

Organic Matters

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER • SPRING 2021



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Transition

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Organically Speaking

Spring is the season of renewal and new growth, and right now at PCO, there is a lot of both!

Our core values state that we keep people at the center of every action, interaction, and decision, and with that in mind we are sad to announce that we say goodbye to Jenny Cruse, our Inspection Program Manager, who like quite a few other staff from certification bodies this spring, is going to work at the National Organic Program (NOP). We will miss her here, but we are confident in the strength of the NOP with so many great staff landing there this season. With renewed attention to customer service and responsiveness, we will be hiring first for an Inspection Program Assistant Manager, as well as for three new Certification Specialists. This restructuring in the Certification Department will help us have more staff available to clients, as well as enable our Certification Specialists to be more involved in other segments of the business, such as outreach, inspections, and other administrative support needed as we implement our new database system.

Our new internal database system, a product of Intact used by many other organic certifiers, will also increase efficiencies in our processes resulting in better service to clients. Internally, we will be going 'live' March 31, prior to the printing of this message, and you should already be seeing messages with information detailing changes to the client portal, including some great details in this issue of *Organic Matters* (see page 6). We'll have more content for you via webinars and recorded trainings as the season progresses, so be sure to stay tuned to our website and emails. **The landing page of the PCO website will be updated with any new system features or developments, and while our staff has worked tirelessly on the details, please reach out to let us know what additional helpful information you might need.**

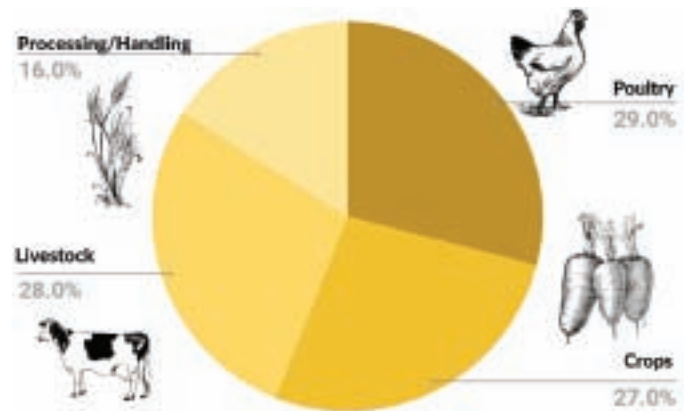
With the Annual Update season coming to a close, please be mindful of returning those ASAP. We're instituting an internal operations calendar this year to keep our processes integrated but moving forward with more timely execution, so returning your information on time will help keep our processes in motion. By utilizing internal metrics and goals, we can make sure you are getting the timely service your businesses need. With service and professional development in mind, we've also instituted monthly manager trainings, monthly all-staff meetings, and we are planning our board meetings and staff trainings this year to include Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) training. We're integrating feedback from the client surveys, but if you have a topic you'd like me to take to the full staff or board for discussion or training, please reach out to me directly.

While we wait for more decisions regarding the National Organic Standards Board's (NOSB) consideration and implementation of the Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE)

A Year in Review – 2020 Data and Statistics

A recap of some of our 2020 statistics shared as part of our Annual Membership Meeting:

- 1659 certified operations
(see chart below for breakdown by scope)
- 213 new organic certifications!
- 94% of inspections completed by year-end



rule, the NOSB is currently taking comments on some materials topics and the issues of human capital related to inspections and certification staff. While we are preparing for the former, we are also active in submitting comments on the latter. We encourage your feedback to the NOSB as well.

Finally, we are feeling in the spring air the possibility of meeting you in person soon, and I hope to do just that. Until then, we hope you will have joined us online at our Annual Member Meeting April 8 – as we share our vision for a bright future!

In service,

Diana Kobus

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MATERIALS TEAM

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Sabine Carey, Materials Specialist
April Kocis, Materials Specialist/Organic Matters Editor

QUALITY TEAM

Angela Morgan, Quality Systems & IT Manager
Garrick McCullough, Systems Administrator

VISION

All communities are enriched through
organic food and farming

MISSION

To ensure the integrity of organic products
and serve our farming community

CORE VALUES

- 1. People & Service** – Keep people at the center of every action, interaction, and decision
- 2. Organic Spirit & Environment** – Promote restorative practices that improve the world for future generations
- 3. Honesty & Integrity** – Embrace transparency and integrity in all our work.

Organic Matters

SPRING 2021



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Cover photo:
Monarch caterpillar, Troy Bishopp,
aka the Grass Whisperer

5 Key Strategies for Farm & Land Transitions

Pasa highlights benefits of business planning, collaboration with skilled professionals, flexibility, communication and timing

Village Acres Farm in Mifflintown, PA

AARON DE LONG, DELAWARE VALLEY PROGRAM MANAGER AT PASA SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

One of the biggest obstacles facing beginning farmers is finding land on which to grow their businesses. A promising possibility for addressing this challenge is to work with established farmers seeking to transition both farmland and affiliated farm businesses to new ownership. While such transitions can have a number of benefits, including a built-in infrastructure and established markets, they nonetheless present a complex set of important considerations for all involved. Even farm transitions from one family member to another are rarely as straightforward as they might seem.

Pasa Sustainable Agriculture hosted an online conversation with farmers who had gone through their own farm transition processes, including Pasa's executive director and Village Acres Farm co-owner, Hannah Smith-Brubaker, and Kimberton CSA co-owner Frank Kurylo. Representatives from Pennsylvania FarmLink, a nonprofit that connects farmers seeking land with landowners seeking farmers and facilitates farm and land transitions, joined in the conversation as well.

Here are some of the key insights and considerations that arose over the course of the discussion:

1. WRITE A BUSINESS PLAN

A basic step towards a successful transition, everyone agreed, was for the prospective new owner to have a business plan in hand. Besides giving the exiting owner confidence that the next generation on the land can succeed, the writing of the plan will help the new prospective owner understand the true size of the task they are looking to undertake and properly weigh the benefits and risks.

Of course, writing a business plan can be a complicated task, especially when it comes to taking over a farm business.

How does one value all the infrastructure, resources, and established networks an existing farm business may have amassed over time? As one of the participants in the session commented, "You can get appraisals for equipment and land, and ask for financial figures from the current owners, but in the end the business will be worth what you're willing to pay. Know your numbers, including what you're thinking you can make, in order to know what you're willing to give."

2. BUILD A TEAM

Everyone in the conversation also agreed that successful farm and land transitions involve more than the two principal parties and are ultimately team efforts. A skilled, third party facilitator, for instance, can often help families and strangers, alike, navigate difficult conversations. This can be a particular help in family farm transitions, where it is sometimes difficult to separate the personal from the professional. "Our goal," one of



Frank Kurylo, co-owner of Kimberton CSA in Phoenixville, PA

the FarmLink team commented, “is to make sure everyone can still eat dinner together after the process is complete.”

Lawyers were another commonly cited team member valuable in the transition process. “Having a facilitator probably would have helped my transition go easier,” one of the farmers noted, “but having a lawyer involved made it possible.” From understanding the basics of the process in transitioning land and businesses as well as different possible business structures for the new owner, to executing the formality of “getting it in writing,” everyone at the table agreed that legal assistance is not only typically essential in sealing the deal, but can be of good use from the get-go.

“Accountants can be pretty helpful, too,” another farmer noted, “but with both lawyers and accountants you want to be sure they know agriculture. Farming is a different business from what most lawyers and accountants might be used to.”

3. BE FLEXIBLE

Two of the farmers in the conversation noted the sudden passing of family members dramatically impacted their farm transitions, and required them to be open to a totally new, unexpected situation. “Plan, plan, plan,” one of the individuals commented. “Still, things will happen that you just didn’t plan for. The more preparation you do, though, the better equipped you will be to handle the unexpected.”

Older generations often need to let go of what they think the farm is or should be, in order to allow the next generation to realize their own vision. At the same time, the next generation might need to be willing to take on an operation that’s different from the ideal they had pictured. Two of the farmers in the conversation noted that their transitions involved them taking on established farm businesses that were bigger than they’d expected to manage, and that they’d had to be open to operating at a larger scale than they’d initially planned in order to realize their farming dream.

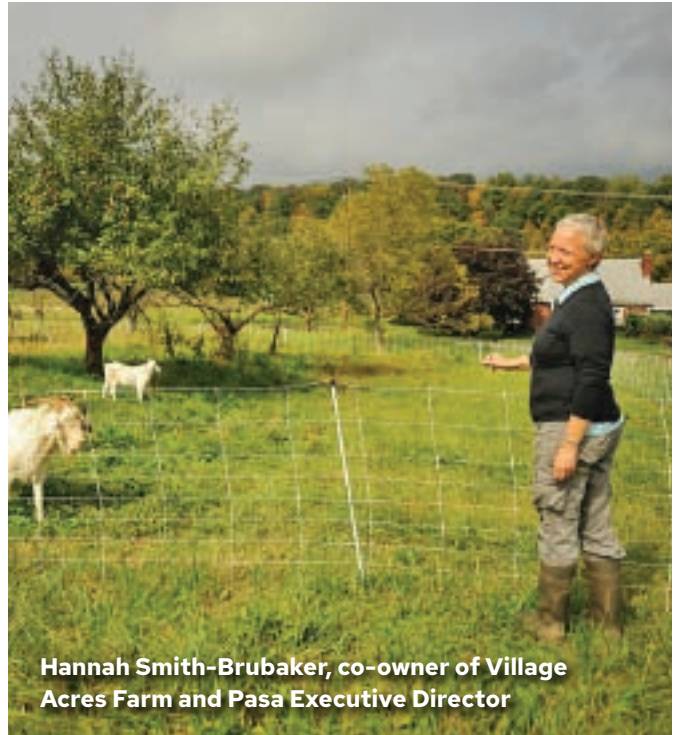
4. FOCUS ON COMMUNICATION

Although implicit within all these insights and considerations, the need for skillful, intentional communication between all parties can’t be stressed enough.

“We didn’t have a facilitator, and our communications with the transitioning farmers were pretty poor, until we worked out a system and method that worked for both of us. In our situation, talking on the phone or even in person often gave rise to unexpected conflict and statements that weren’t heard, or were misinterpreted. In the end, we wound up working through email a lot, which allowed each of us to contemplate what the other side was saying, and give a measured, deliberate response. Once we identified email as our primary communication medium, things went a lot smoother. Another real benefit was that our email exchanges put a lot of things in writing, and made explicit details that might have been otherwise overlooked.”

5. GIVE IT TIME

For many individuals, farm and land transitions are more than business transactions, they are emotional processes, and



Hannah Smith-Brubaker, co-owner of Village Acres Farm and Pasa Executive Director

they take time. Succession planning, in particular, is a continuing process, and a succession plan should be seen as a living document that can change over time. The key is to keep your eye on the prize and remember the ultimate goal, especially when things get tense.

“No two farms are the same, and no two transitions are the same,” the FarmLink team commented. “Recognize where you are now and where you want to be, and with good will and good patience, you’ll get there.”

Some quotes have been paraphrased or edited for clarity. Watch the recording of Pasa’s Farm & Land Transition Strategies webinar here: pasafarming.org/resources/farm-land-transition-strategies/. Find more webinars as well as written reports on Pasa’s Resources page here: pasafarming.org/resources/.

Pasa SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Pasa is a Pennsylvania-based sustainable agriculture association founded in 1992.

We work to build a more economically-just, environmentally-regenerative, and community-focused food system through education and research that directly supports farmers.

We coordinate year-round workshops and events, administer formal farming apprenticeships, and facilitate research that empowers farmers with data they value. We also work to foster productive connections between farmers, community members, local businesses, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

Our annual Sustainable Agriculture Conference draws people from all sectors of the food system for intensive learning on a wide range of food and farming topics.

Perspective from Southern Neighbors

COVID-19's Impact on Farming in the Southeast

DIANA DOMBROWSKI, PCO PROGRAM ASSISTANT

Starting in March 2020, when federal and state mandates were first put in place to protect public health in the face of the growing COVID-19 threat, the Southern Foodways Alliance (SFA) at the University of Mississippi initiated a project to document the impact of the coronavirus on food and agriculture in the Southeast.

Diana Dombrowski is a Program Assistant with Pennsylvania Certified Organic and also works as an independent oral historian with the SFA. She spoke to organic farmers, educators, and consultants in Georgia for this project.

Below are excerpts from oral histories conducted with two farm managers. *Organic Matters* readers will likely recognize common experiences as the pandemic's impact is felt nationwide. While individual farm locations may be different, the tenacity and grit farmers employed around the country to adapt to COVID-19 are universal.

Garver Akers is the Farm Manager of the newly-opened **Rodale Institute Southeast Organic Center** in Chattahoochee Hills, GA. Mr. Akers was raised in Ohio and has farmed organically in states across the Southeast.

Mr. Akers relocated with his wife and children in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic to begin this position, and explained in his oral history how plans for opening the new center have changed, as well as his predictions for the future growth of organics.



A MIXED BAG OF PROS AND CONS

What I am seeing is a mixed bag of pros and cons with this for the small farmer, especially the Southern small farmer and the ones that I personally know in Georgia, Alabama, Ten-

nessee, and so forth, because a lot of them, in the season, it was very obvious a lot of farmers had their bottom line damaged immediately. Because people couldn't come to their farm and purchase as much; because people couldn't meet with them in farmers' markets as much; because if they did any wholesaling—or if they did any value-added food or any food with any shelf life—unless they were relying on those things as the backbone of their business, they took a serious hit.

But at the same time, I've also talked to some farmers who are having their best seasons they've ever had because they happen to be in markets where they can sell with social distancing or at economies of scale that allow for them to be distant in the first place.

So, we're seeing a mixed bag out there, how it's both hurting and helping farmers. That's the immediate superficial take.

A NEW NORMAL?

But down the road, where's this all going to go? You hear people throw around terms like "the new normal," "When do we get back to normal?" I'm definitely of the idea that I don't want



to go back to normal. I don't want to go back to the way things were. I believe this is an opportunity to be a wakeup call, and at the very center of that wakeup call is humanity and our resources and what it takes to sustain ourselves. I'm already hearing people that used to ridicule, make fun of organic produce or organic farming, if you will, any of these things, suddenly pick up their interest, realizing they might want a healthier, more local line to their supply on the consumer end, and I think that is going to be very good for small farmers.

I think this COVID situation could be a tool, if we look at it that way, to shine more of a spotlight on why we do what we do, how we do it, and why that is important to the health of the consumer, which I could have talked about till I was blue in the face before, but now I think more consumers are going to listen, and that will be good for the farms.

Julia Asher is the Farm Manager of **Rag & Frass Farm** in Jeffersonville, GA. Julia was raised in Boston and educated in Chicago. The gardens kept by Julia's mother and grandmother in southern Vermont fostered her love of the rural countryside. She moved to Georgia for its availability of affordable farmland and operates certified organic Rag & Frass Farm with her partner, apprentices, and volunteers.

Julia described in her oral history the timeline of COVID's impact on her farm, coordinating safety information during the first few weeks of outbreak and adjusting market setups, as well as developing direct marketing/online ordering. She discussed the precautionary measures she takes to keep her farm community and customers safe.



STRUGGLING WITH CHANGING SAFETY GUIDELINES

At the beginning, I remember also just there being a distinct lack of information. There was just a lot of questions that everyone had and no one really knew the answers. So, it was really hard to make decisions about what do we do, what's safe, what's not safe, what's the best practice. Some of those best practices, we were just guessing at what they should be and sort of borrowing from common sense and from food safety policy and food safety best practices. At the very beginning, people still didn't really know how long the virus lasted on surfaces and how it is being spread and how many days can you have it before you get symptoms, and we didn't even know how many people were asymptomatic. So, there was just so much guessing and so much just not knowing; it made it really hard to be confident in any decision.

SOME THINGS STAY THE SAME

I would say market has changed a lot in the way we sell certain things. Office work has changed a lot, but most of the day-to-day work for us has not changed at all. I mean, the plants are totally unaffected by this virus. They still need water or fertilizer or to be planted, regardless of what's going on in the news, so I

think that we've actually been able to keep a lot more emotional and mental health and security just by having this like existing routine...if we're going to plant something or weed something all day and be at home, essentially working from home...it's been very safe and nice to have work that continues fairly regularly.

FARM SANCTUARY

We have had a closed-door policy on the farm . . . and I've had conversations with everyone who works here about the need for us to be taking every single precaution every time we leave the farm. Even if people are looking at you weird or whatever they're doing...we need to do that to keep each other and ourselves safe, but also to keep the farm safe, to keep the farm as a business viable. Because if someone here were to get the virus, we would definitely have to shut down operation for a period of time, which would affect a lot of things. Beside income, it would affect crops. I mean, it could be very devastating.

So, I think everyone here really sees how important it is for us to stay safe and healthy and take all the precautions and also respects that, and I think feels safer because everyone else is feeling that way, too. So, we're pretty good about all being on the same page about that. I definitely think that there's something about being on a farm in a rural place that is actually very comforting and very safe. [Laughter] I mean, for a while, it felt like, 'Is this what the end of the world is going to feel like?' Because if so, this is exactly where I'd want to be.

BUY LOCAL, BUILD RESILIENCE

What's also worth noting is that most of the small farms, I think, have really been able to survive this—at least many of them and a lot of the ones I know—have been able to survive this because even though there are challenges, there is something really resilient baked into a local food economy. The smaller that supply chain is, the less supply chain disruption affects my ability to produce something and sell it. The more connected those customers are to the farmer. All of those things make it fragile and delicate and very low-margin sometimes, but also so resilient. So, a lot of farms, I think, that have not benefited from any of the big relief packages have still managed to stay afloat through just having a more sustainable model in the first place, and that's kind of encouraging.



The Southern Foodways Alliance documents, studies, and explores the diverse food cultures of the changing American South. Our work sets a welcome table where all may consider our history and our future in a spirit of respect and reconciliation.

To learn more about the Southern Foodways Alliance, please visit www.southernfoodways.org. The COVID-19 oral history archive will be available in its entirety beginning in 2022.

PCO Moves Forward with New and Improved Certification Database

New client certification and inspector portals will increase efficiencies and improve customer service

KYLA SMITH, PCO CERTIFICATION DIRECTOR

OVERVIEW

PCO is thrilled to announce the official Go Live launch (as of March 31) of the PCO Certification and Inspector Portal powered by Intact Platform (formerly known as Ecert). We are pleased to introduce to you the new and improved PCO client and inspector portals over the next several months. This will include additional written instructions as well as training videos and webinars. By now, clients using the portal should have received an email notifying them of how to navigate to their portal with login information. If you have not received such an email and previously used PCO's client portal, or wish to switch from receiving your PCO paperwork via postal mail to interacting with the new PCO Certification Portal, please contact your Program Assistant for further assistance.

As you might remember, PCO has been engaged in the process of switching to Intact Platform to house our certification database for the past year. Intact Platform is a well-established, complete certification system, designed specifically for organic certification and configured to comply with the National Organic Program (NOP) systems and data collection requirements. These changes will allow us to be more adaptable and timely in our communication to you.

PCO is looking forward to the benefits the Intact Platform will provide to internal and external stakeholders such as:

- Increased functionality (e.g. access to more information) and improved user friendliness of PCO Certification and Inspector Portals
- Enhanced monitoring of performance measures which will translate into quicker turnaround times between parts of the cycle, especially between inspection and certification report
- Modernization of our business intelligence which will allow us to respond to industry changes and communicate those changes to you
- Increased efficiency of and adaptability to new certification programs, which will help PCO more efficiently adjust to client certification needs
- Easier access to educational resources such as our guidance documents as well as inspection related information

NEW AND IMPROVED PCO CERTIFICATION PORTAL

Through our Core Values, we recognize the interdependent relationships between all our stakeholders. The new client portal has been designed with our core values and mission in mind. If your preferred communication is electronic, through the PCO Certification Portal you'll be able to navigate comprehensively through your certification documents and later, be able to easily submit paperwork. The first time you'll likely need to interact with this improved portal will be when we send you notification that your Initial Review Report is available for viewing. However, we encourage you to login on and navigate around to check out the new design and features!

What will be different:

The most welcomed change is to the feature-rich online portal. The PCO Certification Portal is more organized, allowing you to more easily navigate through your certification documents on your own providing for an overall better user experience. Continued development through the end of this year will allow you to submit requests to PCO for various changes on your operation.

Through the PCO Certification Portal you'll be able to check on the status of your inspection and assigned inspector as well as access the name of your assigned Certification Specialist and Program Assistant. Additionally, your Certification Report and other official documents (e.g. Inspection Report, Noncompliances, Certificates) will be easier to read and will continue to be available on the PCO Certification Portal. Lastly, with the new portal, you'll gain easier access to educational resources and membership benefits that our website has to offer.

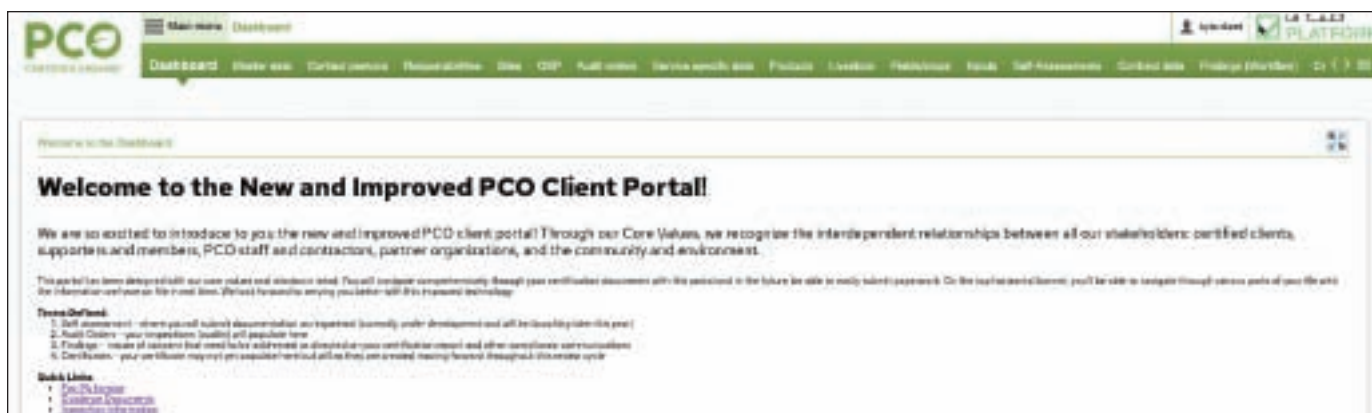
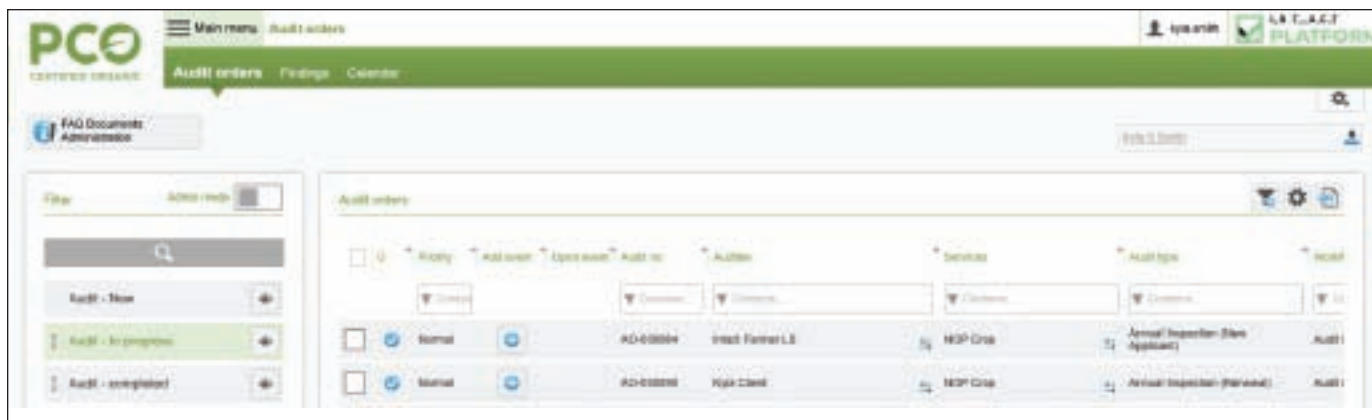
What will remain the same:

PCO commits to making this change in database as seamless as possible for clients. While there will be some significant changes, there will also be areas that won't be changing.

For example, clients will not need to submit new Organic System Plans (OSPs) during this transition and will continue to be able to access your operation's OSP and supplemental documents (e.g. labels, materials used, etc). Affiliate manager admins will still be able to view their entities under one login (now called Consultant Access) and postal clients will continue to receive their items through the mail (as their preferred communication method).

NEW AND IMPROVED INSPECTOR PORTAL

The PCO Certification Portal is not the only exciting update



PCO's new and improved certification portal includes an enhanced landing page with multiple tabs that allows clients to view all current certification information and documents at any time. Clients can navigate to the audit orders tab to access documents live time.

included in PCO's transition to the Intact Platform. The PCO Inspector Portal will also see significant revisions to enable inspectors easier access to client files and facilitate all aspects of the inspection process from scheduling to conducting the onsite inspection to billing in a more efficient manner. Whether it's streamlined document transfer or improved ease of on-site OSP updates, the ultimate goal is to make overall improvements to your inspection experience.

What will or might be different:

Due to several variables (e.g. broadband access, operations preference for technology use on their operation), not all of the changes will be utilized by all inspectors nor experienced by all operations during their inspection. However, one thing is certain, inspectors will be using the PCO Inspector Portal to communicate their inspection report findings and your OSP updates to PCO. There's even a mobile app to allow for the use of smaller devices (e.g. cell phone or tablet), which will allow inspectors to rely less heavily on laptop computers in some cases. As a result, this could facilitate OSP updates to be made while walking through the field. Additionally, through the app, the inspector will have the option to complete the inspection checklist offline and then sync the checklist once they are able to connect to WiFi again, addressing the challenge of incomplete cell service throughout land and facilities where this might be a problem.

The Inspection Report will look somewhat different when the client receives it, although it will function the same way as

the previous report. For each item on the inspection report, you will be able to see any comments the inspector has provided as well as the summary of any issues of concern, just like in previous years. Unlike in previous years, all of your Inspection Reports and the Exit Interview will be contained within a single document, rather than individual documents.

Inspection files should be much more organized for the inspector since PCO is now able to categorize electronic documents by file type. This will allow the inspector to sort and find specific documents more quickly, especially in cases where the file contains many documents, such as labels and Organic Product Profiles. This will make inspections more efficient, saving time and money through the improved organizational and accurate format of your operation's information.

The new PCO Inspector Portal is designed with key changes that will streamline the transfer of documents and information. While you will not see this functionality first-hand, the new system has marked improvements that will produce results that you will see, including decreased inspector administrative time and inspectors with handier access to your documents.

What will remain the same:

With all the change, it is also good to ground ourselves in what will be staying the same. PCO is still working with most of the 2020 inspectors (although there will be a few new faces this year).

Also, the format will largely remain the same where the

continued on page 25

Adaptation to Celebration — Pasa Sustainable Agriculture's Annual Conferences Goes Virtual and Celebrates 30 Years!

All the elements of a quality conference delivered in a virtual format

STACEY BUDD, EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT/OUTREACH COORDINATOR

In the initial planning phase of their conference, Pasa staff certainly did not anticipate designing this annual educational event for a remote setting. Their conference has been as much of a community builder as a peer-to-peer learning opportunity. Honoring the desire for community connection but in a safe environment, Pasa pivoted to an online conference that delivered education, engagement, and a sense of renewal as we reflected on the lessons of this past year. In light of the financial impact of the pandemic, they graciously offered a "pay as you can" option for those in need. Over 1,300 farmers, food system professionals and sustainable agriculture supporters participated in their main conference week, with an additional 300 pre-conference attendees.

Over 100 sessions were available, including the two-week pre-conference workshops, the live main conference, and a pool of on-demand sessions to watch at your leisure. Community connections were made through various social networking opportunities during the main conference: morning meetings with special guests, lunch chats, discussion sessions on big-picture issues, virtual mixers and game nights!

On February 5, the Pasa conference concluded with a powerful keynote from Robin Wall Kimmerer; a mother, scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. She is the author of "Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants," which has earned Kimmerer wide acclaim.

Kimmerer's keynote, entitled "What Does the Earth Ask of Us?", invited the audience to examine how we show gratitude, reciprocity, respect and renewal for the gifts of the Earth. She encouraged us to learn to see with both eyes and incorporate indigenous ways of knowing with western science in our approach to agriculture. An important first step is to acknowledge the lands we occupy and farm are indigenous homelands and incorporate the work of land justice as part of our contemporary stewardship.

Food is our primary connection to Mother Earth. It is a source of life-giving sustenance. Much of the work of sustainable agriculture encourages us to be mindful of the work and its impacts on the land. Kimmerer shared the practice of the Honorable Harvest as a way to remind us to ask permission, take only what we need, use what we take and share what we reap while minimizing harm and showing gratitude.

Dr. Kimmerer asked us to think of the plants, the water, and the soil as beings. By shifting our mindset away from viewing these as resources to extract, we can deepen our understanding of the relational nature of agriculture as we continue to focus on biodiversity, soil health and regenerative growth. As we go forth in mitigating agriculture's impact on climate change, let us take these reminders from Dr. Kimmerer's keynote as we work to heal the land, the earth, and ourselves.

ORGANIC SOLUTIONS: PRE-CONFERENCE SERIES

As part of the Pasa conference experience, PCO partnered with Rodale Institute to sponsor an organic solutions series. Held during the two-week pre-conference timeline, a series of sessions were designed to help educate attendees on a variety of topics related to organic production. From exploring your initial curiosity of where to start to record keeping to various tips on production for fruit and berries, livestock and row crops, these sessions gave insight on best practices and helpful advice to those interested in transitioning to organic. Many PCO staff members contributed their expertise and knowledge as panelists alongside longtime organic farmers.

How Certification Can Power Up Your Direct Marketing Strategy

Utilizing the USDA organic seal to tell your farm story, gain trust, and increase sales

STACEY BUDD, EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT/OUTREACH COORDINATOR

A recent Pasa conference session focused on how organic certification can help your direct marketing strategies. Moderated by Scott Case, Pasa board chair and co-owner of Patchwork Farms (PCO-certified), three experienced organic producers shared their stories of how certification has played a key role in their marketing strategy. Panelists included John Good from The Good Farm (PCO-certified), Joan Norman from One Straw Farm, and Ola Creston from Taproot Farm (PCO-certified).



Aimee and John Good of the Good Farm.



George Brittenburg, co-owner and operator of Taproot Farm.

Scott opened up the conversation by stating, “You can be the most sustainable, organic, regenerative, earth-hugging farmer out there doing amazing things on your little patch of earth, but unless you can sell what you produce everything you worried about and worked for won’t make a difference.” From his perspective, production can be the easy part. It’s the selling of all your product for the most money possible that can challenge a farmer.

John introduced The Good Farm as an 18-acre vegetable farm (9 acres in production) in Lehigh County, Pennsylvania. Though they have sold a bit to wholesale markets, their focus is on the 250 CSA customers they serve. When sharing his organic farming journey, he jokingly stated he was forced into it. When he and his wife Aimee began farming, they leased land from the Rodale Institute, which was already certified organic land. It was a stipulation as part of their lease. After 11 years of leasing land, John and Aimee purchased their own property and continue with their organic certification. John shared a few reasons why organic certification is important to him:

- **He is committed to an organic supply chain.** Though sourcing organically can have its challenges, being certified holds you accountable to your purchases. By expanding the web of certification, we get more production of organic products.
- **Having certification helps him stand out in a crowded marketplace.** As CSAs continued to grow in his area, being certified organic gave The Good Farm a unique standing – one that shows a high level of commitment, authenticity and professionalism.

- **Recognition of a safe and healthy farm.** John mentioned that customers come to the farm for their CSA shares as well as to enjoy a few u-pick flower fields. Being certified organic reassures the health conscious consumer that their experience on the farm will be safe and without exposure to harmful chemicals.

John’s final comment says it all, “Being certified organic makes me a better farmer.”

Joan Norman, from One Straw Farm, has been farming for 38 years just north of Baltimore, Maryland. In the early days of their production, they were one of the largest organic producers selling into the wholesale market. One Straw Farm is a 65-acre vegetable farm selling to 1500 CSA members, 40 restaurants and 4 farmers markets. Joan and her family paused their certification for a period of time based on a dispute with the NOP over a biodegradable mulch application they were using. Though they lost their wholesale accounts, their customers were accepting of this decision as they trusted their farming practices. As the next generation of family members began to take over the farming business, they have once again applied and received certification. They are interested in growing the business and returning to the wholesale market. For Joan, it became more apparent this past year of the power of using the USDA organic seal in their marketing. One Straw Farm became a vendor at a new farmers’ market in a new area. By using the organic seal on their banner and signs, their sales jumped 100%.

Ola Creston is the co-owner and operator of Taproot Farm in Berks County, Pennsylvania. When sharing her organic certi-

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Stefanie, the farmer, during a vegetable harvest on the Perry County farm she and her mother Carol own.



How Landowners Drive Organic Production

Motivations include environmental impact, human health, and pastoral beauty

EMILY NEWMAN, RODALE INSTITUTE ORGANIC CONSULTING PROGRAM MANAGER

Certified organic production is increasing in the United States; part of that trend is coming from landowners that want to use their asset to support certified organic and regenerative organic agriculture. Some landowners live on the farms they rent out and want to see lush cover crops growing in the field; others live halfway across the country but understand the environmental impacts that conventional farming can have on the environment and human health – and they do not want to be a part of it any longer.

Rodale Institute's Organic Crop Consulting service, not only works with farmers, but also with landowners who share the same mission, vision, and core values. The conversations we have with landowners are very similar to those we have with farmers. We always start with the same set of questions: "What are your goals?" "How do you envision getting there?" and, "How much risk can you reasonably take on?"

However, the way we reach those goals is different. Instead of developing a crop rotation plan and making suggestions for fertility inputs as we would for farmers, we act as a support system and a regional partner to make sure that both the landowner and the tenant farmer have the knowledge to implement an environmentally and financially sustainable organic system plan together.

Carol and Stefanie (mother and daughter) are landowners right on the Susquehanna River in Perry County, Pennsylvania. Their farm is approximately 140 acres. "It has been in the family since the 1870s. The barn is that old and the farmhouse is even older, built in the early 1800s. The land has been inherited through five generations beginning with John A. Hilbish, an ancestor of the family.

Over the years, Stefanie, along with some business partners, cultivated 10 of those acres to produce non-certified organic vegetables, flowers, and herbs for local families through a CSA, farm stand, and at farmers markets. The remainder of the acreage was rented to tenant farmers for conventional hay and grain production.

Stefanie recently moved back to the farm full-time and has a dream to honor her ancestors and transition the entire 140 acres to certified organic production. "An inspiration [for us] is how this land has been traditionally farmed." When I visited Carol and Stefanie at their farm in the Spring of 2020, Carol's mother brought out a box of original "Organic Gardening" issues, published in the 1960s by Rodale Inc. Farming organically, "is a way to be in conversation with my ancestors who are no longer here," Stefanie said.

Carol, a chemist, also appreciates the human health aspect of organic farming and cares deeply about the well-being of the farm operators and "the eaters, including the animals."

Transitioning to certified organic as a non-operating landowner does not come without its challenges. "My grandpa would take me out to the garden, but I was really kept away from the farming part because of safety." Stefanie actually learned the CSA model and started understanding a growing season from cover crop to cash crop through her time at Rutgers University, not from spending time on her family's farm. "A challenge has been being a woman in this space. [I've] been easily dismissed; it is hard to be taken seriously and to be taken as competent. As someone who is learning, it can be very discouraging." In addition to this, she has difficulty finding a tenant farmer who is willing to assist her during the transition to certified organic.

Working with landowners is a balancing act. We strive to support both the tenant farmer and the landowner simultaneously; we don't want farmers to have to find new land or lose income, and we want landowners to feel supported in their

Organic Gardening Magazines at Stefanie and Carol's farm.



decision. For landowners, it can be difficult when farmers aren't at all interested in attempting to change their production system.

Stefanie asked both tenant farmers if they would consider an organic system, but unfortunately neither were interested and cited concerns of weed pressure.

When this is the situation we encounter, we're forced to take a different route and find a farmer whose vision and goals matches that of the landowner's. Luckily, Pennsylvania has resources for connecting with both organic farmers looking for land and landowners looking for organic farmers.

The Organic INTEGRITY Database offers an online and transparent database – listing all organic farmers by address, making it easy for Stefanie to find organic farmers in Perry County. She has started cold-calling some of them and has had some success making connections with her local organic community. Sometimes it's a long chain of communication; one farmer will pass along the name and number of another and so on. She hopes this process will lead her to an ideal tenant farmer soon.

In addition, PA Farm Link is a non-profit whose mission is to "link farmers to the future" by having an online land-linking database. Pennsylvania Certified Organic and Pasa Sustainable Agriculture also have classifieds for landowners and farmers looking to advertise available land.

Stefanie remains positive that she will find a farmer to assist her family with the transition to certified organic production. "At the end of these three years [of transition] I'm not entirely sure who the farmer will be; it could be me!" Stefanie exclaimed. "Or it may be a leasing farmer we have yet to iden-


tify, but will through networking and resource sharing."

"The Rodale Institute has been the biggest help with this organic transition. [Rodale] has been a huge help with the technical [support]: cover crop seeds, soil health and increasing our knowledge in exactly the ways we needed to."

Are you a farmer or landowner interested in transitioning to certified organic? Contact Rodale Institute's Organic Crop consulting team at 610-683-1416 or consulting@rodaleinstitute.org.



The Rodale Institute's Organic Crop Consulting services are currently FREE to Pennsylvania farmers transitioning to organic thanks to funding from the PA Department of Agriculture. Farmers who make the transition to organic can earn two to three times the price of their conventional counterparts and increase the value of their land, giving farmers a valuable asset for future generations. Rodale Institute is a trusted resource for technical assistance, regulatory advice and community connections. Consultations typically begin with a phone call, followed by a site visit. Support is provided throughout the entire transition to make sure farmers are on the right track. Farmers that are interested in receiving consulting services can contact the Rodale Institute by calling 610-683-1216 or by emailing Consulting@RodaleInstitute.org




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www.NODPA.com

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President's Message



ANDREW SMYRE, PCO ADVISORY BOARD PRESIDENT

Andrew is the owner/operator of Lazy Dog Farm and the Head of Grain Sales and Agronomy at Belltown Farms.

Greetings! It's one of the highest honors in my life to be able to serve as PCO's Board President. As I enter my second term of service on the board, I am grateful to have the opportunity to continue to bring my experience as a certified operator and agribusiness entrepreneur to the board discussions. I am following in the footsteps of great leaders these last few years, and I will strive to emulate their dedication to our organization. If this past year has taught us anything, it is that those of us in organic agriculture meet challenges head-on and demonstrate our resiliency in what we do. As a growing organization, PCO has and will continue to have its challenges. It is the strong foundation of certified members and committed board members that will lead us through whatever we face.

In 2020 we saw many changes to the agricultural industry, bringing opportunity and challenges to our food systems. Our farmers and processors faced many difficult decisions but were

able to supply the organic food and products that were needed. Consumers continued to trust the organic label for clean, healthy food during uncertain times, reinforcing the need for what we do.

As the board looks to the future, we see a vibrant landscape in which our memberships will do business. As we approach PCO's 25th anniversary in 2022, we are hopeful to provide more opportunities to build connections within our organization and strengthen the organic supply chain.

Much of the board's work is establishing a strategic plan for PCO and overseeing the organization's financial health. Over the last couple board meetings, we have been digging deeper into this work by creating goals to help measure our impact and hold us accountable. Just like we hold you accountable to the organic standards, the board seeks to have its own checks and balances to guide us in our decision-making process. We believe by having SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound) we can access the long term effects of our work for our members and the larger organic industry.

With this new board term, we are saying goodbye to three individuals who were instrumental in leading us through change and inspiring us to do more. At our April board meeting we will be welcoming three new members (see below) who will bring a wealth of talent and fresh perspectives as we continue to serve our members and uphold our mission. We have a bright future here at PCO and I am excited and honored to help lead this organization.

PCO Welcomes New 2021 Board Members



Katherine DiMatteo

Katherine DiMatteo Independent Consultant Leyden, MA

Katherine DiMatteo is an independent consultant, previously managing partner at Wolf, DiMatteo + Associates. Formerly the Executive Director of the Organic Trade Association from 1990 to 2006, she was instrumental in shaping the out-



Denele Hughson

come of the U.S. National Organic Program standards and the U.N. Codex Guidelines for organically produced foods. She currently serves on the Fair-trade America Board of Directors. Katherine was a founding member of the Climate Collaborative and now serves on its management board. Previously she served as the president of



Chelsie Romberger

IFOAM-Organics International Board of Directors and was a founding member of The Organic Center's Board of Directors.

Denele Hughson Grow Pittsburgh Pittsburgh, PA

Denele is the Executive Director at Grow Pittsburgh. Grow Pittsburgh is an urban agriculture non-profit committed to teaching people how to grow food and to promote the benefits that gardens bring to our neighborhoods. Prior to her position as the Executive Director, Denele was the Director of Production and Farm Education and was integral to expanding food access initiatives across Allegheny County. She has a Master of Science degree in Public Policy and Management from Carnegie Mellon University and a

continued next page

PCO Welcome New 2021 Board Members

continued from previous page

Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and History from the University of Pittsburgh.

Chelsie Romberger
Kellerman Consulting
Duncannon, PA

Chelsie Romberger is currently the Food Safety & Regulatory Manager at Bell & Evans in Fredericksburg, PA, but transitioning to a new Food Safety Consultant role with a new agency. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Nutrition Science from Kaplan University and a Master of Science degree in Food Safety from Michigan State University. She has over 10 years of experience in food safety and regulatory compliance in a variety of food industry sectors, including meat and poultry, bakery, and prepared meals. Chelsie's area of expertise includes regulatory compliance and process improvements. Her passions include leadership, innovation, and upholding the safety of the food supply. Chelsie lives in Duncannon, Pennsylvania

Returning board members include Kristy Borrelli, Penn State University; Lisa De Lima, MOMs Organic Market; Bob Eberly; Tina Ellor, Phillips Mushroom Farms; Betty Harper, Penn State University; Dave Hartman, Penn State Extension; Ted LeBow, Kitchen Table Consultants; Samuel Malriat, Rodale Institute; Joe Miller, Kalona SuperNatural; Spencer Miller, Boyd Station, LLC; Andrew Smyre, Lazy Dog Farms/Tuscarora Grain Co. LLC; and Mike Spangler, Indigo Ag.

PCO extends a special thank you to the following outgoing board members for their dedication and service to PCO: Beth Gugino, Ron Hoover, Luke Howard and Ross Duffield.

PCO values a diverse board that supports the mission of PCO and represents the membership by having a balance of interests. Board members are elected for a 3-year term and are eligible to serve a total of 2 consecutive terms. To learn more about our current board members, or to nominate a future board member, visit paorganic.org/about/board.

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Dear Aggy



Dear Aggy,

I recently sent in a product XYZ for your review, and I got a letter indicating it was prohibited as a fertilizer, but allowed for disease control. Why can't I use it the way I was planning? I'm confused, especially since this product has an OMRI seal on the label.

— Confused Carl

Dear Carl,

Thanks so much for confirming the status of the XYZ product with us.

Although we do accept OMRI listings, it's often more difficult for the user to determine what specific category the product is allowed for. As you're becoming aware, just because a product is allowed for disease control, doesn't mean it's allowed as a general production aid or soil amendment. When in doubt, check with PCO!

Here's a quick overview of how the review criteria differ generally for crop and livestock inputs.

CROPS

■ Fertilizers

ALL ingredients need to be allowed, either as non-synthetics not prohibited at §205.602, or if synthetic, they must be listed as §205.601(j) (for example, micronutrients would be a restricted synthetic ingredient)

■ Pest, Disease or Weed Control

Ingredients are divided into active and inactive ingredients, which have different criteria.

For example, a product with mineral oil as an active ingredient would be prohibited, but the mineral oil as an inert would be allowed, since it is listed on the EPA list 4 inerts.

Active ingredients:

- must be non-synthetic not prohibited at §205.602
- if synthetic, must be listed at §§205.601(a), (b), (d), (e), (f), (g), (h), (i), or (k), depending on the type of product

Inactive/Inert ingredients:

- non-synthetics are allowed if not specifically prohibited or restricted at §205.602
- synthetic substances are allowed if included on the EPA List 4 A or B (unless they are revoked ingredients)

- for inert ingredients in passive pheromone dispensers, synthetic inerts are allowed if they are included on the EPA List 3 of inerts

Restrictions for Pest, Disease or Weed Control products are as follows:

May be used if preventative, mechanical, and physical management practices provided for at §205.206(a)-(d) are insufficient to prevent or control crop pests, weeds, and diseases. The operator must document conditions for using the substance in organic system plan.

LIVESTOCK

■ Feed Additive/Supplement

- agricultural ingredients must be certified organic
- vitamins and minerals are generally allowed (Must be AAFCO-listed)

■ Medical Treatments

Again, this category of products can have ingredients divided into actives and excipients (which function as carriers or inactive ingredients)

Active ingredients:

- agricultural ingredients are not required to be certified organic
- all ingredients approved as feed additive/supplements are allowed
- non-synthetic ingredients are allowed unless prohibited or restricted at §205.604
- synthetic ingredients are allowed if they are listed at §205.603(a) or §205.603(b) and meet applicable annotations
- microbial ingredients (including probiotics, enzymes, and yeasts) and citric acid must be non-GMO
- whey/colostrum must be from a non-rBGH and rBST-free source

Excipient ingredients:

- non-synthetic substance are allowed unless prohibited or restricted at §205.604
- synthetic substances are allowed so long as they meet one of the following criteria:
- identified by the FDA as Generally Recognized As Safe (GRAS)
- approved by the FDA as food additive (including direct and indirect)
- included in the FDA review and approval of a New Animal Drug Application (NADA) or New Drug Application (NDA)

Whereas feed additives are expected to be part of a daily ration, medical treatments must be used within the following parameters:

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PCO Core Values in Action

Staff model core values in their day to day work

DIANA UNDERWOOD, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS

How do you make decisions within your family and in your workplace? Perhaps it's an obvious decision that you don't think much about or maybe it's just the way you've always done things. At PCO, those situations certainly happen but more often than not the decision is less clear; that's where our core values help guide us. These core values could just live on our website or on a piece of paper, but then we wouldn't really be upholding them. Instead, we strive to bring them into our day to day interactions with each other, our clients, and all of our stakeholders. Of course, this isn't just one person's responsibility, it's something we all have to believe in and commit to. That's why we created our values as a team and we uphold them as a team.

- **Keep people at the center of every action, interaction and decision** (*Provide Support*).
- **Promote restorative practices that improve the world for future generations** (*Engage Stewardship*).
- **Embrace transparency and integrity in all our work** (*Cultivate Trust*).

In our last edition, we highlighted our first core value. In this edition, we are emphasizing our second core value; to promote restorative practices that improve the world for future generations. This core value supports our work to create a future that's better than we found it. We nourish others by supporting organic food production and creating a network of support for learning and sharing resources. All the while, we advocate for the organic industry.

In order to better highlight how this core value shows up in the PCO workplace, we are sharing a few examples below:

Educational Offerings: PCO and Rodale institute partnered to sponsor an organic track at the Pasa Sustainable Agriculture Conference. Together they offered their collective experience as organizations as well as tapped into the vast knowledge of our members to share their own learnings on various organic production topics.

Thank you to Sabine Carey, Heather Donald, Stephen Hobaugh, Chelsea Johnson, Katie Poppiti, and Dara Raidel for sharing your time and knowledge with conference goers.

Guidance Documents: If you are looking for a PCO Guidance Document, they are on our website! You can easily navigate through general, crops, livestock, poultry, and processor/han-

Congratulations to Sabine Carey as the Pasa Sus-



tainable Agriculture 2021 Community Leadership Award Winner (COVID Response). Sabine is a long-time employee of PCO, currently serving as a Materials Specialist. In addition, she operates Full Circle Farms with her family in Centre County, Pennsylvania and manages Centre Markets, an online farmers market. At the onset of the pandemic in 2020, Sabine leapt into action to help farmers across Central Pennsylvania move their products and safely feed their local community with enhancements to the Centre Markets online platform. The online market connects market vendors and farmers to a broader community and offers customers a diverse market selection of local foods. Her innovative actions and positive attitude brought such a bright spot to a challenging year. Congratulations Sabine, we are grateful for your work within PCO and the local community. Best wishes for continued success in 2021.

dlers categories. Of course, you are always welcome to call our office for specific requests. We're here to help!

Thank you to Stacey Budd for your lightning speed in uploading these to the website to connect our clients to these important resources.

Organic Industry: If there is an organic industry group, PCO is there! Our team members are active in the Accredited Certifier Association (ACA), International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA), and National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). All of these industry groups allow us to bring the certifier perspective to these roles as well as ensure we are ready to inform our clients of any opportunities for input or upcoming regulatory changes.

Thank you Jen Berkebille, Heather Donald, and Kyla Smith for your service in these roles

We hope you will join us in thanking our staff for their awesome work. Stay tuned in future issues as we continue to highlight our core values. Do you have any examples to share with us? We would love to hear from you, please email/call Diana Underwood (diana@paorganic.org or 814-422-0251 ext 215).

You can read about the action steps we strive to model by visiting our Mission, Vision, and Values page on our website: paorganic.org/about/mission-vision-and-core-values/

CALL TO ACTION

Are you a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Person of Color) farmer or producer in our organic community open to sharing your story? We want to elevate your voice in an upcoming publication. Interesting in participating? Please contact Stacey Budd (sbudd@paorganic.org or 814-422-0251 ext 230)

New Report Unearths Soil Health Insights

Pasa unveils first comprehensive public report detailing data from more than 100 farms

New Morning Farm, Huntingdon County, PA

FRANKLIN EGAN, PASA DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Pasa's Soil Health Benchmark Study is a citizen-science project that began in 2016. The study lets farmers comprehensively assess the health of their soils, and see how their soil health data compares to the data of their peers. By identifying soil health benchmarks, this project gives farmers a much clearer picture of whether their sustainable soil health management techniques are achieving their intended results, or if there's room for improvement.

The study is measuring a comprehensive array of physical, biological, and chemical attributes of soil, including aggregate stability, organic matter, microbial respiration, and nutrient levels. The study also puts these soil attributes into the context of field management techniques, including tillage frequency and intensity, cover cropping, and organic matter inputs.

For more details on the study, visit: pasafarming.org.

Our new report offers fresh insights into how farmers can improve their soil stewardship practices to more effectively protect ecosystems and communities, better withstand severe weather, and increase their yields. The report reviews our findings to date of our ongoing **Soil Health Benchmark Study**—the largest and most diverse community science project studying soil health in the country.

Since we began our study in 2016, we've worked collaboratively with partners including the Cornell Soil Health Testing Laboratory, Future Harvest and the Million Acre Challenge, Penn State Extension, Rodale Institute, and Stroud Water Research Center, as well as more than 100 pastured livestock, row crop, and vegetable farmers in Pennsylvania and Maryland, to collect and analyze soil samples and field management records. Collectively, these soil samples and field records shed light on the nuanced soil health strengths and challenges that can exist simultaneously within a farmer's field. Here's what we found.

TILLAGE CAN BE PART OF A HOLISTIC SOIL HEALTH MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Our study's most remarkable revelation challenges a popular theory among farmers and other industry professionals positing that eliminating tillage is always necessary for achieving optimal soil health on farms that produce annual crops.

We found that, while most no-till farms participating in our study did indeed have optimal soil health, farms that rely on tillage for controlling weeds and preparing fields were also capable of achieving optimal soil health. These farms likely accomplished this by balancing tillage with a holistic soil health management strategy, which might include planting cover crops, rotating crops, calibrating inputs well, and carefully timing tillage operations to avoid excessively wet or dry soil conditions.

Most no-till farmers are able to avoid tillage by relying, to some degree, on herbicides to control weeds and terminate cover crops. However, because of the escalating prevalence of herbicide-resistant weeds and the growing public health and environmental problems associated with herbicide use, continuous no-till may not always be a sustainable soil health management method.

While some small farms and farming organizations are experimenting with organic no-till methods, this approach remains largely elusive to most organic farmers who typically depend on at least some "steel in the field" to effectively control weeds and prepare beds for planting. Our findings offer optimistic news for farmers, since we're learning that there are many paths toward optimal soil health—many of which are more practical than we might have previously imagined.

BETTER CALIBRATING FERTILIZER INPUTS WILL IMPROVE SOIL HEALTH AND WATER QUALITY

Many vegetable farms, and some row crop farms, participating in our study struggled with high levels of phosphorus in their fields. Through runoff and erosion, excessive phosphorus can pollute streams and estuaries by causing blooms of algae that exhaust oxygen from the water and kill other life forms. At

Spiral Path Farm, Perry County, PA



the global scale, phosphorus is a nonrenewable resource, mined from a limited number of deposits across the globe. Once phosphorus is lost to rivers and diluted in the vast ocean, it isn't available again to future generations.

For vegetable farmers, excessive phosphorus can also significantly weaken crop vigor by inhibiting a plant's uptake of vital micronutrients, which can impede crop growth and increase susceptibility to pests. In most cases in our study, high phosphorus levels could be attributed to heavy manure or compost inputs, often applied in excess of crop needs. Better aligning fertilizer inputs with soil test results will not only save farmers' money and improve yields, it will also improve water quality.

TOUGH WEATHER IS TOUGH ON SOIL

Our study also provides a glimpse into how climate change will present new challenges for soil stewardship in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions. In 2018, a season defined by historic rainfall totals – most of it arriving in heavy, concentrated doses – we observed a 60% and 54% drop in aggregate stability on row crop and vegetable farms, respectively, in Pennsylvania and Maryland.

While most of these farms were able to partially or substantially rebuild their aggregate stability the following season, which offered more amenable weather and field working conditions, it's likely that extreme rainfall events and consistently wet seasons will become more common in the region. Without much-needed reprieves from wet weather, maintaining healthy soil structure that's resistant to erosion could be a significant ongoing challenge for farmers.

Planting fibrous-rooted cover crops and developing other soil management strategies that anticipate more frequent wet weather may be key for protecting and building soil aggregate stability.

PASTURED LIVESTOCK FARMS ARE THE "GOLD STANDARD" FOR SOIL HEALTH

Both organic vegetable farms and no-till row crop farms were consistently outpaced by pastured livestock farms. While it might be unfair to compare annual crop farms to farms that maintain fields of deep-rooted perennial forage, pastured live-

stock farmers can nonetheless take pride in their superior soil health performance. Perennial pastured livestock farms achieved optimal scores for every soil health indicator we measured, on nearly all fields we measured. Most annual row crop and vegetable farms have excellent or optimal soil health in many respects, but, as mentioned above, often show challenges with low aggregate stability and high phosphorus.

TESTING FOR A HOLISTIC ANALYSIS OF SOIL HEALTH

Our report further details benchmarks for a variety of biological, chemical, and physical soil health indicators, such as organic matter levels and microbial activity, as well as field management benchmarks, such as overall tillage intensity and the number of days farmers maintain living cover in their fields. Collectively, these benchmarks provide a holistic picture of a soil's strengths and problem areas.

For decades, and continuing into the present day, soil health testing labs have primarily focused on measuring a soil's chemical attributes—levels of acidity; nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium; and micronutrients. While this provides farmers with some basic information about soil fertility, such a narrow scope of analysis offers a highly limited, and often misleading, understanding of a soil's true health.

Critically, this approach does not take into account a wealth of other attributes, such as whether a soil is resistant to erosion, or to what extent beneficial microorganisms are present. In contrast, our study employs a holistic approach to soil testing that measures not only a soil's chemical health, but also its physical and biological health.

While the benchmarks outlined in our report paint an overall positive picture of the state of farmers' soils, it's important to note that our study does not reflect a representative sample of agriculture in the Mid-Atlantic region. Many of the farmers participating in our study have worked to hone their soil-building

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Henry Got Crops Farm, Philadelphia, PA

Certification Update

Kyla Smith
Certification Director



Happy Spring!

It is the time of year PCO likes to remind operations to communicate any time sensitive requests. Sending requests, such as adding new processed products, adding fields, adding production lines, adding scopes to your certification, moving farms or facilities, etc., are all examples of items that may have longer internal processing times and may require on-site inspections to confirm the changes. Providing as much advanced notice as possible along with submitting complete information with your request enables us to accommodate you as best as we can. If you have noted these changes on your annual update forms, we would also appreciate a phone call or email if it is a time sensitive request to confirm we are aware and can streamline your paperwork.

As noted several times throughout this issue, PCO transitioned to a new database this spring. Although PCO has been prepping for this transition for almost a year, there are still some things that we want to bring to your attention specifically in order to help serve you best during this brief transition time. We anticipate moving databases will allow for faster intake and quicker processing in the very near future. Thank you in advance for your patience and support during this transition!

Lastly, due to continuation of the presence of COVID-19, PCO will be continuing to complete inspections both on-site and remotely for the time being. Therefore, be prepared for inspections to look similar to the 2020 inspection cycle. This can include a desk audit where your inspector may request paperwork via mail or email, and complete the on-site inspection separately as needed. This could also be a completely remote inspection using some type of technology (e.g. Zoom, FaceTime, etc.). If you are a new applicant (not yet certified), or adding a process to your certification that requires an on-site inspection, at least a portion of the inspection must occur on-site. New clients may receive a hybrid inspection, but an on-site portion must always occur. Please keep in mind that not sending your inspector the requested paperwork (if all or a portion is done remotely) counts as an inspection refusal and you may receive a non-compliance if not submitted.

Legislative Update

Kyla Smith, Certification Director

PCO MEETS WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, POLICYMAKERS

Matt Fry, owner of PCO-certified Fair Hill Farms, Inc, and Kyla Smith, PCO Certification Director, met with Representative Glenn "GT" Thompson, PA District 15, as well as other congressional offices to brief the new administration on the array



of challenges facing the organic sector, and how to keep organic agriculture advancing. This virtual Organic Trade Association (OTA) Farmers Advisory Council (FAC) fly-in included organic producers from a dozen states with the purpose of discussing such issues as continuous improvement and accountability in organic standards; increasing funding for organic research; providing organic farmers, businesses and workers with adequate support and protection to help deal with COVID-19; restoring full funding to help organic farmers cover their certification fees; and investing in federal programs to support farmers in successfully transitioning to – and staying in – organic production. For more information regarding any of the topics above or about joining FAC as a PCO representative, please contact Kyla Smith (kyla@paorganic.org, 814-422-0251 ext. 216).

VILSACK CONFIRMED AS U.S. SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

The U.S. Senate overwhelmingly confirmed President Biden's nominee for Agriculture Secretary, Tom Vilsack, with broad bipartisan support. Secretary Vilsack previously served in the same role during the Obama administration. Since then, he's spent time as CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council and an advisor for Colorado State University. Secretary Vilsack has pledged to address various issues at USDA including climate change, diversity and equity issues, ongoing food scarcity issues, and recovery from the pandemic, and has indicated interest in working to expand the organic market by improving farmers' ability to transition to organic and by supporting local and regional markets.

USDA PUBLISHES FINAL RULE FOR THE PRODUCTION OF DOMESTIC HEMP

On January 15, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) published the final rule providing regulations for the production of hemp in the United States. The final rule incorporates comments following the publication of the interim final rule and lessons learned during the 2020 growing season. The rule addressed key provisions such as licensing requirements; recordkeeping requirements for maintaining information about the land where hemp is produced; thresholds for negligent violations; methods of disposal for non-compliant plants; and flexibility for sample collection timeframes and using non-DEA registered laboratories. The final rule is available for viewing in the Federal Register ([federalregister.gov/docu-](https://www.federalregister.gov/docu-)

ments/2021/01/19/2021-00967/establishment-of-a-domestic-hemp-production-program) and became effective on March 22, 2021. More information about the provisions of the final rule is available on the Hemp Production web page (ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/hemp) on the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) website.

SPENDING BILL INCLUDES BIG WINS FOR ORGANIC

A bipartisan deal on Fiscal Year 2021 federal spending, which includes roughly \$900 billion in funding for COVID relief, was passed and signed by former President Trump in December 2020. The bill included top priorities for the organic industry such as increased funding for the National Organic Program (\$18 million – \$2 million increase over FY20) as well as for the organic transition research program (\$7 million – increase of \$1 million over FY20), assistance for businesses and farmers to protect their workforce, additional funding and flexibility for the Paycheck Protection Program, and direct payments to farmers impacted by COVID that incorporate the increased price premiums associated with organic certification.

Materials Update

Jen Berkebile
Materials Program Manager



Happy Spring! The PCO Materials Team is beginning to work on material reviews that you have submitted with your annual update paperwork. Remember, if you have any outstanding material reviews, don't hesitate to contact us at 814-422-0251 for an update.

Please note the following status changes for materials reviewed by PCO for use by certified operations:

ALLOWED

■ Crop Materials

- **Meat and Bone Meal from EEGAL Farm Service** is allowed as a fertilizer and soil amendment, with the following restriction:

Raw Manure. Raw animal manure, which must be composted unless it is: Applied to land used for a crop not intended for human consumption; Incorporated into the soil not less than 120 days prior to the harvest of a product whose edible portion has direct contact with the soil surface or soil particles; or Incorporated into the soil not less than 90 days prior to the harvest of a product whose edible portion does not have direct contact with the soil surface or soil particles. If applied foliarly, operator must wait 120 days to harvest after application if raw manure has direct contact with the edible portion of the crop, or 90 days to harvest after application if raw manure does not have direct contact with the edible portion of the crop. §205.203(c)(1)

- **Silo Max Special by Peak Forage Solutions, Inc.**, is allowed as a forage treatment.

■ Livestock Materials

- **Calf Glo with leaves on the label by Natural Way Minerals** is allowed as a livestock feed additive/supplement. Please note that Calf Glo without leaves on the label is not currently reviewed for use on organic operations.
- **Rhodimet AT 88 (Liquid HMB) by Adisseo USA Inc.** is allowed as a livestock feed additive/supplement with the following restriction:

Methionine. Allowed in organic poultry production at the following pounds of synthetic 100 percent methionine per ton of feed in the diet, maximum rates as averaged per ton of feed over the life of the flock: Laying chickens—2 pounds; broiler chickens—2.5 pounds; turkeys and all other poultry—3 pounds.

PROHIBITED — Operators must immediately discontinue use of these products unless otherwise noted.

■ Crop Materials

- **America's Best Inoculant Liquid Formula by Advanced Biological Marketing** is prohibited as a seed treatment.
- **N Dure Inoculant for Sainfoin by Verdesian Life Sciences, U.S., LLC** is prohibited for use as a seed treatment.

■ Livestock Materials

- **8 Way Mineral Mix by Free Choice Enterprises** is prohibited for use as an OPT grass-fed feed additive/supplement.
- **HydraFeed by Ecolab, Inc.**, is prohibited for use as a livestock medical treatment.
- **Select BioCycle Plus by Agrarian Marketing Corp.** is prohibited as a livestock medical treatment.

■ Facility Materials

- **Poultry and Hog House Cleaner by Ag Provision LLC** is prohibited for use as a livestock housing cleaner and sanitizer.

Opportunity to Amplify the Voice of Small Organic Farmers

Do you have an interest in influencing the Organic Trade Association's (OTA) national policy work to better support the needs of small farmers? Do you desire direct news and expert analysis of the change in organic regulations that will affect your business? PCO-certified farms with annual organic sales less than \$250,000 have an opportunity to become Farmstead Members of the OTA for just \$50 per year. Benefits include amplifying the small farmer voice in Washington and a vote for OTA's Board of Directors.

Interested? For more information check out
www.ota.com/farmstead

Standards and Policy Update

Kyla Smith, Certification Director

SPRING 2021 NOSB MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) Spring 2021 Meeting will occur virtually April 28 through April 30, from 12:00 p.m. to approximately 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time each day. NOSB will hear oral public comments via webinars prior to the meeting on Tuesday, April 20, and Thursday, April 22, from 12:00 p.m. to approximately 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time. A detailed meeting agenda and the packet of proposals/documents, along with instructions for submitting written comments and oral comment sign up, are posted on the NOSB Spring 2021 meeting web page (ams.usda.gov/event/national-organic-standards-board-nosb-meeting-crystal-city-va-0). The deadline to submit written comments and/or sign up for oral comment was April 5 at midnight Eastern Time. The following topics are included on the agenda: 2023 Sunset Materials, Paper Pots, Biodegradable Mulch, Ammonia Extract fertilizers, and Ion Exchange Filtration.

PCO encourages all stakeholders, especially organic farmers, food processors and other organic certificate holders, to participate in this unique public private partnership. This will be, PCO Certification Director, Kyla Smith's, first meeting in her role on the NOSB as the certifier representative.

For more information on agenda topics, please contact Jen Berkebile (jen@paorganic.org, 814-422-0251 ext. 209) or Kyla Smith (kyla@paorganic.org, 814-422-0251 ext. 216).

TERMINATION OF US-INDIA RECOGNITION AGREEMENT

The National Organic Program (NOP) has recently changed its approach to organic oversight in India. Specifically, the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service informed India's Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) on January 1, 2021 that the NOP is ending the US-India organic recognition arrangement, which was established in 2006. This decision starts a transition period which will allow organic operations certified by APEDA-accredited certifiers to apply for direct certification by USDA-accredited certifiers to the USDA organic standards.

By July 12, 2021, a business in India wishing to export organic products to the US must have applied for USDA-NOP certification. This does not mean that only the final India-based exporter of the product must be seeking USDA-NOP certification; rather all entities in the supply chain must be seeking certification. By July 12, 2022, all organic products being exported to the United States from India must be certified organic to the USDA-NOP and have a valid organic certificate.

If you are buying from an organic supplier certified by an APEDA-accredited certifier, communicate with those suppliers about the need to apply for NOP certification to a USDA-accredited certifier by July 12, 2021, to continue their business with you. After July 12, to continue accepting products from

those suppliers, you must use the Organic Integrity Database (organic.ams.usda.gov/integrity/) to verify that any organic supplier is already certified or has applied for organic certification with a USDA-accredited certifier. This verification process and how your operation implements it will be reviewed by your Certification Specialist and checked at your annual inspection.

FORMATION OF A US-UK EQUIVALENCE ARRANGEMENT

Effective January 1, 2021, the United Kingdom (UK) officially exited the European Union, finalizing the long transition period often referred to as "Brexit." In order to maintain trade of organic products between the UK (including England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland), the USDA and the UK have formed a new equivalence arrangement. This arrangement will allow organic products to be certified to either the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) or UK organic standards in order to be labeled and sold as organic in both countries.

This new equivalence arrangement requires that organic products certified to the USDA NOP standards being sold into the UK must be accompanied by a new UK import certificate. The UK will utilize a new export document manually processed outside of the EU's TRACES document system. The Great Britain Certificate of Inspection (COI) mirrors the COI used by the EU and needs to be signed by PCO before the shipment leaves the United States. Organic shipments will be accepted by the local Port Health Authority (PHA) or Local Authority (LA) in the UK with a copy of the COI, but the original Great Britain COI must be presented and endorsed to PHA or LA within 10 working days for the consignment to be sold as organic. Shipments of USDA organic products into Northern Ireland will continue to use the EU TRACES certificate of inspection system



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Dear Aggy

continued from page 14

- Operator must document the use of preventative livestock health care practices in the Organic System Plan.
- Must not be used in the absence of illness, except for vaccines.
- Use of medical treatments must be documented in operator's health records, and include the identification of the treated animal, the dosage and duration of treatment, and reason for treatment. This restriction applies to medical treatments that may be at risk of routine use as feed supplements, and is not required for teat dips, topicals, injectable vitamins, homeopathics, and tinctures.

The general takeaway is that PCO does need to know the specific purpose of the product you are planning on using, and based on the ingredients, it may be allowed for one purpose but be prohibited for another. But as you can see, material review can be very tricky! Best practice is to always contact the Materials Resource Team at the PCO office to verify a product's allowance *prior to use*. In addition, documenting your intended use on your Materials Used Form and in your Organic System Plan is crucial. Even for OMRI listed products, it is important to verify that you are using the product for the OMRI listed use, and according to any restrictions.

Soil Health Insights

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practices over many years, and are at the forefront of innovative land stewardship. Our findings should therefore be understood in terms of "what's possible" when farmers are committed to soil stewardship and are supported by technical service providers and their peers as they work to fine-tune their field management practices.

We expect this report to be the first of a series of soil health benchmark reports that we will publish periodically to help farmers, technical service providers, scientists, policymakers, and communities better understand soil health and how best to protect it.

Read the full report and learn more about our Soil Health Benchmark Study here: pasafarming.org/resources/soil-health-benchmarks-2021-report/.



PASA's Soil Health Benchmark Study was initially made possible thanks to generous financial investments from Lady Moon Farms, the Jerry Brunetti family, the Shon Seeley family, and more than 120 individual donors committed to supporting farmers' efforts to build and preserve soil health.

Additional support has been provided through the William Penn Foundation, the Hillman Foundation, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, and the USDA Conservation Innovation Grants program.



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New Members

PCO Welcomes 1st Quarter New Members!

NEWLY CERTIFIED ORGANIC

Amos B. Stoltzfus
Ovid, NY

Amos Kurtz
Woodhull, NY

Andrew Martin
New York, NY

Brenize Family Farm LLC
New Oxford, PA

Brent Loewen
Piermont, NH

Charles Cyrus
Sugarcreek, OH

Chris Strawser
Mount Joy, PA

Daniel Brubaker
Kutztown, PA

East Coast Dehydrators
Birchrunville, PA

Hemp Synergistics LLC
Pittsburgh, PA

**Hi-Tech Nutraceu-
ticals, LLC**
Reedsville, PA

Hilda Funk
Mount Joy, PA

John D. Hoover
Narvon, PA

Jonathan White
Sugarcreek, OH

K&O Farm
Holland Patent, NY

Lavazza Professional
West Chester, PA

Lewis Hoover
New Oxford, PA

Luke S. Zimmerman
Greenwich, OH

Mark S. Horst
Penn Yan, NY

Mike Schar
Sugarcreek, OH

Mission Farm
Killbuck, OH

Nathan Myer
Manheim, PA

North Mountain Farms LLC
Killbuck, OH

Pete & Gerry's Organics LLC (Pleasant View Farm)
Monroe, NH

Randal Nolt
Kreamer, PA

Roy Shank
Mount Joy, PA

Sam Beiler
New York, NY

Sarahsway Breeding Farm, LLC
Gilbertsville, PA

Scott Reilly
Sugarcreek, OH

Scott Wagner
New Oxford, PA

Steven Beiler
Telford, PA

The Hershey Company
Hershey, PA

ORGANIC PLUS TRUST

K & O Farm
Holland Patent, NY

BUSINESS

Advancing Eco Agriculture
Middlefield, OH

Alltech Inc
Nicholasville, KY

Animal Science Products Inc
Nacogdoches, TX

Arkion Life Sciences
Garnet Valley, PA

Best Veterinary Solutions
Ellsworth, IA

ChemStation Philadelphia
Downingtown, PA

Eastern Technologies
Morgantown, PA

Ecomight
Miami Beach, FL

Homestead Nutrition Inc
New Holland, PA

Metzler Forest Products
Reedsville, PA

Mushroom Central Supply Inc

Toughkenamon, PA

Peter Miller
Millheim, PA

Qvortex
Guymon, OK

Rivulet Ranch
Schnecksville, PA

Silvateam USA Inc
Springdale, AR

Southland Organics
Bogart, GA

Star Dairy Resources
Hagerstown, MD

York Ag Products
York, PA

ADVOCATE

Dairy Farmers of America
Denver, PA

Emelie and Scott Swackhamer
Macungie, PA

Katherine DiMatteo
Leyden, MA

Kelly Maguire
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EQUIPMENT

Farm cultivators for sale. Four and six rows; John Deere and IH, ready to go to work (both rebuilt). Contact Carl Modica for prices. 814-267-5640. Somerset County.

SERVICES

Ag plastic recycling- I can use black and white bunker covers, bale wrap, plastic twine, clear stretch film, greenhouse covers, flats, and pots. Call for details. 717-658-9660. Franklin County, PA.

LAND FOR SALE/RENT

Certified Organic Land for Sale- 17-acre parcel with a carriage house, horse shed, and fenced pasture (in grass). \$350,000
40-acre parcel (30 acres in grass) \$650,000. Contact 717-476-1220. York County.

Event Calendar

All times listed are Eastern Time, unless otherwise noted.

*All in-person events are tentative depending on public health guidelines. PCO advises all attendees to follow COVID-19 safety guidelines if attending any in-person events.

APRIL

April 20 & 22

National Organic Standards Board - Virtual Public Comment Days
ams.usda.gov

April 21

Webinar: Using Tarps to Control Weeds & Reduce Tillage
12:00-1:00 pm
Pasa Sustainable Agriculture
pasafarming.org/events/category/pasa-event/
814-349-9856

April 28

Webinar: Research Update - Grain Nutrient Density in the Farming Systems Trial
2:00-3:00 pm
Rodale Institute
rodaleinstitute.org/education/webinars/
610-683-1400

April 28-30

National Organic Standards Board - Online Meeting
ams.usda.gov

April 27

Penn State Extension Webinar

Conversations with the Professionals: Ag Succession and Transition Planning with an Ag Accountant
9:00-10:00 am
extension.psu.edu/shopby/webinars
877-345-0691

April 30

Listening Session: What's Next for Small Meat Processors?
12:00-1:00 pm
Pasa Sustainable Agriculture
pasafarming.org/events/category/pasa-event/
814-349-9856

MAY

May 5

Webinar: Getting to Know Your Soil Invertebrates
2:00-3:00 pm
Rodale Institute
rodaleinstitute.org/education/webinars/
610-683-1400

May 6

Webinar: Pick Lists & Packing Hacks: Simplifying Online Order Fulfillment

12:00-1:00 pm
Pasa Sustainable Agriculture
pasafarming.org/events/category/pasa-event/
814-349-9856

May 11

Penn State Extension Webinar
Ramp/Wild Leek Foraging and Forest Farming
7:30-8:30 pm
extension.psu.edu/shopby/webinars
877-345-0691

May 12

Webinar: Industrial Hemp - an Eco-friendly Multipurpose Crop with Untapped Agroeconomic Potential
2:00-3:00 pm
Rodale Institute
rodaleinstitute.org/education/webinars/
610-683-1400

May 19 & 25

Workshop: Harvesting & Packing for Food Safety & Quality Control*
• May 19 - 3:00-5:30 pm
Taproot Farm - Shoemakersville, PA
• May 25 - 6:00-7:30 pm
Braddock Farm - Pittsburgh, PA
Pasa Sustainable Agriculture
pasafarming.org/events/category/pasa-event/
814-349-9856

May 28

Listening Session: What's

Next for Agricultural Cooperatives?

12:00-1:00 pm
Pasa Sustainable Agriculture
pasafarming.org/events/category/pasa-event/
814-349-9856

JUNE

June 9

Webinar: Research Update - Soil Health and Water Quality in the Watershed Impact Trial
2:00-3:00 pm
Rodale Institute
rodaleinstitute.org/education/webinars/
610-683-1400

June 15

Workshop: Organic Strategies for Weed Management in Vegetable Crops*
3:00-5:30 pm
Rodale Institute - Kutztown, PA
6:00-7:30 pm
TBD - Pittsburgh, PA
Pasa Sustainable Agriculture
pasafarming.org/events/category/pasa-event/
814-349-9856

June 30

Workshop: Vegetable Farming 101: Irrigation*
3:00-5:30 pm
The Good Farm - Germansville, PA
Pasa Sustainable Agriculture
pasafarming.org/events/category/pasa-event/
814-349-9856

Advertise in Organic Matters

Organic Matters is the quarterly newsletter of Pennsylvania Certified Organic, a non-profit organization serving growers, processors and handlers of organic products. Issues contain articles on the latest news and research in the organic industry, often highlighting our certified members. Approximately 1,500 copies of each publication are distributed directly to members and those requesting information about organic agriculture, and made available to the public at conferences, exhibits and educational programs in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Ad size	PRICING		Dimensions (in)
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Quarter Page	\$152.50	\$518	3.25 × 4.5 (vertical)
Eighth Page	\$112.50	\$382	3.25 × 2.25 (horizontal)

The above rates refer to a single-issue ad placement and a subscription for ad placement in four consecutive issues.

A 15% discount is granted for the purchase of the 4-issue subscription.

For more information, please contact newsletter@paorganic.org or call the PCO Office at 814-422-0251.

"... good news for the rest of her lactation!"

— Bryce Windecker



WINDEX FARM, FRANKFORT, NEW YORK
Dale, Deb, Bryce and Kayla Windecker
100 Registered Holstein cows
BAA 107.6, 7 EX, 47 VG, 28 GP
65 lbs/cow/day, SCC 110,000
Certified Organic grazing herd

Photos: Bryce, Deb and Dale Windecker with hay equipment. Bryce at 2019 Big E with his bred-and-owned show cow from a top cow family Windex Fremont Dandy EX94. She was nominated Jr. All-American 5-year-old.

"If you can get a cow rolling along when she freshens, it's good news for the rest of her lactation. That's why we use Udder Comfort™ on every fresh cow, especially heifers, 2x/day for 5 days after calving," says Bryce Windecker, cowman in charge of the breeding program at Windex Farm, Frankfort, N.Y. He transferred to Cornell last fall.

Bryce explains how his family has used Udder Comfort for 10 years, since before being certified organic in 2017: "This product is better than anything else. It's real prevention. We use the yellow sprayable Udder Comfort and we like to cover the udder on a fresh animal."

"This gets swelling out fast. That's better for their comfort level and udder quality as a whole, to keep SCC low."

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Direct Marketing Strategy

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fication story, she noted that when they started their farm in 2010 there was never a doubt that they would grow to the organic standards because they believe in the practices. However, the timing of their certification pursuit was unknown. Taproot Farm is a 30-acre diversified vegetable farm that serves a 400+ member CSA, sells to a wholesale distributor and vends at two farmers' markets in Philadelphia. In the early days of their farm, certification didn't seem necessary with their customer base. As the years went on and the conversations with customers grew, it became clear that it was time and in 2017 they became certified organic. For Ola, organic certification is part of Taproot's brand. It is how they separate themselves from an ever-growing marketplace and tell the story of their farm.

CONSUMERS AND THE SEAL

All the panelists agreed that the USDA organic seal is a recognizable staple of our food system. It has been 31 years since the passing of the Organic Foods and Production Act of 1990 and consumers now have a firm understanding of what the seal represents.

John appreciates this knowledge as it provides ease in his communications with customers. CSA farmers are communicating with their customers **all the time** and for John, time is the most valued commodity on his farm. Annually he shares with his CSA customers what it means to be certified organic as a way to reiterate his farming practices. In addition, John uses the USDA organic seal on all their CSA boxes. The Good Farm delivers shares to commercial locations and this helps the passer-by understand a bit about their farm without having a presence to explain.

Ola is witnessing a growing interest in organic agriculture in Pennsylvania with a growing number of start-up farms. However, growth can also be coupled with skepticism. Without direct contact with our customer, you are asking them to trust you and your farming practices. By displaying the USDA organic seal, you are telling them that you grow to a national standard that is third-party verified and you can stand behind your words. Certification is a system that helps ensure honesty.

APPROVING YOUR LABELS

There are regulations on how you use the USDA organic seal when labeling your products. All labels planned for use on organic products must be submitted to PCO for approval prior to use. Use of organic claims, the USDA organic seal, or the PCO name or logo (including those on advertising and marketing materials) must be displayed in a manner that complies with NOP regulations and PCO policy. It is always wise to connect with your PCO Certification Specialist prior to production of any label, especially value-add products from your farm produce.

Trust, commitment and ease are just some of the reasons these producers use their certification as a marketing tool. Consider their stories as you explore how certification can help elevate your farm or production.



Improved Certification Database

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inspector asks you questions, asks you to present records for audit, tours your land, facility, and production areas, and summarizes any issues of concern for compliance with the regulations.

As in previous years, inspectors will be using a guided checklist. There have been some slight modifications to increase efficiency in going through the required information for your inspection; more clearly outlining the expectations and prerequisites for OSP changes. The system is designed to more efficiently evaluate compliance of the operation, while still providing the inspector the opportunity to explain the necessary details of their observations.

CONCLUSION

If 2020 taught us anything it's that change can be hard. We fully acknowledge that, and worked diligently to configure the new system in such a way that will result in more efficient processes, smoother communication between clients and inspectors, faster turnaround times, and an overall better user experience for our stakeholders. Change can be daunting but rest assured, this transition to the Intact Platform will set PCO up to be both more sustainable and flexible to the dynamics of the organic industry. We're looking forward to hearing your feedback so that we can continue to improve your experience in using the PCO Certification and Inspector Portals.



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