

## Ideas and Issues Workshop 4

- Biggest issue undermining organic integrity and holding organic back from Climate-Smart is that USDA is letting a few renegade certifiers certify soilless hydro products as organic
- Only country that does this, It harms real organic farmers that are hurting law. 2010 NOSB rec was ignored on this. The sentiment of board was soilless hydroponics should not be certified
- We don't need a standards change, NOP needs to crack down on accreditation process to stop renegade certifiers from certifying hydroponic
- Lack of consistency with hydroponics, OFPA is not being followed because of hydroponics
- Soil is required for organic production! The law is very clear. The OSP for any crop asks you to describe soil building practices.
- Hydroponics is systemic fraud that harms the credibility of organic
- Hydroponics hurts organic farming, those operations need their own label. Farmers are being undermined, consumers are being deceived, and the US is the only place doing this
- Ensuring farmer voice is actually a real farmer on the NOSB.
- OREI requires soil to qualify for ORG of OREI organic research grants
- NRCS requires soil for EQIP programs
- HUGE fundamental conflict there: use that language from OREI to get hydro out of organics
- Organic should be centered in the climate-smart ag conversation. And we should ensure organic is as climate smart as possible.
- Standards are great, we just don't enforce them.
- It's come down to what CAN we enforce. Maybe we need standards that are more easily enforced
- We need to have crop rotation enforced (why are there organic corn and soybean farms?)
- Why was the word organic missing from Vilsack's 'earth friendly farming'?
- Organic is a large world, how can we claim organic farming is universally earth friendly?
- If we just leave out synthetic nitrogen we solve 80% of the climate impact problem
- More coordination/connection between Organic and Climate-Smart. Offer incentives to be Climate-Smart. Climate-Smart has a big focus on metrics and measurement.
- Outcome metrics for measuring CI: Total organic production, Resource consumption, Carbon captured, Pollution emitted, Efficiency of resource use, Soil health
- On the other hand, already enough on plates just trying to deal with the environmental aspects of certification.
- Challenging to see what the market is doing. Would help if USDA could collect and share more data about the dairy market and about climate and organic.
- Climate data is still new and we need much more research of contributions of organic systems.
- Organic regulations should incorporate & adapt to emerging environmental challenges, the backbone of organic is based on health, nutrition, and environmental issues.

- Maybe inspections should focus on a different environmental challenge each year
- Focus on animal welfare standards for CI.
- Add “electrification” – i.e. electric tractor, solar panels for chicken rotation.
- Provide funding and incentives to support environmental items; ideally, coordinated among USDA and NRCS and Climate-Smart.
- Conventional farms want “fuel diversity”, which clouds the effort of looking toward alternative fuels. Having conventional ag leading this conversation could be a challenge down the road for organic, electrification, and solar.
- The climate hotspots are in refrigeration and transportation.
- Organizations, universities and institutions could do free audits to improve environmental outcomes.
- Organizations, universities and institutions could help with Cost-share for cover crop seed and establishment to improve environmental outcomes.
- Benefits of organic for climate need to be recognized by USDA
- For CI, Additional requirements into standards on water management and soil health
- Focus on soil health has been lost.
- Backpedaling on soil management
- Concerned about creating consistent standards because growing systems are different in humid and non-humid regions.
- Organic inputs now-- just mimic conventional inputs. Too much poor management that's getting under the tent flap of organic.
- Concerned about 'consistent' standards
- To incorporate and adapt to environmental challenges, organic needs to integrate regenerative. We've gotten away from this idea.
- Organic should include water use and availability of water.
- Soil should be a focus. Soil building. Carbon sequestration.
- Certifiers don't understand what biodiversity means.
- Climate change is the big challenge.
- Will address: climate, water, etc
- How to educate certifiers about biodiversity- how to accurately capture it.
- Issues of biodiversity go beyond soil health.
- It is too much for organic regulations to deal with. The management of labor issues on farms would be difficult.
- The immigrant work force is much better at farm work than the domestic work force. But there is a power dynamic that can't be ignored. H2A labor has a set wage that varies per state; undocumented workers get paid below minimum wage.
- Maybe a voluntary or parallel program, but don't include in the organic regulations.
- IFOAM is working on standards around social justice and organic around living wages.
- Organic standards should address nutrition because those standards would relate back to health soil.
- Organic standards should not address nutrition because it seems out of scope and the evidence of organic improving nutrition isn't there.
- Nutrition content of foods is tricky to measure.

- Organic should focus more on the community level and increasing food access, access to fruits and vegetables, how to prepare local foods, how to get more people in a community to buy fruits and veggies, notions of "food sheds".
- CI should have a focus on nutrition.
- Leave labor and social justice standards an open market and not try to put anything in the NOP rules
- What one farmer thinks is good labor practices might not be the same for others
- Really hard/different from a farmers' perspective to do both organic and social justice
- Labor and social justice is supported as a separate standard
- It would help if we knew where the "organic" food was coming from overseas.
- Calling out the international aspect of organic. Imports of organic from places that don't have the same labor laws.
- Allow for market competition around social justice/labor standards in continuous improvement
- If we could do ONE thing around social standards-- it would be to eliminate the ceiling in Organic- allow certifiers to certify above and beyond the base standards.
- Focus: The floor VS the ceiling.
- Organic standards should address nutrition, nutritional quality for organic on label. Concerned about industrial organic- watering down of nutrition
- Resource: Charles Benbrook- the dietary risk index-- randomly sampling of foods around the country. Tie it into the ACA information-- feed all data into 1 system. Map the hotspots of problems in our own community.
- Educating the consumer is still needed
- They need to know what organic is
- Cultural practices- how the practices help the environment
- USDA could play a role by sharing with the consumer what exactly organic is and means. Help inform what it is. Then let the consumer make that choice. That is going to drive the market
- Idea to add to NOP- Marketing relationship training. Involve buyers and users of organic to have a conversation to discuss what a good marketing relationship is. Could happen outside of the NOP.
- The seal is established and consistent. Don't know if you need to change the design. It's simplicity is a good thing
- Maybe you could add a QR code that ppl can scan to learn about what organic needs
- 2nd- I like the idea of the QR code
- Climate friendly has been growing in importance in policy and discussions.
- Organic IS climate friendly. This resonates with the consumers.
- Element of food security- consumers are understanding that we have pitfalls as far as food sec concerned. Organic has some role to play in this. Any way to communicate this with the seal itself?
- Id like to see more certs but then there's the problem of educating the public so they will want to pay higher premium

- Vilsack talking about climate-smart program- would it be third party certified? Don't know yet. But we should assume there will be movement on this, considering his recent public comments
- Grassfed certification. Different certifiers interpret the standards differently.
- So things aren't being enforced consistently across organic
- Lets incorporate these claims of other labels INTO organic
- Processors- they want more flexibility with the color scheme of the logo
- There is pressure on farmers to get all kinds of certifications. Many pork and dairy are relying on multiple certs now above and beyond organic.
- Organic has to be the baseline. Whatever is additional, organic is the baseline. It is climate smart
- There is confusion because of all of the other labels. Confuses the consumer.
- When we see more and more add on labels, it prob creates some consumer confusion, probably will erode consumer confidence in the organic seal
- We need to get on top of this and ensure that the standards are being enforced as they are meant to be
- The 'meaning' of organic changes depending on the product, which is confusing to consumers
- These other aspects are good and fine, but the USDA organic seal pertains to farming. We need to concentrate on that.
- We need consumers who are willing to pay more for organic.
- CCOF just added a bunch of extra labels, including grassfed for dairy. We all know it, but adding these things does make a difference.
- Certified humane allows poultry porches
- Organic Plus Trust is taking off to combat the fact that there are massive dairies in Texas that are organically certified
- Some of these add-on labels are successful because organic is slipping
- Bee Better certified, non-GMO certified, these are add-ons that are a burden on farmers but probably don't have a premium
- Are carbon labels going to be applied to organic automatically?
- Sustainable wine growers just cut their nitrogen-use back by 10-20% and suddenly they are sustainable
- Should we buckle down on the 'us versus conventional' narrative? We are better.
- Non-GMO is directly competing with the organic label. People thing non-GMO means healthy
- GMO. Now we encourage farmers to add the non-GMO claim on their products although it is already part of organic. This year, 2 million in sales and it is not enough to make it. Standard changes is good to help make things more visible. Labelling hydroponics is key.
- At CCOF, we now do additional items pf certification including the real organic but I don't see with what I grow I can meet these standards. At the same time, how do we not overwhelm people? It has to be in a controlled amount otherwise we are in trouble.
- I agree that if we overwhelm consumers they shut down. My concern currently is that I think that consumers don't understand what organic means because the standards have

been so loose and they end up buying the non-organic items. Adding on anything to the label is going to be useless because consumers are out of the loop to begin with.

- There should be more programs to support the connections between buyers and farmers, and especially consumers and farmers. Where do you go with your dollar? There are so many decisions to make. Organic is not as affordable for everybody but at the same time the farmers need to be making a living.
- We know the government is not going to help connect buyers, especially consumers, and farmers.
- The organic seal should be more responsive to changing market conditions and practices, the seal cannot stay static
- The organic seal hasn't stayed static, they have changed
- Frustration with all the add-on labels coming to the market because it causes consumer confusion and takes away from USDA Organic label. If USDA were able to keep up with the times, the add-on labels may not be necessary.
- Regenerative movement is going to steal our cheese (soil health)
- USDA is not the solution to improve viability of farms, we need a stronger community and a more active association
- Organic trade association is an avenue for this
- Organic is looking more like non-organic every year in the way people interact
- Government buying for schools, prisons, etc. They are requiring 50% of the food to be organic. The reasons to favor organic has to do with climate and soil.
- Public shaming has not worked since 2010 when Vilsack joined. There are big institutional forces fighting against that and it is very hard in Washington to change that. The only way I can imagine we can change fraud and enforcement issues in organic is with tremendous awareness campaign. This is a chance to talk to congress and say that this is very important to us. Taking this message to the farm bill with a united voice is super important.
- Regional collaborations between public and private entities to support organic.
- Showcase the health benefits of reduced pesticides in food.
- We need to widen the lens of who we partner with to protect ourselves(farmers) from contamination
- Link- cancer consumer group/events-- try to try organic into that consumer education.
- Develop a CORPS of long-time organic farmers who are willing to be available to younger farmers improve environmental outcomes. Pay it forward.
- Peer to Peer communication
- Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) -- as model for future collaboration support
- Constant connection to community could help improve organic outcomes-- how to get universities out on the farm.
- Establish a hotline-- 1-800 number for farmers to go to with questions to improve environmental outcomes
- Grocery stores and catering companies need to be concerned about liability in selling products that are poisoning people..

- There is some disconnect between NOP and certifying agencies. Certifying agencies need more oversight from NOP and NOSB because there are inconsistencies and agencies are straying away from regulations. NOP should hire more staff to do that.
- Structural changes, relationship and power structure between NOP/NOSB. We should not be afraid to demand things. Cost share should be transformed into something significant for organic farmers.
- Take the whole program and reevaluate for fundamental changes/paradigm shift. Organic should be the center for solutions we are looking at.
- Since NOP took over the business, it's mostly checking boxes instead of doing narratives and descriptions.
- In Canada a lot of standards are developed outside of government, this is a model that we can look to as a possible way to improve the slow process of standards.
- Proponent of NOP, the hard part with NOSB, it works well with specific materials but fails with more philosophic aspects
- Rulemaking includes broader practices and when economics gets in it gets messy
- When things are not unanimous it gets messy
- Worry and concern around how to take broader and philosophical changes to go through the NOSB, which is a narrower more specific process.
- The NOSB shows hesitancy to give power to people outside of NOP even when there is not internal expertise
- Hitch between what NOSB wants to do, stakeholders want to do, expertise on specific things for example marine materials
- Appointment to NOSB is controversial especially when industry people are designated to farmer slots
- OFPA states these 4 slots need to be active farmers, this needs to be followed!
- When I served on NOSB no one asked for my identification as a farmer as it relates to USDA: need better criteria to make sure it is farmers. This needs to be strengthened, it has been a problem and been taken advantage of over years
- Need some kind of help for farmers serving on the board, spring and fall meetings, bad schedules for the NOSB, no matter what date you put the meeting on farmers will be affected. I had to hire labor to cover me. Limitations to serve are how much time it does take to serve. Some financial remuneration for expenses would be great. We aren't allowed direct payments, but payments for travel are a way so if farmers could submit expenses of paying a laborer to cover the farm for them while they are gone it may be a huge help especially for smaller producers.
- Ex. I knew a farmer who missed farmers markets for NOSB meetings and those were her lifeblood
- Most work of serving on board happens between meetings and you really have a lot of homework. Not just an honor, its work. Luckily, I took chemistry in college, material review requires a lot of specific knowledge. Need mentorship to guide you in what you need to serve on NOSB. It is a serious commitment. Need some sort of grant to support real farmers to give that commitment because it is a sacrifice.
- Endowed chair or some type of grant for serving on NOSB: clear open criteria, non-government institutions doing it.

- SARE funds could support serving on NOSB as a way for farmers to build professional skills.
- Need to address farmer support for serving on NOSB
- Agriculture waits for no-one-it's 24/7, it is critical to have resources
- Information about NOSB and NOP is not readily available to the multi-ethnic community
- For our smaller, multi-ethnic farmers to travel and leave farm for NOSB is not feasible: they would rather invest in farm
- Aqua culture farmers have the issue of being on the agenda for NOSB for over 20 years. How do they make it to the top of the list? We import more than 90% of our seafood.
- Background – Seafood standard the NOSB passed was put in place because there was a very powerful Senator from Alaska. That senator got into the organic law during a change that the NOP should develop standards for wild seafood. There were a lot of problems because tracking is impracticable. Coming up with organic feed for organic fish was very tricky. If that change to the law happened, we may have come at fish production from farmed fish first where we have more control over environment and feed.
- There is a lack of responsiveness from the NOSB to NOP. Need structural changes to the power between the two bodies. NOP is ignoring the NOSB so we need something in the Farm Bill to fix that.
- Organic farmers on NOSB need a stipend to pay someone to run the farm while they are at meetings. The NOP could come up with a better process for dealing with NOSB recommendations on sunset and changes to the standards. We need to have a timeline for moving on recommendations or reporting missing information. The community needs to know how to help. Also, the time of year is very difficult for many farmers to participate. Early spring and early fall are very busy for planting and harvesting
- Farmers describe FSA as frustrating and inefficient
- Fundamental lack of coordination across USDA agencies and they don't recognize farms
- Maximize use of technology: use phone to map phone, send location and OSP, that will open doors to a lot of younger farmers. We can't close door to older farmers who are still in a paper world, but govt grants and universities can contribute here: keep up and use technology!
- Broadband equity, equity to technology in rural areas and smart phones
- People don't even get a notice for schedule F, you shouldn't have to jump through all these hoops
- With cost-share programs in NRCS it is hard to qualify because you have already done it, it is frustrating ie cover crop or pest control cost share(took creativity and included weeds
- Ammonia extracts: technology has changed, how do we respond in the rule to those changes that are a big picture thing; USDA is not good at that, it is an onerous process
- Federal Rulemaking Process is very complex
- USDA is built for large broad acre, and we need to focus on human scale farms:
- Is the juice worth the squeeze for USDA programs: it is just not!
- How do we continue to center the need to define small and medium farms and support them

- Organic farmers and farming is incredibly misunderstood in USDA and it is hard to keep fitting a square peg in a round whole. NRCS standards required chemical fertilizer on seeds for a stream crossing and participant had to appeal all the way to the federal level to apply chicken manure instead. The strength of organic is our diversity but FSA does not understand or want to deal with it. Many organic farmers refuse to go their anymore and FSA is happy to not have us. FSA doesn't even ask if farmers are organic. Some NRCS do require use of herbicides. CRP also creates issues when they prefer herbicides over burning. NRCS does have organic contacts in every state and Linsey Haines at the national level, who is very knowledgeable. Linsey will contact county people and help farmers navigate the program.
- Farmers need to be self-advocates. A huge issue is timely reimbursement or payments. Otherwise the resources you may need could be put off for another season. One tool that was put together was requesting a receipt for service in FSA offices so you can track all the way through. You must ask for that receipt to ensure accountability. We had some programs that were supposed to start in December. We had to work on a volunteer basis when funding was not timely. We are operating in crisis due to drought. The soil and water conservation districts are two years behind on receiving payments. Huge issue when prime contractor cannot provide resource to the subcontractors.
- Other countries support organic and see it for what it is as how ag needs to move for a sustained planet. We need to make inroads and USDA needs to understand how important it is to support organic agriculture, food, and fibers for all members of our society in SNAP and farmers markets. There are wonderful models around the world that could show us how to implement these things.
- Crop insurance – Whole Farm Revenue Protection specialists are rare, we need more FSA agents trained in that. That would be the option that makes the most sense for diversified organic producers.
- FSA Offices need major improvements. That's where we should be getting our core support, but our experience locally has been that there's corruption and lack of education/customer service. There has been some progress on the state level – we now have an NRCS specialist, which every state should have. FSA is a huge roadblock – they get zero support when farmers go in, or sometimes even negative/discouragement.
- Our FSA office are nice people, but they're deeply entrenched in conventional. They haven't modernized through the pandemic to offer more digital options. Farmers access to FSA is so limited now. In NJ, I believe we did get an organic point person, maybe even two. The organic specialists do more, but they're just starting out and it's coming so much later in the game than it should have.
- Our local FSA office is wonderful, but we also have a power bloc of organic farmers in our area so we can command more attention. Where people do not have that kind of representation, they can have a much more difficult time getting FSA's attention.
- In Oregon, our FSA office is excellent. So there are clearly peaks and valleys. We can't say all of FSA is a problem, but clearly some local offices are performing better than others.



- USDA Loan Assistance: When I went to them for help I was laughed out of the office. I had to go to the State of Kansas to finally receive some help because the private interest rates were too high.
- OFA keeps pushing the USDA to do something about farm viability, but nothing happens
- There is a deep distrust that the government has organic producer's best interests at heart
- No organic extension agents going out to farm to help with continual improvement.
- Measurables for NRCS annual reports (soil carbon?) would help improve environmental outcomes
- NRCS could be part of the organic environmental conversation
- Strengthen cooperative extension service nation wide- to disseminate knowledge about organic.
- Ag Secretary has avoid embracing organic
- To make organic more accessible, USDA could make money available for stores to put in kitchen training/food prep instruction
- To make organic more accessible, USDA could allow people to buy less processed product
- To make organic more accessible, USDA should build alliances with the Food as Medicine folks
- It is very difficult for the regulatory scene to be continuously changing regulations YET that is the heart of where organic began: continuous improvement so that growing conventional is no longer needed.
- USDA only address the marketplace. For example: hydroponics is now supposedly a part of USDA organic and the solution to changing that would have been to put an add-on. Differentiate organic from organic hydroponics. USDA can't be so hesitant to continuously change the regulation, they need to embrace it to move organic upward.
- CI: Very important. No policy ever got it perfect right out the gate. Continuous improvement drives the industry.
- CI is part of the definition of organic. Involvement.
- USDA and rules chiseled in stone
- Auditors who do accreditation need to be overseeing certifiers the same way. Every 2 years, auditors should look at 2 or 3 specific things they have been hearing about people that are problematic like greenhouses or pasture.
- OSP is a core concept because it requires applicant to think through and put in writing what they will do
- Then they follow it! It is a critical component
- Very concerned if someone gets rid of OSP because it is the soil component do not entertaining any dilution of that!
- Language in OFPA could be altered so plan requires applicant to submit more data that can be used in certification to do audits
- We have the technology to streamline process and capture more data so certifiers can give transaction certificates for sales of commodities(would not apply to direct marketers) because that is where big fraud happens

- Also we need certification of retailers because that is where real fraud occurs: when you can multiply what you're selling with little oversight FRAUD
- Every farmer has own version of OSP, not sure if good or bad.
- Frustrated with hydroponics because with OSP puts "N/A" under soil building. You don't get to skip a question in OSP!
- Change OFPA to take out "must" in practice standards and restate that language in OFPA to be unambiguous to make the OSP consistent that everyone uses soil
- Mass balance is random for me, but talking to another NOSB member the mass balance was predetermined and that is a whole different story to come up with different documents. The random mass balance is really critical and should be standard across the board.
- Risk assessments make a lot of sense: if you have a squeaky mass balance you have to get another audit
- SOE! Get it done!
- OSP is CRITICAL. Why are we even talking about getting rid of it?
- More help to get people to transition around OSP support
- A lot of new terms for BIPOC farmers: need a glossary to define acronyms and practices so we are able to speak to our farmers who are not familiar with it
- Maximize what we are asking for our farmers. We negotiate when we are at the table!
- We've been making the case that organics need to be recognized for their ecosystem services. USDA wants that and they are trying to create new climate friendly programs. We want to make sure organics are recognized as an existing program and the wheel does not need to be recreated. The OSP is the primary document where climate friendly practices can be documented.
- What is missing in OFPA and how can it be strengthened. Example genetic mods are prohibited in final rule but not in the law. We need to get genetic engineering in OFPA because it is silent on cloning, irradiation, genetic, it has all been rule or interpretation based. Let's get in law the language we want: Cloning, genetic radiation is not allowed, soil has to be in organic.
- Farmer skepticism about how OSP metrics can capture the benefits of the whole organic system and what farmers' efforts are on the ground.
- OSP is too much extra paperwork for busy farmers. Organic inspection paperwork is already enough.
- Yes, OSP was created to address some of the non-metric questions and address continuous improvement. It is a logical tool for holding farmers accountable and highlight weaknesses. It is a tool for certifiers to understand the big picture.
- The better farmers will follow the OSP, for other farmers it's just a piece of paper. It almost penalizes the farmers who are doing better. It doesn't really hold farmers accountable.
- Idea to make OSP manageable: Certifier rotates different aspects of OSP each year; i.e. Year 1: How are you working to address biodiversity on your farm? Year 2: How have you done your cultural approach to BT?
- There is a mandate of continuous improvement in the OSP
- OSP was not intended to be a check the box thing.

- Narrative portion-- goal should be continuous improvement
- Historically 75 % up to \$750 per scope, good pattern of getting that done. Got transferred from AMS to FSA, in 2020 got notice they were running short of money from 5 year cycle
- A lot more bureaucracy now because certifiers have to pay to get accredited.
- It is crazy that farmers are paying to be regulated : we need a serious relook at this. It varies by state by state and FSA office
- It has really become a mess, we should just offer direct payments to farmer or certifier
- Cost-share should be 100%. We shouldn't have barriers, it is always enough of a barrier to do all the paperwork, OSP and be inspected.
- You take risk to transition with no support, learning things, and then you have to pay to do beneficial services? It is a wise investment of government to have 100% cost-share. Farmers should not have to pay for certification at all.
- Why should we be paying for having healthy food? It makes no sense it turns it upside down. Corporate folks are trying to suppress smaller, BIPOC farmers with this.
- We have to pay to try to remediate the mess polluters have made of our land?
- It infuriates me to have to deal with this nonsense: the government already suppresses BIPOC farmers ability to grow healthy food
- Non-organic farmers should be certified and pay for toxic inputs!
- Otecep (<https://www.farmers.gov/pandemic-assistance/otecp>) does provide some support to compensate transitioning producers, but in our conversations with growers there was a huge amount of confusion around the roll out of otecep, people didn't apply because they thought they couldn't do cost-share and that, or worried they didn't qualify because they didn't own their land. Need better communication in multiple languages
- Pluses and minuses of Otecep it helps with organic education, organic transition, soil health, but the support is so small that it's a heck of a lot of paperwork for such little support / money most farmers will not do it, it is not worth it!
- It should be 100% cost share at least for smaller sizes. Very big farms can pay something to subsidize smaller
- If certifiers took on role of issuing 3,000 checks instead of state, it would save a lot of labor
- Enthusiasm to get away from reimbursement model and lowering certification fee upfront
- When certifiers are inconsistent, who is that taken up with? There is a place you can complain anonymously on the NOP website. Maybe that site should include where the party wants the complaint to go to within the NOP. Maybe we need a discrepancy reporting tool instead. Farmers need to be able to get clarity without digging through the regulations.
- Fundamental conflict of interest because the farmer pays the certifier, who has an incentive to approve the certifier. That problem is supposed to be addressed by the NOP audit procedure, but that is also subject to political and other pressures.
- As an organic inspector, I could see that large operations who paid big fees were given more slack than smaller operations. The slack I talk about was not in all instances, but I definitely saw it happen now and then. Inspectors get a copy of the certification letter, so we see how the certification agency implements the findings we gave them in the report.

- Beef coming out of South America does not have the same standards as domestic beef. The foreign markets mixing beef products in the United States relates to the fishing industry standards. We need to know what's going on in the larger marketplace – to have a standardized production. There is a potential partnership between NFLR and organic. In NM, their feedstock is generally produced with organic practices. But foreign markets have great competitive edge in certification.
- Is it preferable to have certifying agencies within state departments of agriculture?
- There is a lack of certifiers and agencies. Agencies have lots of backlog.
- State agencies were the original preferred certifiers but not all are equal and some of them have been the worst we've had because they hire from within and don't understand organic. Unless there is much better oversight, state agencies cannot be the preferred certifiers. WSDA is the exception as a quality state agency certifier.
- WSDA has decided they will no longer certify livestock. Washington farms now have to find certifiers from out of state. How is it fair for certifiers to just drop a whole swathe of the industry?
- We need to look at certification as quality control: healthy soil, clean water. If you can't produce quality product, consumer runs the risk of sickness. Everyone should want to have a quality product. We can influence legislation so quality farming takes place.
- The inspector spends so much time looking at paperwork and not so much looking at the operation. This is frustrating for the operator and the inspector. Having to supply information up front is a burden to the farmer. I used to spend 1/3 on paperwork and 2/3 on the farm. Now it is 20% on farm and 80% paperwork. The organic inspection used to be helpful to operator improving their OSP, soil fertility, insect management. Now it is just "show me your numbers." Inspectors can almost tell within 10 minutes if there is a problem or not when they walk on the farm. Don't know if that sixth sense can be taught. We want to protect the integrity of the label and paperwork is not the only way to do that.
- We did hybrid inspections during COVID. Inspectors had us drop paperwork and files into electronic drop box and the inspector reviewed them in advance. As a result, more of the time was spent in the field looking at the operation. That can cut costs, give inspector more time to review, and give knowledge to the farmer.
- Risk assessment is done in other areas. It should be applied to certification because we have huge farms with huge impacts and farms that have passed inspection for 20 years. Cost to the farm should play in.
- USDA spends a lot of money in a lot of ways. The cost share should go directly to the certifiers. The cost share in the first place because NOP standards drove increased costs to the farmer so it was more of a rebate to the farmer. The certifiers should get ¾ of what they are going to get, say if operations under \$400k for 100%, then operations don't have to come up with a bunch of money to get certified. The money would cover the group of folks who don't achieve certification as well. This would save money because right now certifiers have to send FSA invoices and do redundant work. In Denmark, the government covers all cost of organic certification. There are many small operations in the US that rely on the cost share to justify bothering with certification. Without oversight of certification, there is not consistency or understanding.
- There needs to be more oversight from NOP and NOSB on certifiers.

- Cost share should morph into something else. Certification is nothing compared to the cost of growing organic. We need to subsidize organic farmers for growing organic. We should ask for more reimbursement in the farm bill for additional costs organic farmers have to bear because of the conventional system. Other ag sectors get highly subsidized. We should still have limits because these costs are not a big deal to huge farmers.
- Should producers pay their portion into a pool to get around that conflict of interest so farmers are not writing a check to the certifier?
- Should organic producers continue to get subsidized for organic certification, and why? Is there a reimbursement percent of certification fees that seems appropriate? Historically, certification cost-share has been 75% (max \$750/scope) but the last two years it has been 50% (max \$500/scope).
- Cost share should be \$1000.
- Before the pandemic, about 80% of the organic farmers in Wisconsin applied for and received organic certification cost share- that included Hmong and Amish producers. It was very popular!
- Communication & oversight from NOP/NOSB to the certifying agency. More training, education, all the way down to the inspectors to maintain consistency throughout. More inspectors so they are not rushing through workload.
- Certification – it is a challenge in the industry when foreign markets do not have the same standards as us.
- FSA Cost Share: Farmers have applied and still not received it for 2021 (ex from Idaho). Delays in states dispersing those payments has been a huge problem after they switched from the state department of ag issuing to FSA. And the limit was also reduced from 75 to 50% when it moved to FSA.
- Some states have continued their program, like Kansas. Many state programs were originally subsidized by tax dollars. Iowa State has capped out, Oklahoma State has capped out. The ultimate question is: is certification a function of government or the private sector?
- The cost share reimbursement being lowered hit a lot of small producers we work with. I applied four months ago and haven't heard anything about my money. FSA is definitely dropping the ball.
- The OTECP program is so nominal, only \$250 for an education session. Not enough to match up with actual costs.
- We've filed complaints with the NOP- usually international grains. NOP was hugely understaffed at the time. Much has been done with enforcement and fraud since then.
- The certification process is almost totally funded by those wanting to get certified. The fact that its self funded creates some influence.
- We should step away from this
- Could a portion of this be funded differently so that better surveillance can come into play?
- We had an NOP certifier come for a full day. He definitely was doing his job. It was an unannounced inspection. But they didn't leave paperwork behind to cover our OFA

organic certification. They were basically inspecting OFA- making sure that OFA was doing their job.

- IT WAS GOOD. He was very knowledgeable, thorough.
- But I was upset that I couldn't use that for my OFA inspection.
- State of California has their own organic law. They do a good job of looking over fraud.
- Confusion between state and federal organic rules. Inconsistencies. Creates problems for certifiers.
- Original 1989 trial balloon organic law- had USDA doing the certifying. Changed it to a public-private partnership so that farmers could keep getting advisory services from USDA. USDA doesn't know nothing about organic, said farmers.
- We're dealing with production systems that function differently in different climates. This does create confusion and differences across the country
- Interagency cooperation has been initiated since fraud first came up. But there's more work that needs to be done.
- Encourage NOP to continue pursuing more interagency collaboration
- Further to go in detecting fraud
- NOP wanted you to do a lot of the investigation before. But now the NOP has more staff, so raising the flag to them, they are able to follow through with more enforcement.
- Making organic certification more accessible for small and medium sized farms- cost share.
- Improving the way that crop insurance works to compensate farmers for organic practices.
- NOP obligation- they oversee the certifications process. Certify the certifiers. Their authority often does not extend beyond that....Maybe some room for expansion of authority
- Some processors don't want organic inspectors on site, limiting possibilities for certified organic livestock.
- For processors to get organically certified it is a monumental task with separate book keeping, and there really isn't any money in it for them
- That's not true – getting certified as an organic meat processor is NOT difficult or expensive. But it's the unknown that makes it seem unachievable.
- There needs to be support to get processors to get grants to get organically certified
- Small processors are already booked without organic customers, so they don't care
- Working through the enforcement process can take 5 years, during which the products are still on the market
- We will not get the enforcement we want if it treated as a marketing program. Perhaps it should be part of the consumer protection agency, not AMS
- Should NOP be split into enforcement and standards?
- We have a government agency that doesn't believe in organic, and is therefore not willing to enforce anything unless you threaten to take them to court
- Majority of enforcement issues are coming out of retail (80% in California), which could easily be cleaned up if you had integrity from the people who are supposed to enforce it, although this is a result of growers mis-representing their products as organic

- Maybe fines for organic fraud aren't harsh enough (\$100k compared to a million dollar per year business? Is that really enough?)
- Easy-to-read education for farmers is sorely needed. Right now well-meaning farmers have to get 'caught' before they know what they are supposed to be doing.
- NOFA – Northeast organic farmers association – NY seems to be very thorough
- What is the scale of organic fraud? If we had a dollar amount maybe we could make more of a case?
- Port inspectors are severely understaffed, and nothing seems to get tested
- Fraud makes it less viable to be an organic farmer in the US
- In Denmark they have a government program to support organic sales. They don't subsidize the producers; they pay for the certification fees.
- The USDA should pay all the certification for farmers under 250k in sales so that would solve equity issues.
- Most of us believe that there is fraud and it is a challenge to get the government to police it better.
- Most organic farmers believe that the pasture rule is not being enforced and the USDA looks the other way. If that alone would change, that would completely change the face of organic dairy in North America.
- The largest farms know when the inspections are and how to get their ducks in a row for big farms. More surprise inspections would be better for big farms. It takes a long time to take cows to pasture.
- Better training at border patrol needed when it comes to organic would be a good thing. They don't know what they are looking at in terms of certificates.
- Transaction certificates would be really helpful as well to better monitor the origin of imported food.
- About additional legal authorities, one of the things that appear to be true to me (coming from CCOF certification staff), the biggest issue in fraud is that you need to have people working together and the state and federal government need to support organic. It isn't about additional legal authorities. Publicizing people who do these kind of things is the biggest tool and there needs to be efforts to make that happen.
- Enforcement is the greatest challenge
- Solutions to enforcement of standards: random inspections at no extra cost for farmer (easier for big certifiers to do that), make certification cost free
- Enforcement of standards; Shortage of fruit packers and dairy processing; Need to incentivize and promote LOCAL
- Being part of the certification process is that we get too technical. How do we find a way to reconnect with people and community?
- CI -- two tracks. One- regulatory process/certification process. How is it improve?
- Follow up with farmers post inspection that have deficiencies-- address on a 1:1
- USDA Rule-- that once certifiers were 'agents' of the USDA- they couldn't do education. Inspectors originally WERE educators. This was a huge benefit of the service the inspectors-- they have so much knowledge to share!
- All certifier boats need to rise together-- ACA, accredited certifiers association
- Make sure we don't allow inspectors to sell any products.

- Readdress with USDA-- Inspectors should be able to do education.
- Make sure that certifiers and other institutions answer the phone(to improve environmental outcomes)
- Have certifiers create a report about in what farmers are struggling with in meeting the standards (through exit interviews)--> Compile these notes with USDA- about what the industry needs.
- USDA/non-profits/organic industry/universities could help broaden the community to increase diverse producers getting into organics
- Looking at who is making up the certified organic label in terms of who those farmers are, and why are we not relevant to some farmer communities that practice organic but aren't represented in the certified organic label: EQUITY.
- What is process to get into organic added value: It is a considerable expense and we don't know clearly what the steps are to get into certified organic. We are in kindergarten with regards to this.
- It takes forever to be able to implement something, best to work with someone who has experience on the ground
- Need resources to transition, but will that be available? USDA has been reluctant
- Connect mentorship, farmers to farmers, it needs to be thoughtful in reaching out to groups that have not been represented in organic
- Subsidizing in graduate levels as farmers get closer to organic
- Language access: we have been meeting with smaller farmers for farm bill: More outreach on farm bill, translation in all languages on all farm bill programs, connecting creatively, to diversify need to speak to people in their own languages: for cost share, conservation programs, crop insurance, guidance for OSP , we need to routinely translate these materials into Spanish at a minimum but other languages too
- I would add to Jane's point to include shifting agency open hours and/or possibly co-locating some of program staff within community organizations that support translation and are friendlier to underserved farmer communities than government offices.
- Redundancy of information we are asking have one streamlines place for climate-smart, NRCS, Organic all of these things require the same thing from a farmer over and over, application free. Streamline across programs for farmers! Complicated patches to get money back make people confused and annoyed!
- In NM, through the NM Farmers Marketing Association (400 farmers who participate in farmers markets) we are doing a regional food system partnership. It's not really an inspection but part of it is a gap certification. Part of it hinges on convincing people to transition to organic. How do we take people who have a historical, traditional practice of farming and increase the standard? We need to look at the language and relationship and how we go about that. The push to produce quality product is interesting but we need to be careful about language to get farmers to transition. We need resources from USDA to help farmers transition as they are busy farming.
- The initial cost and time that it takes to transition. If they're looking at a 3-year transition period from traditional farming that can be difficult, but the costs are an even greater challenge.



- What is the status of transition nationwide? Looking for benchmark metrics of how many producers/land are transitioning.
- Unclear status. The pattern appears to be that when conventional markets fail or get lower, organic interest ramp up. There had been an upward trend for organic transition, but it seems like that trend has reversed with conventional prices spiking. That seems to flux on a roughly seven year cycle.
- Doesn't feel like programs are set up to support small acreage or new/beginning farmers that may need more training and support with land access. It seems to be more expensive (diminishing returns) to certify small acreage given you have to pay a baseline regardless of how many acres you have.
- Here in NJ, and I understand also NH and MD, their state departments of ag have dropped their organic certification program. That means we have to scramble to find a private certifier. The state charged \$800, private can be up to \$3,000. This just happened recently. NOFA has tried to support farmers by sharing information on contiguous certification. We wonder if this will lead to a loss in new transitioning acres or farmers falling out of the program.
- A first time applicant to OCIA would likely be looking at \$800 for small acreage. We try to keep our prices low and competitive, but it can be hard to compete with a subsidized state program. We're incurring more costs, so it can be hard to balance (because of staff costs, NOP certifications, etc).
- Farmers do need take some initiative to learn what's involved in this process. What new practices will they need to implement? What inputs can they utilize? They also need to prepare for changes to labor (may require more field work) and yields. There are also differences in selling (both in the price you can get and your markets). The information is out there, but farmers can always easily access a one-stop-shop that walks them through all these processes.
- The application to even be eligible to fill out the transition application is too onerous for some. Why shouldn't beginning farmers be able to get started transitioning right away, if that's what they want to do?
- Weed management consisting comes up at our grower meetings as the main barrier. Still a big role for R&E on this front.
- Are role models important?
- I think most farmers know at least someone who is doing organic, and most organic farmers are willing to talk to a farmer interested in transitioning. The other part of it may be the marketplace, however. They may not be ready to deal with the lower yield, higher labor, etc.
- Definitely. That's why I do my YouTube channel and try to interact with people. I wouldn't be where I'm at today if I hadn't had an older neighbor who was a capable producer. The only reason we were able to survive initially is because our land debt was \$0. Being able to go to an established farmer who was doing the things I wanted to do was extremely helpful. That's why I do my YouTube channel. But when I talk to conventional producers, there's this peer pressure cult mentality. They all know that one screw up organic farmer and take solace in laughing at that person to marginalize the idea. I try to work on shifting personal paradigms. What changes the game for you? You have to focus in on

what strikes hot for a particular producer. The more important thing to change is people's minds! You do that through concrete examples, show them it can work.

- Small vs. Large operators: Small acreage farms – Many of these producers are selling direct to consumer. Those relationships make certification less necessary, so many are holding organic certification more for the belief in what it stands for than anything else. We also have many producers who choose to carry less expensive and intensive certifications, like Certified Natural.
- Row crops vs. Field crops: I don't think markets and infrastructure are much of a problem anymore. Access to land, however, is a big big problem. Risk management is not much of a concern unless you're a huge, conventional field-scale operator and are unable to make the switch without crop insurance. We tell our mentees that if their business model requires crop insurance, then maybe you need to re-engineer it. Vegetable producers are usually able to avoid it because they tend to be very large or very small and not be caught in the middle, where risk management tools might make more sense.
- I bought a farm last year and paid \$10K per tillable acre; I would never have believed that 10 years ago. We're back to cost and capital. I don't think that crop insurance is the solution, that just duplicates the conventional model to the organic system and I don't think it would have long-term success. Perhaps there could be transitional income support? Instead of underwriting the farm, we underwrite the operator themselves.
- Successful organic farmers are expanding, but we're competing with conventional/large growers for land at auction. The financial numbers we're playing with today are mind bogglingly higher than the numbers that caused the farm crisis of the 1980s.
- We have to address the capital question
- I hate the USDA government programs, I think they're part of the problem. You can't change a negative feedback loop, you have to break it. We need to completely end commodity support programs and shift to basic guaranteed income levels.
- Technical assistance is very valuable – like how to utilize livestock to ease your transition process.
- There are some innovative programs to support organic farmers through land trusts, but there are still significant barriers with the infrastructure you'd need (e.g., fencing, housing). Housing is a major need for us more urban or peri urban farmers.
- We surveyed our membership and the answer was a strong NO on a transition label. They felt that this would muddy the waters and worsen consumer confusion. More labels create more confusion.
- No, we should focus on reducing the application barriers and other barriers to entry.
- No, I think a transition label will cause more confusion.
- No, there was no interest among those we surveyed. There's such a high degree of failure, it doesn't sound like a transition label would be useful.
- Sometimes you can get a transitional certificate, but in my personal experience it didn't create any extra value. The people who supported me as a transitioning producer would have supported me regardless. -- Was there any marketing support to tell you how to talk about the value add? -- No.
- We need a lot more organic farmers!

- Demand is overrunning supply, so more newcomers to organic doesn't seem like the problem. Instead, the problem is organic fraud because there's so much demand and not enough US supply!
- Processing as barrier to transitioning: Local-level investments here in ID have made a huge impact (e.g., from Rodale, Cornucopia, etc). I know it's hard for USDA grants to cover capital investment, but it's so important. We need more infrastructure investment that is closer to the farm.
- Processing as barrier to transitioning: We saw the USDA ramp up local meat processing during the pandemic, which has been so overdue. The pandemic at least is starting to show USDA that we have to invest in this local infrastructure.
- Grain producers. For human consumption and animal feed should be prioritized for supporting transition.
- Seed producers should be prioritized for supporting transition.
- Pricing data from USDA would help farmers and buyers assess transition! I have no idea how to price my product sometimes.
- To help farmers assess transition, expand the Organic Price Report and make it more timely. We need weekly or even daily updates.
- We had a natural transition program and that was called GMO labeling. If we'd gone all the way with that, then GMO-free would have been exactly the transition program we're talking about maybe needing.
- USDA has some training courses already for beginning farmers.
- There's a lot of support for organic transition. Extension has been hammering this last years
- Land access and land values are huge issues- such as in the NE. Population growth. One thing that has helped with this is land conservation- working with dairy farms going out of business and helping transition it to up and coming farmers. Good lesson from Vermont.
- Farm viability program in Vermont. Farmers just starting out can get in touch with the network, which includes variety of orgs that provide technical expertise. NOFA has mentorship programs. this kind of network could be replicated in a lot of other places
- Market stabilization undergirds all of this though- why would farmers want to get into a career that isn't financially viable?
- Transition-There are various programs for transition assistance. Producers need to make sure that these programs will help them too, not just the buyers.
- USDA beginning farmer program doesn't really work for farmers transitioning from older farmers. For example, Younger farmers cant borrow against the value of the cattle that they are buying from an older farmer until they cattle are 100% theirs. I've heard about this being an issue with cattle farmers my age (up and coming, 30s ish)
- What about a mentorship program. Paying mentors to step up. Being a mentor can end up taking a lot of time, so securing funding for this could be great. Can use beginning farmer/rancher programs to pay for these types of mentoring. But this program is not just for organic.

- To help people from more diverse backgrounds – geographic regions, racial backgrounds, women, etc. – get into organic farming, need \$ resources for certifying agencies to provide handholding to farmers to get certified.
- Have more people/voices from diverse backgrounds at the tables. Have more representation in the board room. More outreach to diverse communities.
- To help people from more diverse backgrounds – geographic regions, racial backgrounds, women, etc. – get into organic farming, Pay people to attend conferences, have apprenticeship programs, increase access to cost-share programs and technical assistance, increase scholarships for people to intern on farms.
- Market solutions have not actually worked in the long term or for producers, really. Every time we have a grain crisis we look overseas and import low-quality grain, and then we have problems.
- Creative marketing facilitation, specifically institutions, schools. Would be great.
- Allowing flexibility of regional purchasing for schools
- Procuring for institutions is v. important. Farm to school. Highlighting organic in farm to school. Would be good to have some consistency across USDA with School food and nutrition and to organic program.
- When farmers want to transition to org- is the market going to be there when I get there 3 years down the road? Hard to have a resounding yes for that. So, how do we stabilize those market conditions so that where we are going down the road? Not just for transitioning producers, but for existing org producers
- Lack of consistent pricing structure
- Guaranteeing stable prices
- Coop structures potentially as a part of that
- Enforcement of organic is key also to avoid fraudulent products, especially imported products
- Consolidation: Each time consolidations happen, it diminishes the farmers voice and space at the bargaining table.
- How can we establish marketing relationships that will provide the stable market that's needed?
- Improving the way that crop insurance works to compensate farmers for organic practices.
- Support for rent, fuel, labor costs. What does support look like beyond org certification? Support for the whole farm. Culturally and linguistically appropriate support.
- There is no generalized marketing for organic. This has been pushed in the CCOF but they have not followed through.
- Small livestock producers need the ability to slaughter animals on-farm.
- Nowhere to have organic livestock processed. Some have to go 350 miles, which is not practical.
- Basic processing for organic grains is not available, really limiting farmer options
- Local farm versus local farm organic – there needs to be more distinction
- 1 processor for organic poultry in Illinois – that is a huge problem
- Organic poultry markets are there, but the processing capacity is not

- Grocery stores were open to working with producers during COVID, but now they are pulling back and not offering shelf space
- Consumers want the products, but the retailers want products like the ones they get off the trucks that bring all of the other products
- We need a market for organic soil grown tomatoes
- There is a real tension between true quality organic and low price
- Should there be a cap on the size of an organic farm?
- The monopolies in other areas push the price negotiations onto the organic farmers, because they are replaceable. The box of macaroni costs more than the grain that made the macaroni
- Having been in organic since before there was an organic market, used to sell organic food to the conventional, problems are: labor and training (we don't have good mechanisms out there that don't include farmer training programs. People are trained for small operations or big corporate but nothing else. Apprenticeship is super necessary.)
- On the market themselves, the marketplace faces consolidation of big players and there is little space for alternative products such as alternative grains or fruits and they don't fit into the current standards for what the case of squash is going to look like. Heirloom varieties with wonderful flavors but it cannot end up in the supermarket so it relegates that to farmers markets and specialty markets). How do we broaden the marketplace for everybody so that it is not just a big chain deciding what food is sold.
- There is no living wage for farmers at the moment, for the business owner.
- USDA does not support or advocate for organic beyond the marketplace. It does not support organic financially (ex: organic research should be way higher than what it is).
- The enforcement of standards needs more support from the USDA. If USDA saw the label as the keeper of the system, they would have moved faster and clearer and would be quicker at finding the players ruining the integrity of the system and the label.
- Lastly, the USDA does not support family farm operators. They are not interested in this although it is at the heart of what organic is about. USDA does not really care about organic and only just as a piece of the marketplace, nothing beyond that.
- The simplest way to support the growth of "real organic" is to increase the enforcement of the rules. We don't need new rules – although it would be nice to clarify the origin of livestock and chicken CAFOs – we just need better enforcement and a true transformation of the NOP. The marketplace is more and more consolidated, and the power becomes more concentrated, so the standards are not properly enforced. In the North East, supermarkets used to buy local producers and this has stopped. It is possible for supermarkets to be more accessible to local producers, but it requires proper enforcement of the rules. If standards were better enforced, that would support the small farms.
- There used to be 400 small farmers in Oregon where I am, and now down to 150. The farms that we compete with are huge and consolidated. The biggest challenge that we had was being undercapitalized, we had to build our own packing facility because nobody would do it so we had to be vertically integrated whether we could afford it or not. The processing and the handling is really hard unless you do it yourself and then you need capital to be able to do that. This is really hard for small farms in rural areas.

We have too much fruit now and we think we maybe need to go to online sales and have consumer direct sales in order to survive because the wholesale prices have never gone up. We are now getting less many for our bushel of pears that we used to get 4 years ago. The premium have flattened. The price support isn't there anymore and the large buyers have all driven the prices down.

- Co-ops might help with purchasing power and vertical integration to negotiate with supermarkets.
- 6-7 years ago corn price went up to \$17 a bushel so it was hard for raising cattle. So we got some help from the government. Volatility of grain market + fraud issue, we are wondering what is going to happen next. If we did enforce the standards as they should be, it would help some of these issues.
- The trucking prices went up, there is a trucking shortage. The consumer demand for heirloom and diverse food is there, it is not a consumer demand problem. The buyer has to pay the additional trucking fees so the farmers end up having to cut her prices to get their produced shipped.
- Dairy is different than vegetable because it is so perishable. It is less expensive for supermarkets to bring cheap fake organic milk than from their local states. How can governments support their regions?
- Between the grocery stores being consolidated or the lack of trucking to get the products to the markets, it really comes down to enforcement. If there is better enforcement, there will be less fake organic dairy competing with us with their prices.
- The reality of what we farmers do in terms of climate initiatives, the government needs to do a better job at enforcing the standards.
- The market is not nearly big enough, we need to have 50% of the market at least.
- We have everything that people want except low prices. We must persuade the eaters and the governments that we are worth it.
- The IOS recently passed a law against the use of ammonium extract which will have an effect on hydroponics since they are used in liquid fertilizer.
- If we look at the country of origin labelling for beef. The absence of this labelling is killing the organic beef market and the largest US producer is being seriously impacted as they are waiting for the law priced from Uruguay. Bill proposed for USDA to fight for flexibility in the WTO to allow for a true country of origin for beef as well as for the other food. This is an anti-consolidation issue on which organic and the USDA need to work together. : Testers bill: American Beef labeling bill & USA Beef label bill
- For CI, consider growth of small farms when measuring success. Measure what happens at farmers markets and co-ops.
- Measuring CI is about quality and quantity -- need for good statistics from farms. OTA does a good job tracking sales, but its time to keep track of quality.
- CI -- The growing process is also being improved. Grad projects at universities that never get put online (i.e. poster boards, presentations.)
- CI is surviving as a species.
- Beef up extension for organic.
- Need reports on where farmers are struggling in regards to environmental challenges
- Protection from contamination shouldn't all be on the farmer

- The chemical industry is well protected
- Contamination doesn't help build community that the only option you have is to sue your neighbor
- Regulatory capture in chemical industries
- Biggest promoter of Organic in Georgia- is Walmart
- Convince buyers to buy more organic
- With contamination, need to clean up our own house on 'cleaner food'-- pesticide contaminations on foods
- Pesticide drift and genetic drift have both had negative impacts on organic farmers, sometimes causing people to leave organic
- Transportation issues and transportation cost. Consumer base is not generally in the backyard so transportation involved. Additional conditioning services need to be provided. Challenge to invest in infrastructure needed and find available infrastructure to fill those needs
- Inflation, feed costs, transportation availability, processing capacity, milk pricing policy
- Organic centric: competitive harm in industry around Origin of Livestock
- We represent small farmers and industrialization of dairy industry worries all of us
- I agree with chemical drift, we are a long time operation that are vulnerable to chemical drift and it created a lot of hurdles for us, I would feel sorry for younger producers dealing with that
- Lack of processing for organic livestock is a major issue
- Hard to find a place to process organic, its such a hurdle people are not direct marketing
- When someone especially in meat has difficulty processing animals as organic, they back off and figure why bother feeding organic feed when I can't get certification for the finished animal: especially pertinent in poultry world where it is really hard to get organic poultry processing
- Fuel prices, trucking industry.
- Access to rail is another problem
- Struggles with finding markets for rotational crops, to build out stronger markets for longer rotations
- Crop insurance restrictions on practices can be limiting for organic farmers and undermine the flexibility they have to respond in a systems way because they are defined as not best ag practices
- "USDA" organic blueberries are hydroponic. The law is very clear that soil building practices is required. It has really watered down the meaning of organic. It is why regenerative is gaining traction, it is why USDA is not recognizing organic in climate discussions: because organic no longer requires soil.
- Other countries' hydroponics flood our markets because the US is the only country that allows them
- Lack of expanded markets for crops to rotate in. Would be nice to see a market to expand crop rotation
- Transportation costs have been killing our coop and our competitors are just dropping smaller producers and getting closer to bigger operations

- Rules are written unclearly and create confusion for certifiers which places us at a disadvantage, even between species(different for chicken than cows)
- Access to money not always there for younger farmers, and there are acres sitting empty
- Consumer education to get more localized markets
- FSA needs a LOT more education about how to deal with diverse as well as organic producers
- Lack of organic certified processing facilities
- Lack of infrastructure
- Consolidation in processing industry has made getting slots for smaller sizes or coop, really hard
- Processors don't want a couple gallons of milk: they want loads and loads and loads. They want a lot of milk
- Displaced demand for organic milk in supply chain by consolidation
- Most of the buying of grain is getting exported out of Midwest: most is going in chicken industry in Southeast so not a lot of local demand. Example 1 organic flour mill in all of Illinois, 1 in Indiana, opportunity to develop local grain market is really limited
- MOSES is expanding our current Beginning Farmer mentorship program beyond production and into navigating some of these systems/USDA programs. This is being funded by USDA BFRDP grant funds.
- Southeast MI, Ann Arbor area, really hotspot consumer market for organic, consistently surprised by the lack of education of FSA, no outreach whatsoever, we had to educate them about what cost share even was, the woman took a week to even track down application info. It is really lacking
- Kansas—It has been significantly improved, but it has been the efforts and advocacy of the Kansas Rural Center , at least now seeing some outreach and making us aware they are willing to work with us. Kansas Rural Center has done trainings for agencies on working with organic.
- Illinois: Pretty hit or miss across state. Our NRCS is pretty bogged down workload and don't move things along for any program. Most are at best neutral and unfamiliar with organic so not a lot of support of existing knowledge with NRCS of FSA.
- Minnesota: MDA did a really good job with organic (state was better than federal program) but when the costshare 25% was given back, we have to go through FSA, but it's been hard. There luckily was one staff member sympathetic to organic
- The Midwest is very focused on commodity crops .It's like youre from a different planet and you have to educate them.
- NRCS you only qualify if you reverse abuse the land, they do not reward someone who has continued to care for land
- NRCS transition to organic program: If you are transitioning we can help you improve crop rotations, but it doesn't help with OSP, and give you tools to get certified. Needs to be reformed so that by participating you are ready to be certified: technical assistance,
- Southwest Wisconsin: It has gotten a lot better under current administration
- With NRCS I have had nothing but frustrating experiences
- I often wonder if FSA is the best place to meet organic needs.
- NRCS is understaffed and demoralized



- A lot of organic farmers have gotten organic dollars, maybe not to
- If we are looking for help with OSP or transitions there is a better opportunity than FSA doing this with such little bandwidth
- Issue of the individual
- Need efforts for mentorship program
- Wetter springs: getting harder to get into field in the spring and get early season weed control
- Wetter Augusts, thought you got over the hump but it just keeps raining. Fall fungal problems have become more problematic because of the moisture. Flooding has come in August 13 in of rain in 2 days! Higher volumes, if we get a rain it's 2-3 inches
- Variability. Record highs, extreme temperature changes. Had adequate rainfall but if we don't get rain soon entering into extreme drought\
- Disease : dark spot in corn, fungal disease that was never here but now we see it every year
- Warmer winters with longer growing days, long term will make organic growing easier here with longer crop rotations
- New Pests: Japanese Beetle used to be occasionally but not infestation, spotted wing drysopila, extreme weather with hail storms becoming more frequent and violent
- Getting hard to raise certain varieties of wheat, a lot more humidity, fluctuation of temperature
- Difficulty to enroll farmers within the south. How to support people that are organic farmers in the South?
- The history of farming in the farm creates a huge amount of distrust for African American farmers to trust a government agency. And among the young generations, they are very educated, watch a lot of youtube, tend to be libertarian and don't see the value because they can sell what they want at the market.
- Then there are the conventional bug growers that get approached by Walmart, telling them to set aside some land for organic so that it can be sold there for a higher price.
- It is cost prohibitive for small farmers to certify
- We don't have a certified farmers market program like in CA and that could be helpful in GA. If we had a better marketing program about what organic means, and what organic certified means. I backed out of my certification because I am downscaling so it was not worth it for such a small scale to pay 2000.
- Another issue is that certifiers are not standardized, they are using different forms. One farmer cannot train another farmer on their certification needs because each process is different.
- I see a great opportunity in terms of connection to the land. More people are asking themselves: how can I grow my own food? Connecting to the land, creating a legacy for my family, etc.
- Some growers will only accept eco-cert listed or omri listed, and then I am told to hire an organic consultant and to pay them a consultant fee. It is not practical and very confusing.
- There is no USDA organic standard for aquaculture. In aquaculture we produce a lot of weekly sludge that could be used as compost.

- We are in great need of technical assistance from OTA. We want to help farmers to understand and transition to organic farming.
- Adding more money from USDA might not be the best solution if people are not wanting to work with USDA. Perhaps we need to think about ways that USDA could be a support to non profit, local groups, university, so that the technical assistance can come through from these non USDA groups
- Last year in Georgia, USDA was signing its contract for the next year in June. The pandemic slowed things down, but this the lead time issue is huge. From a strategic sense, doing soil health programs require the farmers to understand composting, etc. Need to build institutional support to build the sales and the technical part of it. If there is not a food processor that does organic, there is no point for the farmers to turn to organic. Building these infrastructures make transition to organic a lot easier.
- Market consolidation issue
- Designing an organic program that the farm bureau might want to apply for
- From a political dynamic, you won't get success if you get the farm bureau support
- The farm bureau was boxed in to get on board with the organic law
- Extension agents used to be very opposed to organic. What we've seen in the North is really interested young people as many of them seem to be very independent and they are doing a good job at directing the market and doing direct market with organic produce.
- In Atlanta, there are selective markets while in the rural areas, some markets are begging for markets because they don't have the volume and the price point. The delivery companies have struggled because they don't have the regularity of farmers production. We don't have the infrastructures to support the development.
- Low staffed. Some successful models although small in nature are efficient. Being strategic is important.
- The certification was a political statement, trying to support the organic standards and say that it is real value.
- FSA has been a nightmare on the certification cost share, waiting up to 5 years. This needs to be improved to get the small farmers engaged.
- We really need to make organic the gold standard with regard to any food production. And we are penalized for doing that!!
- NOFA-NY hot topics: Attended by several in the breakout. Hot topics: land access with influx of people to rural areas. Land access will only get worse with climate change. Processing infrastructure is a huge issue for organic livestock and dairy.
- Adequate representation of farmer voices in NOP standards development process.
- Need to increase cost share. Improve technical assistance. Need a navigator program so farmers can effectively access USDA program.
- Cost of production is particularly high for organic in NE, especially in wholesale markets. Consumer direct markets require additional support.
- Increase SNAP and WIC to include organic products. Get organic in schools.
- We have a huge demand for organic in the NE region. If there were not so many factory farm products coming into the region, we may be able to come up with a system that works.

- Labor - people have to plan day by day or year by year.
- We have enormous advantages because we have virtually no hydroponic or CAFOs being certified in the NE. If we could build a movement to buy regionally, that alone would be a movement to buy with integrity. Regional buying movement is low hanging fruit.
- Standards interpretations create unfair market for NE region. The demand is here, and we could do it on our own.
- Small farms are less and less welcome on the shelves. We need strong antitrust action. All the “buy local” programs that were around 6 years ago are gone now. The only tomatoes whole foods had in the middle of the harvest season were hydroponic from Ontario.
- The non-integrity of the label means consumers are understanding less of what the label is. The consumer is confused about what they are supposed to buy. Chefs in NYC love NOFA-NY and not other organic. Folks are now requiring other add-ons like Real Organic. Organic should be simple and it is not.
- One thing we have noticed is in conference or meetings with representatives from USDA, PA dept of ag, even when they want to be helpful, they have no concept of diverse produce farms that are planting, harvesting, and selling every week of the year. They assume the labor is seasonal, but it is not. There is a basic lack of understanding on what we do and how we operate.
- We have to realize the whole system is designed not to benefit us. It will not change unless we consistently demand it with clarity and focus. Demand everything we deserve. There is \$1T we are talking about: the U.S. Farm Bill. Nutritional supplement programs because US ag is not designed to produce nutrient dense food for communities. It is designed to create profits for multinational corporations. We need to ask for more. The planet and public health is spiraling. No one asked for this, the demand is for agriculture and good clean local regional food. The farm bill goes in the direct opposite direction. We need to be almost militant and unite because the money is for us to save the planet.
- The insurance money that allows farms to keep doing the same thing needs to be redirected. The USDA is afraid they will run out of insurance money because of the huge demand caused by climate change, which these farms are creating. The country depends on our clarity for the farm bill to provide what the country needs and wants: real food.
- Insurance money needs to be reallocated to transitioning organic farms.
- One producer had no help from FSA and NRCS until COVID hit. Then found out after years they could do the cost share paperwork, etc. There is a lot of information not easily accessible to beginner farmers.
- VT is unusual because we have great leadership in extension through Vern Grubenger. He gives great technical support to organic and nonorganic producers, especially vegetable growers. There is less support for organic dairy.
- The NY commissioner of Ag does not say the word organic, even though NY is 3rd in the country. Access to information in NY depends on sector and region.
- Perception from lawmakers that organic is doing great, doesn't need help, and works on its own.

- Value added gets buried and not even talked about in these organic groups. People have to then learn by making mistakes.
- We need more research in alternate processing methods. Other countries spend so much more money on organic research. We are stuck with so little investment into organic research at USDA.
- Lack of processing infrastructure in the NE- a big issue- Vermont specifically
- GM cattle. No more small farms. Culturally, no more knowledge of how to do small farming anymore.
- Antitrust issues
- Organic potato industry- run by 2-3 companies
- All potatoes need to be grown from organic seed. This is not happening. Causing diseases at the grocery store level.
- How to keep organic wholesome and get back to our roots.
- Climate change. Extreme drought in Colorado. Variable temperatures. Variable rain and snowfall.
- Insect control
- Invasive species
- Climate crisis- drought in California. 30% less planting happening. Going to lead to ppl out of work
- Access to water. Water compacts.
- Big ag are draining the wells, cutting access for small farmers
- Farm workers are being challenged- immigration issues- ICE. Effects planting and harvest.
- Marketing and competing as a small farmer with small production levels
- Water as biggest issue in California. And land.
- Yes water
- Yep, water in california
- Yep drought, even in northern cali
- Environmental degradation
- Massive fires (California). Effects water shed
- Yep, fires. Smoke. Effects our fruits and our products (wine).
- California regulations- keep getting added on and hard for small growers to comply with all of the regs.
- Its increasing our cost of production as compared to other places
- Declining emphasis in certification and inspection on compost and cover crops (soil conservation). Organic regs are remiss at this.
- Winter cover crops in California are water neutral- important thing to note! Lets focus on and enforce more soil building practices like this in certification and inspection
- There are nuances within the conventional world that we don't always get credit for
- Add-on labels. Don't want them. Just need organic to be enforced.
- Push organic as great way for fighting climate change
- Animal slaughter facilities
- Transportation is a major issue. In new Mexico- livestock has to be taken out of state to be processed, and then brought back. No longer affordable for producers

- Slaughter facilities that were running can no longer afford to do so
- Quality control. Farm to table, farm to cafeteria being challenged.
- State needs to provide more resources so producers can subsidize their operations.
- Colorado- also no organic livestock processing within hundreds of miles
- Access to markets also majorly lacking
- Cost of glass for bottles of wine is four times the cost it was one year ago. So have to raise the price on consumers.
- Same with glass for apple sauce, jams. Had to wait a year for jars to show up.
- Cost of diesel has gone up
- Input prices are going up and sales prices are going down.
- Accessing a diversity of seed has been getting harder and harder. Very few companies, not enough diverse regional seed.
- Monsanto patenting heirloom and ancestral seeds.
- Seed trials. With restrictions in travel we haven't been able to go visit seed trial sites.
- Labor is one of the biggest issues
- Hawaii- no organic certifiers in the state. Prohibitively expensive.
- Hawai'i DOA has no organic office or marketing office. Severely underfunded.
- These offices are currently closed. (Covid). One staff member is there and that's it. They're challenged with labor also. This makes it hard for farmers to access the programs and the help with applying that they need.
- Seed crops are failing all over the world
- Seed banks challenged
- Educating consumers about the benefits of organic should be a priority
- Increased funding for food hubs
- Reduce barriers to selling in schools
- Farmers markets are still very important for new farmers
- Local animal processing facilities are greatly needed, there is a large potential market that is not being met
- Newer farmers don't see the relevance of organic certification, but it's important for them to be counted so we need to get people to be willing to be certified
- Washington State is making an effort to move everything online which would make it much much easier to file an annual application
- Cost-share reimbursements need to be more timely
- Structure of farm bill subsidizes small number of crops and subsidizes crop insurance that disincentivizes crop diversity
- Smaller acreages in Idaho are more expensive (?)
- Many producers that sell direct to consumers aren't seeing a market benefit of organic certification – they say they use organic practices and that's satisfactory
- USDA organic certification has a bad reputation with small producers in Western Oregon
- Some don't like the word 'commodities' as it is taken from industrial terminology, organic folks raise food
- Need for more on-farm research
- Consumer demand has pivoted to local, and now local is competing against organic

- Need for organic seed varieties is huge, many don't believe the varieties they have available are not the best for their purposes
- Why not have research funding proportional to market share?
- NRCS is English only in Oregon, which is a problem
- Certifiers are overloaded
- Organic farmers can play a bigger role in educating FSA and NRSC folks by inviting them onto their farm (on Friday afternoons with beer treats)
- Winter crops are at less risk compared to spring crops, so 'winterizing' spring crops could help deal with this
- I'm concerned about USDA's priorities, particularly in the next farm bill. Are they going to maintain, increase, or decrease support for organic producers as the market grows? They have expressed support for nutrition and some areas of conservation, but it's unclear how their support will shift for organic.
- Direct aid to conventional farmers is out of control and should be reduced and redistributed. States are running out of money, which is why many state certification programs have closed. What actual dollars are on the table and how can we ensure USDA is being responsible with who and what receives help?
- Lightning round on consolidation:
  - Unsubsidize the giant size organizations: streamlining food safety
  - Enforce the anti-trust laws in food, ag, and import
  - Order law makers to do the ethical thing
  - More farmers in congress
  - Huge Orchards that start planting small trees and destroy the soil, and then start the certification process
  - Stop USDA focus that says we can't support any scale. We need a better support for small and family scale
  - As long as the farm bill is structured the way it is, until we change the incentives to rebuild the monopolies (monocrop subsidies) we are going to rebuild the CAFO system
- Level the playing field between small and big farmers, between organic and conventional through the farm bill subsidy system
- Give organic farmers more niches to occupy
- Legislation to make manufacturers pay for costs from drift (pesticides and GMOs). The current responsibility on organic farmers to establish the buffer zone is unjust.
- Defects of pesticides (drift) should (increased accountability for chemical manufacturers)-- rather than the farmers
- Improve internet services in rural areas
- Chemical companies should be responsible for their products