

OFARM Quarterly

The dawn of a new era in collective pricing, marketing and inventory by and for North America's organic farmers.

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OFARM welcomes WOMA to the organic farmer network family

The OFARM family of farmer cooperatives/associations is pleased to welcome its newest member, the Wisconsin Organic Marketing Alliance (WOMA).

WOMA is a Wisconsin-based organic grain marketing cooperative, whose purpose is to help organic producers in pricing, marketing and keeping an inventory of what's available for prospective buyers.

Efforts to bring Wisconsin organic grain producers together to market as a group have been underway for several years. Through the efforts of a number of producers from across the state, WOMA was incorporated as a cooperative in September. Mike Stephani, a DePere, Wis. producer and WOMA chairman, was at one of the original meetings held in Ames, Iowa that resulted in the formation of OFARM. Since that time, he sought to generate interest in organic grain producers putting together a group marketing effort in Wisconsin.

In February, 2004, Paulette Bradley sent a letter to OFARM Executive Director John Bobbe asking about the possibility of forming some type of organic marketing group. He connected Paulette with Mike and other producers scattered across Wisconsin who indicated an interest in an organized organic grain marketing effort. Initial discussions about bringing interested producers took place at the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference in LaCrosse in late February.

Bobbe assisted in setting up an interest meeting in late March. They included: Paul Dietman, Sauk County Agricultural Agent; Perry Brown, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (WDATCP) and Greg Lawless and Dr. Robert Cropp, University of Wisconsin (U.W.) Center for Cooperatives and Dave Campbell, Midwest Organic Farmers Cooperative (MOFC) from Illinois. Jeff Breuer, U.W. Hancock Experiment Station superintendent, made the meeting facilities at the station available. At the initial meeting, four producers attended.

The group became the steering committee and met over the spring and early summer through conference calls facilitated by Perry Brown. A summer picnic was planned for late July to further determine interest.

In the fall of 2004, the cooperative began operations. WOMA has a two-year marketing arrangement with NFOrganics to facilitate marketing members grain. NFOrganics is also an OFARM member.

From the very beginning, producers involved in WOMA's formation saw the need to think beyond just having a Wisconsin organic marketing cooperative. They saw the benefits of becoming a member of OFARM to be able to connect with other producers across the U.S. and Canada to protect organic farm gate grain prices.

"We would like to extend a warm welcome to the WOMA organic

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President's Message

By: Oren Holle

Another year has passed. "Happy New Year," to each of you! Oh, how time marches forward. Some events, like children growing up and each of us getting older, seem to move so quickly. Some of our expected timetables seem to make so little progress. Most producers were fortunate enough to have an average crop or better. Take a moment to count your blessings and thank the Lord of the harvest.

The end of the old year is a good time for reflection and the start of the New Year is a good time to look forward.

OFARM has seen a dramatic trend developing this past year. Not long ago OFARM member organization marketers were looking for markets for organic product which needed to find a home. The trend has shifted to searching for organic product to meet the demand in new and expanding markets.

These opportunities present a unique challenge for the future. How can we expand the production base and increase the net returns to reasonable levels of profitability?

When we look at the double-digit annual growth of the organic industry as a whole, and take the current short supply situation into consideration, the overall farm gate price for organic product has not responded as positively as it should.

Producers who continue to do their marketing as individuals leave themselves in a weak position in contract and sale negotiations. This results in pressure on market levels to keep them lower than they could be if they were negotiating and marketing as a group. Larger volume of product and a broader range of market information always results in a stronger bargaining position.

OFARM has the growth potential to effectively address these issues. We have just recently added the Wisconsin Organic Marketing Alliance to the OFARM family. Welcome! Several areas, including the Western Plains Canadian

Provinces, have had their first ever organic conferences. I attended and the OFARM concept of producer groups collaborating in marketing has been well received.

We are pursuing the contacts established at these functions and are doing what we can to assist producers who want to become part of OFARM and groups who want help getting organized. We are also continuing dialog with several existing marketing groups to encourage full participation and membership. Sometimes the obstacles seem endless and the progress painfully slow but we are enthusiastic about the

current possibilities. Development of OFARM as a North American marketing alliance with reaches into global market information and influence has some exciting opportunities.

Some of you, as members of one of the OFARM groups, may have been reluctant to be 100% participants. I urge you to become fully committed and work closely with your marketer to make your marketing program the best it can be. If you are not yet a member of a group I believe you owe it to yourself to research the possibilities of membership in one of the current member groups.

Another excellent opportunity would be to start the ball rolling to get a group started in your area. With the assistance available from OFARM and the benefit of past experience of the member groups who are already functioning, the task of getting a group up and working has become a lot more manageable.

OFARM is currently representing producers in nearly twenty US states and is growing into several Canadian provinces. This producer and organic product base is the largest producer controlled block of organic production in existence and provides you as an organic grower a prime opportunity to become part of highly successful marketing program.

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-- Oren Holle, OFARM president

New organic alliance will help Midwestern farmers

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producers. I am confident that their OFARM connection will prove as beneficial as it has been for those of us who have been around for awhile," said Oren Holle, OFARM president and board member from Kansas Organic Producers. "There is marketing strength for all of us in the added production for the OFARM block and I know the information and collaboration will enhance all of our marketing efforts."

WOMA's board of directors is: Mike Stephani, DePere, chairman; Pascal D'Huyvetter, Fairchild, vice chairman; Tim Zander, Columbus, director; Mike Peters, Sharon, secretary; Lauren Enzinger, Freeport, Ill., treasurer; and Paulette Bradley, marketing coordinator.

For more information, visit <http://organicmarketingalliance.org/index.htm>, or call Mike Stephani at (920) 983-2324 or Paulette Bradley at (608) 427-2201 or e-mail mcdonald@mwt.net.

Producer Portrait

Wisconsin natives help establish new organic alliance

Name: Mike and Janice Stephani

Location: DePere, Wisconsin

DePere is part of the Green Bay metropolitan area.

Mike grew up on a Wisconsin dairy farm that was organic long before the current move towards organics of the 1980s and '90s. They used no sprays or commercial fertilizers.

Mike had professional career in a number of industries including the paper industry and as the corporate treasurer of a major ice cream manufacturer. Mike operates the farm and Janice currently manages an off-farm family business.

He started back into farming in 1989 conventionally. Then a friend of his suggested that he try farming organically. In 1998, he rented his first farm that could be certified organic. He was disappointed with the only averaging 38 bushels organically compared to 60 conventionally.

When asked why he started farming organically, Mike responded, "Economics was a factor, but not the only factor." He did all his own spraying. Mike notes, "The worst days I had out of the year were days I had to spray." At several of the ACRES conferences over the years, he got to know Randy Hampshire who is a member of Organic Farmers of Michigan and OFARM's treasurer.

In 2004, his farming operation grew to 850 acres. Crops included soft red winter wheat, sweet corn, soybeans, hay, rye and clover. Rye, oats and red clover are used as cover crops. He harvests his

own rye and clover for seed. Vinton soybeans work well for him.

Soybeans, wheat or sweet corn are followed by a cover crop. The rotation varies based on business objectives, weather and organic certification requirements.

There is on-farm storage for the crops. He has seven part-time employees that help with planting and harvest during peak work times. In addition, he works with the local technical college to give experience to some of their agri-business students.

The farming operation is certified through Wisconsin OCIA Chapter #2. It is also JAS and NOP certified.

The Stephani's have a large organic garden for their household use.

As for the future, Mike would like to keep his farming operation under 1,000 acres. A challenge is that the land he farms is located on the edge of the Green Bay metropolitan area. A continuous challenge is the pressures of urban sprawl and losing land to housing developments.

Mike has taken on a new challenge as WOMA's chairman. He knows firsthand the battle individual producers face in organic marketing. He states, "I'm sick and tired of seeing individuals ripped off in the market place." That's why he sees growing WOMA as a top priority for farmers to network and go to the marketplace together.

OFARM Events Calendar

Jan. 16-17 OFARM Annual Meeting

Grandview Room, Amway Grand Plaza Hotel, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Jan. 17-21 National Farmers Organization Convention/ NFOrganics

Amway Grand Plaza, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Website: www.nfo.org

Contact: Melanie Dungan, (800) 247-2110 Ext. 217

Jan. 20-23 Guelph Organic Conference

University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada

"Local Organic-A Global Solution"

Contact: Tomas Nimmo, (705) 444-0923

E-mail: organix@georgian.net

Website: www.guelphorganicconf.ca

Jan. 21-22 The 2005 Minnesota Organic and Grazing Conference

St. Cloud Civic Center, St. Cloud, Minn.

Contact: (651) 296-1277.

Jan. 22 Northeast Organic Farming Association, Massachusetts Chapter, 18th Annual Winter Conference

Quabbin Regional High School, Barre, Mass.

<http://nofamass.org/conferences>

Feb. 11-12 Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society Annual Winter Conference

Aberdeen, S.D.

Contact: Theresa Podol, (701) 883-4304

E-mail: tpnpsas@drtel.net

Website: www.npsas.org

Feb. 24-26 Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference LaCrosse Center, LaCrosse, WI

Contact: UMOF, (715) 772-3153

P.O. Box 339

Spring Valley, WI 54767

Website: www.mosesorganic.org

Feb. 25, 1 p.m., Midwest Organic Producers Association at Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference

Contact: Steve Pechacek, (715) 262-5879

E-mail: spgp@centurytel.net

Feb.26, 1 p.m., Wisconsin Organic Marketing Association Meeting at Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference

LaCrosse Civic Center, LaCrosse, WI

Contact: Paulette Bradley, (608)427-2201

E-mail: mcdonald@mwt.net

OFARM Member Organizations

Midwest Organic Farmers Co-op (Illinois)

Contact: Randy Jones, (734) 429-9109

E-mail: mofc-randy@verizon.net

Website: www.midwestorganic.com

Organic Farmers of Michigan

Contact: Steve Steely, (810) 672-9345

E-mail: ofmlc@avci.net

Organic Bean and Grain Marketing (Michigan)

Contact: Mark Vollmar, (989) 673-6402

E-mail: mark@orbng.com

Website: www.orbng.com

Buckwheat Growers Association of Minnesota

Contact: Tom Bilek, (218) 631-9212

E-mail: info@buckwheatgrowers.com

Website: www.buckwheatgrowers.com

Great Lakes Organic (Ontario, Canada)

Contact: Roger Rivest, (519) 687-3522

E-mail: greatlakesorganic@on.aibn

Website: www.greatlakesorganic.com

Great Lakes Organic, Petrolia Office

Contact: (519) 882-4526

Website: www.greatlakesorganic.com

Kansas Organic Producers Association

Contact: Earl Wright, (620) 767-7272

E-mail: ebwright@cgtelco.net

Website: www.kansasorganics.com

NFOrganics/National Farmers Organization

Contact: LuAnn Robinson, (515) 292-2000

E-mail: lrobinson@nfo.org or

Tim Ennis, (800) 306-3913

E-mail: tennis@mddc.com

Website: www.nfo.org

Wisconsin Organic Marketing Alliance

Contact: Paulette Bradley, (608) 427-2201

E-mail: mcdonald@mwt.net

Website: <http://organicmarketingalliance.org/index.htm>

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Dear Producer Member of OFARM,

The OFARM Annual Meeting is just around the corner. As OFARM President, I would like to take this opportunity to encourage you to attend. I know this is not an easy decision. Time away from our farms involves a good deal more than just the cost of traveling, lodging and food. So it comes down to this. "Is this gathering of organic producers important enough to make such a commitment?" As a fellow producer I believe the answer is "yes." Some very important issues need our attention.

**The Annual Meeting will be held at:
Amway Grand Plaza, 187 Monroe N.W., Grand Rapids, Michigan
Monday, Jan. 17, 2005 - - Grandview Room, third floor
Opening of the meeting at 9 a.m., with registration at 8:15 a.m.**

The Board of Directors will have its final planning session and the Marketing Management Committee will be preparing the proposed Target Price List at 3:30 p.m. the day before, Jan 16. We welcome all OFARM members participation in these sessions.

This meeting will be held in conjunction with the National Farmers Organization's 50th Anniversary annual convention which will include several NFOrganics marketing workshops, Tuesday, Jan. 18, at 4:30 p.m., and Wednesday, Jan. 19, at 3:45 p.m., along with many other special presentations

- **Our Target Price List approval.** As an organic producer this is your opportunity for first hand input in establishing price goals for your products. There will also be decisions to plan strategies to use this target price concept to affect general price levels within the organic industry. We need to lay plans to be the 'place to go' for organic price information.
- **Rules and Procedures.** OFARM is a work in progress. While we have some basic procedures we need to know how we can better serve our producer members. The Rules and Procedures reviewed at each annual meeting set the guidelines for accomplishing our mission, "To coordinate the efforts of producer marketing groups to benefit and sustain organic producers." Producer input is very important.
- **Greg Welch, Organic Valley** will be our guest speaker and will be sharing some of his perspectives about the growing organic industry

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OFARM annual meeting, continued...

- **Develop Marketing Strategies.** Marketing Coordinators from other OFARM groups will be there to share and evaluate information about marketing and contracting.
- **OFARM Growth.** The OFARM concept of regional areas developing marketing programs to meet producer's needs, and then sharing marketing information under the OFARM umbrella, appeals to producers. We are making contacts in new areas that we need to add to the OFARM family of organizations. Much more can and needs to be done. Decisions will be made to make the best use of our resources to spread the word about OFARM and in turn help groups with their OFARM connection.

You still have a few days to make plans to attend. Information is included to help you with arrangements. Talk to several of your member neighbors to see if they might also consider participating. If you simply cannot get away and have ideas to share you may contact me personally if you like. Phone toll free 866-846-5577 or e-mail oholle@kansas.net.

Sincerely,
Oren Holle, President