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## OAEC Stakeholder Update Spring 2021.

Dear Organic Growers and Friends,

Spring is here again and we thank you for your on-going support and to update you on progress made and our prospects as we move forward.

Early this year, OAEC, MSU, and Dr. Sands submitted a grant application to USDA-OREI for the future support of our Biocontrol project. Many thanks to those who wrote letters of support for the grant application. We were recently informed that the grant application has been denied. While this is disappointing, we plan to apply again next year and based on comments from the reviewers on this year's application, we will be able to reply to the reviewers concerns and submit a better application next year.

**Dr. Sands is delighted to report:** "We will keep moving the work on the Biocontrol project forward with USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant that we were awarded last year. While more funding will let us move faster, we are making progress. We have more greenhouse space in the MSU Plant Growth Center than in the past, we have two undergraduate research assistants who are keeping the greenhouse work and sample testing on track, a post-doctoral researcher, Dr. Suha Hassan Ahmed Elhag from Sudan (fully funded from outside sources), and a new Masters level Lab Manager/Researcher who started work on May 5 to conduct research and deal with administration and organization to keep the work moving forward."



Dave Sands in his lab showing biocontrol samples to Georgana Webster and Wes Henthorne in late April 2021.

OAEC has an advisory group of four board members monitoring the project now. The advisory group meets monthly with Dr. Sands and the team by Zoom calls and we recently met on campus with the research team. In order to be certain that any products developed from these efforts will be available for use in organic farming systems, we have asked Georgana Webster, the Montana Department of Agriculture Organic Program Manager, to monitor the project to stay within Organic rules and regulations. Progress is being made as this

The Organic Advisory and Education Council (OAEC) is a non-profit organization made up of Montana certified organic farmers whose mission is to assess priority needs for research and education specific to Montana's organic farming community. OAEC's mandate is to identify and to target funds for essential projects. In an equally important role, OAEC provides information and advice to researchers and educators on areas of critical need in the organic community.

www.oaecmt.org

biocontrol project gears up and comes together on new levels. This year will include biocontrol field trials for Perennial Field Bindweed and Canada Thistle Canada Thistle on five different organic farms here in Montana.



MSU Plant Growth Center with trails of Field Bindweed and Canada Thistle. Dr. Suha Hassan Ahmed Elhag, undergrad student, Ole Norgaard, Wes Henthorne, Dr. Dave Sands, Georgana Webster April 2021.

### **IMPORTANT -- WE NEED TO KEEP SEARCHING FOR SICK PLANTS**

As we proceed, the search for sick plants of Perennial Field Bindweed and Canada Thistle continues so we can find the most effective fungal isolates for control. We need your help in 2021 to locate and collect sick plants (yellowing leaves/discoloration of root systems) and we have built sample submission packages to simplify the process of getting the right parts of the sick plants to the lab. We are asking everyone to participate. Watch closely for sick plants to collect and submit to help with the ongoing research. Sample collection instructions are included with this letter and continuing the search for sick plants is key to continued progress.



Dr. Dave Sand in the greenhouse showing Canada Thistle plants that have been inoculated with strains for aggressive Fusarium oxysporum, April 2021.



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Jeff Van Pevenage, President and CEO

### **Other OAEC Updates:**

The Organic Farmer Advisory group, that is connected to the Central Agriculture Research Center in Moccasin, met with Dr. Pat Carr in March on a highly informative Zoom call. Dr. Carr laid out the plans for the 2021 CREEP STOP work as well as informing us that it might be another year or two before any tangible research data and results will come.

### **Other OAEC Updates:**

During this winter, we had three different Zoom calls with key researchers in human nutrition at MSU with the intent to create a comprehensive, robust, and meaningful framework to explore and improve the energy and nutrition levels in the things we grow and better quantify the benefits of organic production to human health. This is another example of OAEC initiating conversations between different colleges and departments at MSU. The people at MSU have become incredibly open to exploring issues together across a range of academic areas. While this is an embryonic project, and will require lots of cooperation, encouragement and nurturing, these meetings are looking very productive with different approaches and multidisciplinary cooperation. The OAEC Board has noted that one of the most important things that we do in Montana is to bring together a wide range of people on campus that do not routinely discuss organic agricultural issues outside of their departments and colleges. It is amazing to see in real time as common questions are discussed broadly and collaboration becomes likely.

Thanks again, everyone, and we are hoping that this year brings the opportunity to meet at farm tours and the MOA conference as we are starting to experience a bit more normal life.

The work that Dr. Sands is doing, as well as other OAEC projects, including sending you this update, can't happen without the generosity of our Montana farming and ranching community supporters. Please consider donating today. You can donate through our website at <u>www.mtoaec.org</u> or by mail to:

Organic Advisory and Education Council 475 Vixen Lane Shonkin, Montana 59450

Have a great spring and a better summer,

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Ole Norgaard, President and Board Chair on behalf of the entire OAEC Board of Directors

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### Bio-Control Weed Collection Instructions Kit 2021

OAEC continues to work with Montana State University on natural bio-controls for the problematic weeds Perennial Field Bindweed and Canada Thistle. The search for new strains of *Fusarium oxysporum* continues, and we are asking for your help in 2021 to locate and collect sick plants (yellowing leaves/discoloration of root systems). We are asking everyone to participate in finding a workable organic solution and your samples will help the ongoing research. When you find a diseased bindweed or thistle plant – there are two parts (A and B) to the collection kit. Please follow the instructions and fill out the information in part A and B and mail the postage-paid box and envelope (next pages).



**Collection Instructions:** Optimally you will want to look for one or more patches of dead plants, but single sick plants will suffice. More specifically, wilted infected plants will have discolored vascular tissue especially towards the base of the stem. We want the plants that are these showing symptoms or have most recently died, so if you found a patch grab a few at the edge of the dying patch. Please note, the fungus may or may not be secreting mycotoxins, so use care (wash your hands, wear disposable gloves, etc.). To harvest the plant, simply dig and pull as if weeding in a garden, and then shake off the dirt. Then cut the plant stem, as we only need 4 inches above the soil line, and more importantly the 6 inches below the soil line. Please remember to always harvest at the edge of the patch, to avoid older diseased plants that may have secondary invaders. Early emergence of weeds and detection of their diseases can have stronger bio-control potential and we would like to start receiving new samples as early as May, but plants usually show wilt symptoms after it dries out (wilt diseases shut off the water), so you will likely be finding samples throughout the summer.

### Instructions -- Part A.

- 1. Identify a sick plant/patch of Creeping Thistle or Field Bindweed
- 2. Take a picture of the plant or the outer edge of a patch, recording the location.
- 3. Dig the root system up, capturing a minimum of 6 inches below the surface.
- 4. Cut the plant from the stem 4 inches above the soil line, so stem and roots only.
- 5. Remove all dirt from the sample so it can dry and not hold extra moisture.
- 6. Place one plant's stem and roots in a paper bag from the kit. Use one bag for each plant.
- 7. Fill out the MSU Plant Information Form below, including your name, address, phone number, email, and sampling information.
- 8. Place all bags and Plant Information Form into the postage paid box and drop off at post office.

### **MSU Plant Material Information Form (A)**

Name/Farm Name:						
Address:						
Phone:		Email:				
Date:		Signature:				
Sample #	Date	Physical Location (GPS Coordinates acceptable)	Plant Species			

### **Instructions -- Part B.**

- 1. Fill out the OAEC Plant Donation Form (below), including your name, address, phone number, email, and sampling information.
- 2. Place the Plant Donation From into the separate postage paid envelope and drop of at post office.

### OAEC Plant Material Donation Form (B)

I hereby donate this/these Field Bindweed (*Convolulus arvensis*) or Canada Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) sample(s) to the Organic Advisory and Education Council for organic research. I understand that I will not receive any compensation for this donation.

Name/Farm Name:					
Address	5:				
Phone:		Email:			
Date:		Signature:			
Sample #	Date	Physical Location (GPS Coordinates acceptable)	Plant Species		

Do you have photos that you think capture the essence of organic food and farming?

## PLEASE SHARE!!!

Photos are needed for both Organic Montana and the Montana Organic Association to be used in social media, on websites, in the newsletter, in advertising, and in the conference program. You will be recognized with a photo credit.



Twins, Spring 2021. Photo credit, Jess Alger

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Business card ad --- \$30 (Size: 3-1/2W x 2H")

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