



Organic MATTERS

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MOA 2016 Conference by Heather Estrada, MOA Board

2016 is the year of the pulse, and in honor of the role of pulses in organic crop and livestock production, this year's MOA conference theme is "The Heartbeat of Organics: Stimulating the Pulse of our Producers, Consumers, and Policymakers." Our annual conference will be held December 1-3, 2016, in Kalispell, Montana, at the Flathead Valley Community College, and will be full of energetic speakers, lively discussion, and useful information for producers and consumers alike.

The keynote address will be given by Dr. John Reganold, Regents Professor of Soil Science & Agroecology at Washington State University. Dr. Reganold is considered one

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MOA 2016 Farm Tour: South Phillips County

Article and Photos by John Larmoyeux, Prairie Grass Ranch, MOA Board

The BNSF Railway provides hours of company as I drive east on Hwy 2 across Montana's "hi-line" toward MOA's South Phillips County Organic Farm Tour in late June. While tuning to AM 560 KMON for the morning commodity market report, a community announcement is broadcasting the MOA farm tour with perfect synchronicity as I enter the town of Malta and spot a hand-painted "MOA Farm Tour" sign at the corner of Central Avenue. After a half dozen turns and 16 miles of dirt roads, the directional signs end at 4M Farms where a red and white quonset hut stands out like a circus big top, complete with a gathering crowd. Feeling a bit like a class reunion, farmer's mill around and reacquaint themselves with colleagues, introducing neighbors, family, children, guests and sponsors.

Serving as the M.C. for the event, Cliff Merriman introduces the line up of speakers and welcomes an audience of 60-plus visitors to his family's farm as they take their seats facing a young crop of

KAMUT® Brand khorasan wheat just east of the big top. Ron Larsen of the MT Ag Safety Program opens the day by promoting "safety first," followed by Jim Anderson with Anderson Schubert Agency, to discuss the benefits of crop insurance, emphasizing how whole-farm policies appeal to organic producers. Ole Norgaard with OAEC gives an update on their current field studies and requests candidates for their FFA youth program. Matthew Leardini of Timeless Seeds shares their company story and seeks new growers for their two registered brands. And, Colton Ellis, Sociology professor at MSU, requests interviewees to participate in his research about rural communities and their relationship with technology.

Reclaiming the mic, Cliff launches the farmer's portion of the tour by sharing how, as beginning farmers, he and his wife Annie acquired their farm from Mark Bruckner in 2012. It's evident that their farm, and this very farm tour, would never have been possible

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South Phillips County Farm Tour *continued from p. 1*

were it not for Mark's pioneering efforts during the '90's, when his organic practices were an anomaly in the region, but successful enough to influence his neighbors on "Swede Square" to convert to organic—all of whom were now being featured on the MOA farm tour.

Taking on a professorial tone, Cliff applies his Agronomy degree by discussing the history of his soil, which includes glacier melt, resulting "blowout areas," heavy salt deposits, tillage attempts, and the present efforts being made to remove salt through cover cropping, grazing, tilling, and identifying more salt-tolerant crops, such as KAMUT and sweet clover. He highlights the benefits of grazing his neighbor's cattle on sweet clover, cautioning against bloat, and after a group discussion about the ideal method to terminate sweet clover, its seeding rates, price, and yield, the group is dismissed to drive one-quarter mile down the road where the conversation revolves around Cliff's purple prairie barley. It's a niche market, and it's unique color appeals to physicians and health enthusiasts for its high antioxidant levels and nutritional quality.

Montana Organic Association is a 501(c)6 non-profit organization dedicated to advocating and promoting organic agriculture for the highest good of the people, the environment and the State economy.

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The tour leaves 4M Farm to admire a field of spelt on the outskirts of John Meisdalen's Farm just around the bend. The discussion revolves around the thick hull of spelt and its affect on seeding, volume, and weight. John shares his strategy of growing ancient grains, such as spelt, as a hedge against a potential drop in the wheat market. After a conversation about the heavy precipitation this growing season and some resulting crop disease in the region, John pauses the tour to invite his guests to enjoy a buffet style lunch a mile up the road.

We reassemble in the farm shop where John invites us to bow our heads as he says grace, and the crowd relishes deli-style sandwiches while a second line-up of speakers bend our ear. Wes Gibbs represents Kamut International and answers many questions about soil quality and tillage. Andre Giles of Montana Flour and Grain shares how his view of sustainability also refers to finance and emphasizes the importance of building long-term partnerships with growers, which includes flexibility in contracts, terms, and prices. After lunch, the crowd visits a nearby field of young KAMUT and then observes a field of young Emmer. We admire a set of Flexi Coil drills on a Ford 876 Versatile, and John concludes his portion of the tour with a demonstration of plowing down sweet clover with a Wishek field disk on a Versatile 575.

Continuing up the road to the next farm, the audience endures the afternoon sun to listen to Terri Simms as she shares about the leased ground she and her husband, Glenn, are converting to organic. After discussing their four-year crop rotation, intercropping, and seeding rates, Terri keeps the crowd entertained with stories of trial and error and plenty of "happy mistakes" that worked out in their favor. Their son, Matt Simms, talks about his composting project that makes use of readily available mulch chips by mixing with local cow manure to make compost that is 20 times more beneficial than mulch or manure alone. With a massive thunderhead rising to the North, and wind gusts picking up speed, Glenn Meisdalen invites the crowd to Sweetgrass Cattle & Grain where he has young lentils, freshly planted garbanzo beans, and healthy winter wheat to show.

As the caravan heads out, the wind intensifies, the skies darken, and a dust storm drives half of the visitors away with the threat of inclement weather. Bypassing the lentils and garbanzos, Glenn leads the remaining crowd straight to his home where we dine on roast beef, baked potatoes, dinner rolls and salad.

After the meal, with the storm passed, a small group of guests follow Glenn down the hill behind the house to observe what has been reserved as the best for the last—Glenn's winter wheat. With the immense rain this season, a nearby creek had flooded its bank and submersed the young crop.



Glenn Meisdalen's winter wheat crop.

Thinking his wheat had been lost, Glenn strongly considered plowing it under, but didn't. To everyone's surprise, his field dried out, the wheat rebounded, and now looks to be a bumper crop.

Feeling inspired by Glenn's story, the small group returns to the house to enjoy a dessert of apple cobbler and strawberry shortcake. Outside, Jerry Pluth has a team of black Percheron horses hitched to a hay wagon for children to ride, a service he provides regularly for events throughout Phillips County. As the evening sun sinks lower, the last of the guests head for home and the South Phillips County Organic Farm Tour concludes with laughs from host farmers and their children. If Mark Bruckner's farm is any lesson in compound interest, perhaps these four new organic farmers will motivate another 16 new farmers. What a farm tour that would be! 🌱

MOA 2016 Farm Tour: Quinn Farm/Oil Barn

Article and Photos by John Larmoyeux, Prairie Grass Ranch, MOA Board

On a beautiful July morning, Bob Quinn hosts over 200 guests who have come to the Quinn Farm & Ranch to learn more about the possibilities and benefits of regenerative agriculture.

As the crowd assembles beneath shade trees on the back lawn of his family home, Bob makes a case for organic farming. "When I am asked, 'Will organics be around in the future?' I say, 'Organics are the future.'" This conviction has driven Bob to excel in organic farming and multiple other organic ventures. Bob explains how the farm tour is organized around four different components of the Quinn Farm & Ranch: organic crop rotations, prairie orchard with dry land vegetables, The Oil Barn®, and experimental wheat plots. With guests free to join a tour, or check out bread and pizza making demonstrations, we all embark on an education.

Farm Manager, Seth Goodman, leads the tour of crop rotations. He describes the challenges of addressing insects, disease, weeds, and soil fertility, without using conventional methods. These issues are managed by relying on cover crops and crop rotations in addition to managing soil moisture through crop selection and termination dates. Evolving from a typical four-year crop rotation, they currently use a nine-year rotation with a goal to have 50/50 fall/spring seeded rotation, attempting to maximize diversity while reducing risks. While the farm is well known for its KAMUT® Brand khorasan wheat crop, Seth points out it is just one of many crops in the mix, and how doing good business also means

relying on other cash crops such as winter wheat.

In the prairie orchard and dry land vegetable garden, Charlie Overbay leads a tour through the 30+ apples varieties under trial, in addition to multiple varieties of plums, pears, apricots, cherries, peaches, and raspberries. Since the prairie is predominately treeless, he describes the concept of creating a microclimate for the ¾-acre orchard by relying on an existing shelter belt, building a snow fence, planting perimeter bushes, and interplanting rows of spruce trees. He describes transplanting, pruning, pest control, disease management, and tilling. Irrigation is limited to the first two years, after which the trees must rely on rainfall.



Charlie Overbay demos a dry land garden.

While some varieties fail the experiment, deep mulch is being applied to those that withstand the limited rainfall. Similarly, he turns our attention to the vegetable gardens where there is no irrigation for squash, potatoes, corn, or sunflowers. Instead the plant numbers are reduced to three-to-four times that of irrigated veggies to ensure sufficient moisture. He also stresses critical weed-free periods, field history, and pollination isolation distances.

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Quinn/Oil Barn *continued from p. 3*

The session wraps up in time for a lunch of pulled pork sandwiches on KAMUT-grain buns, with fruit and potato salad, catered by Bomgardner Catering from Loma.

After lunch, at The Oil Barn, Andrew Long describes how a former cow barn was retrofitted with several automated flex augers to move safflower seed from four grain bins to wall tanks inside where crushing machines extract the oil and a filter press removes any remaining sediment. The high-oleic organic safflower oil is bottled and distributed to restaurants, grocery stores, and an organic soap and cosmetic producer. In an effort to become more independent and less beholden to the petroleum industry, the used safflower oil is then collected from restaurants, cleaned through a waste oil processing system, and used as fuel for farm equipment. A new enterprise for the Quinn Farm &



Andrew Long hosts The Oil Barn tour.

Ranch, Montana Horizons Organic Snacks, uses The Oil Barn safflower oil in making their signature snack item, Kracklin' Kamut®. Thomas Dilworth, Manager, eagerly passes out samples of his product, and shares the vision of seeing Kracklin' Kamut become as popular as sunflower seeds in convenience stores.

Bob Quinn leads the tour of experimental wheat plots, where he began growing modern winter wheat crosses with high baking

quality in 2009. Starting with 36 varieties and eliminating candidates since 2013, the program is currently down to 14 varieties. Also in 2013, he started experimenting with 100 types of wild winter wheat from Turkey, which is currently down to 29 varieties. In order to compare ancient, heritage, and modern wheat varieties, there are four ancient wheat plots, eight heritage wheat plots, and 14 plots in the modern wheat collection. The ultimate goal here is "to identify anti-inflammatory wheat varieties which are good for baking, high in nutrition, high-yielding, have good agronomic characteristics, and are naturally resistant to pests and diseases."

Just past Bob's wheat plots, Dave Christensen showcases a field of 100% native North American corn, which is a variety he has been cultivating for 30 years under the name Painted Mountain

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After Thomas Dilworth offers a prayer of thanks before the meal, Champos serves up Kamut crust pizza, Kamut penne pasta primavera and Kamut spaghetti salad. Not to be outdone with Kamut add-ons, Bomgardner Catering serves oriental salad topped with Kracklin' Kamut and a basket of Kamut grain buns. As if the superior farm tours and two meals weren't gracious enough, Bob announces a talent show, to be followed by music and dancing. While children, adults, and old-timers share the stage to entertain the remaining guests,



One of Bob Quinn's experimental plots.

a sense of satisfaction settles over the audience who relish the unhurried evening. It is evident that the unscripted event is not a performance at all—it is a small glimpse into the lives of the Quinn Farm & Ranch, whose multifaceted enterprise reflects the ethic, ingenuity, faith, and leadership of Bob Quinn and his staff.

Reclaiming the mic, Bob thanks his wife, Ann, for hosting the day's events, and wishes her a happy birthday. We clear the driveway of tables and chairs so the dancing can begin. As the final guests trickle out, the Quinn family and their staff wave goodbye—smiling, dancing, loving farm life, and happy to share it. Opting out of the dance, I snack on a sample of Kracklin' Kamut and read the back of the package: "Thank you for supporting the revitalization of rural America." Well, it appears that rural America is certainly worth supporting! 🌱

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MOA Conference *continued from p. 1*

of the founding and premier scientists in the world in the field of sustainable and organic agricultural research, as evidenced by his more than 160 scientific publications, some of which have been published in *Science*, *Nature*, *Scientific American*, and other land-use and soil science journals. Dr. Reganold's on-farm studies have created some of the largest published data sets on alternative and conventional agricultural systems, which have had a significant impact on U.S. public policy and farm bills, creating major policy incentives to reduce the use of chemicals in the production of the nation's food.

This year's Conference features Organic University, local farm tours, and a GAP training and audit of the FVCC Campus Farm, as well as sessions covering a wide variety of topics. Some that are under consideration include: animal care in organics, opportunities and resources for new and beginning farmers, crop insurance for organic farmers, organic seeds and crop improvement, and organic agriculture policy.

The MOA Conference also offers numerous networking and learning opportunities, smart and innovative participants, fun entertainment, and lots of great organic food.

If you're interested in participating as a volunteer, vendor, sponsor, or advertiser, give Susan a call at (406) 274-4869 or email moa@montanaorganicassociation.org. You can also help by donating to the Sharon Lindquist Scholarship Fund to enable some deserving folks to participate in the Conference. We appreciate all your support to make this another successful flagship event for MOA and the organic community.

We are excited to be located in the northwest corner of the state this year, and we hope you will join us for discussion and connection among friends, new and old. 

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The DARK Act Passes, Banning States From Requiring GMO Labels on Food

On July 14, 2016, The Roberts-Stabenow GMO labeling “compromise” bill (formerly known as The DARK Act: Denying Americans the Right to Know) passed the Senate and House, and the White House has announced (at the time this publication went to press) the President will sign the bill.

“I brought the first labeling bill to Congress in 1999,” states Dennis John Kucinich, former U.S. Representative from Ohio and Democratic candidate for President of the United States in 2004 and 2008. “It is sad to see the grand institution of the U.S. Senate confronted with the realities of what happens when some of its members become indebted to a corporate food industry which has

poisoned the environment, ruined the land, depleted water supplies, and crushed family farmers.”

Vermont, Maine, Connecticut and Alaska had already passed GMO labeling legislation, which protects consumers’ right to know, and Vermont’s law came into effect July 1. According to the Organic Consumer Association, “Vermont’s law was working. GMOs were being labeled. Food prices were staying the same. The labels were being used nationwide and the Vermont Law brought the U.S. into line with the rest of the world (64 countries already require labels on GMO foods).”

The Roberts-Stabenow bill now takes away the rights of states to label GE foods and sticks consumers with QR code technology for

smartphones or 1-800 numbers instead of clear, simple, on-package labeling, even though surveys consistently find that over 90% of consumers want clear labeling on GE products.

On July 13, the Montana Organic Association sent a letter to Montana Representative Ryan Zinke and President Obama, urging them to reject the Roberts-Stabenow bill.

In an excerpt, MOA states, “We wholeheartedly agree with our colleagues at the National Organic Coalition, whose recent statement highlights our concerns as follows:

- The bill has huge loopholes and exempts most GE foods from any labeling: the definition of “bioengineering” in the bill is much weaker than other definitions

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MOA's 2015 Financial Report

by Jonda Crosby, MOA Treasurer, Board of Directors

MOA members, supporters and friends:

The Montana Organic Association officially closed our books on December 31, 2015. We completed MOA's tax report and 1099 forms for our contractors in January. MOA received confirmation from the IRS that we are in full compliance as a non-profit for 2015. We also renewed our status as a non-profit in Montana with the Secretary of State's office.

MOA's other official duty as a non-profit is to report our financial condition to our members and supporters. As you can see in the chart to the right, our income has continued to increase in 2015, due primarily to a very successful MOA Annual Conference, grant support for our field tours, an increase in memberships, and judicious management of MOA resources by your Board of Directors.

An area we were able to improve in 2015 was our memberships, which we made a priority in 2015. With feedback from our membership, the Board has reconfigured our membership dues and benefits to better match our membership needs, interests and contributions.

Another notable change in 2015 was a Scholarship Fund developed in honor of Sharon Lindquist, an early MOA member who died in the spring of 2015. The Scholarship Fund is designed to support the travel and registration for individuals interested in learning more about organics at MOA events. Thank you to those who donated to the Scholarship Fund in 2015. MOA accepts donations for this fund at our organizational PO Box noted at the back of our newsletter.

In 2016, we are in the process of updating our membership database and communications systems, and consolidating our contractor duties to both streamline our work to be more effective and efficient.

Our hope by the end of 2016 is to be able to combine the membership data with our outreach information so that we can communicate with our membership more seamlessly. We do not have the bookkeeping system tied into the membership data yet, but is on the horizon at some point too. And, we are considering a website redesign for 2017.

The MOA Board of Directors, as your representatives, will continue to be frugal while bringing you, our members, the highest value possible for your membership investment.

MOA continues to prosper for a variety of reasons. 1) MOA has great volunteer members! 2) MOA has fantastic educational events. 3) MOA members are skilled farmers and ranchers, conscientious citizens and generous donors and supporters, and, 4) MOA as an organization aspires to embed MOA's mission and values in every thing we do.

If you have suggestions for improving MOA, do not hesitate to contact any one of the Board of Directors – we are your representatives!

Best Regards,



MOA Treasurer, Board of Directors

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	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Income								
Advertising & Sales	843	2,950	1,342	120	1,799	1,066	1,306	1,633
Events	51,841	46,972	41,292	23,320	20,710	20,050	27,485	27,596
Membership	11,744	7,125	6,885	8,775	6,235	6,635	3,860	4,515
Grants, Donations	3,780	<u>2,115</u>	<u>1560</u>	<u>2,130</u>	<u>1,336</u>	<u>1,536</u>	<u>1,477</u>	<u>2,570</u>
Lindquist Memorial Scholarship	<u>610</u>							
TOTAL	\$68,818	\$59,162	\$51,079	\$34,345	\$30,080	\$29,287	\$34,128	\$36,314
Expenses								
Administration	3,443	2,852	3,728	3,385	3,400	3,215	4,048	2,634
Membership Services	2,430	1,096	11,170	8,370	4,770	8,230	12,457	9,530
Events	33,418	32,404	16,036	15,753	5,076	8,188	21,635	12,136
Communications & Outreach	13,228	7,978	1,858	2,775	2,685	1,890	3,385	6,443
Board Expense	<u>1969</u>	<u>627</u>	<u>1,413</u>	<u>678</u>	<u>233</u>	<u>849</u>	<u>272</u>	<u>609</u>
TOTAL	\$54,488	\$44,957	\$34,205	\$30,961	\$16,164	\$22,372	\$41,797	\$31,352
NET	\$14,330	\$14,205	\$16,874	\$3,384	\$13,916	\$6,915	-\$7,669	\$4,962



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Greenhouse Designs for Montana Market Growers

Article and Photos by Jim Baerg, Montana Energy + Design

It is certainly possible to extend the growing season for vegetables in Montana. About five years ago I learned that the Chinese had developed a commercial scale solar greenhouse system that they were using extensively with over three million acres of these greenhouses in operation. These greenhouses are typically 25 by 100 feet in size with the long axis East and West. They have a masonry North wall, insulated end walls and North wall and roof. They use a single layer of poly and a motorized, roll down insulated curtain that closes up the greenhouse at night. These greenhouses will grow vegetables year-round up to the 42nd parallel in China without any supplemental heat.

I also learned that there were a few of these greenhouses in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and that the University of Manitoba had been monitoring their performance, making modifications and publishing some material on their research. I was intrigued and decided to tour these greenhouses in late April of this year.

Dr. Qaing Zhang and Dr. Kris Dick of the BioSystems Engineering Department have led the research. Dr. Dick mentioned that the weather was generally getting warmer but with increased variability making planning and planting dates more risky. Winnipeg has a 90-100 day frost-free growing season. The area has 10,660 Heating Degree Days

(HDD: a measure of annual cold used for calculating building heat loads), whereas most of Montana is in the 7,500 to 8,500 HDD range. Billings has 7,100 HDD, Butte has 9,760 HDD and West Yellowstone has 10,940 HDD.

One of Dr. Dick's functions at the University is to work with construction manufacturers to test various wall assemblies, mostly for structural and thermal performance. In addition to the solar greenhouse, which is roughly 20 X 40 feet in size, they have a collection of small structures of various sizes and materials for testing.

There are two market gardeners West of Winnipeg that use these greenhouses. Wenkai Liu of

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Wenkai Oriental Vegetables is also the importer of these greenhouses. He sells a kit that includes the steel glazing frame, poly glazing and a motorized curtain system.

Wenkai runs three, eight-year-old greenhouses on his property and has about five acres of field crops. He also has another, larger greenhouse with a concrete floor that they use as a shop, storage facility, cold storage and vegetable processing facility. Wenkai sells at two farmer's markets a week in Winnipeg and also has a storefront near the University.



Wenkai's Chinese style greenhouse.

Wenkai's three growing greenhouses were loaded with plants. Most of the ground was planted with tomatoes, which were a foot to a foot-and-a-half high. In between the rows of tomatoes were flat after flat of starts that would be transferred to his outdoor field at the right time of the season. Wenkai also had about a quarter of one greenhouse in kale plants that were about six inches tall.

The three greenhouses were all the same size and built the same way. The back wall was black painted roofing metal which contained an eight-inch thick sand wall. This wall absorbs surplus heat during the day and releases it at night. The glazing frame was a one-piece truss frame that went from the ground on the South side, to the peak and then down the North roof. The back wall and end

walls were framed in wood and mostly covered with painted OSB plywood.



Wenkai's motorized insulated blanket.

The most interesting feature of these greenhouses was the motorized insulated blanket. The blanket was in two pieces, each about 26 feet by 50 feet wide, which were rolled up on a steel pipe that was driven by an electric motor and right angle gear box. This whole assembly sits at the peak of the greenhouse during the day and rolled down from the peak of the greenhouse when actuated by a switch inside the greenhouse.

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The greenhouses have a very simple ventilation system that works passively and is integrated with the blanket. In the summer, shade cloth is used. Wenkai closes down his greenhouses for two months in the winter and freezes them out so that he can travel.

I also toured Wenkai's five-acre field. He was trying out a new system of low tunnels that will be used for germinating plants in the ground. The low tunnels were about 20 feet by 20 feet by 3 feet high and made of small diameter steel pipe welded together.

These 20 foot sections stretched for a quarter mile and could be picked up and moved individually. Wenkai had seeded the space under the low tunnels with his first field crops (greens and root crops), the low tunnels were in place and he was just about ready to stretch a layer of 20-foot-wide poly over the tunnel. This arrangement was intended to improve germination by warming the ground. When those plants were up and established, the low tunnel would be moved, piece-by-piece, to cover the adjacent rows of newly planted crops. This way he would get a jump start on the season with a wide range of vegetables.

The second grower I visited was Blue Lagoon Organics, run by Lori Ann, Rene and Stefan Regnier. They have one greenhouse and have started building another. They also have one wood framed high tunnel for hardening starts. The Regniers have quite a bit of ground, grow alfalfa and have integrated chickens into their crop rotations.

The Regniers also sell at the two Winnipeg markets but also offer

CSA shares. They sell a huge array of vegetables, some fruits, eggs and private label some preserves.



Blue Lagoon's greenhouse frame.

Their greenhouse has some differences from those Wenkai uses. It is raised up about three feet with a short, solid wall on the South side. The North wall is concrete instead of sand and they don't use the motorized blanket. Their original blanket failed when encased in ice and snow one winter and they removed it. Now, they use a movable horizontal plastic film inside the greenhouse to protect crops during the coldest months. They have experimented with underground heat storage and have used a pellet boiler heating system in the past.



Blue Lagoon's vegetable start greenhouse.

Blue Lagoon Organics raises their greenhouse crops in raised beds with tomatoes and some vine plants predominating. The beds run North/South and each had a row of tomatoes started. All available space was covered by trays of vegetable starts. The South end of the bed gets a squash/cucumber plant which eventually spreads out on the

ground. Along the North wall is a row of buckets which will grow squash. These squash grow up the North wall, then horizontally across the ceiling to provide summer shading. Their crops were somewhat behind Wenkai's, probably because their greenhouse runs colder without the blanket.

Both growers have integrated their greenhouse operations into their field production. Both grow tomatoes in the ground which can be started as early in the year as temperatures allow. Timing of vegetable starts is determined by when plants need to be transplanted into the fields. All plants appeared to be vigorous and healthy.

This trip was inspiring. If growers in Canada can start plants in the solar greenhouses early enough in the season to have them ready for transplanting into the fields, then we can too in Montana. I think that the tomato crops in the greenhouse could last easily until Thanksgiving. A small back-up heating system would allow warm season crops to continue towards the end of the year. I do recommend shutting down for a month or so in the winter for a well-deserved rest and vacation to a warm beach.

I am interested in working with market gardeners in Montana to build some of these greenhouses. I have a more complete report of my trip to Winnipeg with photos if you're interested in exploring these ideas. Please contact me at 406-220-1498 or jlbaerg@gmail.com and I'll send them to you. 🌱

Jim Baerg is the owner of Montana Energy+Design in Livingston, Montana. His website is: <http://www.mte-d.com/>

The Dark Act *continued from p. 7*

of genetically engineered foods, including the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) definition; as a result, this proposal runs the risk that soy and canola oil, sugar from GE beets, glyphosate-resistant crops, and most Bt crops would be exempt from labeling requirements.

- There are no enforcement provisions.
- This bill is unnecessary. Many companies, including Kellogg's, Frito Lay, General Mills, Mars, ConAgra, Dannon, and Campbells are already labeling genetically engineered products in response to the Vermont labeling law. This bill blocks Vermont's law and gives the USDA two additional years to set labeling rules under this weak and meaningless framework. A provision in the Senate-passed bill creates uncertainty about whether or not all the clear, transparent GMO labels currently in the marketplace (as a result of the VT law) will be allowed to continue.

- The bill could undermine GMO prohibitions in organic. If USDA were to change existing definitions of genetic engineering to align with the new definitions of bioengineering in the bill, it could significantly undermine the role of organic as the gold standard for consumers seeking to purchase non-GMO products."

When asked about the Roberts-Stabenow bill, the Center For Food Safety states:

- "It has no mandatory standards: rather it preempts the labeling laws of several states based solely on a multi-year discretionary process determined by an as yet unknown, future USDA Secretary.
- It allows a vast number of current and future GE foods to be exempt for any labeling—In fact, 99% of all

GMO food could be exempt from labeling as the bill leaves it entirely up to a future USDA Secretary to determine what "amount" of GMO ingredients in a food qualifies it for labeling.

- It constitutes discrimination against the rural, low income and the elderly. Because of their lack of access to smart phones, more than 50% of rural and low-income populations, and more that 65% of the elderly, will have no access to these labels.

In a surprising move, several big names in the organic industry recently turned their support from mandatory labeling to endorsing the Roberts-Stabenow bill.

- Is a violation of state sovereignty by specifically preempting GMO seed laws and potentially numerous other laws and regulations.
- The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) sent Congress a scathing critique of the labeling law, calling the bill out for its weak language and lack of enforcement."

In a surprising move, several big names in the organic industry recently turned their support from mandatory labeling to endorsing the Roberts-Stabenow bill. The now-supporters of the bill include the head of Whole Foods Market, Walter Robb; Gary Hirschberg, the CEO of Stonyfield Farm and the pro GMO labeling group Just Label It; the Environmental Working Group, represented by Scott Faber, former head lobbyist for the pro-biotech Grocery Manufacturers Association; UNFI, the largest wholesaler of natural and organic foods; and the Organic Trade Association (OTA), led by "natural" brands such as Smuckers and White Wave, and represented by their Board Chair

Melissa Hughes from Organic Valley.

On June 27, the Organic Trade Association (of which MOA is currently a member) sent a letter to their members explaining why they decided to endorse the Roberts-Stabenow bill.

"For years, OTA has supported efforts to bring federal mandatory GMO labeling to the United States. Conventional agriculture, the biotech community, and a

host of food companies have fought hard to defeat labeling, and have spent millions of dollars doing so. OTA's Organic = Non GMO member task force demonstrated a clear priority on reinforcing organic and organic foods

above labeling conventional food as either GMO or non-GMO. Those provisions safeguard USDA certified organic as the gold standard for transparency and non-GMO status. While not perfect, this bill covers thousands more products than Vermont's GMO labeling law and other state initiatives. It will not allow products that are exempt from informing consumers about their GMO content to automatically slap on a non-GMO claim."

When OTA was asked what was specifically at risk for organic, the organization replied,

- "The risk of conventional products, exempted from labeling in Vermont or federally, carrying a bogus, misleading and meaningless non-GMO claim in the marketplace.
- The risk of any products containing meat as a minor ingredient from doing the same.
- The clear risk of organic products being unable to make a legal non-GMO claim in the market due to current conflicting policies from FDA and USDA.
- The risk of narrowly defining biotechnology so that the National

Organic Program's ability to define GMOs as excluded methods broadly and inclusive of new technologies like gene editing and gene deletion would also be limited.

• A compromise GMO labeling bill was happening, with or without us. Not protecting the core value of the organic label would have been risky and wrong for an association whose critical mission is to protect the value of organic."

OTA stresses that the simplest and surest way today to be guaranteed that the products consumers buy are non-GMO is to look for the USDA Organic Seal.

Not sure where you stand on this complex issue? Read the entire text of the bill at <http://tinyurl.com/gv46a6a> and decide for yourself.

This article was compiled from the following sources: MOA Board of Directors, National Organic Coalition, Center for Food Safety, Organic Trade Association, Just Label It, and the Organic Consumer Association. 

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See www.montanaorganicassociation.org/omadrates.htm for details or call Seth Swanson at (406) 258-4205.

Join MOA Today!

Each membership level delivers a quarterly newsletter devoted to sharing the latest news and information about the association and the organic industry, discounts to MOA events, special mailings on legislative alerts and events, a MOA member vote, and the networking and educational opportunities presented by joining others who share interest and experience in the field of organics. Other member benefits include eligibility for a Workman's Comp premium discount, safety training and other services to assist you in your organic endeavors.

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A View From the Chair

As I gather thoughts for this column, I am eagerly anticipating the start of harvest. What a difference a year makes! On our farm, and most of Montana, it appears to be a bountiful crop. We are both thankful and relieved.

In the “organic world,” there seem to be many challenges. Our national community is painfully divided over the prospect of an organic check-off program. Most seem to be either unguardedly optimistic or irrationally fearful over the prospect of a producer and handler assessment to fund organic research and promotion efforts.

Labeling (or not) foods containing Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) is another “hot-button” issue. One way or another, we are assured to see more food packages with some means of disclosure that

ingredients are derived from GMO crops. While I fully support the idea that consumers should have full and transparent disclosure of GMOs in food products, I also contend that the debate takes our focus away from the many benefits that organic food and farming offer to consumers, the environment and rural communities. By focusing too much energy on the GMO (labeling) debate, we may fail to promote and educate the public as to the big picture of organic agriculture’s multiple benefits.

The best outcome I envision from the labeling malaise is that more of the public will come to recognize that choosing organic is the best way to avoid GMOs. My biggest fear is that it will drive a movement to “non-GMO” labeled products, based on product testing rather than any farming system requirements. Non-GMO

could become a competing label that pulls demand away from organic options.

I contend that GMO labeling is not an “organic issue.” Organic is so much more than non-GMO. So, what is the proper role of MOA, or other organic organizations, in the GMO labeling debate? As usual, the question pits “purists” against “practical.” Do we spend our energy and resources demanding legislation mandating clear and transparent labels? Or, do we support compromises that may offer advantages to organic? Or, do we “sit out” the debate altogether? I leave this topic with more questions than answers.

I wish everyone a safe and bountiful harvest season!

Doug Crabtree, MOA Board Chairman