

ORGANIC TRADE ASSOCIATION

Farmers Advisory Council

2019 ANNUAL REPORT



SINCE 1985
Organic
trade association

The Organic Trade Association (OTA)'s Farmers Advisory Council (FAC) provides OTA with input from small- and medium-sized organic farmers, ranchers, and growers for organic agriculture's advancement. Established in 2013, FAC was designed to formalize and improve communication between OTA and organic producers. Through open dialogue, FAC gives organic farmers direct influence on the Association's policy agenda and enables OTA to better represent the diversity of organic producers in legislative and regulatory advocacy.

Members, Meetings, and Work Plans

FAC meetings are attended by 25 small- and medium-sized organic farmers from around the country. Of these, 16 have been appointed by one of nine farmer-governed organizations. Direct Organic Trade Association farmer members constitute the remaining voting-members of the Council. FAC is co-chaired by two organic farmers and members of the OTA's Board of Directors: Perry Clutts and Doug Crabtree. Meetings occur quarterly by conference call and always begin with a virtual 'farmer roundtable' in which members share their experiences and concerns from the field.

FAC developed and approved its 2019 Work Plan by consensus, choosing advocating for OTA's Farm Bill priorities as its top priority (OTA's Farm Bill priorities were originally developed in partnership with FAC). The Work Plan also aimed to address issues facing organic farmers nationwide: Climate Change, Pesticide and GMO Contamination, Labor, and Dairy Industry Issues.

Annual FAC Fly-In

In February 2019, Organic Trade Association held the second annual FAC Fly-In to educate new Members of Congress about organic, FAC, and organic's priorities for Farm Bill implementation. Over 20 organic farmers traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate. Farmers met with 48 Members of Congress (27 Democrats and 21 Republicans—eight of whom were freshman) with the goal to:

- Invite representatives to join the House Organic Caucus;
- Advocate for successful implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill;
- Educate Members of Congress about organic farming's ability to mitigate climate change; and
- Urge the issuing of a final rule on the origin of organic livestock to ensure a level playing field and consistent enforcement of organic standards.

FAC also hosted a roundtable discussion on the Hill to inform congressional staff on the future of organic agriculture. The Organic Farmer Roundtable featured several FAC farmers who shared their perspectives on critical issues such as closing the gap between consumer demand and domestic acreage, farmer succession and labor issues, and challenges in transitioning to organic farming. Additionally, farmers meet with relevant D.C.-based organizations to share priorities and identify opportunities for collaboration.

FAC Working Groups

Climate Change & Organic Agriculture

The FAC working group on Climate Change has explored a wide range of ideas that could provide stability for organic farmers in a variable climate, such as expanding risk management tools, investing in research for regionally-adapted plant varieties and pest controls, and improving access to technical assistance on diversifying cropping systems. To explore risk management options, FAC hosted a Value Chain Roundtable at OTA's Organic Week to explore ways to more equitably share risk throughout the value chain.

Council Members



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Additionally, the working group explored actionable solutions around payments for ecosystem services that could allow farmers to receive economic benefits from their climate change mitigating techniques. FAC is also tracking new soil health research from The Organic Center to show the positive impacts of organic farming practices on mitigating climate change and the benefits of transitioning land to organic production. Furthermore, the working group is tracking a number of current legislative actions that support organic as a solution to climate change.

Protecting Organic from Pesticide & GMO Contamination

The FAC working group on Pesticide & GMO Contamination explored solutions for protecting organic integrity, ensuring safety of food and farms, and creating fairness in compensation and liability. It's current focus has three priorities: 1) To explore opportunities to work with NOP and EPA to resolve issues with crops that are automatically evaluated using zero tolerance when certain residues are detected due to undefined tolerances; 2) to develop consumer messaging about the realities of organic farming in a contaminated world and uphold organic as the better system; and 3) to support research on the economic impacts of organic agriculture contamination, including the export market.

To explore impacts of contamination from glyphosate and other residues, FAC hosted an in-person meeting, attended by 40 OTA members at Organic Week. FAC members discussed this pressing challenge, shared updates on the Council's farmer-driven solutions, and explored forming a new OTA working group.

Labor

The FAC working group on Labor is exploring solutions to provide organic farmers and farm workers with living wages, create work environments that are enjoyable and safe, and ensure that organic farming is viewed as a good career opportunity. It is currently focusing on positive changes through legislative solutions and is tracking a number of current legislative actions such as legal status, rights of agriculture workers, and loan forgiveness for new organic farmers.

Dairy Industry Issues

The FAC working group on Dairy Industry Issues explores solutions that can provide organic farmers with a level playing field for entering and staying in organic production, ensure fair and consistent enforcement of organic regulations, and support consumer awareness of the benefits of organic dairy for environmental and human health. Its primary objective is to advance the issuing of the final rule for Origin of Organic Livestock. With the creation of the Dairy Council in 2018, the majority of dairy industry issues activity has moved to

that council; however, the working group continues to work coordinate with the Dairy Council and remains a venue to address farmer-specific issues for the dairy industry.

Meet Our Member Organizations

FAC is a broad coalition between OTA and organic farming organizations spread across the country and various sectors. Each organization appoints one producer for each 500 members it represents, to serve as the voice of its organization in FAC discussions. Through these partnerships, FAC represents nearly 8,000 organic livestock, grain, and specialty crop producers from most regions and production systems across the country.

CCOF, Inc. (California Certified Organic Farmers)

CCOF is one of the larger organizations in FAC with over 2,800 farmers who grow 420 different varieties of crops and raise 16 different types of livestock throughout the U.S. and Mexico. Their FAC representatives are as varied as CCOF's membership, ranging from the smallest diverse farmers to larger-scale perennial farmers. Being a part of FAC allows CCOF the opportunity to "hear perspectives from diverse types of farmers and regions" and be included on "farmer to farmer exchange of ideas on federal policy through the farm bill discussions."

Georgia Organics

The newest member to FAC, Georgia Organics represents approximately 300 growers throughout the state of Georgia. Their Certified Organic growers range in size from one acre to more than 4,000 acres.

Montana Organic Association (MOA)

MOA is a community of about 250 members that brings together people, businesses, organizations, and agencies that are working to develop Montana's organic industry. MOA is proud of its legacy that has led Montana to be a national leader in organic crop production. MOA advocates for policies that protect the environment, promote healthy living, and support individuals, farms and businesses that are actively engaged in developing sustainable businesses and communities. MOA



LOOKING AHEAD TO 2020

FAC will continue the work of advocating for Organic Trade Association's Farm Bill priorities through ensuring the implementation of the Farm Bill. The working groups will continue to generate new ideas for actionable solutions for relevant issues and engage with other OTA member communities to execute projects for the benefit of the full organic value chain. FAC will schedule its next Fly-In to D.C..

accomplishes this through hosting events, serving as an educational resource, providing networking opportunities, and through its communications channels.

Oregon Tilth Certified Organic (OTCO)

With farmers located in 38 states and Iceland, Mexico, and Panama, Oregon Tilth Certified Organic certifies 1073 farm operations domestically and 127 farm operations internationally. Their farmers produce a wide variety of crops and livestock products and represent all scales of production. Through participating in FAC, OTCO has been able to engage in its Climate Change discussion group and have a certified farmer attend OTA's 2019 DC farmer Fly-in.

Organic Egg Farmers of America (OEFA)

OEFA is made up of individual organic egg farmers, organizations that represent 100's of organic egg farmers, and allied industry businesses. The primary aim of the organization is to educate and dialogue on issues affecting organic egg producers no matter what scale. Especially given current issues, such as the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices Rule being shelved and the pursuit of robust integrity in all aspects of production, OEFA is appreciative to be a part of FAC.

Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative

With over 2,000 farmers, Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative is the nation's largest farmer-owned organic cooperative. The cooperative has farmers in 34 states and serves its members by processing and marketing their organic milk, eggs, meat (beef, pork, poultry), produce, and crops. FAC allows Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative to "hear what other organic farmers are dealing with across the nation and with different crops and livestock that we're not familiar with at the co-op." It is also "useful to have FAC help refine or shape how Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative communicates about the priorities OTA has determined."

Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO)

PCO represents approximately 1,300 farmers across the country. PCO's farmers grow all types of field crops, produce, herbs, tree fruits, forest botanicals, wild crops, and more. Additionally, their farmers raise dairy cattle, beef cattle, pullets, layers, broilers, turkey, ducks, sheep, goats, and swine. Being a part of FAC has allowed PCO's farmers' perspectives to be

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elevated into OTA's policy work through participating in items like the Farm Bill priorities. FAC grants PCO the ability to be "aware of the issues facing farmers around the country and how those issues can evolve into a position or other action taken by FAC or OTA. It has been unifying to know that often we [PCO] are facing the same challenges no matter where in the country we are, what we grow, or how big our farms are."

Tilth Alliance

Newly created in 2016 when Seattle Tilth, Cascade Harvest Coalition, and Tilth Producers merged, Tilth Alliance represents approximately 500 farmers across the state of Washington. With members in almost every county in Washington, their farmers produce a wide variety of items including specialty crops, livestock, and grains. Tilth Alliance's members have been excited that they have been more involved in OTA and FAC, given their presence in the industry.

Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (WODPA)

Working to preserve, protect, and ensure the sustainability and integrity of organic dairy farming across the West, the Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance represents over 285 dairy producers across most of the western U.S. Their farmers are located in AZ, CA, CO, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, TX, UT, WA, and WY.

Get Involved

Interested organic farmers and farming sector, regional, or state organic farming organizations may contact OTA's Farm Policy Director, Johanna Mirenda (jmirenda@ota.com).

Farmers who are current members of one of the organizations affiliated with FAC (listed above) may be eligible for the OTA \$50 Farmstead Membership. Farmstead Members have direct access to OTA resources and full voting rights.

On the cover: Perhaps cows are great joke-tellers? Aerial Miller laughs with her cows on her North Carolina dairy farm. Photo by David Nevala for Organic Valley.



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