, organic research, and plant breeding to benefit organic farm businesses coming together to be a strong and united voice for integrity in the USDA National Organic Program.

Our coalition came together in 2001, just as the federal organic regulations were being finalized and put into place. Since that time, NOC has been working in various arenas, including Congress, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the National Organic Standards Board, to garner support and federal resources for organic programs, organic research, and plant breeding to benefit organic farm businesses coming together to be a strong and united voice for integrity in the USDA National Organic Program.

Our coalition came together in 2001, just as the federal organic regulations were being finalized and put into place. Since that time, NOC has been working in various arenas, including Congress, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the National Organic Standards Board, to garner support and federal resources for organic programs, organic research, and plant breeding to benefit organic farm businesses coming together to be a strong and united voice for integrity in the USDA National Organic Program.

Our coalition came together in 2001, just as the federal organic regulations were being finalized and put into place. Since that time, NOC has been working in various arenas, including Congress, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the National Organic Standards Board, to garner support and federal resources for organic programs, organic research, and plant breeding to benefit organic farm businesses coming together to be a strong and united voice for integrity in the USDA National Organic Program.
Keeping Fairness in Organic: The Agricultural Justice Project’s Food Justice Certification

by Elizabeth Henderson

Just as basic as care of earthworms is care of the people in organic farming. This can be accomplished through fair prices for farmers to their farm products and fair and respectful treatment of farm workers, as well as other workers who work in organic supply chains. Fairness is integral to organic and is one of the four principles of Organic Agriculture. The roots of the Agricultural Justice Project (AJP) go back to the beginning of the National Organic Program (NOP), when some farmer organizations and farmworker advocates realized that the NOP had no standards for fairness in organic trade or for decent treatment of the people who do the farming.

Four people started meeting in 1999, three farmers and one representative of a farm worker support organization—Elizabeth Henderson from NOFA, Michael Sligh from Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI USA), Richard Mandina of Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas/Farmworker Support Committee (CATA), and Marty Mesh of Florida Organic Growers (FOG)—to figure out how to keep fairness in organic agriculture in the US. Together, they formed the Agricultural Justice Project (AJP). Over the next few years, the group wrote standards for fairness on farms and in trade between farmers and buyers, a domestic fair trade certification program. They recruited farmers, farm workers and other members of the organic community to set up a stakeholder advisory committee to make sure that the standards were comprehensive and realistic. The farmworker members of the CATA board reviewed and critiqued the standards. The resulting program - Food Justice Certified (FJC) - provides a way to ensure that fairness is happening on and for organic farms and demonstrates this fairness to the public with credibility. AJP also believes we need to work equally hard using multiple tactics simultaneously and in multiple arenas to re-gain full integrity of our organic certification system – legal, market-based, legislative, administrative, grassroots and media outreach strategies are all components of our much-needed campaign to win back our standards. We support efforts undertaken by other groups in other arenas. However, the entire organic community needs to make sure these efforts are coordinated, synergistic and do no harm to the thousands of family farmers and businesses already adhering to the existing organic standards, both in spirit and to the letter of the law.

AJP invites you to become more engaged in protecting the integrity of the USDA organic seal. Sign up here to get updates and action alerts: www.nationalorganiccoalition.org

The mission statement of AJP is ambitious: “The AJP works to transform the existing agricultural system, seeking empowerment, justice, fairness and respect for all who labor from farm to retail. Central to AJP’s mission are the principles that all humans deserve respect, freedom to live with dignity and nurture community, and share responsibility for preserving the earth’s resources for future generations.”

The certification label is based on high-bar social justice standards for farms, processors and retailers, including every link in the food chain from seed to table. The standards address issues that are pivotal to achieving economic opportunity, parity and justice in our food system. The FJC Standards include:

- Fair prices for farmers negotiated with buyers and based on actual costs to produce food that does not abuse the environment, laborers or livestock
- Living wages, respect and decent working conditions for all food workers
- Transparency of expectations for workers, farmers and their trade partners
- Grievance procedures free from retaliation

How can we ensure that the organic seal, which was born out of our grassroots movement to transform our food system, remains true to its founding principles? The framework we have established with the Organic Foods and Farm Act of 1990 provides us with a strong foundation.

NOC asserts that abandoning the foundation we have already laid with the organic law and organic regulations is irresponsible and could leave us in a weaker position given our broader vision of transformation. NOC also believes that environmental enforcement is focused on cultivating champions for organic on both sides of the aisle; we will continue to increase our grassroots reach in key states and grow our power to influence key decision-makers at the USDA and in Congress to address gaps in the enforcement of organic standards and to demonstrate the value of organic regulations.

In addition to the standards, AJP provides technical assistance to farms and food businesses to help them improve labor and trade policies. On the website in the Farmer section is a Tool-kit which includes a long list of resources to help farmers implement fair labor policies and get prices that cover livable wages for themselves and their employees.

1. A self-assessment check list so a farmer can evaluate readiness for FJC
2. A self-assessment check list for fair pricing
3. A downloadable template for labor policies so that a farmer can quickly create a set of employee guidelines that are FJC compliant
4. Intern learning contract examples
5. Resources on calculating production costs as a basis for pricing that fully covers these costs
6. A guide to fair contracts

The Tool-kit also covers conflict resolution. Resolving conflicts in a fair way and enabling employees to speak to the issues without repercussion and social elements of a fair workplace. Conflicts between farmers and their buyers must also be resolved fairly and without retaliation.

The Agricultural Justice Project conducted a three day training for Food Justice Certification (FJC) for reviewers and inspectors in Deerfield, MA, April 2 - 5, 2018 at Woolman Hill Conference Center. The training is for organic certification staff, organic inspectors and representatives of worker organizations.

NOC is strongly opposed to the with enforcement posture given their broader vision of transformation. NOC also believes that environmental enforcement is focused on cultivating champions for organic on both sides of the aisle; we will continue to increase our grassroots reach in key states and grow our power to influence key decision-makers at the USDA and in Congress to address gaps in the enforcement of organic standards and to demonstrate the value of organic regulations.
who would like to participate in implementing Food Justice Certification on farms and food businesses across North America. The April training reviewed the AJP standards, the process for conducting Food Justice Certification reviews, and the role of certification. A total of 180 people, representing organizations and businesses throughout the US and Canada, attended the training. 58 of those individuals have subsequently participated in the certification process.

United for Health, Justice, and Sustainability: The Domestic Fair Trade Association

by Erika A. Inwald, National Coordinator

Eyes glued to the screen, I still remember feeling my ears perk up as I heard the words fair trade turned our wheels of justice. At the Center’s annual conference, it was during the 2010 Republican presidential primary debate and Governor Kasich of Ohio had just said, “We want to have free trade, but fair trade.”

As someone fighting for fair and environmentally sustainable agricultural supply chains with organizations and businesses across the United States and Canada, I wondered if this moment was finally the one where presidential candidates would actually discuss how to institutionalize fair and stable pricing for farmers or how to ensure fair treatment of farmworkers.

Kasich campaigned around the concept of “Fair trade,” but what exactly did he mean by this term? As our current president engages in renewed NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) negotiations and talks about worker protection in fairness for the future, it is essential to reflect on what fair trade truly means to us as farmers, workers, innovators, advocates, and activists.

The Sixteen Principles of Domestic Fair Trade

Fair Trade is a concept that was first created to empower and build capacity for small-scale farmers and agricultural workers in “developing countries.” Equitable trading relationships and access to socially justice-minded consumers in places like the United States and Europe would help marginalized communities build the enterprises they need to thrive.

About 13 years ago, organizations and businesses from sectors spanning the agricultural supply chain came together to discuss what it meant to have fairness in North American agricultural production. They realized that small-scale farmers and farm workers in the United States and Canada face many of the same hardships as their counterparts in poorer countries. They imagined a future where consumers would be willing to pay just a little bit more to support a living wage, a fair price for farmers, and basic rights for the farmers and workers who produce the food we eat.

The Domestic Fair Trade Association was founded in 2008 as a result of these conversations.

We are a membership-based organization in the United States and Canada representing five sectors of the agricultural supply chain – farmers (including NOFA!), farmersworkers, retailers, intermediaries (processors, manufacturers, and distributors), and other NGOs.

One of the first accomplishments of the DFTA was adapting the international principles of fair trade to fit the domestic context. Our members collectively decided that Domestic Fair Trade would be defined by sixteen core principles:

- Family-Scale Farming
- Sustainable Agriculture
- Rights of Labor
- Direct Trade
- Equity and Opportunity
- Animal Welfare
- Transparency and Accountability
- Advocacy and Education
- Indigenous Peoples Rights
- Capacity Building for Producers and Workers
- Democratic and Participatory Ownership/Control
- Long Term Trade Relationships
- Fair and Stable Pricing
- Affordable Credit and Shared Risk
- Responsible Certification and Marketing
- Appropriate Technology

Through commitment to these principles, the DFTA protects and promotes the integrity of domestic fair trade.

Fighting for Positive Change

Whether it is farmers against farmworkers or retail chains and corporate organizations, a clear vision is needed to create a new agricultural system centered around the十六 core principles of fair trade. The DFTA has been successful in bringing together organizations and businesses that may not otherwise be able to engage in the difficult discussions necessary to create an improved agricultural system.

The DFTA is unique because it is one of the only organizations to meaningfully include all sectors of the agricultural supply chain. Our framework demonstrates that sector isolation does not have to be the norm and that building collective power across sectors is essential to improving agricultural production.

At the DFTA, we believe that building an equitable agricultural system requires simultaneously engaging in two key strategies. It is essential to (1) support market and supply chains and (2) push for policy change and advocacy campaigns.

When we directly support producers, like NOFA farmers, who are committed to our principles, they can increase and maintain agricultural supply chains centered on justice and sustainability. Slowly with this support, we can shift agricultural production away from the dominant system of exploitation and toward one centered on fairness.

Supporting these supply chains, however, is not sufficient to ensure long-lasting positive change in our agricultural system. Without improved policy and advocacy campaigns, it is exceedingly difficult for food and farm businesses that emphasize fairness, sustainability, and stability to succeed. Advocacy and policy change transform the norms of agricultural supply chains and facilitate wide-scale achievement of domestic fair trade principles.

In order to put these strategies into action, the DFTA is currently involved in four specific initiatives that aim to build the movement for domestic fair trade.

1. In partnership with other members of the Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor (HEAL) Food Alliance we are developing a national advocacy campaign to expose corporate control of institutional markets, expand market access for family-scale producers, and demand investment in infrastructure for fair food. This campaign seeks to explicitly benefit family-scale farmers who have been previously shut out of institutional markets in their community.

2. Typically the DFTA has hosted an annual bi-national gathering in order to foster cross-sector education and collaboration. This year we our hosting our regional domestic fair trade meetings instead. Join us at our regional event meeting later this year!

3. Many want to support domestic fair trade supply chains but are unsure of what can truly be considered fair. We are planning “Domestic Fair Trade Week: Promoting Justice,” a promotional week that highlights domestic fair trade producers (maybe including some NOFA members) and processors, in order to highlight those who are truly committed to domestic fair trade principles. This promotional week will also build awareness and feature events related to domestic fair trade advocacy campaigns.

4. Our members know that creating fair and sustainable supply chains is not easy. The DFTA is partnering with the Center for Fair and Alternative Trade (CFAT) at Colorado State University to do research that identifies successes and challenges to building supply chains that center fairness at every stage. This research will culminate in a report on how the DFTA and our members can alleviate some of the challenges that arise.

Join Us!

Any members of NOFA are welcomed to get involved in our exciting initiatives. All of our work is made possible by the committed support of our long-term members, such as NOFA, and we are always looking for new members to join. Even though fair trade might increasingly be used for political sound bites, by working in coalition, we are able to clearly demonstrate what fair trade actually means in the domestic agricultural context.
Springfield is the third largest city in Massachusetts, trailing Worcester by about 15%. Settled only 6 years after Boston, Springfield was originally part of Connecticut but defected after four years to join the Bay Colony, being burned to the ground during the 1675 King Philip’s War. An armory, created there during the Revolutionary War, was almost captured during Shay’s Rebellion in 1787, an event that helped precipitate the U. S. Constitutional Convention.

Springfield was known for inventive residents and cutting edge manufacturing for over 2 centuries, including the first use of an assembly line (1819), the first American horseless car (1825), vulcanized rubber (1844), the first American gasoline car (1893), the first American motorcycle company (1901) and the invention of basketball (1891), the world’s third most popular sport.

Although, like many American cities, during the last century its soil has been contaminated by lead and other heavy metals, the city is situated next to the Connecticut River on land that originally was among the most fertile in the Northeast. Early colonists found Native Americans growing tobacco in the Connecticut Valley and continued the practice. High quality shade tobacco production brought in migrant agricultural workers, some of whom settled in Springfield. Currently it is the most heavily Black and Hispanic of Massachusetts’ big cities, at 61% compared to Boston’s 42% and Worcester’s 32%.

Anna Gilbert-Muhammad is the Food Access Coordinator of NOFA/Mass and lives in Springfield. She was born in New York City but, being the child of a Marine Corps father, lived in various places in California as well as Baltimore. While in California, although she was raised as a Roman Catholic, Anna became interested in the Nation of Islam and ultimately converted.

“When I was in LA,” she recalls, “a friend invited me to a mosque event. It was such a fun event and they were such warm people I started going back, even though I was a pretty devout Catholic. I went to study sessions, congregational prayer, different events – particularly the learning ones. I enjoyed that kind of study. And I enjoyed the whole idea that prayer is a conversation between you and God. There are no intermediaries. You know the Catho-
Anna has been particularly supportive of the no-till and carbon farming work NOFA/Mass has been doing. These practices are not how she learned to garden, but the results—in terms of both usefulness for growing and quality of the produce—has convinced her to spread the word.

“When I first started to garden,” she recalls, “it was all about: ‘go get the roto-tiller and till up everything’ every year. Make your regular rows and keep it moving. But to learn a different way that is better both for the quality of your food and also the environment, that is going to a different level. A lot of people want to learn about that. The gardeners that I have brought to NOFA have found that information very useful and are trying to use it in their gardens, planter boxes, backyards.”

“Some don’t understand why they shouldn’t till up their gardens,” she admits. “They come over and watch me and I show them how to do it differently. One good reason, of course, is that you don’t have to rent a roto-tiller and borrow a truck to get it to your garden. Number two, I don’t have as much of a weed issue because I’m not waking up those weed seeds by tilling the soil. By covering the soil, I keep all the good stuff in there. People can understand that, particularly the part about not having to spend money!”

When Anna talks about no-till, she says, she doesn’t get into all the ins and outs of what is going on in the soil biology. She just talks about what the grower can do to do a better job.

“If you speak the language of people,” she advises, “you will soon find out how to pitch what you have to say. You may want to talk about it differently in Dorchester than in Greenfield, or parts of Worcester where the food policy Council just passed around a petition about putting SNAP cuts, and in Springfield the Food Policy Council is working situations we can work together on. I know in Boston there are groups doing policy work around poor white people vote against their interests—all the good stuff in there. People can understand that, particularly the part about not having to spend money!”

When Anna talks about no-till, she says, she doesn’t get into all the ins and outs of what is going on in the soil biology. She just talks about what the grower can do to do a better job.
She feels strongly, however, about making sure the community group is in charge and making the key decisions. Gardening the Community, for instance, has alliances with different organizations to help out with growing, to bring in affordable CSAs into the city, and to learn about soil restoration to build up their soil. But GTC stays in charge of the agenda and decides what sort of help they need.

“I think the most useful way to work in a community like this,” Anna says, “is to understand history – understand how we got to this point. A lot of times people come into our communities, do services, and leave. It is almost as if they make their living off of our misery, our suffering. This happens with a lot of social service agencies.

“Working in partnership,” she continues, “you need to let the community take the lead in saying what they need. The Springfield Housing Authority’s Robinson Gardens is a good example of a partnership. The families there are the ones that dictate what they need and as community garden coordinator I try to see what resources I can bring to the table to help meet that need. Those families wanted a garden where they could grow the kind of food that they can’t get here with their SNAP benefits and their paychecks. Same thing at Tapley Court. I just played a supporting role to help them get a garden going.”

For groups like NOFA, which she thinks has a wonderful program – to ask: ‘How can I be an ally?’ is the most useful way to approach forming an alliance. Take the back seat and let the group decide where they want to go.

She also suggests that NOFA make its education events more accessible to communities of color.

“‘When I first got involved,’” she recalls, “‘all the workshops that I wanted to attend were way out. You needed a car for most of them. That took a lot of planning on my part to be able to attend. When we came to the Soils and Cover Crops one in Barre we had to arrange for a car and a car pool. If we did that same workshop here it could be on a bus line within walking distance for many people. Then more people would be apt to go. Maybe have a nominal fee like $5. I know we are a fee-for-service organization and have to pay for our programs, but could we make a sliding scale? Maybe the folks coming from Longmeadow could pay a higher price than the ones from Springfield (laughs). Just a thought!

“But when it comes to workshops,” she continues, “ask: Is it accessible? Are we covering topics that make sense to people? How is it advertised? For the workshop UFI has coming up this weekend we’re making it a point to push it in the Dorchester/Mattapan area, in the neighborhoods that people can walk from. They’re marketing it to other organizations in the area, youth groups, neighborhood associations, to reach all the people of color in that area.

“It means coming out of our comfort zone a little,” she concludes, “to reach people. When we table at conferences I go with Marty, our outreach staffer. (Marty Dagoberto is a tall Hispanic). People look at us both and do a double take. But us being there makes it easier for some people to come to the table, ask us what NOFA/Mass is about. I tell them about what is going on at UFI or GTC. They ask how can they get to that workshop or how can NOFA work with them.”

Volunteers dig in at work party (with food, music, a Disc Jockey, and planting contests for children) opening the garden at Tapley Court Apartments, a 40-unit Springfield structure with some low income and some market rate homes.

She feels strongly, however, about making sure the community group is in charge and making the key decisions. Gardening the Community, for instance, has alliances with different organizations to help out with growing, to bring in affordable CSAs into the city, and to learn about soil restoration to build up their soil. But GTC stays in charge of the agenda and decides what sort of help they need.

“I think the most useful way to work in a community like this,” Anna says, “is to understand history – understand how we got to this point. A lot of times people come into our communities, do services, and leave. It is almost as if they make their living off of our misery, our suffering. This happens with a lot of social service agencies.

“Working in partnership,” she continues, “you need to let the community take the lead in saying what they need. The Springfield Housing Authority’s Robinson Gardens is a good example of a partnership. The families there are the ones that dictate what they need and as community garden coordinator I try to see what resources I can bring to the table to help meet that need. Those families wanted a garden where they could grow the kind of food that they can’t get here with their SNAP benefits and their paychecks. Same thing at Tapley Court. I just played a supporting role to help them get a garden going.”

For groups like NOFA, which she thinks has a wonderful program – to ask: ‘How can I be an ally?’ is the most useful way to approach forming an alliance. Take the back seat and let the group decide where they want to go.

She also suggests that NOFA make its education events more accessible to communities of color.

“‘When I first got involved,’” she recalls, “‘all the workshops that I wanted to attend were way out. You needed a car for most of them. That took a lot of planning on my part to be able to attend. When we came to the Soils and Cover Crops one in Barre we had to arrange for a car and a car pool. If we did that same workshop here it could be on a bus line within walking distance for many people. Then more people would be apt to go. Maybe have a nominal fee like $5. I know we are a fee-for-service organization and have to pay for our programs, but could we make a sliding scale? Maybe the folks coming from Longmeadow could pay a higher price than the ones from Springfield (laughs). Just a thought!

“But when it comes to workshops,” she continues, “ask: Is it accessible? Are we covering topics that make sense to people? How is it advertised? For the workshop UFI has coming up this weekend we’re making it a point to push it in the Dorchester/Mattapan area, in the neighborhoods that people can walk from. They’re marketing it to other organizations in the area, youth groups, neighborhood associations, to reach all the people of color in that area.

“It means coming out of our comfort zone a little,” she concludes, “to reach people. When we table at conferences I go with Marty, our outreach staffer. (Marty Dagoberto is a tall Hispanic). People look at us both and do a double take. But us being there makes it easier for some people to come to the table, ask us what NOFA/Mass is about. I tell them about what is going on at UFI or GTC. They ask how can they get to that workshop or how can NOFA work with them.”
Anna also has some suggestions for making an organization’s staff and board more inclusive. The will to do that has to be serious, she feels, and recruitment is often necessary.

“Attracting people of color to an organization that doesn’t have them,” she insists, “has to be intentional. It has to be done every day, not just pulled off the shelf when you need it. We have to set up workshops that will attract the people we want, we have to recruit board members in communities that are different, recruit staff from groups that we are working with. I wouldn’t have known about this NOFA/Mass job without being recruited for it. I would never have gone on NOFA’s website to look for a job. Maybe I would have seen something if it was in the Point of View, which is Springfield’s version of the Bay State Banner. A listing there might open you up to a different pool of candidates. If they see an ad there, people know you are looking for people like them.”

NOFA’s strongest asset, Anna reiterates, is the fact that we are trying to solve problems, make communities stronger, people and the earth healthier. People who believe in those things will be attracted to it.

“NOFA has a deeper meaning than lots of organizations,” she asserts. “For the work I did before, I got paid well. But there was no depth to it. This gives me something not only that I can use, but that I can bring to my community. That’s what I like about NOFA, it’s an organization that is a little different, but it is really doing some good.”

Anna leads group of Springfield urban gardeners attending a workshop on soil carbon led by Ray Archuleta of NRCS at Many Hands Organic Farm in Barre.
Organic dairy farmers gather at a New Hampshire farm. NOFA, working with NODPA (Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Association), was instrumental in drafting the Organic Pasture Rule requiring cows be on pasture for at least 4 months of the year.

This newspaper contains news and features about organic food and farming in the Northeastern US as well as a Special Supplement on

**Organic Allies**