



# Organic Matters

Semi-Annual Magazine | Winter/Spring 2026

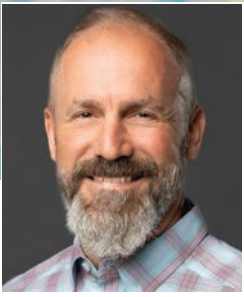
**2 | Innovation in the Field:**  
*Chatham University's  
Living Organic Laboratory*

**5 | Fighting for the  
Organic Industry's Fair  
Share of Research  
Funding**

**8 | Food with Dignity:**  
*Organic Farming  
for Community Impact*

25 YEARS AND GROWING





# Organically Speaking

## Executive Director Reflections



Image credit: Spencer Demera.

---

CHRIS SOLT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**O**rganic has always asked more of us than compliance alone. It calls for care, humility, and a long view rooted in the health of soil and water, the well-being of animals, and the dignity of the people whose livelihoods depend on the land. As I reflect on my first months serving as Executive Director of Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO), I continue to be struck by how alive those values are across our community and by the responsibility we share in stewarding them well.

In the previous issue of *Organic Matters*, I expressed the belief that certification is not a finish line, but the beginning of a much larger conversation. That belief has only deepened. Everywhere I go, on farms, at farmer-centric shows and conferences, in processing facilities, and around kitchen tables, I meet individuals who have chosen organic not because it is easy, but because it is right. I hear stories of farmers balancing soil health with economic realities, processors navigating evolving regulatory requirements, and businesses working to maintain integrity in complex markets. There is persistence in these conversations. There is creativity. There is conviction.

At our Fall board retreat, as Joe Dickson shared in his President's Message, the Board reaffirmed two core commitments that will guide PCO's next chapter: unwavering support for the principles of organic agriculture and a determination to deliver truly best in class service to those who entrust us with their certification. These priorities are not in tension. They reinforce one another. Organic integrity without strong service erodes trust. Service without rigor weakens the

---

**The farmers and businesses we serve are innovators and stewards of biodiversity. They are economic anchors in rural and urban communities alike. They are proving every day that agriculture can be productive, resilient, and responsible. Our role at PCO is to support that work with credible certification, thoughtful guidance, meaningful partnership, and a client experience that reflects the values of the movement itself.**

---

standard. Our responsibility is to hold both consistently, professionally, and with care.

Listening has been central to this season. Over the past months, I have made it a priority to engage directly with farmers and clients at farmer-focused shows and conferences across Pennsylvania and beyond. These are not symbolic visits. They are opportunities to hear candid feedback, understand emerging challenges, and see firsthand how certification intersects with day to day realities. What I have heard reinforces something simple and profound: farmers want integrity in the

*continued page 19*



106 School Street, Suite 201  
Spring Mills, PA 16875

phone: 814.422.0251 / fax: 814.422.0255  
email: pco@paorganic.org  
web: paorganic.org  
facebook.com/PAorganic

**PCO BOARD MEMBERS**

- President**  
Joe Dickson, *Lot 49 Advisors, VT*
- Vice President**  
Lisa de Lima, *Industry Advisor, MD*
- Treasurer**  
William (Bill) Kitsch, *3Stones Advisory Group, PA*
- Secretary**  
Katherine DiMatteo, *Independent Consultant, MA*
- Nominating Committee Chair**  
Jaclyn Bowen, *Independent Consultant, MI*
- Gwendolyn Wyard, *Strengthening Organic Systems, OR*
- Chris Anderson, *Sustainable Strategies, VA*

**PCO STAFF**

- LEADERSHIP TEAM**  
Chris Solt, *Executive Director*  
Diana Underwood, *Director of Operations*  
Edy Penn, *Human Resources Director*  
Leilani Durand, *TOPP Director*  
Alison Garber, *Executive Support and Communications Manager*
- ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM**  
Wren Brudon, *Administrative Coordinator*
- FINANCE TEAM**  
Elizabeth Leah, *Deputy Finance Director*  
Jana Casteel, *Accounting and Grants Manager*  
Shawnee Matis, *Staff Accountant*
- SALES AND MARKETING**  
Craig Shroyer, *Lead Specialist*
- CERTIFICATION TEAM**  
Corinne Wesh, *Certification Deputy Director*  
Carley Jordana, *Certification Program Manager*  
— Pine Team  
Matt Boll, *Certification Program Manager*  
— Cedar Team  
Jordon Downton, *Certification Program Manager*  
— Oak Team  
Caitlan Reilly, *Assistant Certification Program Manager*  
— Cedar Team  
Abbey Roggenbuck, *Certification Specialist*  
Christie Badger, *Certification Specialist*  
Andrea McKern, *Certification Specialist*  
Gail Doesken, *Certification Specialist*  
Hannah McGilvary, *Certification Specialist*  
Tanay Nestico, *Certification Specialist*  
Alex Restaino, *Certification Specialist*  
Lou Saunders, *Certification Specialist*  
Jenny Rocco, *Certification Specialist*  
Rebekah Rodriguez, *Certification Specialist*  
Rose Petros, *Certification Specialist*  
Alexis Dragovich, *Certification Specialist*  
Sophie Skripka, *Certification Specialist*  
Nancy Stoner, *Certification Assistant*
- INSPECTION TEAM**  
Laura Wies, *Inspection Deputy Director*  
Lee Blahoto, *Inspection Program Coordinator*  
Rachel Myers, *Inspection Program Coordinator*
- QUALITY TEAM**  
Cathy Dehnert, *Quality Deputy Director*  
Gwen Ayres, *Quality and Materials Manager*  
Kyla Smith, *Certification Policy Advisor*  
Nathan Lehrman, *Quality Specialist*  
April Kocis, *Materials Specialist*
- TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP (TOPP) PROGRAM TEAM**  
Maggie Saska, *Education & Outreach Specialist*  
Wren Frueh, *Mentorship Program Coordinator*

- PCO'S VISION**  
A world where agriculture systems prioritize health, ecological balance, fairness and care.
- PCO'S MISSION**  
To uphold and advance organic principles and practices through certification, advocacy, and technical support.
- PCO'S 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

Winter/Spring 2026



**FEATURES**

- 2 Innovation in the Field: Chatham University's Living Organic Laboratory**
- 5 Fighting for the Organic Industry's Fair Share of Research Funding**
- 8 Food with Dignity: Organic Farming for Community Impact**

**ARTICLE**

- 10 Building a Strong Organic Farm Brand: From Mission to Market**

**COLUMNS**

- Inside front cover**  
Organically Speaking
- 10 Message from the President**
- 15 Updates**  
*Standards & Policy*  
*Materials*  
*Legislative*
- 16 Event Calendar**

On the cover:  
Indira Alcantara discusses ginger propagation in the high tunnel.





Image credit: Maggie Saska

MAGGIE SASKA, PCO CERTIFIED ORGANIC, NE TOPP EDUCATION AND OUTREACH COORDINATOR

### **ORGANIC EDUCATION IN ACTION!**

Just outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the Eden Hall Farm is at the center of an exemplary site of diverse land use demonstrating fundamentals of agroecology and organic agriculture. This satellite location for Chatham University, not only serves as a living laboratory for students at the university, but also members of the community at large, having meaningful impact beyond the classroom. At the heart of this work are professor, Dr. Laura Livingston, and farm manager, Indira Alcantara. Students learn on farm production from both leaders in the classroom and production spaces. Beyond the farm, Indira serves as a mentor in the Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) working with a mentee, looking for support for their orchard production. In late September, 2025, TOPP education and outreach specialists visited the campus farm, and toured the diverse growing areas with both inspirational professionals.

### **FARM HISTORY**

In 2014, Chatham University opened Eden Hall Farm just outside Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The university, formerly known as Pennsylvania College for Women, drew inspiration from alumna Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*. Carson's work also inspired Eden Hall as an academic center that serves

as a model for sustainable living, including sustainable approaches to water use, energy, air quality, climate, food, and agriculture.

The property encompasses over 400 acres, and supports classwork for 40 classes. In this living laboratory, the farm boasts diverse certified organic growing areas that all function as outdoor classrooms for student and community development. Eden Hall Farm is certified organic by PCO Certified Organic. The produce grown on the farm is either used within the Chatham community or sold or donated to local non-profits throughout the Pittsburgh area.

During our visit, we toured these diverse areas and had a deep discussion on the role of the farm in the education of students, the local organic community and other farmers. We also touched on farmer Indira's role as Farm Manager, and reflections on being a part of the TOPP mentorship program in 2025.

### **FARM OPERATIONS**

Production areas on the farm span a variety of growing conditions including a solar high tunnel, traditional high tunnels (including a moveable tunnel), agroecology garden, historic certified organic apple orchard, and off-site Elsalma, a 5-acre fenced organic growing space that includes an orchard collaboratively managed with the Greater Pittsburgh Community

*TOP: Indira Alcantara and Dr. Laura Livingston giving a tour of Eden Hall's solar high tunnel spaces.*

Food Bank (GPCFB). All the production spaces double as educational areas where students, workers, and volunteers interact with the crops and learn about organic agriculture.

The center of farm activity is focused on the “solar high tunnel.” This space is minimally heated by energy captured through a solar panel display and stored in a specialized system.

This space allowed for in-ground growing which continues throughout the winter months with the production of greens. The half of the greenhouse that is not used for in-ground growing, has a concrete pad with areas set up for seedling production and post-harvest handling, including wash basins for produce. In this space, the farm’s focus on careful record keeping is apparent.

Students grow transplants, harvest vegetables year-round and learn about the importance of recordkeeping for organic and GAP certification.

### CROPS & DISTRIBUTION

Crops harvested at the farm are distributed locally with the help of student staffing. Approximately 50% of what is grown is sold to the dining hall on campus, with the remaining 50% distributed to local food security programs.

Dr. Livingston has worked closely with the chefs in the dining hall to assess the needs of their operation. By reviewing produce purchase records, initially Dr. Livingston was able to identify for the chefs what Eden Hall Farm could produce and supply right from the farm. The needs of the dining hall are the driving force in crop planning. Working closely with the dining hall also meant that it was important to the University that the



*Indira Alcantara discusses ginger propagation in the high tunnel.*

---

**Indira also works with local seed and plant producers to support specialty crops and culturally relevant crops including a rare white eggplant from Ghana, walking onions, “Bloody butcher corn, “Rittle” eastern European beans and specialty Venezuelan pepper crop called “Aji Margariteño.” Growing specialty crops and selling the seeds/sets to mid-Atlantic suppliers like Ujamaa Seeds in Maryland supports the cycle of providing specialty products to Eden Halls’ clients, while supporting the seed supply long-term. In addition, clients who receive culturally relevant crops are moved to have a deeper connection with the farm allowing Eden Hall to reach deeper into the community.**

---

farm applied for and received GAP certification in 2025. Over time, with dining hall staffing changes, has meant that many of the chefs are open to taking whatever is in season for use on campus.

Produce that is not sold to the dining hall goes to local outlets or even to on-campus students in need. Dr. Livingston has also worked closely with nonprofits to collaborate on projects such as SARE grants, supporting produce aggregation across the city of Pittsburgh. Other diverse income streams for Eden Hall focus on specialty crops collaboration. Indira is particularly proud of her high tunnel ginger production. After a fall harvest, the crop is sold to a local distillery to produce ginger whiskey.

Indira also works with local seed and plant producers to support specialty crops and culturally relevant crops including a rare white eggplant from Ghana, walking onions, “Bloody butcher corn, “Rittle” eastern European beans and specialty Venezuelan pepper crop called “Aji Margariteño.” Growing specialty crops and selling the seeds/sets to mid-Atlantic suppliers like Ujamaa Seeds in Maryland supports the cycle of providing specialty products to Eden Halls’ clients, while supporting the seed supply long-term. In addition, clients who receive culturally relevant crops are moved to have a deeper connection with the farm allowing Eden Hall to reach deeper into the community.

*continued next page*

continued from previous page

## TEACHING ORGANIC PRACTICES AND THE ROLE OF RECORDKEEPING

Organic education is at the heart of the farm, and they have the recordkeeping practices to back it up. Indira impresses upon the student workers recordkeeping is key to realizing the connection between organic practices and the importance of documentation, in verification during certification process. Beyond organic certification, the farm holds GAP certification which has been essential for their on-campus sales to the dining hall.

Because of the continual introduction of new students and workers through the seasons, Indira is continually training farm workers on recordkeeping. During the months of September, January, and May she focuses on training with the start of new semesters and summer break. To better manage the recordkeeping process, Indira identifies one student to serve as the recordkeeping point person. The point person needs to be detail oriented and have careful follow through.

Indira and Dr. Livingston shared that while they've tried different types of recordkeeping systems, the most reliable system for the farm is to record all records on a Google Drive based spreadsheet shared with the students. While Indira admits this system is not the most efficient, it is the most transferrable and easily understood.

The system was initially developed by a student and incorporates the use of drop downs to make it easier to record repetitive information like crop varieties, locations, quantities, etc.

Working with the challenge of continual training, Indira shared the following tips:

- ✓ **Keep it simple. Choose a recordkeeping system that you can use and easily update.**
- ✓ **Consider your strengths.**
- ✓ **Have a recordkeeping lead among staff or students.**

## MENTORSHIP

Mentorship for Indira has been a natural extension of the education work done at Eden Hall Farm. Indira signed up for the TOPP mentorship program upon the suggestion of Dr. Livingston. After application, Indira was paired as a mentor with a farmer seeking mentorship advice for her orchard. To date, most of the communication between mentor and mentee has been virtual. Indira has been able to answer questions and make recommendations based on real experience. Mentorship has been a valuable one, allowing Indira share and the mentee to benefit from hard-earned knowledge and reasoning.

Indira cited that one of the most rewarding aspects of being

continued on page 13

APRIL 2025 HARVEST LOG											
HARVEST DATE	FARM LOCATION	LOT NUMBER	CROP	VARIETY / SPECIFICS	AMOUNT HARVESTED	UNITS (HARVESTED)	DELIVERED TO	AMOUNT DELIVERED	UNITS (DELIVERED)	DATE DELIVERED	NOTES
4/17/2025	HH	HH412025	Spinach	Tundra	0.4	lb(s)	FSS	0.4	lb(s)	4/17/2025	
4/17/2025	APTARY	HL412025	Arugula	Esmee	0.4	lb(s)	FSS	0.4	lb(s)	4/17/2025	
4/17/2025		HL412025	Kale	Jacinto Dinosaur	0.3	lb(s)	FSS	0.3	lb(s)	4/17/2025	
4/17/2025	ELS	HL412025	Radishes	Sora	0.6	lb(s)	FSS	0.6	lb(s)	4/17/2025	
4/22/2025	FS - NOT DELIVERABLE	HL422025	Arugula	Esmee	9	lb(s)	PKHST SHY	9	lb(s)	4/22/2025	
4/22/2025		HL422025	Arugula	Esmee	3	lb(s)	PKHST EHC	3	lb(s)	4/22/2025	
4/22/2025	FORAGED LANDSCAPE	HL422025	Arugula	Esmee	2.3	lb(s)	FSS	2.3	lb(s)	4/22/2025	
4/22/2025	NY	HL422025	Radishes	Sora	5.3	lb(s)	PKHST SHY	5.3	lb(s)	4/22/2025	
4/22/2025	HI	HL42025	Radishes	Sora	1.3	lb(s)	FSS	1.3	lb(s)	4/22/2025	radishes with tops
4/8/2025		HL482025	Tatsoi	Oriental Greens	1.5	lb(s)	PKHST SHY	1.5	lb(s)	4/8/2025	
4/8/2025	HYDRO TOWER	HL482025	Kale	Jacinto Dinosaur	1.5	lb(s)	PKHST SHY	1.5	lb(s)	4/8/2025	
4/8/2025	LIVING YARD	HL482025	Spinach	Tundra	1	lb(s)	PKHST SHY	1	lb(s)	4/8/2025	
4/8/2025		HL482025	Kale	Jacinto Dinosaur	1	lb(s)	PKHST EHC	1	lb(s)	4/8/2025	
4/8/2025	SOL	SOL482025	Spinach	Tundra	1	lb(s)	PKHST EHC	1	lb(s)	4/8/2025	
4/11/2025	SOL	SOL4112025	Mizuna		1	lb(s)	FSS	1	lb(s)	4/11/2025	
4/11/2025	SOL	SOL4112025	Arugula	Esmee	0.5	lb(s)	FSS	0.5	lb(s)	4/11/2025	
4/11/2025	SOL	SOL4112025	Lettuce	Mixed	3	heads	FSS	3	lb(s)	4/11/2025	
4/11/2025	HH	HH4112025	Lettuce	Mixed	2	heads	FSS	2	lb(s)	4/11/2025	
4/11/2025	ELS	EL84112025	Shallots		0.3	lb(s)	FSS	0.3	lb(s)	4/11/2025	
4/11/2025	ELS	EL84112025	Garlic		0.2	lb(s)	FSS	0.2	lb(s)	4/11/2025	
4/11/2025	ELS	EL84112025	Garlic		1.7	lb(s)	FSS	1.7	lb(s)	4/11/2025	
4/11/2025	ELS	EL84112025	Shallots		1.4	lb(s)	FSS	1.4	lb(s)	4/11/2025	
4/11/2025	SOL	SOL4112025	Radishes								
4/16/2025	SOL	SOL4162025	Kale	Jacinto Dinosaur	0.2	lb(s)	FSS	0.2	lb(s)	4/16/2025	
4/16/2025	SOL	SOL4162025	Arugula	Esmee	0.2	lb(s)	FSS	0.2	lb(s)	4/16/2025	
4/16/2025	SOL	SOL4162025	Tatsoi		0.05	lb(s)	FSS	0.05	lb(s)	4/16/2025	
4/22/2025	HH	HH422025	Spinach	Tundra	1.9	lb(s)	FSS	1.9	lb(s)	4/16/2025	
4/22/2025	SOL	SOL422025	Tatsoi		0.6	lb(s)	FSS	0.6	lb(s)	4/22/2025	
4/22/2025	SOL	SOL422025	Kale	Jacinto Dinosaur	1.5	lb(s)	FSS	1.5	lb(s)	4/22/2025	
4/22/2025	SOL	SOL422025	Arugula	Esmee	0.5	lb(s)	FSS	0.5	lb(s)	4/22/2025	
4/24/2025	PROCESSED (CIDE	MAPLE4242025	Maple syrup		128	oz	PKHST EHC	128	oz	4/24/2025	maple syrup for gra
4/25/2025	SOL	SOL4252025	Spinach	Tundra	1.4	lb(s)	FSS	1.4	lb(s)	4/25/2025	
4/25/2025	SOL	SOL4252025	Lettuce	Romaine	5	heads	FSS	5	heads	4/25/2025	
4/25/2025	SOL	SOL4252025	Kale	Jacinto Dinosaur	1.5	lb(s)	FSS	1.5	lb(s)	4/25/2025	
4/25/2025	SOL	SOL4252025	Tatsoi		1.2	lb(s)	FSS	1.2	lb(s)	4/25/2025	
4/28/2025	SOL	SOL4282025	Rhubarb		3.4	lb(s)	FSS	3.4	lb(s)	4/28/2025	
4/28/2025	SOL	SOL4282025	Herbs	Rosemary	0.1	lb(s)	FSS	0.1	lb(s)	4/28/2025	

Chatham Eden Hall Farm recordkeeping spreadsheet shows important production details such as field location.



# Fighting for the Organic Industry's Fair Share of Research Funding

VINNIE TROMETTER, POLICY MANAGER, ORGANIC FARMING RESEARCH FOUNDATION (OFRF), AND A NATIVE OF WILLIAMSPORT, PA

## **OFRF IS PUSHING THE ORGANIC SCIENCE AND RESEARCH INVESTMENT (OSRI) ACT SO THE USDA CAN BETTER SUPPORT RESEARCH INTO THE ORGANIC TRANSITION AND ORGANIC PRODUCTION PRACTICES**

The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) is working with Senators Fetterman (D-PA) and Schiff (D-CA) and Congressmen Vindman (D-VA-07) and Lawler (R-NY-17) to ensure the Organic Science and Research Investment (OSRI) Act is included in the Farm Bill. This bill would increase funding for the only dedicated organic agriculture research programs, the Organic Agriculture and Research Extension Initiative (OREI) and the Organic Transitions Program (ORG). It would also bolster economic and market reporting and ensure that future research targets the most pressing organic issues. This will result in universities studying more of the most pressing topics to help established organic farmers and those transitioning overcome their most persistent production and productivity challenges. It will also ensure that farmers have better market data, so they can feel confident about transitioning to organic.

This bill has strong Pennsylvanian support. Outside of Senator Fetterman's leadership, House Agriculture Committee member Representative Rob Bresnahan cosponsors the House bill. Pennsylvania organizations such as the Rodale Institute, Pennsylvania Certified Organic, and Pasa Sustainable Agriculture have also endorsed it.

## **WHY AGRICULTURE RESEARCH THAT IS DEDICATED TO ORGANIC IS IMPORTANT**

Dedicated organic research funding is the most focused and relevant research that helps spur organic profitability and

productivity across the country. "Dedicated" means that research must either be done for established organic farms, like for OREI, or with the goal of how best to manage organic agriculture systems, like ORG. Establishing these parameters ensures that innovations are directly applicable to organic farmers who must adhere to strict organic certification requirements.

## **HOW THE OSRI ACT WILL HELP PENNSYLVANIA FARMERS**

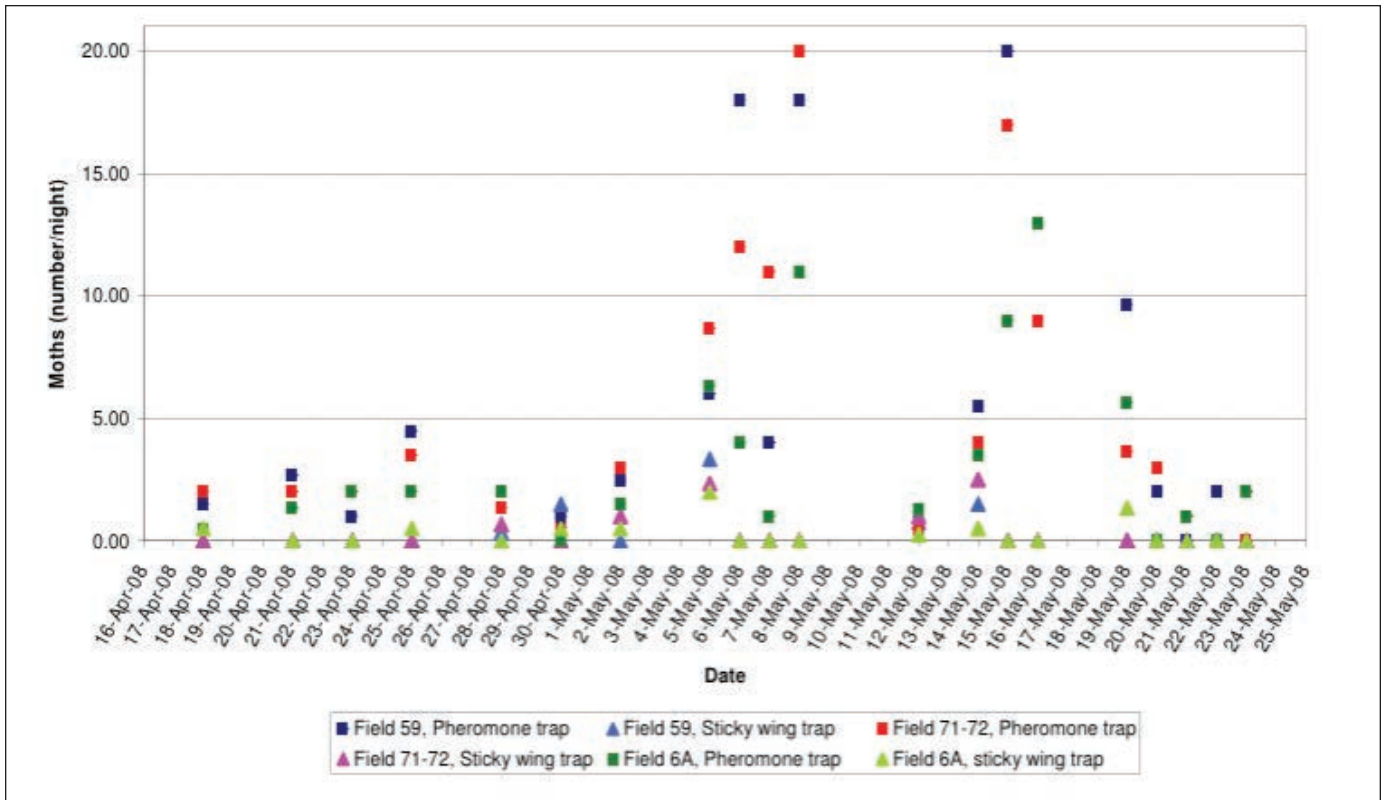
Passage of the OSRI Act would be a huge boost for organic, transitioning, and conventional farmers alike across the Commonwealth. We all know that Pennsylvania is a leader in organic agriculture. According to the latest published Organic Survey, conducted by the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service in 2021, Pennsylvania is the top producer of organic mushrooms and organic broiler chickens. They also consistently rank in the top five for organic egg production. Overall, our Commonwealth ranks third in organic farmgate sales and fourth in organic businesses.

A lesser-known fact is that Pennsylvania is also a leader in organic agriculture research. Penn State ranks 8th among land-grant universities in receiving organic agriculture research funding since 2021. Nearly ninety-nine percent of that funding has come from the dedicated organic research programs - OREI and ORG. Other organic research organizations, most notably the Rodale Institute, enhance Pennsylvania's relative strength in organic agriculture research.

## **NATIONWIDE UNDERFUNDING FOR ORGANIC AGRICULTURE RESEARCH IS MADE WORSE BY THE REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES**

Nationwide, research on organic agriculture is woefully underfunded. Right now, less than 2% of the USDA's research budget is dedicated to studying organic topics, even though

*continued next page*



Rodale Institute Moyer Final Report Table – Black cutworm moths trapped.

organic foods account for 6% of all food purchases, including 15% of all produce. This not only threatens Pennsylvania's organic competitiveness and transition efforts but also imposes additional drawbacks on a highly regional agricultural production method.

At its foundation, organic agriculture works to optimize local conditions for production while adhering to the rules that come with certification. For instance, growing organic crops in the Lehigh Valley calls for different strategies than growing the same crops around Lake Erie. Soils, climates, and other factors differ. Imagine how different it is to grow organic crops in Lewisburg compared with growing them in Montana, Arkansas, or California.

Organic agriculture research is also highly regional. North Carolina State University has a project focused on breeding organic tomatoes to abate the risks of common, potentially devastating diseases that are becoming more prevalent in the mountainous areas of Appalachia. The University of Tennessee has a project addressing barriers to organic corn production in the American Southeast. The list goes on and on, including great research being conducted at Penn State. Many projects also partner with organizations across the country to maximize regional and agroenvironmental relevance for farmers. Though helpful, without sufficient dedicated funding, many region-specific organic challenges go unstudied.

**HOW DEDICATED ORGANIC AGRICULTURE RESEARCH PROGRAMS ENHANCE ORGANIC EXTENSION EFFORTS**

Each OREI and ORG project must collaborate on experiments with working farms and include built-in extension

activities, such as organic conferences, seminars, and workshops, to ensure innovations reach the broad farming community. These built-in extension activities are crucial because it is difficult for state-level agricultural extension programs to serve organic producers. States will always prioritize capacity funding to support their largest agricultural sectors, none of which are organic.

In fact, other organic farmers have been found to be the most important source of technical assistance for organic farmers and those wanting to transition. This is why bills that build capacity for peer-to-peer technical assistance, like the Opportunities in Organic Act and the Farmer to Farmer Education Act, are so important.

However, it is also important to recognize that researchers at land-grant universities dedicate large chunks of their time to extension, on top of the time they devote to research. Often, extension accounts for the majority of their time during the year. For organic scientists, the more topics they are funded to study, the more solutions they can deploy in the field.

Simply put, increased funding for OREI and ORG will generate more organic field days, seminars, and workshops for farmers to participate in, while helping researchers share solutions to challenges through extension. All of this improves farmers' access to technical assistance that can help them transition to organic production, among other benefits.

**THE OSRI ACT COORDINATES RESEARCH BETTER AND PROVIDES CONSISTENCY IN ORGANIC ECONOMIC AND MARKET REPORTING**

The OSRI Act also helps coordinate USDA organic research.

Outside of dedicated organic research programs we've already discussed, other programs have projects that study organic topics. The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) and Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) programs, along with research conducted in-house at the Agriculture Research Service (ARS), often include projects that study soil health, IPM, and other organic-related issues that could benefit organic producers. However, since they are not dedicated to organic research, unless the results explicitly state that they are applicable to organic farmers, it is hard to tell how relevant the findings are for organic systems. The OSRI Act tasks USDA with conducting a comprehensive review of what organic research has already been done so farmers can more efficiently find answers to the organic challenges they are experiencing. Furthermore, USDA would create strategies to tackle the most pressing organic production barriers that remain unsolved.

Securing the Organic Data Initiative (ODI) is another way the OSRI Act helps organic farmers. This small but mighty program provides price and volume data to hundreds of organic crops and commodities nationwide. It also provides funding for the Organic Survey, moving this from a periodic report, to a necessary annual piece of market information as the industry approaches \$80 billion annually. The bill would secure consistent funding for ODI and establish funding for the USDA to publish an Organic Survey annually.

Finally, the bill would direct the USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) to conduct a comprehensive, systematic evaluation of the economic impact of organic agriculture on rural and urban communities, taking into account economic,

ecological, and social factors. This will help highlight the economic and social development impact of organic agriculture on local communities, helping policymakers at all levels better understand the industry.

## CONCLUSION

Organic agriculture deserves its fair share of research funding to support the industry now and into the future. Pennsylvania's organic footprint is outsized compared to every state except California and Washington. Organic agriculture is highly regionalized nationwide, even in our geographically diverse Commonwealth. The OSRI Act is the organic industry's flagship bill to rightsize research funding and improve research effectiveness. Penn State and other agricultural research institutions would directly benefit from the passage of this bill, as their researchers would have more opportunities to study a broader range of topics and, in turn, apply a greater array of knowledge to extension.

Members of Congress want to hear directly from farmers when considering which agricultural policies to support. Only through your voice can change occur. We hope you can lend your voice by calling your local members of Congress and letting them know how important this bill is for Pennsylvania's organic farmers!

---

*Vinnie Trometter, Policy Manager, Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF), and a native of Williamsport, PA.*



# Food with Dignity: Organic Farming for Community Impact



Image credit: Maggie Saska.

---

WRITTEN BY MAGGIE SASKA, PCO CERTIFIED ORGANIC, NE TOPP EDUCATION AND OUTREACH COORDINATOR

## ORGANIC IN ACTION! DIVERSIFIED FARM OPENS ITS DOORS TO TOPP

While standing in the new wash/pack storage facility, Carversville Farm Foundation (CFF) Farm Director Steve Tomlinson explained that “the sky’s the limit” when it comes to the farm’s potential for production. In 2025, the farm donated approximately 300,000 pounds of produce, 665,000 pastured eggs, 52,000 pounds of pastured poultry, and 17,000 pounds of beef to 20 food access partners, including community kitchens and food pantries across the Greater Philadelphia area.

CFF opened their doors to a PCO’s Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) farm tour highlighting organic production methods from the diverse operation certified for all three organic scopes. The foundation has always been organic-focused, and views the organic seal as the highest mark for quality food. The organization’s guiding principles are to provide healthy, fresh food of high quality and flavor, while also ensuring dignity and agency in how food is distributed to partner organizations.

Steve and livestock manager, Matt Dingle, led a PCO TOPP tour through the heart of the 350-acre certified organic farm, focusing on livestock production, processing, storage and late field production during our November 2025 visit.

Highlights of the tour included the compost production area where feedstocks are used to produce the high-quality



Radish cover crop.

TOP: Matt Dingle, livestock manager, with open pasture layers.

compost spread on the vegetable and hay fields. On organic farms, compost production is key in cycling of on farm nutrients, and CFF is no exception. Feedstocks include manure, spent hay, vegetable scraps and town leaves.

Participants also toured the various areas involved in egg production, beginning with the winter facility for birds that are housed in mobile units during the summer, and continuing to the final mobile units still in the field for the season. Matt explained how the mobile units are managed and moved across the lush pasture. Each unit is relocated daily and is equipped with solar panels that support egg harvesting and power an internal belt system that automates egg collection.



Steve Tomlinson discussing the wash pack storage area for the facility.



Steve Tomlinson explaining Carversville Farm Foundation's composting facility.



Steve Tomlinson discussing cover crop procedures (radish).

While walking between field sites on the tour, Steve highlighted the importance of pasture management through cover crop seeding and field management. Steve took a moment to “read the field” for visitors by identifying and discussing the role of cover crops including triticale, clover, daikon radish, and vetch. Steve shared that they plow and overseed bare spots in pasture and add amendments each year to provide healthy grazing areas.

CFF does on-farm processing of meat birds, chickens and turkeys, as well as egg cleaning. The tour stopped and looked at the processing facilities for meat as well as eggs. Steve and Matt explained the steps in processing, related adaptations they’ve made over the years, and touched on inputs used for organic processing.

On the way to the wash, pack, and storage area, the tour looked at vegetable fields cropped for next season and

stopped at the high tunnels to talk about winter greens production and crop planning. Steve spoke about this crop planning, pasture and field rotations, as well as his record keeping practices, explaining that over the years the farm has developed a good sense of average harvest and plans each bed for the upcoming season before spring begins each year.

Finally, the tour concluded at the new wash, pack, and storage facility, which is located in a new building on site. Steve discussed the goals for winter storage and supplying their partner operations with produce throughout the winter months. Steve energetically stated that he won’t be satisfied until they figure out a way to maximize production utilizing the freezer and cooler space throughout the year.

Participants were able to peek behind the scenes of this diverse operation and hear about organic management practices. We are grateful to the farmers for good work, and sharing their time throughout the tour!

Learn more about the Carversville Farm Foundation at [www.carversvillefarm.org](http://www.carversvillefarm.org)



## Explore Resources for Transitioning to Organic

Through the USDA’s Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP), a growing library of [free resources](#) is available to help support organic transition across the supply chain. Handlers can find outreach templates, supply chain guides, and educational tools to engage partners and support transitioning producers.

[www.organictransition.org](http://www.organictransition.org)



The Organic Trade Association and the Rodale Institute are TOPP National Partners



Image credit: Dan Dealmeida.

# BUILDING A STRONG ORGANIC FARM BRAND: FROM MISSION TO MARKET

WRITTEN BY ALISON GARBER - PCO CERTIFIED ORGANIC, EXECUTIVE SUPPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

For organic farmers, growing high-quality products is only part of the equation of a successful business plan. Long-term success depends on clearly defining who you are, who you serve, and how you bring your products to market. Whether selling directly to consumers or through wholesale channels, a thoughtful marketing strategy helps farms increase visibility, build relationships, and grow sustainably.

## START WITH YOUR MISSION

Every successful farm business begins with a clear mission statement. As both a farmer and a small business owner, your mission statement defines your purpose, values, and long-term goals. It explains what you produce, how you produce it, and why you do the work you do.

### An effective mission statement should:

- Clearly describe what your farm produces or the services you provide
- Reflect your core values, such as sustainability, quality, innovation, or community impact
- Communicate what makes your farm unique

Keep it concise enough to serve as an elevator pitch, yet meaningful enough to guide business decisions. Once developed, your mission should be visible on your website, packaging, marketing materials, and even in staff training. For farms certified through PCO Certified Organic, your commitment to organic integrity can be a central part of that story.

## DEVELOP A STRONG BRAND IDENTITY

Your brand is more than a logo; it is the public expression of your mission. A strong brand builds recognition and trust, giving customers a reason to choose your products over those of competitors.

### **Brand development involves:**

- Defining your identity, including personality, visual elements, and tone
- Understanding your target audience
- Creating consistent messaging across all platforms
- Selecting marketing channels that reach your ideal customer
- Engaging authentically with your community

Your website, packaging, signage, and social media presence should all reflect a cohesive identity. Consistency reinforces credibility.

### **KNOW YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE**

Before choosing sales channels, farmers must identify their target customers. Your audience may include local families, restaurants, grocery stores, food hubs, or distributors. It may be broad, such as schools and institutions, or niche, such as health-conscious consumers seeking certified organic heirloom varieties.

Defining your audience helps tailor both your messaging and your distribution strategy.

#### **Farmers often weigh two primary models:**

##### **1. Direct-to-Consumer (DTC)**

Selling through farm stands, farmers markets, CSAs, website stores, or U-Pick operations allows greater pricing control and deeper customer relationships. However, it requires more time, marketing effort, and customer interaction.

##### **2. Wholesale (Business-to-Business)**

Selling in bulk to retailers or distributors offers volume and potentially steadier demand, although it typically comes with lower margins and less direct customer engagement.

The right mix depends on your goals, capacity, and market opportunities.

### **CHOOSE THE RIGHT SALES CHANNELS**

Direct-to-consumer channels provide multiple options:

- On-farm retail stores offer immersive buying experiences and reinforce locally grown credibility.
- Website stores are increasingly essential as online grocery purchasing grows. A simple, mobile-friendly design with easy navigation strengthens trust and expands reach.
- Farmers markets provide visibility and community engagement, though they may have vendor limits and regulations.
- Farm stands create local awareness and flexible sales opportunities.
- U-Pick operations enhance the customer experience while reducing harvest labor costs.
- Community Supported Agriculture programs generate upfront cash flow and predictable demand while building loyal memberships.

Wholesale can be a strong fit for operations focused on scale, efficiency, and steady sales, especially when paired strategically with other market channels. It allows you to:

- Sell in bulk to retailers, distributors, or other businesses
- Move higher volumes of product at one time
- Benefit from more consistent and predictable demand through repeat orders
- Spend less time on individual customer marketing and transactions

However, selling wholesale typically involves lower margins per unit, less direct engagement with end consumers, and fewer opportunities to personally share your brand story.

Each channel has advantages and challenges, from staffing and logistics to weather dependency and regulatory compliance. Thoughtful planning ensures efficiency and sustainability.

### **STRENGTHEN MARKETING AND MESSAGING**

Sales channels move products; marketing channels drive customers to them. Social media, email newsletters, local advertising, partnerships, and search-optimized websites all increase awareness.

#### **Effective marketing messages should:**

- Clearly state your goal
- Reflect an understanding of customer needs
- Highlight how your products provide solutions
- Emphasize what makes your farm unique
- Include keywords such as certified organic where appropriate

Packaging also plays a critical marketing role. It should protect the product, reflect your brand, meet legal requirements, and, for certified operations, accurately display organic claims in consultation with your certifier, such as PCO Certified Organic. Proudly display the organic seal!

### **MARKETING AS A GROWTH TOOL**

Marketing is not optional in today's competitive food landscape. It increases awareness, builds customer loyalty, and communicates the values that set organic farms apart.

As demonstrated by successful farm case studies, growth often comes from listening closely to customers, refining messaging, and adapting marketing strategies over time. Farms that invest in both production and communication are better positioned to thrive.

By defining your mission, understanding your audience, and selecting strategic sales and marketing channels, your farm can build a resilient brand that supports both profitability and organic integrity.

STAY CONNECTED, VISIT:  
**paorganic.org**

# Message from the President

JOE DICKSON, PCO BOARD PRESIDENT



The organic movement was built on deep conviction: the belief that how we grow food, how we raise animals, and how we relate to the environment matters deeply to soil, water, communities, and future generations. This conviction remains at the heart of everything we do at PCO.

At our Fall board retreat, our Board reaffirmed two commitments that will guide PCO's next chapter. First, we confirmed unwavering support for the principles of organic agriculture and the integrity of the organic standard. Second, we confirmed our determination to deliver truly best-in-class service to the farmers, processors, and businesses who trust us with their certification.

These are not competing priorities; they are deeply interconnected and strengthen one another.

As regulatory complexity increases and market pressures mount, our role is not simply to administer compliance. We also have a profound responsibility to steward trust: trust in the organic seal and trust in the experience of working with PCO. Earning that trust on an ongoing basis requires both rigor and responsiveness.

To that end, the Board has asked our Executive Director, Chris Solt, to fully own the PCO client experience and make it as strong as possible. We have encouraged him to show up, listen deeply, and engage directly with our client base – not only to understand challenges, but to continuously improve how we serve. Listening is not passive; it is how we remain

**We can support organic agriculture with excellence — through credible certification, clear communication, thoughtful guidance, and meaningful partnership.**

relevant, grounded, and effective. Since he joined PCO in October of last year, Chris has hit the ground running, visiting with farmers, ranchers and officials in Pennsylvania and beyond. I've been impressed by Chris' ability to connect with our producers and truly listen, and I'm confident this work will lead PCO to more fully support the organic farmers and processors we serve.

Our 2026 organizational goals reflect this direction. We are aligning internal systems, clarifying priorities, and strengthening operations so that we can support organic agriculture with excellence — through credible certification, clear communication, thoughtful guidance, and meaningful partnership.

Organic agriculture will continue to face scrutiny, change, and opportunity. PCO intends to meet that future with integrity, professionalism, and a client experience that reflects the values of the movement itself.

Thank you for the work you do every day to advance organic. We remain committed to standing with you and serving you well.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Dickson'.

Joe Dickson  
PCO Board President, Pennsylvania Certified Organic  
Founder and Principle – Lot 49 Advisors



Image credit: Cheryl Graham.



Solar high tunnel with peppers.



Tomatoes growing in the high tunnel show labels with planting dates.

---

## Chatham University's Laboratory

*continued from page 4*

a TOPP mentor has been the ability to give real-time feedback. For example, when Indira's mentee reached out with questions regarding weed management in the orchard, Indira was able to quickly provide information and help her mentee course correct in real-time. Indira was able to share new ideas and advice with a fellow farmer, allowing her to pay her knowledge forward into the farming community.

### WHY CERTIFY?

Organic certification has been critical to Eden Hall Farm. Indira stated certification is important to consumers and producers, allowing others to be able to trust in their growing practices. She sees that caring for resources, water sheds and the soil are fundamental to how they treat the farm ecosystem. At the farm, students see the reality of working in an organic system. Dr. Livingston echoed these perspectives, adding that building robust organic farming communities and community supported agriculture is part of a bigger movement. Eden Hall is hard at work on several levels, bringing organic practices into their community.

### AN ORGANIC FUTURE

Our farm visit came at a time when the region was during a long, dry summer. When asked about organic in the future at  
*continued on page 16*



Dr. Laura Livingston explains the benefits of using field tarps as ground cover in the field.

# Standards & Policy Update

PCO Certified Organic,  
Certification Policy Advisor



## MARKET DEVELOPMENT (MUSHROOM AND PET FOOD) FINAL RULE UPDATE

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) published the Market Development Final Rule, with an effective date of March 21, 2025 and a compliance date of March 22, 2027 – meaning affected operations must comply with the requirements of the rule by March 22, 2027.

All mushroom and pet food operations should expect to see new forms, policies and resources available to support your compliance with these regulations. PCO plans to have these available in the coming months. The final rule is available at [www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/12/23/2024-30211/national-organic-program-market-development-formushrooms-and-pet-food](http://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/12/23/2024-30211/national-organic-program-market-development-formushrooms-and-pet-food).

The Market Development Final Rule seeks to clarify how organic regulations apply to mushroom and pet food production, aiming to foster growth in these markets – particularly through clearer guidelines for inputs such as slaughter by-products used in organic pet food. While there had been a prior proposal to rescind the Rule in May of 2025, there has been no action on this proposal. As such, PCO is moving forward with our implementation plan to ensure our certified entities affected by this rule are in compliance by March 22, 2027.

## NOP CLARIFIES POLICY ON DEVICES DESIGNED TO CAUSE CHEMICAL REACTIONS

Over the past several years PCO has received several inquiries regarding the allowance of devices (e.g. Green Lightning and Blue Lightning) designed to cause chemical reactions – such as nitrogen fixation – among atmospheric molecules, where the resulting substance is intended as an input in organic production.

PCO prohibited these based on our understanding of these technologies and our determination that they resulted in a synthetic substance, due to a chemical change, that is not on the list of synthetic substances allowed in organic crop production (§205.601). Other certifiers came to a different conclusion. As a result, a question was submitted to the National Organic Program (NOP).

NOP recently responded to certifiers stating, “consistent with existing guidance on classification of materials, substances manufactured through a chemical reaction are considered synthetic and are not allowed under the USDA organic regulations, unless specifically permitted.” This response affirms PCO’s decision to prohibit these inputs.

If you have been using any such device, please notify PCO immediately so that we may walk you through the steps to come into compliance, which includes discontinuing use

immediately and will not impact that status of your certification nor land eligibility.

## STRENGTHENING ORGANIC ENFORCEMENT AND ORGANIC LIVESTOCK AND POULTRY STANDARDS VERIFICATION REMINDERS

As you are likely aware, the National Organic Program has published two major rule changes in the past couple of years – specifically the Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) Final Rule and Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards (OLPS) Final Rule.

These regulatory updates required most, if not all, organic operations to update their procedures and document these updates in their Organic System Plans (OSPs). PCO has been verifying our operation’s compliance with the new regulations through reviewing updated OSPs as well as during inspection. Thank you again for your participation as we all continue to learn and navigate enforcement and oversight of these new requirements!

Due to these changes and in order to verify an operation’s compliance, PCO may ask different questions and require new and different documentation than you are used to.

Below are highlights of changes that are likely to require additional documentation due to the regulatory changes (not PCO policy). This is not an exhaustive list but does provide areas that PCO is likely to inquire about during paperwork review and/or inspection.

### SOE specific verification points:

- Verification of entities in the supply chain
- Organic Fraud Prevention Plans, appropriate to your operation’s scope, activities and complexity
- Emphasis on audit exercises performed during annual inspection (e.g. traceback and mass balance) or any other time through the certification cycle
- New nonretail container labeling requirements
- New documentation requirements to verify organic imports (NOP Import Certificate, or NOPIC)

### OLPS specific verification points:

- Verification of stocking densities for layers, broilers and pullets for both indoor and outdoor spaces
- Verification of exit area requirements, including the amount and size of exits
- Verification of temporary confinement reasonings
- Verification of ammonia monitoring

We acknowledge that this has been a lot to incorporate in a short amount of time. The organic regulations have changed a lot in recent years, and PCO remains grateful for your partnership in effectively implementing these rule updates. If you have questions or concerns about SOE or OLPS verification requirements, please reach out so we can offer information to help you understand these regulations and stay in compliance.

## Materials Update

Gwen Ayres, PCO Certified Organic,  
Quality and Materials Manager



PCO re-reviews approved input materials every five years to ensure they continue to meet regulatory requirements. As part of this process, we verify that product formulations and supporting documentation remain compliant with the National Organic Program (NOP) standards. Occasionally, we find that a product formulation has changed or no longer meets the criteria under which it was previously approved. When this occurs, we update our review and notify certified operations that are using the affected material via email or US mail for postal clients. These Status Change Notifications are issued quarterly. If you receive one, please read it carefully and review it in full. The notice will outline any required actions. It is important to follow the instructions provided, as failure to take the required action may impact your certification status. If you have any questions about a notification or how it applies to your operation, please contact your Certification Specialist immediately.

PCO is currently finalizing preparations for the 2026 PCO Annual Approved Materials List. The updated list will be distributed to clients by or before mid-April.

## Legislative Update

Alison Garber, PCO Certified  
Organic, Executive Support and  
Communications Manager



On Friday, February 13, 2026, House Agriculture Committee Chairman Glenn "GT" Thompson (R-PA-15) introduced the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 (FFNSA).

More than seven years have passed since enactment of the 2018 Farm Bill, and producers across the country continue to navigate economic pressures, market volatility, and evolving federal program structures. Recent years have also brought shifts in federal partnerships, trade policy adjustments, and administrative changes within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The legislation spans commodities, conservation, nutrition, credit, rural development, research, energy, horticulture, crop insurance, and miscellaneous provisions. Below is a high-level summary of select provisions.

### TITLE I — COMMODITIES

Although several major commodity programs were previously addressed in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBA, P.L. 119-21), FFNSA includes updates related to specialty crop support and disaster relief.

Section 1003 establishes a permanent framework for emergency assistance tailored to specialty crop producers facing adverse events such as market disruptions or economic crises. Payments would be calculated based on prior-year sales, creating a standardized mechanism for distributing aid in future emergencies.

The bill also authorizes USDA to administer future disaster programs through state block grants (Section 1004). State administration may allow for more tailored responses to localized disasters, though implementation timelines and consistency across states will likely shape how effectively assistance reaches producers.

While disaster programs provide important relief during extraordinary events, long-term farm viability will continue to depend on the broader structure and accessibility of risk management tools.

### TITLE II — CONSERVATION

The conservation title includes several policy updates affecting major working lands programs.

FFNSA codifies a minimum Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) payment of \$4,000 (Section 2301), establishing a guaranteed baseline level of support for participating producers. The bill also reauthorizes five-year payment limits for CSP and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), updating limits to \$200,000 and \$450,000 respectively.

The legislation increases support for precision agriculture technologies within EQIP and CSP. These tools may offer efficiency and resource management benefits for some operations, particularly larger or technologically equipped farms. At the same time, conservation funding remains competitive, and allocation decisions will influence participation rates across farm sizes and production systems.

FFNSA authorizes a new grant program supporting state and Tribal soil health initiatives (Section 2302), funded through CSP. Additionally, the bill adds greenhouse gas reduction to EQIP's top priority practice authority, enabling states to provide enhanced cost share for practices that address climate-related objectives.

The bill also fully reauthorizes the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), including funding for the Transition Incentives Program (TIP), providing continued stability for this long-standing land retirement program.

### TITLE IV — NUTRITION

Drawing from bipartisan proposals, FFNSA authorizes a new food assistance initiative modeled in part on the Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) program. The program aims to strengthen local and regional markets by investing in states, Tribes, and territories and by supporting producers with food safety training and certification.

The bill authorizes \$200 million in appropriations for the program. Future funding levels will depend on annual appropriations decisions.

*continued on page 17*

## Chatham University's Laboratory

continued from page 13

Eden Hall, they see organic as critical to adapting to changes in climate and weather. Dr. Livingston stressed that resilience of organic systems and their role in carbon sequestration is a key tool to address these changes. To prove the case, Dr. Livingston also has a keen interest in collecting and analyzing data related to farming. She sees it as critical to step back, reflect and ultimately improve agricultural systems in the future. She also hopes that someday, organic may incorporate more responsible social elements such as considering the impact of organic on people, labor conditions, and making organic more accessible. Farmer Indira hopes to see organic grow and reach more consumers. Indira would love to see subsidies supporting organic production and that healthy food can reach more people.

Both Dr. Laura Livingston and Indira Alcantara, will continue their work and share their valuable knowledge. TOPP has been fortunate to be a part of this process connecting these organic farmers to the larger community.

**For more information on the TOPP program visit**

[www.organictransition.org](http://www.organictransition.org)

**For more information the Eden Hall farm**

[www.edenhallfarm.chatham.edu](http://www.edenhallfarm.chatham.edu)



Indira Alcantara showing examples of high tunnel recordkeeping.



# TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

for Transitioning  
and Certified  
Organic Producers

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

*Technical Assistance is available in person or virtually.*

- Up to 40 hours of technical assistance is available for program participants
- Connect with experts from a wide variety of fields including agronomy, certification, record keeping and more!
  - Receive customized support for your operation
  - Communicate directly with a TA provider
  - Get real time feedback to questions at your farm or operation

**Technical Assistance is FREE to farmers and operators.**

Do you have questions regarding organic certification for your farm?  
Do you want to certify but aren't sure where to start?  
Do you need help tackling bottlenecks in transitioning your operation?

The Northeast/Mid-Atlantic Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) Technical Assistance pairs organic producers and producers transitioning to organic with experts to support the transition process, creating a stronger network of organic producers across the country.

**Sign up here**



[topp-ne@paorganic.org](mailto:topp-ne@paorganic.org)



[www.organictransition.org](http://www.organictransition.org)

## Legislative Update

continued from page 15

### TITLE V — CREDIT

FFNSA includes updates to USDA farm loan programs intended to improve access to capital. Provisions include:

- Authorization for USDA to restructure guaranteed loan debt
- Reduced experience requirements for certain loans
- A pre-approval pilot for farm ownership loans
- Expedited approval processes for loans under \$1 million
- Increased limits for direct operating, ownership, and microloans

The bill also shifts the burden of proof to USDA when appealing a loan denial.

Additionally, FFNSA would provide sole regulatory authority over the Farm Credit System (FCS) to the Farm Credit Administration, consolidating oversight responsibilities.

### TITLE VI — RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The bill authorizes a New, Mobile, and Expanded Meat Processing and Rendering Grant Program (Section 6304) with \$3 million in appropriations authorization. It also establishes the Food Supply Chain Guaranteed Loan Program (Section 6303) to support investments in aggregation, processing, storage, and distribution infrastructure.

Longstanding rural business programs, including the Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program (RMAP), Appropriate

Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA), Rural Business Development Grants, and Rural Cooperative Development Grants, are reauthorized. ATTRA's scope is expanded to include tailored assistance for veterans.

### TITLE VII — RESEARCH

FFNSA reauthorizes major agricultural research and extension programs, including the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI), and the Food Safety Outreach Program (FSOP). Authorization levels remain largely unchanged.

The bill increases authorization percentages for extension and research funding directed to 1890 land grant institutions and updates priority areas within the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) to include regionally adapted cultivars and environmental resilience.

Research priorities in the bill emphasize precision agriculture, digital technologies, and automation, alongside other program areas.

### TITLE IX — ENERGY

The bill directs USDA to study agrivoltaic systems—dual-use solar and agricultural production—to assess best practices and impacts on farmland. It also places certain limitations on USDA funding for solar projects on prime farmland and restricts funding for solar components sourced from designated foreign countries of concern.

continued on page 20



**LAKEVIEW  
ORGANIC  
GRAIN**

1343 Nutt Road  
Penn Yan, NY 14527  
315-531-1038  
mh@lakevieworganicgrain.com

for Northeast Organic Farmers . . .  
. . . from Northeast Organic Farmers  
Organic Seed and Grain



**Save the Date!**  
**Field Day at Red Hill Farm**  
**Pitman, PA**  
**June 17th!**

Join us at Red Hill Farm in Pitman, PA!  
Our day will include:

- Farm tour featuring potato production and livestock integration
- Guest Speaker: Gary Zimmer
- Lunch and More!

Scan Code To Learn More



**NORTHEAST/  
MID-ATLANTIC**  
TRANSITION TO ORGANIC  
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

United States Department of Agriculture  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
National Organic Program  
Transition to Organic Partnership Program



# Event Calendar

All times listed are Eastern Time Zone unless otherwise indicated.

## MARCH

### **Organic Trade Association- Virtual Buyer-Seller Mixer: Organic & Transitional Pulses**

March 24

12:00–4:00 pm EST

Online

Cost: free

Register: <https://ota.com/events/topp-event-virtual-buyer-seller-mixer-organic-transitional-pulses>

### **Rodale Institute – WEBINAR: Cover Crops Made Simple: From Planting Basics To Livestock Grazing**

March 25

2:00–3:00 pm EDT

Online

Cost: free

Register:

<https://rodaleinstitute.org/events/webinar-cover-crops-made-simple-from-planting-basics-to-livestock-grazing/>

### **Organic Farming Research Foundation- Organic 101 for Extension Agents: Understanding Certification, Standards, and Producer Journeys**

March 31

1:00–2:00 pm EST

Online

Cost: free

Register: <https://ofrf.org/event/organic-101-for-extension-agents-understanding-certification-standards-and-producer-journeys-southern-sare/>

### **Organic Agronomy Training Service- Integrating Livestock Grazing on Grain Farms**

March 31

12:00–1:00 pm EST

Online

Cost: free

Register: [www.organicagronomy.org/events/integrating-livestock](http://www.organicagronomy.org/events/integrating-livestock)

### **Organic Trade Association – Virtual Buyer-Seller Mixer: Organic & Transitional Grains**

March 31

12:00–4:00 pm EST

Online

Cost: free

Register: <https://ota.com/events/topp-event-virtual-buyer-seller-mixer-organic-transitional-grains>

## APRIL

### **NOFA NY – Tax Return Rescue & Next Level Strategy**

April 1

5:00–7:00 pm EST

Riverhead, NY

Cost: free

Register:

<https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/ev/reg/wsf37s8> or (315) 988-4000

### **NOFA Massachusetts – Webinar Series: 2026 Tri-State SARE Project**

April 2

10:00 am–12:00 pm EST

Online

Cost: free

Register: [www.nofamass.org/event/webinar-series-2026-tri-state-sare-project/2026-04-02/](http://www.nofamass.org/event/webinar-series-2026-tri-state-sare-project/2026-04-02/)

### **Michigan State University – Organic System Plans: the Stepping Stone to Organic Certification**

April 2nd

12:00–1:00 pm CST

Online

Cost: free

Register: [www.canr.msu.edu/events/topp-farmer-webinars-organic-system-plans](http://www.canr.msu.edu/events/topp-farmer-webinars-organic-system-plans)

### **Michigan State University – Soil Health Reduced Tillage Strategies for Organic Farmers**

April 9

12:00–1:00 pm CST

Online

Cost: free

Register: [www.canr.msu.edu/events/topp-farmer-webinars-soil-health-reduced-tillage-strategies-for-organic-farmers](http://www.canr.msu.edu/events/topp-farmer-webinars-soil-health-reduced-tillage-strategies-for-organic-farmers)

### **NOFA Massachusetts – Biodynamic Solutions: Soil Fertility; Weed, Pest, & Fungus Control; Garden Planning & Timing**

April 11

9:00 am–5:00 pm EST

Chestnut Ridge, NY

Cost: \$125

Register: [www.nofamass.org/event/biodynamic-solutions-soil-fertility-weed-pest-garden-planning-timing/](http://www.nofamass.org/event/biodynamic-solutions-soil-fertility-weed-pest-garden-planning-timing/) or (413) 200-2858

### **Penn State Extension – Equine First Aid**

April 11

12:00–4:00 pm EST

Johnstown, PA

Cost: \$45

Register: <https://extension.psu.edu/equine-first-aid>

### **Supply Side Connect New Jersey 2026**

Two Day Conference: April 14 –15

Meadowlands Exposition Center | Secaucus, NJ

Cost: \$50–\$100

Register: <https://ota.com/events/supply-side-connect-new-jersey-2026>

### **MOFGA – Plums 101**

April 15

6:00–7:00 pm EST

Online

Cost: free

Register: [www.mofga.org/event-calendar/plums-101/](http://www.mofga.org/event-calendar/plums-101/)

### **MOFGA – Bench Grafting (Learn to Graft Fruit Tree Scionwood Onto Rootstock)**

April 18

10:00 am–12:30 pm EST

Unity, ME

Cost: free

Register: [www.mofga.org/event-calendar/bench-grafting-workshop-2/](http://www.mofga.org/event-calendar/bench-grafting-workshop-2/)

### **MOFGA – Science for Self Reliance Forestry At Home**

April 29

10:00 am–12:30 pm EST

Brunswick, ME

Cost: free

Register: [www.mofga.org/event-calendar/science-for-self-reliance-forestry-at-home/](http://www.mofga.org/event-calendar/science-for-self-reliance-forestry-at-home/)

## MAY

### **MOFGA – Topworking: Learn to Graft Fruit Tree Scionwood Onto Established Trees**

May 16

10:00 am–12:30 pm EST

Richmond, ME

Cost: free

Register: [www.mofga.org/event-calendar/topworking/](http://www.mofga.org/event-calendar/topworking/)

### **Pasa Sustainable Agriculture – 2026 Temperate Silvopasture Symposium**

Three Day Intensive:

Wednesday, May 27 – Fri, May 29

9:00 am–4:30 pm

In person

Rodale Institute, Kutztown, PA

Cost: \$195

Register: <https://pasa.tfaforms.net/1692> or call 814.349.9856

## Organically Speaking

continued from inside front cover

organic seal, and they also want clarity, predictability, and respect in the certification process.

That clarity matters. Regulatory complexity has increased. Market pressures have intensified. Expectations from buyers and consumers continue to evolve. In this environment, our role is not merely to administer compliance. It is to steward trust, trust in the organic seal and trust in the experience of working with PCO.

Strengthening how we communicate has therefore become a clear priority. Clearer, more transparent, and kinder client communication is not a soft aspiration. It is operational discipline. Transparency means explaining decisions in ways that are understandable and grounded in the standard. Clarity means setting expectations early and consistently. Kindness

The farmers and businesses we serve are innovators and stewards of biodiversity. They are economic anchors in rural and urban communities alike. They are proving every day that agriculture can be productive, resilient, and responsible. Our role at PCO is to support that work with credible certification, thoughtful guidance, meaningful partnership, and a client experience that reflects the values of the movement itself.

For me personally, this role continues to require humility and gratitude. I am deeply grateful for the trust placed in PCO by more than 1,500 farms and businesses who allow us to be part of their organic journey. I am grateful for the leadership of our Board and the clarity of its direction. I am grateful for a staff

whose expertise and dedication make this work possible. And I am grateful for the farmers and businesses who challenge us to be clearer, more responsive, more consistent, and more aligned with the realities they face.

Certification will never be the end of the story. It is a framework, a shared agreement about what we stand for and how we demonstrate it. The deeper story is about soil health restored, water protected, animals treated with care, and communities strengthened through fair and resilient agricultural systems. That story is still being written.

**All the great agricultural systems which have survived have made it their business never to deplete the earth of its fertility without at the same time beginning the process of restoration.**

— Albert Howard

As we move through this year of alignment and preparation, strengthening systems, refining communication, preparing for the conclusion of TOPP, and continuing to advocate for policies that center organic farmers, my commitment remains the same as when I first stepped into this role: to show up, to listen deeply, and to steward both integrity and service with equal seriousness.

Organic asks much of us. It always has. Together, I am confident we can meet that responsibility with professionalism, compassion, and unwavering commitment to the principles that brought us here.

— Chris Solt

Executive Director, Pennsylvania Certified Organic



Building conservation solutions for resilient farms and communities.

- Planning
- Design
- Engineering
- Funding
- Permitting
- Construction Oversight



ENGINEERING | PLANNING | INFRASTRUCTURE SOLUTIONS

WWW.HRG-INC.COM



**Gypsum Products**  
Soluble Calcium Sulfate

- Damp for broadcasting
- Bedding additives
- GripX2 Barn dry
- Compost additives
- Water Clarification

usagypsum.com • Denver, PA • 717-335-0379

---

## Legislative Update

continued from page 17

### TITLE X — HORTICULTURE

FFNSA includes updates to the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP), creating permanent turnkey grant opportunities and expanding eligible activities. The bill also strengthens the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production by expanding technical assistance and directing permanent implementation of urban county committees within the Farm Service Agency.

The legislation directs USDA to assess barriers to selling nontraditional, culturally relevant, and local products into federal nutrition programs and to make recommendations for improvement.

Elements related to organic transition are included, granting the National Organic Program authority to provide technical assistance, though without additional dedicated funding.

### TITLE XI — CROP INSURANCE

FFNSA requires an annual review of challenges to accessing Whole-Farm Revenue Protection and updates eligibility definitions for additional crop insurance premium discounts established under OBBB. Veteran producers are included in expanded eligibility for premium discounts.

The bill also directs research into new insurance products, including weather-based index policies, and increases reimbursement rates for administrative and operating costs for Approved Insurance Providers.

### TITLE XII — MISCELLANEOUS

The bill includes provisions supporting small and very small meat processors, including development of model Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) plans and validation studies (Section 12112). It also includes outreach provisions related to the Cooperative Interstate Shipping Program and reporting requirements to Congress.

Additional provisions address ownership structures within livestock and meat processing markets.

Overall, the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 proposes a broad set of policy updates across the food and agriculture system. Its ultimate impact will depend on funding decisions, implementation details, and how its provisions interact with broader economic and administrative conditions facing producers nationwide.

---

## SOURCES

### Organic Trade Association:

<https://ota.com/advocacy/policy-positions/organic-trade-association-farm-bill-priorities>

### Organic Farming Research Foundation:

<https://ofrf.org/gordons-policy-corner/january-2026-new-year-same-farm-bill-again/>

### National Young Farmer's Coalition:

<https://youngfarmers.org/2026/02/release-house-farm-bill->

[draft-shows-progress-but-falls-short-of-addressing-challenges-facing-new-generation-in-agriculture/](https://sustainableagriculture.net/blog)

### National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition:

<https://sustainableagriculture.net/blog>

**80 YEARS**  
**Fertrell**  
SINCE 1946  
Better Naturally!  
SINCE 1946

**Pit N' Pen**

**Pit N' Pen works by dissolving the fibers in manure making it more soil-friendly, saving you time and work cleaning out your box stalls.**

**NATURAL & ORGANIC FERTILIZERS, LIVESTOCK NUTRITION, FEED SUPPLEMENTS, & AGRONOMY CONSULTING**

**The Fertrell Company**  
PO Box 265, Bainbridge, PA 17502  
800-347-1566 · [www.fertrell.com/organic](http://www.fertrell.com/organic)

# Save the Date! TOPP Gathering at Rodale Institute!

RODALE INSTITUTE VISITOR CENTER



Join us at the Rodale Institute in Kutztown, PA on September 16 and 17 for our TOPP regional gathering. We'll feature farmers & speakers from our region, networking opportunities, technical assistance, activities, Rodale farm tours, entertainment, food and more!



United States Department of Agriculture  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
National Organic Program  
Transition to Organic Partnership Program





106 School Street, Suite 201  
Spring Mills, PA 16875

Non-Profit Org  
US POSTAGE PAID  
STATE COLLEGE, PA  
PERMIT NO. 21

# Foliar N Application

## A Quality Source of Organically Acceptable Nitrogen!



### EFFICIENT, PLANT-DERIVED AMINO ACIDS

#### BENEFITS OF EXPLORER™ LIQUID 10-0-0:

- Does not volatilize
- High carbon content makes excellent food source for soil biology
- Carbon based and contains plant derived amino acids
- Natural product with no negative environmental impact
- Beneficial use in conditions of biotic and abiotic stress

#### Conversion Recommendations from HNI: Explorer 10-0-0

##### Excellent Conditions:

High Organic N (with Manure)  
2 Quarts = 60 lbs. Nitrogen

Low Organic N (without Manure)  
2 Quarts = 30 lbs. Nitrogen

##### Challenging Conditions:

High Organic N (with Manure)  
3 Quarts = 60 lbs. Nitrogen

Low Organic N (without Manure)  
3 Quarts = 30 lbs. Nitrogen

ANIMAL BASED NITROGEN VS. EXPLORER™ LIQUID 10-0-0	Animal - Based Nitrogen	Explorer™ Liquid 10-0-0
<b>Nitrogen Availability</b>	Slow Release, requires bio-decomposition	100% - Immediately
<b>Solubility</b>	Not fully soluble	100%
<b>Application Restrictions</b>	Foliar Applications not recommended	None
<b>Ease of Use</b>	Smell, mixing procedure	None
<b>Origin</b>	Chicken/Fish/Manure	Non- GMO, soy protein hydrolysate
<b>Amino Acid Profile</b>	Inconsistent to None	98.6%/60.9%lq Amino Profile
<b>Stability</b>	Adulterated for insuring some stability	Complete and lifetime



Available through:



494 W. Broad Street  
New Holland, PA 17557  
(888) 336-7878  
www.homesteadnutritioninc.com

