

Organic Montana: A new chapter for Montana's organic community

When the Montana Organic Association was established in about 2003, the founders intended the organization be a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit. After evaluating the Articles of Incorporation and the initial By-Laws, the IRS determined otherwise; that the proposed association, focusing on policy issues affecting organic agriculture and food, was better defined as a 501 (c) 6 trade association.

Since then, MOA has grown and carried out work supporting and promoting organics by relying on membership fees, conference and event fees, sponsorship fees, and both state and federal grants to fund it. MOA's work has included lobbying through letters and farmer fly-ins, taking positions on agriculture- and food-related issues, and developing a policy platform. It has also engaged in work, like Organic University, farm tours, cooking demonstrations, and even food distribution, that charitable foundations and traditional nonprofit fundraising frequently supports. However, the trade association status prevented MOA from receiving charitable funds for the excellent work it has done outside of policy-focused activities.

In Fall 2020, MOA began forming a new 501 (c) 3 nonprofit called Organic Montana. The IRS recently determined that Organic Montana (OM) is a tax-exempt public charity able to receive tax-deductible gifts, bequests, and transfers. This organization does not have a membership structure or voting opportunities like MOA, but rather MOA is its only "member." A board governs OM, with me, Jamie Lockman, currently serving as Executive Director and Ex-Offi cio Board Member.

OM has begun undertaking MOA's more properly nonprofit educational, communication, and community-building activities. OM is able to derive funding from private foundations, donations, and other fundraising activities that IRS rules prohibit MOA from receiving. OM can also obtain discounts on fees such as reduced mailing rates and technology programs that offer nonprofit discounts that will help it operate at a lower cost. Now that it has been approved by the USPS for nonprofit postage rates, one immediate OM goal is to begin sending hard copies of the **Organic Matters** newsletter. Any contributions made to OM are tax-deductible as charitable donations. MOA and OM have distinctly different revenue sources and record keeping.

OM board members include those who currently sit on MOA's Board as well as the Organic Advisory and Education Council (OAEC) board and those who are essential leaders in Montana's organic community: Sam Schmidt, Chair (MOA, OAEC); Wes Henthorne, Vice-Chair (OAEC); John Wicks, Treasurer (MOA); Jennifer Dees, Secretary; Jonda Crosby; Georgana Webster; and Becky Weed (MOA).

The OM Board will be reaching out to ask for your tax deductible financial support for this new organization. Your contributions will help OM support those long-term organic community members and welcome those new to it. OM plans to share the latest agronomic information that helps connect Montana's organic community to the resources it needs to help their enterprises prosper, and that helps consumers learn more about what's in their food, what it takes to grow organic food, and how to find it and to enjoy it. Your founding contributions to OM will build on MOA's work over the last two decades and help it develop the capacity to reach Montana's and the region's organic community in new ways.

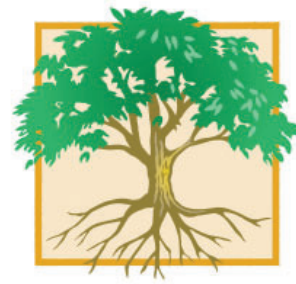
To be clear, OM will not be involved in policy work but will instead serve to educate, communicate, and connect people who support regenerative organic agriculture; healthy nutritious food; and a cleaner, more resilient environment. It will take a while to transition these activities from MOA to OM. Funds contributed to OM will not be allowed to be used for policy work such as funding farmer fly-ins; membership in policy organizations like OTA, NSAC, and NOC; or other lobbying endeavors.

MOA will more keenly focus its work on developing a policy platform and using its voice to influence policy on various issues from beginning farmers and ranchers, pesticide use, hydroponics, cost-share support, and more. It's important that you continue supporting MOA with your membership and continue participating on policy matters. By being a MOA member, your vote helps it determine policy priorities and the direction of the organization. While MOA is currently reviewing membership rates, it maintains its very affordable membership structure which has been in place since at least 2010. Please invite your friends, neighbors, and colleagues to become a MOA member.

Thank you for your continued support of organic agriculture and food. Montana is recognized as a leader in the organic movement and by adding organizational and funding flexibility, it is poised to continue leading the way.

We support local organic agriculture.

Thank you for protecting the environment and supporting healthy communities with good food.



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