



Farmers Advisory Council (FAC) **2016 Annual Report**



## LETTER FROM PERRY CLUTTS GO-CHAIR, FARMERS ADVISORY COUNCIL AND OTA BOARD MEMBER, FARMER SEAT

Now in its third year, the Farmer Advisory Council (FAC) continues on its mission of bringing two-way communication between its farmer members and the Organic Trade Association's Board of Directors. It publishes and shares Council information, meeting agenda and notes, and reports and recommendations to OTA's Board of Directors. While the level of maturity FAC has reached is impressive, the organization recognizes the need to bring more diversified farmer member organizations to the discussion.

One path FAC is exploring to increase its sphere of influence is to work with conventionally minded organizations with common interests and goals. One such organization is the Climate Smart Alliance, whose vision is to improve food security, nutrition and resilience in the face of climate change. These types of relationships help bring the organic perspective to a broader range of agricultural leaders and stakeholders, who may never have considered the value organic production practices bring to the table.

In May, OTA's 2016 Policy Conference hosted its second Farmer Summit. While these meetings have been significant in helping foster farmer discussion and allowing USDA agency Hill visits, they also allow the Farmers Advisory Council opportunities for face-to-face interaction between the Board and the greater membership. However, spring is not the best timing for the farming FAC membership, and such meetings may need to be scheduled for a different time of year in the future.

Nate Lewis, OTA's Farm Policy Director, has been instrumental in helping organize the council along with his many other duties at OTA. If you know of other farmer groups or OTA farmer members who may be interested in this council, please let Nate or me know.

We look forward to continuing our work together to address the issues of importance to organic farmers and to share the vision of good organic practices to grow the sector.

### **Farmers Advisory Council Meetings and Membership**

**Farmers Advisory Council Aims to Continue Growing**  
This past year did not yield any additional organizational members of OTA's Farmers Advisory Council (FAC). However, interest continues, and the Organic Association of Kentucky (OAK) requested OTA's presence at its annual conference to discuss the benefits of joining FAC. OAK is a newer organization that recently was awarded a USDA grant for developing food chains, and its addition to FAC would be enriching. Additional organizations that advocate and support organic farming, but do not have an organic farmer governance structure, have reached out to participate in FAC discussions. FAC members are considering how to incorporate these important voices while maintaining the core of FAC's structure which hinges on direct organic farmer input from farmer governed organizations.

### **Farmers Advisory Council Summit at Policy Conference**

Farmers Advisory Councilmembers convened in Washington, D.C., this past May for OTA's annual Policy Conference. The summit was designed for FAC members to provide feedback to OTA on how to ensure FAC's structure maintained the group's relevancy to OTA's policy agenda and met the expectations of each participating organization. The group strongly supported maintaining the requirement that participating organizations have a farmer governance structure. However, they also acknowledged that there is value in bringing in other organic farmer advocacy groups to provide insight into discussion topics. FAC also strongly supported maintaining the Farmstead Membership category as a FAC organization benefit; members acknowledged the need to bring more small farmers into the fold and committed to working within their own organizations to encourage small farmers to take advantage of this FAC membership benefit. Lastly, the group had lengthy discussions

on how to navigate hot-button issues when not all FAC organizations are in agreement with each other or with the position of OTA. There was no clear solution to this inevitable set of circumstances, yet the discussion was valuable for all in understanding how FAC informs OTA's policy agenda and how a particular organization can opt out of supporting OTA positions.

### **Farmers Advisory Council Members Visit USDA Agencies**

FAC members participated in a USDA agency blitz at OTA's Policy Conference. Over the course of a single day, FAC and OTA staff held meetings with five separate agencies at USDA: Risk Management Agency, Food Safety Inspection Service, Farm Service Agency, National Agricultural Statistics Service, and the National Organic Program. Some meetings had specific asks, while some meetings were for general introductions and contact. The meeting with Food Safety Inspection Service focused on requesting a policy change so that organic livestock producers and processors under Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) inspection could use the term "non-GMO" on their organic products without additional third-party verification from the Non-GMO Project. Meeting attendees explained the disadvantage they face in the marketplace and suggested specific policy adjustments USDA could make. In response to this meeting and with the congressional support stemming from the recently passed mandatory GMO labeling law, FSIS announced in August that organic products under their jurisdiction could now use the term "non-GMO" on their labels without any additional verification.

### **Climate Change**

Climate change played a significant role in Farmers Advisory Council meetings over the past year. FAC members reported unusual weather patterns plaguing their crops, which have become the new 'normal,' and indicated the need for the organic farming industry to become active in mitigating climate change. Members would like to see FAC take the lead in this effort. The group considered three avenues to participate in the ongoing discussions, including supporting a successful Organic Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) grant to incorporate an organic farming module to the Cool Farm Tool, a product of the Cool Farm Alliance which enables farmers to see how their practices contribute to or mitigate the increase in greenhouse gas emissions. FAC also considered signing onto the "4 Pour 1,000" initiative which is a voluntary sign-on effort to encourage

increasing soil organic matter by 0.4% each year to put excess carbon back into the soil. Lastly, the group discussed the pros and cons of joining the North American Climate Smart Agriculture Alliance, which is a coalition of agriculture groups trying to identify and implement practices that will help agriculture reduce its impact on climate change factors. There is currently no organic representation in the alliance, and FAC is considering filling this void.

### **Regional and national issues**

Over the year's quarterly conference calls, Farmers Advisory Council member organizations brought numerous issues to the table for research, discussion, and deliberation. FAC weighed in on CCOF's effort to amend California's Organic Products law to reduce duplicative paperwork for California-based organic businesses, and to make organic registration fees in California more commensurate with what organic farmers can afford. This issue, while specific to California, had the potential to affect all organic farmers, as California operates its own State Organic Program based on registration fees. Without the fees or the California State Organic Program, all enforcement of organic standards would fall on the National Organic Program, which has not received a funding increase to accommodate additional enforcement activities. FAC members requested OTA staff to provide updates on major issues affecting organic farmers like the Trans-Pacific Partnership, AC21 meetings, and USDA's decision to move the cost-share program out of Agricultural Marketing Service and into the Farm Service Agency. It was FAC input that OTA staff brought to Washington, D.C., in April for a stakeholder meeting with the Farm Service Agency on organic cost-share. OTA was able to communicate what elements of the cost-share program are working and what elements could be changed to increase participation. Farm Service Agency was receptive to the input, and OTA's positions were largely shaped by discussions among FAC members. FAC members also participated in various task forces and discussions around organic standards development. This spring, FAC strongly influenced comments OTA made on recommendations for the spring NOSB meeting and on the long-awaited animal welfare proposed rule. FAC's involvement on these comments was critical to OTA's accurate representation of its membership's perspective to USDA and NOSB.

## Farmers Advisory Council Organization and members

### Co-Chair

#### Perry Clutts

Pleasantview Farm | Ohio

OTA Board Member – Farmer Seat

### Co-Chair

#### Samantha Cabaluna

Earthbound Farm | California

OTA Board Member – Community Relations Committee

## Participating Organizations



## FAC Members

Larry Bailey

Clean Food Farm | Washington

Affiliation: Tilth Producers of Washington

Jon Bansen

Double J Jerseys | Oregon

Affiliation: CROPP Cooperative

Grant Brians

Heirloom Organic Gardens | California

Affiliation: CCOF Inc.

Nate Brown

Amaltheia Organic Dairy | Montana

Affiliation: Montana Organic Association

John Brunnquell

Egg Innovations Inc. | Indiana

Affiliation: OTA Member

Doug Crabtree

Vilicus Farms | Montana

Affiliation: OTA Member

Andrea Davis-Cetina

Quarter Acre Farm | California

Affiliation: CCOF Inc.

Steve Koretoff

Nick Koretoff Ranches & Purity Organics | California

Affiliation: CCOF Inc.

Joseph Kropf

Fairfield Specialty Eggs Inc. | Indiana

Affiliation: OEFA

Phil LaRocca

LaRocca Vineyards | California

Affiliation: CCOF Inc.

Sean Mallet

Nature's Harmony Organic Dairy | Idaho

Affiliation: WODPA

Tom Page

Page's Organic | California

Affiliation: CCOF Inc.

Steve Pierson

Sar-Ben Farms | Oregon

Affiliation: CROPP Cooperative

David Roberts

Organic Dairy Farmer | Idaho

Affiliation: WODPA

Bob Quinn

Quinn Farm and Ranch | Montana

Affiliation: OTA Member

Jimmy Wedel

Wedel Farms | Texas

Affiliation: OTA Member



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